

GUEST EDITORIAL

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RE-ASSESSING ASSESSMENT

If we are to change education to meet the demands of the information age, we must overcome our habit of using product-oriented assessment techniques to measure process-oriented education. We need to redesign assessment to fit the goal of the restructured school: to prepare students for the complexities of the post-industrial era.

First, we must re-establish the school as the locus of accountability. School effectiveness, student achievement, and teacher competence are now determined by a narrow range of standardized test scores, but such externally imposed assessment is often unrelated to teachers' classroom decisions. Because local educators have little say over what tests measure, the results disclose little about the adequacy of their curriculum and instruction. In the restructured school, accountability will be related more closely to the concerns of students, teachers, and parents. Assessment data will be used as feedback for reflective practice and as the basis for cooperative decisions about curriculum and instruction.

Second, we must expand the range and variety of the assessment techniques we use; and we should include teachers' assessments. An enlightened teacher is the best evaluator of students' growth in process learnings. Teachers can directly observe and collect evidence of student performance in situations that demand application and transfer of knowledge as well as cooperation, persistence, and creativity.

Other authentic assessments include direct observations of behavior, portfolios of student work, long-term projects, logs and journals, student interviews, videotapes of student performance, and writing samples. A variety of assessment data yields a more vivid and reliable picture of student growth than standardized test scores alone.

Third, we must work to systematize this variety of assessment procedures. Skillful teachers perform many types of assessment daily, but most schools lack a school-wide plan for collection and use of information. School staffs need to define and operationalize common goals

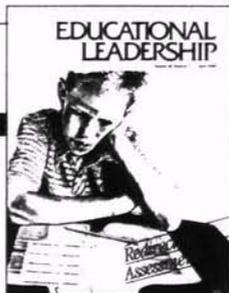


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for assessment. Further, they need to constantly scrutinize the curriculum for the alignment of curriculum goals, instructional strategies, and assessment activities.

Fourth, we must re-educate legislators, parents, board members, and the community to help them understand that standardized test scores are inadequate indicators of the quality of schools, teachers, and students. They need to understand that complex objectives can be documented using a variety of reliable sources and techniques. Decisions about testing, schooling, curriculum, and teacher competencies should be based on sound information rather than political expediency. As professionals, we must work together to re-educate society to judge education's achievements by a more powerful variety of measures.

Most important, we must constantly remind ourselves that the ultimate purpose of evaluation is to enable students to evaluate themselves. Educators may have been practicing this skill to the exclusion of learners; we need to shift part of that responsibility to students. Fostering students' ability to direct and redirect themselves must be a major goal—or what is education for? □

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A stylized, handwritten signature of Arthur L. Costa in black ink, enclosed within a thin black rectangular border.



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