The Implementation of Criteria

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Many practitioners have determined that an outcomes-based approach complements the effort to improve their existing systems. Each district's list of outcomes is stated somewhat differently, however, there are common themes such as communicator, citizen, thinker, learner, producer, and group participant. Each outcome reflects what the community expects a successful person to know, do, and be like as a result having had the school experience. Once the outcomes are established, it is the district's responsibility to make them come alive. Curriculum must be modified to meet these new intended results.

The school's culture must be geared toward attaining these outcomes, and there needs to be in place a system to measure and foster student achievement. The method discussed most frequently for this purpose is called authentic assessment. The student will need to do something significant with the information they have learned while we observe, provide feedback, and coach them to success.

The social studies field is ripe for this type of activity. Historically we have used projects, essays, role playing, simulations, presentations, and other forms of active participation. As mentioned earlier, assessment requires that we provide feedback describing the students current level of performance. This feedback will assist in improving the level of each student's performance in relation to the desired outcome. In order to accomplish these tasks we need to borrow, discover, or invent a means to describe what our outcomes should look like and sound like when held to very high standards. The teacher and student need to have a clear picture of the target, in order to work together to attain the outcome.

In Ida Grove we call these descriptions behavior criteria. The clearly articulated statements, the criteria, make public our expectations of students. We feel that when written properly the criteria should be:

--significant and of high standards
--observable
--clear and known by all concerned
--descriptive of an outcome in use
--developmentally appropriate
--a springboard to effective feedback and growth.

A common means of assessing problem solving and communication outcomes is to devise a task around a significant conflict in the "community" and have students report their findings and proposed solution. One indicator of the student's problem solving and communication ability occurs at the end of the presentation when traditionally the audience has the opportunity to probe and ask questions of the presenter. We have, in Ida Grove, developed a set of criteria for use in defending or advocating a position while building a working relationship or while remaining open to change. The following is an example.

BALANCING ADVOCACY AND INQUIRY

1. The position is made clear.

2. Appropriate evidence was provided to support the position.

3. Questions were addressed effectively. The audience understood the response to the probe.

4. People were encouraged to explore the position of the presenter.

5. Others were encouraged to provide opposing/modified views.

6. The presenter actively probed to discover other viewpoints.

These dimensions of the behavior need to be clearly phrased and known to both the student and teacher.

The Milwaukee based, Alverno College Assessment Council views criteria as indicators of an ability that can be seen in its performance. The picture, created by the criteria, needs to be clear enough for the

beginning learner to infer a performance from it and for the assessor to infer the ability from it. Beginning students need explicit criteria while advance students begin to create their own picture of the outcome in action. It is therefore the responsibility of the teacher and student to have a clear, mutual understanding of the schools expectations.

The written or oral feedback will be based on this view of the behavior in action. Together, the student and teacher will assess the performance and determine methods by which the student can "stretch" the level of success in relation to the desired outcome. The district has now implemented a method for "making it happen." The outcomes are not just wishes on paper, but are being operationalized in the classroom, and explicit criteria communicate our expectations.