

*It's a Test! What Happens When  
Students Are Presented With  
Alternative Assessments?*

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### *Teaching Context: Boalsburg Elementary, Room 21*

This inquiry focuses on my self-contained classroom of eighteen fourth grade students, comprised of ten boys and eight girls. Our school is located within a neighborhood in the historic town of Boalsburg and is relatively small in size. The school building, once the area high school, houses grades four and five, and contains only three classrooms for each grade. The total student population for the school is approximately 125 students.

The learning needs of my students vary greatly. The class includes six high achieving students of who all excel at reading and writing, but particularly shine in math. Within my classroom, I also have four students, all girls, who can be classified as "low" and are reading at a third grade level. Throughout the week, all of these students receive Title I services in reading and math. Furthermore, once of the four girls has been diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder and is currently being evaluated for emotional support. I have one male student who is diagnosed as highly functioning Asperger's Syndrome and is noticeably behind his peers in social development.

Although the learning needs and styles differ among my students, my classroom is mostly homogenous in terms of culture and socioeconomic status. My classroom consists of seventeen Caucasian children and one African American, all of whom speak English as their first and only language. Only two of the eighteen children, one being the African American student, live in a single parent lower middle class household. The remaining students live with both parents and can be considered upper middle class.

### *Why This Inquiry Topic?*

When I was in the seventh grade, I distinctly remember asking my mom every morning if I really needed to go to school. I also remember her, “yes dear” response as she ushered me out the door each morning. Thinking back on this now entertaining memory, I began to question what caused me to dread school so much that particular year. While watching my students taking a spelling test very early in the year, the answer to my wondering became very clear. My seventh grade year consisted of my teacher assigning vocabulary words, asking for written definitions, assigning a reading, assigning comprehension questions, and then giving a paper and pencil test, in that order, the entire year. My math class followed the same routine. We learned a new topic, worked with a few practice problems in the book, completed homework each night, and then were given the test. There was hardly any variance whatsoever. No creative projects, barely any in depth discussions, and scarcely any extension activities were introduced. This approach to teaching and learning will most likely lead to boredom, lack of motivation, and as I felt, no desire to go to school. As a student in that classroom, I was uninterested and unenthusiastic about learning because of the repetition and drudgery that they teacher brought into each lesson.

Because of this personal unpleasant experience, I believe that it is important to strive to be a teacher who encourages learning, who motivates students to want to discover new knowledge, and who attempts to create a classroom and curriculum that welcomes exciting, engaging, and interesting learning activities. In order to become this teacher, I must put effort into each and every part of the classroom curriculum. Accordingly, there is no doubt that

assessment is one integral piece of this curriculum, but as I watched my students taking their spelling test, I started to wonder if certain forms of activities, and assessments more specifically, have different effects on student behavior, attitudes, and motivation. I believe that successful assessments serve as meaningful sources of information for both students and learning. Teachers can use assessments to see where students are in their learning as well as adjust their own teaching to meet their students' needs. Students use assessments as measures of their learning goals and as motivation to further their learning as they see their success and progress in their own learning.

### *Experts, Literature, and Research...*

Because assessment in classrooms is an exceedingly broad issue, there has been much research written pertaining to this topic. Specifically, assessment can be defined as, "collecting and deducing information about students' achievement". (Brookhart, 1999) Susan Brookhart further states, "Sound assessment and grading practices help teachers improve their own instruction, improve students' motivation, focus students' effort, and increase students' achievements". (1999) I then dove deeper into her thinking and wondered exactly what type of assessments can be considered "sound". Furthermore, what types of assessment will achieve this goal?

In the 1980's an education reform movement took the spotlight, demanding accountability from all teachers. The results of this reform led to increased reliance on testing to monitor achievement, especially competency and norm-referenced standardized tests. (Archbald & Newmann, 1988) Because these tests are developed by authorities and professionals outside of the

classroom and only provide annual increases or decreases of learning they cannot inform the

Moment to moment, day-to-day, instructional decisions faced by students and teachers seeking to manage the learning process as it unfolds. The cannot diagnose students needs during learning, tell students what study tactics are or are not working, or keep parents informed of how to support the work of their children. No, these kinds of uses require assessment for learning (Stiggins, 2002)

With this push to hold schools and teachers accountable, assessments soon began to lose their most basic and fundamental role in improving student learning and promoting student motivation to learn. (Guskey, 2003) As I complete my time as a student and transition into my teacher career, I begin to wonder if tests such as those described above are the best choices to promote learning in my classroom. I was to stress that I am not opposed to standardized testing entirely, but I do wonder how students respond to bringing more alternative forms of testing into the classroom.

It is the teachers who hold the responsibility of providing assessment in their classroom that evaluated student understanding and promotes motivation and learning. Today, more teachers are beginning to experiment with new alternatives to standardized tests. These alternatives may offer more enlightening and authentic indicators of how schools should promote achievement and learning. Research shows that student achievement improves when teachers focus on student work through assessment. (Stiggins, 2002) Formative assessment can be something teachers build into lessons and activities in the classroom each day and does not consistently need to be a summative pursuit. Dr. Stiggins holds strong views on incorporating students into their assessment practices. He also believes involving students deeply in the classroom

assessment process builds their confidence and will maximize their achievement. (Stiggins, 2002) Furthermore, "when teachers' classroom assessments become an integral part of the instructional process and a central ingredient in their efforts to help students learn, the benefits of assessment for both students and teachers will be boundless." (Guskey, 2003)

Assessment should not be trivial, meaningless, or obscure given merely through quizzes and tests. "A valid assessment system provides information about particular tasks on which students succeed or fail, but more important, it also presents tasks that are worthwhile, significant, and meaningful—in short, authentic." (Archbald & Newmann, 1988) Authentic and meaningful assessments that are "for learning" as Stiggins calls it, offer many critical benefits. When students are involved in their own achievement and learning they become more self-confident learners because they are able to watch themselves succeed. In turn, the risk that they once saw to continue to learn becomes weaker and weaker. With more effort to learn, the response is greater success for all! Moreover, students begin to take charge of their own learning, monitor their success, make choices toward more success, and develop the foundation of lifelong learning.

After I completed my research and became more knowledgeable on the topic of assessment, I was curious to see how and if teachers in my own school were implementing any forms of alternative assessment in their classrooms. I created a questionnaire (See Appendix A One) asking Dave Rockower, a veteran fifth grade teacher, if at all, he incorporates alternative assessment into his classroom. As I read through Dave's questionnaire responses I noticed that his

beliefs were very similar to much research I had found in support of authentic assessment. In Dave's ideal classroom the chief form of assessment would be through a yearlong portfolio where students highlight their work and are continuously assessed throughout the year. Students become part of their and progress by looking back on their work on a bimonthly basis and commenting. The teacher then takes part in this assessment process by following up on the student responses. Portfolio assessment is one of the most widely used forms of alternative assessment today. Dave says, "I believe in authentic assessment; student portfolios are one way to achieve this because it (authentic assessment) can only be accomplished when looking at their work over time." Although Dave warns that because of accountability in schools today, his ideas are not so practical. He stated that because report cards require letter grades, sometimes incorporating authentic assessment becomes difficult. He says

It's even difficult for students to be assessed by an alternative method, because they are so accustomed to receiving letter grades. If they only read comments, suggestions, and compliments, they ask, 'So, does this mean I got an A?' I think, in order to know how it would affect their behavior and attitudes, they would need to receive alternative forms of assessment from kindergarten on.

As I analyzed this previous statement, I began to wonder if alternative forms of assessment will one day be the sole assessment in schools, and if so, will it happen from kindergarten as Dave suggests? Author and firm believer in portfolios, Elizabeth Herbert, has come to this dilemma as well. As she researched incorporating portfolios, her colleague Dennie Wolf enlightened her. Dennie says, "The design and implementation of alternative modes of assessment will entail nothing less than a wholesale transition from what we call a testing culture to an assessment culture..." (Herbert, 2001) Because Dave needed a

realistic assessment system, he uses rubrics in his classroom. (See Appendix A Two) Rubrics like these provide students the responsibility of choice in their work while still allowing for assessment through more than merely a strict letter grade.

### *My Wonderings and Questions...*

As a future teaching looking to provide a learning environment best suited to my students' individual learning needs, I came to the following overall wondering: What are the reactions of my students as they are presented with alternative forms of assessment in the classroom? Within this I am questioning:

- ◆ *Does this type of assessment have different effects when students have a choice?*
- ◆ *Do students become more motivated to participate in their own learning when they are aware they are being assessed in an alternative manner?*
- ◆ *Are students still able to show their knowledge of what has been learned through these alternatives?*

### *What Makes This Inquiry?*

Because assessment is such an integral topic in the classroom, I was anxious to see the many different outcomes as I planned my inquiry, collected data, and analyzed the results. Without knowing how each student would react to different modes of assessment, I was eager to begin putting my plan into action. As a true inquiry, many of my strategies provided outcomes that I expected, while at other times, the results I found surprised me greatly.

### *My Inquiry Plan...*

I was fortunate enough to begin implementing my inquiry around the same time one unit was ending and next was beginning. The first step in my plan centered on students' general opinions about assessment. I began taking daily anecdotal notes as I heard students react to their recent unit culmination test, weekly spelling tests, math quizzes, timed math skill tests, and talk of the Pennsylvania State Standardized Assessment (PSSA's). From these daily observations, I was able to get an overall consensus of the attitudes that my students felt toward assessment. I was not entirely surprised to conclude that almost my entire class displayed some sort of dislike to these types of assessment.

As I taught my students our six-week lesson on Nutrition, I began to brainstorm ideas for an activity to serve as assessment other than a summative written test. My prior teacher questionnaire also served as a helpful reference. Motivated from Dave's responses and my research sources, I tried to create a project that I believed would engage my students, would increase motivation, and still show the knowledge and information they would learn. I told my students that a new restaurant was opening downtown and the owner needed help creating a healthy menu for his customers. Their goal was to design a menu for this restaurant that consisted of three main courses (breakfast, lunch, and dinner) with descriptions of each meal. In the descriptions they were required to include what nutrients were contained in the meals as well as what food pyramid requirements were met. Their menus were also to be near, creative, and

appealing to a customer! This project would serve as my first experimental form of assessment. My students were excited as they learned of this task, and I in turn, was excited to continue to see their reactions throughout the entire project.

The next step in my plan consisted of creating and giving my students a short survey. (See Appendix B One) This survey gave students a choice between two different forms of assessment that would serve as possible options to end the next unit. After this step, I needed to begin the design process for the next assessment that I would use for the ending of this unit. With support from the results of my student survey, I made the decision to allow students to work in pairs to research and create a project (poster) to present to the class that would serve as the form of assessment for our solar system unit. Before the students began their research I would provide them with a short rubric that contained everything that I required to be in their posters and/or presentation. (See Appendix B Two) The last piece of my plan for the solar system project was to ask my students to write a personal letter to me describing things about the unit that they liked and did not like, in addition to at least one thing they had learned.

As we concluded our solar system unit, talk of the PSSA's began to filter throughout the school as teachers and students began preparing for the statewide tests. I was excited to incorporate what my students were saying and feeling as we discussed the upcoming testing as a piece of my inquiry plan. The concluding step in my plan consisted of creating a parent survey to send home with my students at the beginning of the week of PSSA testing. (See Appendix C) The survey focused on any attitude or behavior changes, positive or negative, that my students may have demonstrated outside of the classroom relating to the PSSA

tests. With the steps of my plan complete, I was eager to collect and organize all of my findings and data to begin the analysis.

### *Data Collection...*

Anecdotal notes, daily observations, and written records comprise the principal part of my data collection. My first section of daily notes and observations on my students took place over a week span in late January. As my teacher conducted one of our culmination lessons on the simple machines, I listened carefully, while taking notes as my students were assigned to read a selection and answer the questions that followed. I continued this same data collection process over the course of the next two weeks. I particularly paid special attention to their reactions as they were assigned spelling tests each week; multiplication, divisions, and subtraction timed tests; and a multiple choice and free response simple machines written test. I circulated in room, listened carefully, and kept a note-taking journal where I made observations and inferences based on my students' actions and discussions. Three separate tally counts of off-task behavior served as a key written record component in my data collection process, starting during our first reading and writing assignment activity. I considered a student to be off-task if he or she was looking around the room, not reading, not writing, or not participating in a partner discussion.

My written records and observations continued as I observed my students as they worked to create a project I designed to assess their understanding of the main objectives in our nutrition unit. This creative task of designing a restaurant menu took the students a week to complete and took the place of a "test". While

the worked, researched, and presented the menus, I floated from group to group, asking students informally how they were progressing on this project. I took notes as my students would say specific thought and ideas relating to their menu, looked for on-task behavior and participation, and also how I rated their attitudes towards the project. My PDA helped serve as an observer during this time as she provided data through notes as she listened to my students while I was involved in other groups.

My data collection continued with daily notes throughout my next science unit and I also introduced a new form of data collection. I asked my students to complete a short survey that gave a choice of two different types of assessment to end our latest unit. They were to choose either a project or presentation that they would work on throughout the unit or an end of unit written test. After they made a decision they needed to support it with a reason as to why that decision was chosen. I then provided my students with rubrics that specifically required a number of details to be included in their planet posters and presentations. For the presentations, anecdotal notes served as my main source of data once again, as well as a short paper chart assessment I created for students to complete as they listened to their peers present the planet posters. As students took turns presenting their posters, I created a simple chart that consisted of the nine different planets with two to three questions about each planet. While their peers presented, they were to listen to the presentation and fill in the corresponding data on the charts. (See Appendix D) I stayed in the back of the classroom and allowed students to have free range of the floor as they presented to their peers.

Towards the end of our unit, I implemented another form of data collection. This time, I asked my students to write a letter to me. In the letter, I asked for things that they liked about the unit and things that they did not like. I also asked for each student to tell me something important that they learned from doing their planet posters. In doing this, I hoped to decide if this choice of assessment was what the students expected when they chose it from the survey and also if they would be able to show if they retained the knowledge that was presented.

At the same time our solar system unit came to a close, reviewing for the state tests became a top priority. I was intrigued to hear what my students would say in response to the state standardized testing. The last section of my notes consists of the two weeks leading up to the PSSA test and well as the week during the testing. My observations were based on the discussion about the tests, the opinions students held, and their attitudes while they were taking the tests. To add further evidence, I finished my data collection with a survey sent home to parents. The survey asked parents to observe their child's attitude and feeling prior to the testing and while their students were taking part in the week of PSSA testing. The following section further examines the results of my entire data collected.

### *Data Analysis...*

To begin my data analysis I started with my first set of written records. Written observations allowed me to determine how my students were feeling and what they were thinking as I quietly took notes and subtly observed their actions. To begin, I went through all of my notes and categorized them into different

groups. The groups were as follows: observations, quotations, discussions, and personal inferences. By organizing my notes, I was better able to see different patterns. By separating my notes into this manner, it was easier to then focus on the notes describing student motivation, participation, attitudes, and effort put toward their test, menus, posters, and presentations.

Once I had organized my notes into their most closely corresponding groups, I proceeded to analyze my numerical statistics through my tally observations. To analyze this data, I compared the number of students who were off-task in each different activity. From this data, I was better able to get a solid idea of when students were more likely to be on-task and when students were more likely to be off-task. From my results, I was able to see a consistent pattern. While my students were working on an assignment that they chose, they were more interested and engaged, therefore, less likely to be off-task.

In order to compare students' own opinions as to how they would like to be assessed, I began to analyze the surveys I provided. I provided students with a short survey asking them to make their own choice between two different types of assessment options. I then separated the survey results into two different categories based on which assessment option was chosen. I then split the group of students who chose a presentation assessment into categories based on their reasoning. In doing this, I was clearly able to see what reasons were more prominent than others as factors in how students would like to be assessed. Based on the analysis of the results of my survey, I can conclude that although the reasons varied, the majority of my class would rather choose to be assessed in a way other than a written paper and pencil test.

My data analysis continued as I read through my student letters asking what or if the students learned from this assessment activity. I asked students to write a letter to me telling me what they liked and what they did not like about the unit. I also asked for one important item that they learned in the solar system unit. With this information I was able to read through the letter to see if students were able to give me a piece of evidence proving to me that they had learned. I was happy to find that every student displayed his or her knowledge to me, most even going more in-depth than I had asked.

To analyze the last of my collected data, I grouped the parent surveys into two piles: those whose children showed any attitude differences toward the PSSA tests and those whose children showed no response to the PSSA testing. Once I determined the two individual piles, I was then able to determine what attitude changes, arose in the children during the week of testing. This allowed me to determine if the standardized tests were indeed having an affect on students' attitudes toward school outside of the classroom.

### *What I Have Learned...*

*Claim 1: Alternative forms of assessment increase positive student attitudes and motivation towards learning in the classroom.*

Continuous anecdotal notes throughout the alternative assessment activities showed much evidence showing that my students demonstrated improved attitudes, and increased motivation toward the assigned projects. One day, I asked students to put away their menus; they would be allotted more time at the end of the day to work. We were then moving on to show a Bill Nye Science video pertaining to nutrition. I was pleasantly surprised with two of my students

asked to continue work on their menus instead of watching the video. (See Appendix E [Top]) This is significant because Bill Nye videos are a major highlight in our fourth grade classroom! When students know they will be watching Bill Nye, excitement immediately erupts and the classroom becomes an instant buzz of noise and excitement. When students began asking me to continue working on the projects, I knew that it was a motivating project.

As I studied my written records from the week of designing and creating restaurant menus, I was able to come to a general conclusion. The class showed they liked this project and were very motivated to complete their menus. They were also excited to receive feedback from me as they finished their menus. My PDA observed my students as they received written comments on sticky notes that I used as my primary mode of assessment. She said, "I was intrigued to see how interested the students were as they became instantly absorbed in reading their sticky note! They immediately stopped what they were doing and intently began reading!" I credit their intense interest in their own success to the fact that this project was such an integral part of their hard work and because they really had taken a part in their own assessment through their menus.

Supporting evidence toward positive student attitudes emerged again later that week as one student came to me during recess and said, "I really like your project Miss Yurko! It's a lot work, but it's really fun!" As another student overheard, she added, "me too! I like doing something like this much better than taking a test!" (See Appendix J [Bottom]) These student opinions definitely show high student interest in this assessment activity.

I recorded interesting conversations that I heard as I floated around the room as well. One student was talking to my mentor about her project and said, "It's better than doing tests. We can relate better to fun projects." (See Appendix H) At one point, I even had two students come to me as we walked to lunch to ask if they would be able to work on their planet posters during indoor recess! (Appendix H)

*Claim 2: Bringing alternative forms of assessment into the classroom changes the daily routine and provides for a weekend change of pace.*

Looking through my observations, I found that when the reading and writing assignment on simple machines was introduced a low moan erupted in the classroom. I noticed a similar pattern as a re-read my written observations on the reactions of my students as they took spelling tests, timed math skill tests, and their science unit test. We gave four-timed multiplication, division, addition, and subtraction tests each month. During the time period of my observations at two students asked each time, "do we have to take these?" (See Appendix J [Top])

As I tallied the responses to the surveys, I found that sixteen out of the eighteen students chose to design a poster and then present it to the class over a written test. (See Appendix K) Of these sixteen, seven said because a project and presentation would be "more fun" and four made their decision based on the fact that they simply do not like tests because they "take them time to do and are way too boring." One student chose the project and presentation choice because she "likes to make things interesting and be creative," while another student agreed and added, "projects make things easier for me to learn because they keep my

attention.” The last three of the sixteen said projects make it easier to remember things, allow for more of a choice, don’t limit their answers to one thing, and cause less stress. The two students who chose to take a test made this decision saying that, “presentations take too long” and “I forget presentation quickly.” The majority of this data leads me to believe that students are unmotivated and lose attention quickly if they are forced to do the same type of assessments over and over. Therefore, most of my students welcomed and appreciated the change of pace as they worked diligently on their assessment projects.

*Claim 3: Alternative forms of assessment decrease off-task behavior and increase student participation.*

After analyzing three separate tallies of observing off-task behavior, I found a significant decrease in off-task performance as students were engaged in the alternative assessment projects. In the first original tally; the total came to twelve out of eighteen students who were off-task. Therefore, the percentage of students off-task was sixty-seven percent. Based on these results, I feel that motivation as well as participation for this reading and writing assignment was low. I performed the same procedure during time while students were working on their menus and the results are as follows: only three students were exhibiting off-task behavior, making the percentage of off-task behavior decrease to sixteen percent. Furthermore, I tallied my students once more during the solar system presentations and found the following supporting data. During the three days of researching information with partners for an assigned planet, all groups, meaning, all students were engaged and stayed on-task for the entire designated time period, making the on-task behavior a full 100 percent! (See Appendix F) I

believe I saw such a dramatic change in data due to the high interest in the projects. As students become interested and engaged in what they are doing, they will inevitably be on-task.

Not only did I see a dramatic decrease in off-task behaviors as I presented the students with alternative projects, but I observed an increase in student participation as well. While analyzing my notes about the simple machines assignment, I noticed the class lacked any enthusiasm. I found it very interesting that two my top students both said to me, in response to a reading and written answer culmination assignment, "Miss Yurko! There is nothing write about from this paragraph. We didn't like it at all, can we just not do it?" When it was time to share, only two students raised their hands to participate. However, as students began finishing their nutrition menus the groups were immediately eager to begin to share with the class, this time more than willing to work and participate. I recorded that thirteen of the students asked me personally when they would get a turn to share their menus. Furthermore, as we began to present the planet posters in class, all eighteen students volunteered to present first in the class. Throughout the two days of presenting, I was approached by three pairs of students at random times throughout the day and asked if they could present their poster then. (See Appendix E [Bottom])

*Claim 4: Alternative forms of assessment take the stress and pressure of standardized and written tests off of students.*

As the time neared for our simple machines unit test, my written records show that about half (eight out of eighteen) of the class showed signs of nervousness and or apprehension. This group of students asked many questions

pertaining to the format of the test, asked if it “would be hard” and said, “I don’t know if I am ready.” However, the remaining half of the students showed indifference toward the test. One student also mentioned stress as a factor in deciding what type of assessment to use in his survey I provided. As I sorted through the letters written to me for the planet unit, I noticed this time, five students said that there was much less pressure to learn by doing the posters and presentations.

As the PSSA tests neared, a constant buzz of apprehension lingered in our classroom. I heard students saying, “I’m going to fail”, “why do we even have to take these dumb tests?” and “I’m so worried about the PSSA’s. What if I do bad?” Results from the parent surveys also showed nervous anticipation displayed in some students. Three parents had had their child talk about a reluctance to take the PSSA tests. (See Appendix M) However, not all students displayed these signs, and there was some inconsistency in student reactions.

These mixed results make drawing a sound conclusion about student attitude concerning this assessment difficult, however, from the majority of the attitudes and the work created, I am confident in saying that the menu and planet project created little to no stress for my students. I also am lead to believe that when stress is reduced, students are more willing to enjoy working and learning, which in turn leads to a deeper understanding.

*Claim 5: Alternative forms of assessment provide evidence that objectives have been met and student learning has taken place.*

As I observed my students as they presented their planet presentation, I was thoroughly impressed as to how many questions the students in the audience

has for each of the presenters. I was also impressed as to how much the presenters were able to say about their planets as they answered the questions that were raised. After each presentation, those in the audience filled out the information on their card without any protest at all. My PDA was able to observe during one day of the presentation and said in response to the presentation, "I love how your students have really put their learning into their own words; have written in interesting sentences that show they understand the content and that engage the audience; and have organized their posters to be visually creative and appealing!" (See Appendix N) After she left I read my students this comment in order to show my own appreciation of their hard work and the room erupted with a round of applause as they congratulated themselves.

In the letters I asked the students to write to me, all eighteen of the students were able to provide me with one fact that they learned from the planet unit, while many provided even more and in greater detail than I had expected. I was intrigued to see that one of the students who originally chose a test instead of a presentation in the earlier survey wrote a detailed letter to me with quite different feelings. (See Appendix G) It read, "I definitely learned a lot from the posters and presentations! I didn't know anything about our planet before we did our research. I could teach the class so much about our planet!" (See Appendix L) To close the unit we showed the students a Bill Nye video on the nine planets and as we watched one student responded out loud to a DID YOU KNOW? question about the planet Jupiter. He exclaimed, "We already know that! Dan<sup>1</sup> and Kevin told us that in their presentation!" This is a definite supporting factor

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<sup>1</sup> Student's name has been changed.

to show students are learning from alternative assessment, however, another student points out an interesting ambiguity in his letter to me. He wrote, "I definitely learned a lot and had fun making the posters, but how can you tell what we learned unless you give us a test?" (See Appendix I )

#### Conclusion & Future Implications...

As a preservice teacher, one of the most important outcomes of this inquiry was to understand the effects of different forms of assessment on students, then to take this information to better improve my future teaching and provide the best assessment to meet my students' needs. The knowledge that I have gained from implementing this inquiry and putting together a set of claims will play a large role in my own classroom and in my practice as a future teacher. I am optimistic that my research, data, and findings from my inquiry will continue my growth towards the type of teacher I am working to become. With an enhanced understanding of what students react well to and what students are not in favor of, I can create a learning environment suited to their wants and needs. From my findings, I can specifically work to incorporate assessment continuously throughout student work. I will work to plan for authentic assessment in my classroom. This inquiry has helped me to understand the importance of designing successful assessment methods to implement in my own classroom. Students do not all learn in one way, therefore I ask, why must we assess in one way? This inquiry has led me to many different ways to bring successful assessment into my future classroom. Projects like those I have experimented with such as the creative writing assignments, research projects and presentations, and even portfolios, seem to be a great way to assess students,

while still keeping them continuously curious, interested, engaged, and motivated. Students who are motivated, eager, and enthusiastic to participate in lessons and activities, and to show their knowledge through assessment will become more adept as learning. I wholeheartedly believe it is important for teachers to consider how to motivate their students in their planning each and every day, especially in the area of assessment.

### *New Wonderings...*

Through careful planning, much data collection, and meticulous analysis, I was able to generate claims in response to my original wondering. However, my research and findings have led me to further wonderings that I am confident I will continue to approach and investigate as my career as an educator begins to unfold.

- ◆ *Do students only choose alternative assessments because they think it will be more fun?*
- ◆ *Are teachers really able to see if each and every student has met the intended learning objectives and outcomes through alternative assessments?*
- ◆ *Will all students respond as my class did to different forms of alternative assessment?*

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Appendix A One  
Alternative Assessment Questionnaire

1. In what ways do you choose to assess your students?
2. If you do choose alternative methods of assessment, why do you choose to use these in your classroom?
3. Are there reactions, either positive or negative that you see in your students' attitudes and behaviors towards alternative modes of assessment?
4. Are there specific assessments that you consistently use? Do you have examples?

Appendix A Two

Writing Score

Content

-I have followed the requirements  
-I have been thorough in completing the task (0-10) \_\_\_\_\_

Organization

-I have transitioned to new paragraphs when appropriate (0-10) \_\_\_\_\_

Spelling

-I have spelled no excuse words correctly (0-10) \_\_\_\_\_

Mechanics

-I have used periods, capitals, and punctuation correctly (0-10) \_\_\_\_\_

Vocabulary

-I have used strong vocabulary throughout (0-10)  
-I have used literacy elements (similes, personification...) (0-10) \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B Two

Name\_\_\_\_\_

Mrs. Keil and I need a way to make sure you are really learning during our Solar System Unit, so we would like your feedback on what you think would be the best way for two of us to find out. Would you rather **a.** research the solar system and then take written test of **b.** research the solar system and then create your own planet presentation.

Choose a. or b. and please explain why. Although I will take all of your responses into consideration, please understand that Mrs. Keil and I will still decide which choice is best for the class. Thank you!

## Appendix B Two

**Let's Tour the Solar System!**

**You and your group members will be given one planet to research. Using classroom resources, books, and websites you will find facts about your planet and record them on a data sheet. In your groups, you will design and create a poster to present to the class.**

**We will use the posters to create a "big book" of the sun and the planets so that anyone can take a "tour" and learn about the Solar System.**

**You must include in your poster/presentation...**

**Distance from the sun**

**Size**

**What does it look like?**

**What are the conditions on the planet?**

**Number of moons**

**Other interesting facts (you will be able to find many!)**

**A drawing/picture of your planet**

**Make sure your poster is neat and pleasing to the eye.**

**We want to invite and teach about the Solar System, so be creative! Plan it out on another piece of paper before you begin your final copy.**



## Appendix D

Mercury	Venus	Earth	Mars	Jupiter
How many moons?	This planet looks a lot like what other planet?	What is so special about this planet?	True or False? Mars has dust storms?	Jupiter is _____ than all of the others combined.
Saturn	Uranus	Neptune	Pluto	Sun
How much bigger is Saturn than Earth?	What is it's nickname?	How many moons?	Is Pluto always the last planet?	What is one fact you learned about the sun?



Appendix E

Preschool/Kindergarten

3/1/06

While watching a culmination  
 Bill Nye Video about the Solar System  
 a clip came up and it said,  
 "Did you know that  
 the giant red spot on Jupiter is  
 and my kids yelled in a voice  
 like  
 "Kylie Doug told us that in their  
 presentation" -Caitlin

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Day of presenting the planets:

The entire class was excited to present  
 their projects, they kept asking when  
 and if they were going to present it

Appendix F

Reading/Writing Ass. Early Feb

OFF  
|||||

ON  
||||

Menus

Feb.

OFF  
|||

ON  
|||||

March  
Lola: System day  
All students on  
task!  
18/18 ☺

## Appendix G

~ Kyle 2

I learned that Jupiter is only made of gas except for the core. It helped with me and Doug's poster.

I thought this unit was a lot of fun but it was really short. I'm happy we didn't do a test because there is a lot of pressure for tests but posters were fun.

~~I learned a lot~~

~~this unit!!~~  
😊

Dear Miss Yurko,

3/14/02

The one thing I learned about the Solar System is that Pluto is not always the 9<sup>th</sup> planet but sometimes the 8<sup>th</sup>. I think that is important because I would have been wrong about it. Because I always ~~just~~ thought that it was the 9<sup>th</sup> planet.

I loved the Solar System unit. It was awesome! I think I learned a lot. I hate taking tests. Because it like takes over my brain. I was glad we didn't take a test.

From,

Caitlin



1. I learned never ever to look at a solar eclipse, or the sun, because you could hurt your eyes or go blind

2. I think what we did with the posters was a good idea because we already take enough TESTS!

Laura

Appendix H

"Its better than doing tests"  
"We can relate to film projects"

As we cleaned up, one student  
asked, "Miss Yurko, can we  
work on our posters during indoor  
recess?!"

## Appendix I

## Doug's Salads

1. The moon doesn't give off its own light. It is important because it teaches kids that when they see the moon during the day that the moon isn't shining brighter than the sun.

2. The unit was Great!!  
Yet, I think that the teacher doesn't know if you learn much. But don't get ideas that I like tests. I like posters!!

## Appendix J

2/6/06

Today we gave the students a practice reading assessment. The entire time the kids complained about it. One student asked, "If you were the principal would you make us do it?" Caitlin said, "Why do we even have to do these?"

"They are the boringest tests!"

2/1/03

After another day working on our Nutrition project Doug walked up to me and said, "I like your project Miss Yurko!" When I said why "It's fun!"

Then Rachel who overheard said, "Yeah I like doing this much better than taking a test!"

Appendices K

Name Julie B

Mrs. Keil and I need a way to make sure you are really learning during our Solar System Unit, so we would like your feedback on what you think would be the best way for the two of us to find out. Would you rather **a.** research the solar system and then take a written test or **b.** research the solar system and then create your own planet presentation.

Choose **a.** or **b.** and please explain why. Although I will take all of your responses into consideration, please understand that Mrs. Keil and I will still decide which choice is best for the class. Thank You!

*B I would do a presentation because you could remember everything for that because you make.*

Name Daron

Mrs. Keil and I need a way to make sure you are really learning during our Solar System Unit, so we would like your feedback on what you think would be the best way for the two of us to find out. Would you rather **a.** research the solar system and then take a written test or **b.** research the solar system and then create your own planet presentation.

Choose **a.** or **b.** and please explain why. Although I will take all of your responses into consideration, please understand that Mrs. Keil and I will still decide which choice is best for the class. Thank You!

*I choose B. That is because I don't like it would now that more things and it would be more fun than a test.*

Name FRANCISCA

Mrs. Keil and I need a way to make sure you are really learning during our Solar System Unit, so we would like your feedback on what you think would be the best way for the two of us to find out. Would you rather **a.** research the solar system and then take a written test or **b.** research the solar system and then create your own planet presentation.

Choose **a.** or **b.** and please explain why. Although I will take all of your responses into consideration, please understand that Mrs. Keil and I will still decide which choice is best for the class. Thank You!

I would want to make project

I would want to make a project because its  
funner and <sup>its</sup> easier to learn stuff for me.

Name Lyndy

Mrs. Keil and I need a way to make sure you are really learning during our Solar System Unit, so we would like your feedback on what you think would be the best way for the two of us to find out. Would you rather **a.** research the solar system and then take a written test or **b.** research the solar system and then create your own planet presentation.

Choose **a.** or **b.** and please explain why. Although I will take all of your responses into consideration, please understand that Mrs. Keil and I will still decide which choice is best for the class. Thank You!

I would like choice B, because I like to make things and be creative

## Appendix L

While the students were working  
on their planet posters....

Kyle said, "Oh yes! I didn't know anything  
about Jupiter before I did research  
for our planet!"

Doug said, "I definitely learned a lot  
and had fun making these posters, but  
you couldn't tell what we learned  
unless you gave us a test."

I said in response:

If I asked you to present to the class  
what you learned doing this would you  
be able to teach the class a lot?

Kyle nodded his head & said very  
enthusiastically, "Of course!"

## Appendices M

Dear Parents,

As a PDS intern, I am required to complete an inquiry project based on my wonderings about teaching and learning. My question is centered on different forms of assessment and how students react to those different types. I am writing to ask for your help with my data collection for my project. If you could take the time to answer a few brief questions over this week, your help would be greatly appreciated! As you know, the fourth graders are taking the PSSA tests this week during school.

1. Did your child mention the PSSA testing before actually taking the tests in school? If so, in what aspect? Was he/she excited to begin? Was he/she hesitant? Was he/she nervous? Was your child showing any feelings toward the upcoming testing?

Yes, she was a little nervous because she wanted to do well

2. During the week of testing, did your child say anything about the tests? Did he or she have any comments, questions, or concerns about the tests?

She just wanted to well

3. Did you notice any difference, positive or negative, in your child's attitude toward school during the week of PSSA testing?

No

Thank you very much for your time,  
Miss Yurko ©

Dear Parents,

As a PDS intern, I am required to complete an inquiry project based on my wonderings about teaching and learning. My question is centered on different forms of assessment and how students react to those different types. I am writing to ask for your help with my data collection for my project. If you could take the time to answer a few brief questions over this week, your help would be greatly appreciated! As you know, the fourth graders are taking the PSSA tests this week during school.

1. Did your child mention the PSSA testing before actually taking the tests in school? If so, in what aspect? Was he/she excited to begin? Was he/she hesitant? Was he/she nervous? Was your child showing any feelings toward the upcoming testing?

Lynn was nervous but was planning ahead on studying and she would need to be well rested and eating healthy breakfasts that week especially.

2. During the week of testing, did your child say anything about the tests? Did he or she have any comments, questions, or concerns about the tests?

Lynn enjoyed the test and she did not have any comments or questions about the test but she did not enjoy the test itself but she thought she did well.

3. Did you notice any difference, positive or negative, in your child's attitude toward school during the week of PSSA testing?

She wasn't quite as excited for school as she usually is, but she was not negative about the tests or going to school.

Thank you very much for your time,  
Miss Yurko ☺

Dear Parents,

As a PDS interu, I am required to complete an inquiry project based on my wonderings about teaching and learning. My question is centered on different forms of assessment and how students react to those different types. I am writing to ask for your help with my data collection for my project. If you could take the time to answer a few brief questions over this week, your help would be greatly appreciated! As you know, the fourth graders are taking the PSSA tests this week during school.

1. Did your child mention the PSSA testing before actually taking the tests in school? If so, in what aspect? Was he/she excited to begin? Was he/she hesitant? Was he/she nervous? Was your child showing any feelings toward the upcoming testing?

yes

that she needed more rest, but was a little nervous about the math

yes

a little hesitant  
a little nervous  
not many feelings

2. During the week of testing, did your child say anything about the tests? Did he or she have any comments, questions, or concerns about the tests?

yes

She said they were easier than she thought, but that she didn't like the essay-like reading question

3. Did you notice any difference, positive or negative, in your child's attitude toward school during the week of PSSA testing?

not really (she was happy for no homework)

Thank you very much for your time,  
Miss Yurko ☺

## Appendix N

Christy,

date 3/1/06

I love how your students have really put their learning into their own words; have written in interesting sentences that show they understand the content AND that engage the audience; and have organized their posters to be visually appealing and creative. Did you give specific instruction or examples in each of these areas? These are definitely not typical characteristics of a child-made presentation! I'm impressed!