Executive Director’s Column

Focus on Formative Assessment

by Pete Ziegler
Executive Director, Minnesota ASCD

Cut me, and I bleed schools. I have been working in education for almost 40 years. My wife is a kindergarten teacher, my son is the principal of an inner-city school, and my daughter, before family, was a pre-school teacher. We give CEUs to all who eat dinner at the Ziegler home. Working in schools is exciting; being able to share it with family is wonderful.

Year-long effort begins with leading expert

It is this deep passion for learning that has me so excited about Minnesota ASCD’s upcoming year. We are going to focus our efforts on formative assessment. Dr. Jim Popham, recognized by many as “THE Authority on Assessment” will start things off. He is facilitating our 4th Annual Teacher Leader Institute – Transformative Assessment in Action: An Inside Look at Applying the Process. The Program Committee has been working with him to design an experience that will assist teacher leaders, principals and schools in implementing a formative-assessment process. But it doesn’t stop there. During the 2011-2012 school year, Minnesota ASCD will host events for principals, teacher leaders, and all practitioners as they implement the process. We are expecting great things.

This edition of the Minnesota Report features an excerpt from an article by Dr. Popham (see page 3). The formative-assessment process, as described and taught by Popham, has the potential to change the way we teach and the way students learn.

I have to admit in my 40 years in schools I have seen many “transformations” come and go. Some of them I believed in, and some I still do. Here are a few of those which still make sense to me.

What if we actually had schools without failure?

When I graduated from college, my wife gave me a book written by William Glasser called Schools Without Failure. I read it, and I believed. I was headed to Iowa City to teach social studies. I believed that I could and that I should help build a school where failure was not an option. Fifteen years later I had the pleasure of hearing Dr. Glasser speak. After his address I went up to him with my well-worn, yellowing copy of Schools Without Failure. He turned the book over and over in his hands, saying nothing, just staring at it. After what seemed like an eternity, he looked me in the eye and said, “If schools had listened to me when this book first came out, they would not have to be paying me to be here today telling you the same things I said 20 years ago!” How true.

—continued on next page—
Executive Director’s Column (continued)

Focusing on the essentials
Imagine, if you will, “clearly focusing and organizing everything in an educational system around what is essential for all students to be able to do successfully at the end of their learning experiences.” That was the essence of Outcome Based Education – OBE. Focusing our energies on what is essential – imagine that! Has anyone read Schmoker’s newest book? It’s called Focus – Elevating the Essentials to Radically Improve Student Learning.

Research-based strategies
In Classroom Instruction That Works, Marzano, Pickering and Pollock identify nine research-based strategies that increase student performance. If we were to put these strategies into practice in all our classrooms, all children would learn.

Formative assessment
I am getting old, and maybe the last “transformation” that will be a part of is formative assessment.

In “Homage to a Hyphen: How to Keep the Formative-Assessment Process What It Should Be,” Dr. Popham makes the case to continue our efforts to improve teaching and learning by developing a formative-assessment process (see an excerpt on the next page and read the entire article on Minnesota ASCD’s web site: www.mnascd.org).

Here is an amazing quote from that article: “Happily, we now have available about four decades’ worth of empirical evidence attesting to the instructional dividends of the formative-assessment process. William (2007/08) reports that five reviews of more than 4,000 studies show clearly, when this process is implemented properly, it can ‘effectively double the speed of student learning.’ Let’s face it, 40 years of research showing that a particular process can double the speed of student learning is nothing to dismiss lightly!”

WOW! Double the speed of student learning, I agree, is nothing to dismiss. John Hattie in Visible Learning – A Synthesis Of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement reports an effect size of .9 for formative assessment – third highest effect of all contributions to learning he studied. We must be onto something.

So what can you expect to learn this coming year?
Minnesota ASCD’s series on formative assessment will help you and your school “double the speed of student learning” through the use of a formative-assessment process.

So, what exactly is the formative-assessment process? Popham describes it like this: “Using non-technical language, the formative-assessment process involves teachers’ and/or students’ using assessment evidence to make adjustments in what they’re doing. This assessment evidence can be garnered in a variety of ways – ranging from traditional, written tests to a wide range of informal assessment procedures such as securing students’ self-reported levels of their own understanding. This process revolves around the use of assessments to collect evidence, such evidence then being employed by teachers and/or students to decide whether they need to adjust what they are up to. The formative-assessment process uses assessments as an integral tactic to determine whether any adjustments are needed. The assessments employed during this process are, by definition, not the same thing as the process itself.”

Please join Minnesota ASCD as we continue our efforts to improve teaching and learning in Minnesota. The yearlong series on formative assessment is sure to impact your schools. Start your journey at the 2011 Teacher Leader Institute October 5-7 at Madden’s Classic Resort in Brainerd. You can sign up online in mid-April at www.mnascd.org. See you in October!

MINNESOTA REPORT

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“Leadership for Learning”
I love hyphens. Always have. Always will. If used properly, hyphens make things easier to read. This is because hyphenated words let readers know there's something still coming in a phrase that's being read, so the reader should hold off a bit before deciding on the meaning of what's being read at that instant.

For an illustration, ask yourself which of these two sentences is more easily understood:

(1) The teachers were dismayed with the test takers’ indifference.
(2) The teachers were dismayed with the test-takers’ indifference.

Upon reading the first sentence, many readers will initially conclude that the teachers were dismayed with the test itself rather than with the nonchalant attitude of students taking the test. In the second sentence, however, the hyphen between “test” and “takers’” makes it apparent the teachers’ dismay was directed toward students’ indifference, not toward the test.

Currently, the absence of a hyphen can seriously muck up the meaning of an instructional approach that’s capable of benefiting thousands of students. I refer to formative assessment or, more accurately, to the formative-assessment process. My contention is that the absence of a hyphen between “formative” and “assessment” inclines educators to accept an inaccurate conception of an instructional approach which, when properly employed, helps boatloads of children. When “formative assessment” is inaccurately thought of as a kind of test, however, it can turn out to be of little value to students.

Happily, we now have available about four decades’ worth of empirical evidence attesting to the instructional dividends of the formative-assessment process.

Recent reviews of more than 4,000 research investigations show clearly that when this process is well implemented in the classroom, it can essentially double the speed of student learning. Indeed, when one considers several recent reviews of research regarding the classroom formative-assessment process, it is clear that the process works, it can produce whopping gains in students’ achievement, and it is sufficiently robust so that different teachers can use it in diverse ways, yet still get great results with their students.

Briefly, let’s review what this thing is that appears to work so wondrously. Using everyday language, the formative-assessment process involves teachers’ and/or students’ use of assessment evidence to make adjustments in what they’re doing. This assessment evidence can be gathered in a variety of ways—from traditional written tests to a wide range of informal assessment procedures, such as securing students’ self-reports of their own understanding of an issue.

This process revolves around the use of assessments to collect evidence, and then the employment of such evidence by teachers and/or students to decide whether they need to adjust what they are doing. The formative-assessment process uses assessments as an integral tactic to determine whether any adjustments are needed.

When teachers are told, inaccurately, that formative assessment is a kind of test, this is akin to telling a would-be surfer that a surfboard is the same as surfing. While a surfboard represents an important ingredient in surfing, it is only that—a part of the surfing process. The entire process involves the surfer’s paddling out to an appropriate offshore location, selecting the right wave, —continued on next page—
choosing the most propitious moment to catch the chosen
down on the surfboard, and staying upright
rumbles toward shore. The surfboard is
process, but it is not the entire

choosing the most propitious moment to catch the chosen

wave, standing upright on the surfboard, and staying upright
while a curling wave rumbles toward shore. The surfboard is
a key component of the surfing process, but it is not the entire

process.

Similarly, an assessment is an important part of the formative-
assessment process, but it is only that – a part of the formative-
assessment process. The entire process involves decisions
about when to test and what to test, selection or construction
of suitable assessment procedures, judgments about whether
assessment-elicited evidence should lead to adjustments, and
choices about the nature of any adjustments. Assessments are a
key component of the formative-assessment process, but they
are not the entire process.

Why is it, then, that so many American educators regard
formative assessment as a type of test? This widespread
misconception often springs from a contrast between
"formative assessment" and "summative assessment." Although,
loosely speaking, this distinction between the summative and
formative functions of educational assessment makes sense,
clarity crumbles when teachers are told that “a formative
assessment” is a particular kind of test.

“Summative assessments” are regarded by many educators
as the tests used to make evaluative judgments about a
completed instructional sequence. The most obvious examples
of summative assessments these days are the large-scale
accountability tests administered annually by states to appraise
the effectiveness of their schools and districts. But summative
assessments can also refer to classroom assessments such as an
end-of-course exam that a teacher might use to determine how
well the teacher’s students have learned what the teacher was
trying to teach.

“Formative assessments” are typically thought of as those along-
the-way classroom tests that teachers create to help them and
their students get a fix on how well students are learning what
they are supposed to learn. Today, a number of commercial
vendors describe their “interim tests,” or their standardized tests
administered every few months, as incarnations of “formative
assessment.”

Whether it’s a novice surfer contemplating a wave or a
classroom teacher considering the formative-assessment process,
confusion about what’s to be attempted will definitely deter
progress. When teachers are told that they should employ “a
formative assessment,” they have been misled. That’s because it’s
not the test per se that is formative or summative. It is the use
to which the test’s results are put.

When we employ phrases such as “a formative assessment” or
“a summative assessment,” we are simply being sloppy with
our language. Unfortunately, many educators truly believe
formative assessment refers to particular kinds of tests that will
– based on ample research evidence – improve kids’ learning.
This simply is not so.

If we are to promote use of the formative-assessment process, it’s
crucial that more educators accurately understand the process in
the way that empirical studies have shown it works best. If
research-ratified versions of the formative-assessment process
are used widely by teachers, then many more students will learn
better and faster. But if formative assessment is regarded as
nothing more than a specific sort of test, its impact is apt to be
trivial.

How this important educational drama unfolds may depend, at
least a bit, on the way we use our hyphens.

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the effectiveness of their schools and districts. They can
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Editorial notes ...
Dr. Richard Cash, Minnesota ASCD President, has
been keeping a frantic pace since the publication of his
book Advancing Differentiation: Thinking and Learning
for the 21st Century. His president’s column will return
with the next issue.

And a special thanks to Dr. Deb Pitton for her work on
this issue while the editor was in England.

The full-length version of this article can be
found at www.mnascd.org under its original title:
“Homage to a Hyphen: How to Keep the Formative-Assessment
Process What It Should Be.”
ANNOUNCING THE 2011
TEACHER LEADER INSTITUTE

TRANSFORMATIVE ASSESSMENT IN ACTION:
An Inside Look at Applying the Process

with
Dr. W. James Popham

October 5, 6, 7
Madden’s Classic Resort – Brainerd, MN

Registration will open mid-April on our web site: www.mnascd.org
Members will receive a brochure with complete details later in the spring.

Minnesota ASCD is thrilled to announce that Dr. W. James Popham will lead our 4th Annual Teacher Leader Institute. Dr. Popham’s session will be the first event in Minnesota ASCD’s year-long series on formative assessment.

Assessment expert Jim Popham cuts through the jargon and the hype to provide the definitive nuts-and-bolts of formative assessment, a process with the power to completely transform teaching and learning.

Popham’s success and influence in his field are partly due to his lively, clear writing and speaking style and his ability to make complex issues understandable. Those attending the TLI will receive a copy of Popham’s new book and step-by-step guidance on how to build frameworks for formative assessment, how to carry out each of the processes, and how to effectively apply formative assessment.

Dr. W. James Popham

W. James Popham is a professor emeritus in the graduate school of education and information studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. His new book, Transformative Assessment in Action: An Inside Look at Applying the Process, was just released by ASCD. He is also the author of Classroom Assessment: What Teachers Need to Know; The Truth About Testing; Test Better, Teach Better; Transformative Assessment; Instruction that Measures Up; America’s “Failing” Schools; Mastering Assessment; Unlearned Lessons; and Everything School Leaders Need to Know about Assessment.

He has spent the bulk of his educational career as a teacher. His first teaching assignment was in a small eastern Oregon high school where he taught English and social studies while serving as yearbook advisor, class sponsor, and unpaid tennis coach. He is quick to point out that the recompense meshed ideally with the quality of his coaching. Most of his teaching career took place at UCLA where, for nearly 30 years, he taught courses in instructional methods for prospective teachers as well as courses in evaluation and measurement for graduate students. At UCLA he won several distinguished teaching awards. In January 2000, he was recognized by UCLA Today as one of UCLA’s top 20 professors of the 20th century.
In my family, depending on your size, you either become a pro-wrestler or a teacher. About 80% of us stand 4’10” to 5’5” and are educators, and a few of my cousins, those we endearingly refer to as the “mutants,” have joined the world of pro-wrestling.

Our last family reunion was over the holidays, and after dinner and before our 37th Annual Wrestle Mania parody, one of the “mutants” pulled me aside and asked me what I was up to these days. Usually he replies for me with, “About 4’11” eh?,” but I jumped ahead of him, put him into a headlock, and told him I was helping a committee of Minnesota teachers write English language arts standards. He feigned pain and interest and asked, “So, what’s your theme song?”

“Theme song? Really?”

“Yeah, it’s the most important thing you do before you take it on the road. You’ve gotta have an entrance theme.” (This from a man who once had to teach a former governor how to growl while doing wrestling interviews.)

Who knew? The Common Core, anchor standards, college and career readiness, benchmarks, grade level progressions, literacy in content areas, alignment, assessment … and now we have to have a theme song, too? I don’t know … I love music, but maybe theme songs are better left to John Cena, The Undertaker, and Rey Mysterio.

What got us to “Theme Song Readiness”?

In the fall of 2009, the National Governor’s Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) drafted the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects. The standards were research and evidence based, rigorous, internationally benchmarked, and aligned to college and career readiness. The intent was to produce a set of standards that reflected what is common in many states’ standards, eliminating the need for every state to independently create such a document, an inefficient and often expensive approach. Literacy skills are pretty universal, after all, whether you go to school in Wisconsin, Alabama, Oregon, or Minnesota.

The NGA and CCSSO asked the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) to provide recommendations on the draft documents. We convened educator focus groups during the 2009-2010 school year to provide feedback on a series of K-12 Standards drafts. The focus groups, representative of Minnesota K-16 educators, had a significant impact on the standards’ final draft, which was completed in June 2010. Over the course of the year, our input molded the content and structure of the Common Core.

Coincidently, Minnesota state statute required a review and revision of the 2003 Minnesota English Language Arts (ELA) Standards during the 2009-2010 school year. Because the Common Core Standards were so closely aligned with the Minnesota ELA standards and reflective of input from Minnesota educators, MDE adopted the Common Core as a basis for the 2010 Minnesota Academic Standards – English Language Arts K-12. Educators applied to serve on the Standards Committee, and we convened the committee and began the revision in mid-June. The group studied the Common Core Standards and input from national literacy experts. They added some wording to improve the clarity of the standards and added content that better represented Best Practices supported by research and valued in Minnesota schools. The committee also addressed media literacy, creative writing, and the contributions of Minnesota American Indian tribes and communities.

The 2010 Minnesota Academic Standards – English Language Arts K-12 draft document was published in September 2010 and is currently proceeding through the state’s formal administrative
rule-making process. Schools are to fully implement the new standards in the 2012-2013 school year. New MCA reading tests, aligned to the new standards, will be administered in the spring of 2013. The standards are available at [http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/Academic_Excellence/Academic_Standards/index.html](http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/Academic_Excellence/Academic_Standards/index.html).

**“Fewer, higher, clearer” are the hallmarks**

The new standards are fewer in number, higher in rigor and more clearly articulated. There are ten Reading, ten Writing, eight Speaking/Viewing/Listening/Media Literacy and six Language Standards. The 34 standards describe the knowledge and skills required for college and career readiness. These college and career readiness standards are called “anchor standards.”

The benchmarks are grade-specific and aligned to the anchor standards. For example, one College and Career Readiness reading anchor standard states, “Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.” The fourth grade benchmark of that anchor standard states, “Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from the details in the text; summarize the text.”

Students will learn to read more complex and more varied types of text. Informational texts are emphasized as much as literary texts. While students will gain skills in writing informational and narrative papers, there is a renewed emphasis on persuasive writing. Research, vocabulary acquisition, language conventions and media literacy skills are also emphasized. The standards and benchmarks are presented in a clear format, showing a progression of skills and knowledge across all grade levels.

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**Standards and benchmarks organized into strands**

The standards and benchmarks are organized into the following four strands:

- Reading
- Writing
- Speaking/Viewing/Listening/Media Literacy
- Language

The **Reading Strand** is divided into two sub-strands: Reading Literature and Reading Informational Text. In grades K-5 there is also a Reading Foundations sub-strand. Text complexity is more broadly defined, and there is an increase in the level of rigor of reading materials and in the amount of informational text read by students.

Persuasive, informational and narrative/creative writing are the focus of the **Writing Strand**. Writing process and research are also included in the strand, as is writing on demand and extended writing.

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**The new standards require shared responsibility since all students are expected to read and write in all content areas, not just language arts.**

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The **Speaking/Viewing/Listening/Media Literacy Strand** addresses both skills required in formal speaking/listening situations as well as skills needed in speaking situations that require collaboration. Media knowledge and skills are significant in this strand.

Vocabulary, language conventions, and knowledge of language are addressed in the **Language Strand**.

While the standards and benchmarks are organized by strand, the processes of communication are closely connected and integrated. It is expected that teachers will integrate the strands. For example teachers will link reading to writing and speaking, and language skills will be woven into reading, writing and speaking skills.

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**All content areas play key role in new standards**

The new standards require that teaching and assessing reading and writing be a shared responsibility. Students at all grade levels are expected to read and write in all content areas, not just in the language arts curriculum. Because the standards have a college and career readiness focus, students will need to be able to read in a variety of disciplines. Students will also need to know how to read informational texts as well as literary texts. Informational texts are a common vehicle for learning in the social studies, science, and technical subjects.

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**Schools move forward in implementing the standards**

Across the state English language arts, social studies, science and technical subjects teachers have given the new 2010 **Minnesota Academic Standards — English Language Arts K-12** a warm reception. It’s been a busy and wonderful eight months supporting teachers and traveling to Minnesota schools and regions with ideas I’ve learned from teachers in other districts. Teachers are welcoming information and ideas that will help them align and implement the standards. MDE is also working in partnership with Minnesota ASCD, the Minnesota Council of Teachers of English, Minnesota Reading Association, and the Minnesota History Center to provide professional development opportunities focused on the standards.

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**Three upcoming ELA standards workshops**

Minnesota ASCD will host an ELA standards workshop in Owatonna on April 11, Willmar on April 28, and Brainerd on May 3. I will look forward to meeting you if you can attend one of these events. Register at [http://www.mnascd.org/registration/index.cfm](http://www.mnascd.org/registration/index.cfm).

Please feel free to contact me with your questions and concerns about the ELA Standards and other literacy education topics at charon.tierney@state.mn.us or 651-582-8643. And if you happen to think of a good theme song, please send it my way.
This January, I was selected along with 40 some Minnesota educators to be part of the social studies standards committee charged with revising the 2004 Minnesota social studies standards. Because I was the state social studies specialist during the standards writing process in 2004, I hesitated to apply to be on the committee because I knew too well how much time, thought, and effort go into standards development. However, I also knew that I could contribute a unique perspective to the committee, and I held part of the institutional memory of what happened more than six years ago. My principal encouraged me to participate as well. Plus, I looked forward to working with a number of colleagues and friends that I had known in my years at the state.

As the former state specialist and witness to the 2004 process, my first impulse in writing this was to compare what happened then with what is going on now. However, describing in detail what went right or wrong – and the craziness of it all – are stories better suited for telling over a cold beer, if anybody’s buying. Suffice it to say that the people at the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), like good historians, learn from the past. The standards-writing process, under the capable direction of Dr. Beth Aune, has become less of a political process and more of a scholarly, deliberative discussion of what is best for students. Although MDE has designed a logical, deliberative process, the legislative decisions themselves don’t always make sense. Even though the social studies standards will not be implemented in school districts for another few years, the final version of the standards is due in May. This may not be a problem in all areas. For instance, economics and geography have well-defined, discrete concepts such as scarcity and population growth that make it easier to delineate what needs to be taught. History, however, presents a different challenge since the content is almost limitless, and every content decision is subject to resistance by one group or another. Do we teach social history, emphasizing race, gender and social structures, or do we teach political history, emphasizing leaders and political movements, or do we try to do both and risk overwhelming students with so much information that they retain little of what we taught? As a member of the world history sub-committee, I don’t want to complain that our job is more challenging, but guess which committee is behind on our work!

What are some of the other challenges? As Jessica Ellison, Communications Specialist at the Minnesota Historical Society explained in the fall 2010 issue of Minnesota Report, one of the biggest changes schools will see in the revised standards is a move away from grade banding K-3, 4-8, 9-12, to grade-level specific standards K-8 – a change not unique to the social studies. The thinking behind this legislative requirement is that the content will be consistent across the state, and that students who move to a different school won’t face gaps in...
their learning. It also shows teachers more clearly what content they are responsible for and removes the temptation to say, “Well, they’ll need to address that next year.” The downside, of course, is that some districts may need to change their scope and sequence. The elementary teachers on the committee have been extremely valuable in helping us understand what is developmentally appropriate at each grade level, as well as what pressure teachers face to raise scores in reading and math. Also, a number of committee members have gone back to their districts for feedback on possible configurations, but we know that not everyone will be happy. When people see the first draft of the standards in March, their first reaction might be, “Why didn’t they think of that?” and the answer is, we probably did. We needed to follow the legislative mandate and make a decision based on the best information available. However, if we did fail to think of something, the public has the opportunity for feedback to the committee.

Another thing that might concern some is that in areas of the standards – e.g., high school world history – the number of standards and benchmarks needs to be drastically reduced in order to be able to teach the content in a year-long or semester-long course. (I think I hear cheering from the teachers!). Using the rule of thumb that we can effectively teach one or two benchmarks per week, it becomes mathematically apparent that we cannot cover all the material in the current world history standards. Some people’s favorite standards might disappear. Others who mistakenly equate quantity with rigor might think that we are lowering our expectations. However, as a classroom teacher who has worked with the current standards, I look forward to having a useful, manageable, coherent set of standards to assist me in designing my course, instead of a long list of things reminding me what little time I have.

By the end of May, we will have a revised set of social studies standards ready to implement in 2014.

By the time you read this article, the public review phase of the standards will be closed. The committee will be taking your input and considering it in the next draft that will be presented to experts in the field for another round of review before we craft the final draft. By the end of May, we will have a revised set of social studies standards ready to implement in 2014. My hope is that, despite some unreasonable demands and expectations from the legislature, we will have a set of social studies standards that can guide curriculum development, as well as demonstrate the significance and importance of the social studies in our schools.

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Charlie Skemp teaches at Henry Sibley High School in Mendota Heights. He is the editor of the Minnesota ASCD newsletter, Minnesota Report, and last year earned his doctorate in educational leadership from the University of St. Thomas.
Developing Teacher Competency and Confidence in Differentiating Instruction

Dr. Amy Vizenor shares key ideas from the Minnesota ASCD March 9 conference, “Taking Differentiation to the Next Level: Ensuring Student Learning,” featuring Dr. Richard Cash and Dr. Diane Heacox.

Question: If I implement a tiered lesson in my classroom but an administrator is not there to observe me, is it still differentiation?

Answer: Of course it is!

In the opening session of the March 9 Minnesota ASCD differentiation conference, Drs. Diane Heacox and Richard Cash engaged participants in an exercise to determine whether or not each of several classroom situations was differentiated instruction. Laughter and conversation filled the room as attendees discussed scenarios, identifying elements that could be considered differentiation, as well as elements that were inconsistent with differentiation.

Heacox provided the following six principles of differentiated instruction to guide participants in their analysis, asking, “Do the activities exemplify …”

1. Deep understanding of the interests, learning profile and readiness needs of your students?
2. Clarity and focus on what you want your students to know, understand and be able to do?
3. Active use of formal and informal pre-assessment and formative assessment to guide your instructional decisions?
4. Opportunities that can motivate learning through student choice?
5. Matching students to tasks that are “just right, right now” for them through the use of tiered assignments?
6. The use of flexible grouping to manage and organize students by likeness rather than differences?

The large-group discussion that ensued revealed definite shades of gray within the situations provided. However, I was struck by a few key ideas during that conversation.

Intellectually gifted and academically talented students

Cash and Heacox noted the difference between these two types of students, describing the intellectually gifted student as an exceptional, high-level student who may not be good at “doing school.” On the other hand, the academically talented student is a bright student who performs well and aims to please the teacher. In differentiated instruction, neither of these types of students should be intentionally grouped with lower-performing students for the purpose of instructing other students because (1) the students who “get it” easily do not make good teachers since they cannot necessarily explain how they gain their understanding; and (2) differentiated instruction involves grouping like students together, based on readiness, interest, or learning profile.

Respectful tasks

Ensuring that all students are valued, honored, and respected in the learning environment is a key philosophy that undergirds differentiated instruction. Incorporating respectful learning tasks for all groups is a key part of that idea. During our discussion, Cash asserted that low-ability students often perform poorly because they do not get the chance to do anything meaningful; rather, they are in the “louder and slower” section of the classroom. The speakers identified three criteria for making sure that varying tasks are respectful: (1) all students take about the same amount of time to complete the tasks, (2) each of the tasks is as engaging as the others, and (3) all students need to put forth about the same amount of effort to complete the tasks.

Thinking and learning in the 21st century

Later in the day, Cash and Heacox both individually addressed the idea of 21st century thinking and learning skills, reviewing the ways that today’s learners are different and the types of skills in which they will be expected to engage. Cash profiled the 21st century learner, noting that today’s learners “will never know Fergie as a princess,” but rather as a lead singer for the Black-Eyed Peas. As I listened to Cash talk about the scientifically-supported differences between males and females, I realized that maybe it was not my husband’s fault that he could not remember to gather his part of our tax information without an e-mail reminder! However, what I truly took away from that session was the significance of meaning: “All people want to be competent at meaningful tasks.” How can we ensure that our classrooms are replete with the types of meaningful tasks in which our 21st century learners long to engage?

At the synthesis level

The differentiation conference offered participants wonderful opportunities to think critically about their teaching, to identify new strategies and ideas, and to network with other educators. As I left the conference, I asked a woman walking down the hall with me what she thought of the day. She replied that she was “at the synthesis level of Bloom’s.” I did not think I was quite there, but that’s okay. After all, isn’t that what differentiation is all about?
Membership Form

Name (first, last, middle initial): _______________________________________
Position/Title: _________________________________________________________
School Affiliation (please include ISD# whenever possible): 
____________________________________________________________________
Mailing Address (circle one): Work    Home
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
Work Phone (     )________________      Home Phone (     )_______________
FAX: (circle one) Work    Home
(     )__________________________ E-mail: _______________________
Position (check one):
☐ Director of Curriculum or Instruction    ☐ Supervisor
☐ District-Level Administrator or Specialist    ☐ Full-Time Student
☐ Principal, Assistant, or Associate    ☐ Professor, Dean or other University
☐ Superintendent, Assistant, or Associate    ☐ Teacher
☐ Other _________________________
☐ New Member    ☐ Renewal
Are you currently a member of our parent organization, International ASCD?
☐ yes    ☐ no
Annual Membership Dues:
$35.00 Active      $5.00 student/retired
If you chose student or retired, please enter the name of your school or former employer: __________________________________________________________
Optional – Enter your ethnic origin: _______________________________________

Membership form for you and your colleagues

Pass the form on this page to your friends, or make copies and distribute them among colleagues who can benefit from membership in Minnesota ASCD. The $35 for dues provides basic funding for organizing several conferences and preparing follow-up materials, publishing newsletters, organizing Curriculum Expos, and other services for Minnesota educators.

One key feature of a membership in Minnesota ASCD is the unique opportunity it provides to educators in all career tracks to network with each other, share important ideas and information, and gain insights into the latest developments in educational initiatives designed for curriculum and instruction.

Thanks for your own membership, and many thanks for encouraging others to join!

Please mail complete application with a check payable to Minnesota ASCD to:
Lori Sandvig
5033 West 56th Street
Edina, MN  55436
Minnesota ASCD members recently elected Charon Tierney as the new president-elect. She will spend one year as president-elect under the tutelage of our current president, Richard Cash, and begin her two-year term as president in the summer of 2012. Mike Snyder was re-elected for a second two-year term as treasurer. The Minnesota ASCD Board of Directors is pleased to welcome these newly elected officers to our leadership team, and we want to introduce them to you!

**President-Elect: Charon Tierney**

Charon Tierney is the English Language Arts (ELA) Specialist for the Minnesota Department of Education. She has been an educator for over 30 years, including 20+ years as an English teacher in Osseo and Willmar Public Schools. She also worked in research and development of graduation standards beginning in the 1990’s as a pilot site director and, later, as a lead in the creation of the 2003 and 2010 ELA standards. During a seven-year stint as a Minnesota Educational Effectiveness Program (MEEP) regional coordinator, she helped educators in the 40 districts she served understand, personalize and operationalize state mandates in ways that best supported student learning. As the MDE ELA specialist, she created a statewide Quality Teaching Network, providing teachers with professional development that they could, in turn, use and teach to colleagues in their home and neighboring districts. Currently her work is focused on developing resources, networking, tools, and support around instruction, curriculum and assessment. Charon maintains her teaching license and has advanced degrees in Curriculum and Instruction, as well as K-12 Principal and Superintendent Licensures. She serves on the Minnesota ASCD Board and cochairs the Program Committee.

**Treasurer: Mike Snyder**

Mike Snyder is currently a fourth-grade teacher at Middleton Elementary in the South Washington County School District. He has a degree in Early Childhood Education from the University of Wisconsin-Stout, Elementary Education certification from the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, a Master’s in Education from St. Mary’s University, Winona, and a K-12 Principal License from St. Mary’s University, Minneapolis. Mike has been a teacher in the South Washington County School District since 1999. He has been a Minnesota ASCD board member for four years. Over the past year he attended both ASCD leadership conferences: the L2L and LILA, and he advocated for education while in Washington, D.C. Mike says that being associated with Minnesota ASCD brings many opportunities to meet and discuss with educators across the state educational trends and ways in which we can all work together to advocate for Minnesota students.

**About the role of the treasurer:**

It is important to note that Minnesota ASCD has a system in place to manage its fiscal responsibility and ensure that members’ fees are well spent. The finances of a non-profit organization such as Minnesota ASCD can sometimes be quite complicated. Assuring our non-profit status, filing taxes as a non-profit, meeting payroll and payroll taxes are just a few of the issues that need to be dealt with. Following the two terms served by Rose Chu as our treasurer, the board decided to move to a new model for managing our finances. Because Rose had done such an outstanding job of getting our affairs in order, and realizing the challenges facing a volunteer treasurer who might not be ‘up to speed’ on finance and tax issues, the Board of Directors created a new position, Financial Officer, and appointed Rose Chu to this role. Mike Snyder was elected as Minnesota ASCD’s treasurer, and in this capacity, he is officially Rose’s “boss.” In effect, the two work together to manage our finances. Both are authorized to sign checks and pay expenses. Both work to provide monthly financial statements and provide information and updates related to our expenditures and revenue. This new organizational structure has provided a great working relationship – one that serves the organization well!