

## **Authentic Assessment**

Written by the MetLife Fellows in the Teachers Network Policy Institute (TNPI)

Words 429

On test day, teacher Morgan Greene weaves through her eighth grade classroom. In one corner, students sit quietly writing an essay, others complete Punnett squares representing the cross-generation of bunnies, still others huddle in a circle reflecting on the potential of genetics to cure cancer. In David Silberberg's room, eleventh graders become immigrants arriving on Ellis Island, their eyes and dreams focused on the naturalization form they themselves created earlier. Joyce Conway's high school students gaze at computers as they graph results of studies on the invasion of gypsy moths, the percentage of students with body piercing, and what new classes students would like in their school. Debbie Deidrick's students put the finishing touches on a PowerPoint presentation for the city council to demonstrate what they have learned from their research on the impact of a proposed shopping center adjacent to a national park.

These teachers and a growing number of others across the nation have abandoned traditional tests in favor of alternative "authentic" assessment. For these teachers, the test of student learning lies in students' ability to synthesize knowledge and apply understanding to solve important problems. How does such work relate to the current move towards the assessment of learning through high stakes testing?

Janet Price, a fellow of the Teachers Network Policy Institute, is part of a growing cadre of accomplished teachers who are studying the impact of policies and mandates on classroom learning. Price looked at what happened when the State of New York allowed her high school to replace high stakes standardized tests with portfolio-based assessment aligned with state standards. In 1999, 83% of Price's students—all English language learners--passed the social studies graduation portfolio, and 68% passed in science. Portfolio assessment provided a much richer picture of student learning than could be discerned from a standardized test, and the process of engaging students in meaningful work raised their achievement levels.

Creating Punnett squares of bunnies holds the promise of future scientists. Simulating being immigrants instills tolerance for the hundreds of ethnic peoples who land on our shores to find a

better life. Studying unchecked commercial development to present to a city council produces citizens who know how to have a say in their communities. Graphing statistics creates people who learn that facts speak more loudly than emotion. Taken together, such teaching practices coupled with authentic assessment fulfill the very purpose of public education in a democracy: the creation of informed and active citizens who achieve not only factual knowledge but the power to use that knowledge to improve lives, communities, and the world.