# Stop the Grade Grubbing:
## *An Whole New Approach to Grades*

Plan for Today

- Evaluate our current grading system
- Compare the traditional grading system to the benefit/risks of standards-based grading
- Define "Specs Based Grading"
- Justify your own personal stance on the best grading system to align with the 1) VCS definition and 2) purpose of grades

Let's jump in and do this!
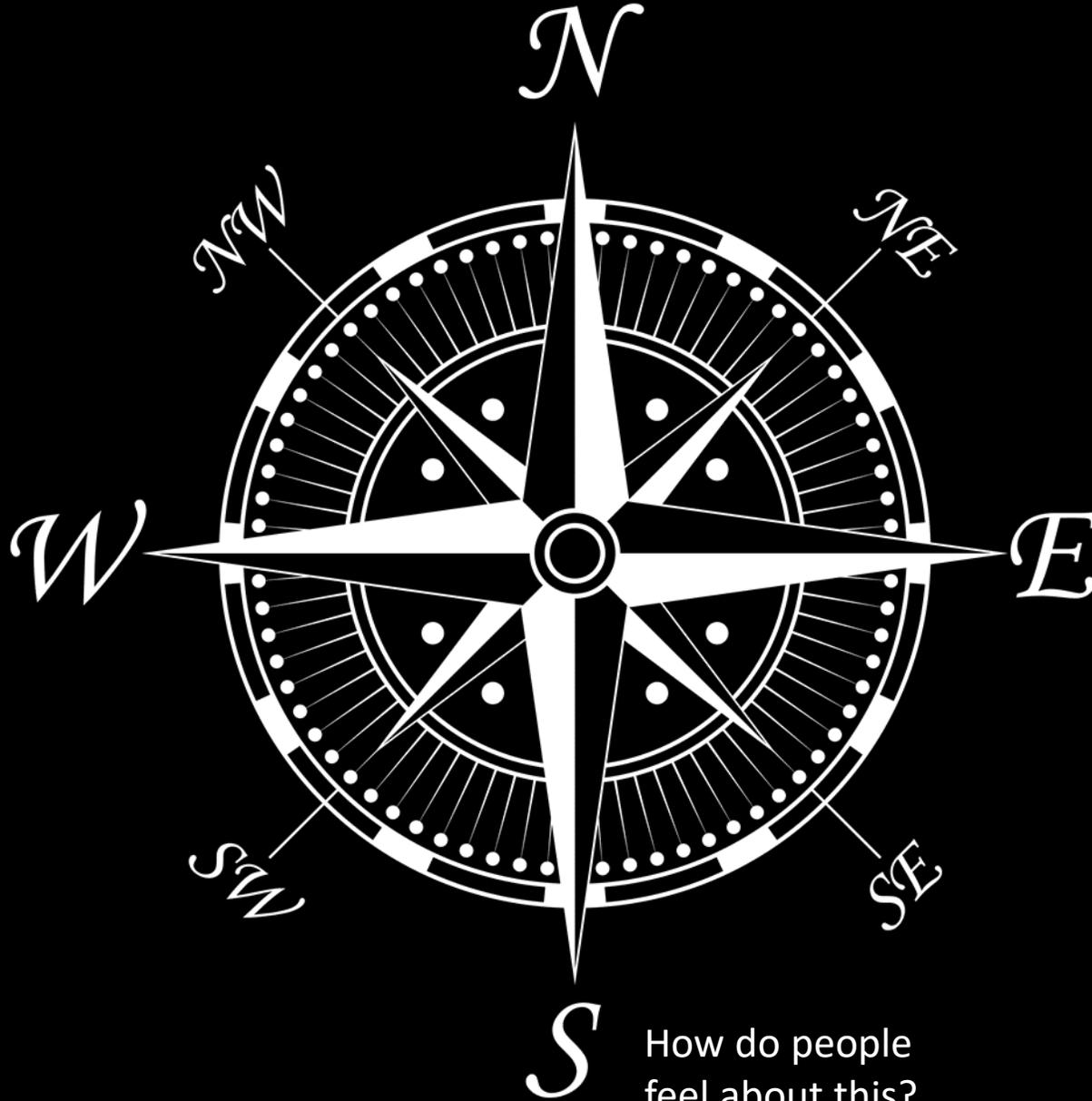
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I need to know the details before I can ever think about this.

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How does this fit into the larger picture?

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How do people feel about this?
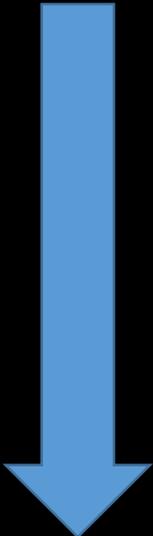
Current VCS Grading System

- Junior High: Total points, two quarters averaged together for a semester grade
- High School: Categories, one running grade for the whole semester
- Both campuses use A-F traditional grade scale
- Both campuses use a combination of mastery and effort assignments/assessments

VCS Definition of Quality Education

Quality education at Valley Christian Schools means accepting learners—mentally, spiritually, physically, and academically—as God created them. It means teaching students at their individual level of understanding and providing instruction at a pace at which they can succeed to their highest potential (Defined by the VCS Board in 2001).

VCHS Grading Philosophy *(Teacher Handbook)*

VCHS teachers use grades primarily:

1. To give students, parents, and counselors feedback about student progress/achievement
2. To provide guidance to teachers for instructional planning
3. To provide guidance to all stakeholders about future course work
4. To give colleges and universities an accurate picture of a student's college readiness
5. To motivate students
6. To give data for VCHS administration to analyze student success

Additional Guiding Policies

All grading policies should be developed with the VCS definition of Quality Education as the guiding principle. Student grades should be compiled based upon a variety of evaluation methods, with both effort and mastery reflected in the grade. In the end, mastery should be more heavily weighted. Grades should follow the departmental policies and expectations for the number of assignments in each category. The more grades averaged in to the grading period grade, the more reliable that grade will be.

VCS grades should reflect learning on the part of the student and not be reflective of behavior or discipline. Discipline, including tardies and absences, will be handled outside of the recorded grade. Grades might reflect the natural consequences of missing instruction, but artificial penalties are not used.

The role of teaching personal responsibility primarily lies with the parent – teachers need to develop policies to target mastery of soft learning skills, successful academic behaviors, content knowledge, and development of higher order thinking skills that work together for today's college and career readiness.

Warm Up Activity: Continuum Range

Stand up and place yourself on the continuum:

- Students who learn at my grade level(s) 100% understand how to earn an A in each of their classes from the start of the year
- Students who learn at my grade level(s) 100% understand how to earn an A in my class from the start of the year

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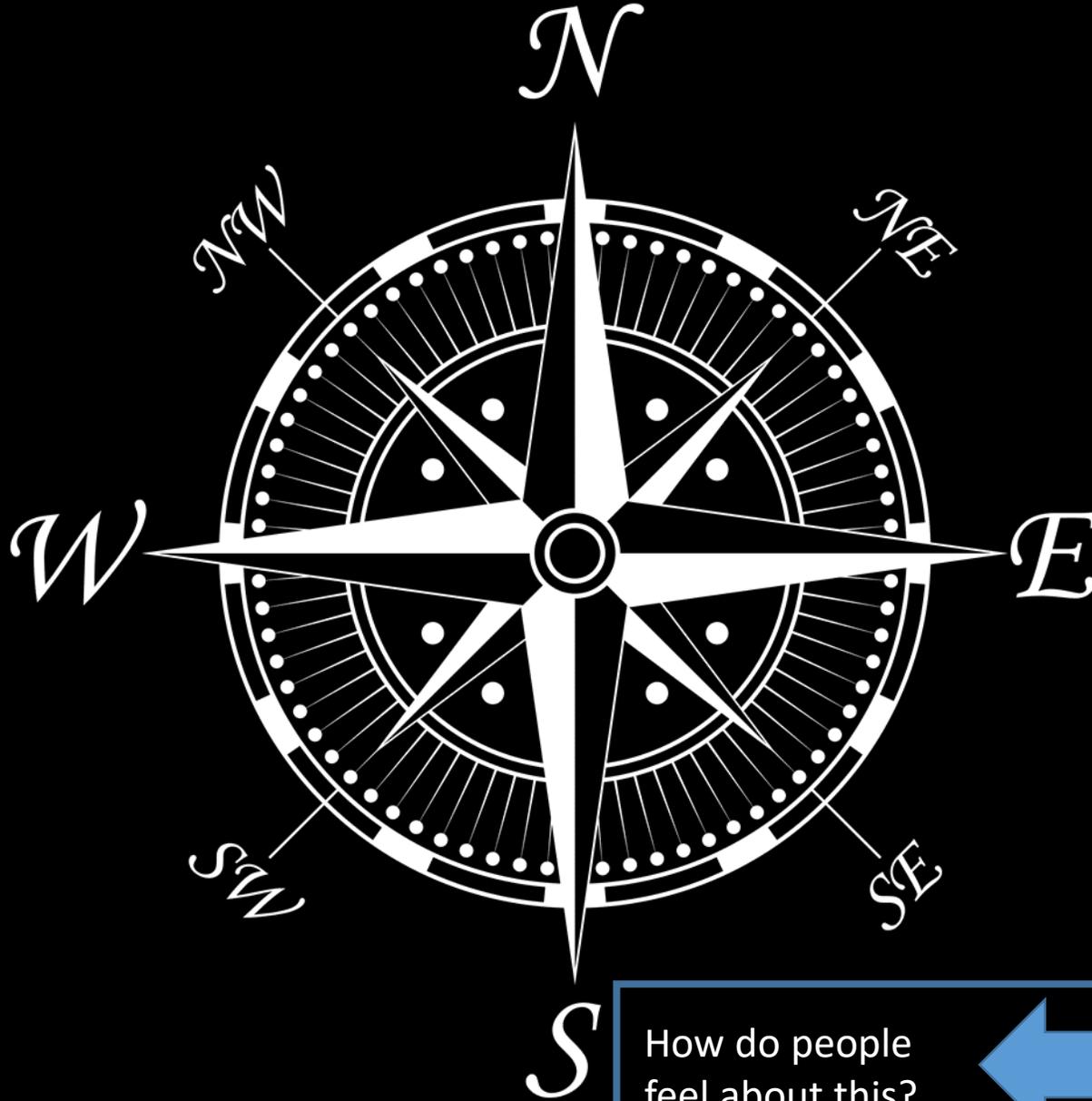
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How do people feel about this?

FEAR:
False Evidence Appearing Real

- Teachers have to fight against both students and parents who have FEAR about the impact of negative grades

- Students have FEAR about the impact of their grades

- Students and parents sometimes feel like the teacher is a BARRIER between them and the grade they want

FEAR:
a companion of our enemy, Confusion

- OUR STUDENTS are CONFUSED by the variations in how grades are calculated

Bird's Eye View Shared with VCHS Teachers in 2018

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Assignments	20										
Exercises	15										
Text Questions/Lecture Notes		35									
Homework							25	15		35	20
Classwork							25				15
Classwork and Class Activities							20	20			
Homework/Presentations			25	25	25						
Classwork/Groupwork			25	25	25						
Classwork/Participation										5	
Quizzes				15		30	15	30		10	20
Quiz			15		15						
Assessments	20										
Exams/Quizzes									30		
Tests		35					20				
Test			20		20						
Exams				20		20		20		30	25
Project	20										
Homework/Projects						15			20		
Text Homework/Essays		20									
Journal/Classwork									25		
Journals		10									
Final Exam	15		15	15	15	15	15	15		20	
Final									15		
Final Examination											20
Potential SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT SUBTOTAL	*55*	*65*	*50*	*50*	*50*	*80*	*50*	*65*	*90*	*60*	*65*

FEAR:
a companion of our enemy, Confusion

- OUR STUDENTS are CONFUSED by what these "hodgepodge" grades even tell them

"What's in my grade casserole? Mauhahaha! You'll never know!!"

Traditional Grading Risks

- Students try for points, not understanding
- Failure means done, don't keep trying to understand
- Failure means lack of confidence in their ability
- Hard to assign a grade that accurately reflects students understanding

First: A minute about Standards-Based Grading

- Reports say it takes more time or ends up becoming formulaic like the traditional system

- Might work at K-5, but limited positive reports from REAL teachers above that age group

- Difficult for college/university to translate
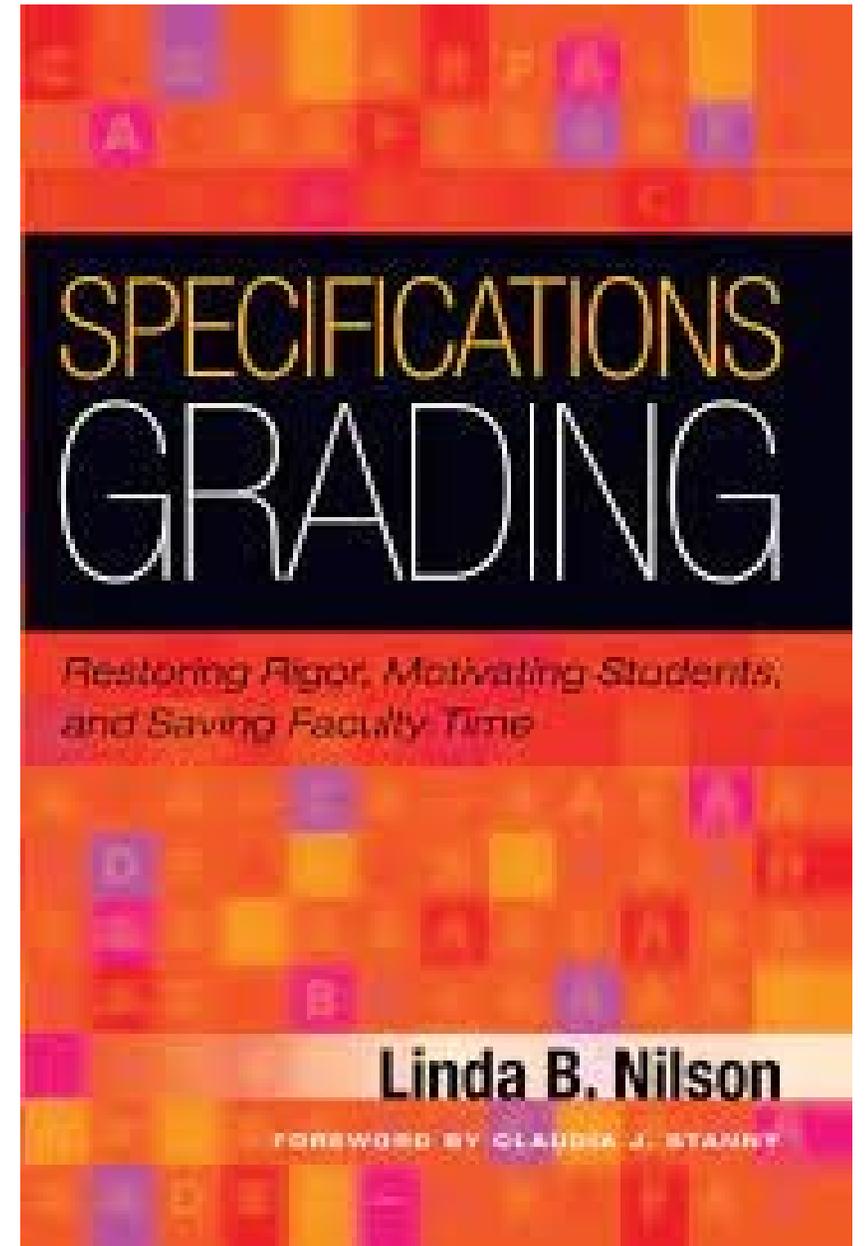
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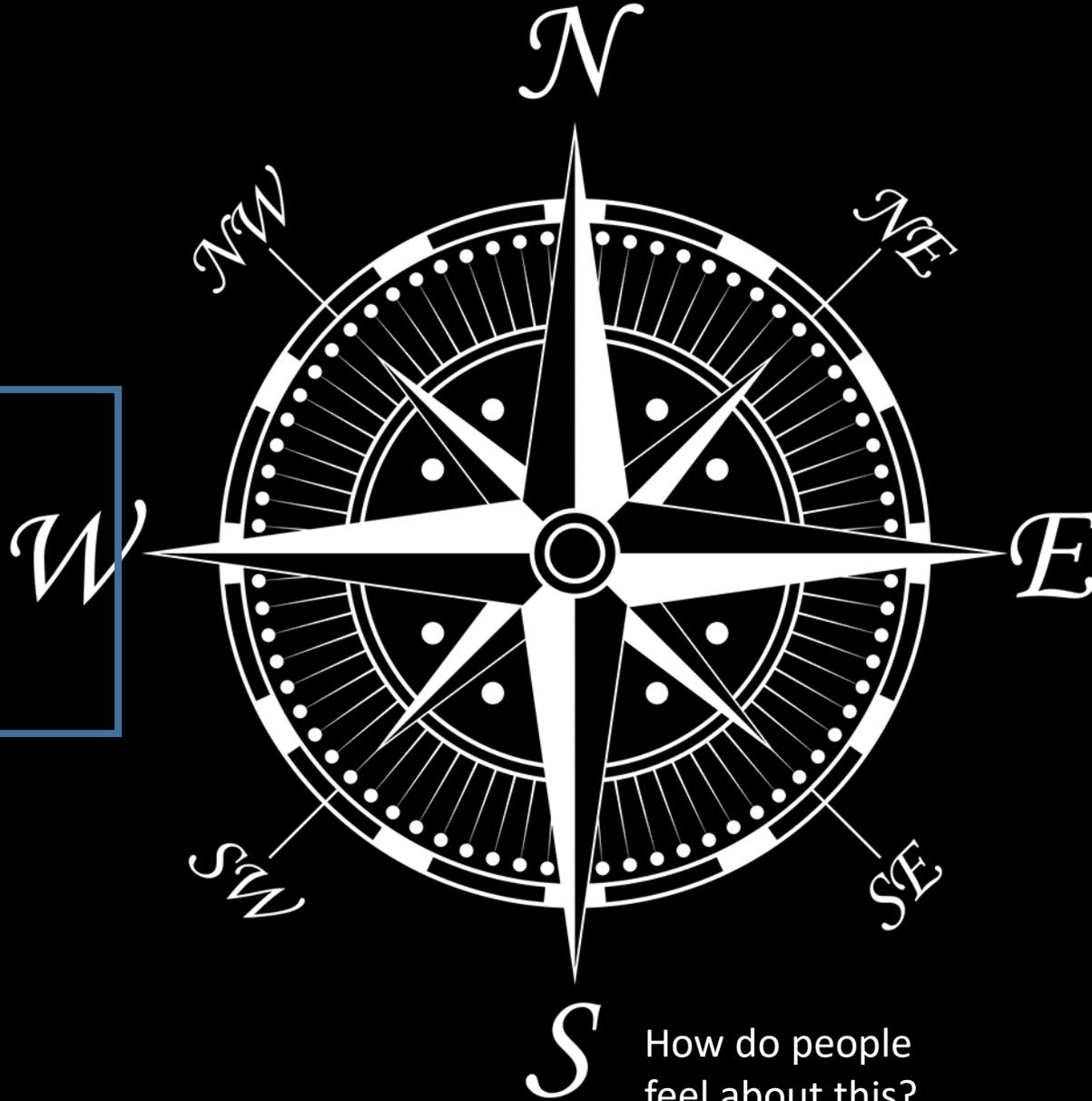
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Could we approach it differently?
An Whole New Approach to Grades

Specs Based Grading

Think about making your whole grading system one big rubric that tells students from day one exactly how to earn each grade

Lots of work on the front end with the goal of more clearer communication/less arguing on the back end (like a rubric)

Specs-based Grading

This system inverts the way students tend to approach the course. In a traditional model, they come to class just hoping for the best. With specs-based grading, students have to think about the grade they want to earn, then this tells them which "bundle" to look at in the syllabus. One day one a roadmap is given for what they need to accomplish a grade. There is no "hoping for a grade." The student is in control and we talk about targeting the grade you wish to earn instead of hoping for the grade you think you "deserve."

How does this translate into grades?

- Students who want a "C" in the course have to do a certain amount of work that meets the specs;
- Those wanting a "B" have to do everything the "C" people do, but more of it and of higher quality and/or difficulty level.
- Similarly the "A" students do everything the "B" students do plus even greater quantity and quality.

Specs Based Grading in a Nutshell

- All assignments are evaluated pass/fail
- Detailed lists of criteria (checklists or single-row rubrics)
- Students choose their grade by satisfactorily completing a set number of assignments
- Students pick a bundle they want to complete
- Students can earn tokens along the way

What's a "Token"?

- A token in specs grading is a sort of "get out of jail free" card that a student can spend to bend the rules of the course a little.

- Example: Every student starts with five tokens. By spending a token, a student could purchase a third submission of a Challenge Problem in a given week, to purchase a quiz retake, or to purchase class engagement credits.

Specs Based Grading

- Each assignment has a specific list of criteria outlining the instructor's expectations of what successful completion looks like
  - Provide examples of "good work"
  - Assignments are "meets criteria/does not meet criteria"
  - Students get opportunities for redos or late work
  - Final grade is based on "bundles" of assignments

Grading Scale:

To get an A in the course you must meet the following criteria:
Complete 14 of 16 chapter quizzes with an average of 80% or better.
Successfully complete 7 of the 8 Discussion Board activities (at least one from each unit)
Successfully complete 7 of the 8 Written Assignments (at least one from each unit).

To get a B in the course you must meet the following criteria:
Complete 13 of 16 chapter quizzes with an average of 75% or better. (at least one from each unit)
Successfully complete 6 of the 8 Discussion Board activities (at least one from each unit)
Successfully complete 6 of the 8 Written Assignments (at least one from each unit).

To get a C in the course you must meet the following criteria:
Complete 12 of the 16 chapter quizzes with an average of 70% or better. (at least one from each unit)
Successfully complete 5 of the 8 Discussion Board activities (one from each unit).
Successfully complete 5 of the 8 Written Assignments (one from each unit)…

Benefit to Students

- Extremely clear expectations & standards
- Student choice; instructor's trust in students
- Closer to real-world situations / adult experience
- Higher Ed is adopting this more and more

Shift in Learning Conversations

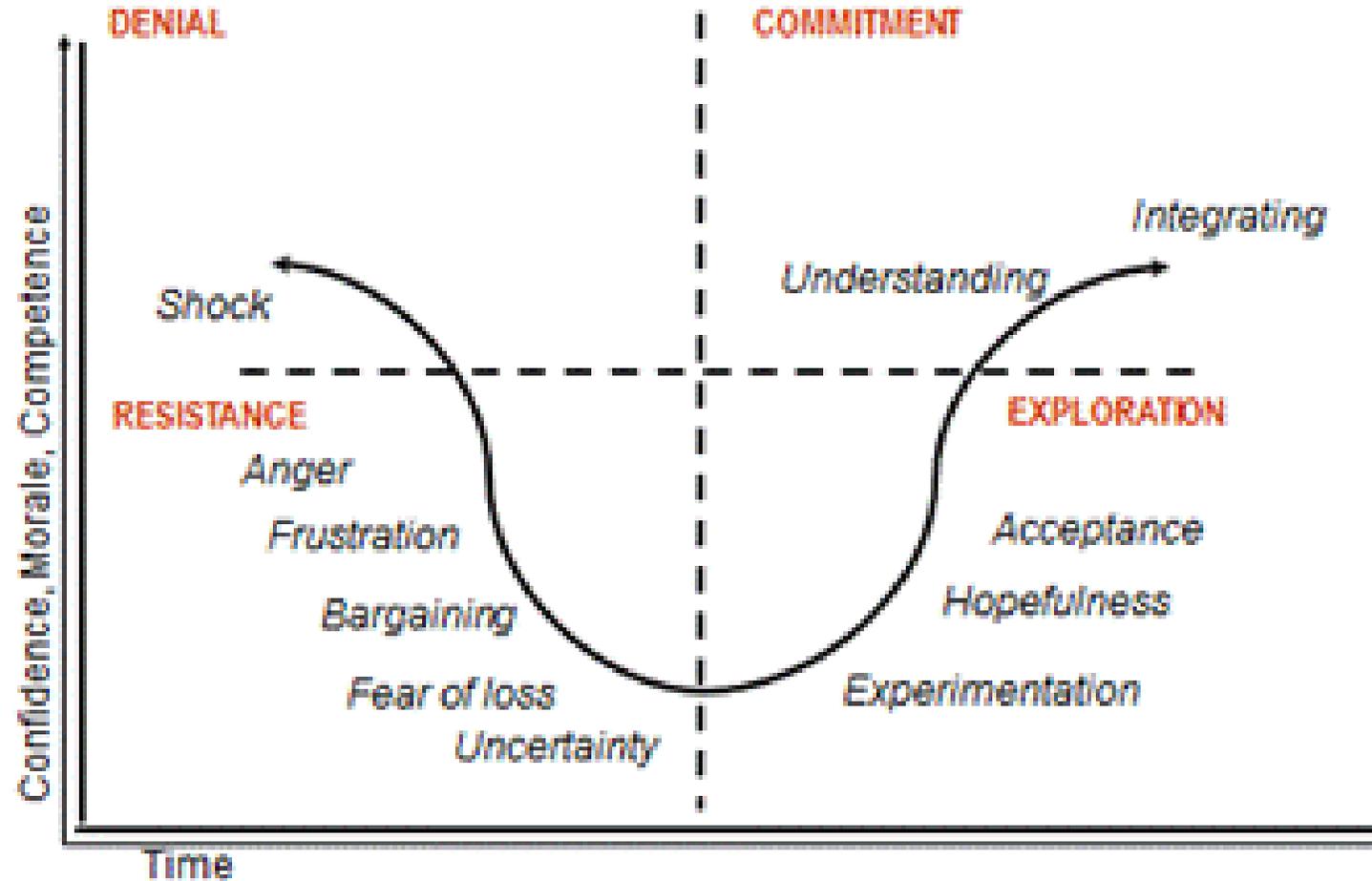I never heard anything like, "I need to earn an 86.2 on the last test in order to bring my average up to a B". Instead I heard conversations like, "I need to complete one more Challenge Problem to get a B, should I focus on applications of graph theory or writing code to implement a relation?" or "I've taken Learning Target P.3 three times without success and it's because I don't get structural induction --- can we talk about that?"

Risk of Specs Based Grading

- Who moved my cheese? ANYTIME you change the rules, students will resist. Any change must be painstakingly mapped out and checked by others.
- The backwards design work is time consuming
- This must include giving students the opportunity to revise their work based on feedback as an attempt to meet specs.

Check how you feel...
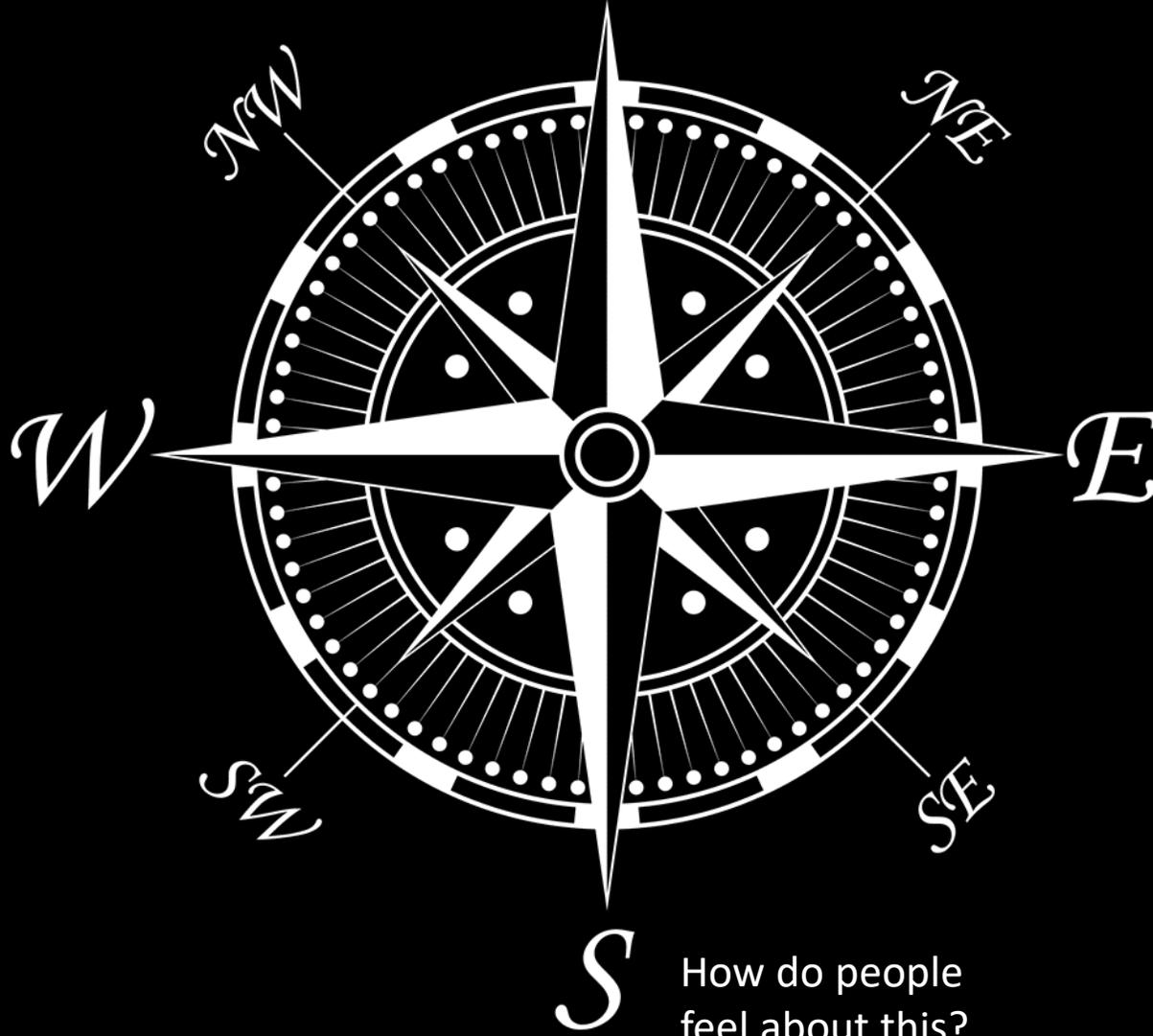
Transition and Emotions

DENIAL

COMMITMENT

Integrating

Shock

Understanding

RESISTANCE

EXPLORATION

Anger

Frustration

Acceptance

Bargaining

Hopefulness

Fear of loss

Experimentation

Uncertainty

Confidence, Morale, Competence

Time

It may take you some time

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YOU are the hero of your classroom: *Fight Confusion*