

Foreword

The Challenge of Standards Without Standardization

Public Law 107-110, more commonly known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), has created a watershed in attention to the problem of instructional ambiguity in schools. While few policy developers or thoughtful administrators or teachers are opposed to educational *standards*, teachers particularly fear *standardization*. It is often hard to separate one from the other. As a practice, standardization might work if children came to school already standardized. But fortunately that is not the case. While all children are similar in some respects, they are very different in other respects. So using standards in the classroom requires knowledge of how to translate global expectations into tangible approaches, activities, and outcomes without losing the knowledge that it is the linkages between these things that are important and not a goal of simple uniformity. The trick is to be able to translate what are perceived to be rigorous goals into specific accomplishments without making each child into a replica of the others or the teacher into a robot. Already, educational researchers are picking up increasing signs of teacher alienation and burnout caused by increased accountability pressures, testing requirements, and the overuse of instructional worksheets (see Brooks, 2006).

As someone who has walked through lots of schools and visited dozens of classrooms since NCLB was passed, I am appalled at the mechanical translation of educational goals into textbook questions and vendor-produced worksheets accompanied by drill and kill approaches that leave students nearly brain-dead. I think the reader will find that Daniel Perna and James R. Davis have designed a process that respects the teacher's professionalism and works to collaborate with stakeholders in a discussion about standards and possible educational outcomes without becoming mechanical. They are not looking for recipes, but for exemplars that show teachers how to link their creative choices to standards that advance student interest and learning and that respect the teacher's choice of processes and activities as a part of goal translation. Admittedly, there is a fine line in moving to attain similar outcomes without making every teacher do it one way. Sometimes similarity of ends does have an influence

on means. Over 70 years ago, John Dewey (1929) made an important distinction:

In reality, ends that are incapable of realization are ends only in name. Ends must be framed in the light of available means. It may even be asserted that ends are only means brought to full interaction and integration. The other side of this truth is that means are fractional parts of ends. (p. 59)

What this book does is help teachers and administrators see the linkages between ends (goals) and means (activities, as in lesson plans), thereby bringing the goals to life. The approach taken also stimulates teachers to think differently about means, leading to what Dewey thought was important, that is, that the teacher is not confined to simply thinking about the improved use of old means but, rather, creates new means which will lead to enhanced learning.

There are many other complexities in promoting student success in classrooms, such as aligning assessment practices (curriculum context) with classroom practices to ensure pedagogical parallelism; understanding the role of cultural capital as creating an opportunity structure which generally favors a certain subset of privileged students, thereby expanding the achievement gap instead of shrinking it; and learning how to understand the interests of various socioeconomic classes in embracing only certain aspects of school reform while rejecting others.

But what Perna and Davis do in this text is begin the process of goal translation, from policy to practice, that is absolutely essential in working within the new constraints imposed by NCLB. The examples are concrete and should provide many teachers with workable models that will fill in the gap without leading to standardization. What is important is that the specific objectives contained within the lesson plans are not to be conceived of as static, never to be changed once promulgated. As Dewey (1929) said,

There is no such thing as a fixed and final set of objectives, even for the time being or temporarily. Each day of teaching ought to enable a teacher to revise and better in some respect the objectives aimed at in previous work. (p. 75)

So, with this in mind, the work represented by Perna and Davis was of the continuous kind, even before NCLB teachers were engaged in it. The demands of NCLB make it more important than ever.

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References

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Dewey, J. (1929). *The sources of a science of education*. New York: Horace Liveright.