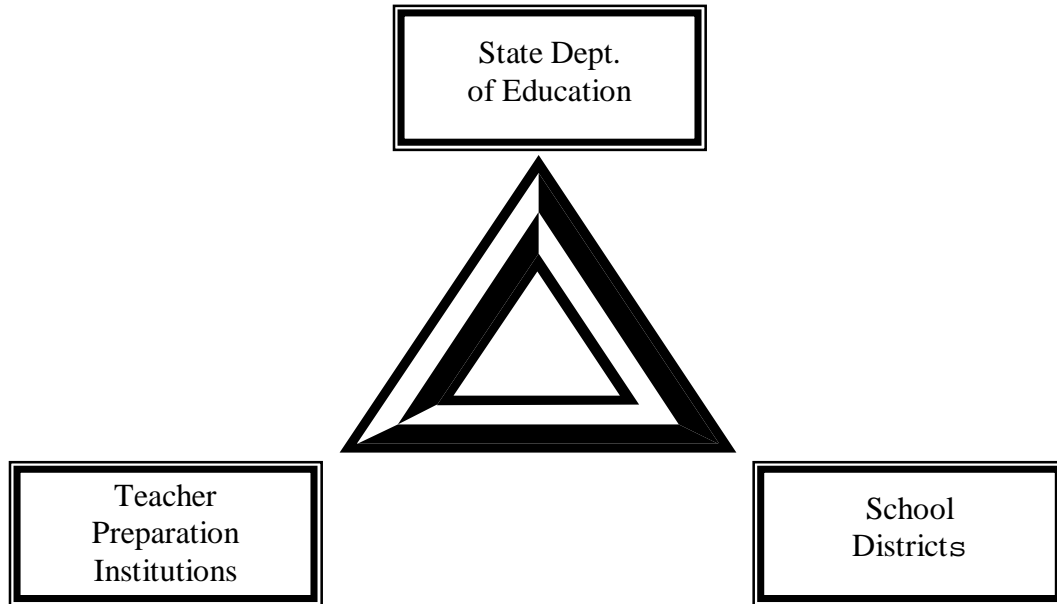


Using Performance Rubrics to Improve Student Achievement



by

Dr. Lois Libby
Chairman of the Intern Program
Sacred Heart University
Fairfield, Connecticut
and
Michael F. Giarratano
Principal
Roger Sherman School
Fairfield, Connecticut

Edited by
Christine Sullivan
Project Leader for Elementary Education Portfolio
Connecticut State Department of Education

July, 2003

INTRODUCTION

As any building administrator who has new teachers in his/her building knows, the State of Connecticut has developed a nationally recognized induction program for beginning teachers entitled the BEST Program. This Beginning Educator Support and Training Program, as the label implies, includes support but also includes the *assessment* of new staff. The program is culminated by evaluating the beginning teacher's demonstration of mastery of the essential teaching competencies related to content knowledge, planning, instruction and assessment. Since 1999, the State assesses this mastery "through a discipline-specific teaching portfolio submitted during the second year of teaching, in which the beginning teachers document a unit of instruction around important concepts or goals. In their portfolios, teachers describe a series of lessons, analyze student work, videotape two different teaching occasions, and reflect on their students' learning and the quality of their teaching."

The portfolio is assessed in four categories: Instructional Design, Instructional Implementation, Assessment of Learning, and Analyzing Teaching and Learning. The assessment of each portfolio consists of collecting and recording data through note-taking, interpreting the patterns found in the evidence, and evaluating the quality of the teaching documented in the portfolio. The score is based on the expert judgment of a highly trained scorer or scorers, who refer to benchmark performances and the professional standards (CCT) to make their judgment.

Beginning teachers who do not meet the portfolio performance standard are provided with additional individual feedback and a personal conference and have the opportunity to submit another portfolio during their third year in the BEST program.

In 2001, the State Department of Education distributed scoring rubrics to the beginning teachers **before** they began the portfolio process. This was done for two reasons:

- a. the teaching practices reflected in the rubrics represent many of the daily expectations for essential teaching competencies related to content knowledge, planning, instruction and assessment and are based on the CCT,
- b. the beginning teacher should internalize these expectations and be performing them daily as routine and not just as preparation for the portfolio assignment.

Now that all districts as well as university Departments of Education have access to these rubrics, it has spotlighted additional problems: The current support personnel in the schools and at the district level are not all familiar with the expectations therein. Moreover, if the standards truly represent the daily expectations for essential teaching competencies for **all** teachers, then all teachers should be aware of these high standards and be effective in implementing them regularly. Likewise, faculty in teacher preparation institutions need to focus on the content in the rubrics as well as the CCT in their courses.

As a result, the authors feel that two new functions for the BEST program have emerged- to make these rubrics of excellent teaching:

- a. the foundation upon which local districts establish their teacher evaluation and professional development plans and,
- b. an integral part of the curriculum in teacher preparation programs in state universities and colleges.

In order to improve both the initial training and the support team for the beginning teacher, the authors have conceptualized and have initiated steps in two arenas: a school

initiative within an elementary school and the teacher preparation program at Sacred Heart University.

Case Study—-Sherman School

One of the authors, Mike Giarratano, is currently the Principal at Roger Sherman School in Fairfield, Connecticut. Sherman School, is a typical elementary community-both socially and economically, with 400 students. Mr. Giarratano is also a trained BEST portfolio assessor. For the past three years, he has spent several weeks each summer assessing Elementary-level portfolios. As a building principal, this assessor role has afforded him two unique functions- to serve as a resource for beginning teachers in his building and to promote the mission of the BEST Program with the entire faculty.

In September of 2002, Mr. Giarratano met with one of his staff members, who was in her second year of teaching, to discuss her upcoming portfolio assignment. They talked about her preparation for beginning the portfolio and the support system she could anticipate: a trained mentor at the school who would provide individual, ongoing support throughout the year, a district-based support team, state-sponsored portfolio clinics, beginning teacher seminars, on-line support at the State web page, and the author's encouragement and assistance.

As the year progressed, Mr. Giarratano and the teacher met consistently. Much of the discussions centered on the rubrics that the BEST program had provided. It was the plan and intention that she "internalize" these practices and expectations- make them part of her everyday teaching routine. As a result, when it was time for her to submit her portfolio, it would not be a "one-time-only" assignment but a true reflection of her daily teaching strategies and activities.

During the course of meetings, Mr. Giarratano realized that, while she was

systematically developing her skills, becoming adept at diagnosing her students' needs and building appropriate programs and activities, there seemed to be a gap between her development and the practices of the rest of the faculty. Because the entire staff had never seen the State rubrics, they were not necessarily practicing what the State was promoting as the state-of-the-art teaching practice for new teachers. For example:

Rubric III.4- Describe how the teacher monitors student performance and uses information about student performance in instruction.

Highest level of practice (4/4): The teacher consistently monitors students' conceptual understanding and analyzes student performance to adjust daily instruction to meet curricular and specific student's needs.

Existing Situation: Much of the typical monitoring focused on student engagement, accuracy in completing the task, or mastery of the objectives rather than conceptual understanding.

If the BEST program is designed to elicit a representation of teaching that demonstrates a high standard of teaching that promotes student learning, it should be the expectation for all teachers, new and experienced, following the same rubrics.

Case Study--The Sacred Heart University Teacher Preparation Program

Both authors, Lois Libby and Mike Giarratano, are part of the graduate education faculty at Sacred Heart University, and teach a course entitled Professional Seminar, which traditionally has required a portfolio of teaching as a product in the course. For this course, prior to dissemination of the elementary rubrics, the professors modified the guidelines for the BEST portfolio required for beginning teachers to be able to gain provisional state certification and helped students to develop a “portfolio-for-practice” which would roughly meet the standards. In the 2002 course after the dissemination of the aforementioned rubrics by the State Department of Education, the authors decided that they would focus on the standards inherent in the rubrics and proffer many examples of best practices that would meet the standards. The goal was that the teachers in training would develop teaching competencies that they would internalize and practice routinely as part of their teaching strategies.

In the last three semesters of the course, both the professors and the students generated these “best practices” and discussed their merits in class. The students were instructed to look for practices that would meet the standards in their field placement/student teaching placement. An example of rubric matched with best practices generated in class included the following:

Rubric NII.5 (Numeracy)- Describe how the teacher uses resources to support students’ development in numeracy.

Highest level of competency (4/4): Resources vary by task and purpose, promote investigation and connection, and accommodate specific differences in students’ achievement, interests and learning styles.

Existing Situation: Teacher identifies different learning goals for individual students based on their results on individual diagnostic tests. She assigns some to work on addition facts with manipulatives; some are working on addition games with dice; some on addition word problems; some on measuring. The instructional area is set up as learning centers and children can rotate among the learning centers when they have finished their assignments.

The students frequently commented that the standards outlined in the rubrics were not routinely practiced in the classrooms where they were student teaching. For example, in the above example, they noted that many teachers did not employ learning centers. They therefore could not observe or model cooperating teacher's practices to learn to address the standards as discussed. This finding echoes the experience of the author's description of his experience in working with the beginning teacher in his school.

Therefore, it appears that both the university and the school must provide more awareness of the rubrics and standards to cooperating teachers and encourage them to provide salient instructional models in their classrooms. They can initiate this effort in a meeting with cooperating teachers designed to coordinate efforts to establish guidelines for student teaching.

Likewise, the professors of reading and numeracy methods courses for elementary education in the Department of Education need to be acutely aware of the rubrics. It becomes their responsibility to focus on the rubrics in developing syllabi and competencies for the classes. The university is currently revising its curriculum to meet the standards of the Common Core of Learning, the foundation for the aforementioned rubrics; thus the Education Department is orienting full-time and adjunct faculty to these expectations for up-to-date teaching beginning with new teachers and following through

with career teachers.

Summary and Recommendations

It is obvious to the authors that there is a disparity between what the State is expecting from our new teachers and what our veteran staff is practicing. The portfolio rubrics have become not only the standard by which second year teachers are judged but the basis for all outstanding teaching practice. The Connecticut State Department is providing standards which beginning teachers must address and document in a teaching portfolio within their second year of teaching. These standards represent the best thinking and current theories about practices that will enhance student learning; thus the authors believe that these standards should be widely disseminated and that all significant parties who are preparing and supporting teachers need to be proactive by a) providing awareness about the standards, b) generating specific teaching strategies that address the standards, and c) assuring that teachers are implementing these practices. To become more proactive, the following are recommendations for an action plan for the State Department of Education, teacher preparation programs, and schools/school districts:

The Connecticut State Department of Education	Teacher Preparation Institutions	School Districts
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The developers of the rubrics should provide workshops on the rubrics to representatives of teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Elementary education and other faculty should become aware of the rubrics and attend any awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All school personnel whose role is to improve instruction for elementary students should become

<p>preparation institutions, representatives of school districts, i.e., elementary principals and teachers, staff developers, curriculum specialists, professional associations of elementary principals and teachers. It should be noted that when the Connecticut Competency Instrument was introduced in this manner in the 1990's educators adopted the indicators as grist for staff development and teacher evaluation plans.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The State Department of Education should provide guidelines to school districts to address the rubrics in staff development and teacher evaluation plans, and in grant applications for Title I and 	<p>workshops on the standards.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty should address the rubrics in their syllabi for courses for elementary education candidates. They should generate and ask students to generate salient examples of teaching practices to meet the standards. Students should observe the teaching practices in student teaching and other field experiences and prepare curriculum and lesson plans which meet the standards. They should reflect on and discuss the implementation of the lessons in classes for hints on improvements. • The rubrics should be represented in competencies that the teacher preparation 	<p>aware of the rubrics.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The rubrics should provide the content for staff development in elementary schools. The staff development should include attention to instructional practices that will meet the rubrics(see Appendix C). • The rubrics should be addressed in teacher evaluation plans. After teachers gain awareness about practices that meet the standards, they should be held accountable for implementing these practices.
---	---	---

<p>other school improvement grants.</p> <p>The State Department of Education should provide guidance to teacher preparation institution in establishing competencies in courses for elementary education candidates.</p>	<p>institutions measure and document for each preparation candidate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty should review the rubrics with cooperating teachers in the workshops provided each semester. 	
--	---	--

CONCLUSIONS

The authors feel that a cooperative effort is needed to address this gap so that every teacher implement a style and method of teaching that will meet the highest performance standard in each of the four instructional areas: Instructional Design, Instructional Implementation, Assessment of Learning, and Analyzing Teaching and Learning. Obviously, this paradigm shift will only be internalized through a long-term plan of consistent and substantive professional development.

If everyone shares the same goal, it will foster rapport and teamwork and common objectives. The authors feel that a variety of resources can work on a common problem but, without a team approach, personal biases may affect the outcome. As Brubaker (1994, p. 87) states, “A product [analyzing the rubrics] is summative- a completed end or result that can be evaluated. Process [changing instructional practice], on the other hand, is formative. It is not what has been done, but instead what is unfolding or becoming.”

The State Department of Education, teacher preparation programs, and schools/school districts must work together to articulate a vision that allows everyone to work together towards mutually accepted goals or as Senge (1994, p.9) asserts, “bind people together around a common identity.”

References

- Brubaker, D. (1994). *Creative Curriculum Leadership*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.
- Senge, P. (1994). *The Fifth Discipline: The art & practice of the Learning Organization*. New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc.
- State Department of Education. (1998). *Connecticut Common Core of Learning (CCL)*. Hartford, CT: Author.
- State Department of Education. (1999). *Connecticut Common Core of Teaching (CCT)*. Hartford, CT: Author.
- State Department of Education. (1998). *Connecticut Framework: K-12 curricular goals and standards*. Hartford, CT: Author.
- State Department of Education. (2001). *Handbook for the Development of a Teaching Portfolio 2001-2002, Elementary Education*. Hartford, CT: Author.