

Challenge Success 2013

Round Table Discussion on Authentic Assessment

Lisa Babinet

Waldorf School of the Peninsula

Inspired to awaken the highest potential of the human being, Waldorf High School of the Peninsula develops each student's capacity to think imaginatively and feely, produce creatively and serve humanity with a true sense of social, ethical, moral and ecological responsibility.

Curriculum exists wherever instruction occurs. Because they are inseparable in practice, some educators and educationalists are unable or unwilling to separate curriculum from instruction conceptually. This causes the kind of confusion in communication that would result if a traveler could not distinguish between his destination and the process of getting there, intrinsically related though they certainly are. Add to this an inability to tell the difference between the process of deciding on a destination and the resulting decision, between the itinerary and the trip itself, and between the conveyance used and the route followed, and both the traveler and anyone who tries to communicate with him are likely to become hopelessly lost.

Mauritz Johnson
(from *Intentionality in Education*)

Introduction

For the past five years, Waldorf School of the Peninsula has undertaken a study of authentic assessment and has used it to inform our teaching practices. [The process we use was developed collaboratively by the faculty of the Waldorf High School of the Peninsula and Paul Zachos, Ph.D. of the Association for the Cooperative Advancement of Science and Education \(ACASE.org\).](#)

Our Process

We began our work with **The law of educational program transformation** – The assessment that you use to evaluate an educational program shapes the curriculum and instruction of the program. If we create assessments that represent our highest expectations for our students then we as educators will strive to meet those expectations.

We then set the stage for our pedagogical discussion by exploring the following questions:

- 1) What will be the critical capabilities for learners to attain to competently face the new century?
- 2) What do you hope that your students will attain during the time you are their teacher?

We then defined a *learning goal* as what comes into being when a teacher identifies a human capability and sets it as a goal to be attained by students. Our work with authentic assessment revolved around discovering and communicating our learning goals with each other and the students, and ultimately including them in our syllabi and student reports.

For working with learning goals, our three basic questions became:

What are the goals for learning?
How do we know the extent to which the goals are being attained?
What are the best ways to help learners attain the goals?

It was helpful for us to distinguished three types of learning goals:

- Knowledge (where we aim for the attainment of powerful concepts)
- Skills (where we aim for the mastery of important techniques)
- Dispositions (a large domain including values, attitudes and habits, for example confidence in approaching problems and new experiences)

These questions became the backbone of our work together. As part of the process, however, we needed to clean up our vocabulary and create operational definitions.

Educational Assessment is ways of obtaining information on the extent to which learning goals are being attained. In our working definition of educational assessment, it is not report cards, grades, narratives or rubrics. Thus we call what we send home *Student Reports*.

Educational Evaluation is the use of information to improve the value of educational programs. It is different than the idea of simply identifying what is good or 'bad in a situation. Rather, it is the use of information in ways that increase the value of an educational program. Assessment information (information on the extent to which learning goals are being attained) is just one source of information for evaluation. The use of a broad base of information about students and a program, to make judgments, come to conclusions, make decisions, make plans, design and revise a program is the substance of educational evaluation.

Formative Assessment is assessment that happens during the learning process which both informs the student and the teacher of the progress toward the learning goals. Often formative assessment can be used to make changes in educational activities. *Summative Assessment* is an assessment that happens after the learning process is complete and ascertains the degree to which the learning goals have been attained.

From working with these notions in our own disciplines during our faculty meetings we found that thinking within this framework:

- Deepened our collegial dialogue and created more cross-discipline discussion and connections.
- Helped us discover that some goals, such the ability to distinguish between observation and inference were cross disciplinary.
- Inspired us to re-imagine and renew our instructional practices.
- Revise our student reports so that they were less cumbersome and more in keeping both with the school's mission, vision and values, and with what we believe is the best way to communicate with students, families, and colleges.

- We examined the problems associated with grades and grading, not the least of which are the repercussions associated with subjectivity of judgment in assigning grades.

We made the decision to update our student reports to include the learning goals. All syllabi which are given to the students at the beginning of the year also include the learning goals.

Our structure for our work became the teacher presentation.

Teacher presentation:

This is what my students attain in my class...

1. Is the learning goal well stated?
 - a. Does the learning goal communicate an intended human capability?
 - b. Will it be clear to students and parents?
2. Is it practical?
 - a. Is it such that it can be taught in a lesson or group of lessons?
(We realized that it can be challenging to truly know the degree to which a goal has been attained and thus at times we prefer the language: evidence of goal attainment and no evidence of goal attainment)

This is why this learning goal is important...

Is it a worthy learning goal? How will you decide?

This is how I can tell the degree to which students have attained the learning goal...

What are the criteria you use to tell if a learning goal has been attained

This is what we do in my class to help students attain the learning goal...

This year at our first parent evening, each teacher will choose one learning goal and give a “teacher presentation” to our parents [that demonstrates each of these critical features](#).