

education review

a journal of book reviews

[reseñas educativas \(Spanish\)](#)
[resenhas educativas \(Portuguese\)](#)

This review has been accessed **801** times since January 5, 2008

Janesick, Valerie, J. (2006). *Authentic Assessment Primer*. NY, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

Pp. 125 \$19 ISBN 0-8204-7648-X

Reviewed by Kristin Stang
California State University, Fullerton

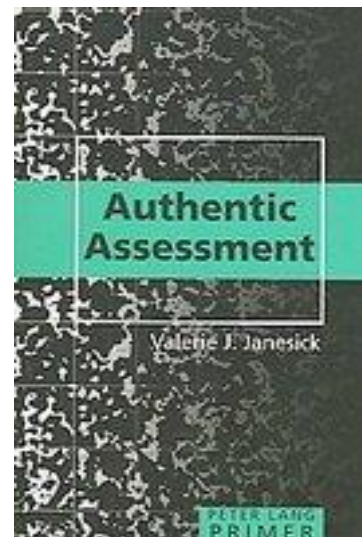
January 5, 2008

In the current educational and political setting, the assessment of student learning and student outcomes in our K-12 schools has become a critical discussion. New legislation for school accountability has led to increased standardized assessment as well as increased school and district accountability through mandatory reporting of student scores to district and school stakeholders. There are concerns that this type of assessment (standardized testing) is not the most authentic and accurate measure of student learning or of teacher effectiveness. Other concerns include the fact that standardized testing results rarely guide future teaching, as it is a snapshot approach to measure what a student has learned.

Janesick's (2006) text *Authentic Assessment Primer* is designed to provide an introduction to assessment tools and techniques that can be used as an alternative to standardized high stakes testing. The author describes authentic assessment as that assessment that "requires authentic tasks that show students' abilities. Students receive feedback and redirection to allow for growth; students have a part in the process and the outcome" (p. 1). This, in her view, is in sharp contrast to the process of standardized testing which she describes as a "corporate model of profiteering."

The main text of the brief primer is 107 pages, which is further divided into five primary chapters. Following each chapter there is a chapter summary and glossary with definitions and key terms. This end-of-chapter information provides a useful resource for the novice teacher wanting to use authentic assessment in his or her classroom. A 20 page "Resources and References" section follows the five chapters. This section includes contact information and descriptions of organizations, state contacts for testing reform as well as website and video lists that provide information about how to use authentic assessment.

The first chapter titled "Introduction and Overview," represents 54 pages and constitutes over half of the entire text. While background information and a strong foundation in the history of assessment are important to understand



Janesick's (2006) point of view and basis for the text, the important part of the chapter is lost in the political and historical discussion. Readers who are practitioners, the audience for whom the book is supposedly written, would be better-served if the second half of the chapter, where Janesick describes types of authentic assessment in detail, stood alone as a single chapter. In fact, although the Peter Lang Primers are reportedly designed to provide brief summaries of important topics for course content, it is difficult to discern if the purpose of this text was to introduce readers to the political history and societal implications of standardized assessment as a justification for authentic assessment, or if the true purpose was to help better prepare pre-service teachers to participate in authentic assessment with their students. Nonetheless, the resources describing various types of authentic assessment (including rubrics and portfolios) are valuable tools for pre-service and in-service teachers.

In the opening to Chapter Two, "Standards, Assessment, and Critical Thinking", Janesick (2006) describes the purpose of the text as "in part to argue that we would be better served as a society if we allowed our students to take responsibility for their learning" (p. 55). Janesick states that the movement toward a standards based education is unethical by providing 11 specific ethical challenges, and that standards-based instruction is driving the emphasis on high-stakes standardized assessment. Using specific examples from the Texas state assessment system, issues related to teaching to the test, and suggested teaching alternatives are outlined. According to Janesick, the NCLB act, while signed into law during the George W. Bush administration, has "historical roots" in Reagan policies and that politics do not belong in the classroom. She makes her point with 16 detailed items that she feels are a direct result of NCLB policy, and that in her opinion are negatively impacting our K-12 schools and subsequently, student learning. Janesick repeatedly promotes an organization in Florida that is designed to publicize problems associated with the law and with high-stakes testing. Much of this chapter is based in Janesick's opinion with few formal references to research and literature.

The introduction to Chapter 3 "Issues Related to Assessment" opens with a strong statement that "when speaking of authentic assessment, there is agreement on one of its outstanding characteristics: authentic assessment is ethical and fair" (Janesick, 2006, p. 75). While I certainly agree with this statement in principle, Janesick's argument would be greatly strengthened by citations to those researchers and theorists who agree that authentic assessment *is* ethical and fair. The author continues by stating that there is agreement that high-stakes testing is unfair and unethical, but again provides no substantive references or data to support to the claim. In fact, the author tells the reader that the research literature documents ethical challenges to standardized testing, yet she only cites a single author that supports the case she is making. The chapter ends with a discussion of the SAT and the "greed" of corporations like the College Board and Educational Testing Services (ETS). Janesick even provides salary, benefit, and bonus information for the officers of ETS in order to support her claim that the large company's financial gains, and in particular the financial gains of the top officials, continue to drive the standardized testing movement.

In the fourth chapter of the *Authentic Assessment Primer*, the author details movements in key states against NCLB and standardized testing (Janesick, 2006). She summarizes lawsuits filed at the state level that challenge the ethics of standardized testing. Janesick includes a sample letter that parents can use to gain testing information from their states. In the chapter summary, the author tells the reader that "the point here is that there are existing models for the reader to access and possibly use in the future" (p. 98) if the reader is interested in working toward assessment reform in their own state. Again, while this information is certainly valuable to those looking to start their own "grassroots" effort for assessment reform, I am concerned that this does not match the purpose of the book. If the purpose is to inform in-service and pre-service teachers to better understand and use authentic assessment in their classrooms, why is the emphasis upon the grassroots efforts for assessment reform and letter guidelines for parent activists?

In a four-page concluding chapter, Janesick (2006) presents what she feels is the "major idea" for thinking about authentic assessment, and that is that authentic assessment "ensures that students are not bystanders but actual participants in the educational process" (p. 101). While this is certainly one of the appealing aspects of authentic assessment, the text does little to substantively document the efficacy of such an approach. To be a valuable resource for "undergraduate and graduate classroom use" the *Authentic Assessment Primer* should focus more upon how teachers can use authentic assessment to involve students in their own education.

It is obvious that Janesick's expertise is in the area of assessment and that she is challenging practitioners to think beyond the use of standardized tests. However, the text misses the mark in terms of its purpose. While the references

and resources provided in the final section appear to be valuable, the author should have discussed some of these resources within the text and should have provided more research-based support for her ideas and claims. Overall, in order to best meet the needs of pre-service and in-service teachers for whom the primer is reportedly designed, the text should include less about the political history and how to participate in reform and more about how to design and include authentic assessment as a valuable teaching and assessment technique in K-12 classrooms.

About the Reviewer

Kristin Stang, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Special Education, College of Education at California State University, Fullerton. Her teaching interests include assessment and special education law. Dr. Stang's research interests include teacher ratings of student learning and behavior as well as the training of pre-service teachers.

Copyright is retained by the first or sole author, who grants right of first publication to the *Education Review*.



[Editors: Gene V Glass, Kate Corby, Gustavo Fischman](#)

~ [ER home](#) | [Reseñas Educativas](#) | [Resenhas Educativas](#) ~

~ [overview](#) | [reviews](#) | [editors](#) | [submit](#) | [guidelines](#) | [announcements](#) | [search](#) ~



Kristin Stang