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ABSTRACT

An extensive review of literature related to the role of standardized tests in the assessment of young children was conducted, and recommendations were made for alternative approaches more appropriate to the assessment of young children. The first section of the paper contains a literature review that provides a brief history of standardized tests and an explanation of their use in elementary schools. The second section draws on the literature to identify conflicting attitudes towards standardized tests and their use as the sole means of assessment in public schools. The pros and cons of standardized testing are examined in section 3 using research-based studies from the last 20 years. The fourth section deals with the negative outcomes of labeling young children, and the fifth section contains recommendations for elementary-level administrators and teachers about alternative and authentic assessment measures such as portfolios, open-ended questions, classroom observations, and other alternatives. The last section discussed these potential alternatives and incorporated the findings from informal discussions with three elementary school teachers and two administrators. These discussions yielded some practical ideas that could be applied easily in diverse classrooms to create a positive atmosphere for young students and their successes. Examples of different types of alternative assessments are presented in an appendix to help administrators and teachers choose appropriate assessments. (Contains 64 references.) (SLD)

THE ROLE OF STANDARDIZED TESTS AS A MEANS OF ASSESSMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN: A REVIEW OF RELATED LITERTURE AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENTS FOR ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS

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INTRODUCTION

Standardized tests have been used in public education as the primary means of assessing children. Standardized tests are commercially published tests that contain a set number of items and have a uniform procedure for administration and scoring (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985; Popham, 1999). Between 1960 and 1989, sales of standardized tests to public schools more than doubled to $100 million a year (Sacks, 2000). Advocates of standardized tests assert that they offer a more equitable and efficient means of assessment. According to Gay (1990), standardized tests include specified procedures for administration and scoring, and the tests provide norms where the scores of test takers can be compared. The test items are derived from experience rather than theory, have an established format and set of materials, present the same tasks and require the same response modes from all test takers (Gay, 1990; Standardized Tests 1999).

The problem of test-driven curriculum captures the major controversy surrounding standardized testing. Ratcliff (1995) reports that these tests are not valid measures of ability and learning. According to James and Tanner (1993), the curriculum is narrowed to a focus on skills that are on the tests. Children are not encouraged to be

independent thinkers, and the narrowed curriculum sacrifices their creativity, self-confidence, and enjoyment of school. School becomes a job instead of a place to play and naturally explore and learn (Brown, 1993; James & Tanner, 1993; Kohn, 2001). According to Geocaris and Ross (1999), some administrators and teachers in public school districts have made the decision to end standardized testing for young children. Instead, they have decided to use alternative assessment that better fits the way children learn. By the fall of 1996, 36 states were involved in some type of alternative assessment. According to Ratcliff (1995), alternative assessment must be focused on the learner. The assessment needs to record developmental milestones, document progress, enhance the student's school experience, and follow the student throughout his or her school experience to provide insight into their goals and abilities (Black & William 1998; Ratcliff, 1995; Wadlington & Partridge; 2000). Assessments are needed that help educators plan effective instruction and should reflect the developing knowledge and skills of young children (Farr & Greene, 1993; Ratcliff, 1995).

Standardized testing is currently being used in public schools to provide comparative scores for individual students and indicate students' strengths and weaknesses. According to Daniels (1999), standardized tests pinpoint areas where a student might need help in a specific content area, offer general measures of achievement, and provide for a comparison between students' abilities and skills. Standardized tests are also being used as an accountability function, to assess the effectiveness of teachers, students, and even entire school districts (Bowers, 1989; Popham, 1999). High-stakes testing brings many unnecessary outcomes effecting school instruction. As a result of these tests,

teachers are altering instructional strategies and curricular content, given their responsibility to legislation and parents regarding higher test scores (Brown, 1993; Hess & Brigham, 2000). The problem with the increase in high-stakes testing is that the tests present many challenging obstacles for students and teachers. The message being sent to students is that the only thing that matters in their whole educational experience is their test score (Kohn, 2001). Rather than attacking the "root problem" of academic failure, attention is being focused on comparing scores among schools.

The high-scoring schools become models, and the low-scoring schools are seen failures (Harris & Longstreet, 1990; Sacks, 2000). As test scores are relied on for important educational decisions, questions need to be raised about the validity of these standardized tests (Farr & Greene, 1993; Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2000). Popham (1999) states educators must spend time looking at the individual tests and the questions that are asked. They need to find out exactly what is measured on respective tests. Educators also need to educate the public that schools should not be rated solely on test scores. Accountability is a necessity, but there are more credible ways to measure student achievement. According to Daniels (1999), standardized tests assume all children have the same knowledge, and that limits the usefulness about individual student's learning styles or needs. Educators need to offer up alternatives to standardized tests. Teachers need to present assessment measures that measure worthwhile skills and knowledge (Popham, 1999).

The purpose of this paper was to conduct an extensive review of related literature on the role of standardized tests as a means of assessment of young children. The pros and

cons of standardized tests were examined for administrators and teachers. Alternative assessment measures were recommended that enhanced individual differences and learning styles. Informal discussions with elementary administrators and teachers were included to offer current alternatives used in today's classrooms. These alternatives were also helpful with regard to campus plans in Texas rural schools. These alternatives were also applicable to other states, depending on the nature of their mission, goals, and learning outcomes or proficiencies.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Standardized tests have primarily been used in education. According to Popham (1998), the purpose of a standardized test is to compare students nationally with respect to knowledge and skills. A standardized test is administered to a representative sample of students. The scores of the sample group are used to compare the scores of future test takers (Eggen & Kauchak, 1992; Popham, 1998).

Brief History

Intelligence tests, the first standardized tests, were designed in the 1900s to seek out children who were in need of special help and to place immigrant children in special classes (Standardized Tests and Our Children: A Guide to Testing Reform, 1990). In the 1920s, multiple-choice tests were also developed and used for grouping children

for instructional purposes. After 1950, standardized tests were used increasingly for retention and selection purposes (James & Tanner, 1993). According to Farr and Greene (1993), testing did not take a dominant role until 1957, when Sputnik was launched. Education was seen as a culprit in the failure to meet goals. As a result of expected outcomes, more programs were to be developed to see if our educational programs were successful, which led to an increase in federal dollars spent on education (Farr & Greene, 1993; Hacker & Hathaway, 1991). Due to the fact that no other assessment measures were available, norm-referenced standardized tests became the required measure of progress. This period included the development of new tests which began to include several sub-sections to test certain skills and objectives (Farr & Greene, 1993; Valencia, 1997). According to Farr & Greene (1993), an argument came in the 1970s that clearly stated goals and objectives were needed so that teachers could focus on what they needed to teach. This focus pushed test developers to add even more sub-skills and objectives to their tests which became the blueprints for instruction.

Ditto masters, workbook pages, and programmed instruction began to flourish (Farr & Greene, 1993). Public officials, in the 1960s, were looking for ways to improve education and achieve accountability. With the development of the computer and norm-referenced tests, standardized testing became an easy way to assess student progress inexpensively (Stiggins, 1999). By 1970, 3 states began statewide testing. Today, the number has risen to 50 states (Stiggins, 1999).

An increase in concern for educational quality in the 1980s led to yet another increase in the use of standardized tests (Brown, 1993; Standardized Tests and Our Children: A Guide to Testing Reform, 1990). Stiggins (1999) reported that our nation's math and science results led many to worry that our academic standing was too low, and America was headed for decay. Therefore, there was an increase in the use of standardized tests due to the public's concern. School personnel began to rely on the test scores to make many educational decisions effecting a student's instruction (Perrone, 1991). According to Perrone (1991), a high school graduate of 1950 may have taken three standardized tests during his or her school career; however, a graduate of 1989 would have taken as many as 21 standardized tests. Neil and Medina (1989) stated 105 million tests were used for 40 million students for the 1986-1987 school year. Stiggins (1999) concluded the history of standardized tests revealed an increase each year in the use of standardized tests, with no real evidence of a definite impact on classroom instruction.

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, there has been no improvement in student learning since 1974, despite the increase in standardized testing (Sacks, 2000; Standardized Tests and Our Children: A Guide to Testing Reform, 1990). Yet standardized tests have been the major means of student assessment in the last decade as well. Scores from these tests have been used to place students in gifted and talented programs, remedial classes, or special education programs. Results from standardized tests were used to determine eligibility in enrichment programs, determine a student's academic level, and even became the basis for tracking (Facts, 1999; Perrone, 1991;

Standardized Tests and Our Children: A Guide to Testing Reform, 1990). These realities have also resulted in differences of opinion.

Conflicting Attitudes: Means of Assessment in Schools

Teacher and classroom realities of standardized tests often conflict with public opinion. According to the 32nd Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward Public Schools, 43% of the public indicate there is the right amount of testing in today's schools. This number drops 5% from 1997. An increase from 20% in 1997 to 30% in 2000 feel there is too much emphasis on testing. Specific questions regarding standardized tests include 65% of the public indicating these tests should be used primarily to determine instruction; however, 68% indicate the best measure of student achievement should be measured by work done in the classroom or at home (Rose & Gallup, 2000).

Such standardized tests provide a comparison of students' achievement to that of a state or national sample (Elliott, Ysseldyke, Thurlow, & Erickson, 1998). Designed to compare students nationally, standardized tests are used to contrast individual students' strengths and weaknesses

with that of a norm group. Comparisons are made among students, based on their knowledge of a small amount of content (Popham, 1998). Commercial test publishers market the vast majority of standardized tests. These test developers do their best trying to create a series of "one-size-fits-all" assessment. Logically, however, this cannot be

done because these tests will always contain items that are not necessarily aligned with all school curriculums (Bushweller, 1997; Popham, 1999).

Standardized multiple-choice tests are often called objective because a machine scores the test; therefore, no individual decides on a child's score. Human beings are still closely involved because they chose the questions to ask and which word to use when asking them. Decisions about the correct or incorrect answers and what particular grade is passing are all decisions made by test-makers (Facts, 1999; Popham, 1999; Standardized Tests and Our Children: A Guide to Testing Reform, 1990). According to Skinner (1994), standardized test publishers do not know the students for which they are designing the test. Test-writers can also make mistakes. Sometimes questions have two correct answers or none at all. The child who selects the two right answers or leaves a question blank does not have his or her test scored because of the machine counting and looses points. Stray marks or failure to erase properly can throw off a machine, giving a false score (Popham, 1999; Standardized Tests and Our Children: A Guide to Testing Reform, 1990). These same test results from standardized tests are aggregated to provide data about individual classrooms, schools, and districts (FairTest Examiner, 1996).

Performances on standardized tests are influenced by other factors. According to Popham (1998), performances on standardized tests are most influenced by students' intellectual abilities and the extent to which students are raised in stimulus-rich environments. If a school is high socioeconomic, the scores are often high due to the experiences the students are able to pursue in the stimulus-rich environments.

Standardized tests are correlated to socioeconomic class (Sacks, 2000). According to Sacks (2000), the data is so strong that you can predict a student's test score by looking at how much money a family makes, how many degrees they hold, and what kind of car they drive. In light of these assessment realities, it is clearly inappropriate to judge a school's staff and effectiveness based on test scores. A school's teacher and administrators could be doing a superb instructional job, but their scores may not reflect that (Popham, 1998).

According to Perrone (1991), while standardized tests create problems at any age, they are extremely questionable for young children. For example, children's growth in the primary years can often be misinterpreted with different developmental patterns, so implications of failure in these years can be devastating. Ratcliff (1995) reports single administration of a test may determine what a child is capable of doing on a specific day, but it cannot predict how a child will perform in any program. According to Ratcliff (1995), tests are not valid measures of a young child's ability and learning. For example, standardized tests are not designed to hold a young child's interest. They measure how well a child can attend to a task rather than indicate ability in the area or skill being tested (Ratcliff, 1995). Test administration, nervousness, awkward seating arrangements, extreme temperatures, poor lighting, and noisy rooms can all affect test scores. Young children are affected the most by these changes. Any change that is out of the ordinary can severely affect a child (Herman, 1998; Standardized Tests and Our Children: A Guide to Testing Reform, 1990). According to the FairTest Examiner (1996),

standardized tests are not completely reliable because an individual's score can vary form day to day due to testing conditions and the mental status of the test taker. According to James and Tanner (1993), young children are often scared of the entire testing procedures. The room may be intimidating, other children may be bothered with their concentration, and the test administrator may be someone they are not used to being around. Young children may not use the pencil dark enough, make stray marks on their test booklet, and be less interested with what is on the test versus what is occurring around them (James & Tanner, 1993). According to the FairTest Examiner (1996), test scores of young children are much more unreliable than those of adult scores.

Standardized test scores, however, still remain a primary indicator and predictor for academic successes and failures (Birrell & Ross, 1996; Sacks, 2000). The scores not only identify low scores for placement into special education classes, but also are used to identify the academically gifted for gifted and talented classes (Popham, 1999). The primary use of results from standardized tests are for placement decisions for individual students, charting an individual course of study for a child's instruction, program evaluation, and now, for accountability of school effectiveness (Bowers, 1989; FairTest Examiner, 1996; Popham, 1999). A survey conducted by Brown (1993) revealed that approximately one-fourth of legislators felt that it was appropriate to use standardized tests scores for program evaluation. Seventy percent of the legislators agreed that test gathered data was acceptable for use in legislative decision-making about education.

One-third of the legislators indicated it was very important to use standardized tests for program evaluation (Brown, 1993).

Accountability: Legislative Demands and Decisions

Many of these related legislative decisions have affected accountability. According to Harris and Longstreet (1990), prior to the 1970s, standardized tests were primarily used for individual placement, diagnosing, and monitoring. The impact on classroom behavior was minimal. Nowadays, these tests are used to monitor not only individual students but also the entire educational system. The current pressure is on all teachers not only in terms of what and how they teach but also if their students achieve high scores. Since the educational reform movement in the 1980s occurred, legislative involvement has become consistently linked to many educational directions and decisions (Brown, 1993).

At no time in history have educators been held more responsible for student learning through accountability than in the last five years (Eisner, 2001; Gay, 1990; Hess & Brigham, 2000). According to Farr and Greene (1993), legislators want to know how effectively students are doing in classrooms and what content they have learned and mastered. Above all, they want to know how their students compare with other students nationally, since most people believe that education is the springboard to economic achievement. Thus, accountability for student achievement has been the primary

justification for standardized testing for the past several years (Engle, 1980; FairTest Examiner, 1996; Tuch, 1996).

Accountability is a legitimate and important concern of parents, citizens, and legislators (Hess & Brigham, 2000; James & Tanner, 1993; Standardized Tests and Our Children: A Guide to Testing Reform, 1990). Accountability is showing whether students are learning and making progress (Elliot et al., 1998). Bushweller (1997) reports many states are accountable based on test results from commercial test publishers, without considering if the tests measure what that particular state has adopted as its standards. In Texas, for example, administrators can lose their jobs and school boards dissolved, if test scores do not measure up. If a school in Texas is rated low three years in a row, state officials can appoint a monitor who takes the position of the school board. If a school is doing well on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), it can mean generous rewards for the school. In Maryland, money is forfeited for poor test scores and if the scores are consistently low, the school can be taken over by the state. This situation creates a problem for administrators, teachers, and students, especially since their jobs and the fate of the school rests on the scores of the standardized tests.

Tuch (1996) further stated accountability has caused pressure on teachers and administrators in school districts, creating an atmosphere of threat, repleted with mandates from the government to remedy the ills of society. According to Stiggins (1999), the assumption has been made that we can maximize teacher effort and student learning by threatening public embarrassment. The conventional wisdom has been to

increase effort through intimidation by the means of dire consequences for low-test scores. Therefore, it is time educators re-evaluate the reliance on high-pressure assessments for public accountability and achieving educational excellence (Stiggins, 1999).

Achieving accountability is neither simple nor cheap. High-stakes testing seems the easiest and most inexpensive way compared to hiring and training competent teachers, reducing class size, or repairing deteriorated school buildings (Eisner, 2001; Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2000; Popham, 1999). Politicians at all levels have promoted the increased use of standardized testing as a means of attaining accountability (James & Tanner, 1993; Moore, 1992; Sacks, 2000). Sacks (2000) states that by 1997, Americans were spending close to 200 million on testing in the public schools.

High-stakes testing puts the state in charge of making educational decisions about what academic content is best for students (Hess & Brigham, 2000). According to Brown (1993), state and federal policy makers seem to have little concern about their testing policies dictated to the school districts. Hurwitz and Hurwitz (2000) state educators at the local level, however, have little faith in decisions made by legislators, especially those individuals or groups with little or no educational background. By berating low-scoring schools or by identifying schools with large gains, politicians give the impression of being at the forefront of education. In reality, little has improved but students' test-taking skills (Harris & Longstreet, 1990; Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2000; Kohn, 2001; Popham,

1999). Schools that are rated low achieving become the object of severe public scrutiny (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2000).

There is no argument that high standards should be placed on school personnel in districts. Teachers and students should also be held accountable for students' learning (Glickman, 2001; Kaufhold, 1998). Children deserve the best education possible and educators should be held accountable for the children learning. According to James and Tanner (1993) concur that teachers should be providing the highest quality of learning and adapting their instruction when children fail to learn. Hurwitz and Hurwitz (2000) conclude what is the real problem. On one side, there are people who feel that standardized tests are the only route to higher standards and stricter accountability. On the other side, there are those who contend that these tests are controlling instruction and punishing disadvantaged and minority students. The question becomes how should standardized tests be effectively used in public schools. According to Popham (1999), the educational usefulness of standardized tests is considerable; however, standardized tests should not be used to evaluate the quality of education. "Employing standardized achievement tests to ascertain educational quality is like measuring temperature with a tablespoon" (Popham, 1999, p. 3). As test scores are used more for important educational decisions, the question of the validity of standardized tests is raised (Farr & Greene, 1993; Kohn, 2001; Popham, 1999).

School districts spend valuable time and money on standardized tests for use in planning instruction in the classrooms. According to Brown (1993), teachers do not

place as much emphasis on test scores as do legislators and the general public. Additionally, there is little information from standardized tests that help teachers alter their instruction for individual students. Teachers indicate that their own judgments are more reliable than the test scores (Brown, 1993; Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2000; Kohn, 2001). According to Mitchell (1997), traditional accountability does not align with current classroom practices. This situation can be attributed to the material on the tests requiring memorization and regurgitation, often leading to a tedious and boring curriculum (Bushweller, 1997).

Standardized testing, however, remains an easy way for the public to understand the emphasis on "back to the basics". By only testing reading, math, and writing, the public can easily see comparisons between schools and individual classrooms (Jones, Jones, & Hardin, 1999; Eisner, 2001). However, curriculums tend to focus on rote-memorization of the basic content areas thus leaving out important subjects such as physical education, art, and music. Jones et al. (1999) state it is much harder to assess critical thinking, the arts, student motivation, and originality. Unfortunately, the difficulty, time, and additional costs often outweigh the overall benefits of different assessments. Standardized tests usually offer the ease of administration and cost benefits over the other previously mentioned assessment measures.

Pros of Standardized Tests

According to Harris and Longstreet (1990) and Coleman (2000) standardized tests offer tremendous advantages. They are carefully constructed by experts, machine scored, relatively easy to administer, inexpensive, and are objective. Furthermore, standardized tests provide the public with an easily understood report card of their child's or adolescent's school (Eisner, 2001; Harris & Longstreet, 1990; Popham, 1998; Sacks, 2000).

According to Popham (1999), the task for developing any of these standardized tests is to create an assessment tool that contains a substantial amount of knowledge for a specific grade or age level. If tests covered all the knowledge and skills it would be far too long; test publishers have to create an instrument, that with a handful of items, yield a valid interpretation of a student's status regarding a large amount of content. Items answered by half of the students remain on the tests. Developers avoid items that are answered correctly or incorrectly too often by students. Assuming that the national norm group is representative of the nation at large, then educators and parents can use these tests results to make useful inferences about the students. Popham (1999) also states people who create standardized tests create assessment tools that permit someone to make an inference about the knowledge and skills that a particular student possesses in a particular content area. The inference is norm-referenced so that the knowledge and skills can be compared with other students of the same age or grade level. The

information obtained from test results provides students' strengths and weaknesses (Daniels, 1999; Popham, 1999). For example, the test can tell that a 4th grade student is performing in the 84th percentile in reading, but only the 39th percentile in science. It is also possible to find out a student's strengths and weaknesses within a given subject area. For instance, if a 30-item test in mathematics allocates 10 items to computation, 10 items to geometry, and 10 items in algebra, it is possible to find out specific areas of concern. However, these tests often contain too few items to make meaningful comparisons (Popham, 1999; Thompson, 2001). According to Daniels (1999), standardized tests pinpoint areas where a student might need help in a specific content area, offer general measures of achievement, and provide for a comparison between students' abilities and skills. These areas can be used when communicating with parents about their child's abilities and capabilities.

Johnson (1981) conducted a study from 298 school superintendents, 12 educational service agency superintendents, 6 state school superintendents, 6 state directors of statewide evaluation, and 10 selected legislators. Two hundred eighty of the 332 individuals responded, which was 84.34% of the sample. Data was analyzed about the perceptions of school district superintendents regarding the impacts of mandatory standardized assessment. Conclusions drawn from the study included that mandatory testing programs were perceived to increase the ability to gather and assess information concerning the needs of all students tested, increase the use of test results to improve instructional methods for

low attainment areas, and increase the use of student assessment and record keeping. The researcher also concluded that communications with parents regarding students' strengths and weaknesses increased as a result in the mandatory testing programs. Communication with the community also increased as a result of the use of the tests. These tests provide an avenue for teachers and parents to discuss many aspects of a child's learning and progress.

Standardized tests, for example, become indicators of what students can do on isolated tasks in a given amount of time (Harris & Longstreet, 1990; Mitchell, 1997). Advocates of standardized testing assert that the tests provide the guidance function of indicating a student's strengths or weaknesses so that the appropriate decisions can be made regarding classroom instruction (Bowers, 1989; Popham, 1999). The primary advantage of standardized tests is that they can eliminate biases in assessment of individual children while providing data that can permit comparisons of groups to a standard (Standardized Tests, 1999). According to Popham (1999), useful information that can also be taken from standardized tests is a student's growth over time. A child's scores can be compared each year to see if significant growth or decline is made in the different subject areas.

Sacks (2000) states using these types of standardized tests are a cost effective way to evaluate students. Purchasing agents can select only resources related to specific objectives on the statewide assessment test (Hess & Brigham, 2000). Standardized tests, intended for widespread use, like statewide performance,are easy and relatively

inexpensive to administer, carefully constructed by experts, and are objective and lend themselves to machine-based scoring (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1982; Harris & Longstreet, 1990). Thus, standardized tests appear to offer an objective means of assessment of how well teachers and individual schools are functioning (Coleman, 2000; Daniels, 1999; Harris & Longstreet, 1990). According to Skinner (1994), some educators feel standardized tests are the only objective evaluation for the readers who rely on these outcomes. This advantage allows for a single test to be administered according to standard guidelines with no varying interpretation of answers. Each question in standardized tests has one specific answer, resulting in the measurement results with a specific number of correct and incorrect responses. Test items, which are too easy or too difficult, are excluded. Another advantage of standardized tests is the testee knows his or her rank compared to students nationally. The manuals and scoring directions that accompany the standardized tests offer yet another advantage with the greatest advantage being their availability (Skinner, 1994).

Another advantage of standardized tests is the effect on the curriculum. According to Hess and Brigham (2000), standardized testing brings clarity and focus to the curriculum because teachers and students have a solid understanding of what successful learning entails. Teachers identify the instructional objectives most likely to appear on the test and focus on them, thus increasing their test scores. Standardized testing dramatically reduces the inequalities of different curricula being

offered in different schools or even different classes in the same school (Harris & Longstreet, 1990; Hess & Brigham, 2000). According to Hess and Brigham (2000), no uniform curriculum is a problem for our society. A child can drive a few miles up the road and increase their grade point average several points due to a different curriculum. Lastly, some school districts find standardized tests helpful in teacher evaluations. Teacher evaluations can focus on how well students do on standardized tests. Principals can easily check lesson plan books and students' work for alignment with the curriculum. These type of student scores provide an easy, concise index of teacher performance (Hess & Brigham, 2000).

Cons of Standardized Tests

Although there are advantages to standardized tests, several serious disadvantages of standardized tests need to be noted. According to Hacker and Hathaway (1991), standardized tests provide worthwhile information, but lack realism and undermine the educational process. The U.S. is the only nation that relies upon standardized testing for large-scale assessment. Countries such as Europe and Asia use essays, oral exams and exhibits of students' work. These assessment measures tend to measure students' skills and knowledge in a more meaningful way including higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills, whereas standardized tests tend to focus on concrete, isolated skills.

According to James and Tanner (1993) and Popham (1999), predicting school achievement for a 5 or 6 year old is difficult at best due to the developmental nature of the child. Young children are instable; their abilities and skills change with their development. A test given one day could yield very different results given on another day. Standardized multiple-choice tests are often called objective because a machine scores the test; therefore, no individual decides on a child's score. However, human beings are still closely involved because they choose the questions to ask and which words to use when asking them. According to Thompson (2001), decisions about the correct or incorrect answers and what particular grade is passing are all decisions made by test-makers. Standardized tests give a false sense of objectivity because humans are the ones who make up the test questions (Facts, 1999).

Another assumption of standardized tests is that if a student is able to perform a skill in the test, he or she is able to perform that same skill in his or her own work. For example, if a student can perform decontextualized editing on a standardized test, he or she will be able to edit his or her own work. According to Hacker and Hathaway (1991), the context of a specific skill is relevant and cannot be detached.

According to Valencia (1997), standardized tests tend to focus on isolated skills, encourage low-level comprehension, rely only on multiple-choice formats, and produce scores at times that are not useful in planning instruction. Students are not involved in their own assessment. Since standardized tests are only administered once or twice a

year, they fail to document change over time in a student's learning (James & Tanner, 1993; Valencia, 1997). Multiple-choice tests do not measure higher-order thinking such as the ability to write, use math, or make meaning from text, nor do they assess what young children can do on real world tasks (Eisner, 2001; FairTest, 1992; Geocaris & Ross, 1999). Multiple-choice tests also limit complex thinking and do not assess the affective domain such as feelings, interests, and attitude (Davies & Wavering, 1999; Wadlington & Partridge, 2000). Due to the fact that most standardized tests are multiple choice, creativity and exposition are penalized. Thus, short-term objectives dependent on regurgitation of isolated facts are most likely the skills that are measured. What is measured is convenient to measure, but not necessarily what is most significant (Harris & Longstreet, 1990).

According to Bigelow (1999) and Johnson (1981), standardized test questions focus on discrete facts but do not address deeper, multi-faceted meaning of facts. Teachers feel pressured to drill students to memorize facts instead of understanding the event or problem posed. Gilman and McDermott (1994) and Kohn (2001) conclude testing has become so pervasive that learning has been broken down into isolated skills. According to Hacker and Hathaway (1991), early psychological theorists believed that thought was made up of independent knowledge that could be broken down into smaller components. Thus it was believed, for example, that to test whether a person could read, you only needed to test the subtask that made up the skill of reading. This approach has been criticized over the years. While our research about the brain and how people have

learned has progressed enormously, our thoughts on testing have remained the same. Most standardized tests still are based on recall of isolated facts and narrow skills (FairTest, 1992; Standardized Tests and Our Children: A Guide to Testing Reform, 1990).

Another concern about the misuse of standardized tests is that these tests have often been used as a method of controlling what goes on in the classroom (Herman, 1998; Kohn, 2001). According to Kohn (2001), principals have diminished extra-curricular activities, programs in the arts, recess, electives, and other activities to focus just on test material. A study was conducted by Jones et al. (1999) with 470 certified teachers in 16 elementary schools from 5 school districts in North Carolina. The schools were randomly selected with a balance of rural, urban, and suburban school systems. Of the 236 teachers that responded, 89% were Caucasian, 10% African American, and 1% were Hispanic. The teachers indicated the amount of time per year that students spent practicing for standardized end of grade tests. Eighty percent of the teachers indicated that students spent more than 20% instructional time practicing for the tests. Twenty-eight out of the 80% indicated 60% of instructional time was spent on practicing for tests. This time was taken away from regular instruction, narrowing the curriculum to the concepts that were tested by the state. The same teachers were asked to indicate the impact of testing on their students. Sixty one percent of the teachers felt that their students felt more anxiety towards learning, and 24% felt the students were less confident. Surprisingly, 45.8% of teachers indicated that the standardized tests had a

negative impact on students' "love of learning". Seventy six percent of teachers surveyed responded that they felt their jobs were more stressful now due to the testing. Teachers expressed feelings of guilt, anxiousness, and pressure.

A simple score on a standardized test can result in many children being given a narrow curriculum (Popham, 1999). Standardized tests often limit and misdirect instruction and fail to achieve improvement of teaching and learning. Some educators worry that tests are driving the curriculum in unwanted directions. According to a study conducted by Sacks (2000), 85% of Texas teachers say the only skills students are learning in the classroom are test-taking skills. Farr and Greene (1993) suggest that tests have become the "blueprint for instruction" (p. 23). Clay (1993) feels that standardized test scores are mere approximations and often misrepresent individual progress in learning. They do not reflect the information that is needed for designing or evaluating sound instruction.

According to Popham (1998), test items that do the best job of spreading out students' scores are those that are answered correctly by at least half of the students. However, test items that are answered correct by 80% or more of the students are not put in the tests in the first place and will most likely be eliminated when tests are revised. In short, if teachers do a good job promoting

mastery of important skills and knowledge, it is unlikely that it will be measured on the standardized tests. Brown (1993) and Hurwitz and Hurwitz (2000) state although many believe that mandated testing has the students' interest at heart, many studies indicated that instruction in the classroom has become rigid and meaningless to students. Students

become bored and often have negative attitudes toward learning (James & Tanner, 1993; Kohn, 2001; Sacks, 2000).

According to a study conducted by Mitchell (1997), 20 school principals spoke about the effects of standardized testing on school restructuring efforts. Principals held up that standardized tests acted as a barrier to school restructuring. They said that the tests were driving their curriculum in directions inconsistent with reform efforts. The greater the focus on raising standardized test scores, the more distorted the curriculum (Tuch, 1996). Rarely do the objectives from the standardized tests coincide exactly with the specific objectives of the individual classrooms (Standardized Tests, 1999). In many cases, the tests become the curriculum. According to Perrone (1991), two to three hours a day are devoted to practicing to the tests and related exercises. According to Ratcliff (1995), many classrooms have become formal in instruction and test-like in their activities. The curriculum has become less meaningful to students and ineffective for adequately preparing students for the future. Oftentimes, even textbooks become "dummied down" because the same companies that make the test create them, and they are designed to increase test scores (Popham, 1998; Standardized Tests and Our Children: A Guide to Testing Reform, 1990).

A study conducted by Freeman, Kuhs, Porter, Floden, Schmidt, and Schwille (1983) selected 5 nationally standardized tests in mathematics given to students in grades 4-6 and studied their content. Assuming that what is taught in the classroom is what is contained in the textbooks, they also studied textbooks for grades 4-6. Their findings

supported that between 50 to 80% of what was measured on the standardized tests was not addressed in the textbooks. Therefore, the content of the standardized tests did not satisfy what was addressed in the curriculum of the classroom.

Standardized tests narrow the curriculum because teachers tend to teach what is on the test. The test essentially becomes the curriculum, discouraging effective teaching and meaningful learning (Facts, 1999). According to Dounay (2000), public school curriculum is "dumbed-down" due to standardized tests. Students are subjected to rote memorization instead of meaningful problem-solving skills. Teachers tend to focus only on subject areas on the test. Art, music, and physical education are de-emphasized (Kaufhold, 1998; James & Tanner, 1993; Perrone, 1991). James and Tanner (1993), state the curriculum is narrowed to a focus on skills that are on the tests. The pressure for higher test scores often yield a narrowed curriculum that is detrimental, particularly to a young child's development. Children are not encouraged to be independent thinkers. It sacrifices their creativity, self-confidence, and enjoyment of school. School becomes a job instead of a place to play and naturally explore and learn (Dounay, 2000; James & Tanner, 1993; Kohn, 2001; Moore, 1992). According to Popham (1998), teachers can become familiar with the test content, thus affecting what they teach in their classrooms. In many instances, the directions ask that teachers first take the test so that they become familiar with the test when they administer it. Therefore, rises in test scores over time could be from teacher familiarity rather than student achievement.

Bushweller (1997) further reports that multiple-choice tests require regurgitation and fail to evaluate problem-solving skills. If teachers are teaching to these tests, many children receive a tedious and boring curriculum because if it is not tested, it will not be taught. Overall, a good test must tell teachers how to improve their teaching. Unfortunately, some elementary schools have done away with recess so that teachers can spend more time on test preparation (Dounay, 2000).

A study conducted by Gay (1990) surveyed teachers from 18 school units representing urban and rural schools and including 64 third grade teachers, 63 sixth-grade teachers, 68 eighth-grade teachers, and 70 tenth grade teachers. One hundred sixty-eight responded to the survey. Thirty five percent reported that they were aware of testing irregularities in their school districts. The most common practice was teaching to the test. The teachers used copies of the test to teach the students, looking ahead at questions that could be problems for student and making these questions the review questions. According to Moore (1992), the importance to a test score can narrow the curriculum and effect good classroom instruction. Some educators have expressed concern that teachers will loose their ability to be creative planners and thinkers due to this type of narrowed curriculum emphasized due to standardized tests (Jones et al., 1999).

Curriculum becomes devoted to the rote memorization of facts and concepts that can be quickly measured (Kaufhold, 1998; McDaniel, 1997). In some states, the level of school funding depends on test results. When school officials and teachers feel pressure to improve test scores, they begin to teach to the test. Teaching to the test ignores almost

everything not included on standardized tests. For example, in the reading portion of the tests, if it asks for a student to read a passage and answer questions, teachers neglect to study novels, essays, and poems. The students do not get to read whole books, work on projects, or solve problems, instead they are taught to memorize isolated facts or complete worksheets (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2000; Standardized Tests and Our Children: A Guide to Testing Reform, 1990). Teaching to the test would be okay if the test measured the goals and objectives important to multi-faceted and higher-level thinking and learning (Bushweller, 1997; Sacks, 2000).

According to Hacker and Hathaway (1991), however, in an effort to improve test scores, many teachers are spending an inordinate amount of time teaching to the test. Much of this time spent by teachers who teach lower order thinking skills could be spent on more productive learning. For example, teachers who spend valuable class time teaching test-taking skills could teach higher-level learning processes. Mitchell (1997) states test preparation in the classroom takes away from innovative and meaningful instruction. The very structure of education is distorted due to standardized tests (Kohn, 2001; Popham, 1999). Classroom activities such as discussions and creative expression focuses on correct answers for the tests, concluding that our children should all beat to the same drummer. Few problems in our society can be easily answered by one correct answer (Harris & Longstreet, 1990). Standardized tests drive instruction in an unwanted direction, rewarding passive learning. Standardized tests focus on rote memorization, not associated with real world experience, fail to address higher-order thinking, and do not

accurately reflect students' abilities (Davies & Wavering, 1999; Lee, 1992). Students are unable to develop critical skills (Sacks, 2000).

According to Kaufhold (1998), standardized tests exclude higher-order thinking and involve only short-term memorization. Material on the tests is most likely forgotten after the test is taken. Standardized tests do not deal with higher-order thinking skills such as reassigning or problem-solving. They focus on recognizing facts. They do not measure people skills, imagination, determination, or leadership (Standardized Tests and Our Children: A Guide to Testing Reform, 1990). Standardized tests emphasize discrete facts because they are easy to measure, thus questions that involve analyzing and synthesizing are left out (Jones et al., 1999). Harris and Longstreet (1990) conducted an analysis of test items contained on a Stanford Achievement Battery. Inferring was required in only 6% of all items; summarizing was included in approximately 2%, ordering in 6%, transposing in 4%, and representing was essentially found in 7% of the questions. Retrieving, a low-level skill, was required for 100% of all items.

Learning to solve problems utilizing creative solutions is a real world experience that children should experience in the classroom (McDaniel, 1997; Sacks, 2000). Creativity is discouraged as students narrow their thinking exclusively to the material on tests (Kaufhold, 1998; Standardized Tests and Our Children: A Guide to Testing Reform, 1990). Standardized tests rarely measure the ability to think or create, and overlook discovery learning.

Students retain information if they are actively participating (FairTest, 1992; Kaufhold, 1998). Children who think creatively can often have trouble answering multiple-choice tests. A child who thinks why one choice is better than another may take too much time answering and not complete his or her tests. In either case, the result could be a lower score (Standardized Tests and Our Children: A Guide to Testing Reform, 1990). A study was conducted by Kolitch (1993) involving the mathematics curricula and testing programs in 3 midwestern school districts to determine the influence of standardized tests on math instruction in grades 3 through 8. Teachers under the greatest pressure to increase scores were shown to increase their instruction on computation, test-like story problems, and isolated geometry facts. A common theme developed from the study was the loss of autonomy felt by the teachers to teach creatively. According to Brown (1993), because several standardized tests lack curricular and instructional validity, teachers find they are not as useful in the classroom. They do not tell the teacher what to do next in working with a student because they do not indicate how the student learns or thinks or how to better improve their teaching (FairTest, 1992; Jones et al., 1999). According to Stiggins (1999), teachers reportedly viewed standardized tests as time consuming, not matching their instruction, failing to reflect true student characteristics, and not meeting instructional needs of identifying the curriculum to teach.

According to Neil (1993), however, the U.S. has a history of using standardized tests as a way to sort and classify all children. In the past, these tests have been used to lock

children into lower levels of academics. "When a poor child doesn't know what a middle-class child knows at the age of 5, we can't assume the poor child's low score indicates he is unable to learn" (Neil, 1993, p. 27). Standardized tests have been used to make important educational decisions (Coleman, 2000). Neil (1993) and Thompson (2001) state educators do not need to make decisions about children based on a single test score. Due to the finding that all tests used with young children have an error rate of 50%, if we label kids based on test scores, we would get the same result by flipping a coin (Coleman, 2000; James & Tanner, 1993; Popham, 1999). Additionally, young children in particular are unpredictable, and it is hard for any test to be reliable or valid.

The primary purpose of standardized tests has been to rank and label students, teachers, and entire school districts. Some are labeled as successes and others as failures (Facts, 1999). Testing young children and applying labels is detrimental (Dounay, 2000; Kohn, 2001; Neil, 1993). The test results are often an indication of their developmental state; the results do not predict later achievement in school. Research indicates that testing is not beneficial to young children when the scores are used to assign labels, classify or retain children. The younger the child, the more potential for a misdiagnosis with a low test score (Andersen, 1998; Gilman & McDermott, 1994; James & Tanner, 1993; Moore, 1992).

According to Smith (1994), any placement decision based on standardized tests is irresponsible and immoral. Educators use test scores to determine if a child will be placed in a gifted and talented program or special classes. Results from standardized tests are

used to determine eligibility in enrichment programs, determine a student's academic level, and even have become the basis for tracking (Perrone, 1991). Young students know their rank compared to all others, and many of these test results label many children as failures (Hess & Brigham, 2000; Skinner, 1994).

Andersen (1998) states all children operate on different levels and develop skills differently throughout the year. Children should be observed and encouraged in their growth. By labeling young children on the basis of a single test score, we label and damage some children as failures at a young age. In reality, we are failing to protect our young children from unnecessary stress and unrealistic expectations. According to James and Tanner (1993), labeling children often results in a lower self-esteem, peer rejection, and a lower level curriculum. Negative labels or conations can lead a teacher to accept that child differently and affect parent's views of their children. Any type of label could cause educators and parents to change the treatment of a child, thus affecting their learning.

According to Farr and Greene (1993), "it is illogical and invalid to make any important educational decisions on the basis of information as limited as a single test score" (p. 25). Farr and Greene (1993) state further that "one-time snapshots often provide a biased and distorted understanding of what a student has learned" (p. 27). Only 10% of public school parents feel that a single standardized test score should be used to measure their child's academic achievement (Rose & Gallup, 2000). According to Anderson (1998), "For many parents their child's score does not measure just one day, or

even a week, of their child's work; it mirrors the family's success, the parents' affluence, and the child's future" (p. 27). Anderson (1998) states we, as educators and parents, derive blanket judgments from standardized tests, which can have lasting effects on our children. For many young children, standardized tests can result in failure at an early age or at least to a life sentence of doing remedial drill and practice in special classes or lower tracts.

Labeling Our Children: The Negative Bias, Outcomes, and Self Esteem

Labels may cause educators or parents to inappropriately alter the treatment towards these children (James & Tanner, 1993; Popham, 1999). Children who receive low scores usually are placed in special classes where the curriculum involves drill and skill worksheets. They fail to learn what their advantaged peers are learning (Facts, 1999). School personnel often have lower expectations for students placed in lower tracts or remedial classes due to low-test scores. These students are more likely to receive an inferior education (Standardized Tests and Our Children: A Guide to Testing Reform, 1990).

Using test results can be harmful to students receiving low scores as well as high scores. According to Birrell and Ross (1996), standardized tests are used to identify the academically gifted and talented. Children identified as such are usually given additional

materials and resources in school. According to James and Tanner (1993), the students who score high on standardized tests show stress-related symptoms and a fear of failure. This heavy emphasis on scores can devalue teacher judgment and seriously affect a student's self-esteem (Andersen, 1998; James & Tanner, 1993; Moore, 1992; Perrone, 1991). Test-induced stress can lead to increased anxiety in all students. Low performing students especially feel that they have already failed, and the tests just add to their feelings of low self-worth.

Skinner (1994) states the greatest disservice a formal test can have on a student is the depletion of a student's self-esteem. Young children perceive themselves as failures when they receive labels such as "behind", "at-risk", "immature", and "remedial" (James & Tanner, 1993). Children who do poorly on tests tend to feel poorly about themselves and possess negative images (Birrell & Ross, 1996).

According to Perrone (1991), when children are labeled slow learners because of standardized tests, their educational opportunity becomes narrowed and unchallenged. These children begin a lifetime of drill and skill worksheets. High portions of these students come from minority groups or special classes. Every test reflects the background of the people who construct the test, who are mostly white, upper to middle class professionals. Most of the experiences they are questioning come from their background, possibly leaving out the background of many of the potential test-takers (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2000; Standardized Tests and Our Children: A Guide to Testing Reform, 1990). Smith (1994) reports test makers are simply limited because no one test can account for

the diverse cultures in our society. Even questions targeted to one particular minority group still leave out other groups not addressed. Test-makers admit low-income and minority group children get lesser educations because sometimes their schooling is not as good (Smith, 1994; Standardized Tests and Our Children: A Guide to Testing Reform, 1990). Standardized tests are biased in favor of who makes up the tests; consequently, a person whose culture and upbringing closely match the test-makers typically do better. The tests have proven to be biased against females, minorities, children in rural areas, and low socioeconomic children (Facts, 1999; James & Tanner, 1993).

Standardized tests are also biased in favor of English-fluent pupils only. Many limited English proficient (LEP) students are improperly assessed and decisions about their placement are made incorrectly (Smith, 1994). According to Skinner (1994), reading performance is generally low for non-English speaking students. Language dominance seems to have a negative effect for students of different cultural backgrounds, and non-English speaking students have trouble with interpretations of test language. Other test biases include language on the exams. Tests are written with complex grammar and oftentimes are hard to understand (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2000; Standardized Tests and Our Children: A Guide to Testing Reform, 1990).

As test results are shown, students who are more likely to fail include the disproportionately poor and African American students, which undermines our mission of offering all students an opportunity to learn (Hacker & Hathaway, 1991; Hess & Brigham, 2000). Children from low income and minority groups are often harmed for life

because of low test scores (Dounay, 2000; FairTest Examiner, 1996; Skinner, 1994). The curriculum is "dumbed-down" for these students because the educators feel they cannot handle the regular curriculum. This leads to a boring curriculum for these students (FairTest Examiner, 1996).

Civil rights and parent advocacy groups are challenging that these tests penalize minority and at-risk students who have been short changed education (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2000). African Americans and Latinos are usually forced into the bottom tracks solely based on their low test scores. According to Dounay (2000), the passage rates for African Americans in Texas, for example, included 60%, Hispanics 64%, and Caucasians 86% for the TAAS taken in 1999.

Another disadvantage to low-income students is the fact they have not had some of the experiences as other students. According to Perrone (1991) and Kohn (2001), if children come from affluent families and stimulus-rich environments, they are more apt to score higher on standardized tests. One of the chief reasons that a child's socioeconomic status is highly correlated to scores on standardized tests is because many questions on the tests measure what is learned outside of school. Some students are offered more experiences than others, thus affecting their scores. According to Standardized Tests and Our Children: A Guide to Testing Reform (1990), saying children are lower in ability because they have not had the experiences of other children is simply unfair. Educators need to understand that students have varied cultural backgrounds (Neil, 1993).

Assessment is needed in the public schools that benefit all children and focus on improving learning instead of ranking and labeling children into specific categories.

Alternative Assessments

Standardized tests do a good job of supplying the evidence needed to make norm-referenced interpretations of students compared to those of students nationally; however, they should not be used to rank and label young children. Elliott et al. (1998) state assessments are needed that are linked to curriculum and instruction that teachers provide daily, and educators should use all the results as a way to drive remediation and instructional effectiveness.

Given these contentions, it is reasonable to assume the demand for test results that can be compared across student populations will remain strong. According to Bowers (1989) and Eisner (2001), the urgent issue educators should be considering is how results obtained from tests provide a more comprehensive look at students' abilities than the present standardized tests. According to Geocaris and Ross (1999), current assessment methods such as standardized test audit student's work, but do not help to improve learning. Moore (1992) reports concerns about standardized testing and their inappropriate uses have led to an increase in alternative forms. Alternative methods of assessment serve individual students more effectively than do standardized tests (Ratcliff,

1995). Alternative assessments subjectively measure problem-solving ability, communication skills, divergent thinking and holistic understanding.

According to Farr and Greene (1993), assessment programs should provide useful, understandable information about students' learning and they need to be linked to ongoing, informal assessment that supports the classroom curriculum. A wide range of assessments should be used to show what a student knows. The assessments must include teacher and student reflections about the work. According to Geocaris and Ross (1999), assessments must be designed to accommodate the developmental needs of each child. In essence, our assessment tools should allow all students to express their knowledge in ways that complement their learning styles and intelligences.

Assessment is a powerful tool and it should help and not hinder student learning (Wilcox, 1998). Assessments should not screen out children. They should be helpful and relevant to the individual as well as an accurate picture of their progress (Skinner, 1994; Wilcox, 1998). Assessments should measure what students have learned and be a direct reflection of the curriculum and instruction that the students have received (Coleman, 2000). According to Herman (1998), assessment communicates to students what is important to learn. Assessment should be developmentally appropriate and always connected to school improvement (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1982; Neil, 1993).

According to Skinner (1994), assessment is best when it is carried out by a knowledgeable teacher who draws on a variety of strategies to observe and document carefully their students' performance across time. Alternative assessments are needed that

evaluate the process and the end product (Wadlington & Partridge, 2000). Alternative assessments should include more holistic forms of assessment in which students receive positive feedback (Birrell & Ross, 1996; Wilcox, 1998).

Assessment should help teachers make decisions about their own instructional effectiveness and student achievement (Birrell & Ross, 1996). According to Valencia (1997), 90% of all assessment takes place in classrooms. Teachers should be involved in the process of assessing their students. According to Herman (1998), teachers feel more ownership in the assessment process, thus gaining more knowledge about their students' learning. Moore (1992) states teachers must be included in the process of finding alternative assessments. Changing the public's attitudes necessitates education regarding what is wrong with the current practices and how other assessment tools could better enhance and benefit student instruction and learning. Teachers should know about their students' progress so that they can adapt their instruction (Black & William, 1998).

Alternative assessments allow teachers to obtain a more accurate description of an individual's strengths and weaknesses. These assessments help teachers design and implement a more personalized program of study (Daniels, 1999). According to Perrone (1991), teachers are trying to make it clear that the best assessment is through continuous documentation of a child's work. Overall, teachers want assessment that will give them a clear indication of how their students are successfully developing and how teachers can improve their teaching (Farr & Greene, 1993; Thompson, 2001).

Assessment tools should be classroom-based and benefit the student. The assessments should be useful to teachers and students alike (Neil, 1993). Educators need assessment tools that foster an individual student's learning (Facts, 1999; Geocaris & Ross, 1999). According to Herman (1998), assessment should give educators accurate information for planning and decision-making, and help to insure learning for each individual child. Standardized tests blur critical distinctions such as cultural diversity, learning styles, and socioeconomic conditions. Alternative assessment seeks out qualitative factors of individual differences in all children (Harris & Longstreet, 1990; Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2000; Thompson, 2001). At the classroom level, the center of assessment should be documentation of a student's progress through observation of students in light of their unique characteristics (Neil, 1993). Geocaris and Ross (1999) state alternative assessments should allow choice, address different learning styles, and allow for critical thinking. Alternative assessments enable teachers to accept a variation in responses and address different learning styles and modalities. Meaningful assessment is reflective, self-monitoring, and constructive. It includes active processes of thinking and creating (Davies & Wavering, 1999; Geocaris & Ross, 1999; Skinner, 1994).

Alternative assessment should represent activities that are typically performed in classrooms (Hughes, 1993). Students should be able to relate their learning and knowledge to real world experiences (Herman, 1998; Neil, 1993). Alternative assessment more accurately depicts what a student can do in real-life contexts with classroom instruction focusing on higher-level thinking skills (James & Tanner, 1993;

Kleinert, Kennedy, & Kearns, 1999). According to Farr and Greene (1993), assessment should involve students in realistic tasks and allow them to construct a response than merely choose a pre-selected answer choice. Children should be allowed to develop their own perspectives. If a student is not allowed to explain his or her reasoning for a particular question, the test has little value for classroom planning. Educators should be concerned about using assessment tools that help them truly understand their students (Hess & Brigham, 2000; Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2000; Thompson, 2001).

Alternative assessment should never threaten a child's feelings of self-worth and always support ongoing development. All assessment tools used should be fair and flexible, allowing for these individual differences (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1982; James & Tanner, 1993; Neil, 1993). According to Hughes (1993), "alternative assessment is any method of finding out what a student knows or can do that is intended to show growth and inform instruction and is not a standardized or traditional test" (p. 29). Alternative assessment provides teachers a way to pinpoint specific learning deficits as well as strengths. They yield more precise information to create effective instruction and guide a student's learning in the classroom (Daniels, 1999; Gilman & McDermott, 1994).

Alternative assessment is needed that is student-centered (Moore, 1992). "Authentic assessment" or "performance-based" assessment are two examples of alternative assessment. Examples of types of alternative assessments include portfolios, cooperative learning groups, journals, exhibitions, observations, simulations, and other types. Authentic assessment focuses on the process as well as the product and it mirrors

applications in the real world (Davies & Wavering, 1999; Hacker & Hathaway, 1991). Alternative assessments such as portfolios allow for students' progress in learning to be monitored over time as well as the students receiving feedback about their performance (Davies & Wavering, 1999). Alternative forms of testing have already been implemented in many states such as Vermont, Connecticut, and California. These alternative assessments are based on reasoning, diversity, and creativity (Harris & Longstreet, 1990; Kleinert et al., 1999; Sacks, 2000).

Authentic Assessments

Since the late 1970s, there has been a great deal of support for authentic assessment of young children rooted in teacher observation and systematic documentation of children's learning (Perrone, 1991). According to Hacker and Hathaway (1991), authentic assessment means gathering evidence of student performance in an integrated manner over a period of time. These assessments are to mirror real world experiences and reveal student performance through meaningful and challenging tasks.

Key characteristics of authentic assessment include challenging the student through real world experience, fostering disciplined inquiry, integrating knowledge, and having value beyond the assessment measure (Hacker & Hathaway, 1991; Valencia, 1997). Rather than the tests being "after the fact", authentic assessment reinforces the curriculum and establishes intellectual standards. Authentic assessment tests directly

what educators want the children to know (Hacker & Hathaway, 1991; Hughes, 1993). Hacker and Hathaway (1991) state most authentic testing involves some type of self-criticism and personal evaluation; therefore, Howard Gardner's intelligences of interpersonal and intrapersonal are utilized.

Authentic assessment is derived from every day activities in the classroom. It includes teacher evaluation, students' work, and student evaluations of their own processes and products (Facts, 1999). According to Daniels (1999), authentic assessment puts emphasis on the student's progress for their specific age and development level. It can be suited to identify what a child knows, how a child learns, pinpoint specific problems with a student's learning, and link instruction to individual student's needs. Authentic assessment puts more emphasis on student's progress, for his or her age and experience, and less emphasis on comparison with students (Hughes, 1993). This type of assessment allows flexibility to encompass performances based on high-level skills, creativity, and diversity. Locally administered, alternative tests allow productive feedback useful to teachers and students (Daniels, 1999; Harris & Longstreet, 1990; Perrone, 1991).

Authentic assessment puts emphasis on whether the progress for a specific student is developmentally and age-appropriate, encompassing a variety of opportunities to demonstrate his or her knowledge. Authentic assessment can be based upon performance assessment such as open-ended questions, exhibitions, portfolios, or projects. They measure directly what the children should know, emphasize higher-order thinking,

personal judgment, collaboration, and urge children to become active in their learning (Hacker & Hathaway, 1991). Performance assessment, one type of authentic assessment, involves teachers and students directly measuring educational achievement in a specific area throughout the school year to document students' progress and development (Daniels, 1999; FairTest, 1992). Principals from schools that used performance-based assessment say they are beneficial because they model good instruction, and provide data for school improvement (Mitchell, 1997). Performance assessment examines a student's actual work over a period of time. Students are encouraged to create, speak, listen, and analyze to solve problems, teaching students that their reactions and opinions are valuable and deserve attention (Hathaway, 1993). Performance-based assessment includes collecting student's work using portfolios, using open-ended questions requiring students to use critical thinking skills, exhibiting projects, and participating in group projects (Kleinert et al., 1999).

Another type, a portfolio, is a record of a child's progress of learning including how a child thinks, questions, analyzes, and interacts. The portfolio continues to relate the evaluation based upon comparing former work with completed, accomplished work (Skinner, 1994). Portfolios serve the purpose of providing evidence of students' skills and accomplishments (Davies & Wavering, 1999; Hughes, 1993; Kohn, 2001). According to Courtney and Abodeeb (1999), portfolios can change their composition throughout each grade level including varying amounts of students' work. Daniels (1999) and Thompson (2001) state portfolios involve teachers and students collectively compiling student

products across different content areas and settings throughout the school year, documenting progress and development. Portfolios can be contained in notebooks or folders and are usually organized according to certain subjects or curriculum areas. They can include surveys, interest inventories, samples, self-assessments, projects, tape recordings, and many other samples. They can be suited to motivate students to improve their performance while documenting affective and cognitive growth (Andersen, 1998; Daniels, 1999).

Portfolios help teachers make decisions about what remediation skills the student needs and the student's strengths. Teachers can monitor and evaluate students' efforts, progress, knowledge, and attitude through the use of portfolios (Courtney & Abodeeb, 1999). These classroom practices meet more fully the range of all students including minority, language-deficient, and special education (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2000). Students are encouraged to reflect on their own learning, making each student responsible for his or her learning (Daniels, 1999; Facts, 1999; Moore, 1992). According to Lee (1992), portfolios further emphasize self-evaluation and a positive self-esteem. Portfolio assessment includes documentation and evaluation of a student's work done by both the teacher and the student. Students learn self-direction when they become part of their own evaluation (Courtney & Abodeeb, 1999; Hughes, 1993; Neil, 1993). Portfolios allow the teacher and student to communicate about a student's work and synthesize the information given. The teacher evaluates the work, but encourages the students to evaluate their own work (Gillman & McDermott, 1994).

Another type of performance assessment is the use of observation. According to Hurwitz and Hurwitz (2000), observations can be done while students are involved in learning activities, presentations, or group activities. Teachers can observe and document strategies used in the learning process. Good teacher observation and documentation of student work involves direct evaluation of student effort on real learning tasks (Daniels, 1999; Davies & Wavering, 1999).

Assessment is definitely needed that measures learning outcomes, communicates goals of learning, generates useful and meaningful information, and links to instruction (Daniels, 1999; Geocaris & Ross, 1999). Assessment must include all learning styles and multiple intelligences, connect to prior learning, and provide useful feedback to both teachers and students. Authentic assessment lends itself to including all of these things (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2000; Thompson, 2001).

Across the nation, many public schools have become "testing havens", putting teachers and students under intense pressure to show better test results. Administrators have cut significant instructional time, relevant programs in art and physical education, and recess for young children so that a stringent focus can be placed on testing. Public school personnel also need to value diverse, noteworthy teaching and learning, which unfortunately suffers when school personnel become anxious and preoccupied solely with standardized test scores for accountability and learning outcomes.

PROCEDURES

Another purpose of this paper was to consider viable alternative assessments. Alternative assessment measures were recommended that enhanced individual differences and learning styles for young children. Informal discussions with elementary administrators

and teachers were also included to offer current alternatives used in today's classrooms. These alternatives were helpful with regard to campus plans in Texas rural schools. These alternatives were also applicable to other states, depending on the nature of their mission, goals, and learning outcomes or proficiencies.

In order to advocate improvements in the current assessment methods used in public schools today, several recommendations were suggested to assist administrators and teachers. Common characteristics of alternative assessments were provided to help administrators and teachers identify the different types of alternative assessments available. Examples of different types of alternative assessments were presented in an Appendix to aid administrators and teachers in the appropriate selection of assessment measures for the classroom.

The first section represented a literary review. It was a brief overview of the history of standardized tests, which enhanced the understanding of assessments used in public schools. This overview included historical "benchmarks" regarding standardized tests as well as an explanation of their primary use in elementary public schools. Hopefully, these

inclusions will help administrators and teachers understand the overall use of standardized tests in public schools.

The second section was developed to identify the conflicting attitudes towards standardized tests and their sole means of assessment in public schools. The basic use of standardized tests in public schools was examined. Emphasis was on the scores of young children and how these scores are often misinterpreted due to the different developmental patterns of young children.

Pros and cons of standardized tests were examined in section three using research-based studies ranging from the last twenty years. The authors included Bushweller, Farr & Greene, Harris & Longstreet, Kohn, Popham, Ratcliff, Stiggins, and others. The resources included Educational Leadership, Phi Delta Kappan, Dissertation Abstracts, ERIC documents, and other resources. Administrators and teachers can refer to other quantitative or qualitative manuscripts written by these authors to gain more insights regarding assessment measures.

The fourth section was developed to familiarize administrators and teachers with the negative outcomes of labeling young children. Young children's self esteem can be damaged, and expectations can be lowered for children who are labeled as "at-risk", "immature", and "remedial".

In the fifth section, recommendations for elementary level administrators and teachers about alternative and authentic assessment measures such as portfolios, open-ended questions, classroom observations, and other alternative measures were presented. These

recommendations can be an aid, improving students' academic achievement by suggesting alternative assessment measures for administrators and teachers to substitute for certain standardized tests or to be used in combination with these tests.

In the last section, potential alternatives to standardized tests, informal discussions with 3 elementary teachers and 2 administrators were incorporated. The purpose of the informal interviews was to show practical ideas that could be applied easily in diverse classrooms to create a positive atmosphere for young student and their successes (See Appendix).

CONCLUSIONS

Standardized tests, which are usually created by commercial test publishers, are designed to give a common measure of students' performance. Due to the realities that large numbers of students throughout the country take the same test, they give educators a "standard" measurement. Educators use these standardized tests to tell how well school programs are succeeding or to give themselves a picture of the skills and abilities of today's students.

Standardized tests can help both teachers and administrators make decisions regarding the instructional program. They help school personnel measure how students in a given class, school, or school system perform in relation to other students who take the same

test. Using the results from these tests, teachers and administrators can evaluate the school system, a school program, or a particular student.

Standardized tests, however, do have their limitations. These tests are not perfect or absolute measures of what individual students can or cannot do. For instance, paper-and-pencil tests give teachers only part of the picture of a child's strengths and weaknesses. A child's scores on a particular test may also vary from day to day, depending on whether the child guesses, receives clear directions, follows the directions carefully, takes the test seriously, and is comfortable in taking the test.

The issues surrounding assessment, particularly tests and the use of tests, is a controversial issue at all levels of education. Tests have been touted as the most efficient method to identify individuals who are in need of special attention. Proponents of testing claim that tests provide schools with a means to group students homogeneously at learning levels in order for teachers to work with them effectively. Opponents of testing, however, argue that the nature of tests is both biased and discriminatory. According to Popham (1999), in order for schools to be evaluated correctly, people must be educated about the deficits of standardized test scores as indicators of schools' effectiveness and provide other credible assessment measures.

At the heart of the assessment process is the notion that people at any age, their skills, abilities, knowledge, and intelligence can be objectively and fairly measured and compared. There is also the belief that the essence of a person can be assessed and reduced to a test score. Additionally, by comparing the test scores of individuals, there is

the assumption that all people can be differentiated as "better" or "more qualified" than others. Although overt bias in tests, to a certain extent, is being addressed by test producers, most forms of bias are subtle and tend to remain in the structure of tests.

Fairness depends on holding students to a high standard, but not accepting the fact that they all fit into the same mold (Neil, 1993; Thompson, 2001). Essentially, how the test is normed, what questions are asked, how the test questions are asked, and who determines the correct answers produce a biased process through which people are ranked, sorted, differentiated, and then compared.

The belief that standardized tests are objective and neutral methods for assessing individuals distorts the reality of tests and seduces people, especially young students in formative, developmental stages, into believing they are what the tests say they are (e.g., educable mentally retarded, incompetent, a failure, or other labels).

School personnel must not limit assessment to standardized tests or allow them to dominate the assessment, particularly so early in education with young children (Kohn, 2001). Assessment is definitely multidimensional and must take into consideration multiple measures to evaluate a person's full capabilities. Without a more inclusive assessment process, those who can contribute to and benefit from society will be forever excluded from the opportunities to do so. According to Stiggins (1999), students of all ages need to renew their faith in themselves as learners and feel they have a part in their learning, thus creating ownership towards assessment methods.

Alternative assessment measures offer these young children these ownership opportunities. Many educators have come to recognize that alternative assessments are an important means of gaining a dynamic picture of students' academic and linguistic development. According to Herman (1998), life is not full of multiple-choice questions. There are many solutions to problems in life, and young children in particular need to know that they can create solutions to solve problems responsibly. Alternative assessments create the diversity needed to allow students to solve real world problems using their own creative solutions.

Alternative assessment refers to innovative procedures and techniques which can be used within the context of instruction, and can be easily incorporated into the daily activities of the school or classroom. In contrast to traditional testing, students are evaluated on what they incorporate, create, and produce rather than on what they are able to recall and reproduce.

The main goal of alternative assessment is to gather evidence about how students are approaching, processing, and completing real-life tasks in a particular domain. Alternative assessments generally meet the following criteria: the focus is on documenting individual student growth over time, rather than comparing students with one another, emphasizing students' strengths rather than weaknesses; consideration is given to the learning styles, language proficiencies, cultural and educational backgrounds; and consideration is given to grade levels of students. Thus, alternative assessment includes a variety of measures that can be adapted for different situations.

School administrators play a key role in finding a solution to this complex set of assessment dilemmas. If young children's assessment translates to reaching their immense potential as well as becoming a force for more success in schools, administrators must fulfill these complex leadership responsibilities. Standardized tests of all types have an immense power since they affect students, teachers, and entire school districts. When used incorrectly, or as the sole means of measurement, the results can be detrimental. Equally as important, young children may suffer consequences that are not within their control and not within their best interests. It is clear that alternative assessments alone will not solve all of our educational problems, but they are an important step to linking learning to the curriculum and creating a true picture with diversity for all young children throughout the 21st century.

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Appendix

Recommendations

PREFACE

Assessment is a powerful tool and it should help, not hinder student learning (Wilcox, 1998). Assessments should measure what students have learned and be a direct reflection of the curriculum and instruction that the students have received (Coleman, 2000). According to Herman (1998), assessment communicates to students what is important to learn. Assessment should be developmentally appropriate and always connected to school improvement (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1982; Kohn, 2001; Neil, 1993).

Assessment is changing for many reasons. Changes in the skills and knowledge needed for success, in our understanding of how students learn, and in the relationship between assessment and instruction are modifying our learning goals for students and Campus Improvement plans for schools. Consequently, administrators and teachers must change our assessment strategies to tie assessment design and content to new outcomes and purposes for assessment.

Several recommendations were suggested to assist administrators and teachers with alternatives to standardized testing. Recommendations were based on the extensive review of related literature. The first part included common characteristics of alternative assessments, particularly for young children. The second part included examples and a brief explanation of alternative assessments.

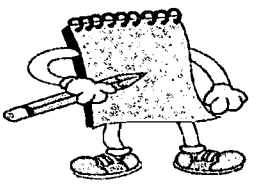
Common Characteristics of Alternative Assessments

- Asks students to perform, create or produce something
- Encourages student self-reflection
- Measures outcomes of significance
- Taps higher-level thinking and problem-solving skills
- Uses tasks that represent meaningful instructional activities
- Invokes real-world applications
- Requires new instructional and assessment roles for teachers
- Provides self-assessment opportunities for students
- Provides opportunities for both individual and group work
- Encourages students to continue the learning activity beyond the scope of the assignment
- Defines explicit performance criteria
- Makes assessment equal in importance to curriculum and instruction
- Accommodates the developmental needs of each child
- Allows all students to express their knowledge in ways that complement their learning styles and intelligences

Credits: Birrell & Ross; Bowers; Eisner; Farr & Greene; Geocaris & Ross; Kohn; Moore; Skinner; and Wadlington & Partridge

ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENTS

ORAL AND WRITTEN PRODUCTS



Portfolios

Portfolios are a collection of student's work selected over time, across multiple subjects, used to motivate student learning and improve student performance. Portfolios are used to evaluate and substantiate students' learning process, progress, development, and achievement. The teacher evaluates the work as the portfolio develops, sharing observations with the student, and encouraging the student to evaluate and improve his or her own work. To gain multiple perspectives on the academic development of young children, it is important for teachers to include more than one type of material in the portfolio. The following types of materials can be included in a portfolio:

- Audio- and videotaped recordings of readings or oral presentations.
- Writing samples such as dialogue journal entries, book reports, writing assignments (drafts or final copies), reading log entries, or other writing projects.
- Art work such as pictures or drawings, and graphs and charts.
- Conference or interview notes and anecdotal records.
- Checklists (by teacher, peers, or student).
- Tests and quizzes.

Credits: Andersen, Courtney & Abodeeb, Daniels, Davies & Wavering, Gillman & McDermott, Hughes, Hurwitz & Hurwitz, Kohn, Neil, Skinner, and Thompson

Reading Response Logs

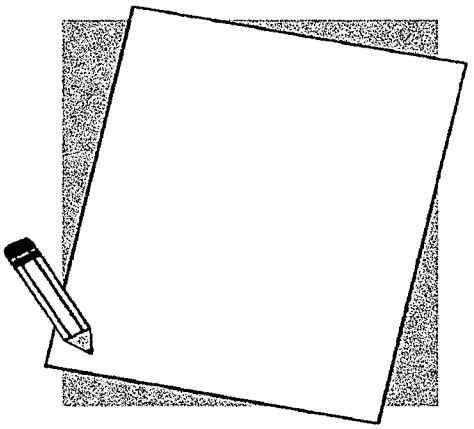
"Reading response logs" are used for students' written responses or reactions to a piece of literature. Students may respond to questions--some generic, some specific to the literature--that encourage critical thinking, or they may copy a brief text on one side of the page and write their reflections on the text on the other side.

Some questions to consider writing about in a reading response log include:

- I really like/dislike this idea because
- This character reminds me of somebody I know because
- This scene reminds me of a similar scene in
- I like/dislike (name of character) because
- This situation reminds me of a similar situation in my own life. It happened when
- The character I most admire is _____ because
- If I were (name of character) at this point, I would
- I wish that
- I felt sad when
- I was surprised when

Credits: Davies & Wavering, Hacker & Hathaway, Hughes, Mitchell, and Valencia,

Journals

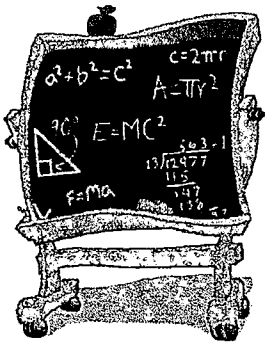


"Dialogue journals" or "Reflective journals" provide a means of interactive, ongoing correspondence between students and teachers. Beginners around the age of 5 and 6 can draw pictures that can be labeled by the teacher.

- Journals are useful in any subject area.
- Students determine the choice of topics and participate at their level of language proficiency
- Journals can be kept confidential or presented to teachers or peers.
- Content should be emphasized instead of mechanics.
- Students can respond to topics studied in class or to problems found in field experiences.
- Journals focus students and build skills.
- Journals help develop personal relationships.

Credits: Clay, Davies & Wavering, Hacker & Hathaway, and Moore,

Construct-Response Items

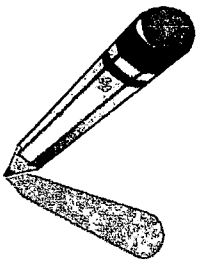


Construct-response items require students to produce an answer to a question rather than select from a list of possible answers such as multiple choice or matching. Examples include:

- short answer
- fill-in-the-blanks
- solving math problems
- constructing a diagram

Credits: Daniels, Davies & Wavering, Hacker & Hathaway, Hughes, Thompson, and Valencia

Short Stories or Essays



Short stories and essays assess a student's understanding of a subject by having the student describe and analyze in paragraph form. Short stories and essays allow students to use facts in content and discuss their importance. Students integrate higher-order and critical thinking. Short stories are useful for younger students in grades K-3. Essays work well with grades 4 and above. Possible story starters include:

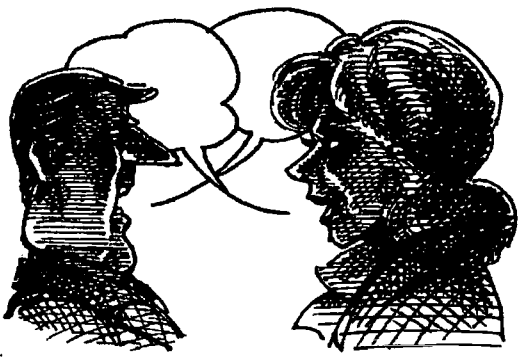
- If I were the teacher I would
- If I could give one piece of advice to any person in history, that advice would be
- Describe a dream that you had recently.
- The best lesson my grandparents ever taught me
- If I were the teacher, I would...
- In twenty years I'll be
- I was most angry/ happy when
- My worst mistake was
- * In 20 years, I will be...
- My favorite hobbies are
- If I won a million dollars I would
- If you were an insect, what kind would you be and why?

Credits: Clay, Courtney & Abodeeb, Daniels, Hughes, Hurwitz & Hurwitz, and Moore

ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENTS

ORAL PERFORMANCES OR PRESENTATIONS

Oral Disclosure

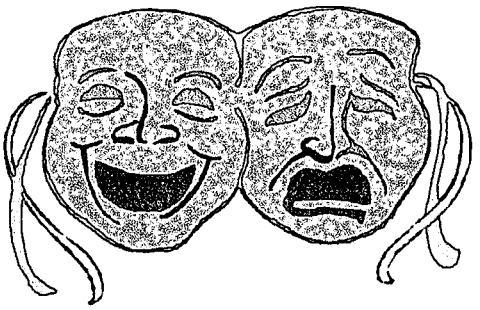


Oral disclosure requires the student to speak aloud. Examples of oral discourse include:

- having the student rehearse a lesson
- recite poems
- recite prose
- oral presentations

Credits: Geocaris & Ross, Daniels, Hurwitz & Hurwitz, Hughes, and Skinner

Role Plays

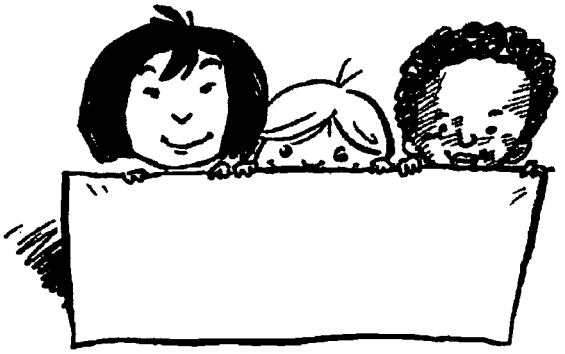


Role plays can be used across the curriculum with all grade levels and with any number of people. This is a fun-filled way for a teacher to conduct informal assessments of students' knowledge in any subject. In addition, role-plays can serve as an alternative to traditional book reports. Students can transform themselves into a character or object from the book. Role plays could include:

- sections of a book
- poems
- prose
- songs
- finger plays

Credits: Daniels, Davies & Wavering, Herman, Hughes, Hurwitz & Hurwitz, and Thompson

Interviews

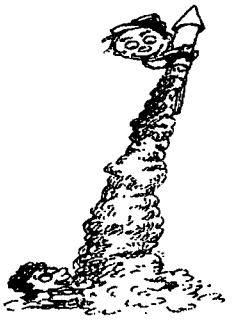


Interviews with students and parents can also yield information useful in evaluating the student's progress. Allow students to prepare for the interview by letting them know about the topic and procedures of the interview in advance. Parent interviews may yield unique ways of looking at their child's progress and promote a renewed interest in their child's learning. Interviews may be used for the following:

- explain subject matter
- describe how children would handle difficult, hypothetical situations.
- gain insight into history
- research
- learn about their peers

Credits: Daniels, Davies & Wavering, Herman, Hughes, Hurwitz & Hurwitz, and Thompson

Exhibitions

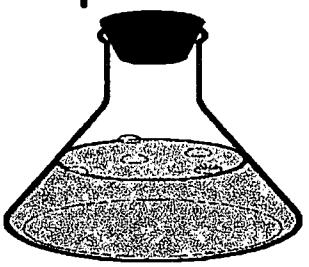


Exhibitions are a more comprehensive way to assess a student's ability to demonstrate skills or competence. Students demonstrate mastery of outcomes to a real audience while being evaluated on clear criteria. Exhibitions can include:

- competitions between individual students
- competitions between groups of students
- a collaborative group project

Credits: Geocaris & Ross, Daniels, Hurwitz & Hurwitz, Hughes, and Skinner

Experiments



Experiments test a student's understanding of scientific concepts and their ability to carry out processes. Students demonstrate the ability to develop a hypothesis, plan the experience, perform the experience, write up findings, and apply their knowledge to come up with a conclusion. Experiments can be used in the following subject areas:

- Reading
- Math
- Science
- Social Studies

Credits: Geocaris & Ross, Daniels, Hurwitz & Hurwitz, Hughes, and Skinner

Section One

Brief Historical Overview of Standardized Tests

The first section represented a literary review. It was a brief overview of the history of standardized tests, which enhanced the understanding of assessments used in public schools. This overview included historical "benchmarks" regarding standardized tests as well as an explanation of their primary use in elementary public schools. Hopefully, these inclusions will help administrators and teachers understand the overall use of standardized tests in public schools.

- Intelligence tests were designed in the 1900s to seek out children who were in need of special help and to place immigrant children in special classes.
- In the 1920s, multiple-choice tests were also developed and used for grouping children for instructional purposes.
- After 1950, standardized tests were used increasingly for retention and selection purposes.
- In 1957, testing did not take a dominant role until Sputnik was launched. As a result of expected outcomes, more programs were to be developed to see if our educational programs were successful, which led to an increase in federal dollars spent on education. Due to the fact that no other assessment measures were available, norm-referenced standardized tests became the required measure of progress.
- In the 1960s, public officials were looking for ways to improve education and achieve accountability.
- In the 1970s clearly stated goals and objectives were needed so that teachers could focus on what they needed to teach. This focus pushed test developers to add even more sub-skills and objectives to their tests.

- An increase in concern for educational quality in the 1980s led to yet another increase in the use of standardized tests. This was due to the public's concern that our nation's math and science results were low and many began to worry that our academic standing was too low, and America was headed for decay.

Credits: Brown; Farr & Greene; Hacker & Hathaway; James & Tanner; Neil & Medina; Perrone; Stiggins; and Valencia

Section Two

Conflicting Attitudes: Means of Assessment in Schools

The second section was developed to identify the conflicting attitudes towards standardized tests and their sole means of assessment in public schools. The basic use of standardized tests in public schools was examined. Emphasis was on the scores of young children and how these scores were often misinterpreted due to the different developmental patterns of young children.

- Commercial test publishers market the vast majority of standardized tests. These test developers do their best trying to create a series of "one-size-fits-all" assessment.
- Standardized multiple-choice tests are often called objective because a machine scores the test; therefore, no individual decides on a child's score. Human beings are still closely involved because they chose the questions to ask and which word to use when asking them.
- Decisions about the correct or incorrect answers and what particular grade is passing are all decisions made by test-makers.
- Test results from standardized tests are aggregated to provide data about individual classrooms, schools, and districts.
- Performances on standardized tests are most influenced by students' intellectual abilities and the extent to which students are raised in stimulus-rich environments.
- Young children's growth in the primary years can often be misinterpreted with different developmental patterns, so implications of failure in these years can be devastating.
- A single administration of a test may determine what a child is capable of doing on a specific day, but it cannot predict how a child will perform in any program.

- Standardized tests measure how well a child can attend to a task rather than his or her ability in the area or skill being tested.
- The primary use of results from standardized tests are for placement decisions for individual students, charting an individual course of study for a child's instruction, program evaluation, and now, for accountability of school effectiveness.

Credits: Bushweller; Elliott; Ysseldyke, Thurlow, & Erickson; Popham; Ratcliff; Rose & Gallup; Sacks; and Skinner

Section Three

Pros and Cons of Standardized Tests

Pros and cons of standardized tests were examined in section three using research-based studies ranging from the last twenty years in Dissertation Abstracts, ERIC documents, and other resources. Administrators and teachers can refer to other resources written by these authors to gain more insights regarding assessment measures.

Pros

- They are carefully constructed by experts, machine-scored, relatively easy to administer, inexpensive, and objective.
- Standardized tests provide the public with an easily understood report card of their child's or adolescent's school rating.
- Assuming that the national norm group is representative of the nation at large, then educators and parents can use these test results to make useful inferences about the students.
- The information obtained from test results provides students' strengths and weaknesses which can be used when communicating with parents about their child's abilities and capabilities.
- The primary advantage of standardized tests is that they can eliminate biases in assessment of individual children while providing data that can permit comparisons of groups to a standard or norm.
- Useful information can also be taken from standardized tests to show a student's growth over time. A child's scores can be compared each year to see if significant growth or decline is made in the different subject areas.

- Standardized tests are a cost effective way to evaluate students and are easy and relatively inexpensive to administer.
- Standardized testing brings clarity and focus to the curriculum because teachers and students have a solid understanding of what successful learning entails.
- Standardized testing dramatically reduces the inequalities of different curricula being offered in different schools or even different classes in the same school.

Credits: Bowers; Coleman; Daniels; Eisner; Harris & Longstreet; Mitchell; Popham; and Sacks

Cons

- Predicting school achievement for a 5 or 6 year old is difficult at best due to the developmental nature of the child. Young children are unstable; their abilities and skills change with their development.
- Standardized tests tend to focus on isolated skills, encourage low-level comprehension, rely only on multiple-choice formats, and can produce scores that are not useful in planning instruction.
- Students are not involved in their own assessment.
- Since standardized tests are only administered once or twice a year, so they fail to document change over time in a student's learning.
- Multiple-choice tests do not measure higher-order thinking such as the ability to write, use math, or make meaning from text, nor do they assess what young children can do on real world tasks.

- Standardized test questions focus on discrete facts but do not address deeper, multi-faceted meaning of facts. Teachers feel pressured to drill students to memorize facts instead of understanding the event or the problem which is posed.
- Standardized tests have been used as a method of controlling what goes on in the classroom. Principals have diminished extra-curricular activities, programs in the arts, recess, electives, and other activities to focus just on test materials.
- A simple score on a standardized test can result in many children being given a narrow curriculum because teachers tend to teach what is on the test. The test essentially becomes the curriculum, discouraging effective teaching and meaningful learning.
- Students are subjected to rote memorization instead of meaningful, problem-solving skills.
- In an effort to improve test scores, many teachers are spending an inordinate amount of time teaching to the test. Much of this time spent by teachers who teach lower-order thinking skills could be spent on more productive learning.
- Classroom activities such as discussions and creative expression focus on correct answers for the tests, concluding that our children should all hear the beat of the same drummer.
- Testing young children and applying labels is detrimental. The test results are often an indication of their developmental state; the results do not predict later achievement in school.

Credits: Bigelow; Eisner; Hacker & Hathaway; James & Tanner; Kohn; Popham; Thompson; and Valencia

Section Four

Labeling Our Children:

The Negative Bias, Outcomes, and Self Esteem

The fourth section was developed to familiarize administrators and teachers with the negative outcomes of labeling young children. Young children's self esteem can be damaged, and expectations can be lowered for children who are labeled as "at-risk", "immature", and "remedial".

- Labels may inappropriately cause educators or parents to alter the treatment towards these children.
- Children who receive low scores usually are placed in special classes where the curriculum involves drill-and-skill worksheets. They fail to learn what their advantaged peers are learning.
- School personnel often have lower expectations for students placed in lower tracts or remedial classes due to low-test scores.
- High portions of students labeled "low" come from minority groups or special classes.
- Test-makers are simply limited because no one test can account for the diverse cultures in our society. Even questions targeted to one particular minority group still leave out other groups.
- Standardized tests are also biased in favor of English-fluent pupils.
- Students who are more likely to fail include the disproportionately poor and African American students, which undermines our mission of offering all students an opportunity to learn.

- Another disadvantage to low-income students is the fact they have not had some of the experiences as other students.

Credits: Andersen; Birrell & Ross; Hurwitz & Hurwitz; James & Tanner; Moore; Perrone; Popham; Ratcliff; Skinner; and Smith

Section Five

Alternative and Authentic Assessments

In the fifth section, recommendations for elementary level administrators and teachers about alternative and authentic assessment measures such as portfolios, open-ended questions, classroom observations, and other alternative measures were presented. These recommendations can be an aid to benefit the improvement of students' academic achievement by suggesting alternative assessment measures for administrators and teachers to use in place of standardized tests.

Alternative Assessment

- Assessments are needed that are linked to curriculum and instruction that teachers provide daily. Educators should use all the results as a way to drive remediation and instructional effectiveness.
- Current assessment methods such as standardized test audit student's work, but do not help to improve learning.
- Alternative methods of assessment serve individual students more effectively than do standardized tests.
- Alternative assessments subjectively measure problem-solving ability, communication skills, divergent thinking and holistic understanding.
- Assessment programs should provide useful, understandable information about students' learning and they need to be linked to ongoing, informal assessment that supports the classroom curriculum.
- Assessments must be designed to accommodate the developmental needs of each child.

- Assessments should measure what students have learned and be a direct reflection of the curriculum and instruction that the students have received.
- Alternative assessments allow teachers to obtain a more accurate description of an individual's strengths and weaknesses. These assessments help teachers design and implement a more personalized program of study.
- Alternative assessments enable teachers to accept a variation in responses and address different learning styles and modalities. Meaningful assessment is reflective, self-monitoring, and constructive.
- Alternative assessments should represent activities that are typically performed in classrooms.
- Alternative assessments more accurately depicts what a student can do in real-life contexts with classroom instruction focusing on higher-level thinking skills.
- "Authentic assessment" or "performance-based" assessment are two examples of alternative assessment. Examples of types of alternative assessments include portfolios, cooperative learning groups, and journals.

Credits: Black & William; Bowers; Coleman; Eisner; Farr & Greene; Goodwin & Goodwin; Moore; Perrone; and Ratcliff

Authentic Assessment

- Authentic assessment means gathering evidence of student performance in an integrated manner over a period of time. These assessments are to mirror real world experiences and reveal student performance through meaningful and challenging tasks.

- Key characteristics of authentic assessment include challenging the student through real world experience, fostering disciplined inquiry, integrating knowledge, and having value beyond the assessment measure.
- Authentic assessment is derived from every day activities in the classroom, including teacher evaluation, students' work, and student evaluations of their own processes and products.
- Authentic assessment puts more emphasis on student's progress for his or her age and experience, and less emphasis on comparison with students.
- Authentic assessment puts emphasis on whether the progress for a specific student is developmentally and age-appropriate, encompassing a variety of opportunities to demonstrate his or her knowledge.
- Authentic assessment can be based upon performance assessment such as open-ended questions, exhibitions, portfolios, or projects. They measure directly what the children should know, emphasize higher-order thinking, personal judgment, collaboration, and urge children to become active in their learning.
- A portfolio is a record of a child's progress of learning including how a child thinks, questions, analyzes, and interacts.
- Portfolios help teachers make decisions about what remediation skills the student needs and the student's strengths.
- Observations can be done while students are involved in learning activities, presentations, or group activities. Teachers can observe and document strategies used in the learning process.

Credits: Daniels; Davis & Wavering; Hacker & Hathaway; Harris & Longstreet; Herman; Hurwitz & Hurwitz; James & Tanner; Kohn; Perrone; Popham; Standardized Tests and Our Children: A Guide to Testing Reform; and Stiggins

Section Six

Informal Interviews

In the last section, potential alternatives to standardized tests, informal discussions with 3 elementary teachers and 2 administrators were incorporated. The purpose of the informal interviews was to show practical ideas that could be applied easily in diverse classrooms to create a positive atmosphere for young students and their successes.

Interview With an Elementary Principal Enrolled in a Doctoral Program

1) What do you think about the current and dominant use of standardized tests to evaluate a school district's performance?

Everyone should understand the limitations of standardized tests. Scores from standardized tests cannot tell all there is to know about a district's performance. When this is the only method used to evaluate a district, there is pressure to teach to the test. Thus, standardized tests often drive curriculum, which is not their purpose. They are only one form of assessment.

2) The administration and classroom teachers have the appropriate training and knowledge to use assessment tools to meet students' needs.

SA—strongly agree A—agree No—no opinion
D—disagree SD—strongly disagree

3) What do you think about the current and dominant use of standardized tests to evaluate a student's progression in learning?

My area of specialization is early childhood, and standardized tests are not appropriate to evaluate young children's progression in learning. This type of test is not designed to hold the interest of young children. Often what is measured is the ability to take a test instead of actually measuring a specific skill. Additionally, young children demonstrate emerging skills that cannot be measured by standardized tests. These tests are only approximations of what children can do. In order to get an accurate picture of student progression, teachers must also observe and record student progress at regular intervals.

4) Learning styles should be incorporated into assessment measures.

SA—strongly agree A—agree No—no opinion
D—disagree SD—strongly disagree

5) How do you use the results of standardized tests in your classroom or school?

Since standardized tests are only one form of assessment, they are used in combination with other forms of assessment to evaluate student progress and to plan instruction.

6) I feel alternative assessment measures help you as a classroom teacher or administrator to communicate better to parents about their child's strengths and weaknesses.

SA—strongly agree A—agree No—no opinion
D—disagree SD—strongly disagree

7) Do you use any alternative assessment practices in your classroom or school? If so, please explain the alternative methods.

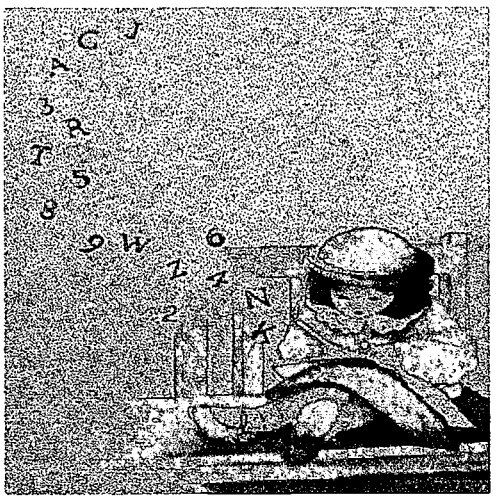
I use informal assessments such as systematically observing and documenting student progress. This gives a broader picture of student progress and can be used to reflect on, evaluate, and design instruction. I also allow students to document progress by compiling a portfolio, which reflects their achievement over time.

8) Alternative assessment gives administrators and teachers a better understanding of how to individualize instruction to improve student learning.

SA—strongly agree A—agree No—no opinion
D—disagree SD—strongly disagree

9) What aspects do you feel are essential to a quality assessment program?

I feel multiple forms of assessment are essential and effective components of good teaching. Assessments should include observations, documentations, portfolios, and self-assessments. Students should be taught to evaluate their own progress so they can become responsible for their own learning.



Interview with an Elementary Principal

1) What do you think about the current and dominant use of standardized tests to evaluate a school district's performance?

This is like comparing apples and oranges. Tests cannot measure the performance of a district--there are too many variables. Most districts have a large population of non-English speaking students. Tests are made for people who speak English, therefore, the test makers are automatically eliminating a large group of people from being successful. Additionally, there are large populations of students with low attendance or that have been very transient. These students may have missed a large amount of information that was learned.

Classroom teachers are the ones that know the students. They know what the student can and cannot do. They should be able to make decisions in this area. Additionally, there are many teachers in a student's life; to say that it was one teacher or one school that made the student successful or unsuccessful is ludicrous and just does not make sense.

2) The administration and classroom teachers have the appropriate training and knowledge to use assessment tools to meet students' needs.

SA—strongly agree A—agree No—no opinion
D—disagree SD—strongly disagree

3) What do you think about the current and dominant use of standardized tests to evaluate a student's progression in learning?

Students learn at different rates and in different ways. There is no way to evaluate the student based on a standardized test because of the individuality of learning. When teachers adjust their teaching to the abilities of the students that they are teaching, then we cannot measure them by a standardized test. This type of test does not allow for all of the variations that can exist. Although the reliability has been established, there is no way to determine if the population on which it was standardized matches the group that was tested. If we really believe that knowledge is learned through a constructive process, then standardized testing is archaic!

4) Learning styles should be incorporated into assessment measures.

SA—strongly agree A—agree No—no opinion
D—disagree SD—strongly disagree

5) How do you use the results of standardized tests in your classroom or school?

Most of the time the standardized tests are given at a point in the year when you are finished with that group of students. Thus, the results do not help you at all with the students that you are teaching. You can use the results to inform your instruction next year, but the next group of students may not have the same areas of deficit that the students had the year before. The only information that they can really give you at the end of the year is if your scores continually remain low in the same areas.

6) I feel alternative assessment measures help you as a classroom teacher or administrator to communicate better to parents about their child's strengths and weaknesses.

SA—strongly agree A—agree No—no opinion
D—disagree SD—strongly disagree

7) Do you use any alternative assessment practices in your classroom or school? If so, please explain the alternative methods.

Students usually participate in authentic learning experiences so that I use rubrics to score students on projects. In some instances, students have developed portfolios to demonstrate their accomplishments. These are particularly useful to show how students grow in their reading and writing.

8) Alternative assessment gives administrators and teachers a better understanding of how to individualize instruction to improve student learning.

SA—strongly agree A—agree No—no opinion
D—disagree SD—strongly disagree

9) What aspects do you feel are essential to a quality assessment program?

First of all, the teacher must be looked to as the primary assessor. Teachers must be made aware of various forms of formal and informal assessments that can be given to students. These assessments need to be related to all of the content areas. Teachers need to understand that testing needs to be ongoing. They need to be constantly observing and revising what they do to match the needs of the students.

The teachers then need to be shown how to use these results to inform their teaching. Most states have provided objectives. Teachers need to know how to use these objectives to guide their teaching. Teachers need to be able to make the

decisions that are based on the needs of the students that they are teaching. This can be very difficult in a standardized testing environment.

Other Comments:

Everyone involved in education needs to understand that the most important aspect of the classroom is the relationship that the students and the teacher have. Any learning that occurs is the result of a positive relationship and experience. Testing breaks down these relationships because teachers teach to the test and not to the students. Educators need to realize that we teach people--not books, programs, tests, etc. Every individual that comes into our classroom is a person--not a number, a stanine, or a percentage. Parents, administrators and others who are not in the classroom need to look at the relationships in the classroom. It is these relationships that build who the individuals are and who they eventually become. We must empower teachers to do their job without THE TEST always being in the way.

Interview with Elementary Classroom Teacher and Diagnostician

1) What do you think about the current and dominant use of standardized tests to evaluate a school district's performance?

If by standardized tests you are referring to the use of the TAAS in 3rd grade and above and the use of other assessments in K, 1st, 2nd then my opinion is that the state legislature has created a test-driven curriculum. The use of these instruments does not reflect the quality work that occurs in the classroom. It has also created a subculture in the state of Texas that exists to create and market materials and programs to help a school increase their TAAS scores.

* The TAAS test is not a standardized instrument since by definition, it is a not a norm-referenced test, but a criterion reference test to which arbitrary norms have been applied.

* The use of standardized tests such as the Stanford Achievement Test 9th edition for program evaluation is appropriate.

* Some, but a limited number of administrators, do use the results of the TAAS for program evaluation and develop strategies for addressing areas of weakness.

2) The administration and classroom teachers have the appropriate training and knowledge to use assessment tools to meet students' needs.

SA—strongly agree A—agree No—no opinion
D—disagree SD—strongly disagree

I work with preservice teachers. No training is provided to them in the use of the results of the TAAS. Additionally, in my preservice diagnostician class, I do a lecture on using existing information and have to teach these teachers, some of whom are giving the TAAS test, what it means.

* When I did my mid-management certification, no one taught me how to use the results for program evaluation.

3) What do you think about the current and dominant use of standardized tests to evaluate a student's progression in learning?

Most teachers do not know how to determine if a student is making progress from the results of the TAAS test. They only know how to look at the final results to see

if the child passed or did not pass. If a teacher knows how to read the results, an IEP could be written!

4) Learning styles should be incorporated into assessment measures.

SA—strongly agree A—agree No—no opinion
D—disagree SD—strongly disagree

5) How do you use the results of standardized tests in your classroom or school?

I am fortunate to be at one school where the administrator uses the test results for program evaluation and develops strategies to address the areas of weakness. I have been the diagnostician for other campuses where this was not done.

6) I feel alternative assessment measures help you as a classroom teacher or administrator to communicate better to parents about their child's strengths and weaknesses.

SA—strongly agree A—agree No—no opinion
D—disagree SD—strongly disagree

7) Do you use any alternative assessment practices in your classroom or school? If so, please explain the alternative methods.

As the diagnostician on an elementary campus, I have helped set up a portfolio system that is used to monitor progress in weak areas identified on the TAAS test.

8) Alternative assessment gives administrators and teachers a better understanding of how to individualize instruction to improve student learning.

SA—strongly agree A—agree No—no opinion
D—disagree SD—strongly disagree

9) What aspects do you feel are essential to a quality assessment program?

The aspect that is most often overlooked is the philosophy of the testing program. This is definitely true when one looks at the state-mandated testing program!

The next aspect that is overlooked is the implementation of training in how to use the test results.

Finally, the development of strategies to address areas of weakness is essential.

Other Comments: Texas has been in the news a great deal with the election of President Bush with particular emphasis on our testing program since it is this program that President Bush wants to implement nationwide. The TAAS test and those versions that preceded it are accountability-focused instruments that come from a legislature that is not composed of educators, but rather of people who come from the business world where accountability is a prime factor of consideration. Somewhere along the way, we have lost the focus on the child, and this is a shame!

Interview with an Elementary Classroom Teacher

1) What do you think about the current and dominant use of standardized tests to evaluate a school district's performance?

Standardized tests overall are not made considering the diversity of our nation's population and it's cultures, traditions, etc.; therefore, they should not be used to evaluate any kind of performance.

2) The administration and classroom teachers have the appropriate training and knowledge to use assessment tools to meet students' needs.

SA—strongly agree A—agree No—no opinion
D—disagree SD—strongly disagree

3) What do you think about the current and dominant use of standardized tests to evaluate a student's progression in learning?

I don't think that any standardized tests could give an accurate result because these tests follow a format that does not reflect the abilities or learning styles of all students.

4) Learning styles should be incorporated into assessment measures.

SA—strongly agree A—agree No—no opinion
D—disagree SD—strongly disagree

5) How do you use the results of standardized tests in your classroom or school?

If applicable, I use them to focus the course or the students' needs.

6) I feel alternative assessment measures help you as a classroom teacher or administrator to communicate better to parents about their child's strengths and weaknesses.

SA—strongly agree A—agree No—no opinion
D—disagree SD—strongly disagree

7) Do you use any alternative assessment practices in your classroom or school? If so, please explain the alternative methods.

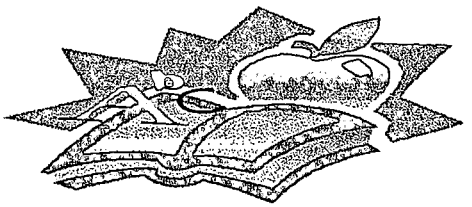
Yes, the Read 180 Program requires that the students take an assessment test that determines their reading levels. The program then automatically confirms to the students their ability level, focusing on the student's needs.

8) Alternative assessment gives administrators and teachers a better understanding of how to individualize instruction to improve student learning.

SA—strongly agree A—agree No—no opinion
D—disagree SD—strongly disagree

9) What aspects do you feel are essential to a quality assessment program?

A quality assessment program should be developed to reflect a student's background knowledge, culture, lifestyle, and learning style.



Interview with an Elementary Classroom Teacher

1) What do you think about the current and dominant use of standardized tests to evaluate a school district's performance?

I think the current and dominant use of standardized tests is absurd and a disservice to teachers and students.

2) The administration and classroom teachers have the appropriate training and knowledge to use assessment tools to meet students' needs.

SA—strongly agree A—agree No—no opinion
D—disagree SD—strongly disagree

3) What do you think about the current and dominant use of standardized tests to evaluate a student's progression in learning?

I think it is a disservice to all involved in education. It does not take into account any differences in students.

4) Learning styles should be incorporated into assessment measures.

SA—strongly agree A—agree No—no opinion
D—disagree SD—strongly disagree

5) How do you use the results of standardized tests in your classroom or school?

Students are placed in my class as a result of standardized tests. I don't use them in my classroom.

6) I feel alternative assessment measures help you as a classroom teacher or administrator to communicate better to parents about their child's strengths and weaknesses.

SA—strongly agree A—agree No—no opinion
D—disagree SD—strongly disagree

7) Do you use any alternative assessment practices in your classroom or school? If so, please explain the alternative methods.

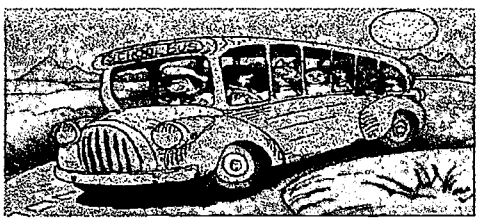
Mainly, I use observation "kidwatching" in my classroom. I also use retellings, K-W-L charts, oral readings, individual conferencing about reading, and students' writings.

8) Alternative assessment gives administrators and teachers a better understanding of how to individualize instruction to improve student learning.

SA—strongly agree A—agree No—no opinion
D—disagree SD—strongly disagree

9) What aspects do you feel are essential to a quality assessment program?

Teacher input, several measures looking at kids' accomplishments from different views, and measures which take into account differences in students.



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