PART VI. A Teacher's Voice
Teaching and Learning in a Standards-Based Classroom

Teaching in a standards-based system is one of the many challenges facing teachers in today's classrooms. What does this mean? How well prepared are teachers for using what they may see as new techniques for old information? School improvement concepts such as the standards-based approach can be seen as the dreaded enemy, the "more to do with less time" syndrome, unless they are viewed as part of an entire process of planning, instruction and evaluation.

Implicit in a standards-based system is the core content of knowledge that students need to learn and apply within a given subject area. For example, there will always be formulas in math and geography concepts in social studies. However, there also are other important components that are inherent in a standards-based system.

- Performance standards are clearly spelled out for students prior to the work being assigned.

- Curriculum is viewed as the vehicle for teaching standards and facilitating student evaluation.

- Prior to beginning work, assessment criteria are shared with students as well as illustrative work samples which meet the criteria.

- Assessment involves evaluation of student work by students and trained parents and community professionals, as well as teachers.

- Performance tasks provide culminating or capstone activities and are scored with scoring guides.

- Classroom work reflects practical and real world use of knowledge and skills.

As students begin to adjust to a standards-based system, several changes occur in their lives. First, they begin to internalize the standards, to make some meaning out of them. One way

this ownership occurs is by students completing classroom tasks which require them to apply this learning to real-world situations. They begin to understand what the standards mean and how those standards will be important in their daily lives.

In addition, students take on a greater degree of ownership in their learning. This occurs because, perhaps for the first time, they have a target for their learning. They aren't shooting for just a score, a percentage, a number of points. Instead, they actually know what knowledge and skills they should have when they finish a unit, and they are aware of the performance criteria that will be used to evaluate their work.

Students also have a greater need for organizational strategies in a standards-based classroom. In fact, after operating in that environment for a number of weeks, they actually will come to depend on "crutches" to keep them focused on the standard. The need for such tools seems to come about because of an increased demand for information about their educational experience. It's as if a light at the end of a dark tunnel goes on when the students learn about the standards or targets for their work, and, as a result, they want more information about their progress. My students benefit from such organizational strategies as monthly calendars which spell out classroom work time, dates activities are due, and lists of available resources. In addition, students keep track of skill improvement and record earned scores on an assignment sheet. They also use a portfolio cover sheet for checking off items that must go in their best work collection, as well as their own sets of scoring guides for basic skills such as reading, speaking, writing, and visual form. Students also see a poster-size set of scoring guides on classroom walls so they can keep the criteria in mind as they work toward a finished product.

Another key change in classroom management is how students use traditional "guided practice" time. Students frequently work in cooperative teams practicing peer review. They also

might be found in the community, in either a job-shadow experience or a community service event. I use these classroom extensions to address certain standards in the areas of character education, social science and the humanities. Students seem surprised to learn that there are wonderful teachers and mentors in the community with whom they should spend some time. In fact, the days spent in their required job-shadow experience or community service events are frequently the most exciting for a student with chronic absentee problems.

A final difference in my standards-based classroom is the focus on student strengths and learning styles. All students complete inventories, including a reading inventory, learning styles activity, and multiple intelligences survey. This information is gathered and shared with the students. They, in turn, put it in their portfolio and draw on it as they complete their performance tasks during the year. Sometimes they will focus their demonstrations of learning in one of their strength areas; other times, I will have them use a less developed intelligence area.

Teachers have used elements of a standards-based classroom for some time. Now we are beginning to view the relationships between the parts. . .in other words, to create a whole instructional cycle, from the standards we want to teach to the validation of student growth toward reaching the standard. How does one go about developing an instructional unit in a standards-based classroom? These questions will lead to planning and teaching a successful unit:

- What knowledge, skills and/or abilities do I want to assess?

- What curriculum is the best vehicle for assessing, evaluating, and measuring this body of knowledge, skills and/or abilities?

- How will the assessment look? What prior knowledge and training will the students need in order to be assessed in this way?

- What scoring mechanism will I use to evaluate the students' work? Choices might include: letter grades, percentage points, peer review, self-evaluation, scoring guides.

- Do I have models of student work samples to share?

- How much time is needed for the students to do well on this unit?

- What other resources can I make available to them to enhance their work?

- Does this unit provide for a variety of knowledge and ability levels? In other works, does it meet every identified rate and level of learning among the students in the room?

- Do I need to modify other staff about any part of the students' work, i.e., use of space in the building, student release from class to work on projects, dual credit for student work, efforts to integrate with other subjects?

- Do I need volunteers, including other staff, for scoring student work? For audience review? For validating how accurately student work is scored?

- Have I planned for time to review student assessments with them?

PART VII. Implications for the Organization and Operation of Schools

If the kind of changes that have been outlined here for teaching and learning are to occur what corresponding changes must occur in the organization and operation of schools? How must time and classrooms be structured differently, and student-parent-teacher-administrator roles thought about differently? And how must the *cultures* of schools, homes, communities, and teacher education institutions change? These are issues to be addressed in a parallel paper, but they are surfaced here to convey the view that changes in teaching and learning of the magnitude suggested will not and can not take place without simultaneous change in the context in which teaching and learning occur. A premise worth pursuing in this regard is that *starting* with the restructuring of teaching and learning that is called for in a standards-based design for schools may be the best strategy we currently have for stimulating the broad dimensions of change in schools that are needed to support the kind of teaching and learning that have been outlined.

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