

Chalkboard

By

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If you are just joining this series of *Chalkboards* the topic is Gentry Public School District's effort to focus its concentrated labors on student learning. The framework for our efforts have been summarized by three questions borrowed from the work of Richard DuFour. Those three questions are "What is it we want the students to learn?" "How will we know when they have learned it?" and "What do we do when they don't learn it?"

Last week's article explained that the answer to the first question could be found at the Arkansas Department of Education's web site at <http://arkedu.state.ar.us/curriculum/frameworks.html> where the Curriculum Frameworks can be found. Perusing that site will garner the searcher the components of literacy and mathematics education.

So "How will we know when they have learned it?" The first article of the series expounded my view that where learning does not occur, neither does teaching occur regardless of the pedagogical expertise of the instructor. I compare this line of thought to the physics class definition of work. A person standing holding 10-pound weights stationary in each hand of outstretched arms is doing no work, by definition, no how much energy he uses to maintain that position. In the same vein a teacher cannot be assured, by definition, that she has taught unless some learner has both internalized that teaching and can demonstrate that learning in some measurable manner.

The key then to answering the second question lies in the proceeding sentence. The only way we can know if a student has learned some skill is for the student to demonstrate that knowledge.

One of my favorite examples of teacher allowing a student to demonstrate what he knows probably "dates me". When I was in high school taking Geometry, our teacher had the habit of sending us to the blackboard in groups and making us solve a problem on the board while she watched. Whether that was a good or bad technique is debatable, but the teacher was able to immediately ascertain whether or not we had "caught" what had been taught.

Similarly David Nelson, our VoAg teacher can tell whether he has taught a student to weld a certain type of bead by examining the weld or by subjecting it to stress. Coach Euford can determine if he has taught a player

to dribble a basketball by simply observing.

Individual questioning of the student by the teacher is another form of checking for learning. Such offers the benefit of the student being offered “specific knowledge of results” immediately by the teacher. A teacher checking a student’s homework is another way. Feel free to expand the list from your own school experiences.

A critical sub-question to today’s question might be, “When will we know if they know it?” The answer should be fairly simple- as soon as possible. No one would argue the point that if a child has not learned something, the sooner the teacher knows that the better. Obviously “Pop Quizzes,” weekly quizzes, 9-Weeks Exams, Semester Tests and such give a student a chance to demonstrate their knowledge or proficiency over different frequencies of time.

For public school educators a new “How will we know when they have learned it?” response has been underway for the last several years. The **Arkansas Comprehensive Testing, Assessment and Accountability Program** (ACTAAP) encompasses the state's Smart Start Initiative, which focuses on Grades K-4; the state's Smart Step Initiative, which focuses on Grades 5-8; and education for Grades 9-12. Within the testing component are the state Criterion Referenced Tests and Standardized Achievement Test that our students are required to take which is, in current thinking, the real final answer to today’s question, “How will we know when they have learned it?”

From another ADE web page, <http://arkedu.state.ar.us/actaap/definitions/#ACTAAP>, I copied the following definitions for you. They will be useful in understanding the terminology, if you do not already, in future articles.

Criterion-Referenced Test (CRT) is an assessment instrument customized around the Arkansas Curriculum Frameworks. The Primary Benchmark (Grade 4) is a CRT. In Arkansas, the test items are based on the academic standards in the Arkansas Curriculum Frameworks and are developed by committees of Arkansas teachers, with support from the Department of Education and the testing contractor. CRT's are administered at Grades 4, 6 and 8 (Benchmark Exams), End-of-Course Exams in Algebra I and Geometry, and a Literacy Exam at Grade 11. **Benchmark** is a term used to describe the standard for judging a performance. Teachers and students can use benchmarks to determine the quality of a student's work. Benchmarks can be used to tell what students should know by a particular stage of their schooling; for example, "by the end of the sixth grade, a student should be able to locate major cities and other geographical features

on each of the continents." **Benchmark Exams** refer to the three criterion-referenced tests that are administered to students at the following three grade levels: Primary (Grade 4), Intermediate (Grade 6), and Middle Level (Grade 8).

End-of-Course Exams are criterion-referenced tests taken at the completion of a course of study to determine whether a student demonstrates attainment of the knowledge and skills necessary for mastery of that subject. End-of-Course Exams will be given in Algebra I, Geometry and in the 11th grade in Literacy.

Add to the above descriptions, the standardized achievement tests our students take and you determine that the answer to “How will we know when they have learned it?” is not just an answer that we are privy to but one that is being asked and answered for every public school in the state.