



PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE



At the recent meeting of ASCD affiliates in Washington, D.C., Deborah Maier, Principal and passionate advocate for public education, stated that “the job of teacher is to undermine class, race and prejudice”. To do

this is to narrow, in her opinion, the achievement gap. However, inherent in this mission is the belief that all people are born capable and with “wonderful ideas”. Therefore, teachers are to listen actively and to consider how to turn students’ “wonderful ideas” into qualities necessary for democracy.

Over the past week, I have had the opportunity to talk to hundreds of teachers about Deborah Maier’s quote. Some felt that the word “undermine” held a negative connotation, while others thought it was not strong enough. Some questioned if “to undermine” negates the celebration of uniqueness and diversity. Nevertheless, a common theme was that teachers must pay attention to factors that might limit equity of access and opportunity.

As I reflect on the quote and on teachers’ reactions to it, I am reminded of the mission of Manitoba ASCD - “Manitoba ASCD is a community of learners committed to enhancing teaching, learning, and leadership by reflecting on current educational research, by engaging in varied forms of professional learning, and by providing a forum for non-partisan dialogue about education”.

One of the ways that this organization works to effect this mission is to bring Manitoba’s educators together to think, talk, network and learn with one another through professional learning. It is in this way that we support teachers, administrators, MECY personnel, consultants and superintendents as they “undermine class, race and prejudice”.

Manitoba ASCD has been successfully doing this for ten years. At the recent 10th anniversary celebration, the founding members of Manitoba ASCD, Diane Phillips, Linda Thorlakson, and Charles Tinman, reminded us that this organization was conceived in order to bring diverse voices from the Manitoba educational landscape together in a collaborative way.

I would encourage you to continue in this conversation and to suggest to your colleagues that they join the dialogue that Manitoba ASCD facilitates through professional learning around teaching and learning. Because, as Deborah Maier reminds us, this job to undermine class, race and prejudice is not one’s individual job alone; it is the collective work of everyone in schools.

Sandra Herbst-Luedtke

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**Professional Learning Opportunities
2005-2006**

FEBRUARY 14, 2006 **“Presentations For Learning”**
Marilyn Onisko **Location: RETSD Learning Center**

MARCH 3, 2006 **“ Navigating Adolescence”**
Anita Roberts **Skills to empower youth to cope with verbal
and physical threats.**
Location: TBA

MAY18, 2006 **Distinguished Lecturer Series**
Carl Glickman **“Powerful Schools; Democratic Purpose:
Assumptions, Struggles and Promises to Keep”**
Location: Greenwood Inn

CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS

For *REFLECTIONS*, the Journal of Manitoba ASCD

2006
**Theme: *Sustaining a Community of
Learners***

Have you considered sharing your stories of sustaining a learning community with Manitoba ASCD readers? Tell us about an initiative you have undertaken at the classroom, school, divisional or provincial level. We also welcome reviews of recent literature and trends in leadership.

Contact: MANITOBA ASCD c/o Gwen Watson, editor gwatson@wsd1.org 788-0203

To indicate your intention to write for the journal contact Gwen Watson at the above email address. She will forward detailed submission guidelines to you. All “intention to write” information needs to be sent in by January 30, 2006. We ask that completed articles be provided by April 30, 2006.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO HEARING FROM YOU.

A Review of Ken O'Connor's Presentation "How to Grade For Learning"

by Margaret Murray

John Henderson Junior High School

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Ken focused his presentation on September 27 around an essential question: How confident are you that the grades students get in your school are: consistent, accurate, meaningful, and supportive of learning? How soon in the school year should we give summary grades? Do we have enough evidence? Interim reports should be anecdotal rather than achievement. What is the impact early in the year if students receive low scores? What is the best organizer for tracking student achievement, grading, and reporting? O'Connor believes we need to consider standards. And/ or learning goals for each course / subject / grade. Another key issue is: How do we crunch numbers? What rules do we have in assessment?

When referring to change process there are three maxims of change: 1. Adapt don't adopt; 2. Start small; 3. Work together. We should focus on 1-3 things that would make a difference with our students. Collaboration is key if we want to become effective.

Thomas Guskey *Communicating Student Learning* "... grading practices are not the result of careful thought or sound evidence, rather they are used because teachers experienced these practices a students and, having little training or experience with other options, continue their use."

What are our beliefs around "fairness?" Fairness is about equal opportunity, not uniformity. We need to be clear about our outcomes if we want success for our students. Students need to have success experiences. We need to motivate them.

Ken spoke about purposes for grading. We need to know our terminology in order to have purposeful dialogue. "Marks" is what we put on individual students' papers and grades are the summary on a report card.

- Communicate the achievement status of students to parents, students, and others.
- Provide information that students can use for self-evaluation
- Select, identify or group students for certain educational paths or programs.
- Provide incentives to learn.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of instructional programs.

We need to have a clear sense of what we are communicating and that we have a shared value about grading and achievement. Perspectives on grading involve professional dialogue. Ken summed up school as a learning game not a grading game.

We need to emphasize growth and achievement. Our goal should be to have as many students as possible to be successful. We need to assess the students at their working level and eventually they should be getting better at their level. If we want our grades to be accurate and consistent then we must have clear standards.

In *How to Grade for Learning*, O'Connor presents eight guidelines for successful assessment at any grade level.

Use individual achievement as the only basis for grades. O'Connor contends that to have

meaning, grades must be pure measures of each student's achievement of the learning goal.

1. Sample student performances, do not mark everything for grades. A student's most recent effort should be reported, not his trials to reach that level.
2. Grade in pencil. Keep records so they may be updated easily.
3. Relate grading procedures to learning goals.
4. Crunch numbers carefully. With this guideline, O'Connor challenges teachers to question their practice of simply averaging marks to arrive at a final grade.
5. Use criterion-referenced standards to distribute grades and marks.
6. Use quality assessment and properly record evidence of achievement. The author discusses the importance of record-keeping procedures, presenting several methods of indicating grades and recording marks.
7. Discuss assessment, including grading, with students at the beginning of instruction. O'Connor encourages a clear, written grading policy that is shared with students and parents at the outset. He goes on to explain: "when students know how they will be assessed and especially when they have been involved in the assessment decisions, the likelihood of student success is increased greatly."
8. Grades should be based on achievement and on individual achievement.

In order for our students to experience success then we need to provide them with several opportunities for learning. An important part of the assessment plan is how much evidence and which assessments are critical to being able to determine student achievement / grades. To have quality assessment we do need a variety of activities in each of our terms. We need to gather evidence from observations, conversations and products. We must emphasize quality not quantity.

Ken believes we must meet these five quality standards for assessment if we are going to be successful.

1. appropriate and clear target
2. clear purpose
3. method matched to target and purpose
4. appropriate sample of the learning domain
5. control for all sources of interference

The best thing we can do is to ensure our grades convey meaningful, accurate information about student achievement. Students need to know how we are assessing them. We can involve students in establishing criteria. We do have students taking responsibility for their learning through student led conferences. Alfie Kohn sums up the three C's of motivation: Collaboration (learning together), Content (Things worth knowing) and Choice (providing choice in our assessment and assignments).

Ken ended the day with a tribute to Einstein: "Doing the same thing over and over and expecting things to improve." He encouraged us to think about our assessment practices. "Adapt not adopt with our new eyes."

Guidelines for Grading Which Support Learning and Student Success

by Ken O'Connor

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“Teach; test; teach; test; average the marks and report.”

For many of us that is what assessment and evaluation and grading have meant. An interesting phenomenon has now developed. Assessment and evaluation practices have begun to change dramatically; teachers are learning to place performance and demonstration at the heart of their assessment repertoire. They have come to see that the assessment and evaluation are integral to the learning process, not just a means to generate marks for report cards.

Grading, however, has remained largely untouched by the new way that data on student progress are generated. The tension between the new and the old is evident in the titles of articles in educators' journals such as: *It's a Good Score, Just a Bad Grade and Are Letter Grades Obsolete?* What is needed is a set of guiding principles which will clearly indicate how the grading task can be aligned to the current, progressive philosophy of assessment and evaluation.

But first, let us begin with a clarification of four pairs of terms.

Assessment: Gathering and interpreting information about a student or group of students, using a variety of tools and techniques. It is the act of describing student performance, primarily for the purpose of enhancing learning.

Evaluation: Making judgments about the quality of overall student performance, primarily for the purpose of communicating student achievement (grading, reporting, placement, accountability).

Grade (Grading): the number (or letter) reported at the end of a period of time as summary statement of student performance.

Mark (Marking): the number, letter, or score given to any student test or performance.

Criterion-Referenced: assessment in relation to a student's success in meeting stated objectives, outcomes, expectations, or criteria.

Norm-Referenced: Assessment/evaluation in relation to other students within a class or across classes/schools or a segment of the population.

Formative: Assessment designed to provide direction for improvement and/or adjustment to a program for individual students or for a whole class, e.g., observation, quizzes, homework, instructional questions, initial drafts/attempts.

Summative: Assessment/evaluation designed to provide information to be used in making judgments about a student's achievement at the end of a sequence of instruction, e.g., final drafts/attempts, tests, exams, assignments, projects, performances.

The Purposes and Ingredients of Grades

Grades are convenient shorthand, which have come to have common acceptance in schools in North America. They serve many purposes: administration, instruction, motivation, control, and communication. Herein lies probably the most serious problem with grades. As they serve so many functions, many ingredients (achievement, attitude, effort, behaviour, participation, attendance, and so on) have been packed into grades, so that they have become almost meaningless for what should be their main purpose—communication. In order to be effective communication vehicles, grades must have shared meaning; that is, they must be clearly understood by the message senders (teachers and schools) and the message receivers (students, parents, university admissions officers, employers, etc.).

Grading Guidelines

The following guidelines are organized in an approximate order of importance to the support of learning and success; all the guidelines are important and fit together to make a consistent whole. The most critical and difficult are listed first.

1. Limit the values attributes included in grades to individual achievement.

- (a) *Individual achievement should be the only basis for grades (not poor effort, behaviour, tardiness, etc.).* If grades are to have a clear meaning they must be a relatively pure measure of achievement. Achievement in this context is defined as demonstration(s) of the knowledge, skill, and value outcomes that are stated for a course (or unit) of instruction by an individual. This does not mean that grading is simply a clinical objective procedure; there is still a great deal of professional judgment involved in the development of an evaluation plan, in the choice or development of assessment instructions, and in the marking for assessment products. Grades should not be used as punishment for poor effort or misbehaviour; these are discipline problems and should be dealt with as such. Also, grades should not include group marks; what goes into the grade should reflect the contribution of each individual in any cooperative learning situation.
- (b) *Effort, participation, attitude, and other behaviours should be reported separately.* These valued attributes should not be included in grades because they are very difficult to define and measure. Also, as each of these attributes contributes directly to achievement, including a mark for attitude as part of the mark for the product, they would tend to blur the objective evaluation of the product and ultimately affect the validity of the grade produced. This does not mean that these attributes are not values — strong effort, positive attitude, regular attendance and submitting work on time are very important, but they should be reported separately (and regularly) - they should be reporting variables, not grading variables.

2. Sample student performance.

- (a) *Mark or provide feedback on formative “performance”.* Many assessments are designed to provide feedback so that students can improve performance and teachers can adjust instruction. As in band or basketball, the purpose of practice is to help students learn, not to produce marks for final grades. Teachers also benefit from reducing marking loads, as they do not need to mark everything students do. Another benefit is that feedback on practice efforts can be made in comment form, which is very motivational. Letter or number marks tend to bring premature closure to a learning task.
- (b) *Include only summative “performance” in grades.* Tests, exams, assignments, performances (debates, seminars, presentations) at the end of a unit or grading period (however arbitrarily the end is defined) should provide the information which is used to grade students.

The practical implication of this guideline is that teachers should have in their mark books a formative page to use for reporting and a summative page to use for grading decisions.

3. Grade in pencil—keep records so they can be updated easily.

- (a) *Use the most recent information.* Our limited ability or achievement at the beginning of a learning task should be held against us as we improve. For the purpose of grading, what matters is what we can do, not how little we could do when we started. Marks, therefore, should be entered in the grade book in pencil so that old information can easily be replaced by the most recent summative information.
- (b) *Provide several assessment opportunities.* Life is full of second chances so we must provide multiple opportunities for students to perform at their best. This does not mean an endless set of opportunities. But if students are willing to undertake responsibility for relearning a task, then reassessment is entirely appropriate.

4. Relate grading procedures to the intended learning goals (outcomes, expectations, standards, etc.).

In order for grading to be fair and provide optimum opportunities for student success, teachers must have a clear understanding of what learning results are expected and grading must be related to these learning goals. It is also critical that teachers evaluate learning on clear, pre-established standards so the use of detailed rubrics or scoring guides is essential. If this approach is used, students should not be able to get credit for a subject unless they have mastered the critical learning goals of the course.

5. Use care “crunching” numbers.

- (a) The average doesn't have to be the mean; consider using medians. The median—the middle score in a group of marks—is a far more encouraging way of calculating grades. The often used averaging or mean calculation tends to emphasize the lower marks. The median is also statistically accurate. The mean is not.
- (b) Weight marks carefully to achieve intent in final grades. The way in which marks are combined frequently involves weighting scores to reflect the importance of assessment methods and/or outcomes. The best way to ensure that weighting is done correctly is to convert all marks to common scale (ideally, percentages) and then apply weighting factors.

6. Use criterion-referenced (i.e., absolute or preset) standards to distribute grades (and marks).

Glasser says, “No student grade should ever depend on what other students do.” Teachers must be careful that they do not have a bell curve half-hidden in the back of their minds and they must be prepared to celebrate, not question, when all students in a class achieve high grades.

7. Use quality assessments and properly record evidence of achievement.

Marks and grades are meaningful only if they are based on quality assessment instruments— that is, assessment instruments which are valid and reliable. Assessment tools should clearly and appropriately measure the designated learning task. The method should both match the task and be a representative sample of student work.

8. Discuss assessment, including grading, with students, at the beginning of instruction.

For students to have the best opportunities to be successful in their learning, they must know how assessment and evaluation will be used and they should be involved in decisions about assessment and evaluation. This does not mean that every detail has to be presented to students at the beginning of instruction, because students should be involved in developing criteria for many of the assessment methods, and this will occur throughout a course. It does mean, however, that students must receive, in writing, clear, concise information on how grades will be arrived at in each course, preferably in the first few days of each course.

Conclusion

It is important to emphasize that what has been presented here are guidelines, not rules. These guidelines are intended to provide a framework which not only gives some flexibility to individual teachers, but also provides the opportunity for all those involved (teachers, students, parents, etc.) to see that there is a consistent philosophy being applied in the grading practices used in school.



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