The Case Against Grades (##)
It's not enough to use "standards-based" grading. That phrase may suggest any number of things — for example, more grades; greater specificity about what each grade signifies; or an increase in the number of tasks or skills that goals or curriculum may be. The result is that teachers may become more adept at measuring how well students have met pre-established standards, but the most important questions about why students work hard and what they learn remain unanswered. “If it's not worth teaching, it's not worth teaching well,” as Elliot Eisner (2001, p. 370) puts it. laptop

Motivation

Jim Drier, an English teacher at Mundelein High School in Illinois who has about 90 students ranging “from at-risk to on track,” says that he asks those students to "reflect on the day's lesson" in their assignments and instead offer only qualitative feedback. Report cards are bad enough, but the destructive effects on motivation are compounded when students are rated on what they do in school day after day. In contrast, traditional grades can be seen as rewards or punishment, but qualitative feedback can reinforce the desire to learn and discover. Assessments that offer the most to students are the most likely to be motivating. What matters more than grades is the way in which they are communicated. When people ask me, a bit defensively, if it isn't important to measure how well students are learning (or teachers are teaching), I invite them to rethink their choice of verb. There is certainly value in summarizing what students have learned, in assigning points or values, and in setting goals that may be measured. The question is not whether to measure but how to measure without destroying the very motivation that we seek to foster.

Curriculum

Implementing performance assessments: A guide to classroom, school, and system reform (Jossey-Bass, 2000). The alternative to grades is description and the starting point for description is a plain sheet of paper, not a form which leads and homogenizes description (De Zouche, 1945). The schools our children deserve: Moving beyond traditional classrooms and “tougher standards.” By Alfie Kohn (2006, March). blogs

Portfolios, for example, can be constructive if they replace grades rather than being used as a tool. They offer a way to thoughtfully gather a variety of memorable samples of learning for the student to review. But when you look at what students are being asked to create, it is easy to see how portfolios can actually de-motivate. It’s important to understand that when students are engaged in the kinds of activities that they enjoy and choose, they learn more and are more likely to be motivated to perform than when they are doing things that are mandated by the system. Even when teachers are not knowledgeable about assessment, they can be very creative in finding ways to give feedback that is constructive and that does not detract from student motivation. Students can learn to enjoy the process of reflection and self-assessment.

It’s not enough to replace letters with numbers or tablets. “Test takers expect a score of some kind,” according to one expert. For all the talk of moving away from traditional grading, we haven’t seen a lot of innovative ideas for how to replace the grades we currently use. “If it’s not worth teaching, it’s not worth teaching well,” according to Eisner (2001, p. 370). blogs

It’s not enough to tell students in advance exactly what they are expected to know. “What school is, in a way, rather than an activity in itself, teachers may persuade students that they are being told ‘if you do this, you will get a grade; if you do that, you will not get a grade’” (Nye, 1998, p. 15). blogs

Grades can be broken down into components, each to be evaluated separately. And more frequent temperature-taking than the expense of learning (at the expense of learning) that researchers have found to be so counterproductive. Some educators talk about breaking down curriculum and standards into smaller parts, allowing students to be assessed on a component-by-component basis. But even if you could, you’d still need to execute the standards, sometimes with surprising results. When people ask me, a bit defensively, if it isn’t important to measure how well students are learning, I invite them to rethink their choice of verb. There is certainly value in summarizing what students have learned, in assigning points or values, and in setting goals that may be measured. The question is not whether to measure but how to measure without destroying the very motivation that we seek to foster.

You say the devil is in the details? Maybe so, but I’d argue that too much attention to the particulars of an assessment system can force us to lose sight of the bigger picture. When we focus too closely on the specifics of an assessment system, we may lose sight of the fundamental problems with grades. Even if grades are all that we are able to measure, we should still strive to measure the right things. At best, these prescriptions do nothing to address the fundamental problems with grading. At worst, they may actually make things worse by reducing the time and effort we devote to responding to student work, rather than helping students learn.

Grades are important, but not enough on their own. “There is certainly value in summarizing what students have learned, in assigning points or values, and in setting goals that may be measured. The question is not whether to measure but how to measure without destroying the very motivation that we seek to foster.” In the end, however, how students are assessed must be broken down into its components, each to be evaluated separately. And more frequent temperature-taking than the expense of learning (at the expense of learning) that researchers have found to be so counterproductive. Some educators talk about breaking down curriculum and standards into smaller parts, allowing students to be assessed on a component-by-component basis. But even if you could, you’d still need to execute the standards, sometimes with surprising results.

Emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to identify, use, and understand emotions. Emotional intelligence is a valuable skill for many reasons. For example, people with high EI are more likely to be successful in their careers because they are better at managing their emotions and understanding the emotions of others. They are also better at handling stress and making decisions. In addition, people with high EI are more likely to have strong relationships with others. Emotional intelligence can be developed through various techniques, including self-reflection, practice, and feedback. It is important to note that emotional intelligence is not a fixed trait, but rather something that can be developed and improved over time. As such, it is important to focus on strategies that can help individuals improve their emotional intelligence.

Some people in the field are candid about their relativism, offering to help align your assessment to whatever your values happen to be. Howard Gardner (1991) observed: “One can have the best assessment imaginable, but unless the accompanying teaching is creative and the product of the special talents of teachers, the whole system doesn’t work.” blogs

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Many educators have recently begun to reconsider the role of the grade in education. In particular, there is growing interest in alternative forms of assessment, such as portfolios and authentic assessments. These alternative forms of assessment are designed to provide a more comprehensive picture of student learning and achievement, as well as to align assessment more closely with the goals and values of the educational system. While these approaches offer potential benefits, they also present challenges and require careful consideration. It is essential to ensure that alternative forms of assessment are implemented in a way that is fair, equitable, and meaningful for all students. This requires ongoing research and dialogue among educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders. It also requires a commitment to supporting all students in their learning and development.

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