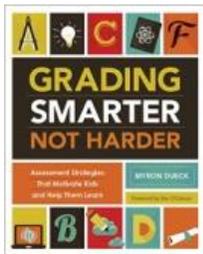


Resource Review: *Grading Smarter Not Harder*



Myron Dueck's book looks at practical assessment strategies that will motivate students and help them learn. As you read, you will quickly realize that Dueck is an experienced teacher who seeks to put into practice the research-based ideas of Ken O'Connor (cf. *A Repair Kit for Grading: 15 Fixes for Broken Grades*, also on our AERIES Teacher Resources page). We hope that this review/summary will provide you some grading and assessment ideas to try in your own classroom

Dueck, Myron. (2014). *Grading smarter not harder: Assessment strategies that motivate kids and help them learn*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Who is Myron Dueck?

Myron Dueck is an administrator and teacher in British Columbia, Canada, whose mentors include Ken O'Connor and staff of the Assessment Training Institute in Portland, Oregon. He is a much sought after conference speaker. *Grading Smarter Not Harder* distills his efforts to change his assessment and grading practices to incorporate what researchers have been telling educators about the need to rethink traditional grading. Ken O'Connor in the Forward, identifies four key lessons of the book: (1) Teachers should grade smarter, not harder; (2) We are often better coaches than teachers; (3) Learning is more important than grades; and (4) Relationships are crucial.

How is the book organized?

After a brief introduction, Dueck focuses on five chapter topics: grading, homework, unit plans, retesting, and creativity. Each chapter begins with real classroom situations that introduce the topic, usually cast as a troublesome difficulty about traditional grading or assessment practices. Although the topics are research based, Dueck's responses are classroom specific; he lists multiple strategies for changes that include detailed steps, anecdotes, and real world examples of how the strategies have worked in his classes. Finally, each chapter ends with Frequently Asked Questions. Most of the sample forms and figures in the book are also available on-line at: <http://www.ascd.org/ascd/pdf/books/dueck2014figures.pdf>

Grading

The first problem Dueck explores regarding traditional grading is including nonacademic variables into the grading of student learning outcomes. He focuses on student behaviors and late work marked with zeroes. Dueck spells out four criteria if punitive action is applied to grading:

CARE: The student must care about the consequence of the penalty.

AIMS: The results of the penalty must complement my overall aims as a teacher.

REDUCTION: The penalty must result in a reduction of the negative behavior.

EMPOWERMENT: The student must feel empowered regarding actions for which he/she is being penalized.

Each of these criteria are explored; however, the bottom line on behavior-based grading is that it amounts to "statistical sabotage." The primary case against this problem is the destructive power of a zero grade, which Dueck describes as "the ultimate numerical weapon" (19).

Dueck responds with strategies regarding uncompleted work, which include:

1. Use incompletes and interventions rather than zeroes. He discusses several steps: (1) setting due dates as time spans, (2) utilizing a late/incomplete assignment form, which allows the student to plan how the work will be completed and/or what support may be needed, (3) providing interventions, often times outside the class times; (4) assign incompletes which remain until the work is completed.
2. Institute a two-tiered testing system. Dueck suggests that two different tests be designed – one for the scheduled test day, and a “less user-friendly one for make-up.”
3. Match consequences to behaviors. Typically schools have developed guidelines for negative behaviors like truancy, defiance, tardiness, plagiarism, etc. Dueck describes several examples (plagiarism, late projects, parents lobbying for no late penalty, misuse of cell phones in class) all typical negative student behaviors with consequences that distort grading and assessment of actual student learning outcomes.

Homework

Dueck reminds readers that the grading of every piece of homework will force teachers to work harder not smarter. He questions whether homework is an effective measure of student learning outcomes, whether the student is the person who completed the work, and whether completion/compliance is any indicator of understanding. He levels several broadsides on grading homework, which promotes busy work at the expense of learning, grade inflation and cheating and/or deflation and disillusion, dependency of students who expect everything turned in should be graded; disadvantages faced by lower income students.

So how does Dueck suggest homework be made meaningful? One strategy is to use regular in-class quizzes which can be used to gauge students' learning in the controlled environment of the classroom; quizzes with pertinent but few questions will be less grading work for teachers, with the benefit of functioning as formative (read feedback opportunity) activities to guide teachers and allow students to monitor their own learning progress using quizzes aligned with homework that functions as a primary support opportunity. A second strategy is to create homework profiles. One of the intriguing questions focuses on comparing homework completion data with quiz results (cf. Figure 2.3: Homework Completion Rates Versus Test Results: The 9 Categories); Dueck concludes that homework completion is behavioral, not academic, personalized learning enables students to gauge how much homework is necessary to learn a topic. A third strategy is to provide in-school support: lunch time homework rooms, after school tutoring support, cross-age mentoring, etc. A fourth strategy is to “flip” the classroom – have students utilize the rich world of online resources as a support for learning.

Unit Plans

Dueck tackles the important issue of creating unit plans and communicating those plans at the beginning of a learning sequence – students need to know the road ahead. To that end he suggests several effective strategies. First, provide student-friendly unit plans that clarify KNOWLEDGE targets (What do I need to know?), REASONING targets (What can I do with what I know?), SKILL targets (What can I demonstrate?),

and PRODUCT targets (What can I make to show my learnings?). Unit plans should clearly spell out learning objectives that are aligned with assessments and learning objectives should be cast as “I can...” statements. Second, unit plans should be utilized throughout the learning process. Early dissemination of unit plans can uncover background knowledge; continuing use of the unit plans give students knowledge of and access to the learning process; and the plans can assist students in self-assessment of their competency along the way. Third, use of student examples in unit plans provides students with the opportunity to “reverse engineer” a sample project; including grading rubrics is crucial.

Retesting

Dueck quotes Rick Stiggins three critical questions that students should be able to answer:

1. Where am I going?
2. Where am I now?
3. How can I close the gap?

How can a student master what hasn't been learned, especially after the test? Dueck takes head on the notion that real world assessments do not allow retests (to which we should ask, how many times did I take the driver's license test?). Traditional testing (once and done) discourages or makes ultimate demonstration of mastery difficult or impossible; sometimes learning occurs during administration of traditional tests. Dueck lists a host of problems with retesting, and then provides several strategies to address those concerns. Especially in standards-based grading systems, tests should be organized or scored by standard strand; if so, then tracking of specific levels of learning is desirable and retesting is essential in providing evidence of student success on learning goals. A first retesting strategy is to create two versions of each standard strand section, one for retest use; creation of a tracking sheet for students to use assists struggling students and helps them track areas where retesting is necessary, while showing them which areas they have successfully learned. Through tracking, students engage in focused readjustment of learning; Dueck identifies several benefits of the retesting opportunity. A second strategy Dueck calls a “Double Dip” system for quizzes; specific quiz questions/sections mirror and match the corresponding sections of the summative unit test, potentially allowing the unit test results to become the retest results for prior quizzes that were eligible for retesting. When students understand the system, it creates an incentive for students to prepare for sections they know they need to improve as they study for the unit test.

Creativity

Dueck concludes his book by focusing on creativity, engagement, and student motivation. As he has done in other sections, he begins with inherent potential problems with creativity – it is unpredictable, a distraction from learning outcomes, a positive or negative factor in grading, or difficult to assess. He lists several strategies to help grade creative projects. First, provide a major project planning sheet that lists learning targets and outcomes, as well as a place students can list how they will show what they have learned. Second, recognize and accept creativity without using grades. Third, build a measurable creativity rubric that describes levels of creativity on each learning outcome. (cf. Figure 5.2: Analytic Rubric for Creativity). Fourth, solicit student feedback on tests to see if other formats could be used to ensure that all students can demonstrate mastery of the learning outcomes. Fifth, create an “I know I am close” multiple choice response format where students can select up to two possibly correct answers with room for them to

provide rationale for their selections; limit the number of questions that have such “second choices.” Dueck also discusses the importance of format options for special needs and language learner students.

Dueck also highlights the importance of embracing technology to encourage creativity. He suggests using Twitter for class discussions, even tests. Use of digital photos and videos can enhance classroom discussions. Use online applications that allow teachers and students to analyze digital media, and use online document management systems such as Google Docs.

Concluding Remarks

Dueck concludes with a brief discussion of the importance of relationships within the school community, noting three especially important actions to strengthen relationships:

1. Eliminating grading rules that penalize students for behavioral infractions and predicaments outside their control.
2. Designing assessments that improve student confidence by promoting improved understanding of learning outcomes.
3. Increasing student ownership and voice in the area of assessment.

He concludes with several thoughts on embracing change:

By blending sound grading and assessment for learning practices, we can better identify and measure learning outcomes.

A 21st-century approach to education must be less about rigor and more about deeper learning, less about enticing students with the currency of grades and much more about building engaged and vibrant learning communities. It is about preparing students for their real futures rather than the artificial ones that we have long claimed to understand, about designing effective consequences and behavioral interventions rather than simply leaning on penalties that students end up ignoring. As educators, our most enduring legacy is in the relationships that we form with the students in our care – and in this area, our approach to assessment can make all the difference.

Grade Smarter Not Harder with AERIES Gradebook

- In a standards-based grading system, enter unit test sections by standard.
- Utilize teacher-made grading scale for homework that includes a mark for Incomplete.
- Use the TK (Temporarily Excused) mark for late work to avoid issuing zeroes.
- Turn on the gradebook option to separate formative from summative activities.
- Create a RUBRIC gradebook and use the Standards Dashboards to track student progress.

IF YOU WANT TO SEE MORE RESOURCE REVIEWS ON OTHER BOOKS, PLEASE eMail Ron Anderson:
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