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### Feedback Feeds Brainiacs

The time has come to get rid of rubrics that force quantitative evaluation. Rubrics used to be a revolutionary method for grading as it allowed students to peer into a teacher's grading method with the advent of extended projects. Nevertheless, the world is evolving rapidly, and traditional methods no longer suffice to uphold modern society and the continuous advent of innovation. This drastic change can also be applied to rubrics as traditional rubrics are used to grade every student's project objectively. However, projects are supposed to promote creativity, and following strict criteria confines students to their teacher's expectations, so it is as if the teacher is expecting a certain product that matches their own bias. Therefore, as project-based learning has introduced very different materials for teachers to assess, the traditional grading method does not suffice. This is because teachers are expected to encourage imagination and self-learning through a project for a student to comprehend the subject better. Hence, teachers need a method that does not constrain the student to a specific direction for their project. For that reason, the most effective way to grade projects created by students is to evaluate the student's process in generating the final product with a feedback-based approach.

Process-based grading allows the recognition of mistakes and thereby encourages improvements that would not be present in a product-based grading method for projects. The process is where students and teachers can find the areas to improve upon before creating the final product. It is no surprise that there is such an emphasis to be placed on the steps it takes to

reach the end goal. Indeed, promotion of a feedback-based system rather than the traditional giving a percentage accompanied by a letter grade method is needed for teaching project-based learning. Similarly, John Larmer, a chief editor at Buck Institute for education, suggests to “Emphasize formative assessment and use it often - without grades, just feedback on how to improve” (Larmer). Feedback is essential to the learning process while producing a project because there are many pathways for students to take while completing the assignment, so it is expected that students will sometimes take the wrong path. Hence, assessments during the process will help to identify these weaknesses, so the teacher can help the student improve via constructive feedback. Michael Hernandez, a journalism and arts teacher, agrees with this notion: “Feedback and corrections should happen frequently to keep students on track, improve their work, and set them up for success in the final product. Waiting too long to give feedback may result in work that is too far gone to be fixed or improved” (Hernandez). Hernandez highlights the importance of providing critiques while students are still working on their project. He argues that the criticisms should be delivered early to students, so they can process the inputs and implement them in their project. Indeed, the evaluations given at the end of the project will not be meaningful as the student does not have the opportunity to implement them into their product. Thus, the student might be tempted to simply ignore the valuable feedback, so grading the process of the student’s project is the best option.

There arises a contention as one may argue that feedback is directing students into a specific direction for their project which limits their creativity. Dr Crowthers, a high school teacher, worries that “One of the disadvantages of a rubric is it constrains students to only look at what I’m looking for and not go beyond and be creative” (Crowthers). This is a legitimate concern as the point of a project is for students to be creative, and a rubric may prevent that. However, this is only applicable to rubrics that name specific criteria for students to meet.

Therefore, a limited, less quantitative, and more feedback-based rubric would help to encourage creativity among students. In addition, there may be some unavoidable bias, but the benefits outweigh the detriments, and the restrictions could also be minimized. In favor of this argument, Amy Pinkerton, a senior instructional designer, posits: “Students need feedback to identify what they are doing well and what they need to do to improve their academic performance and achieve their learning goals” (Pinkerton). Feedback is meant to help students to perceive their project from different viewpoints to generate an effective solution to a criticism. Consequently, comments actually help students to innovate on their project because they know that there is a problem that requires a solution. Thus, students learn to grow from their weaknesses, and they show that growth by producing a better project.

Another argument against feedback-based grading is that feedback itself is inherently flawed. Alfie Kohn, an educational expert, maintains that feedback is detrimental to a student: “Praising people when they succeed can be just as counterproductive as criticizing them when they fail. Nor does it help just to tweak the phrasing or to praise one thing rather than another (for example, effort rather than ability) because the problem rests with the experience of being judged” (Kohn). His position is feedback which evaluates a student in any way will have a detrimental effect on the student rather than helping them. He argues that evaluating a student would make them feel controlled and devalue their work or make them lose interest in their project because they have to meet someone else’s standards. However, this problem could easily be fixed by offering feedback that is not biased towards a teacher’s opinion or their peers. Hernandez agrees that: “The goal of evaluations should be to emphasize growth and encourage improvement” (Hernandez). Giving good feedback can complete this goal easily, and the benefits far outweigh the risk of detriments. Feedback needs to be specific for the project, so that it can enhance the student’s work, and not force a different direction if their work seems to be

unsatisfactory. Hence, to maintain a student's commitment in their work, the feedback must be tailored specifically to their project and inspire the student to pursue their own path. This can be achieved if the teacher thoroughly reviews each student's project, which will be time-consuming, but these comments would be pivotal for the student's improvement as they now have a meticulous critique of their project, so they know what to work on.

A project is composed of many steps and for each of these phases, teachers can provide a creative evaluation method to make the project more interesting, so students would show more effort in their project. Dr. Brookhart, a college professor, supports this point directly: "large projects would be best done with formative assessment opportunities built in to various phases of the work. For example, in the *Childless Millionaire* project, students could be asked to do statements of intent describing which questions they were going to choose, and why" (Brookhart 138). In this quotation, Dr. Brookhart mentions an interesting method for students to initiate their project which allows them to critically evaluate different topics and familiarize themselves with the work. Furthermore, the teacher also assesses these statements to help students choose an issue that they will enjoy working on. Moreover, with so many steps to a project, teachers can comment on students' journey towards their final product to allow for more engagement from students because their teachers are also examining their work. However, the teacher must be wary to not devalue the student's work with their personal biases, and gives feedback based on the work itself. Michael Hernandez offers a few ways to give effective feedback: "Public critiques (such as comments on blog posts) and class discussion help provide wider perspective and may even carry more meaning for the student than teacher feedback. ... Private evaluations, like self-reflections and teacher feedback, can address confidential information about teammates that allows students to be honest about their peers and themselves" (Hernandez). He proposed that peer-reviewing the article allows for more honesty from the student. Furthermore, the

student can discuss with their classmates often which allows them to receive more feedback when there is not an evaluation where students can obtain comments from teachers. Moreover, periods of self-reflection let students ruminate on the remark and extract its values. This enables students to appreciate valuable advice given to them by peers and teachers which can only be achieved through feedback-based evaluations of the process.

When using a rubric, or any methods for evaluation, teachers should always aim to assess the student's work during their process and not just the final product. Furthermore, the feedback should be specific to the student's project to provide excitement for the student as they work to complete their own ideas with the teacher's help. This method of grading lets students pursue an end goal that they enjoy, and not be confined to the teacher's expectations. Thus, advising teachers to take into consideration the student's internal motivation for the student's own project would make the teacher realize that to promote creativity, they need to support their students' work, so that the product is created from students' own thinking. This is to assert that creativity forms through process, and self-evaluation with feedback is the fuel to set inspiration ablaze.

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