STOP AND REFLECT

How do personal success skills reflect what might be included in the profile of the graduate (POG)? How might students integrate academic knowledge and skills with dispositions?

3.2 A RANGE OF PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT TYPES

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) era in education usurped a great deal of learning time in favor of preparing students for high-stakes tests that purportedly measured academic proficiency and ultimately ranked schools through various state-level reporting and accountability systems. What we do know now is that these large-scale tests can suck the joy out of both teaching and learning. Just ask students and teachers how they feel about these tests! One of the leverage points in moving to CBE is to have teachers take a fresh look at what it is that students need to know and do and how students need to prove that they have actually learned it. One "breakthrough" activity we've used is to simply put a well-written, rigorous competency before teachers and ask them how many ways they could ask students to demonstrate their knowledge. The next step is to develop one (or more) of these scenarios into a performance task that can generate the evidence a teacher needs to see in order to determine proficiency. Most educators will agree that this type of evidence collected over time is far more indicative of student learning. Yet the years of test prep and test taking have resulted in a distillation of local assessment strategies.

What Is a Performance Assessment?

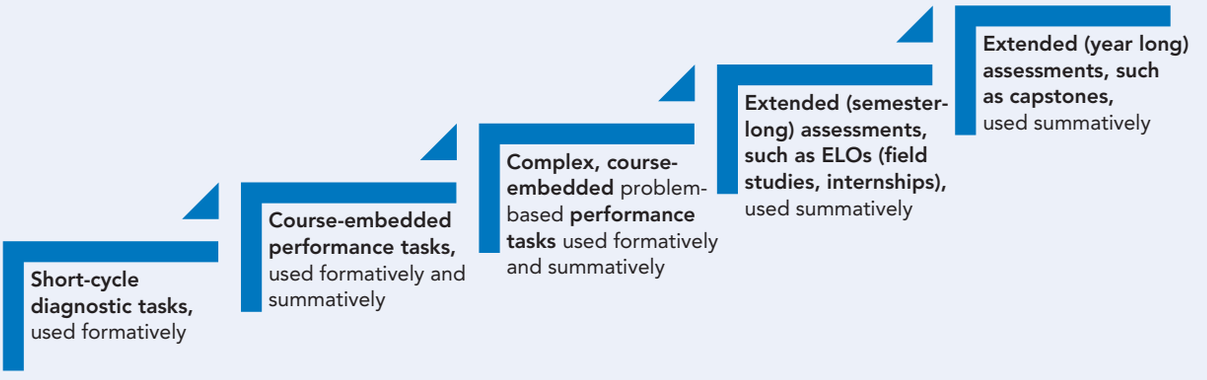
Our everyday lives are filled with "authentic" **performance assessments**, such as making a cake, learning to ride a bike, getting a driver's license, or planning a family reunion. Unlike paper-and-pencil tests, performance assessments require the student to *do* something, not simply describe how to do it (e.g., swimming the length of the pool versus explaining how to swim the backstroke). With performance tasks,

students understand the relevance of applying skills and concepts in a real-world situation (e.g., knowing that measuring accurately is important to the success of the cake). There is also an acknowledgment that multiple performance trials may be needed as students move from being a beginner to becoming proficient.

We'd probably agree that when students design and conduct a STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) investigation or develop a capstone project, they are engaged in performance assessment. These examples require in-depth engagement with content, extended time and resources, and instruction along the way to help prepare students for designing and carrying them out. Sometimes, the instruction is accomplished with a community mentor or an internship outside of school. However, not all performance assessments need to take extended time or extensive teacher planning.

On a continuum from least to more complex performance assessments, capstones, extended learning tasks, and project-based learning live at the more complex end (see Figure 3.3). The final products of these multistage performance assessments probably developed with several smaller performance tasks embedded in them as the larger project evolved. Less complex performance assessments comprise the rest

FIGURE 3.3 The Performance Assessment Continuum



Short-cycle diagnostic tasks used formatively, such as running records in reading, "free writes" during a literacy block, or theater games that demonstrate acting techniques, do not take much time to administer, but they allow students to demonstrate subskills and concepts needed for more complex tasks. Because these tasks elicit clear and observable evidence, teachers can determine whether students are ready to integrate these skills into more cognitively demanding content or decide what additional scaffolding or instruction might be needed next. Tasks designed to be open-ended, rather than having correct answers, elicit thinking, reasoning, and misconceptions. This provides insights as to *why* students are confused or confirms that students are ready to move ahead, having mastered skills or concepts with less complex content.

Course-embedded performance tasks generally require one or more class periods to complete and are linked to ongoing instruction. Mathematics problem-solving activities, open-ended research prompts, and arts-based explorations are performance assessments that require students to apply multiple skills, strategies, and concepts in new ways. The cognitive demand for performance tasks can be reduced by using less-complex content or texts at first or allowing students to work together in small groups. Once students show that they can successfully complete a complex task with less-complex content, teachers can ask for the same skills and strategies to be employed with more challenging content or use of more sources. Course-embedded performance tasks can be used to provide formative, interim, or summative evidence within a unit of study or across a course as content and skills become more complex.

Extended multistage assessments may take as long as a semester or full year to research and develop, such as culminating group projects at the end of a unit of study (**project-based learning/PBL**), student-designed expeditionary learning opportunities (ELOs), community service projects, in-depth analyses of case studies in science or social studies, and capstone projects.

Source: Adapted from Hess, 2018, p. 133.

of the assessment continuum, informing instruction and building the foundation for deeper learning over time. We will revisit this assessment continuum in our discussion of performance scales later in the chapter.

Performance assessment invites critical and creative-productive thinking and often requires integration of more than one skill, concept, or strategy to reach a solution. Performance tasks also invoke opportunities for students to apply many personal success skills (e.g., collaboration, disciplined inquiry, academic perseverance). In our experience, professional collaboration in developing and using competency-based performance assessments is essential in moving away from "teaching to the test" and is far more accurate in determining student mastery. The CBE tools described later in the chapter were developed specifically for designing and validating CB assessments.

Assessment Form Follows Function

In CBE schools, students are required to transfer the knowledge and skills described in one or more academic areas (competencies) while integrating personal success skills, such as creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, or communication. CBE assessments document evidence of learning along a learning continuum (**learning progression**), providing important feedback to teachers that a student is either ready to move on to something more complex or needs more support and practice before advancing. "Teach them, test them, and move on" in a standards-based culture is now replaced in CBE by an assessment system that focuses on how learning develops over time, from being a novice to being an expert at something.

Collective Teacher Efficacy (Effect Size = 1.39)

→ **CBE Tool 1C** (Figure 3.4) provides a framework for examining where your school is now in developing competency-based assessments. (The full version of **CBE Tools 1A–1E** is found in Appendix A.)

STOP AND REFLECT

What types of assessments are currently in use in your school? Do they include performance assessments? Does the use of assessments (e.g., in each content area) form a *continuum* for measuring progress toward deeper understanding?