



Learning Lens

TC3

A Focus on Exemplary Practices

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September 28, 2005

What's right with this picture?

The Sociology in Everyday Life project is an example of "authentic assessment." Student learning is evaluated through performance that demonstrates meaningful application of the skills and knowledge taught in the course. The assessment itself improves learning by helping students make connections between the coursework and their prior and new-found knowledge.

Grant Wiggins, a widely-known advocate for improved assessment in education at all levels, notes that "the best tests always teach students and teachers alike the kind of work that most matters; they are enabling and forward-looking, not just reflective of prior teaching." To be considered authentic, assessment must

- require students to be effective performers with acquired knowledge.
- present the student with the full array of tasks that mirror the priorities and challenges found in the best instructional activities: conducting research; writing, revising and discussing papers; providing an engaging oral analysis of a recent political event; collaborating with others on a debate, etc.
- attend to whether the student can craft polished, thorough and justifiable answers, performances or products.
- involve "ill-structured" challenges and roles that help students rehearse for the complex ambiguities of the "game" of adult and professional life.

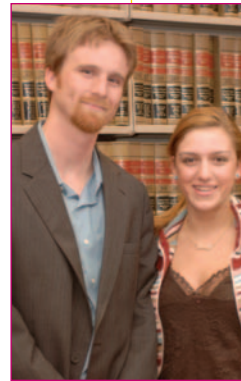
Wiggins, Grant (1990). The case for authentic assessment. Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation, 2(2), <http://pareonline.net/getvn.asp?v=2&n=2>.

An extensive assessment bibliography is available on Dr. Wiggins's website at <http://www.relearning.org/resources/PDF/assbibl.pdf>.

Got a great learning idea? Share it with the *Learning Lens* by contacting Rochelle Mike at x4433 or Groupwise AMT.

The Sociology of Everyday Life

"Personalizing sociology" – that is David Van Arsdale's objective in his Introduction to Sociology course. David developed a research project called "The Sociology of Everyday Life," which asks students to use the theories and methods of sociology to understand the work lives of friends or family members. David explains that "all of our students know someone who works, so they can study how social forces affect the work lives of people they know. It makes sociology personal." The research project combines a qualitative interview and secondary research, and culminates in a research paper.

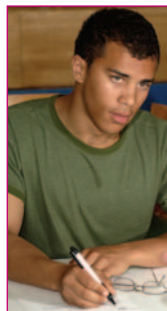


Dr. David Van Arsdale, Assistant Professor (Sociology) with student Alissa Noshie

of globalization and its effect on small family-owned businesses.

As students talk and write about friends' and family members' work they break down the wall between personal life and academic life. David

describes the process as "building a bridge between every day life and the principles of sociology." One of David's goals is to "give students the opportunity to be scholarly – really see this project as research." So he has created opportunities for his students to present their findings to the college community each semester in the form of a panel presentation called "The Sociology of Everyday Life." In the fall of 2002 one of David's sections was filled with students who had been affected by plant closings in Cortland. The impact of the closings on Cortland families became the focus of the course, culminating in a public presentation at the County Office Building in December. He even teamed up with TC3 historian Karen Pastorello to take a group of students to the "How Class Works" conference at SUNY Stony Brook in 2003. The students gave a panel presentation on the realities of being full-time workers and full-time students. Student enthusiasm for David's approach runs high. Amanda Kirchgessner, a former student, described her feelings about the class this way: "He's really passionate about it; and he doesn't just teach it to you; he lets you experience it."



Student Zach Anderson

Many students choose to interview their parents, bringing the project even closer to home. Zach Anderson interviewed his father, an orthopedic surgeon. Alissa Noshie also interviewed her dad, who runs a small jewelry store. From these interviews students identify sociological themes and topics. Zach's interview supported an examination of the relationship between race and work; more specifically, he explored what it's like to be a minority in a high-prestige occupation. He says, "I know that it was extremely hard to start a practice as a doctor. It's a lot harder [for minorities] to get the capital and financial backing to start. Then it's harder to keep it afloat working in low wage communities." Alissa's interview with her father grew into a more far-reaching consideration