

ent ways. We can infer much about their teaching from their approaches to evaluation.

Read each measurement item below carefully. Then, in the space provided, assign each a taxonomic level as either 1.0, Knowledge; 2.0, Comprehension; 3.0, Application; 4.0, Analysis; 5.0, Synthesis; or 6.0, Evaluation. There are no repeats, with one measurement item per taxonomic category.

Taxonomic Level

Sergeant Friday Meets The Taxonomy: We Need More Than Just The Facts Ma'am

By
James M. Brewbaker

The load of data purveyed in a typical high school year is staggering. Just because the facts roll out, of course, does not mean they are either understood or retained. Most are ignored. A few may be deliberately identified as vital for the various tests, but many, if not most, of these facts mean little to the student.

(TheodoreSizer, Horace's Compromise)

... while students learn to read a wide range of material, they develop very few skills for examining the nature of the ideas that they take away from their reading. Though most have learned to make simple inferences about such things as a character's behavior and motivation, for example, and could express their own judgments of a work as 'good' or 'bad,' they generally did not return to the passage to explain the interpretations they made.

(National Assessment of Educational Progress,
Reading Thinking and Writing)

Theodore Sizer and NAEP are two among numerous authorities that have brought to light an apparent problem with the intellectual climate in secondary schools today. They point to a fact-bloated curriculum where students don't and perhaps can't do much with the facts they acquire, however briefly. Somewhat less apparent but equally telling a problem is the way teachers limit the intellectual demands of their classroom testing.

Before exploring this problem, spend a few minutes taking the quiz which follows. Imagine six classrooms, where six teachers of sophomore English, Level 2 have been working with simile and metaphor. Their honest hope is that students will grasp these elemental uses of figurative language well enough to see how they work in both literature and everyday discourse. Now it is time to find out who learned what and how well. But these six teachers of sophomore English, Level 2, despite common curriculum and text materials, elect to measure what happened to their students along the instructional way in six strikingly differ-

Teacher A, Mr. Arthur: Assume that a friend does not understand the definition of metaphor on p. 62 of your book. In the space provided, explain what metaphor is in words you and your friend would both understand.

Teacher B, Mrs. Barron: Attached are two examples of writing with several similes in each. Which, in your view, makes the better use of this figure of speech? Why do you think so? (One sample uses cliched similes; the other does not.)

Teacher C, Mr. Cinch: Define metaphor and give two examples we discussed in class.

Teacher D, Miss Debono: In the space provided, write one simile comparing Ronald Reagan to something else and one metaphor comparing the school football team to something else.

Teacher E, Ms. Edwards: Attached is a xerox copy of page 1 of Sunday's sports section. Using headlines only, find five similes or metaphors. For each, indicate (a) the element being compared, and (b) the element to which it is being compared.

Teacher F, Mrs. Fox: Invent a new product name for a soap, a deodorant, or shoes. Make the product's brand name a metaphor. Then write a commercial which is an extended metaphor favorably comparing the product to something else.

Ready to check your answers? Mr. Arthur has constructed a comprehension item for his students. By translating book talk into student talk ("words you and your friend would both understand"), students successful on this task will demonstrate knowledge that has a personal dimension. Mrs. Barron has devised a sophisticated measurement task calling for cognitive evaluation. Students in her class apparently have also studied cliched use of language, have learned that fresh comparisons are normally preferred, and now will try to show their ability to distinguish between the two.

In contrast, Mr. Cinch plans to measure student learning at the most basic level, that of knowledge. Even in the examples, his sophomores will cite those "we discussed in class." Miss Debono is concerned with application, reasoning that a student's success in framing a simple simile and a metaphor indicates understanding of each concept.

Ms. Edwards has formulated an exercise which sends students on a metaphor hunt calling for analysis of newspaper headlines. Unfamiliar with the examples

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well analyzing unfamiliar material, such as Ms. Edward's headlines, as they do parroting soon-to-be-forgotten definitions and examples. Thinking hurts. But this is only to be expected; no one does as well on the unfamiliar as he or she might on the commonplace. The obvious point is that lack of success in carrying out analytical tasks provides a powerful case for giving students more opportunity for analysis, not less--even when they fuss about it, as fuss they will.

Thus, as we worry about how external testing programs shape and misshape what we can do in English and language arts classrooms, we mustn't ignore the need to improve our own approaches to evaluation. Moreover, we must be increasingly sensitive to evaluation's effects on what our students learn. When Sergeant Friday, Oragnet's laconic detective still seen on late-night re-runs, asked a witness for "just the facts, ma'am," his television audience knew he could put those facts together into larger patterns and meanings. While many of our students will grow up to be bit players, just witnesses, we must keep Joe Friday in mind. The cybernetic world of the coming century will be led by men and women who learned more than "just the facts." My bet is that Joe Friday knew in his generation and the twenty-first century's leaders will have known in theirs, teachers like Mrs. Fox, Mrs. Barron, and Ms. Edwards. And maybe you.

WORKS CITED

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In the local sports page, her students will ferret out the poetic nuances of "Lions Devour Saints" and "Vikings Pillage Raider's Camp," thus demonstrating their feel for figurative language in popular media.

Mrs. Fox, finally, has devised an activity at the synthesis level through which, indirectly at least, she will find out how well students can use what they know of metaphor in creating an original commercial. Her students won't necessarily know they're being tested, an arrangement which has both advantages and disadvantages.

Which teachers, would you say, are superior measurers? Your answer depends on the relative weight you give such elements as objectivity, efficiency, the student's prior learning and testing experiences, and instructional purpose.

Certainly Mr. Cinch (knowledge) and, to a lesser extent, Mr. Arthur (comprehension) and Miss Debono (application) can size things up pretty quickly, put a few numbers in their grade books, and move on. Mr. Cinch will feel good, perhaps, about his objectivity, despite the view of many professionals that such test items, precisely framed though narrowly conceived, are as basically subjective as essay items. Miss Debono (application) should be able to check off rights and wrongs with reasonable accuracy and speed.

The other three teachers, by choosing classroom measurement which many would regard as subjective, may open themselves to criticism from those who value exactness more than a test situation in which learners use facts to complete tasks at a higher cognitive level. If nothing else, the marking and grading process may become sticky. Miss Barron (evaluation) may find that what is clichéd to her seems original and clever to several of her students; too. Without a rubber yardstick, or because of one, she may have trouble justifying her grades even when she is convinced of their soundness. If Ms. Edwards' (analysis) students have worked with headlines before, especially headlines as metaphor, they may accomplish the task she has set; if not, she'll spend as much time explaining what to do as the kids will in completing their work. And Mrs. Fox's (synthesis) students -- well, there's no telling what direction they'll take. If she assigns specific criteria for judging their commercials (three elaborations of the basic comparison, for example), she could gain some standardization of their creations but would probably sacrifice spontaneity at the same time. She also may have trouble coming up with letter or numerical grades she is comfortable with, and she should be ready to defend her product-oriented measurement both to querulous students and her principal.

But there is a paradox in all this. Despite the foregoing testing "problems," the Barrons (evaluation), Edwards (analysis), and Foxes (synthesis) are providing superior measurement. Many times good measurement is messy, involving as it does professional judgment of complex, varied behaviors. Much to their credit, the testing of Barron, Edwards, and Fox, for one thing, bespeaks a clearly intellectual intent and classroom environment. Facts, to these teachers, appear to be the raw material of learning -- elements to use in other activities -- rather than ends in and of themselves. What is more, through their testing, these teachers engage students in processes valuable in their own right.

A generation ago, the romantic critics claimed that children, ultimately, learn what we test. A more accurate way of putting this idea is to say that they learn how we test, and, when our tests are consistently and needlessly low level, our students respond in kind. In a sense, therefore, our classes are "about" both what and how we test, and the tests we use mirror our true objectives more accurately than either the system's curriculum guide or our individual lesson plans. The point is this: that learning simile and metaphor

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