

## Performance assessment

A related aspect of authentic assessment is performance assessment; indeed there is some interchange of terminology here, as they share several common characteristics (Gipps 1994). Performance assessment:

- Concerns direct reality rather than disconnected items of knowledge.
- Models the real learning that students undertake rather than contrives artificial tests; it does not distort teaching.
- Requires students to demonstrate what they can do rather than simply completing test items that address fragments of what they might do and reporting what they could or would do in a particular situation, i.e. it is actual rather than speculative.
- Integrates many areas of knowledge in undertaking and demonstrating a particular activity or project.
- Uses real-world activities and learning.
- Uses activities that relate to the world outside school (e.g. vocational experience).
- Is focused on processes as well as products and outcomes.
- Can replace contrived test situations with everyday, ongoing teaching and learning activities and tasks, which are used for assessment purposes (though specific tasks can be set specifically for assessment purposes, i.e. whilst these might be excluded from authentic assessment they may not be excluded from performance assessment).

## Planning

In planning for performance assessment it is important to plan for the instructions to be given, the marking criteria scheme to be used and communicated to the students (see below on test construction and scoring) and how evidence for assessment will be collected, e.g. formally in writing, or informally through aural and visual observation and questioning, or a combination of methods. Further, the nature of the feedback and feedforward to be given to the students is important, as is the effect of teacher intervention in the process. There are several questions to be addressed in considering performance assessment, for example:

- Is the marking going to involve grading, written feedback, oral feedback, summative assessment, formative assessment, ongoing or on a limited number of occasions, or what?
- How is a group project going to be assessed?
- How is account to be given for differential effort and input into a group project?
- How is account to be taken of individual abilities in an individual's task?
- How much does the output/outcome reflect the processes that went into the production of the outcome?
- How should assessment of the processes be undertaken?
- How are reliability and consistency going to be addressed across different activities, outcomes and different students?
- What are the performance criteria?
- What is the performance evidence and how is it going to be gathered?

- What is going to be assessed: products, processes, knowledge, understanding, application of knowledge, initiative, creativity, lower order thinking, higher order thinking, problem-solving, attitudes to learning, skills, competencies, reasoning?

Though there is a range of questions to be addressed in considering performance assessment, this should not detract from the real benefits to be obtained from this style of assessment; it is rich in authenticity, real-world value, and it provides opportunities for students to be assessed on what they have learned and what they can do, 'for real'.

In planning a performance assessment there are several stages that can be followed (Stiggins 2001):

*Stage one:*

- Define the performance (e.g. what are the targets for the performance? What does it mean to be a 'good writer'? What does 'success' mean?).
- What is the type of performance and (how will success be shown (e.g. examples of work, individual or group performance)?
- What are the performance criteria (what is the expected performance)?
- What is the scoring system to be used?
- What feedback and feedforward systems are to be used?
- How will students be involved in the assessment?
- How will students understand the scoring, feedback and feedforward systems?
- Analyse the expected performance to reveal the main success criteria; synthesise the key performance criteria; develop continua/rating scales/grades/marks of each of the main criteria for success; pilot the use of these to achieve consistency and unambiguity, and refine where appropriate; ensure that they can be understood by the students themselves.

*Stage two:*

- Devise the performance tasks (e.g. the nature of the event, whether deliberately devised or naturally occurring in teaching and learning; the components of the task or activity; the number of tasks or activities required to provide an adequate sample of performance).
- What is the nature of the event, tasks and activities?
- What are the components of the tasks/activities/events?
- What is the sample of tasks/activities/events to be used in order to be fairly representative?

Tombari and Borich (1999) set out a very clear set of steps in devising performance assessment:

Step 1: Decide on a specific subject area.

Step 2: Define cognitive processes and social skills you want to assess.

Step 3: Design a task and task context (including consideration of goal relevance for the learners, levels of difficulty, multiple goals, multiple solutions, self-determined learning, and the clarity of directions).

Step 4: Specify the scoring rubrics (measuring the goals, selecting an appropriate scoring system, assigning point values).

Step 5: Identify important implementation considerations: identifying testing constraints of time, reference material, other people's input, equipment, scoring criteria; delivering the assessment (introducing and structuring the task, motivation, coaching, independent work, debriefing).

A critical aspect of performance assessment is to decide in advance what constitutes the evidence for making judgements of performance, and how the evidence will be acquired, e.g. through writing, questioning, observation, and presentation.

Though there is much to commend performance assessment, not least that it is strong on authenticity and validity, one should be mindful that it is time-consuming, complex to score and difficult to standardise (hence of questionable reliability) and of limited generalisability unless a wide range of tasks is sampled. In this respect it may be easier to use for formative and diagnostic purposes – assessment for learning – rather than summative purposes – assessment of learning. If performance assessment is to be used for comparing students and for high stakes assessment then this will require: (a) clear specification (of cognitive demands, scoring criteria, levels of performance and learning contexts); (b) clear calibration of scoring; (c) moderation procedures, together with their associated training of markers and audit of marks (Gipps 1994).

## References

Gipps, C. (1994) *Beyond Testing*. RoutledgeFalmer, London.

Stiggins, R. J. (2001) *Student-Involved Classroom Assessment* (third edition). New Jersey: Merrill Prentice Hall, Chapter 7.

Tombari, M. and Borich, G. (1999) *Authentic Assessment in the Classroom*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, pp. 150–63.