

# AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT

## TEACHER: "AN LEP STUDENT IS DOING BADLY ON MY TESTS. WHY IS THIS?"

If a student does poorly on one of your tests, it is helpful to analyze the possible reasons *with them*. Perhaps they...

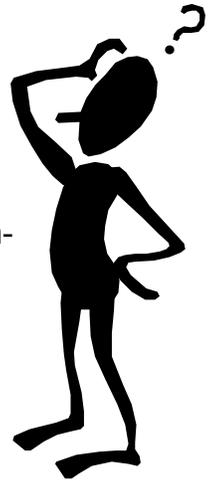
- \* Never did (or understood) the work in the first place
- \* Did and understood the work, but did not study for the test
- \* Understood the work and studied for the test, but did not understand the question(s)
- \* Understood the questions, but didn't know how to answer them
- \* Understood the questions and knew how to answer in their native language, but could not answer in English
- \* Thought they knew how to answer in English but did not give the right answer or did not give the full answer
- \* Did not check their work carefully before turning in the test

## WHAT IS AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT & WHY USE IT WITH LEP STUDENTS?

Simply testing an isolated skill or a retained fact does not effectively measure a student's capabilities. To accurately evaluate what a student has learned, an assessment method must examine his or her *collective abilities*. The term **authentic assessment** describes the multiple forms of assessment that reflect student learning, achievement, motivation, and attitudes on instructionally relevant classroom activities.

Often, traditional types of assessments (i.e., essays, multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, etc.) are heavily language dependent. These content assessments quickly become English proficiency tests rather than a measure of what students know. **Limited English Proficient (LEP) students frequently have difficulty expressing their mastery of content unless they have a certain level of English proficiency.**

Following the example above, if a student is struggling with sequential vocabulary, they may not be able to write an essay on the water cycle. However, if given the opportunity to do a hands-on type of assessment through experimentation or pictures, the same student may be able to demonstrate *knowledge of that content*, confirming for the teacher *their knowledge* of science, *not their limitations* in English. While some authentic forms of assessment can be time-consuming, they are worth the effort when working with students who often have high anxiety levels under traditional testing situations and who may simply need additional time to complete a test or task.



## AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT GENERALLY ACCOMPLISHES THE FOLLOWING GOALS:

- Emphasizes what students know, rather than what they do not know
- Requires students to develop responses instead of selecting them from predetermined options
- Directly evaluates holistic projects
- Uses samples of student work collected over an extended period of time
- Stems from clear criteria made known to students and parents

- Elicits higher-order thinking
- Allows for the possibility of multiple human judgments
- Relates more closely to classroom learning
- Teaches students to evaluate their own work
- Considers differences in learning styles, language proficiencies, cultural and educational backgrounds, and grade levels

### IS AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT FAIR? FAIR IS NOT ALWAYS EQUAL!



In the landmark 1974 *Lau vs. Nichols* case the US Supreme Court established that providing an 'equal' education for LEP children did not always mean students were getting a fair education. In fact, the courts found that Chinese students involved in the suit were being excluded from educational opportunities because, even though they were provided with the same instruction and materials as the English-speaking children, they could not take advantage of those opportunities since they did not have adequate English skills. Given that many LEP students often need accommodations well after they are mainstreamed (Cummins, 1994), it is not equal or fair to them to use the same instructional strategies as with native English speakers since LEP learners cannot take equal advantage of these opportunities.

Additionally, teachers often fail to note cultural and linguistic differences that can affect how LEP children learn (Nieto, 1996). This lack of knowledge may result in teachers having difficulty accepting differences and appropriately accommodating LEP students' needs. Consequently, we must embrace the differences that *all* children bring with them in order to educate each of them according to his/her own needs.

"Fairness" does not exist when assessment is uniform, standardized, impersonal, and absolute. Rather, it exists when assessment is appropriate. Therefore, assessment is fair when it is personalized, natural, and flexible, when it can be modified to pinpoint specific abilities and function at the relevant level of difficulty, and when it promotes a rapport between teachers and students.

There are several challenges to using authentic assessment methods. They include managing its time-intensive nature, ensuring curricular validity, and minimizing evaluator bias. Despite these challenges, efforts must be made to appropriately assess all LEP students and to welcome the possibility of assessment strategies that can empower students to take control of their own learning and to become independent thinkers and users of the English language.

# Types of Authentic Assessments

Authentic assessments include a variety of measures that can be adapted for different situations. These are some examples of authentic assessments.

Assessment	Description	Advantages
<b>Oral Interviews</b>	Teacher asks students questions about personal background, activities, readings, and interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Informal and relaxed context</li> <li>➤ Conducted over successive days with each student</li> <li>➤ Record observations on an interview guide</li> </ul>
<b>Story or Test Retelling</b>	Students retell main ideas or selected details of text experienced through listening or reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Student produces oral report</li> <li>➤ Can be scored on content or language components</li> <li>➤ Scored with rubric or rating scale</li> <li>➤ Can determine reading comprehension, reading strategies, and language development</li> </ul>
<b>Writing Samples</b>	Students generate narrative, expository, persuasive, or reference paper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Student produces written document</li> <li>➤ Can be scored on content or language components</li> <li>➤ Scored with rubric or rating scale</li> <li>➤ Can determine writing processes</li> </ul>
<b>Projects/ Exhibitions</b>	Students complete project in content area, working individually or in pairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Students make formal presentation, written report, or both</li> <li>➤ Can observe oral and written products and thinking skills</li> <li>➤ Scored with rubric or rating scale</li> </ul>
<b>Experiments/ Demonstrations</b>	Students complete experiment or demonstrate use of materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Students make oral presentation, written report, or both</li> <li>➤ Can observe oral and written products and thinking skills</li> <li>➤ Scored with rubric or rating scale</li> </ul>
<b>Constructed-Response Items</b>	Students respond in writing to open-ended questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Student produces written report</li> <li>➤ Usually scored on substantive information and thinking skills</li> <li>➤ Scored with rubric or rating scale</li> </ul>
<b>Teacher Observations</b>	Teacher observes student attention, response to instructional materials, or interactions with other students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Setting is classroom environment</li> <li>➤ Takes little time</li> <li>➤ Record observations with anecdotal notes or rating scales</li> </ul>
<b>Portfolios</b>	Focused collection of student work to show progress over time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Integrates information from a number of sources</li> <li>➤ Gives overall picture of student performance and learning</li> <li>➤ Strong student involvement and commitment</li> <li>➤ Calls for student self-assessment</li> </ul>

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From Authentic Assessment for English Language Learners: Practical Approaches for Teachers  
by J. Michael O'Malley and Lorraine Valdez Pierce