Exploding Myths, Exploring Truths: Humane, Productive Grading and Grouping in the Quality Middle School.

Comprising mostly succinct expository statements, guidelines, and charts, this presentation attacks many cultural and educational myths in the areas of the grading and grouping of students at the middle school level. It stresses the importance of understanding what intelligence and academic success really are, and suggests ways in which teachers can modify their attitudes and curriculum to help all students achieve academic success. It advocates an inverted pyramid structure of grading, providing as much success as possible for as many students as possible, in as many areas of school as possible. It also criticizes questionable grading practices, such as using varying grade scales, using zeros indiscriminately, failing to match testing to teaching, relying on surprise quizzes, and penalizing students for taking intellectual risks. It suggests remedies for such practices, including consistent and fair grading, letting students know what is expected of them, giving feedback before grades, and encouraging intellectual risk-taking. It suggests that students be grouped according to previous grades and performance, teacher and counselor recommendations, parent and student choice, demographics, and standardized test results. (MDM)

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EXPLODING MYTHS, EXPLORING TRUTHS: HUMANE, PRODUCTIVE GRADING AND GROUPING IN THE QUALITY MIDDLE SCHOOL

Barry Raebeck, Ph.D.

Themes

The Right to Be Intelligent

Exploding Myths:
...of the Culture
...of School
...of Teachers
...of Intelligence
...of Discipline
...of Teaching/Learning
...of Testing and Grading

Exploring Truths:
...of Legitimate Educational Goals
...of Success for Students
...of Evaluation
...of Grouping and Tracking
...of School/Home Relations
...of Sustaining Innovation
...of Play Teaching and Real Teaching

Questions and Comments from the Group

Note: due to the amount and quality of information to be communicated Barry will move quickly. Please save all comments (other than questions of clarification) for the conclusion of the presentation. Barry will be happy to stay longer still to continue the discussion, room availability permitting. Thank you—and glad you're here!
Specific Practices for Creation of a Quality School:

Grading/Evaluation
No grades as an option
*Hard to Fail does not mean Easy to Get an A*
Three Honor Rolls
Flexibility of letter grades: A, B, C for Outstanding, Commendable, Acceptable
Additional kinds of Grades: CP, I, U = Unacceptable (No D's or F's)
Virtually No Retention
Instant 8th Graders

Grouping
Pyramidal Structures
Fallacies of Grouping in an "Academic" District
No/Limited Grouping as an option
Flexible, Broad-based Grouping
Grouping without Tracking
Abolishing Leper Colonies
The Learning Lab

School/Home Relations
Letter of Commendation
Report Card
Progress Report
Thoughtfulness and Articulation
About Barry Raebeck, Ph.D.

Barry has been active in educational transformation for many years. He has served as a public school teacher, principal, counselor, and central office administrator, and has worked with students at all levels of education, kindergarten through graduate school. Dr. Raebeck frequently consults with school districts and universities throughout the East. He has published articles in Educational Leadership, Phi Delta Kappan, NASSP Bulletin, Education Digest, and The Clearinghouse, among others. Barry regularly presents at national conferences, including ASCD and NMSA.

Middle level transformation is an area of particular interest and expertise, as Barry has led such processes at the classroom, school, and district level. His recent book, Transforming Middle Schools: A Guide to Whole-School Change, published by Technomic, Inc, of Lancaster PA, details in an upbeat, readable, and easily-grasped fashion the essentials of transition to a truly effective middle school program. When he was principal of Thomas Harrison Middle School in Virginia, that program was recognized as exemplary by ASCD, featured on a University of Virginia statewide telecast, and Barry was asked to serve on the Virginia Department of Education Middle School Task Force.

Dr. Raebeck believes that the central issues of transformation are joy, quality, imagination, courage, and spirit. Without these elements, too many of our efforts will prove ineffectual, and too many of our schools will fail to thrive.

Currently, Barry is Director of Curriculum for the Abington PA Schools, a dynamic and increasingly diverse district in Montgomery County, just outside of Philadelphia. He may be reached at 970 Highland Ave, Abington PA 19001, phone (215) 881-2503, and welcomes communication from other educators.
If intelligence were innate, no man would be free.
If men were not equal, democracy as a system of government would lack a reason for being.

Always efforts have been made to justify every type of social discrimination with scientific or theological reasons: nature, not men, is the cause of the inequalities that justify the submission of some men to others.

Empires have been founded on the belief that there are peoples in conditions of natural inferiority.
Those who have concluded that races are not equal, start from the premise that their own race occupies a position of preeminence.
In every man who believes himself superior to his fellows by nature, there exists a potential racist.

The human brain has not varied since the Upper Paleolithic Age.
With the same brain, the number and quality of creative men have been increasing constantly.
Who produces them?...chromosomes...or education?
Education is the key.
What has changed and in turn caused change, is not the brain, it is education.
At birth, the minds of children forty thousand years ago were the same as the minds of today's children.
No one is torn civilized or primitive.

According to what is considered one of nature's own arrangements, women have been subjected to the greatest injustice ever perpetrated.
For centuries, men believed that women were programmed to feel and not to think, in the same way they were programmed for pain because they bore their children in pain.
Today we know that children can be born without pain and that woman has demonstrated herself to be as unquestionably capable of excellence in any intellectual activity as man.

Until now intelligence has been a privilege.
The last stronghold of privilege.
The most ill-distributed wealth on earth.
The cause and foundation of the remaining privileges.
Every oligarchy is in the last analysis an intellectual oligarchy.
Intelligence is a synonym for power.
Meditation on intelligence is meditation on power.
The power of intelligence constitutes the principal source of oppression in all of history.

Can any sort of teaching take priority over teaching students to think?
Culture is a collective heritage to which all human beings should have access.
But it only enriches the person who, through his power of understanding, may possess it.
The faculty, aptitude or capacity which allows the normal human being to become intelligent is all that is innate.
CULTURAL MYTHS

If we oppose one thing we support its opposite
If there are two sides to an issue an intelligent, informed person must support one or the other
There is not enough money, food, space, fuel, intelligence, etc. to go around
50% of all Americans who marry get divorced
Many Americans have a profound skepticism about the existence of God
Gasoline is far more expensive than it "used to be"
Apathy and ignorance among the electorate lead to non-voting in presidential elections

MYTHS in EDUCATION

SCHOOL
American schools are worse than ever
High school drop-out rates are deplorable
Our students test much lower than students in other nations
Discipline is major problem in secondary schools
Formal learning is superior to informal learning
People are better off with school than without it

INTELLIGENCE
Intelligence is quantifiable, IQ scores have objective meaning
Intelligence is fixed, innate, and finite
We can definitively determine who the Gifted and Talented students are
Students do better when grouped for ability
The faster learner/thinker is the smarter learner/thinker
People can be objectively classified by ability: Bright, Average, Slow/Dumb

TEACHING/LEARNING
True learning is arduous, even painful
What we say to students greatly impacts learning
Teachers must motivate students to learn -- Teachers must correct students
Teaching and learning are distinct entities -- The "affective" is separate from the "cognitive"
"Delivery of Instruction" = Teaching/learning
Many people (14% or more) are "LD"
People need to be taught to read -- Reading occurs at age 6, rather than between 3-9

TESTING and GRADING
Grades are necessary to motivate students to learn -- Grades are necessary as "quality control"
Grades, grading scales, and teacher-made tests provide objective information
SAT scores are correlated with school quality -- SAT and IQ scores predict life success
The failing of students provides accountability
Fewer students failing means more students getting "easy A's"
There is such a thing as an A, B, or C student

Barry Raebeck, 1992
More MYTHS in EDUCATION

TEACHERS

Are resistant to change
Need to be managed carefully
Cannot be trusted with -- keys, thermostats, phones, time, conference trips, teaching strategies, curriculum
Have a job that requires little special training
Are often overpaid and underworked

DISCIPLINE

Uniform standards lead to better behavior
Similar offenses must receive similar punishments
Disciplinary steps and procedures for all offenses should be clearly spelled out
Detention is an effective deterrent
Students need constant adult supervision
There are bad kids and good kids
Parents do not trust school people and will always side with their child
If you make an exception it will backfire
It is essential to maintain professional distance

Barry Raebeck, 1992
A Legitimate Educational Goal

As Much *Success* as Possible

For as Many *Kids* as Possible

In as Many Areas of *School* Life as Possible
Traditional/Meritocratic Grouping Pattern:
*Pyramidal*--*Success is Scarce*

- Elite Few
- Some Others
- Most Kids

Optimal/Democratic Grouping Pattern:
*Inverted Pyramid*--*All Kids Can Learn*

- Most Kids
- Some Others
- Lmtd. Few
| 12 QUESTIONABLE GRADING PRACTICES            |
| And Accompanying Remedies                   |

1. Varying Grading Scales  
*One Should be at Least as Likely to Pass as Fail*

2. Worshipping Averages  
*Use Professional Judgement, Make Exceptions*

3. Using Zeros Indiscriminately  
*Zeros have Rotten Effect on Student Averages*

4. Following Pattern of Assign, Test, Grade, Teach  
*Teach First Before Formal Evaluation*

5. Failing to Match Testing to Teaching  
*Closely Match Testing and Teaching*

6. Ambushing Students  
*"Pop" Quizzes are Punitive and Non-motivational*

---

R.L. Canady and P.L. Hotchkiss, 1989
7. Suggesting that Success is Unlikely
   *Success Breeds Success*

8. Practicing "Gotcha" Teaching
   *What is Wrong With Letting Students Know What is Expected of Them?*

9. Grading First Efforts
   *Give Feedback Before Grades*

10. Penalizing Students for Taking Risks
    *Policies Ought to Encourage Intellectual Risk-taking*

11. Failing to Recognize Measurement Error
    *Maintain Balanced, Thoughtful, Grading Approach*

12. Establishing Inconsistent Criteria
    *Teachers and Administrators Should Continually Review Grading Policies and Patterns*

R.L. Canady and P.L. Hotchkiss, 1989
### OUR EDUCATIONAL GOAL

To educate the whole person as fully as possible in 4 domains: the Intellectual, the Personal, the Social, and the Physical. All three are important and receive full emphasis in our programs. We believe that every student can learn successfully and become a productive, positive life-long learner.

### CORE CURRICULUM: PERFORMANCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic</th>
<th>Personal/Social</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Arts/Social Studies</td>
<td>Teacher(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/Teacher</td>
<td>I: Cooperative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1: Active Learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Works Independently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Grade Level:</td>
<td>All above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>above average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>below average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Below average</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Mathematics/Science | Teacher(s) |
| Teacher/Teacher | I: Cooperative | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|               | 1: Active Learner | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|               | Works Independently | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Mathematics Grade Level: | All above | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|               | above average | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|               | average | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|               | below average | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|               | Below average | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

| Physical Education/Health | Teacher(s) |
| Teacher/Teacher | I: Cooperative | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|               | 1: Active Learner | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|               | Works Independently | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Physical Fitness Test Results: | All above | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|               | above average | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|               | average | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|               | below average | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|               | Below average | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

### GRADES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core</th>
<th>Electives/Explorations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language Arts</td>
<td>Social Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Ed/Health</td>
<td>Resource</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### ELECTIVES: PERFORMANCE

1. Is creative and responsible
2. Produces quality work
3. Is developing new skills
4. Is responsible and cooperative
5. Understands concepts taught

### ADVISOR'S ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT GROWTH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Fall</th>
<th>Spring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>Abdominal Strength</td>
<td>delt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.A.L. SP.R.M.</td>
<td>F.A.L.</td>
<td>SP.R.M.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### OUR SCHOOL RULES

- Respect People
- Respect Property
LETTER OF COMMENDATION

Student Name (print) ___________________________ Date __________

Teacher/Administrator (print) _____________________________

The items checked below indicate exceptional behavior in that area. Your child may also be performing quite well in most or all other areas listed without that being officially noted in this way.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ATTITUDE</th>
<th>ATTENDANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>___ friendliness ___</td>
<td>___ regular attendance ___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ courtesy/respect ___</td>
<td>___ attentiveness ___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ cooperation ___</td>
<td>___ concentration ___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ appearance ___</td>
<td>___ getting to class on time ___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ open-mindedness ___</td>
<td>___ other __________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ persistence ___</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ citizenship ___</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ honesty/trustworthiness ___</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ manners/consideration of others ___</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ willingness to try new things ___</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ humor/enjoyment of the learning process ___</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ significant improvement in attitude/behavior ___</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ other __________________</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ other __________________</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

COMMENTS:_____________________________________
____________________________________
____________________________________

Signature_____________________________________

14
Criteria for Grouping Students

Previous Grades/Performance

Teacher Recommendation
Guidance/Admin Recommendation

Parent Choice
Student Choice

Current Performance

Demographics: Gender, Geographic, Racial Balance, etc.
School/District Philosophy

Diagnostic Tool/Test
Standardized Test Scores
A FLEXIBLE GROUPING ARRANGEMENT

Grouping for Mathematics and Language Arts

40% of students
99-50 percentile in achievement
(many factors—not just scores)

45% of students
70-30 percentile in achievement

15% of students
50-5 percentile in achievement

Grouping for Social Studies and Science

50% of students
First half of each group above

50% of students
Second half of each group above

Note: Achievement ranges are based on many factors not simply standardized test scores. These ranges will of course vary in different student populations.
**Grouping Without Tracking**

Flexible grouping by Achievements in Math and L.Arts. Regrouping in Social Studies and Science.

Letters represent groups of 12-15 students:
- A = Highest Achievement, H = Lowest Achievement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject: Period</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>L.Arts</th>
<th>SocStud</th>
<th>Science</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td>E, G</td>
<td>B, F</td>
<td>D, H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>E, G</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td>D, H</td>
<td>B, F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>B, D</td>
<td>F, H</td>
<td>A, E</td>
<td>C, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>F, H</td>
<td>B, D</td>
<td>C, G</td>
<td>A, E</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE LEARNING LAB

Replaces Remedial Reading
Fewer Kids, Served Better
Inviting Atmosphere
Wholistic Approach
Innovative Staff
Central Location
Part of a Team
PLAY TEACHING and REAL TEACHING

Play Teachers (PTs) Deliver Instruction to Students
Real Teachers (RTs) Do Teaching/Learning with Students

PTs Grade and Categorize Students
RTs Enable Students to Self-evaluate

PTs See Students as Subordinates
RTs See Students as Clients

PTs See Parents as Adversaries
RTs See Parents as Colleagues

PTs Distrust Research and Innovation
RTs Thrive on New Info and Methods

PTs Teach to Live
RTs Live to Teach

PTs View Peers as Competitors
RTs View Peers as Allies and Resources

PTs Believe Intelligence is Quantifiable
RTs Know Intelligence is Complex, Even Mysterious

PTs like Narrow, Consistent Rules
RTs like Broad and Flexible Rules

PTs Impose Punishments on the Group
RTs Deal with Individual Problems

PTs Go "By the Book"
RTs Read "The Book" and Throw it Away

Barry Raebeck, 1992
Elements of Dynamic Education

Barry S. Raebeck

A balance of freedom and discipline is sought in the classroom.

A balance of tradition and innovation is sought in the curriculum.

All participants are expected to do their best always.

All are encouraged to respect themselves, one another, and the environment.

Participants assume responsibility for their own learning.

Students are competing with their own potential, not with their friends.

Teachers are teacher/learners and students are learner/teachers.

Lasting knowledge is gained through understanding of structures and integrated wholes moreso than by memorizing isolated bits of information.

Intelligence is not something simply measurable, finite, nor merely innate.

All have the right to become increasingly intelligent through educational experiences that expand capacities and encourage continual growth.

The finest teaching/learning is simultaneously a joyous and rigorous process.