



NCTI 2009 Innovators Conference

The Future of Assessments for Students with Disabilities

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Discussion

Kevin Bushweller

- The role that technology will play in the future of assessment is HUGE.
- Lessons for assessment:
 1. Motivation matters.
 2. Need to be aware of our low expectations for students who struggle.
 3. Literacy matters.
 4. Need to know our learners and what their learning needs are.
 5. Allow students to experience trial and error through adaptive testing features.
- Looking at the future of assessment – what will it look like? What are some barriers to moving forward?

John Castellani

- Currently he is part of work to look at special education data in Maryland and determine what constitutes ‘good’ special education data. One difficulty found when attempting to make sense of education data is that standardized test scores aren’t available until the following year. By the time the data is available, the student has already moved on, and the classroom teacher cannot use the information to adjust their teaching methods.
- Importance of Universally Designed assessments
- Key points in looking at special education data:
 - Data by itself tells us nothing.
 - Data that tells us what is needs to be transformed into what to do.



- Data that tells us what to do should be fed back to tell us what to change.
- AYP data is great, but doesn't tell teachers what to do day-to-day to reach all students.
- Give special educators a wide variety of data and information to help them view the whole student as well as the whole special education population to make informed decisions about how to address learning needs.

Michael Russell

- Universal Design represents the future of assessment but it is also today – everything is possible today, although we are not exploiting our knowledge to its full extent. If UDL is taken into account during the design phase of curriculum, assessment, etc. we can essentially eliminate the need for testing accommodations. The use of UDL assessments represent a relatively subtle shift in how we do things, but can also represent a paradigm shift that is huge; moving from accommodation after the fact to thinking about all learners from the beginning.
- When determining accommodations for testing, most testers look at three things: IEP, a request from the school, and whether the accommodation provides an unfair advantage. But if accommodations don't create an unfair advantage, why must they be a special request? What is to stop us from building a wide variety of accessibility features into every assessment?
- Technology relieves some of the burden of creating accommodations because we can create dynamic content. With these abilities, it makes sense to just make all assessments accessible. Digital content means we can represent one piece of information in multiple ways.

Arthur VanderVeen

- Formative assessment for diverse learners are becoming more innovative in how we address the needs of those learners have become critically important issues for New York City. One of the ways that NYC has looked at assessing diverse students is through the use of flexible portfolios of assessments:
 - Computer-based adaptive assessments
 - Better ideas of actual need
 - Leads to next steps for school
 - Leads to actionable steps for teachers to take
 - ELL periodic assessments
 - K-2 games-based assessment for early literacy and early math



- New York’s use of adaptive assessments and flexible options for testing has identified lessons learned for the field:
 - Quality of assessments matter.
 - Data and data reporting tools matter, but not without a data-focused culture within the school.
 - Teachers need ability to use data to inform instruction.
 - Professional development is critical.
 - Move beyond state compliance data, AYP data, and others to bring together the kind of data that supports instruction in the classroom.
 - Create an environment for teachers that encourages learning, cooperation, collaboration, mentoring, and sharing of information (NYC uses Web 2.0 functionality to encourage discussion).
 - Engage parents in the data reporting process by providing everything the school has to parents, as well as providing information to help teachers walk parents through data interpretation.
- New York’s future vision of assessment builds on these lessons and current initiatives to move towards programs that include:
 - Portfolio-based assessments.
 - Virtual environments to support socially embedded performance tasks.
 - [School of One](#): Use of learning algorithms to design personalized daily learning plans, profiles, learning preferences, resources and assessments.
 - Expanding the use of instructional technology that supports multiple pathways to mastering learning objectives.

Discussion and Q&A

Comment from John Castellani: Many states (Maryland included) choose one accommodation option for assessments (e.g., Kurzweil 3000), often because lack of turnaround time makes it difficult to deal with multiple assessments. A lack of digitized assessments means that many schools can only choose one option because they don’t have enough time to make variations. Online, digitized testing may help change this and allow schools to provide multiple variations for multiple learners.

Comment from Michael Russell: Not all formats and accommodations are equally good; speech-to-text tools are ineffective if they don’t read with 100% accuracy or the student cannot understand what is being said. Just because something is digitized doesn’t mean it will be useful in a testing environment, we need to consider accuracy and usability.



Question: Finding the correct tool for students. Are we advancing technology and providing assessments because we can or because we're actually meeting the needs of students? Are we throwing darts in the dark or finding the correct option for students (especially those with mild disabilities)?

- **Arthur VanderVeen:** Good assessment design is hard work and expensive and we need to find flexibility in presentation, response, and other options.
- **Michael Russell:**
 - Power of UDL assessments.
 - Linking accommodation to disability is an error, should be based on need.
 - Make accommodations individualized to each student.
 - Help parents and teachers understand options.
 - Use technology to make changes on the fly if something isn't working.

Question: What about preferences for learners. How would they like information presented? What works for blind middle school students in terms of effective image description on high stakes tests? We're just beginning to find out what is the match between individual student, individual need, grade band, etc. and specific accommodation.

- **Chuck Hitchcock:** Imagine a time when formative assessment is embedded in the curriculum and analysis leads to instruction that works better for everyone.
- **Arthur VanderVeen:**
 - [School of One pilot](#): Instruction itself is part of the assessment. You gain assessment time if instruction IS the assessment.
 - Develop a continuum between standardized assessments and individualized.
 - Use data to inform curricular decisions – which instructional tasks are improving student achievement more than others?
 - Every day is another trial about effective instructional resources!

Question from Kevin Bushweller: Several years ago there was a lot of interest in computerized adaptive testing, it seems to have died down on a national scale. Is that what you've all seen? What kind of barriers are there?

- **Michael Russell:** There was controversy a few years ago because there was a lack of clarity about whether adaptive testing would lead to out of grade level testing, but I think that's been cleared up and a number of states are using these types of tests now. It was more confusion at the national level regarding NCLB requirements than anything



else.

- **Arthur VanderVeen:** We think they're highly promising because you can get data so quickly. NCLB didn't allow them before, so it was more at the state level, but that's changing.

Question from Arthur VanderVeen to Michael Russell: Can you talk about the costs of UDL assessments from the beginning?

- **Michael Russell:** Difficult to have exact numbers, but if you try to do anything at the beginning, it is initially going to be expensive and slow because you need training, developers, etc. It is much harder to make a good item on a test than it is to make it accessible. As the technology improves and automates, it will get cheaper and cheaper. But it will always cost more because you're doing more than just scoring one type of item.
- **Arthur VanderVeen:** If we could move more of our instruction and assessment online we could realize massive savings. Of course there are infrastructure and other logistical issues immediately, but we could save money in the long run.

Question from Mark Sherman: Following up on computer adaptive testing, ultimately couldn't all this be cloud-based?

- **Arthur VanderVeen:** If you've designed it in a way that works with multiple devices, managing from the cloud would be preferable because it gives you the flexibility that you need.