Research base underpinning assessment reform

The annotated list of papers below articulates the research underpinning assessment reform at Griffith University.

The order in which Professor Royce Sadler’s work is listed follows a developmental sequence of the foundational concepts.

Each of the papers can be read separately, but there is value in reading them in the sequence suggested.


**Abstract:** Assessment practices, both at the classroom level and for the award of certificates, have traditionally followed norm-referenced principles, although in recent years there has been an increasing interest in criterion-referenced assessment. In the first part of this article, another approach (referred to as standards-referenced assessment) is outlined. Sharing much of the motivation and philosophy of criterion-referenced assessment, it makes direct and extensive use of teachers' qualitative judgments. In principle, standards-referenced assessment is applicable to a wide variety of school subjects, and attempts to provide external, visible standards for the use of both teachers and students. In the second part of the article, four methods of specifying and promulgating educational standards are identified and described. The four make use of numerical cutoffs, tacit knowledge, exemplars, and verbal descriptions. It is argued that the last two of these taken together provide the most promising framework for a standards-referenced assessment system within which teachers may make sound qualitative judgments about the achievements of their students both for improving learning and for summative reporting.

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**Abstract:** The increasing use of criteria-based approaches to assessment and grading in higher education is a consequence of its sound theoretical rationale and its educational effectiveness. This article is based on a review of the most common grading policies that purport to be criteria-based. The analysis shows that there is no common understanding of what criteria-based means or what it implies for practice. This has inhibited high-quality discourse, research and development among scholars and practitioners. Additionally, the concepts of ‘criteria’ and ‘standards’ are often confused and, despite the use of criteria, the fundamental judgments teachers make about the quality of student work remain subjective and substantially hidden from the students’ view. As they stand, none of the approaches identified in the survey is fully capable of delivering on the aspirations of criteria-based grading. Shifting the primary focus to standards and making criteria secondary could, however, lead to substantial progress.

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URL for external access: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0260293042000264262](http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0260293042000264262)

**Abstract.** When assessment tasks are set for students in universities and colleges, a common practice is to advise them of the criteria that will be used for grading their responses. Various schemes for using multiple criteria have been widely advocated in the literature. Each scheme is designed to offer clear benefits for students. Breaking down holistic judgments into more manageable parts is seen as a way to increase openness for students and achieve more objectivity in grading. However, such approaches do not adequately represent the full complexity of multi-criterion qualitative judgments, and can lead to distorted grading decisions. Six anomalies in the ways assessors approach the grading task are identified, together with several likely contributing factors. Overall, the conclusion is that explicit grading models do not have as strong a theoretical foundation as is commonly supposed, and that holistic appraisal merits further investigation.

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http://www.informaworld.com.libraryproxy.griffith.edu.au/smpp/content~db=all~content=a792041193

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http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02602930801956059


**Abstract.** In this article, grade integrity is defined as to the extent to which each grade awarded, either at the conclusion of a course or module of study or for an extended response to an assessment task, is strictly commensurate with the quality, breadth and depth of a student’s performance. The three basic requirements for this aspiration to be realised are, in order: assessment evidence of a logically legitimate type; evidence of sufficient scope and soundness to allow for a strong inference to be drawn; and a grading principle that is theoretically appropriate for coding the level of a student’s performance. When further developed, the general approach outlined could produce positive side benefits, including ways of dealing with grade inflation.

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http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03075070802706553


**Abstract.** If a grade is to be trusted as an authentic representation of a student’s level of academic achievement, one of the requirements is that all the elements that contribute to that grade must qualify as achievement, and not be something else. The implications of taking this proposition literally turn out to be far reaching. Many elements that are technically non-achievements are routinely incorporated into grades and thereby act as contaminants. A variety of credits and penalties are often included with the intention of helping shape student behaviours or improve their learning. Reversing the situation has ramifications not only for assessment and grading practices but also for the ways in which curriculum and teaching are conceptualised, designed and engaged in.

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