Reflection on:

Survey Proposal: Use of Learning Goals & Success Criteria To Support Student Engagement and Achievement

This was my first experience with rigorous survey design and the data analysis necessary to validate findings. I learned how to effectively design survey questions, structure the survey to triangulate findings, and how to work with SPSS to determine results and communicate them statistically.

In my design of the survey, I began with research into the content of the survey, and then into the processes by which other instructional strategies have been evaluated. Much of the current literature references the work of John Hattie, with his scoring of effectiveness. I was so inspired by this course task that following this course I chose to attend a conference at which Hattie was the keynote speaker, and which also included many academics who challenged his work. Yong Zhao, who spoke on the second day of the conference, focused his talk around the "side effects" of instructional and assessment practices. He challenged us to consider not just the effectiveness of a practice, but the corollary effects it might have on learning. In looking back at my focus on Learning Goals and Success Criteria, I then reflected on the unanticipated impact that their use might have in the classroom. I also am considering the impact that examination of the practice might have, since one often hears "what gets measured, gets valued" (though I was unable to locate the original source of this). It would be interesting to see the impact of merely asking questions of students about instruction would have on their learning. Would focusing their attention on the tactics and strategies of the teacher make them better learners?

I now would also like to add questions that consider the possible de-motivating role that expression of Learning Goals and Success Criteria might have on student learning. Did students

feel more motivated to work, or did the success criteria limit their scope of creativity, and deaden their enthusiasm?

I am finding that much of the academic writing that I have been reading lately has been very narrow in its focus, and lacks consideration of the larger picture. Conversely, the popular writing, as published by ASCD, Corwin, and Solution Tree Press, lacks the grounding in research that would be required to drive policy change. The work of John Hattie is often cited as an example of quantitative research to support instructional change, but the narrowness of his focus on instructional strategies ignores concepts such as Universal Design for Learning and culturally responsive pedagogy. His 252 influences have been assessed with an effect size, but research is lacking into the interrelationship between the influences, and the side effects of each. For example, concept mapping has an effect size of 0.64, with 0.4 being the "hinge point". Use of PowerPoint, has an effect size of 0.26, and would then be argued to be a weak instructional strategy. In the secondary or post-secondary context, a research-based leader should then be asking all teachers to convert their PowerPoint slides to Mindomo maps.

I believe that the challenge now is to bridge the academic and popular press, and connect them to the daily practice of educators by grounding change initiatives in research with continuous input from practicing educators to refine and focus.

I'm now inspired to consider how we might assess some of the major changes that have been implemented in K-12 education over my career. Yes, the Student Success – Learning to 18 initiative has improved graduation rates and kept Ontario secondary schools with higher enrolment numbers. However, what is the value of that secondary diploma if it is earned primarily with cooperative education credits? Wouldn't society benefit more if those same students were working for actual pay? Perhaps they would be developing better life skills and

work habits, rather than avoiding work until they get old enough to leave school. The need for a review and assessment of this policy is overshadowed by the pride shown when schools boards and the provincial government publicize improved graduation rates.

As a result of this course I now both put more stock in research based upon surveys, understanding how powerful a well-designed survey can be, and am more skeptical of survey results, realizing how easily a poorly-designed survey can produce weak and misleading results. I am much more critical in my reading of scholarly research based upon surveys, and have a better understanding of how valid data is gathered.

At the conclusion of the course, we were invited to present at a full-day "conference", where we received feedback from a visiting academic. The exercise of condensing an entire study down to a 10-minute presentation, to an audience who may have had little knowledge of the particular context or content, was challenging but rewarding. Being able to present the academic version of the "elevator pitch", that might inspire further conversation and collaboration, is a key skill for an academic scholar.