

5-Minute Read #5 – Grading and Assessment

I have reading a lot of posts and found several of them to be interesting and different than what my school is doing. The first is that of Renae Donaghue, “teachers use numbers to rate broad skills [of core subjects]... [and] there is no rubric for the numbers 1-4.” I took Renae’s post as her administration leaves the grading up to the teachers and it has been scattered and inconsistent. At my school, we have three teams: K-2, 3-5, and 6-8 (Middle School). Each team agrees on the percents for a letter grade, the amount an assessment is worth versus class work (which is usually worth less than 10% of total grade), how to do a “Test Redo”, and that is especially consistent amongst same subject areas. This way parents don’t see a teacher as more rigorous or fair since we have the exact same curriculum and assessment system. We are a small school and word would travel fast if there were discrepancies. Even when I was in a large school, we were uniform with how we graded and which curriculum we used. The instruction used, on the other hand, was up to the teacher.

The second post that caught my eye was that of Eric Hill. His main theme was transitioning from penalizing students via grades for late homework, or participation. There were many posts to follow his original thought and there is a clear divide amongst how educators have perceived assessments. He talks about Ken O’Connor’s *A Repair Kit For Grading*. This book focuses on not punishing a student academically for things that don’t demonstrate knowledge of a subject. Don’t lower a grade for poor attendance. If that student with poor attendance gets a 97% on a test, then their grade should be at a 97%. I haven’t read O’Connor, but I have read Rick Wormeli’s stuff and been to one of his conferences. He yells at us like this, “You are being a dishonest teacher if you don’t grade based on assessments.” His point is more about the end result the student shows you rather than any part of the journey it took to get there. “Billy really drove me crazy! So, even though he aced his test, he’s only earned a B!” This is what Wormeli preaches to not fall into. I thought Eric’s post reinforced this. My school only gives up to 10% for non-assessment work.

I wasn’t too impressed with the other posts as they were saying trivial things like “we use standards based grading on a 1-2-3-4 scale.” I get that and my own elementary school uses that too. The thing I wrote in our posts was something my professor told me in a class I took at Hamline (Auggie here). He said, “Grading is a necessary evil, and I don’t like it.” I don’t like grades either, but then how do students know where they stand in the world. Grading is a way for us to communicate. Do the students know what I’m teaching or not? I take the time in all of my classes to express that notion. I tell the students, “This test that I am giving you is just a way to communicate. Show your work, take your time and trust what you know. I am really good at communicating to you how to figure out what else it is that you need.” This seems to give students comfort and form a growth-mindset.