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Giving Students a Voice in the Grading Process

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Giving Students a Voice in the Grading Process
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**Contract Grading:**
A grading process in which students and teachers co-design learning goals and an evaluation system to meet these goals.

**Advantages**
- More democratic than traditional grading because students are at the center of instruction.
- Instruction and grading is driven by students' interests and needs (Brubaker 2010).
- Grading is less subjective (Potts 2010).
- Increased flexibility and responsibility

**Disadvantages**
- A decrease in classroom structure can create confusion and frustration for students who thrive on organization (Spidell & Thelin, 2006).
- Sometimes students think it gives them too much control and responsibility (Spidell & Thelin, 2006).

**Sample Contract for a “B”**
I, _________________________, agree to abide by the following terms of this contract in order to secure a “B” for this semester in English Composition 112. I reserve the right to revise all three of my essay assignments in order to achieve the grades necessary to meet my contract. If I disagree with my professor’s assessment of my work, I will work with her to construct a system to bring in the judgments of other professionals. I understand that plagiarism or submitting someone else’s work as my own will void this contract, earn me an “F” for the course, and subject me to disciplinary measures. I will immediately consult my instructor should I fall below the standards set below and will accept the consequences if I do not act to renegotiate or sign a lower contract. Overachievement in one area will counteract similar underachievement in another. As an example, if my group writes a “B+” project but my critiques receive a “C” rather than a “B,” the contract will not be voided.

**Findings:**

1. **Student-teacher relationship**
   - Contract grading establishes a more student-centered classroom. This type of atmosphere enhances relationships between students and the instructor.
   - Creates a learning environment built on trust and respect. Students respect that the instructor trusts them enough to design their own class and grading system (Brubaker 2010).

2. **How does this affect grades?**
   - Does not positively or negatively affect student achievement (Potts 2010).
   - Although grades may not improve, more focus is placed on learning rather than grades (Sommers 2011).

**Implementing at the High School Level**
- Difficult to implement at the high school level because of No Child Left Behind.
- Could help prepare students for college. In undergraduate courses, this method fosters time management, organizational skills, managing change, and collaboration skills. These skills could also help students prepare for college if implemented in high school (Hiller & Hietapelto, 2001).