

ASSESSING AND REPORTING OF LEARNER PROGRESS:

Discipleship of Christ rather than competition, and service to God and his kingdom rather than comparison.

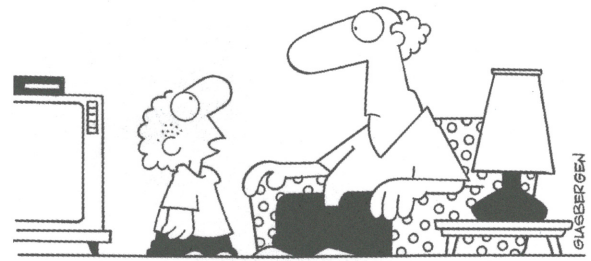


In Australia in recent years, there has been a move away from norm referencing when measuring and reporting student progress. This had been the tradition in education probably since institutional schooling began 100 or more years ago. Schools have now been encouraged (and in some states forced) to move towards a criterion referencing approach. In the context of Christian education, how are we to appraise this? Has this been a helpful change in education and is it sympathetic with our attempts at teaching christianly?

Norm Referencing = measuring and reporting on a learner's progress by comparing that learner's progress to the progress of her peers.

Criterion Referencing = measuring and reporting on a learner's progress by comparing that progress to a group of criteria or outcomes that are set before the teaching unit begins.

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: "God, I thank you that I am not like other men - robbers, evil-doers, adulterers - or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get." But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breasts and said, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. (Luke 18:10-14)



"My teacher says Bill Gates is worth 80 billion dollars. I guess you need to buckle down and apply yourself if you're going to catch up, Dad."

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WHAT WE BELIEVE AS A CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

We believe that:

- God does not measure or assess human merit by a relative comparison to other human efforts but to a measurement of comparison to his perfect nature and character (and of course we fall substantially short and here enters the good news of the gospel of Jesus).
- It is our fallen, sinful nature that is motivated to measure our success not in service to God as a result of his grace, but in relative comparison of our works to other human works.
- Motivation to true and pure Christ like living comes not from a competitive comparison to others, rather, by a complete acquiescence to the past grace, present grace and future grace of the gospel
- **AND** every single human has been created by God with their own unique and precious gifts and abilities. These gifts and abilities should be encouraged, nurtured and celebrated



"I can suck pudding up my nose and blow it out the corner of my eye, but they still won't put me in the gifted class at school!"

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WE ALSO UNDERSTAND THAT:

- A reporting system of norm referencing, is fundamentally a model of comparison from one student to the next or from one student to a group of students (numerical average or rank in class provided).
- In a norm referencing model, one student's success depends upon the failure of another!
- For a significant proportion of students, norm referencing continually places or ranks them under or less than a proportion of their peers. When this happens in every test (or most), every assignment (or most) and every report card to parents, this can be humiliating and demotivating.
- There may be a tendency for a norm referencing model to promote attitudes of pride by comparison, rather than humility in service.
- There may be a tendency for a norm referencing model to encourage motivation to learn based on competition rather than inquisitiveness of God's amazing creation and a desire to become equipped for service as disciples of Christ.
- Reporting to students and parents with 'marks', averages and ranks falls far short of fully informing parents and students of what they have and have not yet actually achieved.

It therefore flows from our beliefs:

- To use criterion referenced reporting that reports on a student's learning by comparison to a set of achievable outcomes, rather than a comparison to each other or a class average
- To avoid using straight marks, ranks or class averages to report back to students and parents

Conclusion

When teaching christianly we are seeking to encourage our students to celebrate their unique differences and to nurture and honour their strengths without comparing themselves to other students. A criterion referencing system of assessing and reporting on a learner's progress is therefore much more sympathetic with a biblical worldview and our faith perspective as Christian teachers. We are to encourage our students to seek discipleship of Christ rather than competition and service to God and his kingdom rather than comparison.

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