



## Rethinking How You Grade

### *Understanding what influences your grading practices*

In reference to the article ***Grading Across Canada: Policies, practices, and perils***

By Christopher DeLuca, Liying Cheng, and Louis Volante

**DISCUSSION LEADER CHEAT SHEET:** 5 key points from the article

5 minutes

**AIM:** TO INTRODUCE THE SESSION AND TODAY'S THEME: **COMPLEXITY OF GRADING**

- 1 From boosting self-confidence, admittance to university and college programs, and gaining access to funding to potential negative outcomes including bullying, lowered self-esteem, and limited career choices, grades not only represent learning, but are connected to important social consequences.
- 2 Policy-based grading aims to reduce subjectivity and encourages alignment between what is taught (i.e. curriculum expectations) and what is assessed. Policy-based grading also provides teachers with explicit criteria to help them distinguish an A from a B or a Level 3 from a Level 2.
- 3 Measurement experts suggest that grades should only reflect student achievement of learning expectations. However, when assigning grades, teachers typically include both achievement (e.g. exams, quizzes, class presentations) and non-achievement factors (e.g. attendance, effort, independence), or what is often called “learning skills.”
- 4 Research has demonstrated that teachers adopt different weightings of achievement and non-achievement factors based on the contexts and use of grades. For example, teachers’ consideration of student effort appears to be correlated with student ability and behaviour, particularly for low-ability students: teachers give better grades to low-ability students and borderline cases (i.e. students at risk of failing) if they are well-behaved and put effort into their work.
- 5 Mixing achievement and non-achievement factors means that grades then provide less valid information for remediation, acceptance for programs, or accurate self-perceptions.

## DISCUSS

20 minutes

**AIM:** TO GET EVERYONE SHARING THEIR THOUGHTS AND QUESTIONS

*The discussion leader can choose 3 questions from the list below or integrate questions of their own.*

- 1 **For high schools:** In a study cited by the authors, teachers reported that “bumping up” a grade to allow a student to be admitted into their desired university or college program was fairer than increasing a grade if there were no immediate consequences. **Have students ever been exceptionally nice to you around exam or college/university applications period? Has this ever influenced your grading decisions or placed you in a “grading dilemma” when preparing students’ final grades?**
- 2 The article outlines that “fair” grading in a study of Ontario teachers often “meant balancing what was best for an individual student in relation to what was consistent and fair for all students in the class.” **For you, what does it mean to be “fair” in your grading?**

- ❓ While measurement experts suggest that grades should only reflect student achievement of learning expectations, teachers typically include both achievement (e.g. exams, quizzes and class presentations) and non-achievement factors (e.g. attendance, effort and independence). **Is this an accurate reflection of your grading practices, or are there other drivers?**
- ❓ **Have you ever noticed a disconnect between YOUR students' grades and their actual learning performance?**
- ❓ **Has students' performance on standardized or provincial tests ever influenced your opinion on their ability to perform on other assignments or evaluations?**
- ❓ The authors suggest that "Grading is a complex practice that often requires negotiating evidence in relation to students' unique learning progressions and curriculum expectations." **In your own practice, what is the most complex part about grading? What supports could help you through this complexity?**

## DO IT

15 minutes

**AIM:** TO UNDERSTAND THE SUBJECTIVITY OF GRADING



**LEARNING GOAL**  
2 minutes

In small groups (2-3) pick a topic or assignment that you recently gave to your students and write down its main learning goal.



**YOUR CLASSROOM**  
5 minutes

Take five minutes to sketch a persona of a student in one of your classes. What activities do they participate in? What are their needs? Where do they meet those needs? Be as specific as possible.

<p><b>Name</b> Give your student persona a name and sketch a drawing of them.</p>	<p><b>Demographics</b> Age? Location? Employment? Family? Subject interests?</p>
<p><b>Habits</b> How does your student persona spend their time in the classroom? Outside of the classroom?</p>	<p><b>Needs and Goals</b> What motivates your student persona?</p>

### Discussion leader instructions

**Have the group swap worksheets with another group. Read out the following scenario and remind the group to think about the persona they have in front of them.**

*In your class, your report card grades are based on quizzes, tests, and an out-of-class project that counts as 25% of the grade. Your student persona obtained an A average on the quizzes and tests, but has not turned in the project despite frequent reminders. In this situation, what would you do?*

### Share back and display

After time for discussion, invite the group to share recommendations and insights. Support the group in making sense of the diversity of their students and range of possible reasons for why their student persona's work has not yet been submitted.