

The comic of the animal school resonated with me as to how ludicrous some of our requirements are in today's education system. I thought of the quote attached to this comic and credited to Einstein, "Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid." I first saw a version of the comic in fable form back in the mid to late 1990's and used it many times to advocate for differentiation especially for students who learned differently in general education classrooms. The comics also reminded me of the struggles my students have with traditional education and testing. PSSA and Keystone testing is fast approaching. Most of my students won't even try, behaviors escalate, and we run out of staff to handle the disruptive ones as the one or two who will try make feeble attempts to ignore the chaos. To date, none have scored above BASIC, a few basic, and most score below basic.

For my educational setting, rubrics are pretty much all I use for grading unless the assignment is a traditional summative assignment designed for recall or skill and concept with very concrete answers. I have had quite a bit of training in developing and using rubrics. However, I still feel I'm just a novice at creating them or modifying ones created by others. The one frustrating thing for me is not having the planning time as well as multiple discipline and content area preps with little to no current materials or curricula. The "work harder, not smarter" mantra of my supervisor adds to the frustration since she recommends using rubrics from sites like Rubistar or irubric, or ones developed by former teachers and current teachers in the program. I have found over the years that many of the generic rubrics just do not fit the academic needs of my special needs student population. The abstractness of the categories and descriptors causes them a great deal of confusion especially since many have very skewed perceptions of reality.

When the two types of rubrics were discussed and examples given, I was able to correctly identify the examples by my knowledge. The second rubric, I do not find very analytic. In my experience, having statements like complete understanding of the topic, able to apply the topic to several different areas is not specific enough for my students. For example: Recently, I had one of my high school Biology classes designing food webs. They were given a template with the boxes and arrows of energy transfer already placed with the sun as the starting point. This was only after days of practice using the "I do, we do, you do" strategies. We were to the "you do" segment. One young lady, randomly placed pictures in the boxes. She had a shrimp as a top predator, an orca as a producer, a tiger was in one of the boxes not in the top predator position, and other organisms that did not fit the system. My para-educator tried to help her by asking who eats who, writing categories like plants, or eats plants under the boxes. The Personal Care Assistant for another student who is also a retired teacher tried to help her, I tried to help her but had other students to assist both in person and virtually. We all kept pointing her to the rubric which was specific about having at least 7 organisms in the correct categories to get the full 4 points. The young lady was angry because she got a one. She kept repeating, how hard she worked to find pictures. Yes, she worked the whole period. However, she did not understand the concept. She believed she understood the topic. There was no convincing her that she had things out of order. She gets frustrated with my classes because she does not get an "A" or 100% on everything. As an education system, we've created this disconnect by handing out A's like candy. I liked the suggestion about adding in an effort criterion to the rubric. For a student like this young lady, she will be successful in at least one area.

Personally, I have vacillated with the idea of measuring creativity. I have had creative descriptors in most of my performance task rubrics because of the instruction I received or supervisor recommendations. I

never really considered myself creative and struggled with how to actually evaluate creativity with my own lack of confidence. When we researched the topic a few weeks ago, I was able to better understand creativity. I also found a rubric that used descriptors that actually will work very well with my population of students. Many of them have an IEP goal about working independently and not “copying” whether it is cut-and-paste or copying another’s idea. I found a suggestion from Susan Brookhart to use Imitative as a 1, Ordinary or Routine as a 2, Creative as a 3, and very creative (way above and beyond) a 4 (2013). Her ideas gave me a starting point for helping students who struggle with how they perceive reality as well as guide them towards independent thinking and not only imitating others.

The discussion on some of the non-content descriptors added into some rubrics resonated with me. I tend to have one line devoted to ELA descriptors like spelling, sentence structure, citations etc. for any of my performance task rubrics. When looking at a 4-point scale with 1 being the minimum earned, having so little of the rubric devoted to the ELA portion has students focusing more on understanding the concepts and their interactions. I can really see what they know, but also fulfill the requirements of cross-curricular applications of other disciplines required by administration.

On the last part of the session, Personification in STEM/STEAM was addressed. As the scientists were shown, I did not make the white and dead connection until it was mentioned. I was more focused on the question, “Where was Neil DeGrasse Tyson?” I guess subconsciously I was thinking about the “whiteness” but only because I use scientists from a variety of genders, races, and ethnicities to spark an interest in science in my 95% minority population of special needs emotionally disturbed students with multiple adverse childhood experiences. I intend to take a look at the secret lives site to add additional “AHA” moments into my classes to engage some of my “sleepers.”

References:

Brookhart, S. (2013, February). *Assessing creativity - Educational leadership*. Educational Leadership. <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/feb13/vol70/num05/Assessing-Creativity.aspx>