

Social Justice and Evidence-Based Assessment with The Learning Record

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Abstract

The educational system perpetuates social injustice through structural inequities of assessment and evaluation. High-stakes standardized testing has a destructive effect on teaching and learning that affects all students, teachers, and schools; it is particularly damaging for disadvantaged students—minorities, students with disabilities, students from violent or impoverished circumstances, non-native speakers, migrant students, and many others who do not meet cultural “norms.” Yet policy-makers, parents, and administrators fear that without the tests, schools cannot be held accountable for meeting educational standards. Alternative assessments such as portfolios have been tried with little success.

This paper presents the Learning Record, a successful alternative for documenting, analyzing, and evaluating student achievement and performance based on evidence drawn from actual learning environments, and analysis based on research in learning theory. Yet this model answers the need for rigor, validity, and reliability as well. The Learning Record provides an organized, coherent account of student learning through observations and samples of naturally-occurring student work, analysis based on Lev Vygotsky’s dimensions of learning, and evaluation according to criteria established by the teacher, by state frameworks, or other performance criteria. Large-scale assessment with the Learning Record is collaborative, open, public assessment through moderation readings. It is an inherently equitable and positive form of assessment with one fundamental rule: we must document what students demonstrate they know and can do, not their deficits or errors.

Introduction:

Making students accountable for test scores works well on a bumper sticker and it allows many politicians to look good by saying that they will not tolerate failure. But it represents a hollow promise. Far from improving education, high-stakes testing marks a major retreat from fairness, from accuracy, from quality, and from equity.

—Senator Paul Wellstone

Social justice in education is crucially dependent upon the methods of assessment. Once high-stakes testing shifted attention from ranking and sorting students—a function it still serves, unfortunately—to ranking and sorting teachers and schools, the entire educational enterprise was diverted into a focus on standardized examinations. Poorly performing schools with large populations of disadvantaged students—children of migrant workers, students from impoverished families, students living in violent neighborhoods, students from other countries, students with disabilities or other disorders—have been punished for their inability to raise test scores on increasingly vapid and meaningless standardized tests. This has only exacerbated existing social injustices and condemned children to a prison of inequality from which there is virtually no escape. The effects are widely known. A 2002 study on the effects of high-stakes testing in 18 states, by Arizona State researchers Audrey Amrein and David Berliner, is cited in

the FairTest report on the consequences of the “Leave No Child Behind Act”:

The researchers also found that states with high-stakes exams are more likely to exclude students with disabilities or limited English proficiency from participation in NAEP. This largely explained the greater-than-average score gains in the high-stakes states of Texas and North Carolina.... In part because states with high-stakes graduation tests are poorer and have larger proportions of minority-group students, the researchers point out that the damage more often affects these students than their wealthier, majority-group peers. Thus, they conclude, “a high stakes testing policy is more than a benign error in political judgment. It is an error in policy that results in structural and institutional mechanisms that discriminate against all of America’s poor and many of America’s minority students.” (Neill 2004; Amrein and Berliner 2002)

Alfie Kohn, well-known critic of standardized testing and author of *The Schools Our Children Deserve* and *Punished by Rewards* writes:

Standardized tests tend to measure the temporary acquisition of facts and skills, including the skill of test-taking itself, more than genuine understanding. To that extent, the fact that such tests are more likely to be used and emphasized in schools with higher percentages of minority students (a fact that has been empirically verified) predictably results in poorer-quality teaching in such schools. The use of a high-stakes strategy only underscores the preoccupation with these tests and, as a result, accelerates a reliance on direct-instruction techniques and endless practice tests. "Skills-based instruction, the type to which most children of color are subjected, tends to foster low-level uniformity and subvert academic potential," as Dorothy Strickland, an African-American professor at Rutgers University, has remarked.

He continues:

Again, there's no denying that many schools serving low-income children of color were second-rate to begin with. Now, however, some of these schools, in Chicago, Houston, Baltimore, and elsewhere, are arguably becoming third-rate as testing pressures lead to a more systematic use of low-level, drill-and-skill teaching, often in the context of packaged programs purchased by school districts. Thus, when someone emphasizes the importance of "higher expectations" for minority children, we might reply, "Higher expectations to do what? Bubble-in more ovals correctly on a bad test—or pursue engaging projects that promote sophisticated thinking?" The movement driven by "tougher standards," "accountability," and similar slogans arguably lowers meaningful expectations insofar as it relies on standardized testing as the primary measure of achievement. The more that poor children fill in worksheets on command (in an effort to raise their test scores), the further they fall behind affluent kids who are more likely to get lessons that help them understand ideas. If the drilling does result in higher scores, the proper response is not celebration, but outrage: The test results may well have improved at the expense of real learning.(Kohn 2000)

Standardized assessments, with their concomitant “test prep” curricula and scripted pedagogical methods impoverish the entire learning environment and deprive the educational system of important evidence needed to assure the quality of education as well as its fairness. Because of the demands of high-stakes standardized testing, schools no longer engage in preparing students for the world in which they will actually need to function. Yet because of the enormous profits for proprietary test providers, the political pressures to keep these oppressive systems in place is only increasing. The claims of “objectivity” and “prevention of bias” for their useless instruments would be laughable if they were not actually tragic in their consequences, and worse yet, naively believed by educational administrators, politicians, and the public. You can learn much more about the research on the disastrous effects of high-stakes testing, as well as the efforts to educate the public and protect students at FairTest. (www.fairtest.org)

Institutions and cultural values

As anthropologist Mary Douglas pointed out, institutions confer identity, create categories, and decide what “matters” in societies. They make life and death decisions; they create, maintain, and can even demolish inequities of internal systems; and they reflect and perpetuate inequities of larger social structures. (Douglas 1986) The institution we call “school” has important cultural functions: it prepares the young to assume cultural roles and responsibilities, it perpetuates cultural values, it determines what is important to know and know how to do, and it creates the earliest identity distinctions outside the family. Children quickly learn whether they are a “slow reader,” “gifted and talented,” “good at math,” “creative,” have a “learning disability,” or a “behavior problem.” Through the mechanisms of sequencing, evaluating, and managing order in the learning environment, schools reflect cultural expectations, assumptions, divisions, inequities, hopes and fears. Because assessment drives schooling in this punitive era, grades, portfolios, examinations, and standardized testing have an impact on teaching and learning that is vast, totalizing, and inescapable. Inevitably we are teaching students *precisely* what we value. As we consider the influence of standardized tests and this reflection of what we value for our children, we should be appalled. Yet despite the damning evidence, many people believe there is no other way to ensure that all children have the opportunity for a high-quality education. They are mistaken.

There is an alternative to this madness

Elsewhere I have written:

Learning is inherently joyful; observing and fostering learning is inherently gratifying. So the process of representing development, learning, and achievement should be a celebration, not a sentence. When a small child is learning to ride a bicycle, the mastery of new skills, knowledge, and embodied experience is deeply satisfying and motivating. There may be frustrating stages, getting started, managing turning and stopping, maintaining balance, but they are challenges and obstacles that are purposefully met and ultimately overcome, bringing triumph and excitement. The parent or guide provides encouragement, affirmation of the child's capabilities, a bit of guidance, and just enough scaffolding to support the discovery process, laughing happily with the child when each difficulty is overcome. Struggles, gaps, mistakes, and setbacks are considered natural parts of the process, to be met with curiosity and attention. The role of feedback is simply to affirm the developments so far, and point to the next challenges to be met, while mobilizing and informing the support needed to meet them. (Syverson 2006)

Assessment of student learning can be based on actual evidence of student learning that is drawn from the student's naturally-occurring activities, performance, and experiences in any learning environment, no matter how diverse the teaching methods, students, activities, or learning topics may be. We call this *evidence-based assessment* and it exists now as an appropriate measure of authentic student development, performance, and achievement. It is called the Learning Record. It can provide teachers, students, parents, and the public with a clear, rich, meaningful representation of students' learning. Appropriate assessment has the potential to redress aspects of social injustice that pervade not only the school systems, but the larger culture in which learning and development are situated.

The sheer volume of students in schools seems to argue for some standardized form of assessment, but the process of thinking about how to accomplish this has been backward. Standardized testing has focused on standardizing the *content* of what is assessed, rather than standardizing the architecture in which diverse kinds of evidence of learning can be collected, organized, understood, and evaluated and providing support for intelligent analysis of the data. Consequently, in order to make the tests "fair," standardized tests must be normed to large numbers of students at a particular grade level. "Content" is reduced to inconsequential questions that can be reduced to multiple-choice answers, which 50% of the students answer incorrectly. Questions that do not meet this standard are discarded. By mathematical law, 50% of students

must fall below the median—*substandard*—no matter what their actual attainment may be. Commercial test providers reap enormous profits while students and their educational process suffer. Do you see any problem with this?

One attempted remedy has been the portfolio movement. Portfolios gather diverse contents and attempt to standardize the reading of them; still, it is impossible to make comparisons across portfolios without standardizing their contents. Portfolios of student work have been a major trend in student evaluation and large-scale assessment for at least twenty years. Portfolios are wonderfully rich sources of data about student learning—if you know where and how to look. Will eportfolios help? Probably not, if they depend on closed, proprietary architectures that artificially constrain teaching and learning. Eportfolios in general have improved the collection of data and made it easier for students to gather data in electronic format, including types of data that cannot be represented in print.

But there is a very big issue with portfolios, including eportfolios: while they continue to make data collection easier for writers, they do little or nothing to aid readers. Even more so than print-based portfolios, they are extremely labor-intensive to read and analyze. Confronted with a bewildering variety of data, now scattered in blogs, multimedia presentations, email messages, collaborative group work, and so on, how do teachers make sense of students' development? And where do they find the time to manage even a cursory browsing of such diverse and random samples?

This is where the Learning Record is unique; it provides a coherent scaffold for reading and apprehending evidence of student learning. Because of its structure, information about student learning, no matter how diverse, is organized in consistent, meaningful sections that can be quickly accessed and understood by readers across all disciplines. Even under the best of circumstances, in large-scale assessments, portfolio readers can only achieve about a 47% rate of inter-reader reliability, rendering this model useless as a viable assessment instrument. Yet the Learning Record model consistently achieved inter-rater reliability of 89-92% in large-scale assessments.

Clearly, both standardized testing and portfolios fall short. However, with the appropriate architecture, it is possible for rich and varied evidence of learning to be organized in ways that

can be quickly apprehended by readers and compared not only with grade-level expectations but across student populations.

The Learning Record

The Learning Record is an assessment model that provides this architecture. It was developed by teachers and educational researchers in London in the mid-1980's to document evidence of learning in large, inner-city classes filled with children from many countries, speaking many different languages. The teachers and researchers drew on the work of Lev Vygotsky and Jimmy Britton, and based their eight-page Primary Language Record on a fundamentally empirical method: gathering appropriate evidence from interviews with parents, making observations of students in "real-world" learning environments, drawing samples of naturally-occurring student work, making an analysis of the evidence that is informed by sound learning theory, and developing an evaluation based on meaningful criteria for learning. This model not only provides a rich, authentic measure of students' achievement and performance, it informs teaching and educational policy making at the school level as well as in larger public policy arenas. It is a source of data for research on teaching and learning and curriculum development. It also forges close connections between parents and schools. Under this mindful, positive regard, paying careful attention to the actual evidence of student development and performance, students, teachers, and schools flourish. This is not merely a matter of restorative social justice for historically underprivileged students; it restores to education its fundamental humanity. *All* students and *all* teachers are disadvantaged by the distortion and impoverishing of learning environments under the regime of standardized testing.

An empirical method

The history of scientific approaches to educational evaluation and assessment dates back to the time and motion studies of Taylor and the subsequent Taylorization of schooling. Then, as now, the public's naive assumptions about scientific methods and misguided faith in scientific infallibility in description and prediction had enormous, and often harmful, consequences for teaching and learning environments. The current scientific paradigms for evaluation and assessment of learning tend to adopt one of three models: the medical model of diagnosis, intervention, and evaluation, repeatedly applied; the psychometric model exemplified in the

myriad forms of multiple-choice testing; and the chaotic free-for-all of portfolios.

There is growing dissatisfaction with these methods among teachers, parents, administrators, and above all, students. It is clear to many that these models fall far short of capturing with any validity or accuracy or analyzing meaningfully what students know and know how to do. The limitations are most marked when these methods are applied to complex kinds of learning, to linguistically and culturally diverse students, to disabled students, to migrant students, to original and creative thinkers, and others who do not fit the middle-class mainstream ideal. Even worse, however, are the well-documented effects on instruction as teachers are increasingly required to “teach to the test,” drilling students on fragmentary testable “facts” stripped from their larger theoretical and methodological context. However problematic multiple-choice standardized testing may seem, however, most administrators, teachers, and parents believe there is no alternative that is “fair” and “objective.”

Without raising the critiques of multiple-choice testing as neither “fair” nor “objective,” however, we can simply state that there is indeed an alternative to standardized testing that is actually valid, reliable, fair, and objective in the ways that we understand sciences to be. The real problem is that people have been looking for answers in all the wrong sciences. Complex phenomena, including teaching and learning, thinking and creating, do not lend themselves to the statistical methods of psychometricians, or the simplifications of multiple-choice questions. Because teaching and learning are not methods for healing disease or injury, medical models are also inappropriate. Alternatively, the idiosyncratic or chaotic collections typical of portfolios do not lend themselves to empirical or comparative analysis. However, current research on complex systems suggests there is a scientific approach that *can* produce rich data and interpretations of change across time in complex systems; the scientific methods that best fit such phenomena are those familiar to the field biologist.

If we understand learning as the transformational change over time of organisms situated in complex physical and social ecosystems, we can use the techniques of the biologist, anthropologist, or other observational scientist to gather information and interpret it through well-established analytical lenses to evaluate student progress and achievement, even when it

occurs in diverse settings (ecosystems), under varied conditions, and using different kinds of tasks and activities. (Syverson 1995) Such a method is discipline and subject-independent, inclusive, and commodious: that is, diverse *kinds* of data can easily be accommodated under this model (including quantitative results from standardized tests, which are, after all, data points). Another hallmark of the scientific approach is making one's data and findings available for peer review and critique; that process can be accomplished through the Learning Record's unique model of Moderation Readings.

One rule

The only "rule" for using the Learning Record is that teachers must focus their observations and interpretations on what students demonstrate they know and can do, rather than reporting their assumptions about the students' deficits. The rule comes from an obvious fact of observation: we cannot observe what isn't there, only what is there. When we talk about what students don't know or can't do, we are speculating, not observing. The Learning Record model is based on students' development, not their presumed deficits. This simple rule has had the effect of qualitatively and globally changing the ecology of instruction and evaluation in ways that support student learning.

The structure of the Learning Record

The Learning Record is organized to provide sections for different kinds of evidence and analysis of students' learning, gathered over the course term:

Demographic information

Part A: Interviews. Once basic student demographic data is entered, the recording begins with *background information* gathered from interviews with a parent or someone who knows the student well, as well as information from the student herself (**Part A**). This establishes the initial conditions at the start of the course.

Evidence of Learning and Development

- **Work Samples**

Over the course of the term, then, virtually any kind of *evidence of learning* can be included in the Learning Record, including lab notes, drafts of reports, field observations, sketches

and diagrams, diagnostic test results, quizzes or exams, reports, links to online materials, and other **samples of student work**. The Learning Record is well suited to assess scientific explorations, collaborative work, creative inquiry, online projects, and other kinds of work that are usually considered difficult to evaluate. These diverse products constitute one form of evidence in the Learning Record.

- **Observations.** Observations of student activity supplement this evidence, providing insights into students' experiences and activities in the class. From about fourth grade, students begin adding their own observations, and in the higher grades observations are basically provided by the students.

Part B: Analysis of the evidence. In the *analysis* portion of the Learning Record (**Part B**), this evidence is interpreted in terms of the *strands of work* in the course (its objectives) and *five dimensions of learning*. These five dimensions are drawn from the learning theories of Vygotsky. They include: confidence and independence, knowledge and understanding, skills and strategies, the use of prior and emerging experience, and reflectiveness. The course strands (learning objectives specific to a particular class), together with the five dimensions of learning, provide the theoretical and methodological framework for the analysis of the evidence of student learning.

Part C: Evaluation based on comparison of the evidence and analysis with established criteria. The final section of the college-level Learning Record (**Part C**) consists of the **evaluation**, which compares the evidence in the Learning Record with grade criteria defined by the instructor in college-level courses (at K-12 levels these criteria are often defined in terms of performance standards, grade criteria, state frameworks, developmental scales). In college-level courses, the entire Learning Record is kept by the student, with the instructor responding to the evidence, the analysis, and the student's estimated evaluation.

The process of keeping the Learning Record reflects robust scientific methods. A sample of the Learning Record form for college-level students can be found in the Appendix.

Dimensions of Learning

Learning theorists have argued that learning and development are not like an assembly-line which can be broken down into discrete steps occurring with machine-time precision, but an organic process that unfolds in complex ways according to its own pace and rhythm. Teaching

and learning occurs in complex ecosystems, dynamic environments where teachers, students, materials and supplies, texts, technologies, concepts, social structures, and architectures are interdependently related and interactive. Using the Learning Record, the teacher (and student) is actively searching for, and documenting, positive evidence of student development across five dimensions: confidence and independence, knowledge and understanding, skills and strategies, use of prior and emerging experience, and critical reflection. These five dimensions cannot be "separated out" and treated individually; rather, they are dynamically interwoven. Our goals for a particular class should describe a trajectory of learning across multiple dimensions, and our measurements should be able to identify the paths taken by students and their progress from their individual starting points along that trajectory.

Individually, learners can expect to make progress across these five dimensions:

Confidence and independence

We see growth and development when learners' confidence and independence become congruent with their actual abilities and skills, content knowledge, use of experience, and reflectiveness about their own learning. It is not a simple case of "more (confidence and independence) is better." In a science class, for example, an overconfident student who has relied on faulty or underdeveloped skills and strategies learns to seek help when facing an obstacle; or a shy student begins to trust her own abilities, and to insist on presenting her own point of view in discussion. In both cases, students are developing along the dimension of confidence and independence.

Skills and strategies

Skills and strategies represent the "know-how" aspect of learning. When we speak of "performance" or "mastery," we generally mean that learners have developed skills and strategies to function successfully in certain situations. Skills and strategies are not only specific to particular disciplines, but often cross disciplinary boundaries. In a writing class, for example, students develop many specific skills and strategies involved in composing and communicating effectively, from research to concept development to organization to polishing grammar and correctness, and often including technological skills for computer communication.

Knowledge and Understanding

Knowledge and understanding refers to the "content" knowledge gained in particular subject areas. Knowledge and understanding is the most familiar dimension, focusing on the "know-what" aspect of learning. In a psychology class, knowledge and understanding might answer a wide range of questions such as, what is Freud's concept of ego? Who was Carl Jung? What is "behaviorism"? These are typical content questions. Knowledge and understanding in such classes includes what students are learning about the topics; research methods; the theories, concepts, and practices of a discipline; the methods of organizing and presenting our ideas to others, and so on.

Use of prior and emerging experience

The use of prior and emerging experience involves learners' abilities to draw on their own experience and connect it to their work. A crucial but often unrecognized dimension of learning is the capacity to make use of prior experience as well as emerging experience in new situations. It is necessary to observe learners over a period of time while they engage in a variety of activities in order to account for the development of this important capability, which is at the heart of creative thinking and its application. With traditional methods of evaluating learning, we cannot discover just how a learner's prior experience might be brought to bear to help scaffold new understandings, or how ongoing experience shapes the content knowledge or skills and strategies the learner is developing. In a math class, students scaffold new knowledge through applying the principles and procedures they've already learned: algebra depends on the capacity to apply basic arithmetic procedures, for example.

Reflection

Reflection refers to the developing awareness of the learner's own learning process, as well as more analytical approaches to the subject being studied. When we speak of reflection as a crucial component of learning, we are not using the term in its commonsense meaning of reverie or abstract introspection. We are referring to the development of the learner's ability to step back and consider a situation critically and analytically, with growing insight into his or her own learning processes, a kind of metacognition. It provides the "big picture" for the specific details. For example, students in a history class examining fragmentary documents and researching an

era or event use reflection to discover patterns in the evidence and construct a historical narrative. Learners need to develop this capability in order to use what they are learning in other contexts, to recognize the limitations or obstacles confronting them in a given situation, to take advantage of their prior knowledge and experience, and to strengthen their own performance.

Recently, through conversations with Myra Barrs in London in March, and email discussions with Mary Barr, both founders of the Learning Record for K-12 students, I've added a new, optional dimension of learning:

An optional dimension: Creativity, originality, imagination

As learners gain confidence and independence, knowledge and understanding, skills and strategies, ability to use prior and emerging experience in new situations, and reflectiveness, they generally become more playful and experimental, more creative in the expression of that learning. This is true not only in "creative" domains such as the arts, but in nearly all domains: research, argumentation, history, psychology. In all fields the primary contributions to the field at the highest levels are the result of creative or imaginative work. This optional dimension may be adopted by teachers or schools to make explicit the value of creativity, originality, and imagination in students' development and achievement. Among other things, it recognizes the value of creative experimentation even when the final result of the work may not succeed as the student may hope. If we hope to foster this quality in students thinking and development, it is important to encourage it, to document it, and to explicitly make it a value. We make this dimension optional because there are certain classes that depend on the transfer of information (as in human anatomy, for example) or the acquisition of fundamentally technical skills (calculus, for example) where creativity and imagination may not play a significant role.

But how do we know whether students are actually making some kind of developmental progress in these dimensions? How do we know whether they are achieving the particular learning objectives we have for our classes? How can we ensure that our own biases don't color the evaluation of the student's development? (Or, as my mentor, Ed Hutchins once put it, "How do we guard against believing our own lies?") In the Learning Record model, these questions are addressed through Moderation Readings.

Collaborative, public, open assessment: Moderation readings

The moderation process is unique to the Learning Record. It is collaborative, open, public assessment. It is collaborative because teachers working pairs read the evidence and analysis in peers' Learning Records. They discuss the evidence and come to agreement on what it represents in terms of students learning, performance, and development. It is open because Learning Record is an open document; anyone with an interest in the student's learning may contribute to it. It is public because moderation readings are open to anyone: parents, administrators, critics, community members, policy makers. Anyone may draw up a chair to hear teachers discussing the evidence in the Learning Record they are reading together. The work of assessment is carried out in plain sight.

The moderation reading process is used for K-12 and college-level classes to inform instruction, support the professional development of teachers, and provide for large-scale assessment. Individual student placements (grades or placements on performance scales) are made at the classroom level for all students, and then a random statistical sample of records is chosen for the moderation process. For moderation readings, student records are masked to conceal the student's identity, as well as the classroom teacher's placement of the student. The first round of moderations typically takes place at the school site. Teachers read Learning Records in pairs, reading only records other than their own, and discussing the evidence and interpretations found in the records. Together each pair of readers decides on a placement and records it. This choice is then also masked while the record is sent on to the next stage of the moderation process, typically conducted at the regional level. The procedures are repeated, with pairs of teachers reading and discussing evidence and interpretations in the records and recording their decisions about placement.

Thus, each record selected for the moderation process receives three readings and three placements: from the original teacher, from the school-site moderation, and from the regional moderation. Where there is a disagreement among the placements, the masked record is read by a final pair of expert readers. The numerical results are aggregated and reported. The original records, with the readers' placements attached, are returned to the classroom teachers or their

representatives, helping to fine-tune the teachers' judgments. This process provides a form of peer review and public accountability unique to the Learning Record model. The validity and reliability of this large-scale process has been established in a major research study at UC Berkeley (Hallam 2000). Further information is available in the Learning Record Handbooks (Barr et al. 1999; Barr and Syverson 1999). See also Sadler's important series of papers on assessment criteria and standards (Sadler 1985, 1986, 1986, 1987, 1989).

In a white paper for the Learning Record, I wrote:

In all of nature it is obvious that the developmental process is both structured and diverse. It is structured in the sense that all healthy chicks seem to develop along the same path, from embryo to full grown adult. Yet even in the same brood, chicks do not all hatch at the same time. Grasses grow and set seeds higher or lower, depending on rainfall. In the flower garden, roses, even from the same rose bush, do not set buds and flower all at the same time, much less across the garden, where there are flowers that bloom in April, May, June, July; where there are some that bloom in the early morning, while some do not open until the afternoon sun. Yet, a daisy unfolds as a daisy, a tulip as a tulip, reliably and predictably, provided there is not some hindrance: poor soil, lack of water, blight or pests. Each thing unfolds in its own time, in its own perfection, in accord with the life circumstances it encounters.

If this is true even for such things as grasses, flowers, and beasts, how can we imagine it is any different with something so exquisitely complex as a human being? Under favorable circumstances, children learn and adapt and grow in healthy ways at very different rates and with different interests and capabilities. Would we want it any other way? Neurophysiology is even now unlocking the vast potential of the human mind and spirit, dazzling us with the incredible range and scope of our human capacities. Yet we have programmed our entire educational system with the opposite expectation and with harsh penalties for non-conformity to an arbitrary set of mind-numbing standards (Syverson 1999).

Conclusion

Because the *organization* of Learning Records and the *analytical framework* of the Dimensions of Learning are consistent across all types of classes and all grade levels, evidence of learning can be apprehended and established even by readers unfamiliar with the subject or the coursework. Yet the *contents* of the Learning Record can be infinitely varied; the architecture does not determine or even suggest particular teaching methods, artifacts, assignments, or class dynamics. The rich data provided in this way informs teaching *as the class is still unfolding*.

With real data about student activity, experience, performance, and achievement in meeting the *actual* learning environments and tasks they have been engaged with, we can begin to understand what the real needs are, what interventions are most likely to meet with success, what resources make a genuine contribution, and how to better create the environments in which teaching and learning can thrive. With the opportunity afforded by the Learning Record for collaboration among teachers, parents, students, and administrators *looking at the actual evidence of student learning*, a community of shared knowledge about teaching and learning creates informed expectations and levels the playing field for students and teachers. It offers the best hope for working toward the amelioration of social injustices inflicted and supported by the institution of school, and ultimately the social injustices perpetuated by the larger culture. For further reading about the Learning Record and students with disabilities, see Sally Thomas, “Rethinking assessment: Teachers and students helping each other through the sharp curves of life” (Thomas 1993). For further reading about equity in cultural and linguistic diversity with the Learning Record, see the work of Pamela Moss (Moss 1994), Mary Barr (Barr and Cheong 1994), and Arnetha Ball (Ball 1993).

Three reasons to care

There are three reasons we as university-level teachers ought to be concerned about the issues raised in this paper:

First, we are seeing the educational trauma in our students coming out of schools wrecked by standardized testing and its toxic effects on curriculum. It shows in underdeveloped skills of thinking, reading, and writing; in student’s cynicism and dissociation from schools and academic learning; in their escape into impoverished forms of online entertainment and superficial social interaction as substitutes for deep and meaningful connection, discourse, and learning. It shows, most alarmingly, in the ways that their curiosity and engagement have been deadened.

Second, proprietary commercial test providers such as ETS have set their sights on higher education as the next conquest. They have money and unlimited patience. Already they have begun quietly lobbying not students and teachers, nor even administrators, but politicians, boards of regents, and other governing bodies. The only counter to their vast resources, lobbying skills,

and rhetoric about “accountability,” “standards,” and “objectivity” is an activist, public stand by well-informed faculty and administrators who care about the quality of teaching and learning and the well-being of our students and our institutions of higher education.

Third, as educators we care about the quality of the teaching and learning environment. We must exercise our experience and expertise in the service of our calling. We have seen the destructive effects of punitive forms of assessment in the K-12 schools, and the poisoning of the relationships among teachers, students, parents, and communities. We have struggled with other ways of evaluating students, only to become exhausted by the enormous labor they require.

There is a better way. The Learning Record can support our highest aspirations for our students and ourselves. We can restore fairness and equity and create healthy, thriving learning environments. For over twenty years, thousands of K-12 and college-level teachers have been doing just that with the Learning Record. Their work brings them joy and satisfaction and their students are excited about learning and developing in diverse, astonishing ways.

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Appendix: The Learning Record form

Student ID _____

Date: _____

LR The Learning Record

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Part C.2 Final Evaluation

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Course Strands

Grade Criteria

Five Dimensions of Learning

Privacy Policy

Please read the Privacy Policy at the end of this document. Then respond below.

May this Learning Record be used for scholarly research and publication, with identification removed?

The Learning Record

Student Profile:

Name:

Email address:

Phone:

Languages:

Primary Language:

Other Languages (reading, writing, speaking and listening):

IF YOU HAVE A RECENT PHOTO, ADD IT HERE BY CHOOSING INSERT/PICTURE FROM THE MENU ABOVE.

TO REMOVE PERSONAL INFORMATION, CLICK IN THE MARGIN NEXT TO “STUDENT PROFILE” AND DELETE THIS ROW.

Course Information:

Course Instructor:

Course Number::

Course title:

Course ID number:

Term:

Year:

Part A1: Interview

Interview with another person who knows you well—for example, a parent or other family member, close friend, or teacher. Please identify the person (first name only) and how long he or she has known you. The interview should focus on the person's impressions of your development as a reader, writer, and thinker. If you have completed a Learning Record interview like this in another class recently, you may use it here.

Interviewee (first name):

Relationship to you:

Interview date:

Part A2: Personal Reflection

Reflections on your own development with respect to reading, writing, speaking, and listening, and other course strands (see the course strands below).

Teacher's comments on Part A:

Part B1: Midterm Analysis of Data

Develop your summary interpretation of your development in terms of the major strands of work and the five dimensions of learning. Be sure to connect your interpretations with specific examples included in the observations and samples of work.

Part C1: Midterm evaluation and grade estimate

Include here any comments you'd like to add, especially concerning:

- Your estimated evaluation in terms of the grade criteria for the course.
- Suggestions for your own further development during the remainder of the term.
- Suggestions for class activities or for the professor to better support learning

Then, indicate your midterm grade estimate.

Evaluation:

Midterm Grade estimate (student):

Teacher's comments on the Midterm LR:

Midterm Grade (teacher):

Part B2: Final Analysis of Data

Develop your summary interpretation of your development in terms of the major strands of work and the five dimensions of learning. Be sure to connect your interpretations with specific examples included in the observations and samples of work.

Part C2: Final evaluation and grade estimate

Include here any comments you'd like to add, especially concerning:

- Reflections on your learning experience in the course.
- Any supplementary information or comments not included in Parts A and B.
- Any suggestions for the instructor for future classes.
- Then, indicate your final grade estimate.

Evaluation:

Final Grade Estimate (student):

Teacher's comments on the final LR:

FINAL GRADE (TEACHER):

Observations

Please include the following information for *each observation*. Copy and paste these observation fields for each new observation.

Copy and paste the whole box below, with all of its fields.

<i>Date observed:</i>	
<i>Date entered here:</i>	
<i>Context (choose one):</i>	individual pair small group large group whole class lab field
<i>Activity:</i>	
<i>Observation:</i>	
<i>Teacher's comments:</i>	

Paste here to create your first observation. Repeat for each new observation.

Work samples

Please include the following information for *each* work sample. Copy the fields here and paste them into the space below. Copy and paste these work sample fields for each new work sample.

Copy the whole box below, with all of its fields:

<i>Name:</i>	
<i>Assignment:</i>	
<i>File name:</i>	
<i>Location:</i>	
<i>Your comments:</i>	
<i>Teacher's comments</i>	

Paste here to create your first work sample entry. Repeat for each new work sample.

Course Strands

(Provided by the teacher)

<i>Course strand</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Weight</i>
Rhetoric	All composing is designed, organized, represented, and evaluated for particular purposes and audiences. Through course activities, students will develop their skills and their understanding of the composing process, regardless of the medium in which it occurs.	
Research	The quality, relevance, and timeliness of composing depends on the depth of the research. Many of the computer applications used in this course will also require some research for students to develop skills and understanding in their use. Students will develop their capacity to conduct research in online and offline environments.	
Collaboration	This class engages students in a wide range of collaborative activities, from peer reviews to online discussions to team projects. Successful collaboration depends on skills, knowledge and understanding, confidence, and reflectiveness; students will develop their capacities for meaningful collaboration..	
Technology	This class focuses on technological environments for composing and communicating: mindmaps, the web, and graphics. The applications needed to develop compelling and challenging compositions are only part of the learning objective in this strand. Students will also develop their ability to distinguish which kinds of writing situations lend themselves to specific applications, and they will also learn to evaluate different kinds of activities and products effectively.	

Grade Criteria

(Provided by the teacher)

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Criterion</i>
A	Represents outstanding participation in all course activities; all assigned work completed, with very high quality in all work produced for the course. Evidence of significant development across the five dimensions of learning. The Learning Record at this level demonstrates activity that goes significantly beyond the required course work in one or more course strands.
B	Represents excellent participation in all course activities; all assigned work completed, with consistently high quality in course work. Evidence of marked development across the five dimensions of learning.
C	Represents good participation in all course activities; all assigned work completed, with generally good quality overall in course work. Evidence of some development across the five dimensions of learning.
D	Represents uneven participation in course activities; some gaps in assigned work completed, with inconsistent quality in course work. Evidence of development across the five dimensions of learning is partial or unclear.
F	Represents minimal participation in course activities; serious gaps in assigned work completed, or very low quality in course work. Evidence of development is not available.