

## Chapter 1: The Task

**F**or both the teacher and the students, the punitive response to late work does not enhance the learning partnership that is necessary for the students to have the best chance of success. Productive communication is replaced by a punitive reaction to late work. The ‘partners’ are distracted from solving the organizational and cognitive problems that caused the tardiness with the assignment.

If students have low marks, is this because they do not know the content or cannot apply it, or did they hand some or all of the work in late? Or did their approach to the task leave something to be desired? If the quality is high but the mark given by the teacher reflects missing or late work, then the meaning of the mark is lost.

Advocates of more precise communication of assessment recommend that the achievement of students is determined by what they can do (evidence) as the primary determinant of the mark rather than when or how they did it (timeline).

The direction for assessing the ‘when and how’ of student work is to report it separately in the assessment of “learning skills” such as homework, participation, work habits and organization. This is considered a distinct evaluation, not included in the final percentage for the course.

Ken O’Connor describes the current direction for assessment in *How to Grade for Learning*:

“For grades to have real meaning, they must be pure measures of each student’s achievement of the learning goals.”

Teachers’ assessments must include a clean and clear determination of what students know and can or cannot do as dictated by the curriculum expectations or outcomes. The ‘how and when’, while definitely important in measuring the students’ success, should be dealt with separately from what they know and can do in the courses they take.

Otherwise, Ken O’Connor points out, students whose knowledge and skills of the curriculum are excellent can be given a lower mark because of issues unrelated to their academic ability.

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### The Difficult Task

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This viewpoint contradicts the still widely held belief of many teachers that the ‘when and how’ of the work is part of the ‘what’ produced by the students.

This focus on clarity of purpose in creating student assessment has created a dilemma for teachers who prioritize ‘fairness’ between students in assessing the work. Teachers do not feel that students who submit work late should be assessed with the same consideration and criteria as those who have submitted it on time. This seems to be an injustice in their minds since evaluating on-time and late responses equally would compromise a key factor of life-long learning.

*...keeps how the achievement of curriculum expectations (the ‘what’ in student learning) is assessed separate from the assessment of the learning skills (the ‘how’ of student learning)*

In addition:

“Many teachers felt that they would lose a key tool for motivating students to hand in their work on time (i.e.: marks)...”

“Students would take advantage of the system if they knew they would not lose marks for lateness or obtain zero for missing work.” (Costello & McKillop)

However, if the goal for high school teachers is to be a catalyst for adolescent growth and intellectual development so that students are prepared for life beyond the classroom, then nurturing their work ethic to a point where they make academically responsible choices is essential.

The focus for teachers now is to move away from the traditional reactive response to late work (deducting marks) to a proactive response designed to improve the students’ response within class and enhance lifelong learning skills. Teachers accomplish this by designing classroom/course policies and procedures that encourage a ‘culture of academic responsibility’, a lifelong skill.

Adolescents do not come with these skills. Therefore teachers need to create assessment policies and practices that proactively teach these students attitudes to work completion that create immediate and life long success.