

Definitions in Education

Source:

NCREL (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory)

1-alternative assessment: An assessment in which students originate a response to a task or question. Such responses could include demonstrations, exhibits, portfolios, oral presentations, or essays.

2-analytical trait scoring: A method for assigning a summary score to a product, performance, or work sample based on a prior analysis that defined the key traits, dimensions, or characteristics possessed by the class of objects being scored. The object is scored independently against each dimension, and a summary score is calculated following a set formula. The summary score may be a simple total (or average) across dimensions, a weighted total, or a more complex algorithm. An example might be the scoring of a piece of persuasive writing on such traits as attention to audience, correct use of grammar and punctuation, focus on the topic, and persuasiveness of argument.

3-at risk: A term applied to students who have not been adequately served by social service or educational systems and who are at risk of educational failure due to lack of services, negative life events, or physical or mental challenges, among others.

4-authentic assessment: An assessment presenting tasks that reflect the kind of mastery demonstrated by experts. Authentic assessment of a student's ability to solve problems, for example, would assess how effectively a student solves a real problem.

5-authentic task: School assignment that has a real-world application. Such tasks bear a strong resemblance to tasks performed in non-school settings (such as the home, an organization, or the workplace) and require students to apply a broad range of knowledge and skills. Often, they fill a genuine need for the students and result in a tangible end product.

6-benchmark: Statement that provides a description of student knowledge expected at specific grades, ages, or developmental levels. Benchmarks often are used in conjunction with standards.

7-benchmark performances: Performance examples against which other performances may be judged.

8-cognitive science: A science investigating *how* people learn rather than *what* they learn. Prior knowledge and out-of-classroom experience help form the foundation on which teachers build effective instruction.

9-cognitively guided instruction: An instructional strategy in which a teacher assesses what students already know about a subject and then builds on students' prior knowledge. Students typically are asked to suggest a way to represent a real problem

posed by the teacher. Guided questions, encouragement and suggestions further encourage students to devise solutions and share the outcome with the class.

10-collaborative learning or cooperative learning: An instructional approach in which students of varying abilities and interests work together in small groups to solve a problem, complete a project, or achieve a common goal.

11-constructivism: Theory suggesting that students learn by constructing their own knowledge, especially through hands-on exploration. It emphasizes that the context in which an idea is presented, as well as student attitude and behavior, affects learning. Students learn by incorporating new information into what they already know.

12-criterion-referenced assessment: An assessment that measures what a student understands, knows, or can accomplish in relation to specific performance objectives. It is used to identify a student's specific strengths and weaknesses in relation to skills defined as the goals of the instruction.

13-curriculum (plural *curricula*): A plan of instruction that details what students are to know, how they are to learn it, what the teacher's role is, and the context in which learning and teaching will take place.

14-data-driven decision making: A process of making decisions about curriculum and instruction based on the analysis of classroom data and standardized test data. Data-driven decision making uses data on function, quantity and quality of inputs, and how students learn to suggest educational solutions. It is based on the assumption that scientific methods used to solve complex problems in industry can effectively evaluate educational policy, programs, and methods.

15-exhibition of mastery: A type of assessment in which students display their grasp of knowledge and skills using methods such as skits, video presentations, posters, hands-on activities: Activities that engage students' physical as well as mental skills to solve problems. Students devise a solution strategy, predict outcomes, activate or perform the strategy, reflect on results, and compare end results with predictions.

16-heterogeneous grouping: Grouping together students of varying abilities, interests, or ages.

17-higher-order questions: Questions that require thinking and reflection rather than single-solution responses.

18-higher-order thinking skills: Understanding complex concepts and applying sometimes conflicting information to solve a problem, which may have more than one correct answer.

19-holistic scoring: Using a scoring guide or anchor papers to assign a single overall score to a performance.

20-inquiry: A process in which students investigate a problem, devise and work through a plan to solve the problem, and propose a solution to the problem.

21-interdisciplinary curriculum: A curriculum that consciously applies the methodology and language.

22-learner-centered classroom: Classroom in which students are encouraged to choose their own learning goals and projects. This approach is based on the belief that students have a natural inclination to learn, learn better when they work on real or authentic tasks, benefit.

23-"less is more": A principle built on the idea that quality is of higher importance than quantity. It is reflected in instruction that guides students to focus on fewer topics investigated in greater depth, with teachers performing the task of prioritizing subjects as well as specific skills within those subjects.

24-manipulative: Any physical object (e.g., blocks, toothpicks, coins) that can be used to represent or model a problem situation or develop a mathematical concept.

25-matrix sampling: An assessment method in which no student completes the entire assessment but each completes a portion of the assessment. Portions are allotted to different, representative samples of students. Group (rather than individual) scores are obtained for an analysis of school or district performance.

26-meta-cognition: The process of considering and regulating one's own learning. Activities include assessing or reviewing one's current and previous knowledge, identifying gaps in that knowledge, planning gap-filling strategies, determining the relevance of new information, and potentially revising beliefs on the subject.

27-modeling: Demonstrating to the learner how to do a task, with the expectation that the learner can copy the model. Modeling often involves thinking aloud or talking about how to work through a task.

28-norm-referenced assessment: An assessment designed to discover how an individual student's performance or test result compares to that of an appropriate peer group.

29-open-ended question: A question that has many avenues of access and allows students to respond in a variety of ways. Such questions have more than one correct answer.

30-open-ended task: A performance task in which students are required to generate a solution or response to a problem when there is no single correct answer.

31-open-response task: A performance task in which students are required to generate an answer rather than select an answer from among several possible answers, but there is a single correct response.

32-performance assessment: Systematic and direct observation of a student performance or examples of student performances and ranking according to pre-established performance criteria. Students are assessed on the result as well as the process engaged in a complex task or creation of a product.

33-performance criteria: A description of the characteristics to be assessed for a given task. Performance criteria may be general, specific, analytical trait, or holistic. They may be expressed as a scoring rubric or scoring guide.

34-performance task: An assessment exercise that is goal directed. The exercise is developed to elicit students' application of a wide range of skills and knowledge to solve a complex problem.

35-portfolio assessment: An assessment process that is based on the collection of student work (such as written assignments, drafts, artwork, and presentations) that represents competencies, exemplary work, or the student's developmental progress.

36-problem solving: A method of learning in which students evaluate their thinking and progress while solving problems. The process includes strategy discussion--determining solution strategies to similar problems and pinpointing additional problems within the context of their investigation.

37-reliability: An indicator of score consistency over time or across multiple evaluators. Reliable assessment is one in which the same answers receive the same score regardless of who performs the scoring or how or where the scoring takes place. The same person is likely to get approximately the same score across multiple test administrations.

38-rubrics: Specific criteria or guidelines used to evaluate student work.

39-scaffolding: An instructional technique in which the teacher breaks a complex task into smaller tasks, models the desired learning strategy or task, provides support as students learn to do the task, and then gradually shifts responsibility to the students. In this manner, a teacher enables students to accomplish as much of a task as possible without adult assistance.

40-scale: The range of scores possible for the student to achieve on a test or an assessment. Performance assessments typically use a 4- to 6-point scale, compared to a scale of 100 or more with traditional multiple-choice tests.

41-scoring guide: A set of guidelines for rating student work. A scoring guide describes what is being assessed, provides a scoring scale, and helps the teacher or rater correctly place work on the scale.

42- standardized tests: Assessments that are administered and scored in exactly the same way for all students. Traditional standardized tests are typically mass-produced and machine-scored; they are designed to measure skills and knowledge that are thought to be taught to all students in a fairly standardized way. Performance assessments also can be standardized if they are administered and scored in the same way for all students.

43-standards: Statements of what students should know and be able to demonstrate. Various standards have been developed by national organizations, state departments of education, districts, and schools.

44-validity: An indication that an assessment instrument consistently measures what it is designed to measure, excluding extraneous features from such measurement.