REFLECTIVE PRACTICE: EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR COMBATTING CHALLENGES WITH GRADING POLICIES

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ABSTRACT

This reflective practice aims to identify and evaluate possible strategies to overcome certain limitations of the world language departmental grading policies in the high school where I teach. As a French teacher at a large public suburban high school in the northeastern United States, I sought to examine the problem of not knowing which strategies were most effective in overcoming my challenges with specific grading policies. John Dewey's theories of reflection and experience provided the theoretical lens with which I explored the problem. I identified strategies associated with four categories of challenges and engaged in reflective evaluation and decision-making based on my experiences and the expertise of other scholars. The reflective process was stimulating, complex, and contemplative. Engaging in reflective practice was critical to evaluating the merits of my practices and identifying effective strategies to overcome certain limitations. I hope other educators, administrators, and policymakers can benefit from this reflection when considering best practices for grading students.

Keywords: *class participation, teaching French, grading, grading policies, reflective practice, rubrics, strategies, test retakes*

PURPOSE

This reflective article aims to identify and carefully assess possible strategies to overcome the limitations of certain high school world language departmental grading policies. I felt the need for change, and I believe reflecting on effectively and accurately grading students is essential for change. Reflection can lead to a better understanding of the efficacy of the grading system with which I am asked to comply. Having defended my doctoral dissertation examining experiences of public school teachers in grades 5-8 with traditional grading practices, I wanted to continue and expand the research I started through reflection on some of the challenges I faced with grading my students. This reflective practice will identify and evaluate strategies that have helped me overcome the policy limitations I face. Other educators may benefit from my experiences and recommendations.

John Dewey's theories of reflection and experience provide the theoretical lens through which I examined the problem of how I grade my students. Dewey believed exploration, questioning, and learning start with problems (Holdo, 2022). Knowledge will result through engagement with the problem and remain integral to an individual's reflection and experience (Holdo, 2022). My reflection incorporates over two decades of experience grading French and Spanish students of all ages. I faced the dilemma of how to modify my grading practices to meet my students' needs better. Within my public high school French classroom context, I have reflected on and actively engaged with the problems I identified (Greenberger, 2020). Greenberger (2020) wrote that the transformation of self

and context can result from reflection. Such experimental transformation can benefit my students, other educators, administrators, and policymakers.

PROBLEM

Dewey believed learning stems from problems, and through engagement with the problems, one gains knowledge that adds to and enhances one's experiences and reflection (Holdo, 2022). The problem was not knowing which strategies were most effective to overcome the challenges associated with how I graded my public high school French students. Potentially problematic was that my students' grades combined behavioral and academic elements. Class participation and homework represented the graded behavioral components. Although I believe class participation and homework are important to student development and learning, I struggled with how to factor them accurately and fairly into a student's grade. Assessments and other performance tasks executed in the confines of the classroom represented the academic components of their grades. Homework and class participation are essential for practicing, reinforcing skills, and achieving subject mastery. Both are critical indicators of success, but they are primarily behavioral and frequently out of a teacher's control. Therefore, by including behaviors in the grade calculation, I felt that I might be distorting the grade's meaning and not accurately representing my students' actual academic success.

I teach at a public high school in a large suburban New England town, where I encounter challenges with grading policies. Although I cannot change the system, I can implement strategies to overcome the restrictions to report student academic growth more fairly and accurately. The grading system is relatively rigid, and I seek to discover how to handle the behavior elements as effectively and equitably as possible. This is one goal that I consistently strive to meet within the confines of departmental grading policies. To help me reach my goal, I need to discover which strategies are effective for overcoming the limitations I experience. I have experimented with many initiatives over the years; some have worked, and others have not. This reflective practice will explore these strategies in detail and evaluate their effectiveness.

WORKING IDEAS/STRATEGIES

The strategies that I have identified to overcome the challenges I face can be organized into four categories: (a) strategies to contend with the no-late assignment policy, (b) strategies to contend with requirements for grading class participation, (c) strategies to contend with the retake test policy, and (d) strategies to contend with the requirement for rubrics. The following strategies are organized under the four dimensions of the overarching departmental grading requirements and discussed in the order listed above.

Department policy states there will be no credit for late assignments or homework, representing 20% of a student's grade. Classwork and homework are usually intended for practice and added reinforcement of skills and concepts essential for mastery and advancing with the subject matter. I understand there are various reasons students cannot complete assignments and homework. Factors out of my control, such as a student's home life, support systems, after-school obligations, illness, mental state, and motivation, can all potentially interfere with homework completion. As a result, over the past few years, I have assigned less homework than I used to. Most often, I ask students to complete assignments at home that were not finished in class. I have considered that perhaps I should stop this and eliminate the dependency on students completing work at home. Another strategy I use is conferencing with the students who do not complete their work to understand why they were unable or unwilling to complete it. I frequently break policy and allow extra time for my students to complete missed assignments without significant penalties. I prefer to have them do the work, hand it in when it is complete, and earn more than a zero. Typically, I take 10 points off if the late assignment is turned in by the next class, which is what most students tend to do.

I use two strategies to deal with the challenges associated with class participation. Participation is 20% of a student's grade. Grading class participation has always been problematic. I need my students to speak French and participate as much as possible while I have them in the classroom, for this is the only time the majority will utter a word in French. Speaking is the most challenging skill to master when learning another language, and they need to practice; however, I cannot force it, no matter how hard I try. Some students are painfully shy, some are anxious, and others suffer from adoles-

cent self-consciousness, making speaking French in front of their peers a dreadful occurrence. I need to prepare for success. Therefore, one strategy I use is to inform my students which class activities will be graded for that day and will count as a class participation grade. I also work thoughtfully to create conditions where all students feel comfortable speaking and participating by varying the exercises and groupings, differentiating the assignments, and offering choices.

Another tricky departmental policy declares that retakes on quizzes or tests are not allowed, which factor 60% of a student's total grade. I use three strategies to help overcome the challenges associated with the retake test policy. Although I adhere to the no retake policy, I provide post-assessment assistance and opportunities for my students to improve their thinking, learning, and grades. The reality is that some of my students do not test well, some struggle in all academic subjects, and some need more time to master the concepts and skills on specific quizzes or tests. My students know I take assessments seriously and expect them to do everything they can to prepare. My many years of experience make it easy to see when a student has not made an effort to study. I work with students after a test has been taken and scored to help them improve their comprehension of skills and allow them the opportunity to raise their test grades. I review assessments with students and try to get them to articulate why they think they performed poorly. I encourage them to make corrections on a separate piece of paper, staple them to the original assessment, and hand both to me by a specific deadline we set together. My students earn extra points to raise their initial assessment grade for correcting mistakes.

I use two strategies to contend with the requirement for rubrics. Honestly, I do not like rubrics; I never have. I am not too fond of the idea of boxing anyone into a block on a grid. They are either too wordy or too simplistic; it is my experience that rubrics confuse more than they guide. Furthermore, accurately converting them to a traditional A-F or percentage grade is an imprecise exercise. Additional calibration issues complicate matters, rendering rubrics another inaccurate measure involving considerable subjectivity. I have spent countless hours over two decades combing the internet looking for viable rubrics and usually rewriting them to fit my needs. Still, I remain dissatisfied and struggle with the rubric-to-traditional-grade conversion. One strategy I use to deal with rubrics is to use them infrequently. The second strategy is to provide my students with detailed, individualized written and oral feedback instead of rubrics.

REFLECTIVE NARRATIVE

My career in education began 23 years ago after working for approximately 10 years in the international business and culinary fields. Since 2008, I have taught French and Spanish to elementary, middle, and high school students in private and public schools in the northeastern United States. I teach French at a public high school in a large suburban New England town. I am the only French teacher at the high school and therefore responsible for planning and teaching all standard and honors levels French I-V classes. In addition to teaching French and Spanish, I have created and developed world language curricula, worked as department chair, and served on leadership teams focused on grade reform, teacher evaluation, response to intervention, restorative practices, community resources, and technology integration. The challenges associated with fairly and accurately assessing and grading my students within the confines of the system and policies become a highly time-consuming primary professional focus every year.

Grading has become a passionate subject of interest. This passion grew from my frustration and a place of empathy for my students many years ago. Approximately 12 years ago, I remember when one of my students came to me with her failing test in hand, looked at me, and broke down in tears. She struggled academically in all her classes, and learning another language was difficult. Her tears and frustration hit me hard. I felt terrible and instantly knew something had to change. I remember my eyes welling up with tears as I tried to console her and assure her we would work together to ensure she would not fail the course. She asked me if something was wrong with my watery eyes. I somehow held it together, made up a little white lie, and told her I was suffering from allergies that made my eyes water. We devised a personalized extra help plan to help her get through the year and pass the course.

Fast forward to 2022, at the high school where

I teach now, I witnessed the same emotional toll grades have on students. I went into the girls' bathroom around the corner from my classroom and saw a student crying hysterically at one of the sinks. My heart ached for her; I asked her if she was okay and if I could help. She told me she had just gotten a test back with a bad grade. She said she had studied so much and did not know what had happened. I told her I was sorry to see her so upset and suggested she talk to her teacher about it. I shook my head as I walked back to my classroom and declared to myself, "There has got to be a better way."

When I started teaching, I had no idea how to grade and calculate percentages. I had never had formal instruction on grading students in my teacher training or professional development sessions. I remember asking other teachers how to put points on tests and calculate percentages to letter grades. Despite some help from colleagues, I primarily relied on my personal experiences as a student to create a grading system that made sense for my students and me. I found that each school I worked at had different policies; however, they all relied upon the traditional 0-100 percentage and A-F letter systems. Different online grade books calculated the grade averages based on how assignments and assessments were weighted. The final grade calculations and weights were usually chosen by someone other than the teachers or were chosen to align with other departments. Very little thought, if any, went into considering or discussing the purpose and meaning of student grades. Reporting methods also varied. To accompany the student grade, some schools required detailed narratives written for each student on the report cards, and others used canned comments with no in-depth commentary to explain student progress.

Last year, I taught six sections of French, one extra class beyond the five the other full-time teachers at the high school teach. Class size varies from year to year. I have had classes as small as five students and as large as 26. Several of my classes combine standard with honors students or are composed of mixed levels. For example, last year, I had French III standard and French III honors in the same class and a combined French IV honors and French V honors class. As with all classrooms, I face diverse learners in grades 9-12 with unique cultural backgrounds and different motivating reasons to enroll in French classes. Some of my students take French to earn graduation credit, some because they like me, and others are on a path to fluency for personal or career aspirations.

My French IV honors and V honors students were motivated, hardworking, and driven to excel. They were A students in all content areas, and many focused solely on getting good grades and not on their learning. The obsession with getting 100% and an A+ was problematic for me last year. For example, introducing a new project or assignment, which is exciting for me, quickly turned stressful and overly grade-focused. I always type assignments and projects with detailed instructions and examples, then post them to Google Classroom. I also connect my laptop to the classroom's big screen and project Google Classroom with the assignment instructions for the class to see. I review everything with them, check for understanding, and answer any questions; I do this in all my classes.

Last year, without fault, every time I started introducing a new project to the French IV and V honors students, several hands would shoot into the air before I had started any explanation. Before listening to anything, they wanted to know how much the assignment would count toward their grade, how much weight it was worth if there was a rubric, and if they could earn extra points. At first, this line of questioning irked me, for had they allowed me to go through the presentation as planned, they would have seen that I had addressed their concerns in the assignment overview, and I would have answered all other questions. I tried to remain calm despite feeling irritated each time, and I responded to their questions. I then would lecture them on the merits of shifting their focus to learning, progress, and growth and away from the grade. Unfailingly, every time they looked at me like I was crazy. This had to stop. I had an idea and decided to do ungraded activities and engage them in informal follow-up discussions about their learning and progress. This was the best thing I could have done for this group. I noticed students were more relaxed, less stressed, and more natural during ungraded tasks. In addition, our discussions about their learning and progress were positive and enlightening. This transformational change came from reflecting on why I became so exasperated

with students interrupting new assignment presentations with overly grade-focused questions.

EVALUATION OF IDEAS

The strategies I evaluate in this section to overcome challenges to grading include strategies to contend with (a) the no late assignment policy, (b) the requirements for class participation, (c) the retake test policy, and (d) the requirement for rubrics. The world language department policy at the high school where I work states there is no credit given for late work, which results in students earning a zero for every late assignment. I understand that teachers, including myself, take deadlines seriously and hope that by adhering strictly to deadlines, students will develop a sense of responsibility and a conscientious work ethic. Although most educators work to prepare their students academically and developmentally, penalizing students for not completing assignments on time seems counterproductive and unfair. The practice of calculating noncognitive factors in a student's grade, such as homework completion and participation, not only distorts the meaning of the grade but also encourages implicit and institutional biases (Feldman, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c; Guskey & Link, 2019). Teachers subjectively measure student behavior, inviting discrimination into grading practices, favoring the more privileged, and penalizing the less fortunate (Feldman, 2019a). Using points is a technique many teachers use to motivate students, yet I would argue that taking away points has the opposite effect. I have seen students give up and lose all motivation when faced with a failing grade or a zero for a late assignment. This practice is not motivating; it is demoralizing.

Shepard et al. (2018) wrote about teachers' belief in the motivational power of points and reported that teachers used them to manage student behavior. Conversely, researchers cautioned that using points does not motivate students; instead, the points reward system becomes a means to control student behavior (Shepard et al., 2018). Guskey (2015) referred to the standard grade reduction practice as the punctuality grade (p. 104) and proposed alternate strategies similar to those I have implemented. Guskey (2015) advised against punishing students with low grades and encouraged establishing required steps to help students complete the assignment meaningfully and purposefully. Wyre (2019) argued that accepting late work in most content areas increases student learning, improves teacher-student relationships, and supports the struggling students' need for extra time. This practice aligns with my strategy of conferencing with students, giving them additional time to finish the work, accepting late work, and avoiding assigning zeros. Guskey (2015) suggested marking the grade as incomplete and requiring study sessions to complete the work so that students learn that deadlines must be respected and that neglecting to complete work on time has consequences. These additional ideas also work well with my strategies and can further strengthen my efforts to improve student work completion rates. Fewer zeros—and the collaborative teacher-student approach—positively impact learning and cultivate student responsibility.

Martin Hard and RaoShah (2021) discussed the many benefits of class participation, including improved motivation, improvement of critical thinking skills, increased comprehension of material, and higher grades. Because of participation's many positive developmental benefits, teachers reward it by including participation grades in their classes (Martin Hard & RaoShah, 2021). I understand this, and perhaps this is why I struggle so much with the importance and fairness of the class participation grade. Scholarly researchers recognize how educators determine class participation grades are inconsistent and potentially biased, resulting in imprecise, ill-defined, and inaccurate measures (Gillis, 2018; Martin Hard & RaoShah, 2021).

Lang (2021) wrote with great insight and integrity about his former practices with grading class participation. Like me, Lang (2021) had no established system for tracking who spoke, when, and how often. I have experimented with different participation rubrics, which evaluate students' active engagement on a 0-4 scale. I have also printed class rosters and attempted to add check marks next to student names each time they participate. Finally, I resorted to taking individualized notes, which resembled quick scribbles that tracked what students said, how they participated, and how often. I feel the notes are helpful when providing feedback and justifying the grade I assign. It is far from perfect and does not solve the problem of introverted learners or the amount of subjectivity involved in judging how class participation should look.

Kunnath (2017) discusses how teachers use personalized and subjective elements in the decision-making process of grading students, producing imprecise and inflated grades. Class participation represents 20% of a student's grade in all my French classes. If a student participates very little or not at all, a zero or low grade can be detrimental to their average in the course. Klein and Riordan (2015) discuss how quiet learners are repeatedly penalized by the practice of grading class participation. This has always been a concern of mine, as is how to assess class participation fairly. It is different for every learner due to their varied backgrounds, cultures, mental states, and dispositions.

Class participation grades typically motivate extroverted and more confident learners and inhibit the listeners and quieter learners (Klein & Riordan, 2015). Is it fair to punish students for their inhibitions and anxieties by grading class participation (Lang, 2021)? I have struggled with this question for many years. A welcoming, collaborative classroom is one in which all students will feel safe participating in a manner that makes them comfortable. Lang (2021) recognized this and stated that transforming participation into an ungraded class expectation is one of the most inclusive practices teachers can exercise. Guskey (2020) emphasizes the need for a more descriptive approach to reporting student achievement and proposes a dashboard design that allows teachers to communicate non-cognitive elements, such as participation, alongside an academic progress grade. Providing feedback regarding a student's participation in class emphasizes its importance. By removing the participation grade from grade calculations, teachers' subjectivity and student behavioral components no longer cloud the grade's meaning.

Recognizing the different types of participation and encouraging students to meet the expectation of involvement is vital to their participatory success. Martin Hard and RaoShah (2021) emphasized the various types of participation. Partner activities, group work, and class discussions can take on many forms and allow students to participate as listeners, speakers, writers, researchers, collaborators, and presenters. The problem with my introverted students is that they will not willingly participate unless enticed. I have seen improved participation with my quieter and disengaged students when I tell them a particular assignment is ungraded. I have also told students that for specific activities if it is evident that they are doing their very best and making an effort to participate actively, they will earn an A for that particular participation activity. This practice motivates the introverted learner in my classroom. The importance is to strike a balance to fairly reward students for their participation, not punish them. Klein and Riordan (2015) supported a standards-based approach to grading student learning separately from participation to clarify the meaning of a grade for students, teachers, and parents. Townsley (2019) concurred and reported that excluding components, such as homework, participation, and effort from a student's grade, provided a clearer and more precise understanding of the grade's meaning. Reporting behaviors separately from academic elements, which is the case with the standards-based grading method, is more equitable (Guskey & Link, 2019). A student's grade should reflect academic calculations to ensure equitable grading practices.

This reflective paper has enlightened me on two themes: fairness and student learning. Although some students do benefit from test retakes—and I have offered them—retaking assessments is a practice that yields few positive results. Typically, students who need to retake an assessment do just as poorly as they did the first time or sometimes worse, yielding no evidence of effort, growth, or learning. I have also witnessed many students decline the offer to retake a test. Department policy says no retakes; therefore, my solution is to provide extra help, review the test with the student, ask them to do corrections, and ask them to reflect on why they think they did poorly on the original assessment. Students earn extra points, which increases their original score, and more importantly, they learn from their mistakes. I have found that test corrections are more beneficial than retakes for most students.

Kemp (2021) recognized that having students correct assessments invites involvement in the feedback process and encourages active learning, which may benefit lower-achieving and disadvantaged students. Favero and Hendricks (2016) reported that students who completed a comprehensive assessment debrief outside of the classroom demonstrated significantly improved exam achievement than those who did not debrief. When students focus on exam errors and acknowledge

inadequacies in test preparation, they learn to self-regulate, prepare better, and prevent repeating past mistakes (Favero & Hendricks, 2016). Rice (2020) referred to Dewey, who believed one learns as much from one's failures as from one's successes. Many researchers have demonstrated that post-assessment assignments—which ask students to review their work and learn from their mistakes—favorably impact student learning (Rice, 2020). Student feedback indicated that test corrections improved student learning and created a less stressful classroom environment (Rice, 2020). I would agree that this has been my experience. Recently, one of my students confused verb tenses on a writing assessment. She came to me with her quiz in hand, we talked about what happened, and we reviewed the verb tenses and constructions. She asked if she could do corrections to raise her grade. The next day, she handed in her revisions and told me she understood her mistakes and the material much better after doing her corrections. Although her main concern was raising her grade, her learning and understanding improved due to this post-assessment assignment.

Alfie Kohn (2006) wrote how rubrics were mainly a tool to further standardize student assignments and assessments, a sentiment I have shared for a long time. Rubrics are detrimental to student creativity and the willingness to take risks, ultimately undermining students' confidence in their academic abilities (Kohn, 2006). Students have become so rubric-focused and dependent upon the rubric to tell them what to do to earn so many points that they struggle to function independently and rubric-free (Kohn, 2006). I do not use many rubrics, and students sometimes ask me if there is a rubric for assignments. Sometimes there is one, and sometimes there is not. Instead, I instruct them to follow the directions and provided examples and not to worry about their score or grade. I must admit that some students look and behave somewhat distressed without a rubric. Morton et al. (2021) wrote about collaborating with students when creating rubrics. Although the focus was on higher education students working with their professors to co-create rubrics, I like this idea and think it could work at the high school level. Guskey (2020) discussed rubrics to report noncognitive student results, encouraged teachers to reflect and analyze them carefully before use, and advised them to include students in rubric creation. I am intrigued by the idea of inviting my students to collaborate with me to develop rubrics. I feel the result could be more meaningful to students. Despite my general adverse reaction to using rubrics in my high school French classes, this strategy merits serious consideration.

Smith (2022) said that 11 out of 16 participants from Grades 5-8n her empirical study revealed inconsistencies with grading with rubrics, and many addressed the frustration and challenges associated with converting rubric scores to traditional grades. Eight participants expressed doubt about how accurately rubrics reflected student achievement due to the widespread inconsistencies with how the scores were converted to a percentage or letter grade (Smith, 2022). Consistency and alignment within the world language department are additional issues I experience when using rubrics. The department does not have a standard set of rubrics to choose from when assessing writing, reading comprehension, listening, or speaking. I am on my own, not aligned with the other world language teachers, nor calibrated. Shepard et al. (2018) discovered issues with the reliability of student grades when teachers were not aligned when calculating grades. Wiggins (2012) talked about the multiple ways students can receive feedback and cited research that reported, "Less teaching plus more feedback is the key to achieving greater learning" (p. 6). One way to improve assessment measures is to examine and consider the power of student feedback (Wiggins, 2012). The high school world language department is not yet aligned with rubrics nor calibrated in how we score and translate rubric scores to traditional grades. Despite having excellent World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages through The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), we struggle to utilize ACTFL-aligned rubrics with our world language learners uniformly.

DECISIONS

After evaluating the strategies to overcome challenges in grading, I concluded that specific strategies appear to be more effective for each of the four evaluated categories (see Figure 1). For the category of strategies to contend with the no-late assignment policy, an effective strategy based on what I have done is to accept late work for a grade

other than a zero. In my experience, most students will complete the assignments if they know I will take them, and they will receive credit for completing the work and turning it in. They may lose 10 points, but they do not earn a zero. I want my students to learn and progress, and holding them accountable to complete their assignments helps their skill acquisition and teaches responsibility. This strategy also allows me to conference with students, provide extra help when necessary, and require them to reflect on why they are not completing work on time. The behavioral zero is eliminated, and my students' grades reflect their academic achievement more accurately.

For the category of strategies to contend with requirements for class participation, I have decided that several methods are effective. First, I will continue to work to create a welcoming and collaborative environment where students feel safe participating. Secondly, students will understand that the expectation to participate is critical to their progress in mastering the French language. Thirdly, reflecting on what I did last year, the strategy to have students engage in ungraded and announced-graded activities was successful. Therefore, I will continue to offer various graded and ungraded assignments and articulate the designation. Making students aware that I recognize the different types of participation is a new effective strategy I will use to engage more students. Class participation is not always speaking, and I know from past experiences that many students find relief in hearing this from their French teacher. I have never emphasized this with my students, and I now understand the necessity. This combination of strategies works to ensure positive results with class participation. These methodologies will set the stage for student success, reducing the chance of zeros and tanking a student's quarter or semester grade for being introverted or simply having a bad day.

Asking students to correct their errors on assessments encourages them to learn from their mistakes and helps them earn extra points. This strategy helped me cope with the challenges of the no-retake-test policy. Although I am not a huge proponent of retakes, some students need a post-assessment survival solution. I know from experience that not all students will take advantage of the opportunity to correct their errors, but many do. Student feedback has been positive, and most students admit to understanding the material better after correcting their tests. Conferencing with students post-assessment and before completing corrections is another strategy I have identified as effective. The reasons for poor test performance are many. Frequently, students have admitted they did not study, were overly tired and could not focus, were not feeling well, did not understand what they were doing, and some cited test anxiety and blanking out the second they started working. Allowing students to verbalize the *why* behind the poor test grade, engage in meaningful dialogue with their teachers, and give them a chance to learn from their mistakes benefits the grade book and student growth and development.

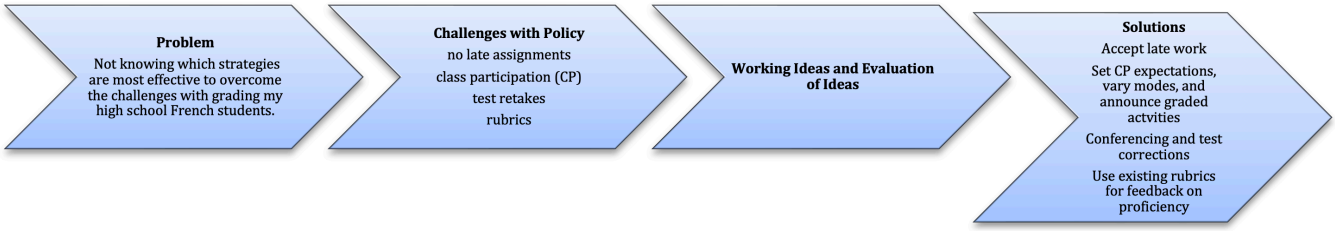
Finally, I have a strategy to contend with the requirement for rubrics. Through this reflective practice, I have learned that I should not reject rubrics but instead experiment with using them differently. This was an unexpected outcome of my reflective practice work. However, until the world language department at the high school adopts or develops a uniform set of effective rubrics aligned with ACFTL standards, I will not be spending time searching or making my own this year. Instead, I will carefully comb through my current rubric file folder and choose a select few with which to experiment. I can use them to provide individualized feedback on proficiency growth rather than calculating a grade. The rubrics will target interpersonal and presentational modes of communication. I will include comments on the rubrics and ask students to self-reflect on their growth and progress with speaking French. There will not be more lost hours spent searching for rubrics and struggling with how to convert rubrics to traditional grades. I will use them more frequently and embrace them as a tool to measure and communicate proficiency progress.

These decisions shed light on my strategies to overcome challenges with grading my French students. I knew some of my practices were effective with my students; however, I did not know that other educators, scholars, and researchers identified similar areas of concern and wrote in support of several strategies I employ. In Deweyan fashion, my decisions result from examining problems of practice, determining the cause, experimenting with possible solutions, and reflecting upon outcomes within a practical and research-based

framework (Anderson, 2020). It was unexpected to emerge from this reflective practice process feeling validated as a worthwhile contributor to the existing scholarly research examining similar challenges associated with grading students.

Figure 1.

Decision Process



not about right or wrong or judging the system; it was about contextualized deep reflection, which helped me gain clarity and may help other educators, administrators, and policymakers formulate informed decisions on grading students.

Although the decisions that emerged from this reflective practice will inform my practices in all four categories next year, I recommend focusing on one specific strategy from one category for future research—for example, a targeted focus on grading class participation only. Additional studies aiming at one component rather than multiple could identify specific problems within one category from which potential new strategies could result. Another recommendation would be to pilot a new idea, such as co-creating rubrics with students and evaluating the process and experience. My choice to focus on multiple challenges with grading my high school French students rather than on one in this reflective practice may represent a potential limitation of my reflection. Another limitation may be my novice status as a reflective practice scholar-practitioner-author. Future reflective practice will involve reflecting upon this reflective practice and targeting one specific category, such as combatting any ongoing challenges with class participation.

REFLECTIVE CRITIQUE

Greenberger (2020) explains that the result of reflective practice is judgment. Based on my best judgment, I have identified the problem, evaluated ideas and methods, and decided which strategies will effectively overcome the challenges of grading my high school French students. The process was highly introspective and pushed my thinking. Ultimately, engagement in reflective practice was instrumental in informing my decision-making about which strategies are effective for future implementation in my high school French classroom. By examining my experiments in combatting the challenges with the world language department's grading policies, I could reflect, confer with the literature, and decide which were effective and which I would utilize in the future.

The reflective process required me to paint a detailed picture of the problem and background before evaluating ideas and deciding. One challenge I encountered was personalization. I learned I had to reflect on myself, my practices, and my students in my educational context. At times, the process felt uncomfortable yet necessary. The exercise became more like telling a story and needed to include examples of lived experiences. What struck me the most was the human and emotional elements involved with the reflective process. I had no idea how vulnerable I would feel. I had to be open to honestly reveal my thoughts, experiences, and methodologies in the name of change and growth. I learned that the reflective process was

I remember wondering: "Why a reflective paper? Who would care? What could anyone gain from reading about my experiences as a high school French teacher from the northeastern United States?" About mid-way through my work on this paper, it clicked. I found myself researching and reading other reflective articles and realized I had so much in common with the authors and their experiences. I was learning from them, and I found the transparency about their reflective journeys refreshing and enlightening. I felt connected and enlightened to the plurality of struggle. I am not the only educator working to combat challenges with the complex task of grading my students. Per-

haps this reflective practice will generate conversation and reflection in the name of change. I hope I have inspired other educators, administrators, and policymakers to pay attention to how we grade our students, recognize the challenges, ask questions, reflect deeply, and embrace the changes and new ideas needed to make grading students more balanced, fair, and meaningful.

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