


# ***Transforming Schools and Systems Using Assessment: A Practical Guide***

*Second Edition*



Anne Davies | Sandra Herbst | Beth Parrott Reynolds

**Foreword by Paul LeMahieu**



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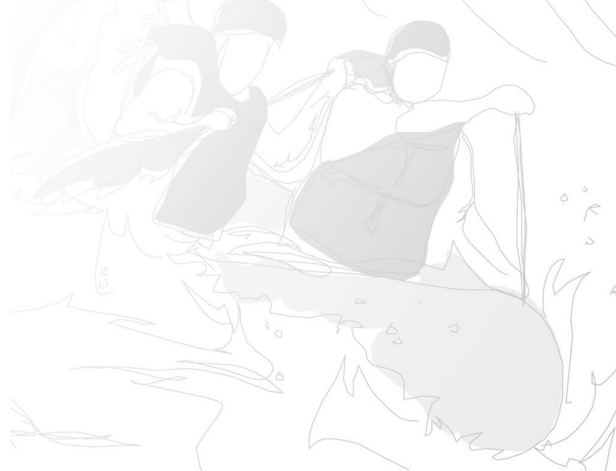
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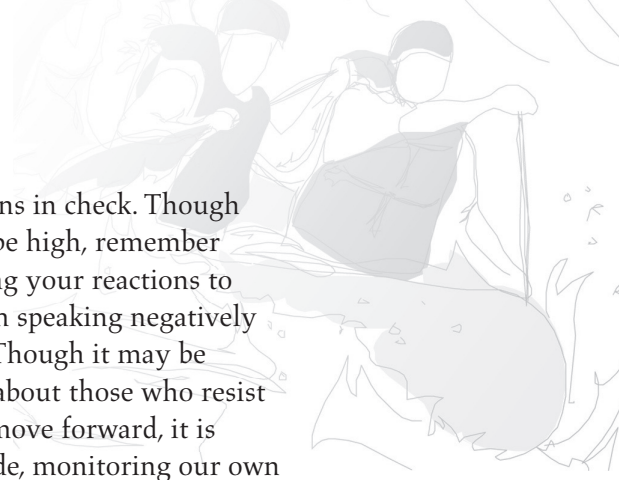
## Changing Habits Connections:

James Prochaska, John Norcross, and Carlo DiClemente (1994), authors of *Changing for Good*, have amassed almost three decades of research examining how habits are changed. Consciously moving through the stages they outline improves your chances of changing habits. Their work is useful when working to change the habits of educators regarding teaching, assessing, and evaluating others.



## Lessons Learned

- Embrace resistance. Though this seems almost contradictory, it is important to learn about what causes educators to resist. In identifying the themes and patterns of resistance, we can create new possibilities that meet the needs of people who are resisting a change. Further, sometimes we discover that the people who are resisting inform the work in important ways.
- Reframe resistance from the notion of “I won’t” to one of “I can’t.” In this way, resistance is shifted to reluctance.
- Assume a stance of positive intent. We need to recognize that teachers and others are doing the best they can do with what they currently know. We lose nothing of ourselves as leaders when we respect those who resist, and are sensitive to and plan for their points of view.
- Build relationships. Know the people with whom you work. Your staff has learning needs no different than the students you used to teach. It is important that they know you care and are open to their viewpoints. In this way, they will share their concerns directly with you, without the need to “go underground.”
- Be clear about “what’s in it for them.” Identify how assessment *for* learning can save time, reduce discipline problems, and increase the achievement of all students, particularly for those who struggle. These are compelling reasons for staff to become genuinely engaged.



- Maintain your cool and keep your emotions in check. Though sometimes your level of frustration may be high, remember that your colleagues are closely monitoring your reactions to those who put up roadblocks. Refrain from speaking negatively to others about people who are resisting. Though it may be tempting to share thoughts and opinions about those who resist the work at hand and make it difficult to move forward, it is essential to maintain a professional attitude, monitoring our own reactions and emotions.
- Persevere. It is important to maintain the compelling vision of what is possible. While we consider the thinking of those who resist and plan ways to support their learning, we cannot stop the work in which the majority of staff is engaged.

### Working Through Resistance

- **What is happening? What is the situation? What is going on here?**

*A group of teachers with whom I am working continue to say that there is no time in their day to involve students in their own assessment. There is too much to do and so this is an extra that they cannot support.*

- **What is my/our personal reaction to this?**

*Each time I hear someone say this, I really get frustrated. I know that it can work and, in fact, I have done this in my classroom. The research in this area is so powerful. It also saddens me that the attitude of either/or cannot be shifted.*

- **Why do I/we think that this is happening?**

*I think that these teachers are feeling this way because they do not have a mental picture of what it can look like. The practical strategies are still in the abstract form for them. Also, I wonder how the group think impacts on the whole. Is there an individual who may think otherwise, but is afraid to voice his opinion because of what others might say?*

- **What may be some consequences if this continues?**

*If we cannot move beyond the thinking that this can't happen, we have really stalled in our work together. If the abstract cannot become practical, how will future learning and direction be impacted?*

- **What am I/are we willing to do about it? What will my/our initial response be?**

*Perhaps I should involve a couple of these teachers in observing someone from another school that is similar in its demographics. This may put a strong image in their minds. Also, we could show them a couple of short video clips of classroom teachers involving students in their assessment. I think that I also need to ask them again what would be helpful to them and reframe my commitment of support. There must be one teacher who is willing to attempt something.*

- **How can I/we manage my/our personal reaction?**

*I need to remember to not take their comments personally and I need to remind myself of the occasions when it took me more time to deeply understand a practice. Speaking to one of my colleagues and asking her how she deals with resistance could be additional learning for me.*

An outline of this figure can be found as a reproducible on page 154 of Appendix 2.

## The Truth About Learning

Reporting must capture and communicate truth about learning. To do so, it must be based on rich evidence of learning from multiple sources, exist as part of a communication and feedback-rich process that supports and enables the learner, and be understood by all audiences – students, parents, and other educators.

It is important to first envision what grading and reporting could look like if they reflected the desired principles of learning. How would assessment *for* learning practices help create a standards-based grading system that communicates truth about learning? Consider the following essential questions that can help you to check for alignment and consistency as you consider the reporting structures in your jurisdiction:

### Essential Reporting Questions: Checking for Alignment and Consistency

#### The Learning Destination (in relation to Standards or Outcomes)

1. Are report card grades given for the full range of educational standards or outcomes, not just those easiest to measure?
2. Has evidence of learning been selected because of its alignment with outcomes and standards?

#### Reliable and Valid Evidence of Learning

3. Are the report card grades based upon a wide array of evidence from multiple sources over time so as to ensure validity and reliability?
4. Do students understand expectations and acceptable evidence?
5. Are students involved in co-constructing criteria in relation to products, processes, and collections of evidence of learning?
6. Does the summative evaluation take place after students have time and opportunity to learn?

## Evaluation at the End of Learning in Preparation for Reporting

7. Are report card grades derived from evidence present, not absent (thus devoid of practices such as assigning zeroes, grading on a curve, averaging, or penalty deductions)?
8. Are report card grades for achievement of standards or learning outcomes reported separately from other non-achievement factors such as effort, attitude, attendance, and punctuality?
9. Are report card grades reflective of a student's most consistent, more recent pattern of performance in relation to course learning goals based on the relevant standards and outcomes, as well as pre-determined levels of quality?

## Informed Professional Judgment

10. Do report card grades reflect informed teacher professional judgment of the level of quality of student work in relation to the standards or outcomes?
11. Are report card grades validated by and anchored in collaborative conversation and analysis of student work against agreed-upon criteria by teachers across grade levels and subjects?
12. Are report card grades reflective of and illustrated by collections of exemplars and samples that illustrate levels of quality and achievement?

Transforming traditional grading or marking practices means redefining the way we measure and report success to others. It requires shifting the beliefs of the school community and revising policies and practices so that judgments of learning will better communicate that which we choose to value. Here are some powerful examples from others who have begun this journey:

After several years of work with teacher teams in assessment for learning and standards-based design, one large, rapidly growing urban school district decided to initiate a standards-based grading initiative. Initial work approved by the school board included framing district beliefs about assessment, learning, and grading. Teacher volunteers worked with internal and external consultants to design