

Designing Performance Tasks

The purpose of a performance task is to provide authentic assessment for a specific unit of study. By observing and evaluating the final product, educators are able to make a summative assessment of the actual learning that has taken place.

In the arts, educators may ask the following question: “What could I have the students create that would show that they have the knowledge, skills and understanding of the concepts that we have been working on?”

[For example: if the unit of study in visual arts is about the use of line and how it may communicate emotion, the performance task should include criteria and parameters that require the students to create a drawing that expresses emotion through the use of line. It may be necessary for accurate and fair assessment to have the student explain the drawing and how the lines created are meant to communicate specific emotional content, i.e. an artist statement.]

For an arts integrated unit of study the performance task is a student created work of art that can only be created when the student acquires the knowledge, skills and understandings that are the desired learning outcomes in the arts and the other academic subject.

[For example: if the unit of study is an integration of dance and reading comprehension, focused on the ability to infer meaning, the performance task could be to create a dance using movement with variations in energy inspired by the feelings of the characters in a story, without acting out the story itself. Again, for assessment to be accurate, students may need to explain why they selected a particular amount of energy to communicate a particular feeling.]

Curriculum designers must imagine what they will look for in the completed work of art that will prove to them the student has reached the desired outcome(s). Creating the performance task is the most important part of the curriculum design process and should come first, before any sequential learning activities are planned.

To check if the performance task will work as an assessment tool, ask this question: “How will I know if Johnny gets it, and Suzy does not?” If there is no answer to this question, then you need to go back to the drawing board and add criteria for success. Also, if it is possible for a student to successfully create the work without acquiring the learning desired, you run the risk of it being an activity that will not necessarily support learning, either in the arts or in other integrated subjects. If designed well, students often go further and deeper than expected.

Performance tasks should include:

- the demonstration of critical thinking and problem solving skills.
- opportunities to assess knowledge, skills, and conceptual understandings.
- authenticity (relevant to the specific student population).
- clearly stated criteria (by which to evaluate success).
- clearly stated age appropriate instructions with specific parameters.
- open ended opportunities for student choice.

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