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# Assessment in 2099



In researching the literature on assessments for this issue, I came across the text of a fascinating report, “The Evolution of Educational Assessment: Considering the Past and Imagining the Future.” Originally delivered in 1999 as the Educational Testing Service’s William H. Angoff Memorial Lecture by James W. Pellegrino, and updated in 2005, the report begins by bluntly stating that “assessment has become one of the most pervasive aspects of the American educational landscape.”

Pellegrino refers to the 20th century as the “Test Century,” when scores of tests were developed to measure aptitude and intelligence. But he points out that while many of these tests serve a purpose, most of them have little impact on student achievement. What’s needed, he says, is a system that combines formal testing with other assessment practices and strategies. “but it must be more valid and informative than is currently the case.”

Looking into the future, Pellegrino foresees the impact of “ubiquitous information technologies” on educational assessments. “The most salient feature about technology is that it is a means to an end; it provides tools to support the creation and enactment of more powerful learning environments.”

By the year 2099, Pellegrino envisions “a platonic ideal, a Unified Republic of Educational Assessment,” in which theory and research on cognition and analytic methods are seamlessly combined with external and classroom-based assessments to provide “technology-assisted dynamic learning environments... for multiple domains of knowledge and skill, with assessment as an integral component...” These environments may well include “intelligent tutoring systems...and inference engines focused on what and how people learn.” Today’s tests will be “artifacts of history” in an era where “information about student competence and achievement will be captured as a part of the normal teaching and learning process.”

While none of us will be around to witness this in 2099, bits and pieces of Pellegrino’s vision can already be seen. In this issue, assessment guru Jim Popham says, “The task before today’s educators is to promote the adoption of good classroom assessments and good accountability assessments so that both strongly contribute to children’s learning.”

Monty Neill of the Center for Fair and Open Testing, an outspoken opponent of high-stakes testing, says: “Accountability should no longer be based on test scores alone. Rather, it should include classroom and school-based evidence of achievement, standardized test scores, and regular detailed investigations by trained observers.”

Technology can certainly help in all of these areas, but nowhere is it more promising than in measuring year-to-year individual student growth—value-added assessment. Gerald Bracey points out, “In the past, most states have lacked the technical capability to conduct such year-to-year tracking, but improvements in information technology now make such tracking feasible and affordable.”

Maybe we won’t have to wait until 2099 after all.