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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>項目</th>
<th>内容</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Standards as a Vehicle for Curriculum Reform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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お問合せ先
茨城大学学術企画部学術情報課（図書館） 情報支援係
Standards as a Vehicle for Curriculum Reform

Robert J. Betts
Department of Communication Studies

This paper is a brief discussion of how standards-based educational programs are a driving force behind recent reform efforts in education in the United States and the role assessment plays in standards-based curriculum. For any reform plan to be successful there has to be a catalyst or driving force as an integral part of the process for change. This traditionally takes the form of the introduction of tenets or constructs providing the platform that launches change into the community. Learning based on set academic standards has succeeded in becoming one of those tenets that has changed and influenced education in the 21st century.

Modern day standards-based educational programs are not new to education in the U.S. In 1894, one of the first publications to mention standards, written by the Committee of Ten (Jones, 2002), recommended that high school students follow an established academic curriculum. In the 1980s, learning and teaching based on academic standards became the prevailing concept for reform in education (American Federation of Teachers, n. d.). Over the past two decades, educators around the country have strived to implement standards-based teaching and learning.

In addition, assessing standards achievement is an integral part of standards-based education. The definition of assessment in standards-based education is “a process through which the criteria for assessment are derived directly from content and/or performance standards” (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2006, p. 1). Developing assessment methods is the next step after states and school districts have started to implement standards-based education into their schools. Standards-based assessment is different from traditional methods in three basic ways. First, standards-based assessment closely connects assessment and curriculum. Assessment is an integral part of the curriculum at all levels. Second, standards-based assessment requires teachers to compare students’ achievement with standards, not with other students as they have been in the past. Grading systems need to abandon the classification of students’ achievement utilizing methods that adjust grades to focus on class averages. Thirdly, standards-based education assessment needs to include new forms of assessment. Assessment methods need to be flexible enough to include a variety of methods to assess students’ skills and knowledge.

Standards-based assessment should be an integral part of the curriculum. Initial stages of curriculum development and design need to include assessment methods for learning units. Tracking students’ progress and re-evaluating lesson tasks throughout the course are an integral part of lesson planning when implementing standards-based education. The Regional Educational Laboratory (2005, November
1b) presented a teaching learning cycle diagram that explains course design for standards-based education, clearly showing the role assessment plays in the process (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Teaching learning cycle from NW Regional Educational Laboratory (2005, November 1b)

In this diagram, the process moves in a circle, continuously re-evaluating learning outcomes. This would indicate that assessment is an ongoing process necessary to ensure that the learners in their studies are meeting standards.

Discussion

In any effort to reform education, there are always various points of view. There are those who advocate the setting of academic standards for students and those who oppose setting standards. Both positions have published numerous documents for and against these recent reform efforts. After a careful review of material published on the subject, there is overwhelming evidence that majorities of educators are in favor of an academic standards-based education system in the United States.

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) overwhelmingly supports reform efforts that implement academic standards for students. They recommend schools implement “measurable standards in core academic subjects for elementary and secondary school students (American Federation of Teachers, n. d.).” In addition, the AFT states that “Clear and rigorous standards serve as a guide to focus our collective energy and resources on improving the academic performance of our students (American Federation of Teachers, n. d.).” The main criticism of American education in the past has been allowing students to learn just enough to get by in society, failing to promote and produce students with a quality education on a general basis.
Lewis (1997) noted that students in English Language Development (ELD) courses attending Long Beach schools in California were barely above the average for the state. Students passed on to the next level because they could communicate well enough with their teachers and peers even though this did not reflect their true reading and writing ability. Both of these skills are essential in middle school if students are going to successfully complete course work based on the academic standards set for that level. Consequently, Lewis (1997) advocates the setting of standards for ELD students in order for them to receive proper instruction to prepare them to enter and actively participate in mainstream classes.

There are those who claim that implementing academic standards has become the “rallying point of American education (Henry, 1998, February 23, ¶ 1).” Evidence would support this in an examination of current literature published by educators and those associated with education across the country. Education has moved to the top of the domestic agenda and there has been a general effort to raise standards for American children (Riley, 2002). The benefit or strength that provides the catalyst for reform is how easy it is for concerned people to understand standards-based education. Setting goals and striving to reach those goals is not new to the American people. The driving forces behind a majority of institutions or businesses are attempts to reach goals or objectives on a daily basis. Americans are very goal oriented people. For this reason, standards-based education is easy for parents, teachers and students to understand and this makes any effort to adopt academic standards relatively easy for everyone to understand.

Some factors are essential when adopting standards-based education. The AFT list ten factors that are necessary for writing clear standards for educational institutions and students:

1. Standards must focus on academics.
2. Standards must be grounded in the core disciplines.
3. Standards must be specific enough to assure the development of a common core curriculum.
4. Standards must be manageable given the constraints of time.
5. Standards must be rigorous and world class.
6. Standards must include "performance standards."
7. Standards must define multiple levels of performance for students to strive for.
8. Standards must combine knowledge and skills, not pursue one at the expense of the other.
9. Standards must not dictate how the material should be taught.
10. Standards must be written clearly enough for all stakeholders to understand. (Jones, 2002, ¶ 14).

If educational institutions are willing to adopt these tenets for standards, there is no reason they will not be accepted by the parents, teachers and students as a whole. Input from those involved in the educational process will continue to influence how standards are determined for students. Contribu-
tions from all those involved should help make the wide acceptance of this form of education the logical consequence.

Not everyone is supportive of academic standards-based learning and teaching. Recently, there have been numerous claims that standards-based learning is not working and students are constantly studying for achievement tests in order to measure the effectiveness of teaching. Quirk (2005) claimed that traditional math standards do not take into account the new technology students associate with everyday. In some cases, there has been criticism about how the federal government provides guidance for standards-based reforms at the local level (Goertz, 2001). Schmoker (2000) suggested, “educators must critically exam the case against standards and accountability (p. 1).” Such an examination shows the importance of standards-based education to teachers (Schmoker, 2000). Even though there are those who oppose standards-based education, recent statistical results have shown an increase in achievement scores in many schools who have adopted academic standards.

Grading criteria for standards-based education takes on a different a focus from traditional methods in many ways. In the past, teachers tended to compare students with each other when deciding grades. In standards-based education, teachers do not compare students to each other, but compare them to the standards. Students no longer need to compete against each other under standards-based education. They need to compare their own progress with standards and strive toward developing skills that will help them develop those abilities. One of the many methods utilized in standards-based education is for teachers to use rubrics to determine students’ performance on specific assignments. Grading rubrics (See the Appendix for examples of rubrics developed by the writer) insure the assessment of individual students in the same manner by providing defined criteria determining learner achievement. It is important for all of the instructors teaching the curriculum utilize the same rubric to insure standards attainment across the board.

In standards-based education, grading criteria should involve a combination of testing, observation and self-assessment. Burger (1998) wrote that there are seven design principle needed to create an assessment system for improving students’ learning. These seven principles, originally derived from the research of Cordell and Waters (1993), stated that these seven elements must include "accountable, flexible, standards based, anchored, ongoing, disaggregated, and transition focused" (Burger, 1998, ¶ 10) principles. Robertson (n.d.) recommended that schools incorporate a guide to assessment that includes both formative and summative methods in their assessment plans. In addition, Robertson (n.d.) reported that assessment plans need to include examples of students’ work, assessment rubrics and explanations for student and parents. North Dakota (n.d.) schools use what they call “calibration packets” to help prepare their students for standards assessment. These packs consist of items and tasks that are similar to the State Test they give students during the school year. Finally, grading methods in standards-based education needs to support the learning process rather than evaluate
students based on what their classmates are able to do.

There are a number of ways to monitor and report standards fulfillment. Quenemoen, Thurlow, Moen, Thompson, & Blount Morse (2004) suggested a progress monitoring plan that included (1) Curriculum-Based Measurement; (2) Classroom assessments (system or teacher-developed); (3) Adaptive assessments; and (4) Large-scale assessments used during the year to monitor growth of individual students and groups of students (p. 1).” Obviously, these suggestions support the students’ learning and measure their progress as they strive to develop skills required to meet standards. However, one of the most important features of this kind of reporting method is that it makes assessment clear and open for those involved in the learning process. This is something that past methods under previous educational plans did not always do.

The Chugach School District (2004) has eight methods for meaningful reporting: “Student Assessment Binder (SAB), SAB Snapshot, Parent Conferences, Quarterly Report, Permanent Records, Developmental Diploma and an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) (p. 1).” These reporting methods emphasize communication between the students, parents and teachers in their school district and help keep everyone involved in the learning process focused on the learning progress. Finally, reporting methods need to include established plans, concrete documents to record progress and openness to support effectively standards-based education.

This writer believes that teacher training is an integral part of successfully implementing standards-based education into educational institutions. Training programs offered by organizations such as the NW Regional Laboratory (2005, November 1a) encourage teachers to seek training outside their own school district to experience a broader view of how standards-based assessment around the nation is being discussed by teachers. Teachers need to actively search for school and community organizations that support standards reform. In addition, busy teachers need easy access to forums related to standards-based assessment. Teachers should actively join and work with organizations dedicated to “helping schools become successful in standards base performance assessment” (Exemplars, 2005, April).

**Conclusion**

Finally, there remain a number of challenges for reforms based on standards. There are still some concerns over the way standards are being written at all levels of educational hierarchy. Clarity is still an issue and will continue to be so until standards can be written in a way that is understood in the same way by everyone. In addition, there are still concerns related to the level of achievement standards represent. Some claim they are too low and others claim they are too high (Doherty, 2001; Quirk, 2005). Subsequently, there are concerns about assessment methods and assessment instruments. Measuring student achievement in a manner that is acceptable to all involved is a dif-
ficult task and will continue to be a major criticism in the effort to reform our educational institutions.

This writer considers open discussion, support for teachers and community support important elements in determining grading criteria, reporting tools and reporting forms in standards-based education. An open approach to all of these elements will successfully help communities implement standards into the school system. Grading criteria needs to include a variety of methods to track students’ progress and evaluate their skills. Reporting tools should be easy to use and focus on individual student progress not on comparing them with other students. Reporting forms need to provide easy access to information that parents and students need to support the educational process. Finally, as standards-based education becomes more entrenched in our educational system there will be constant improvement in the very important area of assessment.

Reform based on standards is definitely a move in the right direction for education. The evidence is undeniable there have been some definite improvement in the achievement levels of many of the participants in programs based on reaching academic standards. Perhaps it is time that Japanese universities begin to consider standards-based curriculum for their English language programs. Reform efforts based on set achievement levels will help drive and support curriculum development as Japanese educational institutions attempt to reform the current system. Even as controversial as standards-based education is in the United States, no one can deny that its implementation is a catalyst for education reform. Perhaps, establishing a similar system for measuring student achievement in Japan will support reform efforts taking place at this time, however, that is a topic for discussion and future research. The writer believes that every educational institution needs to consider implementing standards-based education to insure that every child receives a quality education.

References
Standards as a Vehicle for Curriculum Reform


# Essay Assessment Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Key Elements</th>
<th>Possible Points</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1 | Did the student provide the correct structure for the essay? | • Introduction  
• Main Body  
• Conclusion | 10 | 10 |
| 2 | Did the student provide the correct formatting for the essay? | • Cover Page  
• Title  
• Paragraph Indentation  
• Margins  
• Line spacing (double) | 10 | 10 |
| 3 | Did the student provide error free grammar and spelling for the essay? | • Correct grammar  
• Correct spelling | 20 | 20 |
| 4 | Did the student successfully express his/her ideas clearly and logically in the essay? | • Clear meaning  
• Logical sequence | 20 | 20 |
| 5 | Is the essay well organized and easy to understand? | • Topic sentences  
• Supporting sentences | 20 | 20 |
| 6 | Is the essay the correct length? | • Minimum 500 words | 10 | 10 |
| 7 | Did the writer hand in the assignment on time? | • Met the deadline | 10 | 10 |

| 8 | Total Score | 100 |
| 9 | Letter Grade | |

| 10 | ID # | Name |

Comments:
## Oral Presentation Assessment Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Assessment Items</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Needs Improvement</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Presentation Preparation and Practice</td>
<td>1) Came to class prepared to practice with enthusiasm</td>
<td>1) Came to class prepared to practice</td>
<td>1) Missed practice often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2) Practiced often with enthusiasm</td>
<td>2) Practiced often</td>
<td>2) Did not practice enough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3) Frequently gave helpful advise to classmates</td>
<td>3) Gave helpful advice to classmates</td>
<td>3) Did not give advice to classmates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4)</td>
<td>4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Speech Contents</td>
<td>4) Content was unique and very interesting</td>
<td>4) Content was interesting</td>
<td>5) Content was not interesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5) Content provided a lot of useful and practical information</td>
<td>5) Content was informative</td>
<td>6) Content was not informative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6) Content was an excellent choice for the audience</td>
<td>6) Content was appropriate for the audience</td>
<td>7) Content was not appropriate for the audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Presentation Poster</td>
<td>7) Excellent design</td>
<td>7) Good design</td>
<td>8) Poor design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8) Excellent organization</td>
<td>8) Good graphics</td>
<td>9) Poor graphics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9) Excellent graphics</td>
<td>9) Good organization</td>
<td>10) Poor organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10) Excellent use of text</td>
<td>10) Good use of text</td>
<td>11) Poor use of text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Presentation Skills</td>
<td>11) Excellent posture</td>
<td>11) Good posture</td>
<td>12) Poor posture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12) Excellent eye contact</td>
<td>12) Good eye contact</td>
<td>13) Poor eye contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13) Excellent voice volume and voice variety</td>
<td>13) Good voice volume and voice variety</td>
<td>14) Poor voice volume and voice variety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14) Excellent use of gestures</td>
<td>14) Good use of gestures</td>
<td>15) Poor use of gestures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Points</td>
<td>(7 = 98 points)</td>
<td>(6 = 84 points)</td>
<td>(5 = 70 points)</td>
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«ID» «Name» Date Total score