

What About 3-1?

What about the students who don't do anything in class throughout the term or semester and then, at the end, hand most of their work in and show up to take the final exam? They pass based on work that is all done at the last moment. It's not right.

Some students have figured out that it is sometimes possible to pass in the last moments of the course. This can be frustrating. To change this, we need to re-examine our definition of success for the course. If we calculate a term or final mark based on only tests, quizzes, and a list of assignments, then, as we share this list with the students, they come to understand exactly what matters. It is only what is on the list. The learning outcomes and standards have been effectively been replaced. Suddenly we have students who figure out how to give us exactly what we have asked for and no more.

What if teachers defined success in such a way that students had to collect evidence throughout the semester to provide proof that they were reaching the learning goals set both for themselves and by the teacher? What if the evidence that they collect is evaluated and contributes to the end-of-term grade? What about a collection of evidence of learning – you might even choose to call it a portfolio – that at the end of the semester shows growth and development over time, in relation to important standards or outcomes? Could this comprehensive collection of evidence in relation to the standards and outcomes also be significant part of the final grade?

What about describing what an A or a 90-percent-plus student would look like in this class? Could you include habits of mind such as perseverance, flexibility of thought, and risk-taking? Could students show evidence of these habits of mind being evident day-by-day across the course and the semester? This is not only possible, but high school teachers have begun to share exactly how they do this (Davies, Herbst & Busick, 2013).