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Concise Answers to Frequently Asked Questions About Assessment and Grading

By Nicole Dimich, Cassandra Erkens, Jadi Miller, Tom Schimmer, and Katie White

Study Guide

This study guide is a companion to the book *Concise Answers to Frequently Asked Questions About Assessment and Grading* by Nicole Dimich, Cassandra Erkens, Jadi Miller, Tom Schimmer, and Katie White. *Concise Answers to Frequently Asked Questions About Assessment and Grading* provides succinct responses to common queries, organized with intention around the Solution Tree Assessment Center's six key tenets of assessment: (1) assessment purpose, (2) assessment architecture, (3) communication of results, (4) accurate interpretation, (5) instructional agility, and (6) student investment.

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.

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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.

Chapter 1

Hope, Efficacy, and Achievement

1. In this chapter, the authors present their concept of how educators can use assessment as a way of instilling hope, efficacy, and a sense of achievement in their students. On page 7, the authors list five strategies for building hope. Choose one of the five and come up with a concrete example of how you would apply that strategy in your classroom. On page 8, the authors present two strategies for building efficacy. How might you adapt one of these strategies for an assessment that you currently have in place?
2. What are some of the ways the authors describe using assessment to build relationships with students? Which one of these methods resonates most strongly with you? How would you use that method in your own classroom?
3. The authors detail ways teachers can use assessment to encourage students' creativity, growth mindset, resilience, productive failure, and risk taking. Focusing on whichever of these you most would like to cultivate in your students, what changes might you make in your assessment methods to benefit students?
4. Remote learning presents several challenges for educators. To ensure students are growing in hope, efficacy, and achievement, what do teachers need to adapt or change in

shifting from in-person to online instruction? What remains constant in both in-person and virtual teaching?

Chapter 2

A Culture of Learning

1. In chapter two, the authors make the case that assessment is a vital part of creating a positive school culture. In doing so, they point out a contrast between what they refer to as a “traditional assessment culture” and assessment as a component of a positive culture. What marks a traditional assessment culture? How is a positive assessment culture different? How do such differences benefit learners?
2. How do the authors characterize the relationship between assessment and creativity? What ideas do you have for assessments in your classroom that would foster student creativity and encourage risk taking and critical thinking?
3. In what ways might you use assessments to motivate students to learn continuously and be an active participant in a culture of learning? How might you adapt your assessment practices so that student motivation becomes intrinsic (learning for personal growth and sense of accomplishment) rather than extrinsic (wanting to please teacher or parents through compliance and good grades)?

4. In what ways does a culture of learning prepare students for life beyond school? How is assessment a part of that culture? How might you reframe your assessment practices to help students be aware of and prepared for later challenges?

Chapter 3

Assessment Purpose

1. Why is clarity about the purpose of assessment so critical to ensuring that assessment lives up to its potential? Think of an assessment you currently use. How would you define its purpose? How would you convey that purpose in student-friendly language so learners in your classroom are clear about what the assessment measures, how it will help them, and what you will do with the information it provides you?
2. What is the purpose of preassessment? When would preassessment benefit you and your students? Can you think of a specific way you might incorporate preassessment into your teaching? How would you make best use of the information that this preassessment would provide?
3. What concerns and methods do the authors discuss for assessing behavior? How do they support their argument that it is as important to assess behavior as academic achievement? In what ways might you assess behavior in your classroom to best help students' growth in this area?

4. In what ways can teachers use assessments to help and encourage students who are struggling? What ideas do you have for ways to use assessment to help and encourage your own students?

Chapter 4

Assessment Architecture

1. What is assessment architecture, as defined by the authors, and why does it matter in your teaching? On page 72, the authors present a list of steps for engaging in assessment architecture. Focusing on one of these five steps, what would that step look like in practice when you or your team design assessments?
2. Beginning on page 79, the authors explore assessment design. As you review this section, which of the questions resonate the most with you as a concern you have in your own teaching? What do you see as the biggest challenge you face in designing assessments? What ideas can you come up with, based on the authors' advice, to overcome those challenges?
3. One of the questions the authors answer is, *How can I know if an assessment I have already created is a good one?* Think about one of the assessments you're currently using in your classroom. If you find that the assessment needs improvement, what could you do differently to help students thrive in a positive assessment culture? If you find that your current assessment already aligns with the authors' description of an effective assessment, what elements of it can you apply or adapt in other assessment methods in your teaching?

4. On page 103, the authors focus on examining assessments in use. What is involved in the critical examination of assessment tools and processes? What kind of evidence tells you whether an assessment is as effective as it could be?

Chapter 5

Communication of Results

1. Review the authors' discussion of the importance of communicating the results of assessment. Did anything resonate with you particularly in this discussion? If so, in what way? What challenges have you faced in the past with communicating results, or getting stakeholders to understand the importance of assessments? What can you do to overcome those challenges?
2. What constitutes quality feedback with learner assessment? Knowing the value of quality feedback, have you faced challenges in providing your learners with such feedback? What can you take from this book that you would like to try in your own practice to help deliver more effective feedback? What are some specific ways you could try out your chosen strategy?
3. What role, if any, does learner self-assessment play in your current assessment practice? After reading the section of this chapter on student involvement in communication, do you anticipate altering or adapting your current practices? If so, why and in what ways? If not, what do you see as already working in your practice?

4. On page 127, the authors explore the concept of professional judgment and ways of communicating it to stakeholders. Think of an incident in which you have experienced difficulty making students, parents, caregivers, or other stakeholders understand what professional judgment is and why you are qualified to make subjective evaluations. What might you have done differently in that scenario to better help the stakeholder come to a shared understanding (and also make the conversation easier for you)?

Chapter 6

Accurate Interpretation

1. What challenges do educators face in accurately interpreting the data they glean from assessments? What are some strategies for overcoming such challenges? What insights do you have about how you might interpret assessment data more accurately or more easily in your own practice?
2. What is the role of collaboration in interpreting assessment data? Thinking of the three criteria required for interpreting assessment results—accuracy, accessibility, and reliability—how would you work with team members to ensure interpretation results not only in the most effective assessments but also in the best use of the data those assessments provide?
3. How can you ensure that the more subjective aspects of interpretation (professional judgment, observation, and conversation) help you interpret data accurately?
4. Beginning on page 141, the authors cover interpretation practices. Was there anything in this section that struck you as different from what you currently do in your classroom or from what you learned in your teacher training? Was there anything that made you

rethink how you will use assessments? What new methods might you devise based on what struck you as new or challenging in this section?

Chapter 7

Instructional Agility

1. The authors ask a big question in this chapter: How does assessment help learning? Based on what you've read in this book, what are three key points you would choose to summarize the answer? How do these points align with what you've experienced in your teaching? Would you add anything from your own professional experience to answer the question of how assessment helps learning?
2. Beginning on page 156, the authors address logistical concerns teachers may have about adjusting instruction based on assessment data. Which of these logistical concerns strike you as a challenge you currently contend with, or anticipate encountering with instructional adjustments? What can you take away from this chapter that could help you make instructional agility a viable option in your classroom?
3. While differentiation of instruction is sound pedagogical practice, it often presents teachers with a challenge. What, according to this chapter, is the relationship between assessment and differentiation? Does this chapter give you any new insights or ideas about differentiation and how to make it a more viable option for your learners? What ideas might you wish to try in your classroom and why?

4. What is the instructional value of reassessment? When might you consider reassessing learners? What challenges might you anticipate with reassessment and how might you overcome those challenges?

Chapter 8

Student Investment

1. On page 179, the authors state, “Student investment happens by design.” After reading this chapter, what are three key methods you want to try in your classroom to increase student investment? Looking at assessment specifically, what would you like to try to get your learners involved in the assessment process?
2. How can you help your learners see the value of assessments in relation to what’s important to them outside the classroom or in preparation for life beyond school? How can you deploy assessment to increase student confidence and self-regulation?
3. Starting on page 185, the authors address several questions relating to assessment practices. Reviewing this section of the chapter, was there anything that particularly resonated with you as a question or concern you’ve had? What insights about assessment practice have you gotten from the chapter? What ideas might you want to try in your classroom to lower student anxiety about assessment, encourage students to apply your feedback, pursue extension rather than settle for proficiency, or another area in which you wish to help learners be more invested in their learning?

4. What ideas has this chapter given you about ways to use assessment not only to gather data on student performance but also to encourage positive changes in mindset and behavior? What strategies can you think of to help your own students in these areas using the concepts covered both in this chapter and throughout the book as a whole?