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Grading From the Inside Out: Bringing Accuracy to Student Assessment Through a Standards-Based Mindset

By Tom Schimmer

Study Guide

This study guide is a companion to the book *Grading From the Inside Out: Bringing Accuracy to Student Assessment Through a Standards-Based Mindset* by Tom Schimmer. *Grading From the Inside Out* details clear, well-researched steps educators should take to institute grading and reporting practices that parallel the profound changes in pedagogy and assessment that have taken place.

This guide is arranged by chapter, enabling readers to either work their way through the entire book or focus on the specific topics addressed in a particular chapter. It can be used by individuals, small groups, or an entire team to identify key points, raise questions for consideration, assess conditions in a particular school or district, and suggest steps that might be taken to promote a healthy school culture.

We thank you for your interest in this book, and we hope this guide is a useful tool in your efforts to create a healthy culture in your school or district.

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Chapter 1

The Modern Assessment Paradigm

1. At its best, what has the formative use of assessment results let teachers do?
2. What did the report *A Nation at Risk* deduce about education in the United States? How did this report help to provoke the standards movement in education?
3. How is it that *standards* and *standardization* are not always the same?
4. What makes an assessment formative, and what is the purpose of formative assessment? Why are grades not effective assessments on their own?
5. What will be the final step of the assessment revolution?
6. How should teachers communicate to students' parents the changes in grading practices that need to occur because of the modern assessment paradigm?

Chapter 2

Accuracy and Confidence: Our Grading True North

1. Why is it critical to establish a true north for grading practices? What does a grading true north prevent teachers from doing?
2. What does the accuracy of grades hinge on?
3. According to Carol Dweck, how is a fixed mindset different from a growth mindset? What is the link between one's mindset and one's confidence?
4. What three noteworthy lessons about confidence does Rosabeth Moss Kanter identify in her book?
5. Why is instituting a collective true north both simple and complex?
6. Why is healthy discussion essential, and what leads to a healthy conversation?

Chapter 3

Five Myths of Standards-Based Grading

1. What are some common grading myths that surround standards-based grading?
2. How has implementing standards-based grading in her classroom impacted the time and effort it takes for Stephanie Harmon of Rockcastle County High School in Mount Vernon, Kentucky, to complete her work?
3. How do educators often falsely depict real-world work environments, and how can this negatively impact their students?
4. According to David Dobbs, how do teenage brains differ from adult brains, and when do major changes take place in young people's brains? How may these differences impact how teenage students and adults in their schools understand each other?
5. What grading policies do the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Wellesley College use with their freshmen students?

6. What is the key to getting parents on board with standards-based grading in their children's education? How can educators prevent misinformation surrounding these education changes?

Chapter 4

The Standards-Based Mindset

1. What two things does acquiring a standards-based mindset achieve?
2. In your own words, define *hybrid grading*. Why is hybrid grading sometimes referred to as “standards-based grading lite”?
3. What is the difference between grade determination and grade calculation?
4. What does the art of grading involve?
5. In what ways does Malcolm Gladwell contest the standard ways that society defines success?
6. Describe the three misunderstandings parents commonly have about how their children are graded. What do teachers need to communicate to parents in order to clear up these misunderstandings about grading practices?

Chapter 5

How to Give Students Full Credit for What They Know

1. Why does calculating grades with the mean average often inaccurately or unfairly characterize what students know?
2. For what kind of tasks may the grading practice of weighting be relevant, and why can weighting become a distraction in grading?
3. Why does the author consider reassessment the most vital and most misunderstood grading reform practice? How does reassessment pass both the accuracy test and the confidence test?
4. Name the two keys to effective reassessment practices.
5. What five fundamental aspects of assessment can guarantee that a teacher's practices are effectual?
6. When may the most recent evidence of learning be the most accurate measure of student proficiency, and when may the most frequent evidence be the most accurate?

Chapter 6

How to Repurpose Homework

1. Briefly describe the research and reasons behind the arguments on both sides of the homework debate: the call for homework and the call against homework.
2. What does it mean to repurpose homework?
3. What are the purposes of practice and games, and what is the relationship between the two?
4. When the author decided to no longer grade his eighth-grade students' homework, what surprise outcome and what anticipated outcome arose?
5. In what six ways can teachers compel their students to do homework without depending on grading?
6. When teachers tell parents about the potential of repurposing homework, what three elements should they stress?

Chapter 7

How to Redefine Accountability

1. Why do many students see cheating as a win-win situation?
2. What do “students who struggle” and “students who settle” refer to? How does accountability let these groups of students off the hook?
3. Why is giving missing work an *INC* (an *incomplete*) instead of a zero the most appropriate response? What is the key to using *INC* for important assignments?
4. Briefly describe what the can’t do—infrequent, can’t do—chronic, didn’t do—infrequent, and didn’t do—chronic classifications of students each refer to. Which category frustrates teachers the most?
5. On what kinds of responsibility may formal lessons on responsibility be anchored? Provide an example of each of these kinds of responsibility.
6. What do teachers need to voice to parents who are hesitant for grading practices to eliminate punitive consequences?

Chapter 8

How to Use Levels of Proficiency

1. Why can increasing the number of levels in a proficiency scale cause problems?
2. What must educators keep in mind as they calibrate their grading mechanisms in standards-based instruction?
3. How can teachers foster students' investment in their learning? Why are students the definitive source of assessment information?
4. Define *holistic assessment*. What are the advantages and disadvantages to solely assessing every assignment with levels of proficiency?
5. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using analytical rubrics and holistic rubrics?
6. Why is organizing instruction by standards superior to organizing instruction by units?

Chapter 9

How to Teach and Assess Student Attributes and Competencies

1. What are some examples of what the behaviors of responsible students, respectful students, and students who are good citizens looks like?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using frequency scales?
3. When a project is assessed, what characteristics identify group work, and which ones typify collaboration?
4. According to Patti Drapeau, what qualities do students who think creatively share? What must teachers do to set up creative learning environments?
5. What five minds does Howard Gardner state that teachers must nurture?
6. In traditional grading practices, what may a high grade disguise and a low grade eclipse?

Chapter 10

How to Use Standards-Based Reporting

1. What are the non-negotiable fundamentals of standards-based reporting?
2. According to Thomas Guskey and Jane Bailey, into what six categories do educators' responses to the question "What is the purpose of grading and reporting?" fall? Also, what three questions do Guskey and Bailey say teachers should answer to help clarify the purpose of their grading and reporting?
3. How are achievement and progress different from each other?
4. How can the comment boxes featured on formal report cards prove useful in accurately reporting students' progress?
5. List the five questions that students should ask to help craft their stories of progress.
6. What role should parents play in the development of new report cards?