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INTRODUCTION

“Our Schools Grappled with Grade Point Politics and Lost.” (Ashenfelter 1990)

“Why Any Grades At All, Father?” (Juarez 1996)

“Testing and Grading Practices and Opinions in the Nineties: 1890’s or 1990’s?” (Frary, Gross, and Weber 1992)

“Grades are not inherently bad. It is their misuse and misinterpretation that is bad.” (Guskey 1993, 7)

“Ten Measures Better Than Grading.” (Malehorn 1994)

“Researchers and professional organizations encourage teachers to use multiple assessment measures but give little indication of how to incorporate them into a grade for report cards.” (Seeley 1994, 4)

“What grades offer is spurious precision, a subjective rating masquerading as an objective assessment.” (Kohn 1993b, 201)

“Letter grades have acquired an almost cult-like importance in American schools.” (Olson 1995, 23)

“Many common grading practices . . . make it difficult for many youngsters to feel successful in school.” (Canady and Hotchkiss 1989, 68)

“I learned . . . that there are reasons, historical reasons why grading exists. But I also learned from history that there are no good reasons, no sound educational ones, anyway, why they should continue to exist.” (Kirschenbaum, Napier, and Simon 1971, 73)

What is your reaction to the titles and quotes about grades, on page 1? What do they say about grading? How do you think your colleagues, your students' parents, and your community at large would react to them?

What Grading Terminology Is Needed?

As the titles and quotes about grading show, grading has many concerns. One communication concern is grading terminology. The term *grading* carries different meanings for different people while other words, such as marking, may sometimes mean grading, too. As McTighe and Ferrara stated, “Terms [are] frequently used interchangeably, although they should have distinct meanings” (1995, 11). Discussion of any issue or principle must proceed from a clear understanding of the meaning of the terms being used. In support of this goal, a glossary is provided in Appendix 1. But, at this point, readers need a shared understanding of two critical terms: *grades* (or grading) and *marks* (or marking). These terms are often used interchangeably, although grading is used more frequently in the United States and marking more commonly in Australia.

Reflecting on . . . Terminology

Ask yourself the following questions:

1. What do you understand by the terms *grades* and *grading*?
2. What do you understand by the terms *marks* and *marking*?
3. Are they the same? Are they different? How?

The problem is that the terms *grades* and *grading* are often used with two meanings. For a meaningful analysis, it is critical to have a clear meaning for each term. In this book, grading and marking are used as follows:

Grade(s) or grading—the number or letter reported at the end of a period of time as a summary statement of student performance.

Mark(s) or marking—the number, letter, or score given for any single student test or performance.

Airasian used grading to mean “making a judgment about the quality of a pupil’s performance, whether it is performance on a single assessment or performance across many assessments” (1994, 281). In most writings, the context makes clear which meaning is intended. However, this is not always the case, and, when the meaning is not clear, confusion and lack of clarity in analysis and discussion requires that the two activities be distinguished by using separate terms.