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ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken to describe ways in which "performance oriented" teachers in Maryland communicate learning targets, elements of quality, and standards for performance to their students. Surveys were distributed to approximately 90 participants at the annual meeting of the Maryland Assessment Consortium and to 72 scoring team leaders in the operational scoring project for the 1994 Maryland School Performance Assessment Program. Of these, 48 surveys were selected for scoring and 20 were selected as a coding validity check set. Data analysis indicated that most teachers communicate to students what they expect them to learn orally, in writing, or in classroom displays. However, they do not involve students directly in evaluation and in developing evaluative criteria on a regular basis. Also, teachers do not make distinctions among self, peer, and group assessment, and between applying pre-established criteria and generating criteria. Findings suggest that teacher training should focus on ways and means to communicate performance targets, elements of quality, and standards for performance in order to improve classroom assessment practices. For example, although these teachers reported that they communicate to students what they should know and be able to do, responses suggest that they communicate primarily traditional instructional objectives in traditional ways, and are more comfortable with providing scoring criteria to students rather than involving students in developing criteria and selecting model responses. (ND)

Ways in Which Teachers Communicate Learning Targets, Criteria, and Standards for Performance to Their Students

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, April 1995

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How do students know what we want from them? How do they know what criteria we will apply to evaluate the work they do for us? How do they know when their work meets our expectations or is good enough? These questions pertain to the performance targets and learning outcomes, elements of quality of student work, and standards for performance that we hold for our students. When we communicate the answers to these questions -- when we make the targets for learning and performance clear (e.g., Stiggins, 1994, chap. 4) -- students can understand what we expect them to know and be able to do and try to hit our targets. Most important, once students have internalized the elements of quality and standards for performance we hold out for them, they can apply these criteria and standards to all of their learning and work. The degree to which students internalize and learn to apply elements of quality and standards for performance is fundamental to improving student learning and performance, and to educational reform. The purpose of this study is to describe ways in which "performance oriented" teachers may communicate learning targets, elements of quality, and standards for performance to their students.

As conceptualized for this study, we regard teachers who are familiar with performance based instruction and performance assessment (classroom, formative, and summative) as "performance oriented." Performance oriented teachers might be expected to communicate performance targets, elements of quality, and standards for performance to their students regularly as part of the instruction and learning process. In addition, they might be expected to employ a wide array of approaches for assessing student learning in the classroom, but with a heavy reliance on performance based approaches. Also, they might be expected to communicate targets, expectations, and standards to their students via demonstration and modeling in addition

to telling and describing. Finally, they might be expected to do all or most of these things more frequently than teachers who take a more traditional approach to instruction, assessment, and learning.

If students do not understand what we want them to know and be able to do they are less likely to learn what we intend for them and to perform well when we assess their learning in the classroom. Further, other surveys of classroom teachers have demonstrated that teachers use classroom assessment as a way of communicating and reinforcing for students what they should know and be able to do (e.g., Stiggins & Conklin, 1992). However, a recent study suggests that some students may not recognize classroom assessments as signals of what is important to know and be able to do (e.g., Davinroy, Bliem, & Mayfield, 1994). Thus, how teachers communicate their expectations is essential not only to student learning and performance but also to effective classroom assessment. By identifying and exploring the extent to which teachers who are already performance oriented communicate performance targets, elements of quality, and standards for performance, we can learn what direction or re-direction classroom ought to take.

Method and Procedures

Instrument

A 21 item survey was developed to gather information on ways in which teachers communicate performance and learning targets, the elements or criteria of good performance and work, and standards for student performance and work. The survey includes both multiple choice items and open-ended items that elicited responses that required coding for analysis and reporting. Definitions of terms and concepts fundamental to this study were provided in the survey. The survey comprises five sections, as indicated in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Subjects

Surveys were distributed during July 1994 to approximately 90 participants in the annual meeting of the Maryland Assessment Consortium and 72 scoring team leaders in the operational scoring project for the 1994 Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP). Maryland Assessment Consortium participants are recruited from school systems in Maryland to develop performance assessment tasks in English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies for use as formative classroom assessments in elementary, middle, and high school classrooms. The classroom teachers recruited to develop these tasks are selected because of their interest and experience in performance based classroom assessment. They undergo extensive training to develop performance assessment tasks for use in the classroom according to Consortium specifications. The MSPAP scoring team leaders are Maryland educators who have demonstrated expertise in scoring performance assessments and may have experience in developing or refining scoring tools such as rubrics. They undergo intensive training in applying scoring criteria to student responses and must meet stringent accuracy requirements in qualifying rounds. They then score student responses over more than four weeks of the scoring project. All study subjects were chosen because they are expected to represent practices of performance oriented teachers rather than more traditional classroom teachers.

Table 2 contains descriptive information on the 68 respondents to this survey. Over all, 42% (68 of 162) of the teachers surveyed provided responses to the survey. Among assessment consortium participants 50% (45 of 90) responded to the survey; 28% (20 of 72) of the scoring leaders responded to the survey. Approximately two thirds of the respondents are assessment consortium participants, over half are upper elementary and middle school teachers, and respondents are evenly spread across the primary areas of teaching (see Table 2). In addition,

respondents come from 17 of the 24 school systems in Maryland, including urban, suburban, and rural systems from all major regions of the state.

Insert Table 2 about here

Procedures

Surveys were distributed to assessment consortium participants after a brief presentation on the purposes of the study and with instructions to return completed surveys to the consortium director in one week. Surveys were distributed to scoring leaders during the fifth and last week of the scoring project after a brief explanation of study purposes and with instructions to return completed surveys to the scoring project director at the end of the week. Follow-up reminders to survey respondents yielded a small increase in the response rate.

Returned surveys were numbered and then randomly ordered so that the source of each survey (i.e., assessment consortium or scoring project) was not evident. The three study co-authors then examined a random sample of open-ended items to derive initial coding categories for survey responses. The co-authors discussed these initial categories and collapsed and clarified their definitions as necessary. Each coding category and its definition was assigned a number and a coding key was created. The coding scheme allowed for up to three responses per open-ended item. Twenty surveys were randomly selected as a coding validity check set. The remaining 48 surveys were randomly assigned to two of the study co-authors for coding. Two of the study co-authors each coded open-ended responses on a unique set of 24 surveys, and each coded all 20 of the check set surveys. Responses to both multiple choice items and coded responses to open-ended items were key entered in word processing files and then imported to SPSS for Windows. Both sets of codings on open-ended items in the check set were entered into a separate data file for later agreement analysis. Codings by one author for odd-numbered surveys in the validity check set were imported to the study data file; codings by the other coder

for even numbered surveys in the validity check set were also imported. All survey responses were submitted to frequency analyses in SPSS for Windows.

Results

Agreement Rates on Codings of Open-ended Items

Table 3 displays percentages of open-ended items in which response codes by the two coders were identical. These agreement rates are reported for each item separately, each section of the survey, and for all open-ended items on the survey. Rater agreement rates from large scale direct writing assessments provide a rough benchmark for evaluating the survey coding agreement rates. In general, the agreement rates in Table 3 compare favorably to agreement rates found in typical large scale direct writing assessments, which usually require 70-75% exact agreement rates and allow for 99% exact plus adjacent agreement rates (e.g., Ferrara, 1993). Overall, the codings of responses by the two coders were in agreement 69% of the time (see Table 3). Agreement rates are highest in the first and third sections of the survey, pertaining to ways in which teachers communicate performance targets and standards for performance (76% and 78% agreement, respectively). Agreement rates are lower in the survey section pertaining to ways in which teachers communicate criteria/elements of quality, which elicited a wider range of responses and required larger numbers of coding categories than in the other two sections of the survey.

Insert Table 3 about here

Ways in Which Teachers Communicate Performance Targets to Their Students

It is likely that most teachers believe that in the course of instruction they clarify for students what they want them to know and be able to do. The clarity of this communication is

helpful to student learning and essential for students as they are assessed in the classroom. Table 4 provides information on how and when teachers say they communicate performance targets and learning outcomes. Most teachers responding to the survey (95%) say that they communicate what they expect students to learn (see Table 4). Almost 90% of their responses indicate that they communicate this information orally, in writing, or in classroom displays (see Table 4 at "how" teachers communicate). While written communication and classroom displays may provide models of what students should know and be able to do, only 11% of responses indicate that these performance oriented teachers actually demonstrate performance and learning targets for their students. These teachers indicate that, for the most part (69%; see Table 4 for "what" teachers communicate), they communicate outcomes and objectives for a lesson. Approximately one quarter of the responses indicate that these teachers communicate in more performance oriented ways such as by providing students with scoring criteria and rubrics (15%) and examples of other students' work (13%). Few teachers report that they tell students what will be included on a classroom test (3%). The responses of these teachers suggest that they communicate what they want students to learn primarily before a lesson begins (58%; see Table 4 for "when " teachers communicate) and reinforce these targets/outcomes less often during instruction (27%) and after instruction (16%).

Insert Table 4 about here

Ways in Which Teachers Communicate Criteria/Elements of Quality to Their Students

As students develop understanding of what they should know and be able to do, it is helpful to them to know the criteria we will use to evaluate their learning, and the elements of quality necessary to include in their classroom work. If students understand the criteria that will be used to evaluate their learning and work they can use these criteria to evaluate and improve their own performance. Most teachers in this survey (97%) indicate that they help students understand criteria and elements of quality. These teachers report that they communicate criteria and elements of quality in performance oriented ways, most often by providing scoring criteria

such as rubrics (33% of the responses; see Table 5) and by helping students apply criteria (22%). Teachers also report that they show other students' work as models (18%) and that they communicate criteria and elements of quality through discussion and review of student work (15%) and feedback on students' work (4%). Their responses suggest that few teachers (8%) involve students in generating criteria for evaluating their work.

Insert Table 5 about here

Ways in Which Teachers Involve Students in Applying and Developing Criteria

Self and peer evaluation are recognized as a valuable approach to assessing students in the classroom (e.g., Sommers, 1989, pp. 174-186). In addition, when students are required to practice applying pre-existing evaluative criteria to their own and others' work they may be more likely to internalize these criteria. According to Table 6, over three quarters of these teachers report that they involve students in applying criteria to evaluate their own work (88%) and their peers' work (83%). Teachers most often reported that they require students to use scoring tools (e.g., rubrics, checklists) for both self evaluation and peer evaluation (both 41%). These performance oriented teachers report less frequently that they involve students in comparing their own work to other students' work as models (12%) or help pick anchor papers that exemplify levels of performance (1%). Similarly, these teachers report that they infrequently involve students in peer evaluation by comparing other students' work to anchor papers (8%) or helping pick anchor papers for use in peer evaluation (3%).

According to Table 5, only 8% of these teachers report that they involve students in generating evaluative criteria. In addition, only 1% of these teachers report that they r uire students to develop evaluative criteria as part of applying criteria (see Table 6, third panel). These low response frequencies occur items which require teachers to report ways in which they help students understand and apply evaluative criteria. In contrast, Table 6 also indicates that one third to one half of the teachers report that they involve students in developing evaluative

criteria for self evaluation (35%) and for peer evaluation (58%) when they are explicitly prompted about involving students in this activity (see the last panel of Table 6).

Insert Table 6 about here

Ways in Which Teachers Communicate Standards for Performance to Their Students

In order to meet our standards for adequate and excellent work, whether during instruction or while being assessed in the classroom, students must know what those standards are. Table 7 indicates that 94% of the teachers in this survey say they communicate this information to their students (see Table 7). Teachers report communicating standards in a variety of formats including providing anchor papers and model responses (39%), grading requirements (33%), and scoring rubrics (26%). However, similar to their responses in Table 4, these performance oriented teachers tend to rely on telling (50%), writing (24%), and displaying (22%) their standards rather than modeling them (4%).

Insert Table 7 about here

Discussion and Conclusions

In this preliminary study we asked "performance oriented" teachers to tell us about the ways in which they communicate performance targets/learning outcomes, criteria/elements of quality, and standards for performance to their students. These teachers are expected to use classroom instruction and assessment practices that involve demonstration, modeling, guided practice in applying evaluative criteria, and performance based approaches to classroom assessment perhaps more regularly than other teachers. These teachers' responses to the survey suggest that they tend to rely more on telling, rather than showing, students what they should know and be able to do. However, like many other teachers in Maryland, these teachers do

report that they provide scoring tools (e.g., rubrics and checklists) to their students and help them apply these tools to evaluate their work. This approach to assessing students in the classroom is likely to help students understand what their teachers expect of them and internalize and apply these expectations in other situations. These teachers report that they do not often involve students in developing scoring tools or selecting anchor papers. Likewise, these activities represent an approach to assessing students in the classroom with benefits to learning as well, which should be encouraged.

The results in Table 6 suggest that these teachers do not make a distinction between student self-evaluation and peer evaluation. These teachers may see classroom instruction and assessment that actively involves students in evaluating their work as an amorphous group process. The distinction between these two activities is important because, despite its value in helping students understand and use evaluative criteria and performance standards, self-assessment lacks the interactive and public nature of peer assessment that may force students to come to sharper understandings about the quality of their learning and work. Further, most teachers would agree that it is important that students internalize elements of quality and standards for performance and become effective evaluators of their own learning and performances. Similarly, Table 6 suggests that these teachers do provide opportunities for students to apply pre-existing scoring criteria but do not ask their students to develop criteria or select anchor papers/models of levels of work quality. This latter activity, which may be thought of as a hybrid instruction/assessment activity, is likely to be another effective, as yet relatively unexplored, way to help students understand and internalize criteria and standards.

We have referred to this study as preliminary, in part because we expect it to be the first study in a line of research on (a) how teachers communicate expectations and standards to their students, (b) differences in instruction and assessment practices among "performance oriented" and other teachers, and (c) differences in the characteristics and effects of classroom practices that blend instruction and assessment in terms of purposes and methods. However preliminary these results may be, they suggest at least some tentative implications for teacher training. For

example, although these teachers report that they communicate to students what they should know and be able to do, our codings of responses suggest that they communicate primarily traditional instructional objectives in traditional ways. This is surprising in Maryland, with its high stakes statewide performance assessment program that focuses on broad academic learning outcomes. In addition, these teachers report that they communicate performance targets primarily once, before instruction begins. These teachers and their students might benefit from training in the importance of reinforcing expectations in an on-going fashion. Further, even these performance oriented teachers appear to be most comfortable with providing scoring criteria to students but not with involving students in developing criteria and selecting model responses.

Since the coding categories for open-ended items were derived from the teacher responses themselves, not from our notions of exemplary teacher practice, the results from this survey are informative for what they do not suggest as well as for what they do suggest. Apparently, still missing from these teachers' repertoires are classroom instruction and assessment strategies such as directly involving students in evaluation and in developing evaluative criteria on a regular basis. Of concern as well in the survey responses is the lack of distinction among self, peer, and group assessment and between applying pre-established criteria and generating criteria. Findings from this survey suggest that teacher training should focus on ways and means to communicate performance targets, elements of quality, and standards for performance in order to improve classroom assessment practices.

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Table 1

Survey Structure and Examples of Survey Items

Cover section

Introduction and purpose of the survey and study
Directions for completing the survey
Questions regarding respondent characteristics (e.g., grade levels and content areas taught)
Definitions of terms (e.g., student performance, elements of quality, standards for performance)

Performance targets/learning outcomes

"In what ways do you communicate performance targets (or learning outcomes) to your students...?"

Evaluative criteria/elements of quality

"In what ways do you help your students understand the criteria (or elements of quality) to be used in evaluating ... products and performances?"

Standards for performance

"In what ways do you communicate expected standards for performance to your students prior to and/or during instruction?"

Closing Section

Questions regarding respondent's willingness to participate in follow-up studies

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Table 2

Descriptive Information on Survey Respondents (N = *68*)

	n	%
Respondent type		
Assessment consortium[1]	45	66
Operational scoring project[2]	20	29
Not specified	3	4
Teaching grades		
K -3	12	18
4 - 5	16	24
6 - 8	20	29
9 - 12	10	15
Elementary[3]	6	9
Not specified	4	6
Primary teaching areas		
Reading	7	10
English language arts	7	10
Mathematics	7	10
Science	3	4
Social studies	10	15
Other	9	13
Not specified	25	37

[1] From the Maryland Assessment Consortium.
[2] From the operational scoring project for the 1994 Maryland School Performance Assessment Program.
[3] Elementary generalist or elementary/not specified.

Table 3

Agreement Rates on Codings of Responses to Open-Ended Survey Items

	% agreement	*Number of coding categories*
In what ways do you communicate performance targets/learning outcomes to your students?		
How	76	5
What	64	5
When	88	4
Subtotal	76	
In what ways do you communicate criteria/elements of quality to your students?		
- Help students understand criteria/ elements of quality	61	7
- Involve students in applying criteria/ self evaluation	58	7
- Involve students in applying criteria/ peer evaluation	69	7
- Involve students in developing criteria/self evaluation	54	4
- Involve students in developing criteria/peer evaluation	63	4
Subtotal	63	
In what ways do you communicate standards for performance to your students?		
Formats	78	4
Ways	77	4
Subtotal	78	
Total all items	69	

Table 4

Ways in Which Teachers Communicate Performance Targets/Learning Outcomes to Their Students

	n	%
Do you communicate performance targets/learning outcomes to your students prior to/during instruction?		
Yes (66 valid responses)	63	95
How do you communicate performance targets/learning outcomes?		
Orally	29	36
Written/to individual students	12	15
Classroom displays	30	38
Demonstrations	9	11
(Total 80 valid responses)		
What performance targets/learning outcomes do you communicate?		
Outcomes, expectations, objectives, etc.	46	69
Criteria, rubrics, grading requirements	10	15
Examples of student work	9	13
What will be tested	2	3
(Total 67 valid responses)		
When do you communicate performance targets/learning outcomes?		
Prior to instruction	26	58
During instruction or on-going	12	27
At the conclusion of instruction	7	16
(Total 45 valid responses)		
In what content areas do you communicate targets?		
Reading ($n = 55$[1])	38[2]	69
Writing/language usage ($n = 57$)	41	72
English language arts ($n = 52$)	31	60
Mathematics ($n = 50$)	29	58
Science ($n = 45$)	22	49
Social studies ($n = 51$)	30	59
Interdisciplinary lessons ($n = 47$)	31	66
Other ($n = 25$)	11	44

[1] Number who teach this content area.
[2] Number responding "yes."

Table 5

Ways in Which Teachers Communicate Criteria/Elements of Quality to Their Students

	n	%	
Do you help students understand criteria/elements of quality to your students?			
Yes (65 valid responses)	63	97	
In what ways do you help your students understand criteria/elements of quality?			
Discussion and review	16	15	
Provide criteria, rubrics, etc.	35	33	
Show student work, model responses	19	18	
Help students apply criteria, etc.	23	22	
Involve students in generating criteria	8	8	
Provide feedback to students on their work	4	4	
(Total 105 valid responses)			
In what content areas do you help students understand criteria/elements of quality?			
Reading (n = 53[1])	36[2]	68	
Writing/language usage (n = 55)	40	73	
English language arts (n = 51)	30	59	
Mathematics (n = 47)	27	57	
Science (n = 46)	24	52	
Social studies (n = 52)	33	63	
Interdisciplinary lessons (n = 47)	31	66	
Other (n = 28)		11	39

[1] Number who teach this content area.
[2] Number responding "yes."

Table 6

Ways in Which Teachers Involve Students in Applying and Developing Criteria to Evaluate Products and Performances

	Self evaluation		Peer evaluation	
	n	%	*n*	%
Do you involve students in applying pre-established criteria to evaluate:				
Yes (64 valid responses)	56	88	53	83
In what ways do teachers involve students in applying criteria?				
Students:				
Compare work to student work/anchors	9	12	6	8
Help pick anchor papers based on criteria	1	1	2	3
Use scoring tools (e.g., checklists, rubrics)	31	41	32	41
Develop criteria	1	1	1	1
Valid responses	76		78	
In what ways do teachers involve students in developing criteria?				
Brainstorm/discuss criteria (generic focus)	16	35	14	58
Discuss elements of quality/task requirements	22	48	6	25
Discuss elements of a good answer/"A" work	5	11	2	8
I do not do it/I do not do it often	3	7	2	8
Valid responses	46		24	

Table 7

Ways in Which Teachers Communicate Standards for Performance to Their Students

	n	%	
Do you communicate standards for performance to your students?			
Yes (63 valid responses)	59	94	
In what formats do you communicate standards for performance?			
- Rubric	12	26	
- Contract	1	2	
- Grading specifications, expectations, requirements	15	33	
- Anchor papers, model papers	18	39	
(Total 46 valid responses)			
In what ways do you communicate standards for performance?			
Orally	23	50	
Written	11	24	
Displays	10	22	
Demonstrations/modeling	2	4	
(Total 46 valid responses)			
In what content areas do you communicate standards for performance?			
Reading ($n = 46$[1])	30[2]	65	
Writing/language usage ($n = 45$)	31	69	
English language arts ($n = 45$)	25	56	
Mathematics ($n = 40$)	21	53	
Science ($n = 40$)	19	48	
Social studies ($n = 43$)	25	58	
Interdisciplinary lessons ($n = 38$)	24	63	
Other ($n = 29$)		10	34

[1] Number who teach this content area.
[2] Number responding "yes."