Personal Grading Philosophy Nate Henson

10/20/2013

One of the many facets of education is grading. There is no set way to tackle this concept, and everybody sees aspects of it differently. Grading serves several purposes for students, teachers and administrators. There is much debate about what should and shouldn’t be graded, how grades help progress towards current standards, and many other decisions about grading. Through my undergraduate work at The College of Idaho as well as my student-teaching experience, I’ve shaped and reshaped my grading philosophy. I will learn more as I gain more experience in the classroom, but I do have a good working philosophy about grading.

What is grading? Grading can be a simple check at the top of a page, or a letter at the end of an essay, or the horrendous red markings on a student’s exam. Grading should be a representation of student knowledge. When a student earns a grade, because teachers don’t give grades, students earn them, it should be explanatory. Grading is a summation of what a student has learned.

The most important question about grading is why? Why should grades exist, and why do they need to be equated to a single letter in a report card? Grades serve several purposes. I believe first and foremost, they serve as one of the best communication methods between teacher and student. While there may not be enough time in each class hour to touch base with each individual student for as long as they need, grades can start to close that gap. It’s just as important to convey to the typical “A” student why they earned that grade as it is to convey what the “F” student can do to earn a better grade in the future. Grades should mean just as much to a passing student as they do to a failing student. Instead of just reaffirming that a student is a success or failure, grades should encourage every student to work their hardest and produce the best assignments they can.

Grades also create a tangible number that can be understood. This is good for parents because it’s a simple way to check the progress of their student. A grade can soothe a student’s urge to be satisfied with their work because they see it as receiving a teacher’s approval. Grades can show how many students understood concepts and whether or not the class is ready as a whole to move on to the next unit, or if they need more time to work with the current material.

A lot of the instant satisfaction and information about a class’ readiness to move on depends on organization. Grades should be prompt and timely. In order to produce grades in a timely manner, they need to be organized. The way that I like to do this is create a space in the grade book after the attendance for the day to write the assignment in. My grade book looks very much like this:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Assignments | Infomercial 20 |  | Notebook 80 |  | Exam 1 100 |
| Attendance | 9/2 | 09/03 | 09/04 | 09/05 | 09/06 |
| Student name |  | A | T |  |  |
| 20 |  | \_\_\_\_ |  | 86 |
|  |  |  |  |  |

This way, I can keep track of assignments and attendance, so I know which student missed work because they were absent. The number in the student’s second box indicates their score, the A symbolizes that they were absent, and the T shows they were tardy. The highlight means I don’t yet have that assignment in from them yet. I also believe in a running total of points for the class. This allows flexibility for students who are anxious test taker and may not perform as well as they can. While exams are worth more points, they aren’t weighted so doing poorly on exams alone can drop your grade dramatically.

In the example grade book above, you’ll notice that not every day has an assignment. I don’t believe in grading something every day from students. I will grade assignments such as exams, projects, notebooks and presentations. These assignments reflect student understanding of the material and their ability to apply what they’ve learned to their lives. Assignments such as review questions from the book may not be graded because they aren’t an exercise in application of knowledge. Students read the book and essentially replicate others’ thoughts. This is mindless work and shouldn’t be accounted for in their grade. While I believe that a student must be in the classroom to get as much as they can from the material, I do not believe in giving an attendance grade. Attendance is an expectation, not an assessment of student learning.

The goal of the education system is to provide the opportunity for students to become college and career ready. A big push is that students become literate in writing and mathematics. Grades in my class will show progression to achievement of these standards. A lot of what we do stems from class discussion and turns into a writing assignment. On these assignments a large part of what gets graded is a student’s ability to formulate complete sentences and paragraphs, proper grammar, use of appropriate vocabulary, and conveying ideas convincingly. On the math side of things, students will be graded on their use of math to make calculations in the food and nutrition unit. As well as being graded on content understanding, math skills will be emphasized.

As I’ve said before, I expect students to show up to class. Therefore, as a classroom expectation, students will not receive an attendance grade for my class. I feel like including attendance grades serve as a frivolous buffer, and do not provide students the chance to get college and career ready. In college, most professors don’t take an attendance grade, and really don’t care if you are there or not. They get paid either way and the student is still held accountable for the information. In the workforce, attendance is an expectation as well. If you choose to not show up, chances are that your job will be given to someone who values the job and will show up.

As far as homework goes, I provide ample class time for assignments as there are resources in the classroom that may not be available at a student’s home. Students shouldn’t have any homework from my class. However, if they choose to work on assignments outside of class, that’s fine too. I will grade all assignments equally, not based on if the student took the assignment home and worked on it there. Handling homework in this manner provides more time at home to study. In fact, if students work diligently in class, they have time in class to study and ask me clarification questions.

As I’ve previously discussed, grades serve many purposes. Ranking students is not one of them. I had a college professor who thoroughly enjoyed writing the class’ test results on the board in a breakdown of how many students earned an “A” and how many failed the test. This is not conducive to a positive educational experience for all. Grades are an individual record of how each student is progressing along in the class. The thought of how one’s grade compares to another shouldn’t be a concern. When posting grades, I like to post by student ID number, randomly, and not show the final grade, but only each individual grade. If a student does well on all assignments, their final grade will be high as well.

I do not believe extra credit should be available at the students’ fingertips. If they feel the need to improve their grade, they are more than welcome to make corrections to a previous exam before or after school, or re-do an assignment they did poorly on. However, if I see an opportunity for an out of class assignment that would benefit the material in class, I will offer extra credit. An example of this is the school that I student-taught for had a competition for the don’t text while driving campaign. Students had to submit a short, 30 second, video clip portraying their message. This involves avoiding health risk behaviors, using positive peer pressure, and provides a unique way to learn something new. This would enhance the lessons covered in class, therefore I feel like extra credit is deserved.

The last and probably most developmental part of my grading philosophy deals with students earning zeros on assignments, late work and missing work. I’ve worked with this concept a lot, have seen several different approaches, and have talked with teachers with multiple years of experience about students earning a zero. The conclusion my discussions and observations have led me to is that a zero for a grade is a real possibility. If a student refuses to turn work in, participate in class discussion, or misses every question on an exam, they have earned zero credit for that and there is proof that they’ve earned it. However, if the student is absent, or waits to turn an assignment in, then they don’t get a zero, they get an incomplete/missing in the grade book and the space where their grade would go gets highlighted so I know they don’t have it in. When a student earns a zero, it means they did not produce any quality work for that assignment. They completely misunderstood what they were supposed to do, or just missed the activity completely. This practice holds students accountable for the knowledge ion class. If they don’t understand the material, they don’t deserve to earn a passing grade. If they didn’t do the work their boss wanted them to do in the real world, they’d be fired. This practice is applicable to the real world and helps to prepare them for their future. If a student is held back because they didn’t show they understood the material by completing the assignments, then they should be held back until they complete the material to a satisfactory degree.

While this is my current philosophy, it is a fluid document. I’m sure I will learn more as I have more experience in my own classroom. I am open to the possibility of change if I see something new that’s effective and beneficial to my students.