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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. I understand, though, that the degree of my overachievement must be matched by the degree of my underachievement. I cannot expect an "A" on the project to undo a "D" or lower on the critiques. Missing no more than 3 classes, except for excused absences, can also work to keep the contract from being voided if I underachieve in one area. Otherwise, I will do the following to earn a "B":

- I will respect and encourage other students
- I will be prepared for and actively participate during draft workshop days
- I will miss no more than one deadline for prewriting assignments, research activities, syntheses, drafts, and revisions
- I will receive no less than a "B" on two of my essay assignments and no worse than a "C" on the other, or a similar ratio, such as a "B+," a "B," and a "C-"
- I will fulfill my responsibilities for the group research project and ensure that my group receives a "C+"
- I will earn at least a "C" on the reflective essay
- Two of my critiques will earn "B's"
- I will earn at least a "B" on the syntheses
- I will do the reading and demonstrate my knowledge of it in a way that the class sees as reasonable (Spidell & Thelin, 2006, p. 60)

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).