

Chapter 30

One University's Pathway to a Change in Practice

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on the process of implementing problem based assessment at the college/university level in teacher education. Past research points to an overemphasis on factual information, lecture, and paper and pencil tests in higher education. Performance based assessment is discussed as an alternative and a measure that calls for students to demonstrate more active participation, critical thinking, and work that aligns more closely to what they will actually be engaged in in the field of education after graduation. Particularly, a case study of one university's path in the implementation of performance based assessment is highlighted. The process of implementing three specific performance based assessments are considered as well as roadblocks, assets, and specific methods found to be beneficial and/or challenging.

INTRODUCTION

As Dr. Moore finished grading the last exam in the large stack of papers before her, she took a moment to reflect on the purpose or perhaps the futility of her efforts. She had data before her, didn't she? Couldn't she easily divide her class into stacks of high, middle, and low achievers and make sound data based judgments about their abilities from there? Or could she? Dr. Moore considered whether a series of multiple choice, true/false, and short answer questions could truly be representative of her teacher candidates' performance in the dynamic and ever changing world of the elementary age classroom. Dr. Moore's ponderings led to a larger discussion amongst peers about altering the manner of assessments

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promoted in their teacher education program and eventually to a departmental change which focused heavily on the use of performance based assessments for their teacher candidates.

In this chapter we will consider the literature base surrounding the implementation of performance based assessments in teacher education including the benefits and challenges documented. Perhaps most importantly, we will provide a case study of one university's path in making a change in this direction. We will consider roadblocks, assets, and specific methods that we found to be beneficial and/or challenging.

Literature Review

Past considerations point to an overemphasis on the measure of factual information in education (Sandholtz & Shea, 2012); an issue that Gronlund (2003) views as an epidemic of too much knowing and not enough doing. When students are relegated to a primarily passive role in which they are simply absorbers of information and the teacher's role is one of dominance, it may be difficult to determine the level of learning and engagement on the part of the student (Yager, 1991; Goubeaud & Yan, 2004). Some scholars have advocated a move away from this traditional approach towards a more constructivist approach that reflects the reality of a reflective and autonomous profession (Porter, Youngs, & Odden, 2001; Tellez, 1996). Goubeaud & Yan (2004) note, "If the goal of instruction is deep understanding, then assessment strategies with open-ended, cognitively demanding structure should be used, and assessment practices should align with instructional methods" (p. 2). Based on this premise, many universities are considering the use of performance based assessments as a superior method to former traditional methods of assessment.

What Is Performance Based Assessment?

Traditional assessments tend to focus on evaluation solely, and, as a result, may not provide students with in-depth feedback and/or chances to revise and better their work (Chappuis & Stiggins, 2002; Shepard, 2000.) In contrast, performance based assessments give students opportunities to be actively involved in the process of learning (DeLain, 1995). Nitko (1996) defines performance based assessment as "an assessment activity that requires a student to demonstrate her achievement of a learning target by producing an extended written or spoken answer by engaging in group or individual activities, or by creating a specific product" (p. 240). It involves students in the act of "doing" and therefore relies on the integration of several processes, skills, and concepts (DeLain, 1995). Generally, performance based assessment is a move away from traditional paper and pencil tests such as multiple choice and true false to assessments that focus on the application of deeper problem solving skills which are applied in a dynamic learning environment. These assessments may include portfolios, videos, case studies, or reflective essays. Regardless of the forum, problem based assessments "have higher realism, more complexity, and offer greater flexibility in scoring" (Goubeaud & Yan, 2004, p. 4).

Benefits of Problem Based Assessments

As problem based assessments become utilized with greater frequency on university campuses, some researchers have begun to document the benefits of the practice both for students and instructors. Shepard (2000) noted that performance based assessments line up with findings from cognitive science research demonstrating the trajectory of student learning, as well as Gardner's research which demonstrated the

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