Marking and Reporting Pupil Progress in Physical Education

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One of the most persistent and frustrating tasks that the physical educator faces today is that of marking and grading pupil progress. Most schools require marks in physical education and certainly pupils and parents are interested in grades. However, the matter of reporting value judgments regarding the status and progress of students at regular intervals throughout the year is fraught with many perplexing difficulties.

Very few educators question the desirability of a continuous program of evaluation in our schools. It is true that there are a certain number of teachers and pupils, and even parents, who cry that we should do away with all forms of examinations but as Stein points out, this "is as futile as the demand that do away with textbooks."[1] We may wish to make drastic revisions in the present manner in which most teachers examine, mark and report but this is quite a different proposition from advocating elimination of marks and grades.

In recent years there has been widespread experimentation with many forms of marking and reporting practices within education. The degree of experimentation suggests that teachers, administrators, pupils and parents are dissatisfied with present methods and are continually seeking more effective ways to solve this vexing problem.

The task facing the new teacher is an enormous one. Although he may have been exposed to introductory courses in tests and

measurements which give him some insight into educational statistics, he still is heard to comment, "I really don't know how to grade my classes." This implied criticism requires an answer. Certainly no undergraduate course, book, or professor should attempt to describe how a teacher will grade his classes in physical education. A fundamental purpose of marking and grading in education is to interpret as accurately as possible the extent to which the student has achieved the educational objectives of the program. Students differ, their needs differ, schools differ, and their programs differ and under these many situations the methods used to determine and report marks also should differ. The problem then becomes one of examining the role of marks and forms of reporting in order to establish sound principles which will serve as effective guides for teachers charged with this unenviable task.

REASONS FOR MARKING AND GRADING

After careful analysis of the various uses made of marks, Wrinkle concluded that they could be classified according to four main functions: information, guidance, administration, and motivation and discipline.[2] Remmers, Gage and Rummel break down these four functions into the following purposes of marking systems (1) information for parents on pupil status or progress, (2) promotion and graduation, (3) motivation of school work, (4) guidance of learning, (5) guidance of educational and vocational planning, (6) guidance of personal development, (7) honors, (8) participation in many school activities, (9) reports and recommendations to future employers, (10) data for curriculum studies, (11) reports to a school the pupil may attend later.[3]

Most educators, including those in physical education, agree that the single most important function of marks is to provide a means of communication between the teacher, the pupil and the parent. Effective communication should provide both child and parent with tangible evidence of the student's status in terms of the objectives of physical education. In addition, good communication which results in improved understanding of student problems can do much to help physical educators enlist support of both parents and students in developing realistic and improved physical education programs in the schools. Both parent and child can be led to recognize, through improved marking and reporting techniques, the values and contributions of a sound physical education program.

PROBLEMS IN MARKING

Each of the above stated reasons for marking is important. Why then does so much controversy rage over this topic? The answer lies in the fact that, whereas most educators are agreed on the importance of reporting pupil progress, few are satisfied with present methods. Many reasons for this dissatisfaction can be found. Baron and Bernard include the following among the shortcomings of present grading systems:

1. Marks tend to become the end and aim of education.
2. Marks tend to emphasize subject matter.
3. Marks tend to discourage good teaching.
4. Marks tend to cause teachers to overlook individual differences.
5. Marks create a situation that is "unlike life."
6. Marks tend to penalize those pupils most in need of help.
7. Marks have little meaning in themselves.[4]

In addition, there are several problems which, while of concern to the classroom teacher, cause particular difficulties for the physical educator. In their desire to maintain academic respectability, physical educators have insisted that they follow the same marking and reporting system used in the other school subjects. This has resulted in a tremendous burden for the physical education teacher who may see as many as 300 pupils in class weekly and is required to submit grades for the report card three, four, and even six times per year. Mathews records a situation in which he attempted to submit five separate grades in physical education, six times per year for 400 students or a total of 12,000 individual marks in a school year.[5] Some readers may question the need to submit five marks within physical education and yet to combine marks in aquatics, dance, gymnastics and tennis into one composite grade for physical education is like lumping English, history, chemistry and a foreign language into one classroom mark.

Controversy has existed for years in education regarding the degree of objectivity which should be required in educational testing programs. Physical education has not escaped the debate. For years physical educators have enunciated comprehensive lists of objectives and goals in their courses of study and yet the teacher, all too often, has carried on a testing program limited to the basic areas which are amenable to measurement by the stop watch, the tape measure and quantitative computation. Many of the most important stated goals of education such as development of sound

health habits, positive attitudes towards fair play, and quality of movement are neglected because they cannot be easily measured. Adams and Torgerson comment that the classroom teacher has been no less guilty in his concentration on the cognitive areas.[6] Fowler summarizes this point very well when he states:

> Since educational objectives range all the way from the highly tangible to the highly intangible, teachers must be prepared to make subjective judgments when completely objective measures are unavailable. Still they must strive to make their judgments as expert and objective as possible by obtaining necessary training and making full use of the most reliable and valid evidence available.[7]

Yet another problem centres around the grade and report card. Teachers acknowledge that grades help to motivate and control students. Some teachers use grades and report cards as a lever to control student behavior. A few teachers, especially in very large physical education classes, grade more on behavior qualities than on the extent to which the objectives of the program are realized. They contend that behavior and attitude reflect achievement (or the lack of it), when actually they use the grade as a whip to ensure class control. Other teachers use the grade in physical education as the basic motivating device with the result that many students become far too grade-conscious and "passing the course" becomes more important than the stated educational outcomes.

THE BASES OF MARKING

"The traditional basis for evaluating school achievement is mastery of content."[8] Mastery of content in physical education may be interpreted as level of skill performance in physical activities. Many physical educators maintain that if physical education is to be consistent with other areas of the educational program, skill should be the sole basis for marking. Others contend that improvement should be a factor in marking. This proposal does not have much meaning unless the potential for improvement is considered. It must be clear that final achievement is not solely the result of what is learned in class. Students who have varying initial levels of ability and varying degrees of prior experience may be expected to show different amounts of gain. Lacour points out that research has shown that the intelligence quotient, when taken alone,

is not a perfect predictor of scholastic success. He states, however, that unless a reasonably high relationship is found between a student's ability as measured by the I.Q. and his overall achievement, he is usually assigned to special guidance and counselling.[9] Thus far in physical education it has not been possible to place even this degree of confidence in measures of motor fitness quotient. Yet, in terms of effective communication and guidance, information concerning the discrepancy between achievement and the child's potential may be extremely useful data.

PRINCIPLES FOR IMPROVED MARKING AND REPORTING

The foregoing should make it abundantly clear that there are many problems which confront the physical educator in marking. What can be said to help the teacher improve his basis of grading in this subject area? Certainly no single scheme or formula can be suggested. It remains to present certain guides which, when applied to most situations, will provide the basis for improved practices in reporting pupil progress.

1. Program objectives must be clearly defined so that marking and grading reflect progress toward specific goals.
2. The relative portion of the total mark or marks should correlate with the amount of emphasis placed upon each aspect of the program and reflect the degree to which that facet contributes to the overall objectives.
3. Various forms of reporting should be developed which contribute to the most effective communication possible between pupil, parent and teacher. These may include report card, letters to parents, home visits, teacher-parent and teacher-pupil conferences.
4. Students and parents should clearly understand the basis on which evaluation of the student is made.
5. Students must be given ample opportunity to develop the techniques of self-appraisal.
6. Greater emphasis should be placed on evaluation of the student in relation to his own potential and previous levels of achievement rather than inviting invidious comparisons with others.
7. Accurate and meaningful reporting requires continuous measurement throughout the school year.
8. Subjective assessments must be utilized in formulating grades in physical education if the extent to which achievement of desired outcomes of physical education are to be appraised.

However, judgments should be as expert and objective as presently available measures permit.

9. Test administration must be efficient. Careful planning can eliminate many of the wasteful practices of which physical educators have been guilty in the past.
10. Despite the contention that physical education reporting procedures should be consistent with those of the rest of the school, there are good reasons why physical educators should prepare a report card to meet the particular needs of their department in a given school.
11. Marks and grades must not be looked upon as ends in themselves but as means toward the development of sound citizens.

No universally acceptable practice of marking and reporting pupil progress has yet been devised. Certain weaknesses may be found in all systems which have thus far been reported in the literature. But this should not be reason for despair. Through intelligent, cooperative planning based on sound principles, procedures can be developed which will result in much more meaningful reporting and better educational practice in our schools of tomorrow.

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