

# A Fresh Look at Grading and Reporting in High Schools



Sandra Herbst and Anne Davies

# A Fresh Look at Grading and Reporting in High Schools

Sandra Herbst  
Anne Davies, Ph. D.



Herbst, S. and Davies, A. (2014). *A Fresh Look at Grading and Reporting in High Schools*.  
Courtenay, BC: Connections Publishing and Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

© 2014 Text, Sandra Herbst, A. Davies Duncan Holdings Inc.

© 2014 Book Design, Building Connections Publishing, Inc.

All rights reserved. Except as noted, no part of this book may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Printed and bound in Canada by Hignell Book Printing.

16 15 14 5 4 3 2

**Book Design:** START Communications

**Cover Art and Design:** Anne Davies

**Project Management:** Judith Hall-Patch

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Davies, Anne, 1955-

A fresh look at grading and reporting in high schools / Anne Davies  
and Sandra Herbst.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-9867851-6-0

1. Grading and marking (Students)--Canada. 2. Education,  
Secondary--Canada. I. Herbst, Sandra, 1970- II. Title.

LB3054.C3D39 2013 373.127'20971 C2013-901222-2

Additional copies of this book may be purchased from:

 connect2learning

2449D Rosewall Crescent

Courtenay, BC V9N 8R9

CANADA

1-800-603-9888 (North America only)

1-250-703-2920

1-250-703-2921 (Fax)

books@connect2learning.com

www.connect2learning.com

Discounts available on bulk orders.

# Contents

Foreword .....	ix
Introduction .....	xiii
<b>Chapter 1</b> Preparing for Quality Classroom Assessment .....	1
<b>Chapter 2</b> Activating and Engaging Learners Through Quality Assessment .....	27
<b>Chapter 3</b> After the Learning: Evaluating and Reporting to Others .....	53
Afterword: Until the Next Time .....	69
References .....	71
Appendix A: Pushing Back: What About These Challenges? .....	77
Appendix B: Four-Quadrant Planning Questions .....	89

### What About...?

*This process of determining how well students are doing may make sense at the elementary level, but we are preparing our students for university or college. This may not work in the real world.*

That students understand what needs to be done, how their current work compares to what is expected, and ways to close any gaps between the two are necessary skills that prepare them for the post-secondary environment, workplace success, and life beyond K-12 schooling.

*(To read more about this, see What About I-1? on page 78.)*

Classroom assessment is a research-based inquiry process that has its roots in social science. Evidence of learning matters. As you work, it is important to take care when gathering evidence of learning for a particular course of study. When evidence of learning is collected from multiple sources over time (products, observations, and conversations), it is referred to as *triangulation* (Lincoln and Guba, 1984). And the evidence can be, potentially, as diverse as the students, teachers, and the various disciplines being taught. When evidence of learning is collected from multiple sources over time in relation to the learning destination, trends and patterns become apparent. This process can serve to increase the reliability and validity of teachers' professional judgment. Research clearly shows that teachers' *informed* professional judgment, in relation to a comprehensive collection of evidence, can be more reliable and valid than external test results (ARG, 2006; Burger et al., 2009).

To summarize the process of classroom assessment:

1. Informed classroom assessment is a set of methods and procedures that are grounded in research.
2. Evidence of learning is collected from multiple sources over time in relation to standards and is, potentially, as diverse as the students, teachers, and the various disciplines.
3. Teachers' informed professional judgment, in relation to comprehensive collection of evidence, collected with triangulation in mind, can be more reliable and valid than external test results.

What is the effect of this thinking within a course of study? Here are two scenarios depicting how teachers can explain to students what counts at the beginning of the course:

**Scenario 1:** *The teacher explains to students at the beginning of the course that what counts for their grades are three culminating assignments, a mid-term, and a final test. The teacher makes this clear. Yet, suddenly the goal is no longer learning; rather, it is the culminating assignments and tests that the teacher has determined to be of value. In this class, it is likely that some students (teachers know which ones) will interpret this clear description as an opportunity to do as little as possible. “After all,” they say, “as long as I turn in the culminating assignments and tests, I can fulfill my obligations.” These students have understood the teacher’s words (not their meaning) and will act accordingly. None of the other learning processes – engaging, asking thoughtful questions, debating ideas, and so on – count.*

**Scenario 2:** *Let’s repeat this scenario, this time knowing what we know about classroom assessment and evidence of learning. The teacher explains to students what they need to learn, know, do, create, and articulate in relation to the standards and outcomes. All these are detailed in the course outline. When students ask, “What counts? What is it worth?” the teacher responds, “Everything you do, say, or create counts. In this class what counts is learning. You will generate potential evidence of learning every moment of every day. You will make selections from the entire collection of evidence to best show your learning. This will include, but will not be limited to, tests and common assessments. You will use a folder to do that. And, at the end of the learning time, I will look at the evidence you have collected day-by-day, I will review my observations, and I will review interview notes and your journal notes and make a decision – an informed professional judgment – about your grade. If at any time you are unsure about how well you are doing, refer to the definition of quality work included in your course outline. It describes what the evidence of learning should look like, how much there should be, and the key attributes of quality. If you are producing enough quality products, if you are interacting with others in ways that show that you are learning, if you can talk about your learning in an informed way, then you will do well. Remember that everything – all evidence of learning – is of value because, potentially, everything is considered part of the evaluation.”*

Think about the difference in these two scenarios. In the first one, the teacher may have to impose penalties for the students who choose to not attend classes or participate, or who turn in work late, for example. In the second scenario, students may not have the kind of clarity they are used to about the grading scheme (which sometimes enables those who choose to do as little as possible and still pass). But they do know that they are producing evidence of learning all the time that is being collected and will be examined. Which scenario reflects your classroom? Which scenario would you like to have in your classes? Which scenario is most likely to result in engaged students who learn? (See Figure 1-11 for a list of evidence across a term.)

▼ **Figure 1-11**

<b>Evidence of Learning for One Term</b>		
<b>English – Listening and Speaking Strand</b>	<b>Mathematics</b>	<b>Spanish as a Second Language</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• speaker self-assessments</li> <li>• listener self-assessments</li> <li>• posters</li> <li>• PowerPoint presentations</li> <li>• reflection cards</li> <li>• peer listening logs</li> <li>• double-entry journals</li> <li>• e-journals</li> <li>• speaking proof cards</li> <li>• listening proof cards</li> <li>• scripted interviews</li> <li>• web pages</li> <li>• speaking and listening checklists (e.g., range of contexts, specific behaviours)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tests</li> <li>• quizzes</li> <li>• math journal</li> <li>• assignments</li> <li>• performance tasks</li> <li>• group work interactions</li> <li>• self-assessments</li> <li>• problem-solving assignments</li> <li>• mathematical games</li> <li>• group talking</li> <li>• structured interviews</li> <li>• demonstration of math processes</li> <li>• four-pocket portfolio (I use mathematical language; I persevere; I apply math concepts to solve problems; I use technology in mathematics)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• response logs</li> <li>• oral reading</li> <li>• tests</li> <li>• quizzes</li> <li>• oral responses</li> <li>• small-group conversations</li> <li>• large-group conversations</li> <li>• narrative paragraphs</li> <li>• expository paragraphs</li> <li>• presentations</li> <li>• assignments</li> <li>• self-assessments</li> <li>• posters</li> <li>• role plays</li> <li>• story and text retellings</li> <li>• letters and emails</li> </ul>

Once teachers plan the evidence that needs to be collected, they spend time thinking about who will collect what evidence of student learning and which samples or models will best support students in understanding the learning expectations.

## What About I-1?

*This process of determining how well students are doing may make sense at the elementary level, but we are preparing our students for university or college. This may not work in the real world.*

It is true. Some of our students do continue their education immediately after high school graduation by attending college or university. But not all our students follow this pathway, and among those who do start, many do not continue into the second, third, and fourth years. So, while it is important to help students to see themselves continuing on to post-secondary institutions, if that is their dream, high school is a time for students to practise and put patterns of behaviour in place that will be helpful later on, when they are no longer in school. Learning the skill of self-monitoring and self-regulating their way to success is extremely important. It is necessary that students understand what needs to be done, how their current work aligns with what needs to be done, and how they can close the gap between the two, especially outside the K-12 setting.

How else might you respond to this “What About”?

## What About I-2?

*At the high school level, there are high-stakes tests. So I can't afford to involve my students in this way.*

This is a good point. Many teachers feel the pressure of external and internal exams. It is an ever-present reality, not only in the high school. However, involving students in their own assessment – helping them to understand what is expected of them, helping them picture quality by sharing samples or co-constructing criteria, and helping them to self-monitor to success – actually prepares them for those exams and tests. Research shows that students who are involved in assessment *for* learning strategies do better on external tests and measures than those who are not (Rodriguez, 2004; Meisels et al., 2003). Furthermore, the research indicates that students whose teachers spend all their time “teaching to the test” score lower on those same external tests and measures (e.g., Berliner & Biddle, 1998; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). Assessment *for* student learning prepares students for whatever comes their way by helping them deeply understand the work that is expected of them.

How else might you respond to this “What About”?