

APPENDIX B

Assessing Non-Cognitive Standards

In the Catholic school's educational project there is no separation between time for learning and time for formation, between acquiring notions and growing in wisdom. The various school subjects do not present only knowledge to be attained, but also values to be acquired and truths to be discovered.

The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, 1997, #14

The virtues, values, truths, and wisdom, which are never separated from instruction in Catholic schools, must not be forgotten or minimized because they are not easily measurable. Our efforts at complete human formation often find us situated into matters of the heart and spirit which do not easily lend themselves to traditional quantitative assessment.⁴⁰ We need not worry about this or apologize for it. We must also avoid the common trap of assuming that only that which can be quantifiably assessed should be taught or only that which is quantifiable is assessable. As Catholic educators, we know many of life's most important things are invisible to the eye and do not lend themselves to the scientist's tools of measurement. This does not prevent us from teaching the things that matter most.

Values, beliefs, attitudes, interpersonal skills, and virtues have always been taught, for the most part implicitly, in Catholic schools. It is important to be explicit about all that is implicit in our instructional efforts and their nature so that we do not lose touch with them or allow them to be sidelined by a culture of constant assessment. We must plan for the un-planned and never hesitate to grab a teachable moment, even though it deviates from a lesson plan or state standard. Formal lesson plans with objectives stating "Students will internalize aspects of our Catholic cultural heritage" or "Students will value the sacraments as outward signs of God's inner grace" are not typically required or appropriate. These affective⁴¹ dispositions are, for the most part, taught by the example given by others (especially as modeled by the teacher) or developed through classroom discussions and firsthand interactions with materials, problems, and experiences. Growth in such areas is more often "caught than taught," and rather than planning for them in discreet experiences, the Catholic teacher must be constantly aware of them so as to integrate them naturally whenever possible and without immediate concern for concrete assessment.

This area of highly personal affective behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs touches close to the heart of the individual, and because of this schools have traditionally shied away from placing numerical values on whether students do or do not possess particular affective qualities. While we are seeing more attempts at this type of measurement in public schools, sometimes measurement of these beliefs, values, and attitudes is not absolutely necessary. Sometimes framing the dispositions as an objective for the classroom teacher so as to provide focus and direction is all that is required. Sometimes it is appropriate to assess the group as a whole,

either through observation or an anonymous class survey, in an effort to determine progress on developing dispositions such as: do students “realize a deep sense of wonder and delight about the natural universe,” or do students “recognize and value how literature assists them in interpreting and evaluating all things in a truly Christian spirit”?

Three Methods for Assessing Non-Cognitive Dispositions

When contemplating an assessment, one should always ask: “What is the purpose, use, and measure of this assessment?” “Why is this assessment necessary?” “How will this assessment be used?” and “Is this a proper measure for this type of standard?” These types of questions are always necessary for any assessment, but especially assessments where students’ values and beliefs are the center of attention. When focusing on whether a student possesses a certain attitude, belief, or value, we are entering into an area that is highly personal and might change from day to day. While assessing cognition seems slightly removed from the center of the person, assessing beliefs and values cuts to the heart. It is almost like assessing love. “How much do you love me?” would be the assessment question, but isn’t love in-and-of-itself worthy without measure?

While caution needs to be used when seeking to align assessment to non-cognitive dispositions, it is still possible to design assessments for some of the non-cognitive standards using three primary methods: teacher observations, student-teacher interviews, and student self-reports. Because of the nature of assessing a disposition, it is advisable to use multiple measures to gain a fuller insight into a student’s behaviors and beliefs rather than through the use of only one assessment. Gathering information through the use of multiple types of assessments will result in a better understanding of what the student actually believes and, perhaps, why he or she believes it. Taking multiple measures over a longer period of time can also improve the reliability of the measure and help to confirm or disconfirm the student’s beliefs, values, and attitudes.

Non-cognitive dispositions can be assessed daily through interaction, such as brief or concentrated discussions with and between students, casual teacher observations of student traits or behaviors, or as articulated statements of belief made by the student during classroom exercises. These observations can be gathered informally through an anecdotal running record. Teachers might also record more formal notations of student beliefs, values, and attitudes through the development of a more structured rating scale. Either approach relies upon a solid understanding of the disposition in question.

When targeting a specific affective disposition for formal assessment, teachers first need to think deeply about the quality and characteristics evident for that disposition. Working with other teachers to compile a list of both positive and negative behaviors is the first step toward developing a continuum for observation. With this complete, a scale or frequency checklist can be created to provide reliability and guidance when observing students.

For example, a teacher might like to note the developing disposition of how well her students “exhibit a primacy of care and concern for each human person at all stages of life and as images and likenesses of God.” The teacher would first think about what qualities and characteristics are evident in a student who “exhibits a primacy of care and concern for each human person...” and begin to list these characteristics. Consultation with other educational experts about these

characteristics helps validate the behaviors or lack thereof. The teacher would next create either a rating scale or frequency checklist as illustrated below using the behaviors as the criteria of measurement.

Rating Scale

Behavior	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the Time	Almost Always
Helps others in need without being asked.					
Looks for ways of making life easier for others.					

Frequency Checklist

Number of events	Behavior
	Helps others in need without being asked.
	Looks for ways of making life easier for others.

Most Catholic schoolteachers are familiar with the National Catholic Educational Association's ACRE exam,⁴² the *Assessment of Children/Youth Religious Education* given to students in 5th, 8-9th, and 11-12th grades annually. This exam assesses students' knowledge as well as beliefs, attitudes, practices, and perceptions about the Catholic faith. This assessment is an example of using a student questionnaire or survey to uncover developing dispositions of faith and is similar to what can be designed to address dispositions in other content areas. Unfortunately, students might not feel comfortable completing these assessments as accurately and honestly as they could if anonymity is not available. Again, this is where multiple measures of assessment are necessary to confirm a developing disposition.

While it is possible to create assessments of dispositions for individual students, it is recommended that whole class assessment be made through teacher observation and that these types of assessments not be used for grading purposes. Assessments of this nature are best used as formative assessments to aid the classroom teacher in a more focused and integral formation of the student in all content areas.