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Table I.1: A Culture of Grading Versus a Culture of Feedback

A Culture of Grading	A Culture of Feedback
The fear of receiving a bad grade motivates students.	The satisfaction of making real progress toward meaningful outcomes motivates students.
Students are disappointed when they don't earn As.	Students are rarely disappointed by their grades, recognizing that improvement is always possible.
Students are ranked and sorted by their academic ability. They are also aware of their own standing as compared to their peers.	Sorting only provides students with extra practice on outcomes that they are still working to master.
Students are embarrassed or ashamed when they struggle to learn a new concept.	Students are convinced that struggles to learn new concepts are nothing more than challenges to conquer.
Students are afraid that they might not be good enough to learn challenging content or to master challenging skills.	Students are hopeful and confident about their abilities to learn challenging content or to master challenging skills.
Students see feedback that the classroom teacher delivers as the final word on their performance.	Students see feedback, which they actively seek out on their own, as the starting point for new learning.
Students see grades as evaluations of learners.	Students see grades as evidence of learning.

Chapter Overviews

In *Creating a Culture of Feedback*, we will take a closer look at the role teachers in grades 3–12 can play in cultivating these skills and attitudes in their students. You will become more aware of just how important feedback is to developing learners, discover the characteristics of effective feedback, and explore a set of approachable

instructional strategies for prioritizing feedback over grading in upper elementary, middle, and high school classrooms. The chapters draw on three commonsense questions that successful learners often ask and that form the foundation of research-based assessment *for* learning practices (Hattie, 2009; Sadler, 1998; Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis, & Chappuis, 2004): (1) Where am I going? (2) How am I doing? (3) What are my next steps?

Chapter 1: Where Am I Going?

Teachers who successfully prioritize feedback recognize that there is more to it than simply writing dozens of provocative comments and interesting questions on final copies of student assignments. In fact, the best feedback progressions begin long before students complete *any* work, as teachers help them identify outcomes worth mastering. This chapter examines the role that “I can” statements, unit overview sheets, and Not Yet / You Bet lists can play in bringing early clarity to the content and skills covered during an instructional cycle—a critical first step toward turning students into partners in the learning process.

Chapter 2: How Am I Doing?

Students need clarity about what mastery of complex tasks looks like in action. As a result, teachers who successfully prioritize feedback are constantly developing instructional strategies that ask students to compare their own work against authentic examples of accomplished performance. This chapter introduces the concept of *feeding forward*—providing students with enough information to learn to be right before they ever have the chance to get something wrong. You’ll also learn about the role that High and Low Comparison, Revise It Once / Revise It Again, and Need to Have / Nice to Have activities can play in helping students reflect on the progress they are making as learners.

Chapter 3: What Are My Next Steps?

The most important steps in any feedback progression are those teachers take after instruction ends and they pass back papers. If our students are ever going to succeed at Papert's (1998) one really competitive skill—knowing how to act in situations for which they were not specifically prepared—they must learn to use feedback to independently identify logical and appropriate next steps worth taking. Chapter 3 examines the role that reflection checklists, unit analysis forms, feedback forms, and next steps reflection sheets can play in helping students do just that.

Integrating the techniques and strategies we discuss in *Creating a Culture of Feedback* into instruction will require additional time, energy, and effort, but like most meaningful and effective practices, they are worth it. Moreover, there are dozens of digital tools that can make these strategies more efficient for both teachers and students. Each chapter will highlight a handful of apps and programs that can supplement traditional pencil-and-paper techniques. Most carry no cost to educators and are easy to use.

The trouble with recommending online resources, of course, is that they change rapidly and can become obsolete or unavailable. As a remedy, we will maintain a constantly updated list of suggested tech tools at <http://bit.ly/CCFtools> to use as a reference for years to come. It will include the services mentioned in this book and any replacements or additions worth exploring.

Each chapter also includes sample handouts to structure more meaningful feedback experiences. These examples are shortened versions of the complete handouts to give you an idea of them in action. To further facilitate your efforts, we have provided you with ready access to customizable copies of the complete handouts. Visit <http://bit.ly/CCFhandouts> to access these editable, reproducible files. Our hope is that by having digital copies of editable files, you can begin changing your practices immediately. Visit the *Creating*

a *Culture of Feedback* landing page at go.hbe.com.au to download complete versions of the free online-only reproducibles in this book.

Conclusion

There really is no one right way to read this book. Maybe you will start at chapter 1 and work to the end of the text in order to get a complete sense for the kinds of feedback practices that you could implement throughout an instructional cycle. Perhaps you will read individual chapters addressing the specific feedback challenges that you are currently wrestling with or the technology recommendations that you are the most interested in. Regardless of how you tackle *Creating a Culture of Feedback*, find at least one strategy to use in your school or classroom. Changing perceptions about the role that feedback plays in the lives of successful learners may be the most important work that you do all year—and changing perceptions starts by changing your *practices*.

Chapter 1

Where Am I Going?

All too often, teachers use the terms *grading* and *feedback* interchangeably. We convince ourselves that any information we give students—letter grades on reports, number grades on quizzes, or written comments on projects—counts equally as forms of valuable feedback. The truth, however, is that grading and feedback are different practices serving different purposes and having different impacts on learners.

Grades communicate how well a student's work measures up against a teacher's expectations. Often given only after a student completes an assignment, grades rarely promote growth in learners. In fact, grades rarely even *report* growth. Instead, they boil down product, process, and progress indicators into one ambiguous number or letter (Guskey, 2009). The result is that students have no clue whether the grades they are earning are a reflection of the quality of the content they have created, the effort they invested into the task, or the fact that their final pieces were better than they expected.

As Wiggins (2012) argues:

The most ubiquitous form of evaluation, grading, is so much a part of the school landscape that we easily overlook its utter uselessness as actionable feedback. Grades are here to stay, no doubt—but that doesn't mean we should rely on them as a major source of feedback. (p. 16)

Chapter 2

How Am I Doing?

Whether feedback occurs in the workplace or in the classroom, it has almost always flows downhill. Managers use feedback as a tool for evaluating employees and for reinforcing the organization's goals. Annual reviews summarize an employee's strengths and weaknesses—and compare an employee's performance against the performance of their peers (Goldsmith, 2002). Traditional schools have mimicked this flow: teachers most frequently use feedback as a tool to critique and assess student performance against grade-level standards. Those critiques and assessments then determine the grades students earn, which become the de facto sorting tools for rating and ranking learners. In both circumstances, the primary purpose of feedback isn't to improve a learner's performance. It is to justify an authority figure's evaluations. The result is discouraging: feedback is rarely helpful *or* hopeful, leaving learners with little more than lists of ways that they haven't met expectations.

For noted executive coach Marshall Goldsmith (2002), the solution is to prioritize *feedforward*—information that can help learners better understand future expectations and identify next steps—over *feedback* in our organizations:

There is a fundamental problem with all types of feedback: it focuses on the past, on what has already occurred—not on the infinite variety of opportunities that can happen

Chapter 3

What Are My Next Steps?

Here's an interesting question: what happens in your classroom when you hand back assignments? If your students are anything like ours, they check their grades and promptly file their papers into binders, recycle bins, or trash cans. That's discouraging, isn't it? We spend long hours and late nights filling margins with comments and covering rubrics with check marks only to see students move on without giving our feedback a second thought.

There are lots of reasons why students don't really care to hear what you have to say about their work. Some have learned to tune out feedback because it has always been too general to be worthwhile. Spend a decade reading vague comments like "Good work," "I like this," "Remember to capitalize proper nouns," and "Don't forget to indent," and you would question the value of teacher comments too. Others tune out feedback because it has always been overwhelming. Being buried under a thousand things left to learn can cripple some students. Most, however, are ready to move on simply because that's the classroom's regular rhythm. Teachers assign tasks, collect papers, and give grades. Students complete work. The student's job is to turn something in. The teacher's job is to score it. Nothing more, nothing less.

Here's another question: when was the last time you passed back an assignment and gave students time to really wrestle with the comments