

Pigeonhole Questions and Comments
Paper 9. Everson

Q: Do you think that tests like the SAT or ACT still have a role as a requirement for college entrance?

Yes. These standardized college admissions tests play an important role in providing admissions committees with a common metric for ranking student applicants, particularly at those schools that receive a very large number of applications (>25,000, for example) for a relatively small number of available seats. The research on the predictive validity of these test scores in conjunction with h.s. GPA, suggests they do a reasonably good job of predicting who will succeed academically in post secondary education.

Unfortunately, the popular media has helped fuel the notion that these college admissions tests are "contests", and students and their families are pouring lots of resources into getting the "highest" score, making them even more of a contest or a zero-sum game.

Q: I was wondering how can we know that an assessment has fulfilled the requirements in the framework?

There are a number of methods in the educational research literature for conducting alignment studies that yield information about how well any particular test or test form is aligned with the measurement goals identified in the framework document.

Q: You stated in answering the question that teachers need a course on assessment that is not like what we used to give them--So what should a course preparing teachers contain, then?

As it happens I teach a graduate level course that addresses this question by focusing on the intersection of cognition and test design. In this course we introduce the design of an test or assessment by asking what level of learning and understanding we are attempting to measure (e.g., rote knowledge like facts, problem solving, analysis or synthesis).

Q: Could you interpret your 4 Core Design Principles specifically for ELLs? What skills would it take for mainstream teachers to be able to do this?

When designing instruction and assessments for ELL students it is key to attend to the linguistic demands of the instructional materials and the test items. Moreover, with respect to ELL students teachers ought to pay close attention to the role that prior knowledge plays in promoting student learning and understanding.

Q: You're worried about spontaneous assessment, but doesn't assessment happen on a moment to moment basis in learning environments--even ones that happen outside of classrooms?

Yes, teaching is a dynamic process and teachers do assess students on a moment-to-moment basis. But when using more formal assessment tools, e.g., formative or summative assessments, teachers ought to focus their design ideas to uncover more hard to get at levels of students' understanding and attempt to use these assessment opportunities to "make their students' thinking visible."

Q: Your schematic says teachers' domain knowledge is central, but you also seem to suggest teachers need a well-elaborated, general theory of learning. Is that right, and if so, is it realistic?

I do think it realistic to ask teachers to reflect on how they think students learn from instruction. Do they hold theories, for example, that have core ideas about the fixed nature of the intellect? Or, do they believe their students intellectual capabilities are malleable and can be changed or modified by carefully designed instruction. Further, I think it matters.