

HORACE

When we put student work in the spotlight and ask hard questions about its quality, our standards and expectations for all students come into sharp relief. Essential schools that have been successful in many other ways are now reaching for new strategies to raise the bar higher.

Making the Good School Better: The Essential Question of Rigor

YOU ARE WORKING IN A PEER coaching situation that has paired you with a good friend who has taught three classrooms down the hall for ten years. He has found it difficult to let you into his classroom, but he finally asked you to come in and observe his Social Studies II Final Exhibitions. He has not asked you to be a judge of the exhibitions (he and a panel of parents are doing that), but rather to look for the public presentation skills of his students. How poised are they? How well do they relate to an audience? You come in, primed to look for those qualities. But what strikes you is the poor content in the performances. What he asked you to look at seems fine; the students are very poised and their public speaking skills are better than average. The parents love the presentations. But the students have a marginal grip on their subjects. They get facts wrong (Rosa Parks didn't start the Montgomery bus boycott in 1968; the War on Poverty did not have a program that targeted the homeless) and they don't link the facts they have to any more general ideas. Your concerns go far deeper than presentation skills. What do you do?

Applicants for the Annenberg Institute's new National School Reform Faculty will write their own answers to that question posed by the Institute's staff at Brown University. But the situation

described here is familiar to many thoughtful teachers in Essential schools. It strikes deep personal and political nerves with teachers and administrators, parents and policy-makers. It underlies this country's preoccupation with national standards and "the basics," and it also sparks the movement toward more authentic assessments. The quality of student work is shaping up as the dirty little secret of school reform; on its ultimate evidence this wave of innovation must prove its case, or not.

Essential School ideas rest, of course, on the belief that students can do far better than most schools now require. TheodoreSizer's Nine Common Principles call for high academic expectations for all students; for deeper, more focused inquiry; and for the exhibition and defense of student work before a critical audience. The intellectual passivity that marked so many of the classrooms Sizer visited during his 1980s Study of High Schools catalyzed the Coalition's effort to make active and rigorous student inquiry the heart and soul of school reform.

But as schools struggle to reshape their structures to achieve these goals, their focus often shifts to other matters. First, they must get students more engaged—get them to come to school at all, to care about what they do. They must break down isolating barriers so teachers can collaborate, can know

The Tuning Protocol: A Process for Reflection on Teacher and Student Work

What is it students are asked to do and what is the quality of the work they produce? The tuning protocol asks a teacher to present actual work before a group of thoughtful "critical friends" in a structured reflective discourse aimed at "tuning" the work to higher standards.

In his essay "Three Pictures of an Exhibition," the Coalition's Joseph McDonald describes the "warm" and "cool" responses participants are asked to proffer. Warm, supportive responses identify what is positive in the work, showing "those investments of belief in the performer that arise from a caring history." More objective, "cool" responses address the substance of the work, objectively evaluating what is presented (not who presents it); does the test measure what is really valued?

Though it is often used to critique the design and context for exhibitions, the tuning protocol is designed as a way to present student work, in the form of several contrasting samples of written work or a videotaped presentation. Participants then address questions about the extent and quality of the work, and the standards to which it is held. "It may help to think about *qualities* of work, rather than make an overall judgment of quality," CES's David Allen says. "For example, the Prospect Center's 'descriptive review' process asks participants to describe what is there, as well as point out what's missing or weak—a variation of 'warm' and 'cool.'" [See "The Descriptive Review of a Child," by R. D. Kanevsky, in *Authentic Assessment in Practice* (New York: Columbia University, NCREST, 1993).]

In the outline below, the time allotments indicated are the suggested minimum for each task.

I. Introduction (10 minutes)

- Facilitator briefly introduces protocol goals, norms and agenda.
- Participants briefly introduce themselves.

II. Teacher Presentation (20 minutes)

- Context for student work (describing the exhibition's vision, coaching, scoring rubric, etc.)
- Samples of student work (such as photocopied pieces of written work and video clips).

III. Clarifying Questions (5 minutes maximum)

- Facilitator will judge if questions more properly belong in warm or cool feedback than as clarifiers.

IV. Pause to reflect on warm and cool feedback (2-3 minutes maximum)

- Participants may choose to write down feedback items they'd like to share (generally no more than one example of each).

V. Warm and Cool Feedback (15 minutes)

- Participants share feedback on work and its context among themselves while teacher-presenter is silent.

- Facilitator may try to give some focus by reminding participants of an area of emphasis supplied by teacher-presenter.

VI. Reflection / Response (15 minutes)

- Teacher-presenter reflects on and responds to those comments/questions he or she chooses to.
- Participants are silent.
- Facilitator may intervene to clarify or give response focus.

VII. Debrief (10 minutes)

- Begin with teacher-presenter. ("How did the protocol experience compare with what you expected?")
- Talk about any frustrations, misunderstandings, etc. (as well as positive reactions) participants may have experienced.
- More general discussion of the tuning protocol may develop.

GUIDELINES AND NORMS

Guidelines for Facilitators

1. Be assertive about keeping time. A protocol that doesn't allow for all the components will do a disservice to the presenter, the work presented, and the participants' understanding of the process. Don't let one participant monopolize!
2. Be protective of teacher-presenters. By making their work more public, teachers are exposing themselves to kinds of critiques they may not be used to. Inappropriate comments or questions should be recast or withdrawn. Try to determine just how "tough" your presenter wants the feedback to be.
3. Be provocative of substantive discourse. Many presenters may be used to blanket praise. Without thoughtful but probing "cool" questions and comments, they won't benefit from the tuning protocol experience. Presenters often say they'd have liked more cool feedback.

Norms for Participants

1. Be respectful of teacher-presenters. By making their work more public, teachers are exposing themselves to kinds of critiques they may not be used to. Inappropriate comments or questions should be recast or withdrawn.
2. Contribute to substantive discourse. Without thoughtful but probing "cool" questions and comments, they won't benefit from the tuning protocol experience.
3. Be appreciative of the facilitator's role, particularly in regard to following the norms and keeping time. A tuning protocol that doesn't allow for all components (presentation, feedback, response, debrief) to be enacted properly will do a disservice both to the teacher-presenters and to the participants.

"The Tuning Protocol: A Process for Reflection," by David Allen, is forthcoming from the Publications office of the Coalition of Essential Schools (tel.: 401-863-3384).

their students and their families. They must build trust and community, reshape the schedule to accommodate new aims, involve every voice in governance. So many competing demands press on schools in the midst of change that, even in the most "successful," the rigor question often hides its ugly head.

Those "gold coast" schools where standardized test scores and college acceptance rates are already high often see no need to question how meaningful are the conventional measures most accept as success. The result is what English teacher Margaret Metzger terms "playing school"—"a script we all know," writes this longtime Essential School friend, who teaches at Brookline (MA) High School. "Teachers play school for discipline, routine, and efficiency. Students play school to get good grades, stay out of trouble, and avoid exerting themselves."

At the less privileged end of the spectrum, schools facing desperate odds take pride in success of a different nature. To cut dropout rates and disciplinary incidents, to increase attendance and college admissions, to raise aspirations and get students thinking and caring about intellectual work signifies so much real progress that few will puncture the bubble by pointing out low quality in reading, writing, and mathematical reasoning skills.

Yet as the Coalition enters its second decade, it has trained its sights squarely on this charged and problematic issue. Through several key initiatives, school people at every level are orienting all their efforts toward ratcheting up the quality of the work they ask students to do, the range of students whom they ask to do it, and the measures by which they decide what makes it good enough.

Enabling the Discourse

The crucial first step to this end is for teachers to lay out student work openly for review—by other teachers (both within the school and from

other schools), by parents, and by outside experts from the community and the university. This act so threatens the traditional autonomy of the teacher that its success must depend on finding respectful ways to carry it out. To this end, researchers Joseph McDonald, David Allen, and others involved in the Coalition's Exhibitions Project have developed what they call a "tuning protocol"—a highly structured, facilitated discussion in which teachers share student work and receive "warm" and "cool" feedback from teachers and other "critical friends." (See sidebar, page 2.) The kind of student work that does not lend itself well to standard tests—exhibitions, Socratic seminars, portfolios, and the like—will especially benefit from such close critical attention, they believe.

Since its introduction in 1992, the tuning protocol has seen wide use in Coalition-sponsored professional development programs as well as in statewide and local school reform networks in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York state, and Chicago. California requires it as a quality review mechanism for all schools receiving grants under the state's 1274 restructuring legislation. And the practice is spreading electronically; Oceana High School in Pacifica, California recently conducted a tuning protocol via interactive television, through the Annenberg Institute's new workshop *e.g.* (for Educators' Guild), with teachers receiving feedback from colleagues and university professors as far afield as New York's Albert Einstein School of Medicine.

Other efforts share one of the tuning protocol's most important functions: to get faculty to agree on what they regard as exemplary work, and why. At Rancho San Joaquin Middle School in Irvine, California the staff meets regularly to apply an "analytical thinking rubric" to pieces of student work. "This represents a pretty dramatic shift," says Roger King, Rancho's

professional development coach. "Every teacher now has a stake in shaping the culture and curriculum of the whole school." Whether they teach highly academic subjects, technology, or physical education, many members of Rancho's staff observe that they have begun to share common standards for analytical work.

Similar strategies have worked well for other schools. "Try getting everybody on the faculty to score the same piece of student work," suggests Grant Wiggins, whose Princeton, New Jersey group CLASS consults widely on assessment issues. "If the range of scores they come up with includes every possible score, that's not acceptable; you need to do something about it." A school culture should tolerate only modest differences in such judgments across the board, he argues, taking explicit steps to clarify their standards and expectations. "Faculty should regularly publish student work, for example—at the very least display the best, worst, and middle range of it on the walls,"



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he says. "How else will people know what your standards are?"

O'Farrell Community School, a San Diego neighborhood middle school, asks all its sixth- through eighth-grade students to perform the same tasks for assessment at the end of every quarter. Teachers schoolwide then trade the work for scoring—not only to judge what thinking and literacy skills need further classroom attention, but also to gain a sense of student progress over the years at O'Farrell.

In New York City, both Central Park East Secondary School (CPESS) and University Heights High School have invited outside educators, university people, and state education officers to participate in regular audits of their performance standards. The day-long meetings, which involve close looks at student portfolios and videotaped presentations, evoke strong feelings in teachers who must see student work regarded through the eyes of people who cannot know the progress it represents. But "we are looking here at our standards, not specifically at the student," writes CPESS co-director Paul Schwartz in an essay in *Education Week* (November 23, 1994). "It is the school's task to judge the individual, but it is also our responsibility to look outside for help in setting standards."

An even more formal initiative comes from New York state's School Quality Review Board, which sends a team into a school for a week-long external review modeled after Great Britain's school inspection approach. Brought from England to launch the system here, David Green is now developing similar plans with the Southern Maine Partnership and in several other states.

In New Jersey, Grant Wiggins asks the schools he works with to "validate" their standards by having representatives of business, industry, and higher education review the "authenticity" of the assessment tasks and the quality of student performances. A newspaper journalist,

for instance, might review a writing assignment and talk over with teachers the standards students would have to meet to produce a publishable article; or a scientist might review a chemistry experiment to see if it reflected laboratory standards in industry. Many technical high schools already require something like this, Wiggins points out, through industry review boards or consulting committees; in a more academic situation, it serves the same purpose of setting a concrete "real world" context by which to assess student progress.

Some areas have set up alliances between a number of schools for the purpose of comparing their standards for student work. The Pacesetter Consortium, for instance, includes a number of New York and New Jersey schools whose faculties agree to mutual critical feedback. The Westchester (NY) Collaborative meets regularly for the same purpose. And the New York Assessment Collection, an emerging computer data base created with a grant from IBM to the Coalition, aims to make digitized examples of student work widely available via computer.

Rigor for All Students

When teachers look at exemplary student work and compare their standards, it can inspire more effective classroom strategies for raising the quality of work. Bringing those same examples into the classroom can have a comparable effect on students themselves. A commitment to rigor seems to include two key characteristics: teaching all students to recognize and strive for the elements of high quality work; and not tolerating shoddy work from students at any academic level. In both, the complication comes from their inclusiveness: *All* students will strive for quality, at *all* academic levels. Ted Sizer calls this "universal goals," his third Common Principle. When they wholeheartedly practice it, Essential schools enter upon a

virtual revolution in secondary education.

Opening its doors in 1990 in a booming suburb of Atlanta, Salem High School decided to give all students, regardless of prior achievement levels, the same demanding education. Students learn in heterogeneous groups, whatever the subject; the school offers Advanced Placement courses, but any student who wishes may take them. Salem uses a practice they term the "J-curve" to encourage students to stick with a subject until they attain real competence.

"The state may say that 70 percent is a passing grade," says tenth-grade team member Frances Freedman. "But if you get a 70 in Algebra 1A, you'll be struggling in Algebra 1B. And if you can only write a complete sentence 70 percent of the time, you write like a mess! Why would you want to go on to eleventh-grade writing?"

Instead, Salem advocates revision and retesting along strict guidelines until a student reaches sufficient mastery to move on. "It's not about giving a kid another day to get the homework in," Freedman argues. "They learn to identify and understand their problem areas, then work on them until they qualify for a re-test."

Salem's staff gives plenty of time and energy to making that system work. Using Bloom's taxonomy of thinking skills as its guide, the faculty takes much of its meeting time to discuss how to prompt students to move beyond mere recall toward analysis, synthesis, and other higher-order thinking skills. They design assessments to let students know explicitly which of these skills they are displaying. They take time both in and out of class to coach students who need extra help. And despite initial anxiety, after four years Salem's students, parents, and teachers praise the way this approach has evoked higher quality work from all kinds of students.

"Let's be honest," says English

teacher Jerry Smith. "Sometimes Advanced Placement students' attitudes actually can be a *block* to rigorous work. They're capable of higher-level work, but they're so used to jumping through hoops to please the teacher that they're not comfortable opening new roads. They can turn out a beautiful essay on a teacher-generated topic, but they're using mid-level thinking skills at best."

It's often the students who *haven't* been so teacher-oriented, Smith says, who can turn their own experiences into original work. "Once you find an entry point to teach all students the basic concept of rhythm in poetry, for instance, these kids will often be able to *apply* that knowledge," he notes. "They'll be the ones who write their own piece in the style of Walt Whitman or Emily Dickinson, and then explain to you what its rhythms are and why. They'll be working at a higher thinking level."

Building the study and evaluation of "best work" into instructional time helps students learn to recognize and internalize high standards, many teachers observe. When a class participates in creating the rubric by which work will be evaluated, for instance, its members have a much higher stake in meeting and applying its criteria.

"They need to be able to describe as explicitly as possible what a discussion looks like when it's being done well," says Eric Sundberg, who teaches social studies at New York's North Shore High School. "The first text I use for a Socratic seminar, for example, is the seminar rubric itself, with its indicators for conduct, listening, reading, and speaking and reasoning. I ask students, 'What would something like this be used for?' You can only get so far into any of these indicators—like 'express yourself logically and clearly'—without asking what it *looks like* when someone is being logical and clear, or shows inappropriate conduct, or speaks too long or

Indicators of Classroom Thoughtfulness

In his 1991 article "Promoting Higher Order Thinking in Social Studies" (*Theory and Research in Social Education* 19:4), University of Wisconsin education professor Fred M. Newmann describes six key characteristics that can be observed in a thoughtful classroom, condensed with his permission here:

1. There was sustained examination of a few topics rather than superficial coverage of many. Mastery of higher order challenge requires in-depth study and sustained concentration on a limited number of topics or questions. Lessons that cover a large number of topics give students only a vague familiarity or awareness and, thereby, reduce the possibilities for building the complex knowledge, skills, and dispositions required to understand a topic.
2. The lesson displayed substantive coherence and continuity. Intelligent progress on higher order challenges demands systematic inquiry building on relevant and accurate substantive knowledge in the field and working toward the logical development and integration of ideas. In contrast, lessons that teach material as unrelated fragments of knowledge, without pulling them together, undermine such inquiry.
3. Students were given an appropriate amount of time to think, that is, to prepare responses to questions. Thinking takes time, but often recitation, discussion, and written assignments pressure students to make responses before they have had enough time to reflect. Promoting thoughtfulness, therefore, requires periods of silence during which students can ponder the validity of alternative responses, develop more elaborate reasoning, and experience patient reflection.
4. The teacher asked challenging questions and/or structured challenging tasks (given the ability level and preparation of the students). Higher order thinking occurs only when students are faced with questions or tasks that demand analysis, interpretation, or manipulation of information—non-routine mental work. Students must be faced with the challenge of how to use prior knowledge to gain new knowledge, rather than the task of merely retrieving prior knowledge.
5. The teacher was a model of thoughtfulness. To help students succeed with higher order challenges, teachers themselves must model thoughtful dispositions as they teach. Key indicators include showing interest in students' ideas and in alternative approaches to problems; showing how he or she thought through a problem (rather than only the final answer); and acknowledging the difficulty of gaining a definitive understanding of problematic topics.
6. Students offered explanations and reasons for their conclusions. The answers or solutions to higher order challenges are rarely self-evident. Their validity often rests on the quality of explanation or reasons given to support them. Therefore, beyond offering answers, students must also be helped to produce explanations and reasons to support their conclusions.

too loud." Once having arrived at a shared understanding of quality in these areas, the class then revisits it before every subsequent seminar, and spends ten or fifteen minutes afterward evaluating how their discussion measured up. "If students do this every two weeks or so in a given class, the emphasis on quality starts to spill over into other discussion-based classes," Sundberg says. "But you have to reinforce it regularly or it will be lost."

At Central Park East Secondary School, students begin the two-year Senior Institute by reviewing the work of previous graduates in the fourteen portfolios required for graduation here—thus gaining practice in not only meeting the school's standards but raising them. "They talk about standards," writes Paul Schwarz. "Did this project really deserve a distinguished grade? How could it be improved?"

An emphasis on rigor takes as

many forms as there are good teachers. "So much has to do with the expression in a child's eye, showing he's willing to walk farther down the path," says Jerry Smith. "When a teacher sees that and pushes for more, that's rigor." However and wherever it appears, that habit of high expectations can become an explicit schoolwide value.

"A good school makes very clear that quality always matters more than quantity," Grant Wiggins asserts. "That means plenty of opportunity to revise. It means the work that goes into the final portfolio is revisited and judged to higher standards. No matter how able you are or what course you're in, everyone can produce some quality." What makes schools mediocre, Wiggins contends, is not the best work of the best students. "It's the non-good work of the best students, and the work that's tolerated by all the other students."

Honors by Achievement

Easy enough, some object, to say that a school expects high-level work from every student; it is a more difficult task to attain it. How can one maintain a commitment to high standards regardless of prior achievement levels and still challenge the student who could go much further than most?

That's hard to answer without first deciding just how high those standards ought to be. Teachers at Parkway South High School near St. Louis, Missouri agreed, after months of work, on six areas in which they would share responsibility for coaching all students: communications; personal and social development; artistic creation and interpretation; critical thinking and problem solving; the interrelationship of science, society, and technology; and national and international awareness. Starting with communications, they began methodically to develop diagnostic tasks that would reveal where students stood in each area at the beginning of their high school

years, and to work into their regular instruction attention to these overarching skills.

If a student shows early deficiencies in writing, for instance, now all Parkway South teachers share an interest in intervening to supply extra coaching in that area. "Instead of summer school being a warehouse where kids could make up lost credits," says Patrick Conley, the Essential school coordinator, "it becomes a serious effort to improve skills the student has to show before graduation." Kids who used to squeak by with D's, he says, now keep at it until they can show competence.

Where a student reveals special aptitude in a particular area, teachers start early encouraging her to plan a demonstration of "mastery"—an individual performance task at a level beyond the ordinary high school curriculum, overseen by faculty mentors and the school's enrichment facilitator, Anne White. "The emphasis is on gifted *behavior*, not just talent," says White. "The mastery guidelines set professional standards to stretch for—which gives kids the idea that they can tackle things they might not otherwise try. It's a matter of bringing together above-average intelligence, creativity, and task commitment." (See sidebar, page 7.)

Like Parkway South, North Shore High School has refused to rest on its reputation for high achievement. "You always have to be asking how to move every student along to the next level of challenge," principal Elaine Boyrer observes. "We look for any opportunity for students to do independent work." North Shore offers both an independent science research elective and a mathematics research seminar, for instance, in which students from every grade level pursue serious independent projects.

"The honors kids used to write these meaningless book reports on vast topics like probability," says math teacher Rob Gerver, who leads

the math research seminar. "Now we ask them to read a three- to six-page article from a math journal, then extend it and build it up on their own. They're *doing* math, not being spoon-fed it." Enrollment has risen steadily, with some students coming back year after year to investigate new topics or continue research from a previous year. "Their papers are a hundred times better," Gerver says.

Not content with conventional standardized tests that show North Shore students among New York state's top achievers, Elaine Boyrer also tracks how they perform against other, more finely tuned measures. "We use the Educational Record Bureau testing service to compare our students' writing performance to that of other high-performing suburban and independent schools," she says. "Since the tests are externally evaluated, they give us a way to compare and validate our own grading standards."

An Honest Report Card?

Many thoughtful educators, in fact, worry about the reliability and validity of their grades, which most systems quantify in ways that seem so ambiguous as to be meaningless. What do grades and scores actually signify about the quality of student work? In a heterogeneously grouped classroom, for example, does every A signify the same level of work? Do high test scores mean students are thinking more critically and generating more thoughtful ideas, or just that they're dutiful or clever regurgitators?

We'll never know, insists Grant Wiggins, until we start reporting grades as if they were baseball statistics—by scoring different facets of performance separately. "Instead, many teachers vary how they calculate their grades from one student to another," he says. "One A might reflect a student's actual problem-solving ability and another might mean the student tried hard and made good progress."

The trouble rests in the single letter grade, Wiggins asserts; it leads teachers to average things that shouldn't be averaged, and it confuses their expectations for particular students with their standing relative to uniform standards in the field. "We need more, not fewer grades," he argues in his article "Toward Better Report Cards" (*Educational Leadership*, October 1994), "and more different kinds of grades and comments if the parent is to be informed."

The sports fan knows how to interpret the compact statistics on a baseball card, Wiggins says, to tell how well a player is doing in various independent (and unweighted) areas like runs, hits, and strikeouts. Just so, the parent and student need a concise profile of the student's

performance in many subcategories—in different genres of writing, for instance. And they need to see achievements and progress reported in different categories.

"Until you disaggregate all aspects of performance you can't demand rigor," he says. "The current grading system forces teachers into fudging and cheating people of the information they need. You've got to be able to let a student know that even though his work is vastly improved, it's still not rigorous."

Letter grades should be used, Wiggins suggests, to symbolize "the normed judgments a teacher makes about the degree to which a student has met expectations." Separate performance scores, by contrast—similar to the scores a gymnast or diver receives in competition—

should symbolize "the student's level of achievement on a continuum ranging from novice to expert." Finally, teachers should provide parents with the rubrics and developmental descriptors used in assessing student performance, with a booklet of sample work and anchor papers, and with a narrative describing the student's successes and struggles.

Hard-pressed for time, teachers may prefer Salem High School's practice for grading students in heterogeneous classes. All students work on the same math problems and take the same tests in Algebra 1, for instance. But if a student ends up with a 68 average, the report card shows not a D in Algebra but a B in "math," Georgia's designated non-college prep math category.

Work in Progress: A School's 'Mastery Guidelines'

In suburban St. Louis, Missouri, Parkway South High School's Enrichment Coordinator, Anne White, offers these "plus, minus, and interesting" observations from the early stages of the school's Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM), in which students may outline their own high-level performance to qualify for a "mastery" designation on their transcripts.

PLUS

- Students want to be in charge of their own learning.
- Students who initiate projects usually do so because they "just want to," not because finishing mastery offers rewards.
- Students are willing to take risks.
- Students want to present to an audience.
- Having the program puts the facilitator in touch with students who may need curriculum differentiation.
- Individual projects shift the responsibility for learning to the students, where it belongs.
- Students sense the need for quality products.

MINUS

- The process for mastery is at first confusing to students.
- Students embrace the idea with enthusiasm but burn out before completing the specifics.
- Students become frustrated when there is not enough time.
- The facilitator needs contact with the students on a regular basis.
- Students lack skills related to organization, awareness of resources, and quality products.

- Students are not always successful in finding staff mentors.
- Supervising 100 or more students requires administrative and clerical work (due partly to state guidelines for gifted-talented programs).

INTERESTING

- Schoolwide Enrichment Model is attracting all types of students, though some identified students are not interested.
- An exhibition date may provide a target for completion.
- In some ways, the way the school functions on a daily basis is incompatible with SEM (as when the theater is too heavily booked for additional student use).
- Students appear to be most attracted to mastery projects in Artistic Interpretation and Creation.
- Some students prefer creative expression as a diversion from demanding academic classes.
- Some staff members are willing to compact curriculum for SEM students.
- Mastery is most appropriate for juniors and seniors, though freshmen can set targets.
- Freshmen and sophomores (and some seniors) focus more on enrichment projects that may not be related to mastery.
- Each performance area basically consists of research and presentation.
- Projects should be structured so students can synthesize learning in and out of class.
- Mastery makes the most sense when it is explained one on one.

"We're teaching them the same things in the same class, so it's not tracking," principal Bob Cresswell asserts of the 16-point adjustment. "They could move up into the next league at any point."

Making Quality Endure

The acid test of what any student has learned in school is not grades in any case, contends Art Powell, the co-author of *The Shopping Mall High School*, who is writing a book about long-term objectives for student learning. "We should concern ourselves with what happens five or ten years down the road—what people remember when they forget what they learned in school." Powell believes that school can ignite a student's interest in something, then give her enough coaching and practice in it to generate habits of mind that last a lifetime. "You want the student to wind up with some set of serious interests and passions about various matters," he argues.

Teachers play a vital role, he says, in nurturing and modeling this outcome. "Good teachers have interests and passions of their own. They

are willing to take stands—to make judgments about quality. They create an image of the educated person that clarifies for students what they might get from going beyond conventional dutiful work."

Providing a framework in which teachers might do that has motivated the research of education professor Fred M. Newmann and his colleagues at the University of Wisconsin for the past many years. In a series of articles published in *Theory and Research in Social Education*, they identified some observable elements of a thoughtful classroom. (See sidebar, page 5.) Taking these ideas further in a forthcoming work, they suggest a framework in which teachers can make assessment tasks, instruction, and student performance both more rigorous and more "authentic"—valuable to both student and community beyond the school years. These "authenticity standards," Newmann hopes, will help local teachers and schools define high intellectual quality themselves, without having a host of fragmented standards imposed on them from

"experts" at the state and national level.

With such responsibilities on their shoulders, little wonder that many teachers want time and support, not hard-nosed criticism, as they lead students down more thoughtful paths who once would have slipped through the system unnoticed. But the growing emphasis of Essential School people on looking at student work can be conducted, all these examples show, in a spirit of celebration and growth.

Addressing the question of rigor, in the end, demands both pride and humility from teachers. They must care so much about the integrity of good work that they will not stop until they elicit the very best they believe their students can do. And then they must invite others to look critically at it, too—with the cool eyes of the outsider as well as the warmth of the friend. To develop supports that foster such honest discourse—among students, teachers, and the community—is the lasting task of Essential School reform. □



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