

## Meeting 14 • 12 May 2011

Version:  
5/12/11

Today • my deadline page

numbers in ( ) = minutes planned for activity/ topic

√ = topic / activity that was adequately dealt with during the class

+ = topic needs more attention &amp; will be resumed at next / subsequent meeting(s)

-M (earlier: -) = a topic / activity that was proposed but not carried out (but will be taken up later for MORE discussion)

N = a topic / activity that was proposed but not included / is NOT going to be taken up after all

*Red italic text like this = comments after the meeting*

	Main topic(s): Introduction to Assessment; the FL and AL Cultures
(5)	Review of previous meeting: main points; thoughts in the meantime?
(5)	(possibly a regular feature:) assessment (or language learning or just education) in the news! (If I can find something). Today: retiring Oregon school administrator muses about national strength, education, standards and assessments.
(30)	Oregon and PPS second/world language standards; "teaching to the test"; quick overview of kinds of K-8 language programs;
(20)	Assessing and teaching writing (guidelines 0013): query: What are the text type, function(s), context(s), and accuracies of the various writing activities in textbooks?; three English (L1) samples (0315; 673; 0770 - unlinked for privacy reasons); PSU first-year German 102 final writing test with scoring guide and work samples (0683); (0278) a literary interpretation scale (presumably for speaking as well as writing); follow-up reading for later implementation: Liskin-Gasparro (giant in our field!) "Teaching for Writing Proficiency: Principles and Approaches" (0124)
(20)	more about rubrics: multiskill/ multi-person activities (projects, teamwork); GER 102 Project 1 (Einkaufen und Geschenke; also work samples 0777a • 0777b • 0777c • 0777d • 0777e • 0777f); **SG teamwork
(10)	Two generic scoring guides for language activities: 1) reading a dialog aloud; 2) global prochievement SG - for just about anything.
(10)	Assignment 4: scoring guide for a language activity
(10)	Maybe: validity and reliability of the OPI.

## Upcoming class meetings

*importance of assessment for communication & CBI learning*

Oregonian May 7, 2011

B 2

THE AMERICAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

O 9901

# Rising to the challenge — as always

BY ROGER RADA

Over the past 50 years public education in the United States has been under fire. In President Barack Obama's most recent State of the Union address he talked about a Sputnik moment, that time in 1957 when the Soviet Union launched a satellite into orbit around the Earth, causing great alarm across America. That alarm soon took the form of dissatisfaction with our public education system. The Soviet Union was producing more and better scientists, we concluded, and we needed to get up to speed. "New math" was born.

Thirty years later, as Japan appeared to challenge the United States economically, the Reagan administration published a report titled "Nation at Risk." It placed blame for our apparent second-rate economy squarely on the shoulders of public education. That led to a flurry of education reform initiatives, most of which took the form of establishing standards and accountability. The era of state assessments of student achievement had arrived. Now, state standards and related assessments of student achievement are well entrenched across the country and are mandated by the No Child Left Behind law.

So here we are, 54 years after Sputnik. We've defeated the Soviet Union and left the Japanese economy in the dust. But the rise of a robust Asian economy led by India and China, again causes alarm and comparisons to the challenge we faced when the Soviets launched their space program. And once again public education is targeted as the culprit for our apparent lack of competitiveness.

As I conclude 40 years as a public educator and reflect on the challenges we've faced, I don't need a history book to explain world events and their effect on our education system. I lived it. As a third-grader I went outside with my family to watch Sputnik cross the October sky. As an eighth-grader my classmates and I across the country were introduced to

the "new math," part of our national response to that Sputnik moment.

Well, the new math must have worked. We beat the Soviets to the moon and tore down the Berlin Wall.

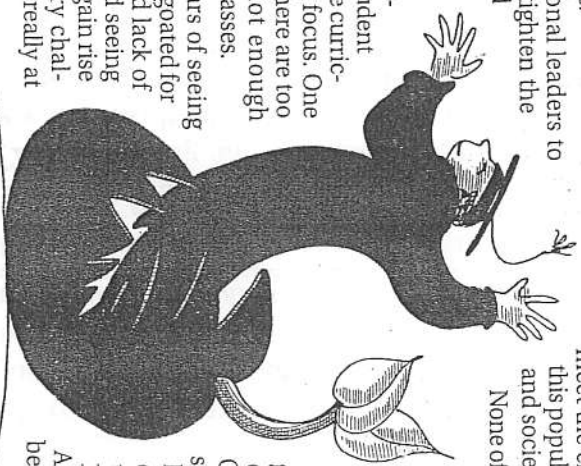
As an administrator in the late '80s and through the '90s, I witnessed and participated in development of a standards-based education system and its partner, statewide assessments of student achievement. School and district test scores were soon being regularly published on the front page of *The Oregonian*, and the race was on. No Child Left Behind soon followed, adding fuel to the test-score fire. And the standards movement must be working; we held back that Japanese economic threat.

Now as we take on our latest perceived threat, the economic explosions in India and China, pundits again find public education lacking. They note that American students score lower on international assessments of achievement than students in many Asian and European countries.

Response from national leaders to this latest "crisis" is to tighten the noose on educators and the education system. Teachers are assumed to be incompetent unless they can prove themselves by winning the student test-score game, and the curriculum is seen as lacking focus. One hears arguments that there are too many electives and not enough hard-core academics classes.

But after 40-plus years of seeing public education scapogated for our country's perceived lack of competitive stature and seeing the country time and again rise to meet each and every challenge, I wonder what's really at play.

From the first interna-



MARGARET SCOTT/NEWSART

May 7, 2011

tional comparisons nearly 50 years ago. U.S. students have always finished in the middle of the international pack, trailing countries such as Finland, Singapore, Japan, South Korea and Germany. Based on our country's experience, test scores don't appear to have a direct correlation with a country's economic success or its status among nations.

Yet critics still point to these international comparisons as an illustration of the failure of the American school system. What they fail to recognize is the incredible challenge that system has faced and met over the past century.

In the early 1900s, millions of immigrants from Eastern Europe came to America, and our educational system was the institution that made them productive members of our economy and society. During the past 40 years we've seen another influx of immigrants, this time from Southeast Asia and Latin America, and once again the American educational system has stepped forward to meet the challenge of integrating this population into our economy and society.

None of the countries that score better than our students have faced this sort of challenge. For the most part their populations are homogeneous. They share a common language and a common culture. By contrast, in Oregon City there are 409 students whose primary language is something other than English, and these students represent 17 different languages. And Oregon City's numbers are small compared with our country's large urban centers.

It's easy to imagine the challenges that this diversity creates for our schools, and yet it's this diversity that makes our country exceptional among nations. Diversity brings different perspectives, which lead to different ways of viewing problems and challenges, and eventually lead to creative solutions.

We are by far the leading nation in exporting information and ideas. Students from around the world seek to attend our universities, and international visitors come to find out the secrets of our educational system. The secrets they seek are the way we honor diversity, the way we encourage creativity and the way we teach problem solving.

And so it seems we approach a crossroads. Or perhaps we've already passed it. Do we continue to blindly follow the test-score-driven strategies that limit curriculum offerings in favor of basic skills? Or do we play to our strong suit: our creativity and innovation, and our entrepreneurial spirit? We need to seek a balance, and my sense is that the balance has tipped sharply from creativity to basic skills.

And do we focus on having all students achieve acceptable academic performance at the expense of not helping the most capable students excel? Again, we need to find the right balance.

The American education system is among the best in the world, and the latest challenge it faces won't be its last. Our system has always responded well, and it will continue to do so. However, we must be sure that we seek a balance between basic skills and creativity, and between having all students meet educational standards and helping our most capable students excel.

Our educational system ranks high among the factors that make this country exceptional among nations, and I'm proud to have been part of it.

Roger Rada, superintendent of the Oregon City School District, retires in June.