

Introduction

Focusing on Standards in the Classroom

In this time of standards for student learning, high-stakes testing, and accountability for all, teaching has become more challenging than ever. I know of no educators who would disagree with the previous statement! Without a doubt, the pressure to teach the standards (see Box 0.1 for a definition) and to have all students succeed on the tests has complicated the already-complex task of teaching children. So, as one teacher asked me recently, “How do I do it all and still enjoy the journey?”

Box 0.1

Standards

Standards are statements by national organizations, states, and local school districts to clarify the expectations for student learning. They state what students are expected to know and be able to do with that knowledge when they reach a benchmark or exit the system.

I do believe that it is possible to implement standards in the classroom, motivate students to become engaged in their learning, and enjoy the process of teaching at the same time. The first step is to get a clear picture of what the standards demand of students and how these demands will impact the way we teach and assess students on a daily basis. The second step is to incorporate four major components into classroom instruction and assessment. These components are a synthesis of many best practices already available for effective teaching, and, when in place, they create the type of classroom that will be necessary for implementing state content standards. This four-part approach also offers a broad enough frame to allow teachers to add new research-based methods as they become available. The best part, though, is that in this type of classroom, teaching is fun again.

The premises in this book are based on the states’ standards documents and how they should guide classroom instruction and assessment. I am not ignoring the fact that states are using high-stakes tests to measure student learning, but I believe the standards are the bigger picture and

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come closer to describing what students will need to know and be able to do to succeed in school and beyond. If students do, in fact, learn what is in the standards, they will be able to succeed on the tests. They could, however, pass many of the tests now being used and not meet the standards in their states. For additional discussion of high-stakes testing and its relationship to standards and classroom practice, please see the Conclusion.

■ A POSITIVE VIEW OF STANDARDS

As we approach discussions on standards, we should be positive. Realizing that these statements of what students should know and be able to do when they reach a benchmark or leave school are a step in the right direction and will help us ensure student success. They can guide us toward some of the things we want most from our students and our schools—the development of successful, responsible adults who will take active and positive roles in our communities. As Mizell (2000), director of the Program for Student Achievement at the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, said in a speech to a conference of representatives of states, school systems, and schools participating in the Making Middle Grades Matter initiative of the Southern Regional Education Board on July 10, 2000:

Standards . . . are not the enemy. Fear of change is the enemy. Weak curriculum is the enemy. Lack of will and effort is the enemy. But standards are not the enemy. They can be a useful weapon. What makes the difference is how you think about standards and use them. Standards are not for the purpose of punishing students for their academic deficiencies. Standards are not an excuse for narrowing a teacher's instruction to prepare students to pass a high-stakes test. (p. 5)

I agree with Mr. Mizell because I believe that the standards are for the purpose of helping schools and teachers coordinate their efforts to prepare students well for their futures. Clear learning standards for students can help us see where we are now, what our goals need to be, and what steps we need to take to meet those goals. Standards are an opportunity for us all to work together for the good of students, and if we could see standards in this positive light, we would have a much better chance of helping students meet the higher expectations.

■ TAKING A BIG-PICTURE LOOK AT STANDARDS

To deal rationally with the current pressure to meet standards, educators need practical ways to determine just what the standards mean for students, for teachers, and for administrators. Teachers who are teaching specific grade levels or content areas where the state tests occur are certainly experts in their own segment of expectations for students. But they need to see the big picture, to know what the end result of the child's learning should be, and to recognize their own part in creating the graduate that can meet the learning standards.

Clarifying what the standards really demand of students is crucial to being able to create the type of classroom needed to meet these demands. Therefore, I am offering a process for examining state standards for student learning to determine their implications in the classroom. As a group goes through this process and looks at their local expectations for student learning, they must answer three significant questions (see Box 0.2) to clarify what should be done at the local level to address the standards. The first question is, What are these standards demanding of students? After these demands have been noted, we have to ask, How are they different from what was demanded of students in the past? The differences between previous expectations and standards students must now meet will be the driving force for change in classrooms and schools. Because of this, Question 3 is, What are the implications of these demands and differences for classroom and school practices? Having teachers, administrators, students, parents, boards of education, and the community surrounding the school answer these questions is essential for building a rationale and support for school change that is aligned with national, state, and local student learning standards.

Box 0.2**Three Questions to Ask About Standards**

1. What do the standards demand of students?
2. How are these demands different from what was required in the past?
3. What are the implications of these differences on classrooms and schools?

What Do Standards Demand of Students?

To answer this question, we need to look at some sample standards representing different content areas. As a teacher, I would look at my own state's standards, but for our purposes, I have chosen sample standards in the various content areas from different locales (Box 0.3). The sample standards in Box 0.3 represent exit standards that would be expected of a graduate from high school. I feel all teachers, K–12, should be examining and discussing the kind of graduate being required so that they can do their part in contributing to that result.

To see how this exercise works, please take a moment to consider the samples offered. Do not look for specific pieces of content that students must know but at the demands that transcend content areas and, therefore, must be addressed by all who are teaching students. It is these common strands, in fact, that are the major differences between these standards and what we have always taught and tested in schools. As you look at these sample student learning standards, note the common threads and common language used. What do you see being required of students? You can use the space below the standards to record your observations if you like. You can also compare your responses to those from a teacher group in

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Box 0.3

Sample Student Learning Standards

Sample 1

New York State Learning Standards and Core Curriculum in Mathematics (Rev. 2005), fifth grade, Problem Solving strand

Students will apply and adapt a variety of appropriate strategies to solve problems.

- 5.PS.10: Work in collaboration with others to solve problems.
- 5.PS.11: Translate from a picture/diagram to a number or symbolic expression.
- 5.PS.12: Use trial and error and the process of elimination to solve problems.
- 5.PS.13: Model problems with pictures/diagrams or physical objects.
- 5.PS.14: Analyze problems by observing patterns.

Retrieved February 24, 2008, from <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/mst/math.html>.

Sample 2

Illinois Learning Standards for Social Science (Illinois State Board of Education, 1997)

State Goal 16: Understand events, trends, individuals, and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the United States, and other nations.

Late High School: 16.A.5a Analyze historical and contemporary developments using methods of historical inquiry (pose questions, collect and analyze data, make and support inferences with evidence, report findings).

Retrieved February 23, 2008, from http://www.isbe.net/ils/social_science/standards.htm.

Sample 3

Science Content Standards for California Public Schools (California State Board of Education, 2000), Grades 9–12: Investigation and Experimentation

- 1) "As a basis for understanding this concept and addressing the content in the other four strands (physics, chemistry, biology/life sciences, and earth sciences), students should develop their own questions and perform investigations." For example, item i states, "Students will analyze the locations, sequences, or time intervals that are characteristic of natural phenomena (e.g., relative ages of rocks, locations of planets over time, and succession of species in an ecosystem)." (p. 52)

Retrieved February 23, 2008, from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/scinvestigation.asp>.

California State Board of Education 1430 N Street, Suite #5111 Sacramento, CA 95814

Sample 4

North Carolina Standard Course of Study in English Language Arts, English IV 9 (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2004)

- Competency Goal #2: The learner will inform an audience by exploring general principles at work in life and literature.
- 2.01: Locate, process, and comprehend texts that explain principles, issues, and concepts at work in the world in order to:
 - relate complex issues from a variety of critical stances.
 - discern significant differences and similarities among texts that propose different ideas related to similar concepts.

Retrieved February 23, 2008, from <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/curriculum/languagearts/scos/2004/30english4>.

Sample 5

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Health Education Grades 7–8 (Texas Education Agency, 1998)

- 1) Health information. The student comprehends ways to enhance and maintain personal health throughout the life span. The student is expected to:
 - analyze the interrelationships of physical, mental, and social health;
 - identify and describe types of eating disorders such as bulimia, anorexia, or overeating;
 - identify and describe lifetime strategies for prevention and early identification of disorders such as depression and anxiety that may lead to long-term disability; and
 - describe the life cycle of human beings including birth, dying, and death.

Retrieved February 23, 2008, from <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter115/ch115b.html#115.23>.

Texas (Table 0.1). They were looking at the *Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills* (Texas Education Agency, 1996, revised 2001) document, but you may be surprised to see similarities with your own responses. One observation I have had as I worked with various state standards is that, although the language varies in the documents, they seem to be making similar demands on students.

Standards Are Connecting Content Areas

One of the first things teachers comment on as they analyze their state standards is that the boundaries between content area disciplines are blurring. This is appropriate because if we want to prepare students for success in a complex world, we must see that discipline knowledge is not used in isolation. In fact, real-world problems are, by their very nature,

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Table 0.1 Demands, Differences, and Implications of Texas Standards

<i>Demands</i>	<i>Differences</i>	<i>Implications</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Think critically * Solve open-ended problems * Communicate in many ways in all content areas * Analyze information * Identify patterns * Apply concepts * Predict results * Demonstrate knowledge * See real-world connections * Use technology * Work independently and with others * Gather information * Connect one discipline with others * Present data * Critique ideas and works * Organize data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Less memorization and more <i>thinking</i> * More student responsibility for their learning * More application of what is learned * Use of technology * More connection between content areas * Expectations that students write in all classes, even math * More connections to the work outside school * Expectations of active learning * Students working together and talking about what they are learning—class not always quiet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Different teaching style: fewer lectures, more discussion * Cooperative learning strategies * Students writing in all classes * Teachers connecting content to real world * Teachers learning about technology and planning for kids to use it * Teaching of critical thinking * More staff development about how to get kids doing more * More current resources for content areas

interdisciplinary. To illustrate this move toward integration, the New York State Education Department (2005), for example, has listed math, science, and technology in one curriculum document.

Standards Require More Than Memorizing

Another observation about the standards is that complex critical-thinking processes are demanded along with content knowledge. Students cannot meet the standards simply by memorizing facts. They must also be able to pose questions, analyze data, make and support inferences, comprehend texts, relate complex issues, discern significant differences and similarities, organize, and interpret. We always worked with students to see that they could do these things, but, in the past, most curriculum documents did not require such skills.

Perhaps the most obvious demand of the standards is, however, that students are expected to be able to apply the content they have learned in complex ways. The standards' statements have a large number of action verbs, and they all say, "the student/learner will. . . ." These facts make it clear that the students are expected to *do* something with the information they have been taught. The ability to use content knowledge in unpredictable situations is a survival skill in the adult world. In the mid-1990s, Daggett (1994), an international expert on standards and assessment, pointed this out by presenting a new taxonomy for learning that was based

on the context in which learners could apply content knowledge. He called it the Application Taxonomy and said that it used the real-world context that students would be operating in as adults to set levels of competence (Box 0.4). The highest level of learning, according to this model, is having the ability to use content information in a complex and unpredictable situation in the world beyond school. Judging from the wording of standards, they also require the ability to apply content knowledge in complex situations.

Box 0.4**Application Taxonomy**

Level 1: Knowledge of one discipline

Level 2: Application of that knowledge within that discipline

Level 3: Application of that knowledge across disciplines

Level 4: Application of that knowledge to real-world, predictable problems

Level 5: Application of that knowledge to real-world, unpredictable problems

Sample of Leveled Tasks Using Map Skills

1. Student knows, can name, and can explain map symbols.
2. Student can read a map and answer questions about it in a geography class.
3. Student uses map-reading skills learned in geography to read a topographic map of land forms in earth science class.
4. Student plans a family trip from Denver, Colorado, to St. Louis, Missouri.
5. Students use a road map to figure out where they are in New Orleans and how to get back on the proper road when lost.

SOURCE: Adapted from W. Daggett (1994, July 6–10), *Designing curriculum for today's and tomorrow's labor market demands*. Materials from workshop presented at the Reaching New Heights in Learning conference, Vail, Colorado.

How Are These Demands Different From What Was Required in the Past?

After creating a list of what standards demand, it is important to determine how these are different from what was expected of students in the past. This is a very interesting question, and answers will vary somewhat based on a person's experience in school as well as on the nature of the student learning expectations in a particular school community. Some people will look at the standards and remark that they match what was expected of students when they went to school or began teaching. Most, however, will immediately exclaim that these standards don't really look like what they had to do to graduate from high school. In fact, many will admit that

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they really did not have to do very much in school other than memorize and stay out of trouble.

There are many differences between the student learning standards at the beginning of the 21st century and what was officially expected of the last generation of public-school students. Admittedly, individual teachers throughout the ages have expected their students to do more than simply memorize factual information, but statewide school systems did not legislate these expectations as they have done with modern standards documents. Some of the differences in past and present expectations may vary in degree, depending on which state's standards you are reading, but the following list gives some of the main ways that current standards change the type of graduates we want from our school systems.

Students are now

- Expected to do critical thinking as opposed to only memorizing facts
- Expected to ask questions as well as answer them
- Held accountable for all communication skills—listening and speaking, understanding information communicated through various mediums, and reading and writing
- Asked to integrate curriculum areas and relate pieces of discrete information to a bigger picture instead of just knowing a finite list of facts
- Expected to take more responsibility for their learning and to become actively involved in the learning process instead of sitting quietly and passively in class
- Required to deal with and understand broad concepts in discipline areas instead of only small, isolated facts
- Asked to gather and organize data instead of just taking in information that has already been collected and sequenced for them
- Required to learn and use technologies that were not even on the horizon when their parents were in school

Another significant difference between the standards and what was officially expected of students in the past is that the requirements are for all students. It used to be accepted that only certain students would meet high-level academic requirements. In the past, for example, New York State demonstrated this expectation by granting Regents and non-Regents diplomas. The Regents diplomas required that students take a challenging curriculum and pass Regents exams in different content areas. Now all students must pass the Regents exams to receive a high school diploma. States may have to modify their criteria for high school graduation as the implications of the high-stakes tests are felt by students and parents, but the learning expectations put forth in the standards documents currently illustrate a version of something reformers have been saying for the past few years: "All students can and will learn."

What Are the Implications of These Differences for Classrooms and Schools?

We do not have to worry about the things in the standards that are the same as what we are already doing. It is the differences between the standards and previous expectations for student learning that will drive change. With that in mind, let's go back and take a look at just one of the

differences listed in Table 0.1 to see what changes it might initiate. The first item in the list states that students must now be skilled at critical thinking. Implications of this single difference for the traditional classroom, where the teacher gives out information and the students absorb it without question, are enormous. Critical thinking involves open-ended and messy processes that are difficult to teach, control, measure, and grade—all things that teachers spend a great deal of class time doing.

Implications of Just One Demand: Critical Thinking

For the purpose of illustration, we will look, in Box 0.3, at just one of the critical thinking skills evident in the sample standards: Students should be posing questions as well as answering them. For students to be able to ask good questions, they have to be taught to recognize different types of questions, and they need to have practice creating, asking, and answering their own questions. For teachers, this means that some lessons might be about the art of questioning instead of content-specific facts: For example, teaching Bloom's Taxonomy could give students a way to classify questions and analyze what information they need to supply to answer various test questions well. Teachers will also need to plan for students to spend less time answering the questions supplied by texts or teacher-made tests and more time generating and answering their own questions. In addition, teachers will need to model various questioning techniques for students, including the use of open-ended questions. Open-ended questions rarely have one correct answer and may, in fact, lead to other complex questions before any logical answer is possible. This means teachers will need to be flexible in how they assess and evaluate student knowledge when students are struggling with complex questions.

When students do start generating substantive questions on their own, these questions are often open-ended and can easily go beyond the teacher's realm of expertise or the school's resources. So teachers must be able to help find the answers or teach students strategies for getting information when the answer is not apparent and resources are not immediately and easily available.

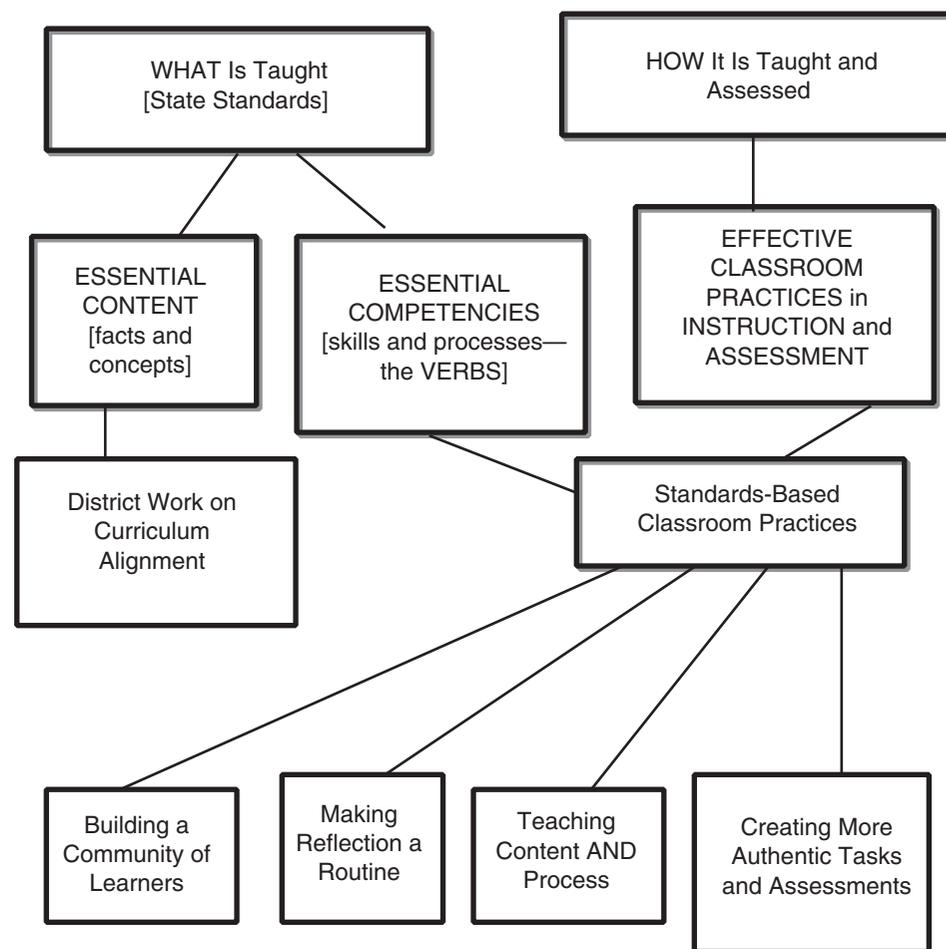
Continuing to follow this one demand for students to demonstrate critical thinking through creation of good questions, let's see what it could mean even beyond the type of lessons and classroom assessments teachers will have to create. If a teacher does not know how to question effectively, he will need to work on this skill in professional-development activities sponsored by the school. If there are limited print resources for specific content areas where students are involved in seeking answers to complex questions of their own creation, the school budget may need to include fast Internet access to allow for worldwide exploration of resources. Maybe this budget item will be more significant in helping students meet the district's learning goals than a full set of texts for the class. If that is the case, parents will need to be included in the decision so they understand why each student may not need to have a book to bring home in all classes and why homework assignments may appear to parents to be very untraditional. Looking at just this one example of what standards demand, it becomes obvious that the shift in what students must know and be able to do will have many implications for what teachers must know and be able to do and for how classrooms and schools will operate.

To illustrate the impact I believe the standards will have on education, I often compare it to someone dropping a stone in a still pond. Initially, the action seems harmless, but, in time, the ripples will spread out in concentric circles that disturb the whole pond and splash on the banks far from where the stone was dropped. We don't know the full impact of the standards yet, because the implications are just beginning to be understood; the ripples are just beginning to be felt.

■ STANDARDS AND THE CLASSROOM

The relationship between the content standards and classroom practice is direct and complex. The standards tell us what to teach—both content and competencies that are represented by the action verbs in all content areas—but they do not tell us how to teach. Teaching all the required content and competencies, however, will require a synthesis of existing best practices and new strategies crafted to facilitate and assess learning in an active, student-centered classroom. So, the required content and the methods necessary to be sure all students learn well are closely connected (see Figure 0.1).

Figure 0.1 Two Facets of Standards-Based Classrooms



Aligning a district curriculum with new state standards is usually the first step districts take when new state standards go into effect. This step is necessary because what teachers are teaching must coincide with what is now demanded of students, but aligning curriculum is just the beginning. As many teachers and administrators are discovering, despite the fact that the district has spent a lot of time to get an appropriate curriculum guide, students are still not reaching targets for learning and the schools are not reaching Annual Yearly Progress goals set forth by No Child Left Behind. What is the problem?

First, the problem is multifaceted. The standards tell us what to teach, but they do not tell us how, and we will need many, many methods and strategies if we are to teach all students the amount of content that may be in a standards-aligned curriculum. With all good intentions, teachers are often working very hard doing the same things they have always done in school and expecting to produce a different result, a new type of graduate the state wants. Teaching the essential content facts and concepts in a traditional way is not going to be enough, because the student is still a passive learner. Educators and experts in teacher training, Wong and Wong (1991) tell new teachers, "It may be dangerous to teach as you were taught" (p. 28). We were taught when content knowledge was enough, so in today's environment, when students must have knowledge and skill and where accountability is a reality, Wong and Wong are certainly correct.

Because of the requirement that students be competent at applying knowledge, the standards-based classroom will be a very different place from the one we remember from our own schooling. Looking in on this classroom (see Table 0.2), one sees the increase in student involvement and the fact that every day is not the same. One day the teacher may be lecturing while students take notes, but on another day, students may be accessing information in many different ways, both individually and in small groups. The secret to this classroom will be that it engages students in their own learning and balances whole-group activities with those tailored to meet individual needs.

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The truth is that it will take a different type of classroom and different types of student work to teach both the content and the process skills represented by all the verbs embedded in the content-specific objectives of the standards. Creating this type of class will initially feel uncomfortable because it is different from what we experienced. In a classroom where students are actively involved in their own learning, the teacher's role changes to facilitator, and even if we see the need to create different learning experiences for students, we are sometimes not sure how to do it. This problem is compounded by the fact that so many programs promised to help students meet standards, and each one seemed to exclude the practices of the one that came before it. Teachers often refer to this situation as the flavor-of-the-month phenomenon. In workshops, they make comments like, "Last year it was cooperative learning, and this year it is brain compatible classrooms. Which does the district want me to do now, and what will it be next year?"

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Table 0.2 Snapshots of the Standards-Based Classroom

The Classroom

- Might have desks in rows but more often desks will be clustered to allow interaction, or there will be tables for students to use
- Might be noisy as students talk and work together
- Might look messy as students are involved in complex, long-range tasks involving multiple activities
- Should be full of student work for viewing
- Will offer working areas that are comfortable and have varied resource materials
- Will have evidence of student collaboration in posted lists, signs, mementos, and presentations

The Students

- Will sometimes be working alone but more often will be working in groups
- Will be able to explain what they are doing and why
- Will be glad to include a visitor in their activity or explain their work
- Will be respectful to each other and any adults in the room
- Will be collaborative rather than competitive with classmates
- Will ask questions as often as answer them
- Might be involved in different activities at the same time as they work to complete a complex task
- Will have goals and be focusing on doing quality work, which means they are constantly trying to improve
- Will be able to discuss what they are learning and how they can use it
- Will use rubrics to self-assess as they do their work

The Teacher

- Might be hard to find among the students
- Will be facilitating student learning—sometimes by direct instruction and lecturing but more often by coordinating group and individual activities
- May be assisted by other adults in the classroom
- Will be interacting with students in a respectful and encouraging way
- Can explain what students are doing and why
- Can discuss the alignment of student activities and tasks with district and state standards
- Does not give students all the answers
- Asks open-ended questions and helps students learn the processes needed to problem solve for answers
- Has a professional portfolio with collected artifacts and reflections on the year's activities

The Student Work

- Might be graded in a traditional way or might be assessed with descriptive rubrics using categories like "Excellent," "Acceptable," or "Not Yet Acceptable," to give improvement-focused feedback to students
- Will often be evaluated with rubrics developed by the teacher and/or students
- Might integrate content areas
- Might be leading to a complex student demonstration of learning
- Might involve experts from the community
- Might deal with a real community problem
- Will often be accompanied by student and teacher reflection on the process and product
- Will often depend on the work of other students and contribute to a larger task the class is completing
- Will be public and available for others to view, critique, and enjoy

In reality, the best analogy might be that all the programs we have tried in the past are tools in our toolboxes for successful teaching. We will need to be able to select from all the good ideas and strategies we have available rather than only use one program at a time. Therefore, what teachers need is a simple structure to help synthesize prior knowledge and practices with new information, to help organize strategies, to help make decisions about classroom practices and staff development needs, to help design lessons, and to help create appropriate classroom assessments. We need a practical way to organize our thinking and practices so that we can help students meet both facets of the standards—the content and the competencies.

The four components of a standards-based classroom offer just such an organizational structure for creating a classroom to implement standards. A classroom that offers the best opportunity for all students to learn the content and competencies required is one where the teacher is following the curriculum set out by the standards and is

1. Creating a community of learners who are self-directed, interactive, cooperative, and focused on quality
2. Making reflection a routine for everyone
3. Teaching content *and* process
4. Developing more authentic student tasks and assessment methods

These four components need to be in place in classrooms from kindergarten through 12th grade, in all content areas. When present, they create the necessary environment for everyone to take risks as they explore new ideas and skills, learn from mistakes that will happen when we are doing something new, and benefit from the richness of working with others toward worthy goals. Teachers as well as students need this type of learning place as they struggle to raise standards for everyone.

IDEAS FOR TEACHERS ■

To Focus on Standards

Whether teachers like it or not, they are the local representatives for the district or state agencies that may have imposed the standards for student learning that affect students in their schools. I'm sure they have realized this whenever a friend who has some concern about her child's school or teacher has accosted them in a grocery store or dry cleaners. So teachers need to be prepared to help their students and their parents understand and accept the requirements that the student will have to meet in school. Here are some ideas to assist you, as a teacher, in this task:

- Be sure you understand the standards in your state and can discuss them comfortably in simple terms with your students' parents.
- Become very familiar with the learning expectations your students must meet, and connect these to the assignments you give students.

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Be sure to share this information with your students so they know what and why they are learning.

- Help your students understand what is expected of them, both at their grade level and beyond. Young students can examine what will be needed to pass the grade they are in. For example, on the first day of fourth grade, one teacher gave her students the task of discovering what would be needed to get to fifth grade. They determined what they needed to know, where they might find out, and how to begin. They interviewed fourth- and fifth-grade teachers and fifth-grade students. They examined the state learning standards for fourth grade and looked at the textbooks in their classroom. They discovered that they would have to pass the state tests in reading, writing, and math. Then they wanted to talk to “the test guy,” so the teacher invited the district test coordinator to come and be interviewed. By the end of the first week of fourth grade, these students had a good idea of what they were expected to do, had developed a plan to get started, and were ready for the challenge.
- If students are older, take them through the Big Picture activity. (See Resources, Samples 1 and 2, for the process and a work page.) This will give them an idea of what is expected of them and help them understand *why* you will be asking them to learn in new ways.
- Whenever possible, communicate positively with parents about the standards that will affect their children. For example, in notes, letters, or regular communications you send parents include one standard and a sample assignment that students have been working on that meets this standard.
- Ask students to talk to their parents and share their work and the standards it addresses.
- Invite parents to your classroom to see the work students are doing, and post standards being met as students work in certain centers or complete projects that might be on display in the room.

To Create a Standards-Based Classroom

For years, we have heard that a teacher should be not the “sage on the stage” but rather the “guide at the side,” and now the standards are requiring just that. If a teacher has been the one who dispensed all the knowledge while students soaked it up, her role will change. Now she must be the one who plans and facilitates the learning experiences for students. She won't have to throw out everything she is already doing and start over, but she will have to assess all that she does to see if it is getting the students actively engaged in learning. She will need to combine best practices from the past with emerging knowledge about learning. She will also have to be prepared to be a learner, because this classroom is not like the ones in which she was taught and trained (see Box 0.5). The professional teacher of the 21st century must be an expert at using what works, balancing multiple approaches so that the various needs of students are met, and continuing to explore the changes taking place in the world students will enter as well as any new research about the process of learning.

All this work and effort will not be in vain, because the teacher's expertise is the key ingredient to student success. Olson (1998) cites William Sanders of the University of Tennessee, who researched what impacted

Box 0.5**Building a Standards-Based Classroom**

Building a standards-based classroom doesn't mean starting over! Use the tools you already have, and work to get the ones you are missing by

- Reading
- Attending workshops
- Starting study groups with other teachers (in-house or a teacher learning network with other schools or districts)
- Using grade-level, content-area, and staff meetings for discussion, sharing ideas and experiences, and problem solving as you try new strategies
- Doing formal lesson study, which is defined by Stigler and Hiebert as "a collaborative process in which a group of teachers identify an instructional problem, plan a lesson (which involves finding books and articles on the topic), teach the lesson (one member of the group teaches the lesson while the others observe), evaluate and revise the lesson, teach the revised lesson, again evaluate that lesson, and share the results with other teachers" (cited in Sparks 1999, p. 2)
- Doing action research, which Caro-Bruce defines as "a process where participants—who might be teachers, principals, support staff—examine their own practice, systematically and carefully, using the techniques of research" (cited in Richardson, 2000, p. 1)

student learning and reported, "The single greatest effect of student performance is not race, it's not poverty, it's the effectiveness of the individual classroom teacher" (p. 27). What teachers do matters! Following are some suggestions to help teachers get started on creating the classroom that standards demand:

- Assess classroom practices by looking through the descriptors in Snapshots of a Standards-based Classroom, (Table 0.2), and checking the ones that a visitor might see in your classroom.
- Now, go through the list again and put a star next to any that you *wish* described your classroom. These can become the source of goals for you, and you can begin to search for staff development opportunities, reading material, study groups, or courses that would help you gain strategies to make these items part of your practice.
- Use the lists of staff development programs that complement the four practices of a standards-based classroom to take inventory of knowledge-base and learning needs. (See Resources, Sample 3, for a list.) Check any of the programs you have attended or studied in the last five years. Now, put a star next to the ones you are using on a regular basis with your students. Look over what you have marked to determine areas of expertise that you could share with colleagues and areas of need where you should be learning more. The areas of need could be included in your own professional development plan for future growth.

16 HOW TO MEET STANDARDS, MOTIVATE STUDENTS, AND STILL ENJOY TEACHING!

- Start collecting classroom strategies that you could use in all four of the components of the standards-based classroom. Write these on your classroom computer for quick access or on cards in a box or on a Rolodex so they are available to you at a moment's notice as you plan and teach. (See Resources, Sample 5, for instructions.)
- When you attend staff development sessions, be sure to have a blank page with you entitled "Ideas and Strategies I Can Use." As you listen to the information and observe the presenter's methods, jot down ideas and interactive learning strategies you can use with *your* students. This way you have separated out items you might want to implement so that you can find them quickly. You could put this page in your plan book for easy access. Once you have tried a strategy and like it, you can add it to the list of ideas you keep on your computer or elsewhere.
- Once a week, try at least one new strategy that will actively engage students in their own learning.
- Work together with other teachers to build trusting, collaborative relationships so that you can share ideas, critique student work, plan together, and support each other.

■ IDEAS FOR ADMINISTRATORS

To Focus on Standards

Since you are the leaders in schools and systems, you are essential in initiating the process of meeting standards. Without focused discussion, educators and school communities will waste time needed to work toward student success. As you no doubt already know, people will not do what needs to be done unless they feel the need to do it. If you tell them what the standards mean and demand that they do what is necessary, chances are good that real change won't be occurring in all the classrooms in your school. Teachers must see the need to change and say in their own words what needs to happen. So, your task is to facilitate this discussion. Following are some ideas to help you:

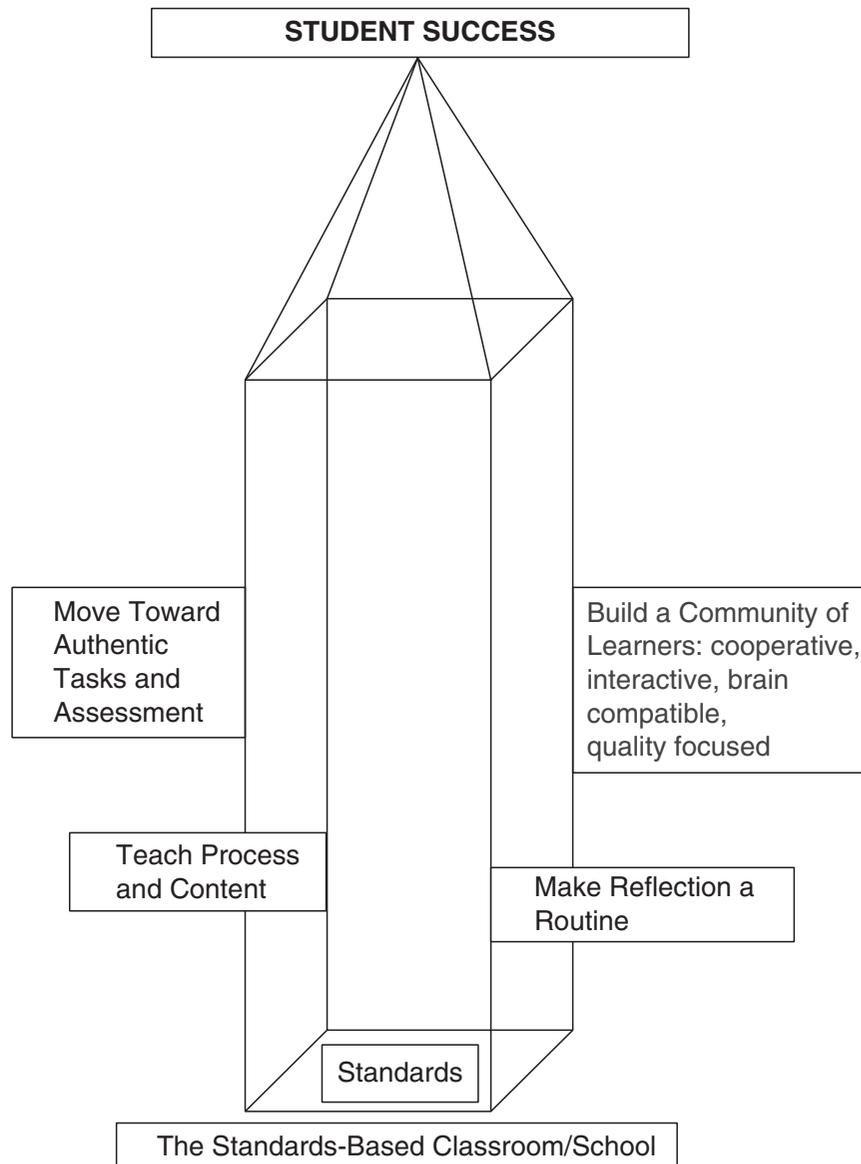
- In order to help people see the purpose for the standards—to help students succeed in the world once they leave school—get some good pictures of children of different ages. Make some color transparencies or put these on a computer to be projected at meetings as you discuss the origin of the standards movement and the intent of clarifying learning expectations for students.
- Facilitate the Big-Picture activity to help the group get a quick grasp of the standards' demands and impact on their schools. (See Resources, Samples 1 and 2, for instructions and a worksheet.) I have done this activity with many groups of students, parents, teachers, administrators, and community members, and it has always delivered the same type of information on the demands, differences, and implications of the standards. The responses you get to these three questions are the rationale for changes that will be needed.

- Be sure that what teachers are teaching is what is demanded in the standards at their grade level. If your state standards only give learning expectations for benchmark and testing years, have curriculum committees made up of teachers representing all grade levels create curriculum guides of essential content and competencies—the skills represented by the verbs in your standards—for teachers of all grades to use. Once these are created, be sure they are put into practice.
- Communicate in positive ways about standards with parents and your community at every opportunity: in school newsletters, in news releases, at parent meetings, at school board meetings.

To Facilitate and Support Standards-Based Classrooms

You will need to be an instructional leader for your teachers if you wish to have a school where classrooms have the components needed to achieve student success on standards. According to David Holdskom (cited in Checkley, 2000), assistant superintendent for research, development, and accountability in Durham (NC) public schools, it makes sense that, “As we redefine what teachers do as professionals, we must, by necessity, redefine how school leaders operate” (p. 1). If you are looking for new ways to lead and support teachers as they implement standards, following are some ideas for beginning the process:

- The four practices for a standards-based classroom can be used to unify staff development opportunities with school improvement plans. The current focus on research-based programs for school reform and test-driven professional development has helped, but for far too long, school staff development has been a scattered affair. Teachers went to whatever they chose with little guidance from or accountability to the school or district. Or the district brought someone in to present training to teachers in the deadly two hours after a full day of school. In both cases, the message was that this learning and new classroom practice was not really important, was not connected to the school improvement document that sat on shelves in offices throughout the district, was not expected when administrators observed classes, and, therefore, made no measurable difference in student learning. I agree with Richardson (2001), director of publications for the National Staff Development Council, that, “If the school is not integrating its school improvement plan and its staff development plans, it is not likely to move forward” (p. 1). Figure 0.2 shows the four practices for a standards-based classroom as the steel skeleton of a skyscraper. To take stock of how your school’s staff development connects to these components, write in all the initiatives and staff development programs that teachers have been involved in or attended in the last five years. See which of the four girders they connect to, and see if your school or system has not addressed adequately one or more of these components. If so, that is an area you might want to target for the coming year in your school improvement plan and staff development offerings.

Figure 0.2 The Standards-Based Classroom and School

SOURCE: B. Benson, *Teaching in the Changing Classroom*.

- Consider the Staff Development Survey, Sample 3, in the Resources, which lists some training programs that relate to the four practices of a standards-based classroom. You might want to add other programs or titles that you know have been available in your area to the list. Then ask teachers to check the topics they have been exposed to or studied. Also ask them to put a star beside the ones that they use regularly in their classes. Collect these surveys and list the teachers who are using appropriate programs in their classes. This list can be distributed to all teachers and become an in-house resource for teachers to use to learn about practices they need. They might ask

for help from these experts or go and see their classes in operation. If you have areas that are not in practice, these are the topics that your teachers need to investigate and that should be offered as staff development sessions in your school or district.

- Help your staff make use of the in-house experts the survey identifies. If teachers want to visit classes, make that possible. If grade-level or content-area groups want to meet and discuss strategies, help them arrange for time in the school day and for credit for this work. If there is schoolwide interest in one particular topic, make arrangements for your experts to offer professional development sessions and compensate them in some way.
- Give the survey forms back to the teachers so that they can use them to set professional development goals addressing areas where they need more information.
- Once you have determined areas of need in your school and district, create staff development request-and-reflection forms for teachers to use when they wish to attend learning opportunities outside the district (see Resources, Sample 4).
- Be sure to maximize the impact of any professional development that is sponsored by the school or district or to which teachers are sent (see Box 0.6). Remember, the purpose of teacher learning is to impact and improve student learning.
- Take time in all faculty meetings to share and discuss articles or strategies that address targeted areas of need. If the announcements could be placed on the agenda, and everyone was asked to read

Box 0.6

How to Maximize the Impact of Professional Development: Getting the Biggest Bang for Your Buck

- Have clear district and school goals for improving student learning and be sure the professional development activities are aligned with these goals.
- Have specific goals for teachers who attend staff development and be sure teachers know what these expectations are.
- Attend sessions with your teachers so you will know what they may be trying in their classes and can support their efforts.
- Send teachers to professional development sessions in teams to improve the chance they will implement new strategies in their classes and to give them a support system to help them sustain any new practices.
- Have a form for teachers to request release or support for professional development activities they wish to attend on their own.
- Create a reflection sheet that teachers must complete after they have attended professional development. This sheet should require that teachers reflect on their learning in sessions they attend, on how they plan to use their new ideas with students, and on the impact of the new methods on student learning.
- Have teachers share their information with colleagues.

them ahead of time and then sign in to indicate that they had done so, it would be easier to provide time for professional discussions. Teachers could have been given articles in advance so small group discussions could be organized in the staff meeting. Teachers could also take turns bringing material or classroom strategies to share.

- Help interested faculty start professional study and discussion groups to address areas they wish to learn more about. Allot time in the school calendar for these gatherings and attend them if asked. Allow teachers who take part in a study and discussion group to have that count as professional development activity to address their own professional development plans and requirements. Ask these groups to share with the whole faculty what they are learning and doing differently in their classrooms as a result.
- Go through the Snapshots of a Standards-Based Classroom (Table 0.2), and check the ones that describe the majority of classrooms you see in your own school. Then put stars beside the ones that you would really like to see more of when you visit teachers' rooms. The ones you have starred can be the focus of goal setting for your school or individual teachers. Once you have selected areas that need improvement, you can offer information or staff development activities to address these. You can also begin to include these items in conversations with teachers after observation visits.
- As the instructional leader, you will need to have a repertoire of classroom strategies that address the four components of classrooms you want in your building. You will need these strategies so you can model them in staff meetings and share them with teachers who need to change how they teach and assess student learning. Start collecting good strategies as you continue to read this book, observe teachers, do other professional reading, and attend meetings and professional development sessions. Keep a running list handy when you are planning meetings with staff, observing teachers, and conferencing with teachers (see Resources, Sample 5).
- Model classroom strategies in meetings you conduct. Teachers are more likely to use a new method if they have experienced it themselves and know how it will work. If they see you use a strategy to enhance the interaction of a faculty meeting, they will know that you understand how that strategy might look in the classroom. They will have more confidence to try it and know that you will understand what is going on if you see it in their classrooms.
- Start a support group to help you implement these ideas in your school. Find other administrators who are working to align the classrooms in their schools with standards, and plan to meet together regularly to problem solve and celebrate successes. Depending on where your school is at the beginning of this process, you may need to make some drastic changes, and you will need a support group of your own to help you get the job done.