

## Your Gradebook Should Not Be a Punishment Tool

Educator Barnes – 5/5/18

If you want to start an argument among educators, discuss gradebooks and grading practices. There are various opinions floating around about grades and various grading rules teachers must follow based on mandates from the principal or school district.

I have worked at different schools during the course of my career and below are some of the mandates I have had to follow:

- No student can be given a grade lower than a 50% F even if the student does not turn in the assignment.
- Students must be allowed to redo all assignments and retake any assessments; you must give the higher grade and not an average of the multiple submissions of the assignment or assessment.
- The weight of each category in the gradebook such as: test, quizzes, homework, classwork, etc. was predetermined.

At the end of the day, I didn't want to be reprimanded for not following guidelines. I followed them even if I didn't agree with them all. What I don't understand is when educators use the gradebook as a discipline tool. The gradebook is a tool to document mastery, not a tool to punish a student.

I currently work in a school with few grading mandates, in comparison to other schools where I have previously worked. Even though this isn't mandated at my current school, I allow my students to redo work because I want them to master the skill. I don't believe if a student fails, we should just shrug our shoulders and move on to the next skill. We should reteach and give them an opportunity to show mastery. I know a student who was frustrated and had a meltdown during an assessment. The teacher knew the student could do the work, but instead of wanting to give the student another opportunity to do the work, the teacher thought it was more important for the student to learn a life lesson about doing the work within the time allotted. The student was punished and the gradebook did not accurately reflect what the student could do.

Another highly debated aspect of the gradebook is a participation. In addition to teaching in a high school, I am also a part-time adjunct professor. In full disclosure, I give a self-reflection/participation assignment to my college students at the end of the course where I ask them to reflect upon the class and their participation both online and when we have face to face sessions. It is the content of their discussion in class and online that really counts, not their behavior. Unfortunately, some participation grades in the K-12 setting have been used to address the behavior in class. "Shawnta, he's not about to keep acting a fool in my class; I need this participation grade to keep him in line," a teacher once told me. Why should a child's grade be lowered when he or she is

showing mastery because he or she can't behave in the class? Isn't that what the comment section on the report card is for to address the reason for the grade, be it high or low, and to address behavior? Honestly, some of the most painful thorns in my side are the brightest students I know.

As a parent, I want to look at my children's report card and know that this grade is truly reflective of what they have learned, not reflective of how they behaved. Behavior does need to be addressed, but the gradebook should not be used to help manage student behavior.

Have you witnessed teacher gradebook's become tools for punishment?