Utilizing Assessments to Improve Knowledge Construction, Motivation, Discipline, and Learning Performance of High School Students

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Abstract

This study explored how teacher-student relationships in high schools affect students' motivation, engagement, and classroom performance. This research also studies the impact of graded classwork, open-book tasks, and bonus questions on student success and university acceptance. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, seven teachers from two independent Toronto schools were interviewed via Zoom, and data were analyzed with inductive thematic coding. Findings indicate the significance of positive teacher–student relationships and their impact on increasing engagement and motivation. Moreover, graded classwork and open-book tasks support the construction of knowledge. Bonus questions encourage engagement, effort and participation, and formative assessments can impact students' achievement. The results highlight that daily teaching practices strongly influence student learning, engagement, and academic outcomes.

Keywords: graded classwork, open-book classwork, bonus question, student engagement, student motivation.

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Utilizing Assessments to Improve Knowledge Construction, Motivation, Discipline, and Learning Performance of High School Students examines how high school teachers perceive the impact of assessments on students' motivation. The literature review below presents the theoretical framework that guides the study. It explains how Constructivism helps students build knowledge by connecting new information to what they already know (Kimmons, 2016), and how Motivation, including both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, is important for student engagement (Gopalan et al., 2017). The review also describes how formative assessments support learning through feedback (Popham, 2006), while summative assessments evaluate performance and give grades (Garrison & Ehringhaus, 2007). The review indicates that formative assessment is not effective in improving student learning performance and achievement (McMillan, Venable, and Varier, 2013). Teacher Leadership is important because effective teaching and classroom management help students stay focused and engaged (Stevens, 2018). Research on dropout indicates that disengagement, low support, and low motivation are associated with increased dropout (Stearns & Glennie, 2006).

The research problem is that high school students who rely on extrinsic motivation face difficulties with engagement and knowledge construction, which affect their learning performance and achievement (Gopalan et al., 2017). Formative assessments are intended to support students during the learning process, but research shows they have a smaller impact on student achievement than expected (McMillan et al., 2013). When students are not constructing knowledge, do not participate in class activities, or ignore teachers' feedback, they continue to struggle (McMillan et al.,2013). As a result, they do not do well on summative assessments, their

marks decline, and they start losing motivation. As disengagement increases, students stop trying to meet learning expectations and feel the school environment is not supportive. These problems increase the possibility of academic decline and dropout (Stearns & Glennie, 2006).

The significance of this study lies in understanding how teachers can help students stay motivated, especially students who depend on extrinsic motivation; therefore, external rewards are needed to convince students to participate in activities (Gopalan et al., 2017). The experience of effective teachers who succeeded in motivating their students to use class time more effectively, participate more, and feel they can still succeed plays an important role in highlighting how these teachers helped their students succeed and get a university placement after grade twelve (The Reading School, 2021).

There is a literature gap in studies that discuss formative assessment; however, there is a scarcity of research exploring how effective high school teachers actually experience formative assessment in their classrooms. There is limited research on how teachers use formative assessment tools, such as graded classwork, open-book classwork, and bonus points, to support students with low motivation, reduce disengagement, and help them stay in school. Also, there are not many qualitative studies that connect teachers' assessment practices to long-term outcomes, such as student retention and university transition.

Because of these gaps, this study focuses on high school teachers' lived experiences and aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How do high school teachers experience and interpret their relationships with students in shaping motivation, engagement, and overall classroom performance?

2. How do high school teachers experience the use of graded classwork, bonus questions, open-book classwork, and assessment evidence when supporting student success, retention, and university acceptance?

Literature Review

Constructivism

According to the Constructivist learning theory, students do not acquire knowledge by receiving it from the teacher; the teacher has a significant role (Kimmons, 2016); instead, they construct knowledge and meaning from their experiences (Bada, 2015). Learning is a continuous process of adding new knowledge to the existing knowledge that students already possess. By connecting new information with what students already know, students will construct knowledge as they are exposed to new experiences (Kimmons, 2016). Steffe and Gale (1995) described knowledge as more about what remains constant in a person's experience, rather than about things, structures, or events in the world that exist independently.

Therefore, cognition, or mental construction, depends on students' motivation, beliefs, and attitudes, which prevent students from acquiring information and building knowledge. According to Gal and Ginsburg (1994), students' beliefs, ideas, and expectations can disrupt the class environment that the teacher makes, and sometimes this goes against what the teacher wants to achieve.

According to Oliver (2000), constructivism helps explain how students acquire knowledge; however, students need motivation to remain engaged and construct their own knowledge. Teachers who understand students' prior knowledge and support their learning can help students stay motivated and engaged. Constructivist classrooms demonstrate that students learn more effectively when they are actively engaged and take responsibility for their own

learning. Moreover, Oliver (2000), found that students who only performed the browsing task achieved the lowest results, while those who completed the searching task did better. Those who completed the connecting task performed the best.

Motivation

Motivation is defined as the process of triggering and maintaining behaviour towards a goal (Urhahne & Wijnia, 2023). Motivation is essential in learning because motivation gives energy and direction to students' actions (Gopalan, Abu Bakar, Zulkifli, Alwi, & Che Mat, 2017). Urhahne and Wijnia (2023) stated that the mini theory proposes a self-determination continuum that ranges from intrinsic motivation to extrinsic motivation to amotivation. Motivation can be intrinsic, when students study because they enjoy learning or like challenges, or extrinsic, when they study for rewards such as grades or praise, or when there is pressure. Amotivation happens when intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are absent. A demotivated student will be unable to engage in the learning process and therefore will not be able to construct knowledge. Thus, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are important for constructing knowledge; highly motivated students can face challenges, understand how things work, and apply the knowledge they have constructed to real-world examples and problem-solving (Gopalan et al., 2017).

Assessments

There are two types of assessments: formative and summative.

Formative Assessment

Formative assessments are ongoing evaluations that teachers use to assess students' understanding (Popham, 2006). Teachers provide students with feedback after these assessments, rather than assigning a grade (Popham, 2006). Formative assessment is when the information

from the assessment is used during teaching time to adjust instruction and support students better (Popham, 2006). Teachers use formative assessments to gauge students' understanding and provide feedback rather than a grade (Popham, 2006). Examples of formative assessments include discussions, readings, answering questions, problem-solving, group thinking, in-class writing assignments, homework, formative tests, and short formative tests (Boston, 2002). Overachievers, or students with intrinsic motivation, participate in classroom discussions and take classwork seriously. However, students who rely on extrinsic motivation and those who are demotivated tend not to participate, take the discussion seriously, or complete the practice. A quote for Kingston and Nash (2011) stated by McMillan, who found that formative assessment has a smaller impact on student achievement than many people believe (McMillan et al. 2013).

Summative Assessment

The summative assessments are for evaluation purposes; teachers use them to measure what students know and do not know and to provide a grade or a report card (Garrison & Ehringhaus, 2007). Summative assessments are periodic assessments used to assess what students know and what they do not know. Students receive their test marks or report cards at the end of a unit or term (Garrison & Ehringhaus, 2007).

Bonus Point

The bonus point is an example of extrinsic motivation that encourages students to engage. An example of bonus points is an additional question on a summative assessment. Bonus points increased participation, engagement, and the quality of discussion, especially for quieter students (Dunn, Fontanier, Luo, & Goad, 2020–2021).

Teacher Leadership

School leadership cannot directly impact students' performance; improving student performance depends on teachers' professional capacity for instruction and leadership (Bost, 2019). Effective classroom management is crucial in supporting students' attention and learning. Engaged students will remain focused, complete their tasks, and this will eliminate behavioural problems, ensuring a calm classroom where students can construct knowledge (Stevens, 2018).

Dropout

Student dropout is when students leave high school, and students drop out for various reasons. Students drop out of high school due to pull-out factors and push-out factors. The push-out factors are school-related and refer to the circumstances under which students drop out due to a loss of motivation or feeling unsupported at school. Some students leave their schools due to an unwelcoming environment, the strictness of rules rather than rewards and motivation, or they have problems with teachers or peers due to ineffective classroom management (Stearns & Glennie, 2006).

Canadian Background

Student dropout is a significant issue in Canada. In Canada, students complete high school around age 18. Among individuals aged 18–24 in 2021–2022, one in three grade 12 students attended a Canadian University. In Canada, 33% of the population aged 18 to 24 are in universities, 13% are in colleges, 4% are still in high school, 38% have joined the labour force, and 12% are neither employed nor in education (Zeman, 2023).

The literature review highlighted the importance of students' motivation (Urhahne et al., 2023) and explained the purpose of formative and summative assessments. Constructivist principles suggest students learn better when they are active and responsible for their learning

(Oliver, 2000). Motivation theory explains how both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation influence students' effort. Students who depend on extrinsic motivation tend not to take formative assessment seriously; therefore, formative assessments do not positively impact their learning achievement (McMillan et al. 2013). Practicing teachers' leadership to impact students' performance depends on teacher capacity (Bost, 2019) and improves engagement and focus (Stevens, 2018).

Method

Research Design

This study used a qualitative phenomenological research design. Phenomenology helps researchers understand how participants experience a phenomenon and describe it in their own words (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 50). For this study, the phenomenon was how high school teachers in Toronto independent schools understand student engagement, student motivation, and assessment practices.

The qualitative phenomenological approach is suitable when the goal is to explore, describe and analyze the meaning in depth. The researcher explores how participants describe, perceive, judge, feel about, talk about, and make sense of their lived experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2021). Focusing on the participants' lived experiences guided the study, as the researcher sought to learn how teachers interpret their relationships with students, daily routines, classroom practices, students' engagement, assessments and results without any intervention or experiment.

Independent schools were selected because they have an approximately 100 percent transition rate from grade 12 to university (The Reading School, 2021). Understanding teachers' experiences in such schools can help to see how they support student engagement during

formative and summative assessments. This may also provide insight into the larger goal of reducing dropout rates, especially during a period when many young adults aged 18 to 24 are neither employed nor studying (Zeman, 2023).

Participants

Sampling

This study used non-probability, purposeful sampling (or convenience sampling), as participants were selected based on their convenience and availability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Teachers from two independent schools in Toronto were invited by an email sent for the two schools. According to Creswell (2018), the target sample size for qualitative phenomenography should range from 5 to 10 participants. The sample comprised seven teachers who agreed to participate, as planned. The participants are teachers from two independent schools, teach different subject areas, have varying but long years of experience, and all teach the high school grade level.

Participant Profiles

The group of teachers has a combined professional experience of 15-35 years, and all have taught across grades 7–12 at two independent schools. The teachers currently teach many subject areas, including English, Law, Biology, Business Education (including economics and accounting), History, Political Science, Visual Arts, ESL, Social Studies, Physical Education, and Digital Technology. Some teachers also taught Advanced Placement (AP) courses and served in leadership roles, including Head of the Arts Department and Head of the Business Department. Their backgrounds demonstrate broad teaching responsibilities and a strong familiarity with different grade levels, academic streams, and curriculum demands in the independent school system.

Table 1

Participants' teaching experience, subjects taught, grade levels, and school type.

Participant	Experience	Subjects Taught	Grades Level	Type of School
Teacher 1	15	English, Law	Grades 8–12	Independent School
Teacher 2	23	Science, Biology	Grades 7–12	Independent School
Teacher 3	19	Economics, Accounting, International Business, AP Economics	Grades 11–12	Independent School
Teacher 4	15	Visual Arts, ESL, Social Studies, English	Grades 9–12	Independent School
Teacher 5	36	History, Political Science	Grades 9–12	Independent School
Teacher 6	20	Physical Education, Business	Grades 9–12	Independent School
Teacher 7	24	English, Computer Studies	Grades 9–12	Independent School

Ethical Considerations

All ethical procedures were followed. Participation was voluntary, and no incentives were given. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the research. Each participant signed an informed consent (Appendices A-G). Teachers were informed about the study's purpose, their right to withdraw, and confidentiality measures. No students participated, and no school intervention was done. Interview recordings and transcripts were stored securely, and pseudonyms were used. Each interview lasts 30-45 minutes.

Data Collection

Data were collected through seven structured interviews (Appendix H). Each interview included 18 questions, with the final question open for additional comments. Interviews were done through Zoom, providing flexibility for participants. The data was retained in pseudonymized form indefinitely. All interviews were recorded, and transcripts were downloaded from Zoom after each interview. Marshall and Rossman (2021) note that qualitative interviews aim to explore a topic in depth and detail, follow quality standards that researchers consider important, and allow greater flexibility so participants can express their experiences more freely.

The interview questions mainly ask teachers to discuss their teaching experience, including subjects, grade levels, and years of teaching, as well as how their relationship with students affects engagement in instruction, classwork, and assessment. The questions also explore classroom routine, discipline, expectations, and how these routines influence motivation. Teachers are asked to describe how they conduct classwork activities, the frequency, and how classwork, graded, ungraded, or open-book, helps students construct knowledge and stay motivated. The interview also examines how different types of classwork affect engagement, behaviour, confidence, and performance, and how teachers balance graded and ungraded tasks. It asks about assessment breakdown, classroom averages, student failures, and university acceptance for Grade 12 students. The questions also examine the use of bonus questions and their effect on effort, participation, and confidence. Finally, teachers are asked which assessment practice was most effective for learning and motivation, what challenges they faced when grading classwork, and if they want to add anything else about classwork, marking, or student engagement.

Analysis

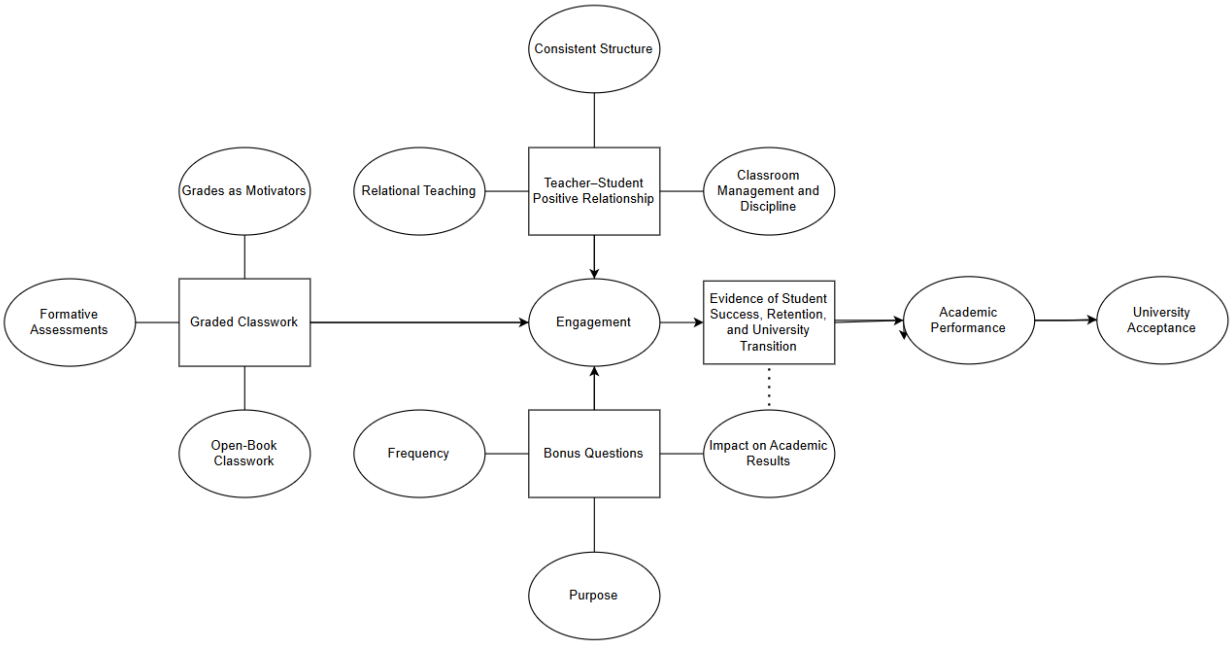
This study used thematic inductive analysis. According to Saldaña (2025), the themes were not chosen before the study but developed from the participants' own words. During inductive coding, the analysis begins with an open mind and generates new codes as the data are read for the first time. This inductive coding usually takes more time and is a standard data-driven method used in phenomenological qualitative approaches.

The first round was the familiarization step, during which the researcher read each transcript multiple times to become familiar with the data. The second round was the initial coding (descriptive coding – Appendix I). According to Saldaña (2025), descriptive codes summarize in a word or short phrase the basic topic of a passage. Meaningful statements and terms were highlighted and assigned descriptive codes. The researcher prepared a comparative table for each interview question and highlighted the inductively derived codes, sub-codes, and preliminary themes in different colours.

The second-round pattern coding (Appendix J) was used to summarize the first-round codes and sub-codes. Pattern coding helps group codes into more meaningful units of analysis. Codes and sub-codes were summarized into patterns that showed similarities or differences across teachers, revealing larger patterns in the data (Saldaña, 2025). Then, patterns were merged into preliminary themes. Themes were reviewed and refined to ensure clarity and consistency. Finally, themes were named and defined, and a code book was prepared (Appendix K). These themes captured the core meanings of how teachers understand assessment, student motivation, and engagement.

Figure 1

Thematic coding concept map.



Findings

The results from the teachers' interviews are organized into themes that show how teachers understand student motivation, engagement, assessment practices, and academic outcomes. The findings explain how teacher–student relationships, classroom structure, graded and ungraded classwork, open-book tasks, and bonus questions all influence students' learning behaviour. The section also shows how these practices connect to student success, strong academic performance, and a smooth transition to university.

Teacher – Student Positive Relationship

The first theme is that having a positive teacher–student relationship helps in increasing student engagement, motivation, and readiness to participate in classroom learning. Teachers said that the relational teaching they create with students becomes essential for academic effort, confidence, and taking learning risks.

Relational Teaching: All the teachers explained how approachability, trust, encouragement, and regular communication improve the students' engagement. Teacher four said that checking in with students and showing interest in their progress is very powerful, and explained that "when students feel like you are invested in their results, they are more engaged." The same teacher also said that when the relationship becomes stronger, "they're more likely to ask for help to show you what they've been doing, and ask for input," showing that trust leads directly to higher motivation and more classroom participation.

The teachers also claim that communication and support help students to become more confident over time. Teacher six said that engagement depends on "clear expectations, feedback, and providing a supportive and trusting environment." The teacher also explained that collaboration and regular check-ins help students stay focused and take responsibility for their learning, saying: "I find having them have that guided learning builds their confidence, and takes ownership of their progress."

Teachers highlighted that a relational approach, based on being available, encouraging students, and interacting with the students, helps students feel safe to take academic risks, ask questions, and participate more in class. The relationship becomes a motivational tool that improves the classroom climate and also impacts student achievement. Teachers believe that without a positive relationship, students would be less likely to engage. Positive relationships enhance the day-to-day interactions and motivate students to learn the material. Teacher seven said: "If you have a positive relationship with students, then they tend and want to engage with the classroom material more. I think that if I didn't have a positive relationship with students, and they would be much less liable to want to engage with the material. Having a positive

relationship with students, I think, makes it easier outside of the classroom, and to sort of make your day-to-day life with the kids better".

Consistent Structure: Teachers also shared the importance of consistency in structure and predictable routines for students, which helps improve student engagement. When expectations are clear, students feel secure, understand what is required, and are more willing to try. This consistency allows students, especially those with attention, focus, or organizational challenges, to stay grounded and prepared for the lesson. Teacher Seven said: "I try to be as predictable as possible in my classroom routine. Lots of students have talked about how they like that. Especially students who have challenges with attention, focus, and organizational skills. Having that sort of base level of organization, I think, really helps them to stay on top of what's going to happen. I think it also helps with motivation too".

Classroom Management and Discipline: Teachers described the need to balance firmness with approachability. They noted that discipline does not damage relationships when it is fair, predictable, and accompanied by solutions like extending due dates, makeup assessments, and providing extra help sessions. This balance helps create a respectful environment where students feel both accountable and comfortable seeking help. Teachers suggested that humour, fairness, and demanding effort all work together to maintain this equilibrium. Teachers believe that students are responsible for time management and self-directed progress, and this reflects a university-prep behavior, adjusting students' focus from routine compliance to independent learning habits. Teacher five said: "I always want them to have that kind of self-directed thing, class work would be homework if they don't get it done in class. That tends to do the trick. I don't know if I would say that's positive motivation or not, but it's a kind of motivation".

Engagement: Teachers said they stimulate engagement by using assessments, interactivity, and by modelling mistakes in a positive way. Teachers explained that assessments and clear routines help students stay focused and ready for learning. Teacher two said: “They know they have to come prepared, and they know the routine, which allows us to spend more time actually engaged in what we're supposed to be learning.” This indicates that students were engaged and came prepared, which allows for more time for real learning activities and helps keep the class active.

Teachers also shared that making mistakes is acceptable for building a safe learning environment. The teacher explained, “I tend to show students that it’s okay to make mistakes, I’m always laughing at myself for mistakes, and I tell them that. It’s okay to do that, and we’ll all laugh, but it’s not at you; but we’re all laughing together”. By laughing at their own mistakes, the teacher shows that errors are normal in the learning process, and students do not need to feel scared or embarrassed. This kind of modelling helps reduce pressure and supports academic risk-taking. The teacher also said that adding humour and “kind of making things silly” helps students remember the material better. Teacher two explained that “if you can make something silly, it becomes memorable, so that they can relate back to it.” This approach makes learning more interactive, fun, and easier for students to connect with, and as the teacher said, “it’s engaged in that sense.”

Graded Classwork

The second theme is about how graded classwork affects student motivation, accountability, and learning behavior. Teachers said that grades have a significant impact on students’ effort, emotions, and readiness to participate in learning. The results show that teachers

influence students' performance, knowledge, and confidence through practices, including grading, feedback, and assessment structures.

Grades as Motivators: Teachers said grades are a practical tool to make students complete work, stay focused, and take responsibility. One teacher said clearly: "Sometimes the tools I'm using are extrinsic motivation, like grades, to get them to complete their homework." This shows that grades help reinforce effort and diligence.

Teachers explained that graded tasks help students to improve their diligence, effort and responsibility. Students use grades to check performance, adjust study habits, and stay accountable. In this way, grades act as a structure to support student responsibility. Teacher four said: "Yes, I have definitely graded classwork, because I will do, sort of, any beginning work. Sometimes I level to make sure that they are understanding, they're on track. When they know there's a mark involved, sometimes they do, for the most part, they will put a little bit more effort."

Teachers recommended a variety of best practices, including low-stakes graded classwork, to help students construct knowledge and evaluate their understanding before proceeding to summative assessments.

Teacher six said: "I'd say low-stakes graded classwork, with regular feedback, with observation conversation, is very effective."

A few teachers argue that when students hear that something is marked, their stress level rises slightly, but their effort increases as well. Teacher two said: "Anytime you say something is marked to students, their stress level will increase a little bit, but the effort will increase, too."

Formative Assessments: Teachers' opinions about the importance of formative assessments vary about the ability of formative assessments to help students construct knowledge

and for teachers to evaluate students' understanding. However, all the teachers stated that they are using at least one formative assessment tool, including class discussions, homework, classwork, worksheets, lab activities, and practice tests. These tasks focus on evaluating the learning process and providing feedback to students, allowing them to take risks, be creative, and learn without fear of mistakes.

Teacher three said: "Formative assessments, I don't think, get students there very well. I give them lots of resources, lots of practice questions, lots of extra questions. As I say to them, it should allow them, before they go into a real assessment, to self-assess their knowledge. I do go around, I look at what their work is, I point out what's wrong, we talk about it, and so it's incredibly valuable time from that perspective."

Teacher seven said: "Do I grade classwork? Not usually. I will assess it as a learning skill so, when we have to report on responsibility. And we have to report on the completion of homework tasks. I will check homework for completion."

Teacher six emphasized the importance of hands-on activities, which help students construct knowledge and apply it right away. Teacher six said: "I'd say frequent classroom work allows students to apply concepts right away, which then reinforces their learning."

Engagement: Teachers agree that students might be slightly less motivated to complete ungraded classwork, and students' engagement depends on the teacher-student relationship, the course or subject (practical or theoretical), the activity design (e.g., interactive, such as watching videos), and grade level.

Teacher five said:" Like, they know they're not getting marked, but they get to watch some interesting videos, and it has their attention."

Teacher seven said:" In my grade 10 computer class. Most of the time, the kids are working in a paired programming model. Working through lab exercises. I never grade the lab exercises. I rarely check to see if they get through to the end of the lab exercises. I still find the students engage with the lab exercises, one, because they're fun. And two, because they understand that this is how material is being presented to them. They are probably highly motivated to complete ungraded classwork even though it's not being graded. In an English class, they might be less liable to do the work, but not much less, I think. And part of that's just because they've gotten to know me, too."

Teacher five stated that only good students take their classwork seriously because they know they need it to construct their knowledge and that they will need to use it later. Teacher five said: 'I don't think they see it as a serious thing. I think the good students are always going to want to do that stuff, because they know it's going to help them in some other way."

Open-Book Classwork: Teachers said that open-book classwork plays a significant role in constructing knowledge, boosting motivation and engagement, reducing stress and anxiety, allowing students with challenges to overcome them (for example, those with memory problems), and encouraging students to organize their resources.

Teacher two said: "An open-book test motivates students to have their binders organized."

Teacher four said: "I have done some open-book quizzes. I do think it does help them to a degree where they feel less nervous".

Teacher six said: Students are able to produce more detailed responses, and have more confidence in presenting them; they become more creative.

One teacher explained how low-pressure formative tasks help students grow:

"Sometimes you just need to provide… specific motivation to get them to learn enough to be able to appreciate what it is that they're learning."

Bonus Questions

The third theme is bonus questions, teachers use it as a strategy to motivate students, differentiate instruction, and support engagement with learning. Teachers explained how often they use bonus questions, why they use them, and the impact they observe on student results and confidence. While bonus questions contribute only slightly to academic marks, teachers consistently described them as useful tools for increasing student participation, encouraging risk-taking, and supporting differentiated learning environments.

Frequency: All of the teachers are using bonus questions. Some use bonus questions regularly, while others use them occasionally.

Teacher six said: "I've used a bonus question before, and I think, yes, it does, those questions do motivate students."

Teacher one said: "I have occasionally used bonus questions."

Purpose: Teachers explained that bonus questions provide positive motivation, offering students a low-pressure way to extend their thinking, reading the textbook, connect to real-world examples, support differentiation, enabling stronger students to earn more marks, and engage students more actively with classwork. Students often view bonus questions as an opportunity to challenge themselves without fear of penalty.

Teacher three said: "For an economics class, current events are really important for us, and students know that bonus questions will usually come from current events, for example: The U.S. Government being in shutdown, the latest jobs report on inflation, inflation rate, and unemployment rate."

Teacher four said: “I would say students like bonus questions, because they have an opportunity to get the extra marks.”

Teacher five said: “That's something highly specific from the textbook, you know, to reward the kids who actually read the book.”

One teacher described how students respond enthusiastically:

“Even if they don’t know it… if they know it's for a few extra credits, they will definitely take a chance on the question.”

Teacher seven said: “I'm putting a bonus question on an assessment, and it's going to be hard. I want to test them on the stuff, and I want the questions that I put on an assessment to stretch them, so I will often build at least one question into an assessment which is harder than the rest just because I want to separate the 90% from the 100% students.”

Impact on Results: Teachers agreed that bonus questions do not significantly change the overall results.

Teacher seven explained: “I wouldn't say they give a larger effect. They might increase it to the amount of the bonus value.”

Engagement: Teachers see that the bonus questions have a larger indirect effect, as bonus questions increase engagement and effort, particularly among students who might otherwise remain passive. Therefore, the motivational impact of bonus questions is stronger than the numerical impact on grades.

Teacher six said: “If they know it's for a few extra credits, they will definitely take a chance on the question enthusiastically, even if they don't know what it is, they'll write something. But it does definitely boost confidence and participation.”

Teacher four said: “When students feel like you are invested in their results, they are more engaged, and then that relationship just naturally grows.”

Evidence of Student Success, Retention, and University Transition

The fourth theme focuses on the individual and collective outcomes of the teachers’ best practices. These outcomes include students' academic performance and the smooth transition to post-secondary education. This is proof of preventing student disengagement, academic decline, and eventual dropout.

Academic Performance: Teachers monitor and evaluate students’ academic progress so they can intervene early and provide support, such as extra help sessions or makeup assessments. This helps prevent failure and keeps students engaged. Teachers look at averages from different assessments like quizzes, tests, final exams, lab activities, individual study projects, and assignments to see if the patterns are normal or if something is worrying.

Teacher seven said: “If I see that more students are failing than usual, I might dive into the numbers a little bit more and see, what are they struggling with? And is that because of them, or is it about because of me? Based on that, I might make changes on the type of questions, the length of questions on an assessment. But generally, especially in the English classroom, where there's quite a wide breadth of types of assessments that we ask.”

Teachers said that their class averages for each assessment and the overall course remain consistent year after year. The class averages are usually high, ranging from 75% to 95%. The biggest part of the student’s mark comes from tests and the final exam, which together are about 70% or more of the grade. The smallest part comes from quizzes and assignments. Class averages for quizzes and assignments are usually higher than the averages for tests and the final

exam. Many teachers also said that nobody fails their class. A few teachers explained that the only reason a student might fail is incomplete work, and that this happens very rarely.

Teacher two said: “So, because I'm always communicating with parents, when a student is at the verge of failing or failing at some point in the year. The motivation for the student to actually come in and start to do some help, or what I find often is that it’s just the effort outside of the class. I find the effort for help and outside work has increased. So last year, I think I had one grade 10 student fail.

Teacher three said: “None last year, none have failed my class in a number of years.”

Teacher five said: “I have very few kids who fail history. Like, I'll honestly have maybe one a year. Last year, I didn't have any.”

University Acceptance: Consistent over the years, strong acceptance rates revealed by the teachers, which indicated that students were engaged, responsible, and motivated throughout high school years. Teachers said that almost all grade twelve graduates get accepted into a university program. The university acceptance rate for these teachers’ students is in the high 90s. A few students did not get into their first-choice program but were accepted into their second-choice program.

Teacher three said: “I would guess everyone graduated, and everyone gets into university. We'll have a small number that do a gap year.”

Teacher seven said: “Every student got into a university at our school last year. But I'd say there were probably about 4 or 5 children who didn't get into their first-choice program.”

Overall, the findings show that the interviewed teachers believe that positive teacher–student relationships, clear routines, and supportive communication are important tools for increasing motivation, confidence, and engagement. Interviewed teachers said that graded

classwork serves as an extrinsic motivator, increasing effort and accountability, while formative assessments help students build knowledge without fear of mistakes. Ungraded classwork and open-book tasks also support learning by reducing stress and allowing students to explore and organize information more freely. Bonus questions are used to motivate students, encourage risk-taking, and provide an extra challenge, even if they do not change grades much. Finally, interviewed teachers reported strong academic results, very low failure rates, and high university acceptance rates, showing that these assessments and classroom practices help maintain consistent student success.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how the interviewed teachers in two Toronto independent schools understand their relationships with students and how the interviewed teachers use different assessment practices to support motivation and learning. The interviews answered both research questions.

For the first question, the interviewed teachers said that positive relationships are significant for student engagement. When students feel respected and supported, they usually participate more and put in more effort. Several interviewed teachers mentioned that routines and clear expectations reduced the student stress, especially for students who struggle with attention or organization. Interviewed teachers also said that discipline works best with fairness and consistency. The interviewed teachers use their relationships with students to guide behaviour, calm anxiety, and help students stay engaged.

For the second question, the interviewed teachers explained how graded classwork, bonus questions, and open-book tasks influence motivation and engaged students. Most of the interviewed teachers said graded classwork makes students put in more effort because they know

it counts. On the other hand, a few teachers said that low-stakes or formative tasks help students learn without fear of making mistakes. Open-book classwork helped students become more confident and think more deeply, especially for those who get anxious during regular tests. Bonus questions did not change marks much, but they gave students a slight push to try harder and reduced the fear of making mistakes. Interviewed teachers also monitor class averages. Interviewed teachers reported very low failure rates and almost all students moving on to university.

Findings in Context

The findings showed that the interviewed teachers used real-world tasks, and most used graded classwork and open-book classwork to help students build understanding and confidence. Teacher four said: “Yes, I have definitely graded classwork, because I will do, sort of, any beginning work. Sometimes I level to make sure that they are understanding, they're on track. This strongly reflects the constructivist perspective described in the literature review. Constructivism argues that students do not simply receive information from the teacher; rather, students construct knowledge and meaning from their experiences (Bada, 2015). Teachers’ use of open-book classwork, practice activities, and authentic tasks confirms Kimmons’ (2016) explanation that learning occurs when students connect new information with what they already know. Moreover, interviewed teachers’ observations that motivated students learn more effectively also align with Oliver’s (2000) claim that students need motivation to remain engaged and construct their own knowledge. Interviewed teachers observed that some students do not complete their classwork or homework, indicating they did not build knowledge. The interviewed teachers then encouraged the students by grade to complete the formative task, in order to build knowledge. Teacher one said clearly: “Sometimes the tools I’m using are extrinsic

motivation, like grades, to get them to complete their homework." This idea aligns with Oliver's (2000) finding that students who completed the connecting task performed the best. Therefore, the interviewed teachers' classroom practices support the constructivist idea that students learn best when they actively engage, process information, and relate lessons to their prior knowledge.

The study found that graded classwork increases student effort, while bonus questions motivate participation, especially among quiet students. This is consistent with the literature review, where motivation is defined as the process that triggers and maintains behaviour towards a goal (Urhahne & Wijnia, 2023). Students in this study behaved exactly as described: they put more effort into activities tied to grades or rewards. Teacher four said: "Yes, I have definitely graded classwork, because I will do, sort of, any beginning work. Sometimes I level to make sure that they are understanding, they're on track. When they know there's a mark involved, sometimes they do, for the most part, they will put a little bit more effort." The findings also match the motivation theory presented earlier, which states that extrinsic motivation occurs when students work for rewards such as grades or praise, or when there is pressure (Gopalan et al., 2017). Graded classwork and bonus questions function as these external rewards. The interviewed teachers' reports that bonus questions increase engagement. Teacher six said: "If they know it's for a few extra credits, they will definitely take a chance on the question enthusiastically. Which aligns with Dunn et al.'s (2020–2021) conclusion that bonus points increased participation, engagement, and the quality of discussion, especially for quieter students. Thus, the role of graded work and bonus questions in shaping classroom behaviour directly aligns with established research on extrinsic motivation.

The interviewed teachers' opinions about the importance of formative assessments vary about the ability of formative assessments to help students construct knowledge and for teachers

to evaluate students' understanding. Teacher three said: "Formative assessments, I don't think, get students there very well. This aligns with McMillan, who stated that formative assessment has a smaller impact on student achievement than many people believe (McMillan et al. 2013). On the other hand, teacher six said: "I'd say frequent classroom work allows students to apply concepts right away, which then reinforces their learning." This matches Popham's (2006) definition of formative assessment as "ongoing evaluations, used during teaching time to adjust instruction and support students better." The teachers' reliance on frequent practice tasks also aligns with Boston's (2002) list of formative methods, such as discussions, problem-solving, and short writing assignments. Interviewed teachers also noted that some students do not take ungraded formative tasks seriously, which reflects McMillan et al.'s (2013) explanation that students who depend on extrinsic motivation tend not to participate or complete the practice. Summative assessments played a major role in confirming progress. Teachers' descriptions of tests and final exams align with Garrison and Ehringhaus' (2007) explanation that summative assessments are used to measure what students know and do not know and to assign a grade. Therefore, the findings highlighted a literature gap regarding formative assessments and the extent to which they can impact student achievement.

The findings also confirm that teacher leadership has an important influence on motivation and engagement. Teacher Seven said: "I try to be as predictable as possible in my classroom routine. These lived experiences reflect Bost's (2019) statement that improving student performance depends on teachers' professional capacity for instruction and leadership. Interviewed teachers described using trust, communication, availability, flexibility, and clear expectations to support students. Teacher six said that engagement depends on "clear expectations, feedback, and providing a supportive and trusting environment." Interviewed

teachers' emphasis on predictable routines and effective behaviour management matches Stevens' (2018) conclusion that "effective classroom management is crucial in supporting students' attention and learning." When teachers created a calm, structured environment, they saw improved engagement as the literature suggested.

Finally, the findings align with the dropout literature presented earlier. Interviewed teachers emphasized the importance of relationships, academic support, early intervention, and motivation factors that help prevent disengagement and failure. Teacher two said: "So, because I'm always communicating with parents, when a student is at the verge of failing or failing at some point in the year. The motivation for the student to actually come in and start to do some help. This supports Stearns and Glennie's (2006) explanation that students are pushed out of school when they experience a loss of motivation or feeling unsupported at school, or when they face an unwelcoming environment and ineffective classroom management. Interviewed teachers' descriptions of consistent follow-up, extra help, and encouragement directly address these push-out factors. Interviewed teachers' practices show what the literature warns about when teachers are too strict, and students lack motivation; some students may drop out. But when teachers build strong, positive relationships with students, the risk of dropping out decreases.

Limitations

This study has some limitations. In spite of the fact that the number of participants is seven teachers, it is considered enough for a qualitative phenomenological research, according to Creswell & Creswell, a qualitative phenomenological research requires from 5 to 10 participants (2018); however, the teachers were from only two independent schools in Toronto. Moreover, students and parents were not part of the study, and they may have different opinions about

motivation, engagement, and classroom work. Another limitation is that there were no classroom observations, so the study could not see how teachers use classwork or assessments in real time.

Potential Follow-up Research Studies

Future research can continue this study in additional ways. First, studying a larger number of teachers across other schools in other geographical areas can show whether the results hold in other places. Also, including graduate student opinions can help better understand motivation and engagement. Moreover, a case study that uses one open-book graded classwork assignment in every unit across all subjects can provide more information about its impact on learning. Finally, real classroom observations can show how teachers use formative assessments, open-book classwork, feedback, and bonus questions during daily teaching.

Conclusion

This study highlights the significance of teacher practices on student motivation, engagement, and success. This study assures the importance of building positive relationships with students to engage them and improve their participation in classwork. Graded classwork and open-book tasks help students construct knowledge, reduce stress, and build confidence. Bonus questions also increase motivation and effort. These everyday classroom strategies support student success and improve the transition to university. The findings align with prior research on constructivism, motivation, assessment, and teacher leadership. Finally, this study is significant because it shows that simple teaching actions can make a big difference in students' learning and future progress, especially by closing the gap and improving the efficiency of formative assessment to impact student achievement and increase student engagement.

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Appendix A

Teacher 1 Letter of Information and Informed Consent Form

Letter of Information and Informed Consent Form

Study Title: Utilizing Assessments to Improve Knowledge Construction, Motivation, Discipline, and Learning Performance of High School Students'
Researchers: Mr. Sam Tibi, MSED, MBA, and Dr. Lori V. Quigley, PhD

Kindly read the letter before agreeing to participate in the research. You can find below the purpose and the procedure of this research. You have the right to skip any question or opt out of the interview at any time. The Institutional Review Board of Niagara University has approved this study.

Explanation of Procedures
The purpose of the study is to explore the impact of motivating high school students through assessments in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. The method that will be utilized is the phenomenological qualitative method to investigate teachers' experiences through the lens of Constructivism Theory, Self-Determination Theory, Motivational Theory, and Positive Discipline Theory. The first goal is to highlight a strategy of using formative assessment to improve the students' construction of knowledge, engagement, and classroom discipline. The second goal is to recommend a tactic for using summative assessment to enhance the learners' motivation, learning performance, and classroom discipline. The interview will require about 60 minutes in a virtual format, including open-ended questions.

Risks and Discomfort
The participants are not expected to face potential risk. Participants will have the chance to skip any interview questions and to opt out of the interview if they want.

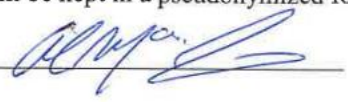
Benefits
The potential benefits to society include exploring and communicating formative and summative assessment strategies, which will improve the students' learning experience during instruction and assessment times. Moreover, improving students' motivation, engagement, and learning performance will improve the transition rate for high school students transitioning to university, and decrease the number of students dropping out.

Confidentiality
The date will be saved in a pseudonymized form, and every teacher will be labeled with a sequence number. Only the researcher and the supervising professor will have access to the data. The data will be stored on a laptop protected with a password. Personal information won't be collected. The interview transcript will not include any personal information, and the participant will be asked to review the transcript of the interview and confirm that the data is correctly transcribed.

Withdrawal without Prejudice
Participation is voluntary, and opting out will involve no penalty. You can opt out of the consent and leave the study at any time without prejudice or penalty. And you can refuse to answer any question.

Further Questions and Follow-up
You are welcome to ask the researchers any questions about the study. If you have further questions after the completion of the interview, please do not hesitate to contact the researchers using the contact information below. If you have another question or concern about the study, please contact the chair of the Institutional Review Board at Niagara University at 716-286-8335 or via email at pschupp@niagara.edu.

I have read the above information. I freely agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to refuse to answer any question and to withdraw at any time. I understand that my responses will be kept in a pseudonymized form.

Signature:  Date: 1 October 2025

If:
(a) You are interested in getting the results of this study and/or
(b) If you would be willing to be contacted again for future follow-up

Check those that apply:
_____ I would like to receive the study results.
__✓__ I would be willing to be contacted in the future for a possible follow-up survey or interview.

Researcher Contact Information

Mr. Sam Tibi
Doctoral Student, Niagara University
haltibi@mail.niagara.edu

Dr. Lori V. Quigley
Professor, Niagara University
lquigley@niagara.edu

Appendix B

Teacher 2 Letter of Information and Informed Consent Form

Letter of Information and Informed Consent Form

Study Title: Utilizing Assessments to Improve Knowledge Construction, Motivation, Discipline, and Learning Performance of High School Students'
Researchers: Mr. Sam Tibi, MSED, MBA, and Dr. Lori V. Quigley, PhD

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Risks and Discomfort
The participants are not expected to face potential risk. Participants will have the chance to skip any interview questions and to opt out of the interview if they want.

Benefits
The potential benefits to society include exploring and communicating formative and summative assessment strategies, which will improve the students' learning experience during instruction and assessment times. Moreover, improving students' motivation, engagement, and learning performance will improve the transition rate for high school students transitioning to university, and decrease the number of students dropping out.

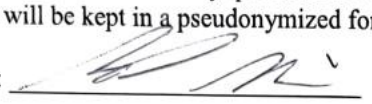
Confidentiality
The date will be saved in a pseudonymized form, and every teacher will be labeled with a sequence number. Only the researcher and the supervising professor will have access to the data. The data will be stored on a laptop protected with a password. Personal information won't be collected. The interview transcript will not include any personal information, and the participant will be asked to review the transcript of the interview and confirm that the data is correctly transcribed.

Withdrawal without Prejudice
Participation is voluntary, and opting out will involve no penalty. You can opt out of the consent and leave the study at any time without prejudice or penalty. And you can refuse to answer any question.

Further Questions and Follow-up

You are welcome to ask the researchers any questions about the study. If you have further questions after the completion of the interview, please do not hesitate to contact the researchers using the contact information below. If you have another question or concern about the study, please contact the chair of the Institutional Review Board at Niagara University at 716-286-8335 or via email at pschupp@niagara.edu.

I have read the above information. I freely agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to refuse to answer any question and to withdraw at any time. I understand that my responses will be kept in a pseudonymized form.

Signature:  Date: Oct 2, 2025

If:
(a) You are interested in getting the results of this study and/or
(b) If you would be willing to be contacted again for future follow-up

Check those that apply:
_X_ I would like to receive the study results.
_____ I would be willing to be contacted in the future for a possible follow-up survey or interview.

Researcher Contact Information

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Dr. Lori V. Quigley
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Appendix C

Teacher 3 Letter of Information and Informed Consent Form

Letter of Information and Informed Consent Form

Study Title: Utilizing Assessments to Improve Knowledge Construction, Motivation, Discipline, and Learning Performance of High School Students'
Researchers: Mr. Sam Tibi, MSED, MBA, and Dr. Lori V. Quigley, PhD

Kindly read the letter before agreeing to participate in the research. You can find below the purpose and the procedure of this research. You have the right to skip any question or opt out of the interview at any time. The Institutional Review Board of Niagara University has approved this study.

Explanation of Procedures
The purpose of the study is to explore the impact of motivating high school students through assessments in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. The method that will be utilized is the phenomenological qualitative method to investigate teachers' experiences through the lens of Constructivism Theory, Self-Determination Theory, Motivational Theory, and Positive Discipline Theory. The first goal is to highlight a strategy of using formative assessment to improve the students' construction of knowledge, engagement, and classroom discipline. The second goal is to recommend a tactic for using summative assessment to enhance the learners' motivation, learning performance, and classroom discipline. The interview will require about 60 minutes in a virtual format, including open-ended questions.

Risks and Discomfort
The participants are not expected to face potential risk. Participants will have the chance to skip any interview questions and to opt out of the interview if they want.

Benefits
The potential benefits to society include exploring and communicating formative and summative assessment strategies, which will improve the students' learning experience during instruction and assessment times. Moreover, improving students' motivation, engagement, and learning performance will improve the transition rate for high school students transitioning to university, and decrease the number of students dropping out.

Confidentiality
The date will be saved in a pseudonymized form, and every teacher will be labeled with a sequence number. Only the researcher and the supervising professor will have access to the data. The data will be stored on a laptop protected with a password. Personal information won't be collected. The interview transcript will not include any personal information, and the participant will be asked to review the transcript of the interview and confirm that the data is correctly transcribed.

Withdrawal without Prejudice
Participation is voluntary, and opting out will involve no penalty. You can opt out of the consent and leave the study at any time without prejudice or penalty. And you can refuse to answer any question.

Further Questions and Follow-up
You are welcome to ask the researchers any questions about the study. If you have further questions after the completion of the interview, please do not hesitate to contact the researchers using the contact information below. If you have another question or concern about the study, please contact the chair of the Institutional Review Board at Niagara University at 716-286-8335 or via email at pschupp@niagara.edu.

I have read the above information. I freely agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to refuse to answer any question and to withdraw at any time. I understand that my responses will be kept in a pseudonymized form.

Signature: _____ Date: 10/5/25

If:
(a) You are interested in getting the results of this study and/or
(b) If you would be willing to be contacted again for future follow-up

Check those that apply:
_X_ I would like to receive the study results.
_X_ I would be willing to be contacted in the future for a possible follow-up survey or interview.

Researcher Contact Information

Mr. Sam Tibi
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Dr. Lori V. Quigley
Professor, Niagara University
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Appendix D

Teacher 4 Letter of Information and Informed Consent Form

Letter of Information and Informed Consent Form

Study Title: Utilizing Assessments to Improve Knowledge Construction, Motivation, Discipline, and Learning Performance of High School Students'
Researchers: Mr. Sam Tibi, MSED, MBA, and Dr. Lori V. Quigley, PhD

Kindly read the letter before agreeing to participate in the research. You can find below the purpose and the procedure of this research. You have the right to skip any question or opt out of the interview at any time. The Institutional Review Board of Niagara University has approved this study.

Explanation of Procedures
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Risks and Discomfort
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Benefits
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Confidentiality
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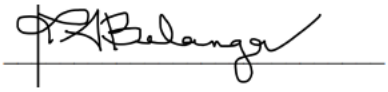
Signature:  Date: _**October 2, 2025**

If:
(a) You are interested in getting the results of this study and/or
(b) If you would be willing to be contacted again for future follow-up

Check those that apply:
_____ I would like to receive the study results.
___x___ I would be willing to be contacted in the future for a possible follow-up survey or interview.

Researcher Contact Information

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Dr. Lori V. Quigley
Professor, Niagara University
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Appendix E

Teacher 5 Letter of Information and Informed Consent Form

Letter of Information and Informed Consent Form

Study Title: Utilizing Assessments to Improve Knowledge Construction, Motivation, Discipline, and Learning Performance of High School Students'
Researchers: Mr. Sam Tibi, MSED, MBA, and Dr. Lori V. Quigley, PhD

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Risks and Discomfort
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Benefits
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Confidentiality
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Withdrawal without Prejudice
Participation is voluntary, and opting out will involve no penalty. You can opt out of the consent and leave the study at any time without prejudice or penalty. And you can refuse to answer any question.

Further Questions and Follow-up
You are welcome to ask the researchers any questions about the study. If you have further questions after the completion of the interview, please do not hesitate to contact the researchers using the contact information below. If you have another question or concern about the study, please contact the chair of the Institutional Review Board at Niagara University at 716-286-8335 or via email at pschupp@niagara.edu.

I have read the above information. I freely agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to refuse to answer any question and to withdraw at any time. I understand that my responses will be kept in a pseudonymized form.

Signature: _____ Date: Oct. 2/25

If:
(a) You are interested in getting the results of this study and/or
(b) If you would be willing to be contacted again for future follow-up

Check those that apply:
_____ I would like to receive the study results.
_____ I would be willing to be contacted in the future for a possible follow-up survey or interview.

Researcher Contact Information

Mr. Sam Tibi
Doctoral Student, Niagara University
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Dr. Lori V. Quigley
Professor, Niagara University
lquigley@niagara.edu

Appendix F

Teacher 6 Letter of Information and Informed Consent Form

Letter of Information and Informed Consent Form

Study Title: Utilizing Assessments to Improve Knowledge Construction, Motivation, Discipline, and Learning Performance of High School Students'
Researchers: Mr. Sam Tibi, MSED, MBA, and Dr. Lori V. Quigley, PhD

Kindly read the letter before agreeing to participate in the research. You can find below the purpose and the procedure of this research. You have the right to skip any question or opt out of the interview at any time. The Institutional Review Board of Niagara University has approved this study.

Explanation of Procedures
The purpose of the study is to explore the impact of motivating high school students through assessments in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. The method that will be utilized is the phenomenological qualitative method to investigate teachers' experiences through the lens of Constructivism Theory, Self-Determination Theory, Motivational Theory, and Positive Discipline Theory. The first goal is to highlight a strategy of using formative assessment to improve the students' construction of knowledge, engagement, and classroom discipline. The second goal is to recommend a tactic for using summative assessment to enhance the learners' motivation, learning performance, and classroom discipline. The interview will require about 60 minutes in a virtual format, including open-ended questions.

Risks and Discomfort
The participants are not expected to face potential risk. Participants will have the chance to skip any interview questions and to opt out of the interview if they want.

Benefits
The potential benefits to society include exploring and communicating formative and summative assessment strategies, which will improve the students' learning experience during instruction and assessment times. Moreover, improving students' motivation, engagement, and learning performance will improve the transition rate for high school students transitioning to university, and decrease the number of students dropping out.

Confidentiality
The date will be saved in a pseudonymized form, and every teacher will be labeled with a sequence number. Only the researcher and the supervising professor will have access to the data. The data will be stored on a laptop protected with a password. Personal information won't be collected. The interview transcript will not include any personal information, and the participant will be asked to review the transcript of the interview and confirm that the data is correctly transcribed.

Withdrawal without Prejudice
Participation is voluntary, and opting out will involve no penalty. You can opt out of the consent and leave the study at any time without prejudice or penalty. And you can refuse to answer any question.

Further Questions and Follow-up

You are welcome to ask the researchers any questions about the study. If you have further questions after the completion of the interview, please do not hesitate to contact the researchers using the contact information below. If you have another question or concern about the study, please contact the chair of the Institutional Review Board at Niagara University at 716-286-8335 or via email at pschupp@niagara.edu.

I have read the above information. I freely agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to refuse to answer any question and to withdraw at any time. I understand that my responses will be kept in a pseudonymized form.

Signature: Eleni Gr Date: Oct 2/2025

If:
(a) You are interested in getting the results of this study and/or
(b) If you would be willing to be contacted again for future follow-up

Check those that apply:
✓ I would like to receive the study results.
✓ I would be willing to be contacted in the future for a possible follow-up survey or interview.

Researcher Contact Information

Mr. Sam Tibi
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Dr. Lori V. Quigley
Professor, Niagara University
lquigley@niagara.edu

Appendix G

Teacher 7 Letter of Information and Informed Consent Form

Letter of Information and Informed Consent Form

Study Title: Utilizing Assessments to Improve Knowledge Construction, Motivation, Discipline, and Learning Performance of High School Students'
Researchers: Mr. Sam Tibi, MSED, MBA, and Dr. Lori V. Quigley, PhD

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You are welcome to ask the researchers any questions about the study. If you have further questions after the completion of the interview, please do not hesitate to contact the researchers using the contact information below. If you have another question or concern about the study, please contact the chair of the Institutional Review Board at Niagara University at 716-286-8335 or via email at pschupp@niagara.edu.

I have read the above information. I freely agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to refuse to answer any question and to withdraw at any time. I understand that my responses will be kept in a pseudonymized form.

Signature: _____ Date: October 1, 2025

If:
(a) You are interested in getting the results of this study and/or
(b) If you would be willing to be contacted again for future follow-up

Check those that apply:
✓ I would like to receive the study results.
✓ I would be willing to be contacted in the future for a possible follow-up survey or interview.

Researcher Contact Information

Mr. Sam Tibi
Doctoral Student, Niagara University
haltibi@mail.niagara.edu

Dr. Lori V. Quigley
Professor, Niagara University
lquigley@niagara.edu

Appendix H

Interview Protocol and Questions

Thank you for participating in the interview. The purpose of the interview is to explore your experience with formative and summative assessments, student evaluation, students' engagement, and the overall performance of the classroom. Everything is confidential. There is no right or wrong answer, only your own experience.

1. If you feel comfortable sharing, could you please tell me about your teaching experience? (Subject, grade level, and number of years in teaching)
2. How do you describe your relationship with students? Do they see you as approachable, strict, supportive, or demanding?
3. How does this relationship impact their engagement during the learning process? (Instruction, classwork, and assessment)
4. Could you please describe your classroom routine and discipline? What expectations do you set for classwork and behavior? How do classroom routines affect students' motivation and engagement?
5. How do you usually conduct classwork activities in your classroom? Could you please describe the tasks and the frequency?
6. According to your experience, how does classwork help in constructing students' knowledge and trigger their motivation?
7. Have you tried graded classwork? What was your experience? Did you see a difference in students' engagement, behavior, or participation?
8. What about ungraded classwork? How do students respond compared to graded classwork?

9. Have you tried open-book classwork, where students construct knowledge more freely? Did it change student performance, confidence, or motivation?
10. In your opinion, how does the balance between graded and ungraded classwork influence student engagement and effort?
11. Can you describe your assessment breakdown (assignment, quiz, test, exam, project, etc.)?
12. What is the usual classroom average in your courses? Is it the same every year? How does it compare between assessment types?
13. Could you please share the classroom average mark for: Quizzes, Tests, Exams, and Assignments?
14. In reference to student results: around how many students failed your course last year? Was this normal or unusual? Did it change your teaching approach?
15. At your school, how many Grade 12 students graduated but were not accepted to university last year? What factors do you think make this outcome?
16. Have you used bonus questions in a summative assessment? How do students react? Do bonus questions motivate them to put in a more substantial effort? In your experience, do bonus questions increase average only equal to the bonus value, or also give a larger effect (confidence, participation)?
17. Looking back, which assessment practice (graded/ungraded classwork, bonus questions, open-book task) was most effective in promoting learning and motivation? Did you face any problems when deciding whether to grade classwork? What advice would you give to other teachers who think about using classwork to motivate students?
18. Is there anything else you want to share about your experience with classwork, marking, or student engagement that we did not ask?

Appendix I

Descriptive Coding First Round

Q1. If you feel comfortable sharing, could you please tell me about your teaching experience? (Subject, grade level, and number of years in teaching)

Teacher 1 has 15 years of high school teaching experience. They taught all high school grades, mainly grades 11 and 12, but mostly English and Law. They also taught grade 9 English and now teach three sections of grade 8 English. Their experience is in the intermediate to senior division.

Teacher 2 has 23 years of teaching experience, only in science subjects. They first taught grades 7 and 8, then later grades 10, 11, and 12 Biology.

Teacher 3 has 19 years of teaching experience in Business Education. They teach economics, accounting, international business, and AP economics. Most of their teaching is in grades 11 and 12.

Teacher 4 has 15 years of teaching experience. They are the Head of the Arts Department and teach visual arts. They also taught ESL, social studies, and English.

Teacher 5 has 36 years of experience. His teachable subjects are History and Political Science. In the beginning of his career, he taught many different subjects.

Teacher 6 has 20 years of teaching experience. They are the Head of the Business Department. They taught grades 9-12 in Physical Education and Business.

Teacher 7 has 24 years of teaching experience. They have a double major in Computer Science and English. They taught English from grades 9 to 12, including Canadian Literature, Studies in Literature, and AP English Literature and Composition. In computer studies, they taught Digital Technology, Computer Programming, and Computer Science. They also taught Business and Accounting for one year in an emergency case.

Q2. How do you describe your relationship with students? Do they see you as approachable, strict, supportive, or demanding?

Themes	Codes
Teacher Approachability and Support	Approachability, Supportiveness, Encouragement, Availability, Rapport
Classroom Management and Consistency	Environment, Consistency, Predictability/Clarity, Control, High Standards, Expectation, Demanding
Balance of Discipline and Engagement	Firm/Strict, Fair, Fun, Demand effort, Humour, Discipline
Perception and Relationship Dynamics	Familiarity, Acceptance

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A mixture of some of those things	A little bit of both	A little bit of most of those	Students see me as fun but strict	Students probably see me as all of those things, depending on their perspective	Describe myself as firm and fair, supportive, and balanced	Realized early in my career that I must be consistent and not present a different personality to students
Students find me approachable	My mindset is that for students to be successful, the environment must be predictable and consistent	Strict in the sense that students come to learn and pay attention, but not overly strict	Very consistent with classroom management	I hope they see me as approachable	Not strict	Students tell me I am very patient
I try to be easygoing and receptive	Students see me as strict regarding uniform policies, homework completion, and communication home for any indiscretions	Classroom rules are fairly lenient	Have high expectations of students' behavior, especially in a visual arts room	Students likely see me as tough and ***demanding*** because I set high standards in my classroom	Try to maintain a supportive and fair environment	When marking, especially in English classes, I am quite strict
I have very high standards for the level of discourse and academic quality	Students know there are no surprises in my expectations	Students know that not attending or not paying attention will hamper their understanding	Students are expected to help manage the room due to the mess of the media and activities	I am old school, quite different from many other teachers, which I believe is good for them		Students enjoy the dynamic in my classroom
	Communication always involves both the	Approachable and have a good	Like to joke and have fun			Keep the classroom highly

	student and the parent	relationship with students	with students			organized so students know what to expect
	Students, even hesitant ones, come for extra help, sometimes out of fear of messages home or realizing the need for effort, especially in grade 11–12 biology	Involved in business co-curricular activities	Aim to put students at ease			Believe students appreciate this structure
	Extra help sessions are focused but light in mood	Know many students from different places and often for three years before teaching them in Grade 12				
	I joke around with students to break down walls of hesitation	Demanding, expect a lot from students, not unachievable, but something they need to work for				
	We laugh in almost every class, which helps lighten the mood when dealing with boring or difficult material					

Q3. How does this relationship impact their engagement during the learning process? (Instruction, classwork, and assessment)

Theme	Codes
Positive Relationships Boost Engagement	Trust, safety, motivation, risk-taking, liking the teacher, support
Relational Teaching Enhances Engagement	Respect, routines, effort, buy-in
Engagement is Contextual / Variable	Grade/subject differences, student variability
Structure Encourage Effort	Expectations, high standards
Stimulating Engagement	Humour, assessments, interactivity, and modelling mistakes

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Having a good relationship with students at the beginning and throughout the course is critical	Not a lot of time wasted because students know they must come prepared	Relational teaching is a big piece at my School and is highly effective	The relationship helps because when students respect you, they want to perform	The relationship is variable based on student and grade level	When students trust, they participate more actively	Sometimes having a positive relationship with students helps engagement, sometimes not as much
The more students engage with and respect me as a person, the more buy-in I get for the work I need and want them to do	Students follow routines and avoid arguing about being late	Teaches only boys. Emphasizes that if boys don't like you, they won't learn for you	Students who like you tend to engage more and ask for input	Teach many of the same students in Grades 10, 11, and 12	A safe space encourages students to ask questions freely	A positive relationship can make students want to engage more with classroom material
Early in the year, my light and approachable manner can lead to a wake-up call when students receive their first feedback	Class time is focused on the subject matter, keeping students engaged in learning		Their manner in the classroom shows they are putting more effort into their work	By Grade 12, the approach becomes very different, students are open and comfortable	Students are more willing to take risks and push into uncomfortable zones	Notices a difference in engagement between core English classes and elective classes

				coming to see me		
My high standards for quality make students realize they need to adjust	Encourage students that it's okay to make mistakes, and often laugh at my own mistakes to model this mindset			Younger students may see me differently	Uses a system where each student has a chance to answer but can pass if uncomfortable	Core English is required through Grade 12, and few students list it as their favorite or top subject
Students often discover that it's not just fun and games, but also serious schoolwork	Laugh together to dispel misconceptions and create a supportive environment			I tell students they must adjust to my way of doing things and I hold them to a high standard	Finds that most students choose to participate, even quiet or introverted ones	Often a struggle to get students engaged and enjoy the material in core English
	Classes are interactive, students often act as examples and move around			I don't apologize or regret that approach	Creates a comfortable environment where even wrong answers are handled supportively and with redirection	In elective classes like computer programming, students are there by choice and show higher engagement
	Use humor and silliness to make lessons memorable and relatable			Students at Crestwood are accustomed to extra help and additional support		Believes that without a positive relationship, students would be less likely to engage
	Various assessments used: formative, summative,			I try to meet them on that level as best I can		Positive relationships make day-to-day interactions

	tests, labs, worksheets					easier and can motivate students to learn the material
	Strict and demanding during assessments, expect students to explain why and fully answer questions					
	Students learn over time to meet expectations and respond precisely to what is asked					

Q4. Could you please describe your classroom routine and discipline? What expectations do you set for classwork and behavior? How do classroom routines affect students' motivation and engagement?

Theme	Codes
Classroom Routine	Clear daily structure, posted agenda, homework, consistent format; predictable flow, adjusted by grade, organized materials
Classroom Discipline	Enforced punctuality, accountability, clear consequences, consistent rules, nonverbal redirection
Classwork Expectations	High standards, clear goals, consistent formats, collaborative tasks, balance of group and independent work
Behavior Expectations	Respect-based culture, co-created rules, responsibility for space, courteous conduct, shared accountability
Student Motivation and Engagement	Structure builds confidence, active learning, humor and interaction, student ownership, independence in senior grades

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
In older grades, keeps some consistency but is less rigid about routine	Routines are guided by school policy, which I strictly enforce (I'm a good soldier)	Classroom routine begins with reviewing the previous day's topics	Class begins with a 5–10 minute project review, checking students' progress (e.g., Step 1, Step 4, Step 5)	Structured daily routine, especially in Grade 10 Canadian History (9–10), a required course	Class begins with clear learning goals, outlining what was done previously, what's happening today, and how it connects to future lessons (housekeeping or sandwich approach).	Predictable structure: Each class begins with an agenda posted on the Smart Board before the bell rings, outlining the day's plan and required materials.
Grade 12 lessons may span multiple periods	Punctuality: once the bell stops ringing, late students must sign in at the office and enter quietly	Starts with a question on the whiteboard to prompt discussion	Students then have studio time to work independently on projects	Class starts with a quick homework check (≈2 minutes of circulating to confirm completion)	Incorporates varied learning formats, flipped learning, independent work, group work, and think-pair-share discussions.	Organizational support: This consistency helps students, especially those with attention, focus, or organizational challenges, stay grounded and prepared for the lesson.
Always provides slides, posted on Edsby or	Uniform policy: enforced consistently; early weeks	Whiteboards surround the classroom, giving all 24 students	Teacher conferences individually with students,	Next 20–30 minutes: teacher-led instruction and	Activities are interactive and student-centered, encouraging	Motivational clarity: Seeing the class steps and progress

another platform	are a training period for what's acceptable	space to work	monitors engagement, and redirects off-task behavior	discussion, emphasizing key takeaways and student input	application and dialogue.	helps maintain motivation, even for students less naturally interested in the material.
Uses consistent formats for assignments and rubrics so students know expectations	Homework routine:	First 10 minutes: students graph a concept from the previous lesson and discuss it with peers	High expectations for productivity: students who waste class time must attend extra help sessions and parent contact may follow	Final 20–30 minutes: independent work time to begin homework or prepare for the next lesson	Example: In a marketing class, students start with a short 10-minute case study, read independently, form teams to analyze it, and present their reasoning, fostering collaboration and deeper engagement through discussion.	Core expectation: The primary classroom rule is respect, especially peer-to-peer respect. While respect for the teacher is valued, disrespect among students is never tolerated.
For behavior and classroom management:	Students must have work out and ready at the start of class	Encourages a collaborative classroom culture, where students work together to overcome challenges	Structured cleanup routine: final 10 minutes reserved for washing materials, tables, and putting supplies away	Consistency and organization reinforced: includes notebook checks and structured expectations		
Begins courses by co-creating a classroom code of conduct with students	All homework is checked, even if it takes time	Maintains high interaction with students during lessons	Accountability enforced: incomplete cleanup results in students redoing the task or	In Grades 11–12: greater independence and flexibility		

			cleaning all tables			
Often students contribute effectively to setting expectations	Tasks posted on the board so class stays organized while homework is checked	Does not cold-call students or give surprise quizzes	Emphasizes personal responsibility and respect for shared spaces, reminding students that maintaining cleanliness is their duty, not the teacher's	Homework is assigned less frequently (1–2 larger assignments per week)		
Occasionally needs to reinforce respect for peers and environment	Class start is highly structured to prevent chaos	Focuses on formative work on the board, allowing for one-on-one interaction and assessment while circulating the room		Students are responsible for time management and self-directed progress		
In older grades, uses discussion and reminders of agreements when lines are crossed	Lesson format varies:			Reflects a university-prep philosophy, shifting focus from routine compliance to independent learning habits		
Emphasizes cordiality and respect for differing opinions	Sometimes lecture-based, followed by questioning to check					

	understanding					
	Keeps students engaged by having them reword concepts instead of just agreeing or memorizing					
	Homework and assessment:					
	Students share documents online for review and feedback					
	Must avoid copying/pasting and provide examples and illustrations, especially in biology					
	Reverse classroom method:					
	Students prepare notes in advance					
	Lead lessons by sharing their research					
	Peers are asked to re-explain concepts to show					

	understanding					
	Labs:					
	Include a pre-lab session to review procedures beforehand					
	During labs, students work independently after a safety talk					
	I give nonverbal cues (e.g., funny expressions) to prompt reflection without interrupting					
	Encourage students to trust themselves and learn from mistakes					

Q5. How do you usually conduct classwork activities in your classroom? Could you please describe the tasks and the frequency?

Theme	Codes
Instructional Methods & Task Design	Lecture, activity mix, project-based, flipped learning, peer-led tasks, meaningful work, scaffolded projects, real-world links, practice, check homework
Collaboration & Student Responsibility	Group work, peer feedback, jigsaw tasks, self-directed work,
Assessment & Monitoring	Circulating checks, AI and academic integrity
Engagement & Time Management	Interactive lessons, variety

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I have students work together and use each other as resources to learn content.	Homework is assigned almost every night.	Don't do tremendous amounts of classroom activities, especially in grade 12.	Do classwork activities about once per unit (a unit equals eight to ten classes).	Classwork activities are variable depending on the grade level.	Classwork activities use a mixed approach combining exercises, case studies, and projects.	Classwork approach varies by subject area.
I divide topics into pairs or small groups for expert group jigsaw activities.	It usually involves questions reinforcing the day's concept.	Activities must offer significant benefit to justify class time.	Everything is project-based, with students creating a piece of art.	Grade 10: follows a structured daily routine.	Small tasks and exercises occur almost every day.	In computer programming, the class runs like a math or accounting lesson:
I teach them not to rely on Google or AI but to engage with the content I provide.	About three quarters of the time, it's reverse classroom style, homework prepares them for the next lesson.	Some activities are highly effective and have a lasting impact.	Once per unit, do a peer input activity.	Grade 11 and 12: structure is more flexible.	Larger projects are scaffolded and span about a week.	Review key points from the previous lesson.
I monitor independent work by circulating and checking their shared Google Docs.	Students research using guiding questions to build background knowledge.	Have a 10-minute whiteboard period at the beginning.	Peer input can be: Elbow partners, Matching picture cards to find partners, Small groups formed from names on the board	Example: started a new unit with a 45–50 minute teacher-led lecture using Google Slides, asking questions to encourage discussion.	Example: in business class, students analyze a real company's marketing plan one day, then spend several days creating their own marketing campaigns.	Take up selected homework questions.

I use discussion to check understanding, encourage questions, and guide lessons.	AI use is acceptable as long as they understand the topic.	Limited work periods ,most of the time spent learning and teaching each other.	In groups, students share ideas, show progress, and give feedback in a positive, respectful way (modeled from the start of the year).	Sometimes provide in-class work time at the end of lessons.	This blend of daily and long-term activities supports consistent engagement and deeper learning.	Introduce new material through examples or demonstrations.
I give practice assessments before real ones so students learn both content and format.	The goal is for no student to come in unprepared.	Class time mainly focused on going through materials together.	Teacher uses this time to observe and converse to assess learning and understanding.	Example: in Grade 12 Politics, had a 45-minute lecture + 20-minute activity, then assigned group presentations with two class periods to prepare.		Students complete short-answer worksheets or programming tasks.
	Classwork varies depending on the topic.	Reduced work period time over the years because it's often not productively used.	Peer input helps students stay on track and learn from one another.	Teacher and student teacher check progress and give feedback next class.		In English, structure changes by unit:
		Class time is too valuable to give up for hard material.	Aim to include peer input at least once per unit, though it can't always happen as often as desired.	In senior courses, occasionally show movies tied to topics, followed by related assignments.		Start with grammar practice when attention is highest.
				Use DigiExam for written work to support academic integrity, though AI use is difficult to fully prevent.		Move to writing activities for the yearlong writing portfolios.

						End with reading or analyzing a story or play.
						Goal: Teacher-led instruction = one-third of class time.
						Remaining two-thirds are student-directed, with the teacher acting as a mentor or guide.

Q6. According to your experience, how does classwork help in constructing students' knowledge and trigger their motivation?

Theme	Codes
Practice and Knowledge Construction	Repetition, application, reinforcement, assessment alignment
Relevance and Engagement	Real-world connections, student interest, flexible projects, autonomy
Differentiation and Motivation Strategies	Scaffolding, feedback, grade-level adaptation, formative checks

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Classwork is essential for building students' knowledge, compared to athletic training where practice prepares for performance.	Never liked giving classwork or homework that involves only copying information or writing definitions, as it lacks real thinking and is not motivational.	Beginning-of-class activity helps students remember previous lessons and clarify understanding, allowing for more effective teaching of new material.	Everything is classwork because students, especially in lower grades, cannot take paintings home to complete.	Motivation varies greatly between grade levels.	Frequent classroom work allows students to apply concepts right away.	Class activities are designed to directly align with upcoming assessments.

Classwork and homework act as practice sessions before summative assessments.	Designs classwork that encourages application of knowledge to daily life.	Because many students miss classes for sports or other activities, topics are taught one day and reviewed the next to help them catch up.	Keeps students engaged with projects that truly interest them.	For Grade 9 and 10 students, homework often feels like a routine task they simply have to complete.	This immediate application helps reinforce their learning.	Students practice the same skills in class that they will need to demonstrate in their assessments.
Motivation varies among students:	Example: In Grade 12 Biology, students analyze one of their daily meals to identify nutrients and assess balance.	Includes activities every few weeks, but in AP classes, many activities don't provide enough value to justify using class time.	If a student isn't motivated, asks, What else would you like to do instead?, this often helps them choose to stay and participate.	For Grade 11 and 12 students, motivation increases when they work on presentations, ISPs, or larger projects based on topics they choose themselves.	It also enables teachers to address misunderstandings or expand on newly introduced concepts.	The approach follows the coaching principle: play like you practice, and practice like you play.
Some are motivated by learning and feedback.	Believes classwork should move beyond rote memorization.		Since most work happens in class, maintaining engagement through interesting, flexible projects is essential.	Having the freedom to select topics that interest them fosters ownership and engagement.	For example, in a finance lesson, students improve significantly through small, hands-on exercises.	This connection can enhance motivation, as students see clear relevance between classwork and assessment tasks.
Others are motivated by grades, often asking, Is this for marks?	Emphasizes helping students think critically and connect learning to real-life situations.			This autonomy helps create intrinsic motivation, as students view their work as an opportunity to explore meaningful	These repeated, practical tasks help them build skills progressively and see results immediately.	Knowing that class activities prepare them for summative assessments encourages more meaningful engagement.

				ideas and excel in the course.		
Teacher explains that classwork influences overall professional judgment and can affect final grades.						
When students realize that consistent effort in classwork reduces pressure in major assessments, they become more motivated and engaged.						

Q7. Have you tried graded classwork? What was your experience? Did you see a difference in students' engagement, behavior, or participation?

Theme	Codes
Grades as Motivators and Accountability Tools	Increased effort, focus, responsibility, completion
Balancing Motivation with Stress and Over-Grading	Stress, time burden, diminishing value, low-stakes assessment
Formative Learning without Formal Grading	Feedback, self-assessment, learning process, autonomy

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Students tend to be more motivated when they know the work counts for marks.	When students hear that something is marked, their stress level rises slightly, but their effort increases as well.	I don't do much formative assessment that is graded because I don't find it particularly useful.	I have definitely graded classwork to make sure students are understanding and staying on track.	Students often don't understand the terms formative and summative, but once they hear something isn't being marked, they tend not to take it seriously.	Graded classwork helps students stay accountable.	The problem with graded classwork in an English classroom is that there's so much of it, and the marking takes forever.
Although I wish that weren't the case, grades often drive students to put in more effort than they would otherwise.	I often give out worksheets or classwork and tell students it will be graded.	It encourages students not to study for the formative assessment and instead rely on it to identify what they need to learn later.	When students know there's a mark involved, they usually put in more effort.	I don't use much formal formative assessment in my grade 11 and 12 classes ,virtually none that I label as such.	It can be challenging to get all students to submit work on time, but grading holds them responsible.	A former department head changed my perspective by emphasizing that we spend too much time grading.
	At the end, I sometimes reveal it wasn't graded, but it still motivates them to focus and do their best work.	This takes away students' ability to assess their own understanding and makes them dependent on external evaluation.	Since everything in my room is classwork, I sometimes collect rough work or sketchbook tasks for a low mark.	Formative assessment happens informally as part of learning how to learn, even if I don't explicitly call it that.	I use weekly quests and small projects to maintain accountability.	English teachers often copy-edit every piece of writing, but doing that for all homework would be impossible.
	When they think it's graded, students tend to talk less and concentrate	I provide lots of resources and practice questions so students can self-assess	When students ask if it's being marked and I say yes, they often improve	With older, motivated students in elective courses, formative assessment	A quest is a quiz with the same amount of work as a test, and students usually put	I don't usually grade classwork; I assess it more as a learning skill, checking for

	more, which can be useful depending on the goal.	before real tests.	their work right away.	tends to happen naturally.	more effort into preparing for it because it impacts their grade.	completion when reporting on responsibility or homework completion.
	For formative assessments, framing an activity as a quiz or graded task is very motivational.	They should know their expected performance before entering an assessment; if not, they haven't prepared enough.	I believe marks do motivate students, but I don't want grades to be their only source of motivation.	In grade 10 history, formative assessment is usually simple, like binder checks or worksheets.	I keep these assessments low stakes to motivate students without causing stress.	I only grade work that students have had a chance to revise and improve.
	As the year progresses, students often ask, Is it marked? and my answer, I don't know, keeps them motivated to give their best effort.	While I might think differently for Grade 9, at the Grade 12 level I don't believe formative assessments help prepare students for university.		These small tasks don't have a big impact on motivation; good students do them because they see the benefit.	This approach helps students stay prepared and accountable in class.	This approach reduces stress for both me and the students.
		The board work and graph analysis at the beginning of class serve as informal formative assessments, I circulate, check, and give feedback.		Much of my assessment process is intuitive, I know what to do and try to pass that structure to students.		While grading can increase motivation, it also raises students' anxiety levels, which are already high, so I try to limit that.
		That time is valuable for learning, even if it's not graded or documented.		If I assign classwork, my expectation is that it must be		

				done since it may appear on a test or count in some way.		
		I don't give practice tests or quizzes since students already have access to online tools like McGraw-Hill Connect for self-assessment.		Most students use in-class work time productively, especially when the alternative is to do it as homework.		
		I believe in that type of formative work but not in written practice tests, which I strongly dislike.				

Q8. What about ungraded classwork? How do students respond compared to graded classwork?

Theme	Codes
Intrinsic Motivation and Safe Learning Spaces	Low-stakes learning, freedom to experiment, reduced fear of mistakes, collaboration
Variability in Student Motivation	Depends on student type, autonomy vs. accountability, inconsistent effort
Task Design and Perceived Value	Relevance, structure, engagement, feedback

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Unfortunately, there are still some students who just do not seem to care, for whatever reason.	It really depends on the students.	The 10 minutes of ungraded formative work at the beginning of class are very effective and have strong student buy-in.	In the visual arts room, students often get social since they sit at group tables.	The impact on motivation depends on the nature of the assignment.	Formative assessments are generally ungraded, but sometimes a small grade can be added to	Because I do so little grading of classwork, students respond to it in much the same way, which is ideal, they

					motivate students.	do ungraded work as well as graded work.
Generally speaking, most students try to perform better when they know their work will count toward a mark.	Some want to do their best all the time, while others are more motivated when it is marked.	Students immediately grab a marker, read the question on the board, and start working collaboratively.	They may appear to start working but quickly shift to unrelated conversations about topics like math or sports.	In American history, there's a project called Hollywood in the Cold War, where students explore Soviet-American tensions through Hollywood films.	Comparing graded to ungraded classwork, ungraded tasks allow students to experiment more freely.	Sometimes students don't complete homework, but that becomes apparent during tests or assignments, where they see the benefit of practicing classwork.
However, some students with confidence issues or lower ability levels are not motivated even when grades are involved.	Sometimes not telling them whether it will be graded makes them put in more effort.	This setup keeps students engaged while attendance is taken and creates a productive classroom culture.	This leads to lost class time and rushed, lower-quality work.	Students watch YouTube clips, write their impressions, and complete an exit ticket.	When students know the work isn't graded, they're less afraid to make mistakes.	Students generally work harder if it's graded, but that can also increase stress and anxiety.
Graded classwork tends to encourage effort overall, but it does not necessarily reach every student.	Usually, when it is not graded, the effort tends to be less.	Over time, students become comfortable putting work on the board and learn that mistakes are part of the process.	The teacher is focusing on being stricter this year to reduce socializing and keep students on task.	Even though it's ungraded, students enjoy it because it's engaging and different.		In my grade 10 computers class, students work in pairs through lab exercises that are never graded, yet they stay engaged because the activities are

						fun and clearly connected to learning.
		Occasionally, observations and conversations during board work are graded for summative purposes, though it feels similar to regular classwork.	The goal is to ensure students use class time productively and maintain the quality of their work.			The class operates through coaching and collaboration rather than lecturing, which keeps motivation high even without grades.
		Formative or ungraded homework is viewed as ineffective; students learn better when homework is graded.		When in-class assignments are interesting or out of the ordinary, students tend to stay focused and motivated.		In English, students might be slightly less motivated to complete ungraded work, but familiarity with my teaching style helps maintain engagement.
		Making homework formative may help at-risk students but hurts those in the middle who need the incentive to stay motivated.				

		Top students complete homework regardless, but ungraded homework leads to poorer outcomes for average students.				

Q9. Have you tried open-book classwork, where students construct knowledge more freely? Did it change student performance, confidence, or motivation?

Theme	Codes
Reduced Anxiety and Increased Confidence	Lower stress, comfort, accessibility, inclusion, motivate
Focus on Understanding and Organization Skills	Conceptual thinking, binder organization, strategic preparation
Variable Motivation and Misconceptions	Underestimation, self-direction, accountability

1	2	3	4	5	6
Many of the courses I teach work well with open-book assessments and classwork, especially in English, where students can refer to texts and materials.	In grade 11 biology, during the diversity unit on kingdoms, the unit test is open-book.	The short activities at the beginning of class are usually open-book, since students can use their textbooks or handout packages if they missed a previous lesson.	I have given some open-book quizzes, and they seem to help students feel less anxious about taking a test or quiz.	In Grade 10 History, students complete an open-book, in-class essay that is graded at the end.	In marketing classes, students tend to give more thoughtful and detailed responses during open-book because there is less pressure.
Students generally find open-book classwork less stressful than closed-book tasks, since they don't have to rely	Students quickly realize that the questions require understanding rather than simple recall, which changes	Technically, this makes the start of every class an open-book activity.	In visual art, though, open-book classwork doesn't really apply in the same way it would in other subjects, since we don't have	Open-book activities are used rarely, and when they are, students receive advance notice so they can prepare	

solely on memory.	how they prepare.		traditional notes.	independently beforehand.	
I haven't formally measured its effect on motivation, but I believe the reduced anxiety helps students feel more confident and ready to perform.	The open-book format motivates them to organize their binders, add sticky notes, and include clear examples.	However, I don't typically dedicate an entire class period to open-book work.	The only comparable situation would be open-book tests or quizzes.	The goal is for students to come in with a plan and use their notes only as a reference, maintaining a self-directed learning approach.	
Open-book assessments can particularly benefit students who struggle with memory, attention, or learning styles that make content retention difficult.	It encourages them to simplify and structure their notes so they can use them effectively during the assessment.	If I'm away, I might leave open-book tasks like note-taking from the textbook or completing homework in class.		This approach fits well in history, where open-book work allows for interpretation and analysis, unlike in math.	
These assessments often allow such students to reach levels of success they might not achieve otherwise.	When tests are not open-book, students tend to be less organized and more likely to keep messy, unstructured materials.			Regularly, students have in-class work periods that function as open-book time, and unfinished work becomes homework.	
However, some students underestimate open-book work,	Overall, open-book assessments seem to motivate			While it may not always be positive motivation, the system	

assuming it will be easy just because they have access to resources.	students to stay organized and engage more deeply with the content.			effectively keeps students on task and accountable.	
In reality, success in open-book assessments depends on being organized, knowing where to find information, and not wasting time trying to relearn material during the task.					

10. In your opinion, how does the balance between graded and ungraded classwork influence student engagement and effort?

Theme	Codes
Grades as Catalysts for Effort and Accountability	Focus, responsibility, structure, performance drive
Value of Ungraded Work for Creativity and Risk-Taking	Curiosity, experimentation, intrinsic motivation, reduced stress
Balanced Assessment for Sustained Engagement	Mix of stakes, varied incentives, connection between tasks

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
On average, students are noticeably more engaged when they know the work is graded.		When tasks are ungraded and not collected, students generally put in very little effort.	In visual arts, all classwork builds toward the final project, so every activity connects to that end goal.	Graded assignments have a much stronger impact on student motivation than	A balanced mix of graded and ungraded work tends to be most effective for motivation and engagement.	In a grade 10 computers class, students work collaboratively on ungraded programming labs and remain highly engaged

				ungraded ones.		because they find the activities enjoyable and recognize their value for learning.
They tend to put in significantly more effort compared to when the work is ungraded.		In economics, providing incentives to complete homework and skill-building tasks is essential for helping students succeed.	Students usually put less effort into the early ideation and brainstorming stages compared to the final project.	Ungraded work often lacks meaning for students because there is no tangible reward attached to it.	Graded tasks promote focus, accountability, and responsibility for learning.	The class structure emphasizes coaching and peer collaboration rather than direct instruction, which fosters intrinsic motivation.
		Graded work motivates them to build a stronger foundation of understanding.	The creative process itself is assessed as part of their overall mark, recognizing effort and development.	Many students today are highly mark-driven, making grades a key motivator in their learning.	Ungraded tasks encourage curiosity, risk-taking, and exploration in a low-stakes environment.	Even without grading, students stay motivated because they understand the purpose of the tasks within the course structure.
		As students gain deeper comprehension, they often become more passionate about the subject.	Graded work, particularly the final piece, tends to generate the most value and engagement.	As a result, guiding them toward graded work tends to be more effective in sustaining engagement and effort.	Combining both, such as a weekly quiz with an ungraded brainstorming activity, allows for open discussion and deeper thinking.	In English classes, motivation for ungraded work may be slightly lower, but the teacher-student relationship and clear communication of expectations help sustain engagement.

		The ultimate goal is to spark that passion, so their learning extends well beyond what is taught in class.	Because of the subject's nature, it's difficult to separate classwork motivation from the motivation tied to the final graded project.		This balance helps maintain student engagement without overwhelming them with constant grading pressure.	

11. Can you describe your assessment breakdown (assignment, quiz, test, exam, project, etc.)?

Theme	Codes
Diverse and Balanced Assessment Structure	Mix of tests, projects, labs, presentations, essays
Summative Weight and Exam Emphasis	Tests/exams 60–75%, final worth 30%
Adaptation to Context and Subject Needs	Subject-specific design, AI concerns, skill-building focus

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I maintain a balance between smaller graded assignments and larger summative assessments.	In my Grade 10 Science and Grade 11–12 Biology classes, each unit includes three major assessments.	Midterm in December or January.	In senior classes: approximately 60% assignments.	In recent years, I've placed greater emphasis on tests and exams due to concerns about AI and ensuring authentic student work.	In Business Leadership, the assessment breakdown is approximately:	Computer Programming:
Each unit typically includes two major summative evaluations in different formats ,for example, one traditional test and one presentation or discussion.	Every unit ends with a test to ensure students gain experience for university-style evaluations.	Final at the end of the year, worth 30%.	15% for the Independent Study Project (ISP).	Across all Grade 11–12 courses, the breakdown is roughly:	20%, Assignments	75%, Tests, exams, and presentations

Test formats remain consistent to reduce student stress, while other assessments vary depending on the content.	Alongside the test, there are typically two additional lab-based assessments.	Mostly… tests and some assignments.	15% for the final exam or final summative.	65%, Tests and exams	15%, Quizzes or quests	10%, Report writing (three reports on different topics)
Some topics are better suited to presentations or seminars, while others align with written evaluations.	For example, in Grade 11 Biology's internal systems unit, students complete a test, a circulatory system lab measuring blood pressure, and a research project on a related medical condition.	For any given unit: you might have a test at 45 marks, an assignment out of 5–10 every other unit.	10% for written critical analysis and reflection.	10–15%, Major project (ISP), partly completed on DigiExam	25%, Tests	15%, Video presentation
At Crestwood, the assessment structure is partly predetermined: the final 30% is split between an exam and a culminating activity (often 15% each, or 10% and 20%).	I strive for variety in assessment formats, but my main emphasis is on lab work, as it is key to building scientific understanding and skills.	A few homework marks (probably 3–5 mark range) to incentivize homework/notes.		20%, Small assignments, quizzes, oral presentations, and similar tasks	30%, Exam	Note: Few or no traditional assignments due to generative AI concerns
The remaining 70% includes roughly 10% for quizzes, 20–30% for tests, and 30–40% for major assignments such as essays, projects, or presentations.		In Accounting: 30% culminating project, without a final exam.			10%, Project	English:

		Lots of tests (probably 7–10 tests).			In Marketing, there is no exam, so the final team project carries greater weight as the major culminating assessment.	40%, Tests and exams
		Maybe 5 assignments.				60%, Writing assignments, other evaluations, and short oral assessments

12. What is the usual classroom average in your courses? Is it the same every year? How does it compare between assessment types?

13. Could you please share the classroom average mark for: Quizzes, Tests, Exams, and Assignments?

Theme	Codes
Average	High or low averages, Quizzes, Tests, Exams, and Assignments
Consistency	Similar averages every year or averages vary every year

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Classroom Average Overview:	Assessment Weighting: Tests are not the highest component; lab work carries the most weight. Each test is about 6–7% of the final mark (around 18–20% total), while labs and assignments account for about 40%.	Course Context: Teaches both regular and AP Grade 12 Economics, with comparisons to Grade 11 Economics results.	Course Context: Teaches Visual Arts from Grade 8 through Grade 12; elective courses attract students who are generally interested and motivated in the subject.	Course Context: Teaches multiple History courses, including World History 11, World History 12, American History, and Canadian History, at Crestwood, a school noted for strong academic engagement.	Overall Class Averages: Typically range from 78–85%, depending on the course, assessment type, and student engagement level.	Overall Class Averages:
Highly variable depending on cohort, grade	Performance Patterns:	Class Averages:	Class Averages by Grade:	Overall Class Averages:	Assessment Type Trends:	Computer Programming: Typically 80–

level, and subject.						85%, slightly lower (75–80%) in Grade 10 due to skill development and experience level.
AP or elective courses with motivated students: typically high 80s.	Test scores are generally lower, especially on analytical and thinking questions.	Regular Grade 12 Economics: Around mid-80s, sometimes lower depending on the time of year.	Grades 10–12 (electives): Typically range from low 80s to mid-90s, depending on cohort.	General Range: Typically 80–84%, with minor year-to-year variation depending on cohort strength.	Quizzes: Average in the mid to high 80s, reflecting strong short-term recall and preparation.	English: Generally 76–80% in core classes, slightly higher in Grade 12 because of stronger student motivation and effort.
Mandatory courses with mixed engagement: usually high 70s to low 80s.	Lab and conceptual knowledge scores are higher due to hands-on understanding and extended completion time.	AP Economics: Typically 90–low 90s early in the year.	Grades 8–9: Average ranges from 70 to 90, with greater variation due to mixed motivation and ability levels.	History is viewed as an accessible subject where consistent effort leads to success.	Tests: Generally between 78–82%, showing slightly lower performance compared to quizzes.	Assessment Type Trends:
Differences often reflect student background (e.g., English language learners may perform better on written than oral assessments).	Class Averages:	Over time, Grade 11 averages tend to rise, while Grade 12 averages decline slightly, often due to university application pressures.	Year-to-year variation is significant; student engagement and cohort composition strongly influence averages.	Assessment Type Trends:	Exams: Average around 75–81%, often the lowest due to cumulative content and higher difficulty.	Grammar Tests: Lowest average at 65–70%, though they carry minimal weight.
No consistent pattern across years ,averages depend on cohort quality and engagement rather than a	Grade 10: High 70s (training ground).	Overall: Averages align closely with prior Grade 11 performance; AP averages are higher because the cohort is	Assessment Type Trends:	Tests:	Assignments: Consistently strong, averaging 85% or higher, as students have more time and flexibility to	Tests: Average between 75–80%, reflecting solid understanding but some difficulty with formal assessments.

fixed target or curve.		stronger academically.			complete them.	
Comparison by Assessment Type (General Trends):	Grade 11: Mid-to-high 70s, occasionally low 80s.	Assessment Type Trends:	Assignments / Art Projects: Usually the highest averages ,around 85–88%, reflecting strong practical performance and creativity.	World History 12: 88% (strong class)	Projects: Usually the highest-scoring component, often above 85–90%, driven by creativity, enjoyment, and hands-on application (e.g., a social media campaign project earning marks in the 90s).	Writing Assignments: Stronger performance, averaging 80–85%, as students have time to revise and refine their work.
Quizzes: Slightly higher averages; students tend to prepare more.	Grade 12: Usually low 80s; rarely above 85.	Tests: Considered hard ; results are slightly below the overall class average.	Written Reflections: Typically lower (around 80–82%) due to many art students being less confident in written expression.	World History 11: 84%		Oral Assessments: Highest averages at around 85%, showing student confidence and engagement in conversational tasks.
Unit Tests: Slightly lower than coursework, reflecting overall understanding.	The teacher views averages above 85 as a sign of insufficient challenge for students.	Assignments:	Final Exam: Combines practical work and written components; averages fluctuate by year ,recently around 83%, but historically	American History: 77%		

			closer to 87–88%.			
Exams: Typically lower than course average; few students improve significantly.	Assessment Trends:	Used to be more substantial, but mark weight and frequency were reduced due to AI use and collaboration concerns.	Outlier Years: Occasionally reach around 91% when cohorts are particularly strong.	Quizzes:		
Assignments: Generally stable; some students improve over time while others plateau.	Exams: Typically lowest scores due to the volume of material.	Students may work together but submit individually, emphasizing learning over grading.		American History: 91% (easier quiz)		
	Tests/Quizzes: Slightly higher averages since they cover less content.	High marks, but low weight in the final grade.		Canadian History: 78%		
	Labs/Assignments: Highest marks ,students have more time to revise and refine work.	Quizzes: Not used.		Presentations:		
		Projects: Results are roughly in line with test performance ,not significantly higher.		American History: 86%		
				World History 11: 84%		
				Assignments: Generally align with overall course averages (low–mid		

				80s); occasionally higher when designed to build early confidence (e.g., 94% average on an introductory assignment).		

14. In reference to student results: around how many students failed your course last year? Was this normal or unusual? Did it change your teaching approach?

Theme	Codes
Results	Nobody failed, Few failed, Many failed
Consistency	Normal pattern, Unusual pattern
Self-Review	Change teaching approach, No change needed
Why did students fail?	Poor study habits, poor work, did not submit assignments, communicating with parents,

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Touch wood, I have very rarely had a student fail a course.	I'm always communicating with parents when a student is at risk of failing.	None failed last year; none have failed my class in a number of years.	I've never had a student fail.	Very few kids fail history, maybe one a year.	No one failed my courses last year.	In a core English class, I might have 1–2 students fail out of about 40 (2–3% failure rate).
In English, if students complete the coursework, it's unlikely they'll fail.	This communication increases student motivation to seek help and put in effort outside class.	This year, I might have 3–5 students at risk of failing, that's completely unusual.		Last year, none failed, but 3–4 students were in the high 40s (46–47).	Three students didn't do as well as I expected.	In elective classes, almost nobody fails ,they usually drop before that point.
The only way you'll fail is if you don't do the work.	I find the effort for help and outside work has increased.	The issue is tied to poor work and study habits, incomplete homework,		I bumped them to 50 since they were close enough.	It encouraged me to provide extra support and more one-	If more students fail than usual, I review the data to see if the issue is with them or

		and weak textbook notes.			on-one check-ins this year.	my assessments.
The only students I've failed were those who didn't submit assignments or complete studies.	Last year, only one Grade 10 student failed; Grade 11 and 12 failures are rare.	It does change my approach slightly, it reminds me how ineffective formative homework is.		That's just the reality, I don't get many students who fail.	I want to make sure struggling students succeed.	I may adjust the type or length of questions based on what I find.
	If I have one or two students fail out of about 100, that's exceptional, due to strong communication and motivation.				Thankfully, no one failed.	English offers a wide range of assessments, so students usually find something they can do well in.
						Even if they struggle with exams, they can still pass through discussion-based work.
						In grades 9 and 10, a noticeable group sits between 50–65%, just scraping by, but this improves in higher grades.

15. At your school, how many Grade 12 students graduated but were not accepted to university last year? What factors do you think make this outcome?

Theme	Codes
Results	100% acceptance, Few not accepted, Many not accepted
Consistency	Normal outcome, Unusual outcome
Factors	Students, School, Course, Teacher reflection

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The schools I've taught at are independent schools that like to boast 100% university acceptance.	Maybe two or three students don't go to university, though some take a gap year.	I'd guess everyone graduated, and almost everyone goes to university, maybe a few take a gap year.	We had a lot of kids graduate last year, maybe around 80.	Very few students don't go to university.	Every student got into university last year.	Last year, there were two students who graduated but did not attend post-secondary.
Those statistics can be massaged to look better than they are.	High acceptance rates might be due to some courses being a bit too easy.	We have a strong academic culture, supportive parents, and it's a wealthy school.	I don't know all the exact statistics.	We had about 120 graduates last year.	About 4 or 5 didn't get into their first-choice program.	It was either because they didn't get in or didn't get into the school they wanted.
All the students I've taught who wanted to pursue post-secondary education were accepted.	Easier courses with averages of 90 or 95 motivate students to choose them, raising overall acceptance.	Behavioral issues are minimal, the biggest problem might be something like bringing food into class.	I think 85% or more of our students went on to university.	Around 90–95% got accepted to university, for academic or athletic reasons.	Reasons included limited effort, poor time management, and inefficient preparation.	They could have gone somewhere, but not to their preferred choice.
To my knowledge, no student I've taught chose not to continue their education.	In sciences like biology, physics, and chemistry, class sizes are smaller ,around 30 to 50 in Grade 12 biology.	Because of supportive home environments, students face fewer performance issues.	I don't know how many students were not accepted, I'm not privy to that information.	Students often come back and say my approach helped them in university.	Some were too marks-focused and dropped extracurriculars.	They chose to take time to improve their grades and try again.

	Expectations in science courses are higher compared to some other departments.	Many parents are university-driven, which pushes students to work harder and stay balanced.		That feedback encourages me to keep the same teaching approach.	They started university planning too late, in grade 12 instead of earlier.	
	Students in biology are very motivated and already know my expectations from previous years, so little extra training is needed.			Crestwood is unique, almost everyone goes to university.	Everyone got accepted somewhere, just not always their first choice.	

16. Have you used bonus questions in a summative assessment? How do students react? Do bonus questions motivate them to put in a more substantial effort? In your experience, do bonus questions increase average only equal to the bonus value, or also give a larger effect (confidence, participation)?

Theme	Codes
Frequency	Regular use, Occasional, Do not use
Purpose	Positive motivation, Engagement with learning, Differentiation, Choice and autonomy
Impact on Results	Small / limited mark impact, Larger indirect effect

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The teacher occasionally uses bonus questions but not regularly.	The teacher has used bonus work in two ways.	The teacher occasionally uses bonus marks, usually a small amount (e.g., ½ mark out of 45).	The teacher said students like bonus questions because they offer a chance to earn extra marks.	The teacher said the impact of bonus questions depends on the type given.	The teacher said they have used bonus questions before and believe they motivate students to challenge themselves.	The teacher said bonus questions don't have a large effect and only raise marks by the value of the bonus.

Students enjoy having an extra opportunity to improve their marks.	Introduced a "redemption assignment" last year that students could complete once per year.	In economics, bonus questions are based on current events such as U.S. government shutdowns, inflation, unemployment, or job reports.	However, they noted that bonus questions only raise the average by their own point value, not enough to significantly affect overall grades.	They include a bonus question on every test, often something highly specific from the textbook to reward students who read it.	Even for a few extra credits, students enthusiastically attempt the bonus question.	They noted that bonus questions are rare because they prefer to test essential content.
Sometimes gives an open-ended bonus question like: "If you studied something that wasn't asked, write your own question and answer it."	The assignment involved analyzing a news article and presenting it to the class.	These questions encourage students to stay informed about real-world economic issues.		Sometimes the bonus relates history to current events, such as a political cartoon.	Some students try answering even if unsure, showing strong engagement.	The teacher explained they usually include one difficult question in regular assessments to differentiate top-performing students, rather than using a bonus question for that purpose.
This helps students who feel frustrated when their knowledge isn't tested.	If done well, it added up to 10% on one test (e.g., 100% on the assignment = +10% on a test).	The teacher has helped the school secure free student subscriptions to major publications like The New York Times, The Globe and Mail, and The Financial Times.		The teacher marks bonus questions strictly, so only students who really know the material benefit.	Bonus questions boost confidence and participation, and students get excited when they see one on a test.	

Occasionally builds this idea into the assessment instead of adding it as a bonus.	In practice, the overall impact on the final grade was only about 1%, but students found it motivating.	The bonus questions serve as motivation for students to engage with these resources and follow current economic developments.		They estimated bonuses might raise marks by only 1–2%, noting that while the effect is small, students find it motivating and appreciate the extra opportunity.		
Finds that giving students choice in questions is motivating.	Also includes a one-mark bonus question at the end of every test (worth about 3% of the test).					
Often includes optional questions to give students flexibility.	The bonus question always connects to the previous unit, encouraging retention across topics.					
	The teacher finds this approach motivational and useful for reinforcing cumulative learning.					

17. Looking back, which assessment practice (graded/ungraded classwork, bonus questions, open-book task) was most effective in promoting learning and motivation? Did you face any problems when deciding whether to grade classwork? What advice would you give to other teachers who think about using classwork to motivate students?

Theme	Codes
Effective Practices	Practice Assessments, Collaborative Learning, Low-Stakes Grading, Makeup Assessments, Feedback and Reflection, Teacher behaviour

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The process that has had the most success is doing a practice or mock assessment in class under normal, sort of, test-like conditions.	Students are most motivated when doing labs in pairs or groups of three, since they can socialize and problem-solve together.	Business classes start in grade 11, unlike other subjects that begin earlier.	There must be a clear reason for grading classwork so students understand its value and importance.	Asked whether graded classwork refers to formative assessment, noting the importance of defining the term.	Emphasized that low-stakes graded classwork, combined with regular feedback, observation, and conversation, is highly effective.	Expressed strong support for open book assessments, noting that in a Canadian literature class, all assessments and tests are open book.
This gives very actionable feedback and suggestions that students can take and immediately see improvement on.	The multi-day nature of labs and the uncertainty of what comes next make the process exciting and motivating.	To build passion for business, accounting, or economics, students must overcome the initial challenge of learning foundational content before applying it meaningfully.	Grading milestones within larger projects helps keep students on task and supports time management, especially for long-term work like an ISP or final exam project.	Explained that approaches vary greatly among teachers — some rely on worksheets collected at the end of class, which they do not find motivating.	Explained that open-ended projects help foster critical thinking, while small, consistent assignments help students build confidence and improve performance over time.	Explained that this method promotes continuous learning, as students annotate and engage with texts throughout the unit instead of cramming before tests.
The advice to other teachers is to do a practice assessment and have everything the same except the	Worksheets can also motivate students, especially when they compare their work with others.	These classes are content-heavy and require deep understanding.	Collecting and checking in-class work allows for timely feedback and discussions about progress	Emphasized that their own teaching focuses more on personal interactions and course	Noted that the process of revising and resubmitting work allows students to develop deeper understanding	Highlighted that open book assessments are motivating and improve performance, since

exact format of the questions.			before it's too late to improve.	design, rather than heavily relying on graded classwork.	and achieve better grades.	students work consistently rather than relying on last-minute study.
This helps students gauge their ability with the content, their time management, and the types of questions they'll face on the real test.	All assessments are graded, including homework, which is graded formatively.	Graded work, including small amounts of graded homework based on completion, helps students build foundational knowledge.	When well-planned and well-executed, grading classwork is valuable for learning and provides ongoing support throughout the process.	Advised teachers to find their own force of personality and love of the content, as these are what truly motivate students and support learning.	Concluded by strongly recommending the use of low-stakes graded assignments with regular check-ins to support both learning and motivation.	Mentioned that all classwork is also open book, allowing students to use and strengthen their resources during both formative and summative activities.
The practice test is ungraded toward the 70%, but a grade is given to show what they would have gotten if it was real, since students still want to know their grade.	When test averages are low, it leads to reflection on whether the issue is the question or the preparation.	Consistent work makes it easier for students to connect concepts to real-world applications.				Advised other teachers to mark less and focus on meaningful feedback, providing one or two key comments that guide improvement.
It is described as "the most meaningful process that I have yet discovered in my teaching career."	If students are unprepared, they are given feedback, review time, and a second chance to improve under test-	A former teacher's advice: if students don't know the rudiments, they can't learn complex or nuanced ideas.				Warned against over-marking every assignment, emphasizing that students benefit more from one clear, actionable suggestion than from

	like conditions without using resources.					excessive commentary.
The con is that it's fairly time-consuming, requiring periods for the practice test, take-up, and the real one.	The focus is always on making sure students learn from their mistakes.	For example, students must know how to calculate unemployment rate or GDP before analyzing the economy critically.				
Sometimes a self-assessment and peer review component is added, which can be successful but is hit and miss depending on the class and personality types.	In the department, there is an emphasis on different types of assessments.	Strategic use of graded work is effective — it may begin as extrinsic motivation but leads to intrinsic motivation as students recognize the purpose and connections in learning.				
	Everything is graded, even homework, because grading is seen as feedback.					
	Written comments make feedback tangible, helping students reflect and draw from it					

	in future summative work.					

18. Is there anything else you want to share about your experience with classwork, marking, or student engagement that we did not ask?

Theme	Codes
Engagement and Motivation	Decline in engagement, Pandemic impact, Fewer motivated students, Extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, Real-world connections, Passion
Teacher–Student Relationships	Connection, trust, communication, regular check-ins, and feedback
Classwork, Workload, Student Balance	Communication and flexibility, athletes' schedules, quantity of assessments, workload balance

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Observed that overall student engagement has declined over the past 15 years of teaching.	Focused on training students to break down questions and answer exactly what is being asked in any assessment.	Emphasized that the primary goal is developing student passion for the subject, as genuine interest leads to growth in all other areas.	Stated that there is a strong link between teacher-student relationships, project design, and regular interaction or check-ins.	The teacher ended the conversation by saying there was nothing else to add at the moment	Student engagement depends on clear expectations, feedback, and a supportive, trusting environment.	Assessment frequency has been a key discussion point at the teacher's school.
Noted that fewer students are innately engaged now compared to a decade ago or before the pandemic.	Explained that if a question asks "what" and "why," students must respond to both parts — not add unrelated "when" or	Explained that both extrinsic and intrinsic motivators are used — grades may initially drive effort, while real-world relevance sustains engagement.	Emphasized that student engagement increases when they feel the teacher is personally invested in their success.		Communication and flexibility are essential, especially for student athletes balancing academics and athletics.	The teacher prefers fewer but richer assessments that include a variety of types.

	"how" details.					
Suggested a possible correlation between the pandemic and reduced classroom engagement, acknowledging that while not a sociologist or psychologist, the trend appears clear.	Emphasized that answers must be relevant and precise, rejecting responses that include unnecessary or decorative information.	Gave the example of the business team and student-led investment fund, where students see how accounting and economics connect to real financial decision-making.	Explained that this connection encourages students to ask for help, share their work, and seek feedback.		The teacher coordinates with coaches and teachers to help students manage workloads and stay on track.	They believe having 25–30 graded items in a mark book is excessive and unhelpful.
Emphasized that class dynamics vary since each class is shaped by the individual students within it.	Stressed that this skill is essential for preparing students beyond the classroom, ensuring they can address tasks directly and effectively.	Highlighted that these experiences also support success in DECA, helping students build practical and transferable skills.	Concluded that relationship, engagement, and feedback are interconnected — "you can't have one without the other."		Guided learning builds confidence and helps students take ownership of their progress.	Their own classes typically have 15–20 assessments per year.
Pointed out that some students remain highly engaged and participate actively in formative classwork, though their numbers have decreased.	Concluded that the goal is not just content mastery, but learning to respond accurately to the specific demands of	Stressed a flexible motivational approach, using any effective strategy to spark interest and curiosity.			Confidence and engagement should develop gradually, starting before grade 12.	They noted that students, especially younger ones taking 8–10 courses, become overwhelmed when every class includes

	a question or task.					so many graded tasks.
Concluded that students are generally more engaged when marks are involved, showing that grading can increase motivation and participation.		Concluded that initial external motivation can lead students to a deeper appreciation and intrinsic interest in what they're learning.			Engagement is nurtured through expectations, trust, feedback, and a positive atmosphere.	The teacher concluded that fewer, high-quality assessments are more effective for student learning and teacher workload.

Appendix J

Pattern Coding Second Round

Theme 1 – Positive Relationship		
Codes	**Sub-codes**	**Related Questions (Q#)**
Teacher–Student Relationship: Enhance Engagement and Motivation	Approachability, Supportiveness, Encouragement, Availability, Rapport, Feedback, Connection, Trust, Communication, Regular Check-ins, Familiarity, Acceptance, Safety, Motivation, Risk-taking, Liking the teacher, Support, Respect, Routines, Effort, Buy-in	Q2, Q3, Q4, Q18
Classroom Management, Consistency, and Structure Encourage Effort	Environment, Consistency, Predictability/Clarity, Control, High Standards, Expectation, Demanding	Q2, Q3, Q4
Balance of Discipline and Engagement	Firm/Strict, Fair, Fun, Demand effort, Humour, Discipline	Q2, Q3, Q4
Stimulating Engagement	Assessments, Interactivity, Modelling mistakes	Q3
Theme 2 – Graded Classwork		
Codes	**Sub-codes**	**Related Questions (Q#)**
Grades as Motivators for Effort and Accountability	Increased effort, Focus, Responsibility, Completion, Focus, Responsibility, Structure, Performance drive, Graded work encourages diligence, accountability, and effort	Q7, Q10
Formative Assessments	Feedback, Self-assessment, learning process, Autonomy, **Creativity and Risk-Taking,** Curiosity, Experimentation, Intrinsic motivation, Reduced stress, Encourages freedom to explore ideas, intrinsic learning drive	Q7, Q8, Q10, Q17
Diverse and Balanced Assessment Structure for Sustained Engagement	Mix of stakes, Varied incentives, Connection between tasks, Stress, open-book tasks reduce pressure, Time burden, diminishing value, Low-stakes assessment, low-stakes tasks sustain motivation, Mix of tests, projects, labs, presentations, essays, **Summative Weight and Exam Emphasis, Adaptation to Context and Subject Needs,** Various grading methods maintain motivation	Q7, Q10, Q11, Q17

Consistent positive results as evidence of motivated students	**Results (**Nobody failed, Few failed, Many failed), **Consistency** (Normal pattern, Unusual pattern), **Self-Review** (Change teaching approach, No change needed)	Q14
Open book classwork	**Focus on Understanding and Organization Skills (**Conceptual thinking, Binder organization, Strategic preparation) **Variable Motivation and Misconceptions (**Underestimation, Self-direction, Accountability**)**	Q9
Relevance and Engagement	Real-world connections, Student interest, Flexible projects, Autonomy	Q9
Differentiation and Motivation Strategies	Scaffolding, Feedback, Grade-level adaptation, Formative checks	Q9
Reduced Anxiety and Increased Confidence	Lower stress, Comfort, Accessibility, Inclusion, Motivate	Q9
Theme 3 – Bonus Questions		
Codes	**Sub-codes**	**Related Questions (Q#)**
Frequency	Regular use, Occasional, Do not use	Q16
Purpose	Positive motivation, Engagement with learning, Differentiation, Choice and autonomy	Q16
Impact on Results	Small / limited mark impact, Larger indirect effect	Q16
Relevance and Engagement	Real-world connections, Student interest, Flexible projects, Autonomy	Q6, Q16
Differentiation and Motivation Strategies	Scaffolding, Feedback, Grade-level adaptation, Formative checks	Q6, Q16
Reduced Anxiety and Increased Confidence	Lower stress, Comfort, Accessibility, Inclusion, Motivate	Q6, Q16
Theme 4 – Best Practices Prevent Dropout		
Codes	**Sub-codes**	**Related Questions (Q#)**

Effective Practices	Practice assessments, Collaborative learning, Low-stakes grading, Makeup assessments, Feedback and reflection, Teacher behaviour **Engagement and Motivation (**Decline in engagement, Pandemic impact, Fewer motivated students, Extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, Real-world connections, Passion**)** **Classwork, Workload, Student Balance** (Communication and flexibility, Athletes' schedules, Quantity of assessments, Workload balance)	Q17, Q18
Academic performance	**Average (**High or low averages, Quizzes, Tests, Exams, and Assignments) **Consistency (**Similar averages every year, Averages vary every year**)** **Results (**Nobody failed, Few failed, Many failed**)** Teacher **Self-Review (**Change teaching approach, No change needed**)**	Q12, Q13, Q14
University Acceptance	**Results** (100% acceptance, Few not accepted, Many not accepted) **Consistency (**Normal outcome, Unusual outcome**)** **Factors (**Students, School, Course, Teacher reflection**)**	Q15

Appendix K

Code Book

Theme 1: Teacher–Student Positive Relationship

Code 1: Relational Teaching

Code 2: Consistent Structure

Code 3: Classroom Management and Discipline

Code 4: Engagement

Theme 2: Graded Classwork

Code 1: Grades as Motivators

Code 2: Formative Assessments

Code 3: Engagement

Code 4: Open-Book Classwork

Theme 3: Bonus Questions

Code 1: Frequency

Code 2: Purpose

Code 3: Impact on Academic Results

Code 4: Engagement

Theme 4: Evidence of Student Success, Retention, and University Transition

Code 1: Academic Performance Monitoring

Code 2: University Acceptance Outcomes