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# Authentic Assessment through Rich Tasks

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**ABSTRACT** This short article explains the key principles of 'rich tasks', a version of authentic assessment developed in Queensland, Australia, as part of a major curriculum development called the 'New Basics'. In various documents, the project leaders recognised the danger that inappropriate assessment would undermine the proposed curriculum and pedagogy. Under the rubric 'rich tasks' they developed a range of interdisciplinary challenges for the end of each stage of education which could serve as summative assessment. The article is an amalgamation of explanations, and a selection of examples, derived from various documents from the New Basics project.

*The notion of authentic assessment was adopted and developed by Education Queensland for its curriculum development project 'New Basics'. This demonstrates ways in which assessment can become educationally meaningful to learners, and can make meaningful connections across subjects rather than narrowing them down.*

## Rich Tasks

Rich tasks have to be valuable in themselves, and not distract from real learning. They culminate in individual or team presentations, based on research and problem-solving. They involve a range of skills, often connecting different subjects. The challenge must be meaningful to the learners; it could involve a local context, and be presented to an audience of parents or a community group.

A Rich Task is a performance or demonstration or product that is purposeful and models a life role. It presents substantive, real problems to solve and engages learners in forms of pragmatic social action that have real value in the world. The problems require identification, analysis and resolution, and require students to

analyse, theorise and engage intellectually with the world. In this way, tasks connect to the world outside the classroom.

If we really want to improve educational standards, we should use assessment which enhances learning rather than trivialising it. This could involve peer- and self-assessment which is supportive rather than judgemental, and recognition for cooperative learning in groups rather than individual competitiveness. These forms of assessment would help to foster a genuine sense of *learning community* in our schools.

### **Rich Tasks for 11-year-olds...**

#### *Multimedia Presentation of an Endangered Plant or Animal*

Students will investigate a threatened plant or animal and the extent to which it is at risk. They will use this investigation to take constructive action and create a persuasive and informative multimedia presentation.

#### *Oral Histories and Diverse and Changing Lifestyles*

Students will explore change in, and diversity of, modern lifestyles, with particular reference to the nature of work, by recording oral histories from various members of their own community, including people in a variety of cultural groups. They will use the oral histories as the basis for a media presentation that portrays significant changes in work practices in the past and predicts how work practices might change in the foreseeable future.

#### *A Celebratory, Festive or Artistic Event or Performance*

Students will work within teams, in different capacities, in planning, organising, creating and performing in a celebratory, festive or artistic event or performance that takes place at or outside the school.

### **...and for 16-year-olds**

#### *Improving Health and Wellbeing in the Community*

Students investigate the local situation through books, statistics and interviews, and acquire knowledge of some health issues, before presenting recommendations.

#### *National Identity: influences and perspectives*

This project involves the planning, production and presentation of a powerful, filmed documentary including information gleaned from research and interviews with people from different cultural backgrounds.

*Opinion-making Oracy*

Students will make forceful speeches on an issue of international or national significance to different audiences.

*The Shape We're In*

Students use mathematical skills to investigate alternative shapes and/or dimensions for at least one container, a domestic object, a mechanical device and an object from nature. They then present an alternative design for one of these, explaining the mathematics.

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