



## Growing Classroom Culture through Parent Partnerships with Robyn Burlew

### Lecture 2: Grading and Academic Feedback

#### Outline:

##### Grading and Academic Feedback

- Our system of grading pulls us away from the liberal arts, common arts, and fine arts.
- We have to be always assessing our own assumptions with the issue of grading.
- Colleges and other institutions want an idea of what student we are sending to them with grades.
- Ask the right questions around your grading practices.
- Grades get put in a couple different paradigms.
  - Grades carry a message about how the student is doing.
  - Grades are seen as currency (trade them in and trade them up).

##### Purposes that teachers would have for grades:

- Grades are concise communication of the progress that our students are making in acquiring skills and content.
- Grades can be seen by teachers as a message for what needs to be improved.
  - The best way is a conversation or a written comment.
- Teachers can think about grades doing is that they define who is a “good student” in the class. This is a negative thing.
- We can use grades as an assessment of effort or engagement. This is in the “okay” category.
- Teachers can use grades for behavior modification. This is behavior modification versus shepherding.
- We can use grades as motivators or sources of competitions between students. This is a bad thing. We ought not to use grades as carrots or threats.

##### Ways that students look at grades:

- Students can see grades as a way that they can be instructed on how they can improve on their work. This is a positive thing.
  - Grades actually steal an opportunity for the teacher to instruct the student.



- Students can use grades as the way they take the temperature of how much work or effort is needed to be successful in a class.
- Students can use grades as a measure of their self-worth. This is a negative thing. The students shouldn't think they are a failure if they fail a test.
- Students can use grades for motivation and competition. Squelch student comparison of grades.
- Students can use grades for approval both at home and at school.
- Grades can be currency for freedoms (If you get enough As on your report card then you get something good).
- Students see grades for currency for college and university for acceptance and scholarships. This is what makes grading necessary.

### **Ways that parents look at grades:**

- Parents view grades as a concise report of acquisition of skills and content. This can be a good thing or a bad thing.
- Parents can see grades as motivation.
- Parents see grades in the college entrance and scholarship world.

### **Do grades matter?**

- We can't just declare that grades don't matter. For the time being, we are in the system of grading.
- Bring parents and students along in understanding grading and how to navigate the world of grades in ways that are healthy for our students.
- We can't use grades as a reward for compliance.

### **For Administrators**

- Pursue ways in which you can lead your school away from numerical and letter grades, particularly before high school.
- You can have standards that are high without having A-F grading system (or percentage grades).
- Begin by reducing the number of subjects in which students get numerical or letter grades.
- Share the story of the history of grading with parents. This is part of modern education's factory model.
- Electronic gradebooks can tempt students to not learn from narrative feedback. Suggestion: don't let electronic gradebooks be open all the time.

### **For Classroom Teachers**

- Classroom teachers need to implement the wisest grading practices possible.
- Communicate clearly to parents and students at the beginning of the year what your grades are saying. This is peacetime instruction.
- Communicate what your grades are not saying.
  - "Grades in this class are not for effort. I will communicate about effort in the following ways..."



- “Grades in this class are not for completion. I will communicate about that in the following ways...”
- You must follow through on the commitments in regard to communication. Be careful to not overcommit as a new teacher.
  - Conversations
  - Comments
  - Narrative reports
  - Parent teacher conferences
  - Phone calls
- You should not be fooled by an average.
- Within a numerical and letter grade system, separate the quantitative and qualitative feedback you give to students and parents, as much as possible.
  - Open the report card as a part of a whole conversation.

### **Navigating Particular Comments**

- “But he worked so hard on this, and I can’t believe he didn’t get an “A”.”
  - In the moment might not be the best time for this conversation.
  - What can I say when school starts to help parents think differently about grades?
  - Help students and parents to see the other good fruit that has come out of their work.
- “My child is a straight A student, and I can’t believe that he’s got a B in your class.”
  - As teachers we have the ability of making courses harder or easier, so the idea of a straight A student is false.
- “Is there something I can do to earn extra credit?”
  - Extra credit makes the grade the king.
  - The question is really, “How can I raise my grade?”
  - We need to be gracious about not getting too tied to gradebooks in terms of a numerical average.