Authentic Assessment through the Lens of An Artist

Literature Review

EDUC 5305G Authentic Assessment
Student #100436563
Sylvia Buchanan

7/18/2011

Authentic Assessment through the Lens of an Artist

Authentic assessment, though sometimes referred to as performance-based assessment is not a new idea, in fact its history dates back to the 1950's. With more than half a century of debate on the subject in varying branches of thought, this paper will focus on a few of the key concepts of authentic assessment as seen through the lens of an artist. An investigation of the literature begins with a brief look at the historical concept of mastery as was practiced through the ancient system of patronage, workshops, and guilds. The discussion that follows will examine the theoretical thought on authentic assessment and the implications for practice.

The idea of mastery can be traced as far back as Aristotle who "felt that artistic training included mastery of a medium and gaining knowledge of one's environment" (DeHoyas, M., Lopez, A., Garnett, R., Gower, S., Sayle, A., Sreenan, N., Stewart, E., Sweny, S., & Wilcox, K. (2005). This concept of mastery has held true for many centuries in varying forms, with the "Medieval apprenticeship being one of the first examples of art instruction in the Western world" (DeHoyas et al., 2005). Beginning around the 11th century craft guilds played a major role in training apprentices, journeymen, and masters, with the earliest recorded guild dating from 1099 (Madaus & Dwyer, 1999). The craft guilds played an important role in the European economy, and by the 14th century became a powerful hierarchal organization (Madau et al., 1999), which we can still see today in the form of trades and unions. Throughout the history of art, the relationship between apprentice and master held a prominent position in the education of young artisans. The

apprentice usually began training at the age of 13, although Leonardo da Vinci's apprenticeship began at fourteen under the tutelage of Andrea del Venocchio, the official sculptor to the ruling family of Lorenzo de Medici of Florence. It has been said that del Venocchio thought da Vinci's talent so great that he never painted again, though others believe del Venocchio saw it as an opportunity to return to sculpture, which was both his greatest passion and his greatest talent. Either way, the idea of mastery is one that is still held today, which this paper will discuss as one of the key concepts of authentic assessment.

While the term authentic assessment was certainly not around during da Vinci's time, it is essentially what was happening when apprentices worked on tasks increasing in complexity as their skills progressed from novice to expert. For those with exceptional talents like da Vinci, the progression was much quicker, but for most artisans mastery was a difficult endeavour that very few achieved, since tasks often required years of training, practice and even rejection before they were mastered. In Wiggins' (1990) belief, authentic assessment emphasizes a student's progression towards mastery, and like the ancient training of the famed masters, students learn to self-assess, to use exemplars as their own skills are developing, but most importantly they learn from the continual feedback associated with the apprentice/master or novice/expert relationship.

Mastery

 Art history is just one lens through which to view the concept of mastery, it can also been seen in positions that require great skill like those of doctors, musicians, lawyers, or scientists. Newmann and Archbald (1992) propose that in attempting to recognize authentic forms of achievement we should look to the "kinds of mastery demonstrated by successful adults" such as those listed in the professions above. By "calling their accomplishments authentic instead of

contrived and trivial" (Newmann et al. 1992) these authors suggest that people in those types of professions are challenged to produce rather than reproduce knowledge, which are the kinds of skills our schools should be teaching. Instead they rely heavily on traditional curricula that essentially requires students to regurgitate what has already been said or done by others, or to do a variety of low level tasks such as matching artists to their work or labelling diagrams (Newmann et al., 1992), skills not necessarily transferable into the real world. "Most of the cognitive work of school consists in transmitting prior knowledge to students and asking them to reproduce it, rather than helping them use it to produce knowledge" (Newmann et al., 1992). We have only to look at the expectations of employers today to know how essential is it to teach students the 21st century skills needed for jobs that do not yet exist. Research (Cumming, & Maxwell, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 1994; Herrington, & Herrington, 1998) shows that assigning students authentic tasks and using assessment tools closely matched to those in the 'real world,' better prepares students for life outside of the classroom than do the more traditional models so widely used. This idea is also held by Wiggins who believes that "ill-structured" challenges and roles help students rehearse for the complex ambiguities of the "game" of adult and professional life" (Wiggins, 1990). This is an important point in the debate on authentic assessment because the traditional models currently employed many schools do not accommodate the assessment of critical thinking skills, problem solving abilities, or project-based learning, although McTighe (1997) offers us some insight into the evaluation of these skills. "Like the problems and issues we confront in the real world, authentic classroom performance tasks rarely have a single, correct answer. Therefore, our evaluation of student products and performances must be based upon judgment and guided by criteria. The criteria are typically incorporated into one of several types of scoring tools: a rubric, a rating scale, or a performance list. With all of these tools, the criteria

help to spell out the qualities that we consider to be most significant or important in student work" (McTighe, 1997)

These rubrics with criteria designed for specific tasks are used as a means for evaluating process, progress and product (Montgomery, 2002), the types of things not possible to evaluate through standardized testing. When creating assessment tools it is important to ensure the rubrics are closely tied to the tasks being evaluated, and that the criteria is made available to students prior to the assigned tasks (Darling-Hammond, 1994; McTighe, 1997; Montgomery, 2002; Wiggins, 1989).

Integration of Content, Instruction and Assessment

Just as authentic tasks are intimately linked to their assessment tools, so should content and instruction be integrated into the assessment model. As McTighe (1997) suggests, "the principle of establishing clear performance targets and the goal of teaching for understanding fit together as a powerful means of linking curriculum, instruction, and assessment." Through the integration of these tasks students are provided with a more realistic view of how work is conducted in the outside world rather than just reproducing another person's knowledge, as is so often the case with traditional . The intellectual challenges involved in authentic tasks and assessments require the integration of knowledge, not" fragmented and static bits or tasks (Newmann et.al, 1992; Montgomery, 2002) as is currently represented by our outdated assessment system, whose industrialized standards fit the era in which it was born, but can no longer support the ever evolving revolution of technology. Authentic assessment should be "seamless, ubiquitous, and invisible to instruction" (Barber, 2011), perhaps such a model can be found in the kinds of

programs offered at more specialized schools, like that of The Etobicoke School of the Arts, as we discussed in our breakout group. Students at that school are expected to handle a full academic course load, as well as two additional credits in their field of study. What's more, students are also required to attend practices and performances on a regular basis, as well as provide evidence of prior knowledge and motivation for entry into these programs. Clearly students willing to prepare portfolios for entry auditions and assume heavy class schedules must be highly motivated and self-directed individuals. Although, in return for their dedication, students are rewarded with specialized studies and instructors, facilities in which to practice their craft and access to professional artists, but of far greater significance are the authentic experiences they are getting as they train for their future careers in the arts. In contrast, it seems rather unfair that students in mainstream schools who have not yet found 'their calling' are not being provided with the same kinds of authentic experiences, which I believe will ultimately slow down or even alter their progression towards mastery.

Higher-order Thinking Skills

Programs such as the one just illustrated, though in part standardized to meet ministry requirements, have also managed to achieve authenticity by integrating performance-based instruction into the curriculum. Authentic tasks provide students with an opportunity to 'practice' their art before heading to university or entering the more complex world waiting beyond the boundaries of academic study. The skills students learn when negotiating the ambiguities often associated with authentic tasks require problem-solving, analytical, or critical thinking skills to be employed in order to complete their projects. In fact before students can even begin their studies in these schools they must make critical decisions regarding the artefacts they will submit

for assessment. The formal audition required of all prospective art students is much like the real-world experience of applying for a job. Students are expected to provide evidence of their commitment to the study of art as well as a demonstration of their prior knowledge in the field they wish to study. As is recommended for all authentic assessments, students and parents can the find rubrics outlining specific criteria for portfolio submissions on the school's website. Newmann & Archbald (1992, p. 75) "indicate that a major goal for authentic achievement is `to cultivate the kind of higher-order thinking and problem-solving capacities useful both to individuals and to the society. The approach to mastery gained in school is likely to transfer more readily to life beyond school." As students progress through these authentic tasks they learn to self assess and develop higher-order thinking skills, essential elements for success in this 21st century world.

In trying to determine a curriculum that adequately prepares children for life in the real world, educators need only to look at the words of Wiggins to guide us; "Norms are not standards, items are not real problems, right answers are not rationales" (Wiggins, 1990). This statement would imply that a more inclusive and multifaceted assessment model is far overdue in our schools. On the other hand Cummings and Maxwell (1999) remind us that "no matter how realistic a performance-based assessment is, it is still a simulation and examinees do not behave the same way they would in real life". Although that may be true, it is still arguable that a simulation is better than learning fragmented pieces of information out of context, something not easily transferrable as employable skills. Unfortunately, unless education policies and public awareness of these issues change, students will continue to march through school like robots on a production line.

For a look at a visual art unit I created for a final assignment, in the Technology and Curriculum course, that could be described as authentic assessment. Also provided are some suggestions for possible extensions to the unit. http://issuu.com/sylviab/docs/sylvia_s_final_assignment_97

References

Barber, W. (2011). Designing and assessing lessons that work. *Week one PowerPoint presentation.* EDUC 5305G Authentic Assessment, slide 7.

Cumming, J. J., & Maxwell, G. S. (1999). Contextualising authentic assessment. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice, 6*(2), 177-194.

Darling-Hammond, L. (1994). Setting standards for students: The case for authentic assessment. Paper presented at the *The Educational Forum, 59*(1) 14-21.

DeHoyas, M., Lopez, A., Garnett, R., Gower, S., Sayle, A., Sreenan, N., Stewart, E., Sweny, S., & Wilcox, K. (2005). History of art education, *University of North Texas*. Retrieved from http://www.art.unt.edu/ntieva/HistoryofArtEd/index.html

Herrington, J., & Herrington, A. (1998). Authentic assessment and multimedia: How university students respond to a model of authentic assessment. *Higher Education Research & Development, 17*(3), 305-322.

Madaus, G. F., & O'Dwyer, L. M. (1999). Short history of performance assessment: Lessons learned. *Phi Delta Kappan, 80*(9), 688-689.

Newmann, F. M. & Archbald, D. A. (1992). The nature of authentic academic achievement. *Toward a New Science of Educational Testing and Assessment.* State University of New York Press, Albany New York. 71-84.

Wiggins, G. (1990). The case for authentic assessment. ERIC digest.