



**Differentiated
Grading: Tackling the
Most Controversial
Grading Issues in the
Middle-Grades
Classroom Today**

Schools to
Watch
Conference
National Forum
for Middle
Grades Reform
2019

For further conversation about any of these topics:

Rick Wormeli
rick@rickwormeli.onmicrosoft.com
www.rickwormeli.com
@rickwormeli2 (Twitter)
Herndon, Virginia, USA

What is evidence-based assessment and grading?

At its basic level, it's expressing a student's school performance as a report of evidence of specific standards. Academic grades rally around content and skills, nothing else. We want to know to what degree "Junior" can:

- Explain the dual nature of light
- Determine the area of a polygon
- Analyze an argument
- Titrate liquids
- Use knowledge of exercise and metabolism to make healthy snack choices
- Write an information paragraph
- Incorporate musical dynamics in a successful concerto

The veracity of a grade is what students carry forward and can do independent of all assistance, not what they demonstrate on a test and soon forget. The most recent and independently demonstrated evidence is the most accurate indicator of a student's proficiency.

We are criterion-referenced, evidenced-based, *not* norm-referenced in classroom assessment and reporting.

It's what students carry forward, not what they demonstrated during the unit of learning, that is most indicative of true proficiency.

We cannot conflate reports of compliance with evidence of mastery. Grades are reports of learning, not doing.

'Time to Change the Metaphor:

Grades are NOT **compensation.**

Grades are **communication:**

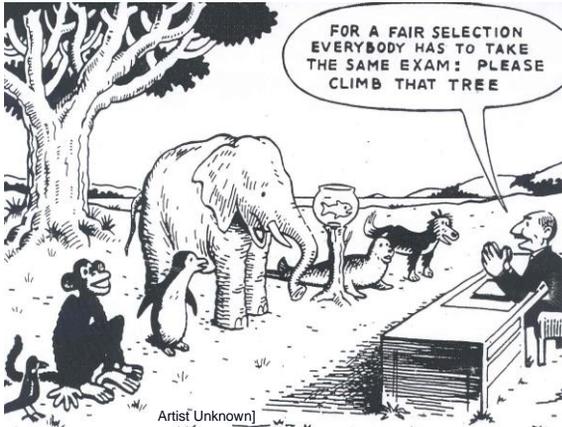
They are an accurate report of what happened.

1892: The Committee of Ten:

- The Standardized Curriculum
- High School
- School Day made of 50-60 minute class periods

Popcorn kernels pop at different rates, but when each one pops, it's accorded full status as a piece of popcorn, not something less than popcorn because it popped later than its fellow kernels.

Let's end the false assumption that students all learn at a uniform rate and manner.



Artist [Unknown]

Time is a variable, not an absolute.

"Nobody knows ahead of time how long it takes anyone to learn anything."



Dr. Yung Tae Kim, "Dr. Tae,"
Physics Professor,
Skateboarding Champion

This is a Civil Rights issue:

- Complacency, indifference, lack of teacher problem-solving skills, and assuming other classes/teachers will meet these needs and it can't be done in this particular class exacerbates the problem.
- Students with learning challenges and disabilities will *not* demonstrate intended outcomes if we don't employ differentiated practices.
- Hence, we can't blame the student or his environment for his lack of success when we aren't making differentiation actionable.
- There is urgency here -- It's a moral imperative, not something we do as we have the time. Very real futures and students' civil rights hang on today's decisions.

Absent moral imperative, nothing in education changes. (Reeves)

- What's the moral thing we do?
- Do we have the moral authority to knowingly falsify a report of student learning?

"Compared with schools with low percentages of students experiencing poverty, schools with high percentages of students experiencing poverty are more likely to have:

- less access to school nurses and college counselors;
- more limited access to computers and the Internet;
- inadequate learning facilities such as science labs;
- more teacher vacancies and substitute teachers;
- more teachers unlicensed in their subject areas;
- less rigorous and student-centered curricula;
- inoperative or dirty student bathrooms;
- less access to preventive healthcare;
- serious teacher turnover problems;
- higher student-to-teacher ratios;
- insufficient classroom materials;
- less access to stable housing;
- fewer extracurricular programs;
- fewer experienced teachers;
- lower teacher salaries;
- larger class sizes; and
- less funding."

Before we assume students lack grit and claim openly or privately that this and personal character are the roots of their academic struggles, let's remember...

- Paul Gorski, Associate Professor, Integrative Studies, George Mason University
May 16, 2018

Be careful – Grit and growth mindset programs and emphases can be racist, classist, and more. Check out, "Grit and Growth Mindset – Deficit Thinking?" (*AMLE Magazine*)

www.rickwormeli.com/articles

Identify the Principles Involved, THEN Gather the Solutions

Example: How do I grade English Language Learners?

Principles/Tenets Involved:

- Teachers must be ethical. They cannot knowingly falsify a score or grade.
- To be useful, grades must be accurate reports of evidence of students' performance against standards.
- Regular report cards report against regular, publicly declared standards/outcomes. They cannot report about irregular standards or anything not publicly declared.
- Any test format that does not create an accurate report of students' degree of evidence of standards must be changed so that it does or replaced by one that does.

(continued)

Identify the Principles Involved, THEN Gather the Solutions

Example: How do I grade English Language Learners?

Principles Involved: (Continued)

- English Language Learners have a right to be assessed accurately.
- Lack of language proficiency does not mean lack of content proficiency.
- Effective teachers are mindful of cultural and experiential bias in assessments and try to minimize their impact.

If teachers act upon these principles, what decisions/behaviors/policies should we see in their assessment and grading procedures?

**Fair Isn't
Always Equal**

What is the Role of Each One?

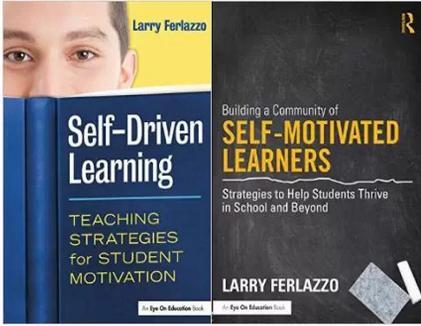
- Formative Assessment
- Summative Judgment

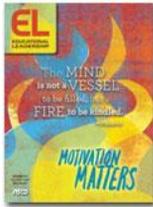
***Formative vs
Summative in Focus:***

**Lab Reports in a
Science Class**
*(Or any other lab-like activity in
any subject area)*

Two Homework Extremes
that Focus Our Thinking

- If a student does none of the homework assignments, yet earns an "A" (top grade) on every formal assessment we give, does he earn anything less than an "A" on his report card?
- If a student does all of the homework well yet bombs every formal assessment, isn't that also a red flag that something is amiss, and we need to take corrective action?

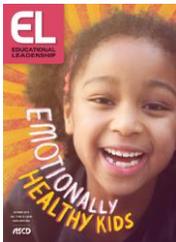




Motivation Matters

September 2014 |
Volume 72 | Number 1

www.ascd.org



**ASCD's Education Leadership
"Emotionally Healthy Kids"**

October 2015 | Volume 73 |
Number 2

www.ascd.org

**And How Do We Build
These Skills in Students?**

*There's
no one strategy that works.*

And even more interesting:

*The strategies will need to
change as the students
mature*

Recommended Resources:

- *Smart but Scattered: The Revolutionary "Executive Skills" Approach to Helping Kids Reach Their Potential* by Peg Dawson and Richard Guare
- *Smart but Scattered Teens: The "Executive Skills" Program for Helping Teens Reach Their Potential* by Richard Guare, Peg Dawson, and Colin Guare
- *Late, Lost, and Unprepared: A Parents' Guide to Helping Children with Executive Functioning* by Joyce Cooper-Kahn and Laurie Dietzel
- *Promoting Executive Function in the Classroom (What Works for Special-Needs Learners)* by Lynn Meltzer
- The National Center for Learning Disabilities (www.ncl.org)
- http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/multimedia/videos/inbrief_series/inbrief_executive_function/
- "Worth a Closer Look: Executive Function," Rick Wormeli, *Middle Ground* magazine (Now, *AMLE Magazine*), August 2013, Association for Middle Level Education

Recommended Resources for ADHD information:

- *The Attention Deficit Disorder Association* (www.add.org)
- http://www.helpguide.org/mental/adhd_add_signs_symptoms.htm
- *National Resource Center on ADHD* (<http://www.help4adhd.org/>), which includes resources for the organization, CHADD (Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder)

If an "F" on a project really motivated students to work harder and achieve, retention rates would have dropped by now. They haven't; they've increased. We need to do something more than repeatedly document failure.

Recovering in full from a failure teaches more than being labeled for failure ever could teach.

It's a false assumption that giving a student an "F" or wagging an admonishing finger from afar builds moral fiber, self-discipline, competence, and integrity.

**Re-Do's &
Re-Takes:
Are They
Okay?**



Thomas Edison

- C, B, and B+ students get to re-do just as much as D and F students do. Do not stand in the way of a child seeking excellence.
- If report cards are due and there's not time to re-teach before re-assessing, record the lower grade, then work with the student in the next marking period, and if he presents new evidence of proficiency, submit a grade-change report form, changing the grade on the transcript from the previous marking period.
- Reserve the right to give alternative versions and ask follow-up questions to see if they've really mastered the material.
- Require parents to sign the original attempt.

- It's okay to let students, "bank," sections of the assessment/assignment that are done well.
- No-re-do's the last week of the grading period.
- Replace the previous grade with the new one, do NOT average them together.
- Sometimes the greater gift is to deny the option.
- Choose your battles. Push for re-doing the material that is transformative, leveraging, fundamental.

Grading Late Work

- One whole letter grade down for each day late is punitive. It does not teach students, and it removes hope.
- A few points off for each day late is instructive; there's hope.
- Yes, the world beyond school is like this.

Clarification:

When we're talking about converting zeroes to 50's or higher, we're referring to zeroes earned on major projects and assessments, *not* homework, as well as anything graded on a 100-point scale. It's okay to give zeroes on homework or on small scales, such as a 4.0 scale. Zeroes recorded for homework assignments do not refer to final, accurate declarations of mastery, and those zeroes don't have the undue influence on small grading scales.

From Dr. Tom Guskey, "The Case Against Percentage Grades," *Education Leadership*, September 2013:

- "Why not use a 50-point grading scale and designate ten levels of failure rather than the 100-point percentage grading scale with 60 levels of failure? After all, the choice of 100 is quite arbitrary."
- "...[W]ith more levels [in a grading scale], more students are likely to be misclassified in terms of their performance on a particular assessment."

Summative Assessments						
	Student: _____					
Standards/ Outcomes	XYZ Test, part 1	PQR Project	EFG Observ.	XYZ Test, part 2	GHI Perf. Task	Most Consistent Level
1.1 [Descriptor]		3.5			3.5	<u>3.5</u>
1.2 [Descriptor]	2.5	5.0	4.5	4.5		<u>4.5</u>
1.3 [Descriptor]		4.5	3.5	3.0	3.5	<u>3.5</u>
1.4 [Descriptor]	3.5			3.5		<u>3.5</u>
1.5 [Descriptor]	2.0			1.5		<u>1.75</u>

*Gradebooks and Report Cards in the Differentiated Classroom:
Ten Important Attributes*

1. Everything is clearly communicated, easily understood
2. Use an entire page per student
3. Set up according to Standards/Outcomes
4. Disaggregate!
5. No averaging – Determine grades based on central tendency, trend, mode

*Gradebooks and Report Cards in the Differentiated Classroom:
Ten Important Attributes*

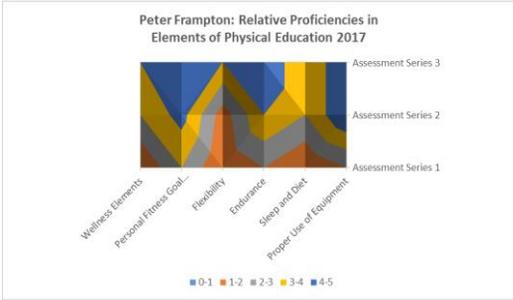
6. Behavior/Effort/Attendance separated from Academic Performance
7. Grades/Marks are as accurate as possible
8. Some students may have more marks/grades than others
9. Scales/Rubric Descriptors readily available, even summarized as possible
10. Grades/marks revisable

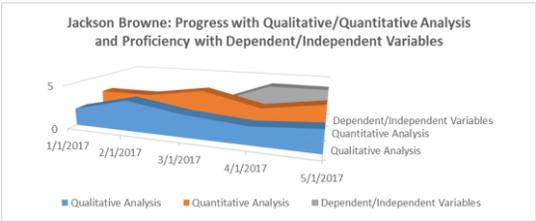
Responsive Report Formats

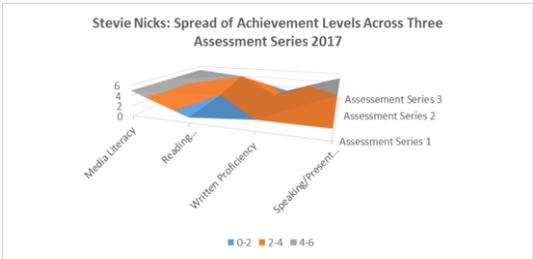
Multiple Categories Within Subjects Approach:

Divide the grade into its component pieces. For example, a “B” in Science class can be subdivided into specific standards or benchmarks such as, “Demonstrates proper lab procedure,” “Successfully employs the scientific method,” or “Uses proper nomenclature and/or taxonomic references.”

The more we try to aggregate into a single symbol, the less reliable that symbol is as a true expression of what a student knows and is able to do.







- Disconnected content running through their still-developing minds, some of it pruned and some of it elevated to prominence, but little of it maintaining its clear provenance. Referring to university students, Associate Professor Michelle Navarre Cleary at DePaul University writes,

"...[A] student last quarter told me that when she really is involved in a project her brain just picks up word verbatim so that a week or two later she is not sure whose words they are. She is not alone. A study of English university students reported that "It was considered [by the students] highly feasible for a phrase or sentence from a text to lodge in one's subconscious and be reproduced word-for-word in an assignment" (Ashworth and Bannister)."

**Constructive Response to Cheating,
including Plagiarism**

When a student cheats on a test, record a zero, F, "not yet," or, "no evidence," in the gradebook, and inform his parents of the cheating.

Here's the important part, however: Make the learning/grade/"credit" **recoverable**. *It's recovery from mistakes that matures students, not being labeled permanently for them.*

It's a false assumption that F's and zeroes help students build moral fiber or learn self-discipline. When did curriculum incompetence become the proper response to student immaturity and poor judgement?

Ask students to rebuild what has been broken:

Tell him he will not be trusted for a finite period of time (six weeks, for example), which means he will not be allowed to work at home on tasks unless he's in the presence of the teacher's designee, nor will he be allowed to run errands anywhere in the building by himself, work at a computer without a partner, or to extend a deadline. If possible, ask parents to come sit beside their child when the test is re-administered.

He may also need to write letters of apology to the class or teacher, as well as to their families, and they may have to do service to the school as a form of restitution. They may need to submit themselves to the school's restorative justice program, too, but once they have completed the tasks and justice is restored as judged by the community offended, they are reinstated in full, and their earlier indiscretion and cheating is not held against them.

"My goal should be to help inculcate honor and integrity rather than build a culture of fear and accusation. ...[W]e can develop...guidelines for an effective response: The solution should be positive; that is, show students how to act as responsible scholars and writers. The same tone should be reflected in the syllabus. I have seen many syllabi in which the penalties for plagiarism are laid out in excruciating detail, with no positive models or behavior mentioned...It should help students avoid plagiarism rather than focus on our catching it. The solution should objectively strengthen both students and teachers....It should also make students and teachers feel as though they are stronger.

- Professor Jeff Karon, University of South Florida, "A Positive Solution for Plagiarism,"
The Chronicle of Higher Education, September 18, 2012

Minimize the Likelihood of Student Cheating

- Construct assessments that require creative, unique responses not easily traded among students, classes, and schools.
- Teach students in a developmentally responsive manner, focusing on what works well for the developmental level we teach. When students learn well, they grow competent in our disciplines, which reduces the need to cheat.
- Teach personal integrity overtly and repeatedly.
- Be very, very clear in expectations.
- "Tell students caught cheating that they are liars. Students tend to shrug off cheating by saying, 'It's no big deal -- everyone does it!' ...'Connecting cheating with lying unmasks the 'sleight of mind' that allows students to think of cheating as a justifiable way to act."
- Sharon Cromwell, 2006, *Education World*,
www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin375.shtml

- Take students on a virtual tour of Websites teachers can use to check student work for plagiarism, so they see that you take cheating seriously and have the tools to act upon that solemn responsibility. In addition, it may be helpful to take students on a brief tour of a website that sells students finished essays and reports they can download and submit as their own. Walk them through the lack of ethics employed when choosing this route, how it undermines their real learning (setting them up for later humiliation when others think they've learned but have not done so, or when others discover their dishonesty), and ruins their academic and personal reputations for years to come.
- Teach students the skills of executive function so they can better manage their studying and preparation, avoid impulsive decisions, appreciate the consequences of their actions, reason morally, and self-regulate.

- End pep rallies focused on state or provincial exam performance, and do not promise students they will have a class party if everyone scores above a certain mark on those exams. Instead, use that time for high quality teaching and student engagement in course curriculum.
- Teach proper paraphrasing and summarizing techniques. For more ideas on this, see, *Summarization in any Subject, Second Edition* (ASCD, 2019).
- Teach proper note-taking techniques and how to keep track of quotes, gathered information, and citations.
- Help students analyze samples of students' work that have and have not been plagiarized. Talk about your feelings as you discover the cheating in students' work, and how they would feel if some of their cultural and sports heroes cheated in their fields.
- Use multiple assessments in varied formats, not just one, to determine a student's true proficiency. It's far more difficult to cheat across multiple formats and on multiple occasions.

- Outline the class and school rules on cheating and plagiarism clearly. Describe the consequences for such infractions in vivid terms.
- Show students the test or quiz ahead of time. There are not going to be any surprises for students here, and they are more confident going into the exam, reducing anxiety and the panicked moment of cheating.
- For long-term projects, ask students to submit sub-sections of it for status checks periodically throughout the quarter or trimester.
- Cultivate positive relationships with students, so they know they can be honest with you, trusting that, if they come to you admitting they are not prepared for the exam, you will find a way for them to learn the material, obtain credit for mastery demonstrated at a later date, and save face.
- Allow re-learning and re-assessing for full credit. Make F's and 0's recoverable in full. There's hope here, students reason, so there's no need to panic and cheat their way to a more acceptable grade.

Grading Inclusion Students

Question #1:

“Are the standards set for the whole class also developmentally appropriate for this student?”

- If they are appropriate, proceed to Question #2.
- If they are not appropriate, identify which standards are appropriate, making sure they are as close as possible to the original standards. Then go to question #2.

Grading Inclusion Students

Question #2:

“Will these learning experiences (processes) we’re using with the general class work with the inclusion student as well?”

- If they will work, then proceed to Question #3.
- If they will not work, identify alternative pathways to learning that will work. Then go to Question #3.

Grading Inclusion Students

Question #3:

“Will this assessment instrument we’re using to get an accurate rendering of what general education students know and are able to do regarding the standard also provide an accurate rendering of what this inclusion student knows and is able to do regarding the same standard?”

- If the instrument will provide an accurate rendering of the inclusion student’s mastery, then use it just as you do with the rest of the class.
- If it will not provide an accurate rendering of the inclusion student’s mastery, then identify a product that will provide that accuracy, and make sure it holds the student accountable for the same universal factors as you are asking of the other students.

Education Leadership (ASCD)
February 2010 | Volume 67 | Number 5
Meeting Students Where They Are Pages
Grading Exceptional Learners
Lee Ann Jung and Thomas R. Guskey

*The next four
slides’ content
can be found
in this article.*

For more details, see:

Office of Civil Rights. (2008, October 17). Dear colleague letter: Report cards and transcripts for students with disabilities. Available:
www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-20081017.html

ljung@uky.edu
guskey@uky.edu

“Myth 2: Report cards cannot identify the student’s status as an exceptional learner.

“Fact: According to guidance recently provided by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights (2008), a student’s IEP, 504, or ELL status can appear on report cards (which communicate information about a student’s achievement to the student, parents, and teachers) but not on transcripts (which are shared with third parties—other schools, employers, and institutes of higher education) (Freedman, 2000). Even on report cards, however, schools must carefully review whether such information is necessary.”

“Myth 3: Transcripts cannot identify the curriculum as being modified.

“Fact: This is perhaps the most common of all reporting myths. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 and 2004, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, transcripts cannot identify students as qualifying for special services or accommodations— supports that provide access to the general curriculum but do not fundamentally alter the learning goal or grade-level standard. However, schools can legally note curriculum modifications—changes that fundamentally alter the learning goal or grade-level expectation (Freedman, 2000, 2005).”

Three types of learning criteria related to standards (see Guskey, 2006):

“Product criteria address what students know and are able to do at a particular point in time. They relate to students’ specific achievements or level of proficiency as demonstrated by final examinations; final reports, projects, exhibits, or portfolios; or other overall assessments of learning.”

“**Process** criteria relate to students' behaviors in reaching their current level of achievement and proficiency. They include elements such as effort, behavior, class participation, punctuality in turning in assignments, and work habits. They also might include evidence from daily work, regular classroom quizzes, and homework.

“**Progress** criteria consider how much students improve or gain from their learning experiences. These criteria focus on how far students have advanced, rather than where they are. Other names for progress criteria include learning gain, value-added learning, and educational growth.”



Check out the **FREE Website** for **Perspective and Practicality on Assessment and Grading Issues!**

www.stenhouse.com/fiae

1. Two new, substantial study guides for *Fair Isn't Always Equal*
2. Q&A's - abbreviated versions of correspondence with teachers and administrators
3. Video and audio podcasts on assessment and grading issues
4. Testimonials from educators
5. Articles that support the book's main themes



Also, check out
ASCD's *Education Leadership*
November 2011 issue
Vol. 69, Number 3
Theme: Effective Grading Practices
Single Issue: \$7.00, 1-800-933-2723
www.ascd.org

Among the articles:

- Susan M. Brookhart on starting the conversation about the purpose of grades
- Rick Wormeli on how to make redos and retakes work
- Thomas R. Guskey on overcoming obstacles to grading reform
- Robert Marzano on making the most of standards-based grading
- Ken O'Connor and Rick Wormeli on characteristics of effective grading
- Cathy Vatterott on breaking the homework grading addiction
- Alfie Kohn on why we should end grading instead of trying to improve it

Former AP Teacher,
now Building Administrator,
Reed Gillespie

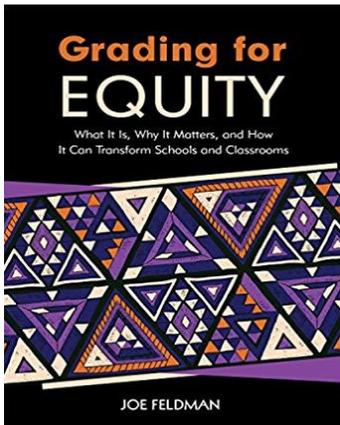


Responses to Re-Do Concerns:

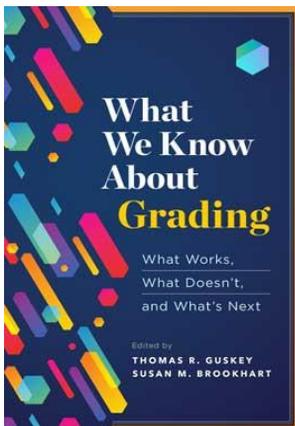
<http://www.reedgillespie.blogspot.com/2013/04/redos-and-retakes.html>

12 Practical Steps to Conducting Re-do's:

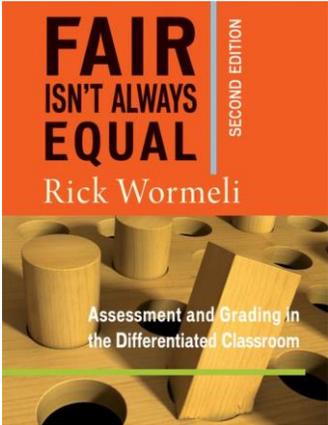
<http://www.reedgillespie.blogspot.com/2013/04/12-steps-to-creating-successful-redo.html>



'Just released at the end of 2018 –
'Great new book with important content!



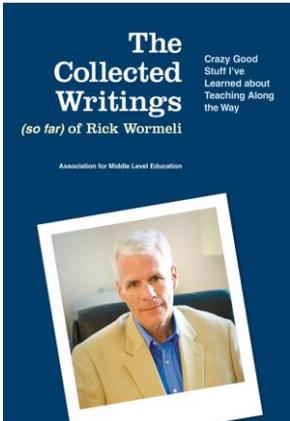
Just out in February 2019 - 'Over 100 years of research about grading and what it means for teaching and learning. Highly recommended!



Eleven years in the making -- Here it comes!

Fair Isn't Always Equal, Second Edition

Available from Stenhouse Publishers, Barnes and Noble, and Amazon.



Great Books on Feedback, Assessment, and Grading:

- *Grading from the Inside Out* (Schimmer)
- *Hacking Assessment* (Sackstein)
- *Elements of Grading* (Reeves)
- *How to Give Feedback to Your Students* (Brookhart)
- *Balanced Assessment, From Formative to Summative* (Burke)
- *Grading Smarter, Not Harder* (Dueck)
- *Grading* (Brookhart)
- *How to Grade for Learning* (O'Connor)
- *A Repair Kit for Grading: 15 Fixes for Broken Grades* (O'Connor)
- *Fair Isn't Always Equal* (Wormeli)

- *Checking for Understanding: Formative Assessment Techniques for your Classroom* (Fisher and Frey)
- *Transforming Classroom Grading* (Marzano)
- *Classroom Assessment and Grading that Work* (Marzano)
- *How to Assess Higher-Order Thinking Skills in your Classroom* (Brookhart)
- *Grading Exceptional and Struggling Students: RTI, ELL, IEP* (Guskey, Jung)
- *On Your Mark: Challenging the Conventions of Grading and Reporting* (Guskey)

Three particularly helpful books I just read and I highly recommend:

- Keeley, Page. *Science Formative Assessment: 75 Practical Strategies for Linking Assessment, Instruction, and Learning*, Corwin Press, NSTA Press, 2008
- Brookhart, Susan. *How to Assess Higher-Order Thinking Skills in your Classroom*, ASCD, 2010
- *Alternatives to Grading Student Writing*, Stephen Tchudi, Editor, NCTE, 1997
