



















others but certainly they need to meet those four conditions. I see those things as being conditions for quality and I would see that they point towards standards-based grading as absolutely being one of the ways that can meet those four conditions. Except for specific, I think we can have excellent grading practices that aren't standards-based but they really wouldn't meet the conditions for specific, because the whole idea of specific is that it is related to learning goals, standards, expectations, whatever we call them.

Mullen: That's a very good point. So even though it's not mentioned, standards-based today is definitely addressing those four attributes much more so than traditional percentage-based grading practices.

O'Connor: Absolutely. I mean, traditional grading, the issues as I see them is - the use of percentages, the use of averaging, the inclusion of behaviors in all sorts of different ways, so that would probably be the three main things or issues, but the three main ones.

Mullen: Now I have time for just one more question. In my experience, I've noticed a difference in how students react to standards-based grading practices depending on their age and grade level. My younger students, as young as third grade have a much easier time adjusting than my middle school students. I'm wondering in your experience what does percentage-based grading practices in elementary school experiences have on the challenges facing secondary schools?

O'Connor: A lot, unfortunately, and I think when you make that distinction between the third grade and the older elementary students, that's basically because, and it's probably from about grade three on in many situations, that teachers start focusing on grades. I've never heard a grade one student say "does this count?" I don't think I've heard many grade two students say that, but certainly by grade four or five you'll have students saying "does this count?" because teachers have put a number on every thing and every number goes into the grade book. I think basically we have trained students into that. Yes, it is, if students have had two or three or four years of that before they get to middle school, and six or seven years before they get to high school, it is difficult to, in a sense, retrain them. But I may be hopelessly naive and optimistic, but I really believe if we've trained them into it we can train them out of it by using practices that support learning, making it clear that school is about learning, by making the distinction between practice and performance, by emphasizing more reason for achievement and by involving them in the assessment and grading process.

Mullen: I definitely agree with you and I don't think that's naive at all. In fact, I'm hoping that it's not just possible but is something schools are actively trying to shift towards.

O'Connor: Well, we certainly have examples of it. One of the things, because I've been working on this for a long time, I mean I wrote my first article about grading published in 1995 so we're talking twenty-five years almost, and at times there seems to be very little change. One of the things I like about twitter and twitter chats is the people talking about their success stories and

students becoming learners. Occasionally people get their own students to be on chats that is what I think is inspiring and really gives me hope.

Mullen: I want to make sure that people know of any upcoming events because you speak all over the world and publishing, but where can people find you and the works you have coming out in the future?

O'Connor: All of the things I have in the next while are individual schools or school districts that are not open events. The only event that people can register for that I expect to be speaking at is the Edge conference in Orlando in early April. If people are interested, the best place to go is my website [oconnorgrading dot com](http://oconnorgrading.com). Things change quickly, though, somebody asks me for an open conference tomorrow, or I see a conference I would like to attend and I put in a proposal. Things change dramatically quite frequently at times.

Mullen: Quickly, indeed. You mentioned twitter, is there a twitter hashtag you like to follow or get involved with?

O'Connor: Well the two twitter chats I like - SBLchat which is on the first Wednesday of the month at 9pm eastern, and the other one is ATAssessment, all things assessment, which is on Tuesdays at 9pm eastern, alternate tuesdays. Both of those, SBLchats because its focused on standards-based, and ATAssessment because they seem to get moderators who ask particularly thoughtful questions, thought-provoking questions, and then the other social media that I like and engage in is the Standards-Based Learning and Grading facebook group.

Mullen: Mr. O'Connor, thank you for taking the time to speak with me. I really appreciate you being on the program.

O'Connor: Well, thank you, Greg, it was an enjoyable and interesting conversation. Thank you.

### **[End Interview]**

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