

Assessment and Evaluation in the OCDSB (grade 9 – 12)

Speaker: Professor Garfield Gini-Newman

December 10, 2009

"The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs, and tyrannize their teachers.

Dr. Gini-Newman opened the presentation with this quote and asked who wrote it. It is attributed to Socrates which demonstrates that every generation makes similar comments about youth.

Contrasting an excerpt from the Toronto Star and from Growing Up Digital by Don Tapscott, a discussion ensued about the negative evaluation by professors on state of teens - lazy and unprepared upon entering University and the positive commentary from Tapscott – these teens compose the brightest generation. The discussion that followed attributed the difference in our education and expectations to those of the “Net-Generation” as one of the reasons for the disparity in the perspectives on this generation. We were encouraged to read Tapscott’s book and the insights from brain research. Brains are shaped by experiences (neural pathways) in the world and the Net-Generation brains are wired differently. Of particular interest is Chapter 4, Seven things to do to sharpen the brain and Chapter 5, What we need to do in schools.

Dr. Carol Dweck ‘s book Mindset is the result of decades of research on achievement and success.” Does a child’s belief about intelligence have anything to do with academic success?” Dr. Dweck conducted an experiment with 400 fifth graders, separating them into 2 groups. One group was taught how to study and prepare for tests and the other group was given encouragement that they could develop and grow with practice. The latter group did better in testing.

The difference is the Fixed Mindset versus the Growth Mindset.

The Fixed Mindset:

- intelligence is fixed at birth
- results are either success and failure
- school is about demonstrating your worth (intelligence and talent) not developing it
- avoid any challenge which may not immediately yield success.

The Growth Mindset:

- setbacks are not failures but a challenge which motivate further development
- chose a course that is challenging in order to stretch themselves
- intelligence and talent are developed through dedication and hard work
- see school is an opportunity to expand intelligence.

The last chapter of Mindset contains come advice to parents and teachers. Do not nurture the fixed mindset. Celebrate the work, preparation and study effort that the student puts into a project. Do not reinforce the fixed mindset with comments like “you are so smart,

you are so good”. This type of praise does not support effort. Success comes with hard work.

Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice provides insights into the definition of intelligence. Dr. Gini-Newman asked the audience “What is the difference between a prodigy, a gifted person and a genius?”

A prodigy is young. A gifted person demonstrates great competency. A genius “exerts a material effect on the definition and delineations of the domain...the more universal the contribution, the more it travels across cultures and eras, the greater the genius”. He made the group think about our preconceptions by asking whether we thought Madonna or the Beatles were gifted musicians or geniuses. Did they influence the direction of their art?

Intelligence “solves problems or fashions products” and is not the storage of information like the savant portrayed in the movie Rain Man.

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John Dewey, How We Think(1933), believed that education must engage with and enlarge experience. From an intellectual point of view, the methodology of education should enhance the activity in schools that involve problem solving through the scientific method of inquiry.

Distributed Intelligence recognizes the role resources play in helping us to solve problems and meet challenges. Intelligence is a selection of appropriate resources to solve problems; a reflective process. Intelligence is better thought of as distributed.

The adult experience of education was to load up on information, spit it out then forget it. Professor Gini-Newman contrasted this with the modern-day experience of challenging students to apply their knowledge; for example, to solve a problem or to build a project. When we engage children in solving problems we experience learning. He projected a black and white drawing and asked us to identify the time of day and the season, adding pieces of information as the audience talked about the clues. We agreed that the picture alone wasn’t very interesting but as we studied it and talked about it, we became more engaged. There were no words to read or data to study. What is interesting is applying information and using knowledge to solve a problem. Children who cannot read can solve problems. All children can think and solve problems.

Dr. Art Costa 2008: “Thinking is innate but skilful thinking needs cultivation.”

Achievement Chart on school projects identify

- a) Knowledge and Understanding
- b) Thinking
- c) Communication
- d) Application

Parents should spend as much time discussing with their child the learning abilities on a report card as they do the grades their child achieves. He made the point that the child who receives high marks in learning abilities, even though she/he has lower grades, is

probably further ahead than the child who receives high grades but low marks in learning abilities.

Critical Thinking

- focuses on the quality of reasoning
- concerned with judging or assessing what is reasonable or sensible in a situation
- depends on the possession of relevant knowledge
- occurs when we attempt to solve a problematic situation
- takes effort but is more interesting than simply absorbing information. For example studying an historic event is more interesting when thinking critically about the impact and the causes of that event.

."Assessments or judgements of possible options in light of relevant factors or criteria."

Critical thinking is **criteria** thinking – thinking in the face of criteria.

With homework help, ask questions such as what criteria will help you decide.

Assessment: a paradigm shift

- focus on learning targets
- assessment For and As learning not Of learning
- understanding diverse means by which students demonstrate learning of curriculum targets.

Where do we go to next?

Understanding assessment as a journey and not a series of events.

Identifying important and broadly applicable learning targets.

Putting thinking at the core of learning

Less paperwork: Spend more time developing the skill of writing a paper. Work on two papers as opposed to four papers. Less quantity and more quality. Focus the time and effort using the feedback on how to improve the paper. Mark less and better quality results.

Example: "the pen is mightier than the sword" Spell check did not alert the student to her mistakenly combining words when she wrote that "the penis is mightier than the sword."

The journey so far:

Assessment:

- understanding multiple uses of assessment and the power of assessment to enhance learning
- increased awareness of the potential for assessment to engage learners
- reverse "failing with dignity" - to see assessment as the scaffold to student learning and narrow the achievement gap.

Dr Gini-Newman gave the example that, especially with boys, the student prefers to "fail with dignity" than work and fail at something. They make up excuses that they didn't work at it.

"Formative versus summative" assessment task trap; we need to do work at building blocks even if it doesn't count towards marks. Provide ways to gather evidence.

Dr. Roland Case (2005) “Nurture the imagination through critical thinking”
Passive receipt of information versus active and critical review of information = engaged
= more likely to recall. The intellectual tools that support the student’s ability to think
critically are the same kind of tools that nurture the student’s’ imagination.
Shift from accumulation of information to critical thinking classes.

Learn through cartoons and songs. We listened to a song and looked at an early cartoon
of early immigration and were asked whether “Canadian diversity was result of or in spite
of government immigration policy” and whether the song or cartoon depicted the early
immigration situation. Schools can use a multitude of interesting media to engage
children in critical thinking.

‘Nurture learners: begin in the child’s world and invite them to come and play in ours by
inspiring awe and wonder and providing intellectual tools for quality thinking.’

If we take care to manage the learning, we will have less need to manage the learner:
Benjamin Bloom

Equal is not equitable. Schools and teachers should focus on giving every child the
opportunity to learn (equity), not on giving every child the same education (equality).
Each child has different barriers to learning or different learning needs in terms of how
they learn and how much teacher attention they require.

The Ottawa-Carleton District School Board: Policy Discussion

Jennifer Adams, Superintendent of Curriculum, spoke about the OCDSB development of
the Provincial Assessment and Evaluation policy. Over 18 months, the board consulted
with stakeholders. They aligned the school district policy with the province’s mandate.
They built consistency within and between schools. Three years ago they conducted the
review of the district policy and procedure focussing on assessment for learning.

They provided staff then students with the understanding of what mark levels 1 – 4
looked like for report cards.

They encouraged “school embedded learning” – providing understanding of the
expectations within the classroom. They developed an Educator’s Resource Guide for
both elementary and secondary school. It was so well received, other boards across the
country requested copies and it now a cost recovery endeavour.

Concerns expressed by the public were about missed assignments and plagiarism.
Secondary School Assessment and Evaluation Policy; sessions with school teams to share
best practices.

In June 2007, a review committee was struck and principals met with their school teams
and provided feedback. In September 2009, the committee reported back to staff, students
and parents.

2009-2010 Actions:

Joint Committee OSSTF and staff

Secondary School Assessment and Evaluation Policy
OCDSB Board Improvement Plan K-12
Assessment and Evaluation focus for the district Professional Activity Day
Community Forum
Department Head Council and Heads Day
Provincial Policy – Growing Success

School Prospective from two Vice- Principals

Jean Fulton-Hale – Nepean High School
Cheryl Black – Canterbury

Nepean:

Framework – common language for all discussion with stakeholders

Consistency

Means of ensuring equity

Consultation Process

-start with staff, students = stakeholders

-key elements in the final product: character, literacy and numeracy, assessment and evaluation and school model

-Stakeholders expectations and responsibilities

-work completion and consequences

-academic integrity

-student support

Canterbury

Started with professional development within the departments, staff meetings and Professional Activity Days. The school recognized the differences within the department. Heads wanted to create the process and to understand better the performing arts component.

2007-2008

Discussions were difficult in developing the policy. The policy was taken to the school council in spring 2008, put into the student planner and communicated over synrevoice to parents. By the end of 2008, there was a solid foundation for evaluation.

Although the high schools had different perspectives, they had a common philosophy to rely on in the implementation:

-Professional judgment of teachers

-Dialogue within the school and with parents

-Transparency

When students do not submit work, there are multiple opportunities although maybe different tasks.

Deadline dates at Canterbury are 2 weeks before the mid semester and 3 weeks before the final instruction day.

Teachers did not want a volume of work to mark all at once so deadlines were defined. In the first term there was some additional work but now the students are handing in on time and if not a discussion take place with their teacher.

Nepean went from 104 students with referrals to the Vice- Principal for late work to 4 in one year.

Academic Integrity is the term used instead of plagiarism.

- It is discussed in all classes,
- Supported by the teacher librarian,
- Reflected in the nature of the work assigned.

When problems occur: communication with the student's parents and school team, and a referral is made to the Academic Integrity committee.

Academic Integrity speaks to the school values.

School-wide practices:

- opportunity room – a teacher to help with organization skills
- staff development
- ongoing communication with students, parents and school council, superintendency and within and across panels

A Canterbury there is a student success room used in conjunction with the resource room for students to get help from the learning support teacher.