

University System
of New Hampshire

ATI Open Education Webinar Series 2019-20

#ungrading

Tonight! *Ungrading: Pedagogical Possibilities*
Coming Soon! *New Perspectives on Inclusive Teaching*

We will begin at 7pm!



University of
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UNGRADING: Pedagogical Possibilities for Going Beyond the Grade

#ungrading

bit.ly/usnh-ungrading-slides



Open Learning & Teaching Collaborative
Plymouth State University
Spring 2020 Webinar

Sponsored by the USNH Academic Technology Institute



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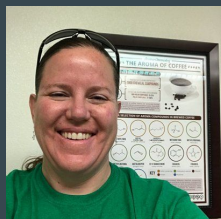
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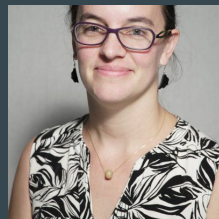
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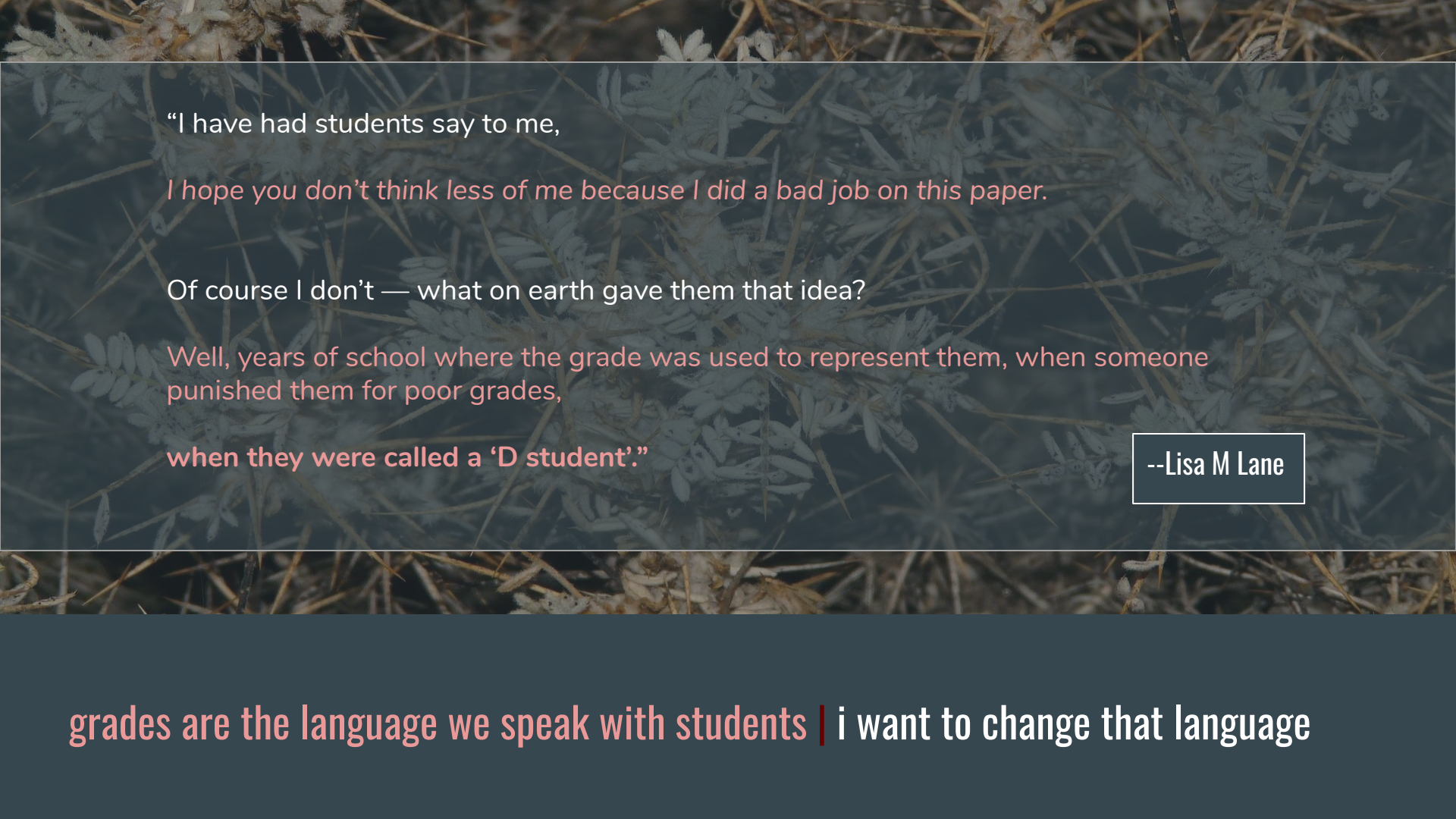


Cathie LeBlanc

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WHO?

WHY?



“I have had students say to me,

I hope you don't think less of me because I did a bad job on this paper.


Of course I don't — what on earth gave them that idea?

Well, years of school where the grade was used to represent them, when someone punished them for poor grades,

when they were called a ‘D student’.”

--Lisa M Lane

grades are the language we speak with students | i want to change that language

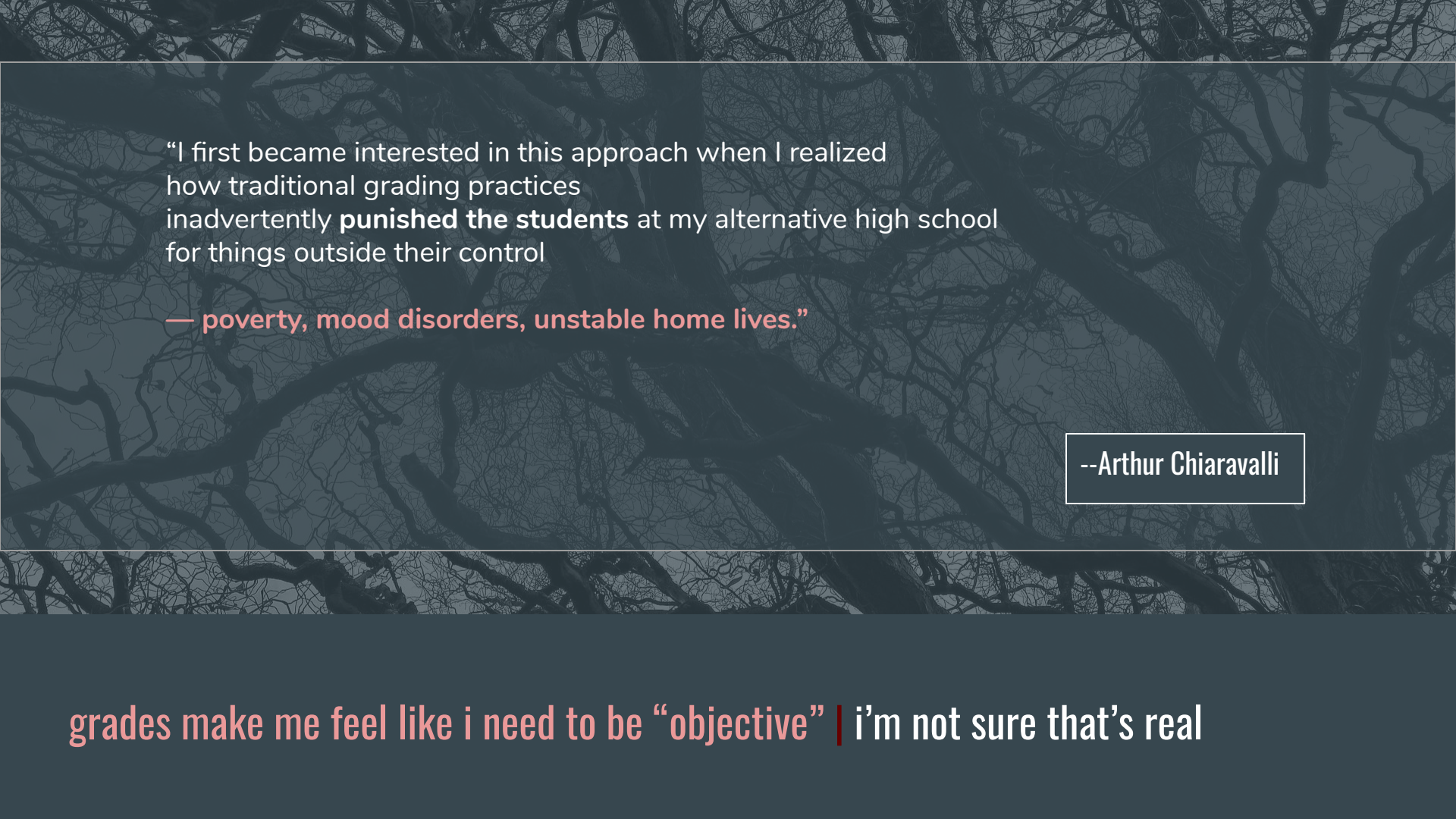


“I explicitly teach students about **giving and receiving feedback** so that they can **give each other** helpful feedback and also **make good use** of the feedback they receive.

As part of that process, I teach students about **growth mindset** and the positive value of **learning from mistakes.**”

--Laura Gibbs

i want to **speak** more about learning **and less** about grades

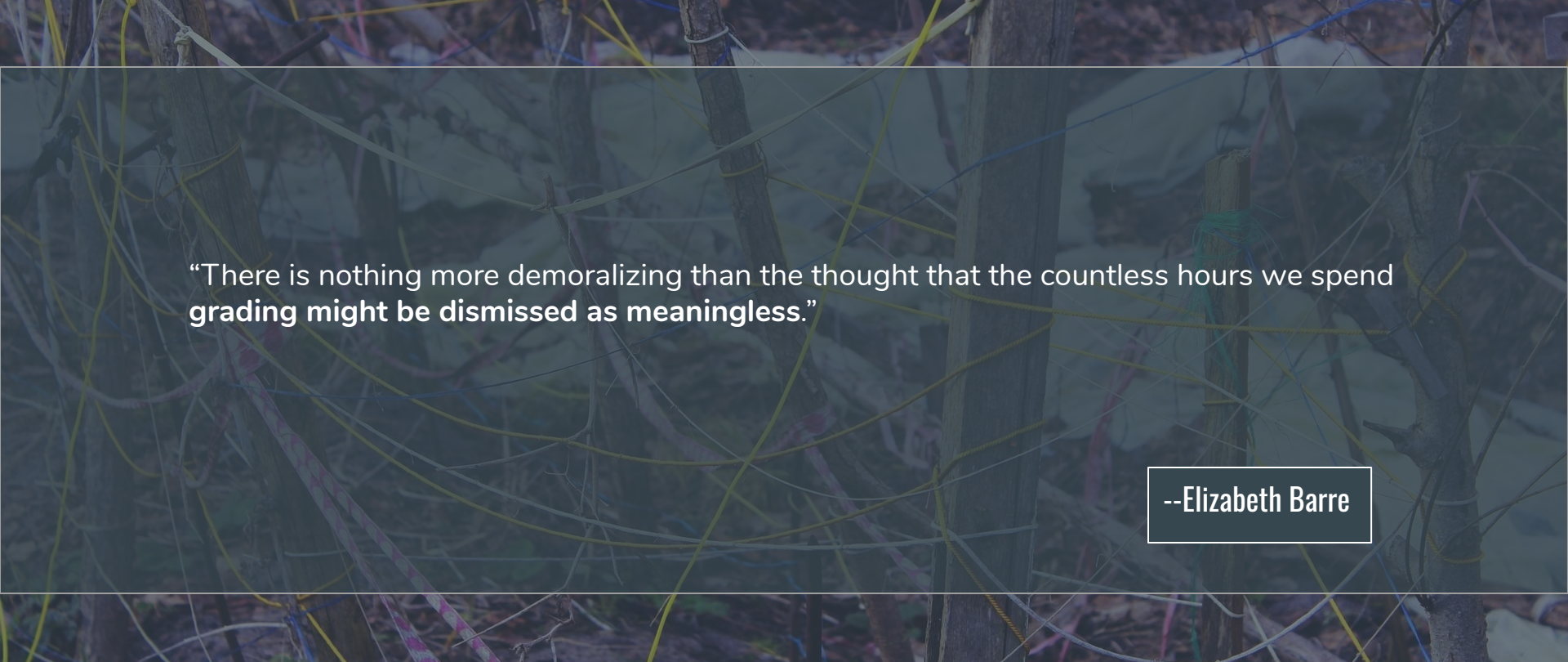


"I first became interested in this approach when I realized how traditional grading practices inadvertently **punished the students** at my alternative high school for things outside their control

— **poverty, mood disorders, unstable home lives."**

--Arthur Chiaravalli

grades make me feel like i need to be "objective" | i'm not sure that's real



“There is nothing more demoralizing than the thought that the countless hours we spend **grading might be dismissed as meaningless.**”

--Elizabeth Barre

grading feels like how i make my work (and care for students) **visible/measurable**



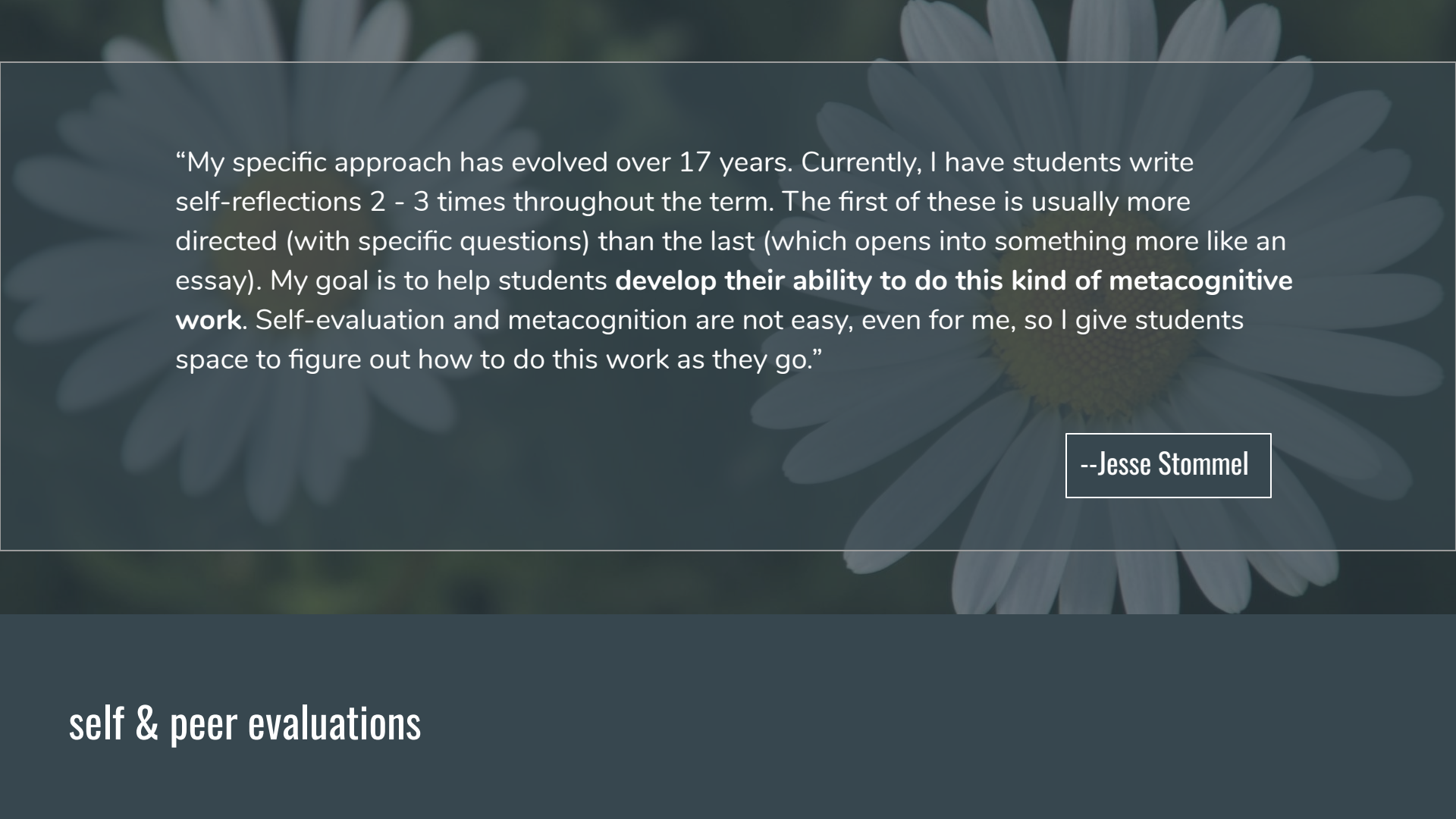
“Grades seem so consequential
that students believe they can’t take a chance on anything unproven.

In most college classes, a mistake is punished by a lower grade,
which is then averaged into the other grades,
even if the student completely gets it forever after that initial try.”

--Susan D. Blum

grades are impeding actual learning

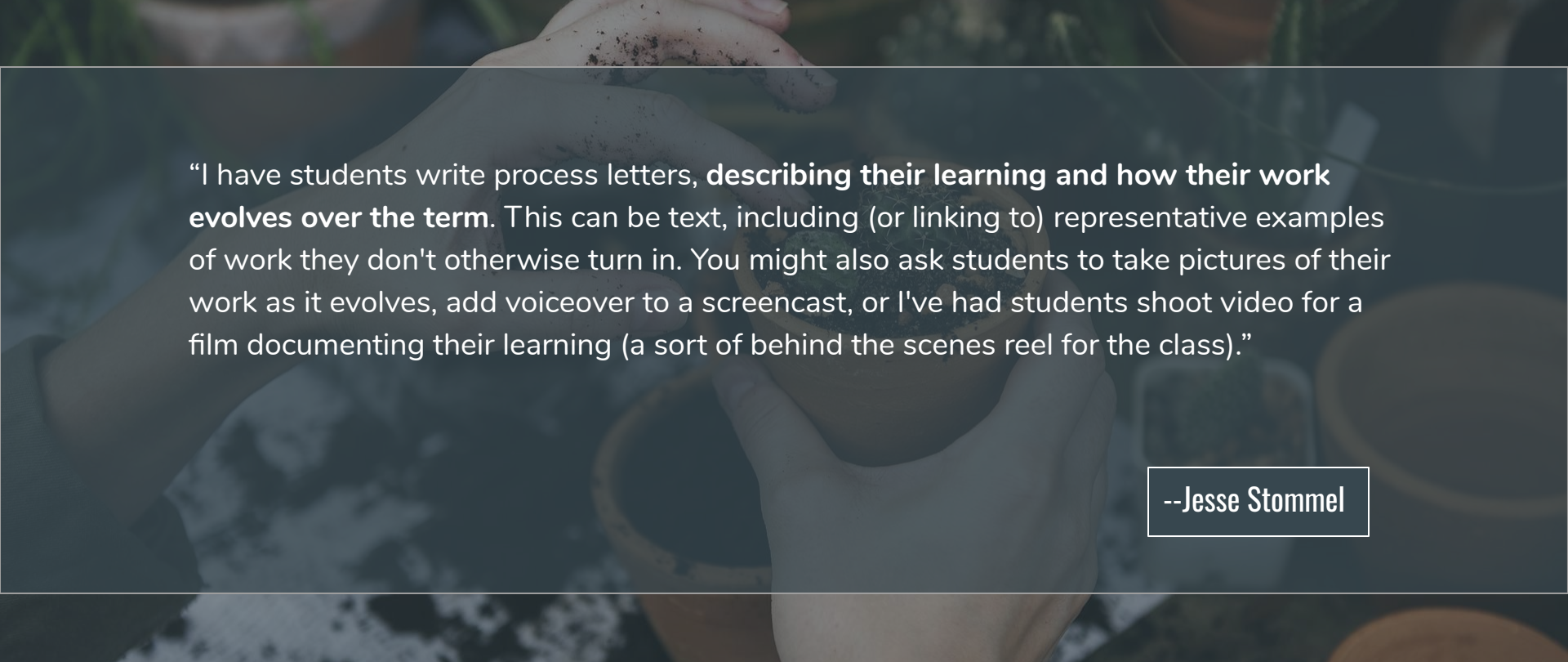
WHAT?



“My specific approach has evolved over 17 years. Currently, I have students write self-reflections 2 - 3 times throughout the term. The first of these is usually more directed (with specific questions) than the last (which opens into something more like an essay). My goal is to help students **develop their ability to do this kind of metacognitive work**. Self-evaluation and metacognition are not easy, even for me, so I give students space to figure out how to do this work as they go.”

--Jesse Stommel

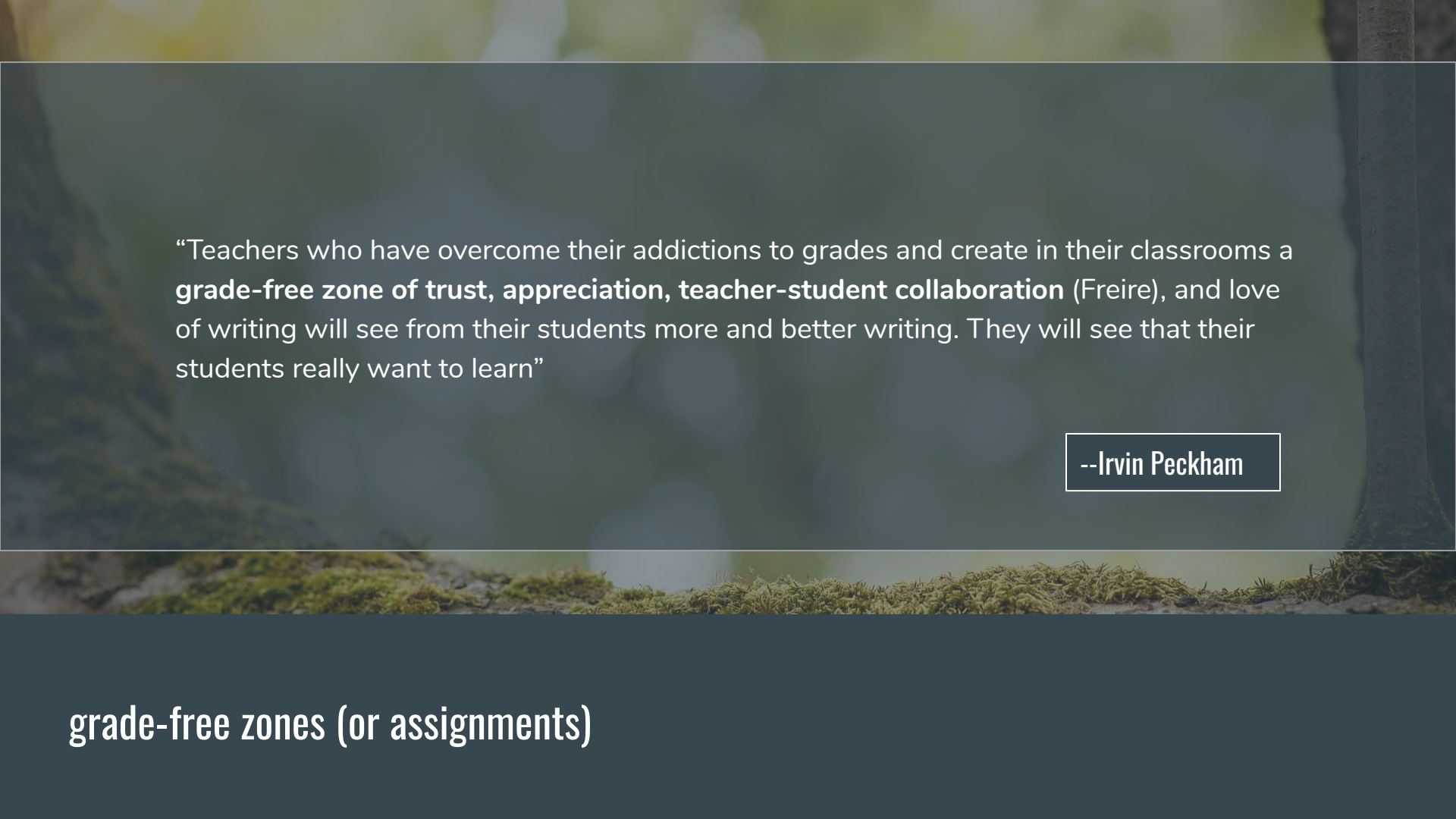
self & peer evaluations

A person's hands are shown holding a small, dark-colored potted plant. The background is a blurred image of various other plants and pots, suggesting a greenhouse or indoor garden setting. The overall image has a dark, muted color palette.

“I have students write process letters, **describing their learning and how their work evolves over the term**. This can be text, including (or linking to) representative examples of work they don't otherwise turn in. You might also ask students to take pictures of their work as it evolves, add voiceover to a screencast, or I've had students shoot video for a film documenting their learning (a sort of behind the scenes reel for the class).”

--Jesse Stommel

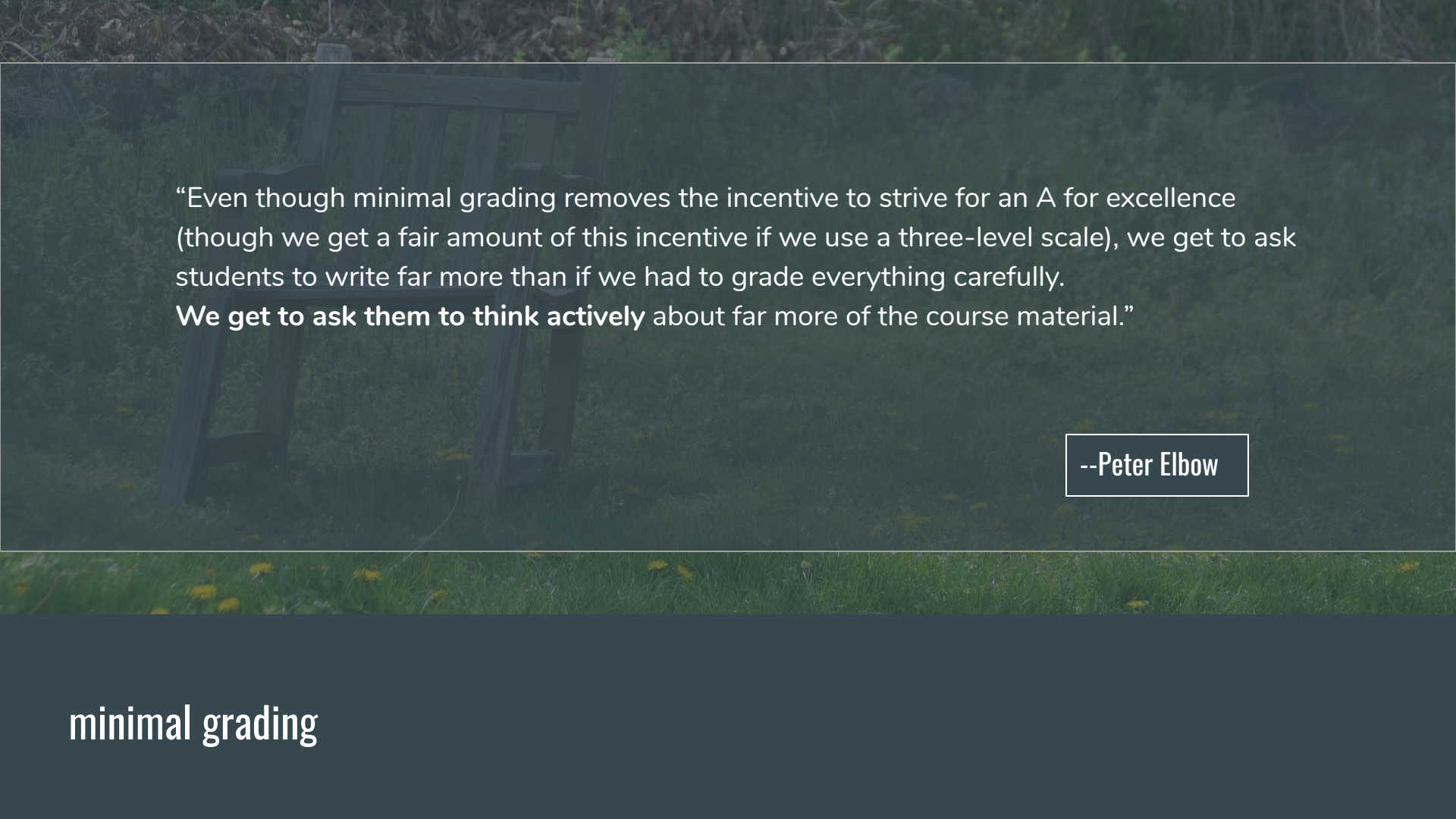
process letters

A background image of a forest stream with mossy rocks. The water is calm, reflecting the surrounding greenery. The rocks in the foreground are covered in vibrant green moss. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

“Teachers who have overcome their addictions to grades and create in their classrooms a **grade-free zone of trust, appreciation, teacher-student collaboration** (Freire), and love of writing will see from their students more and better writing. They will see that their students really want to learn”

--Irvin Peckham

grade-free zones (or assignments)

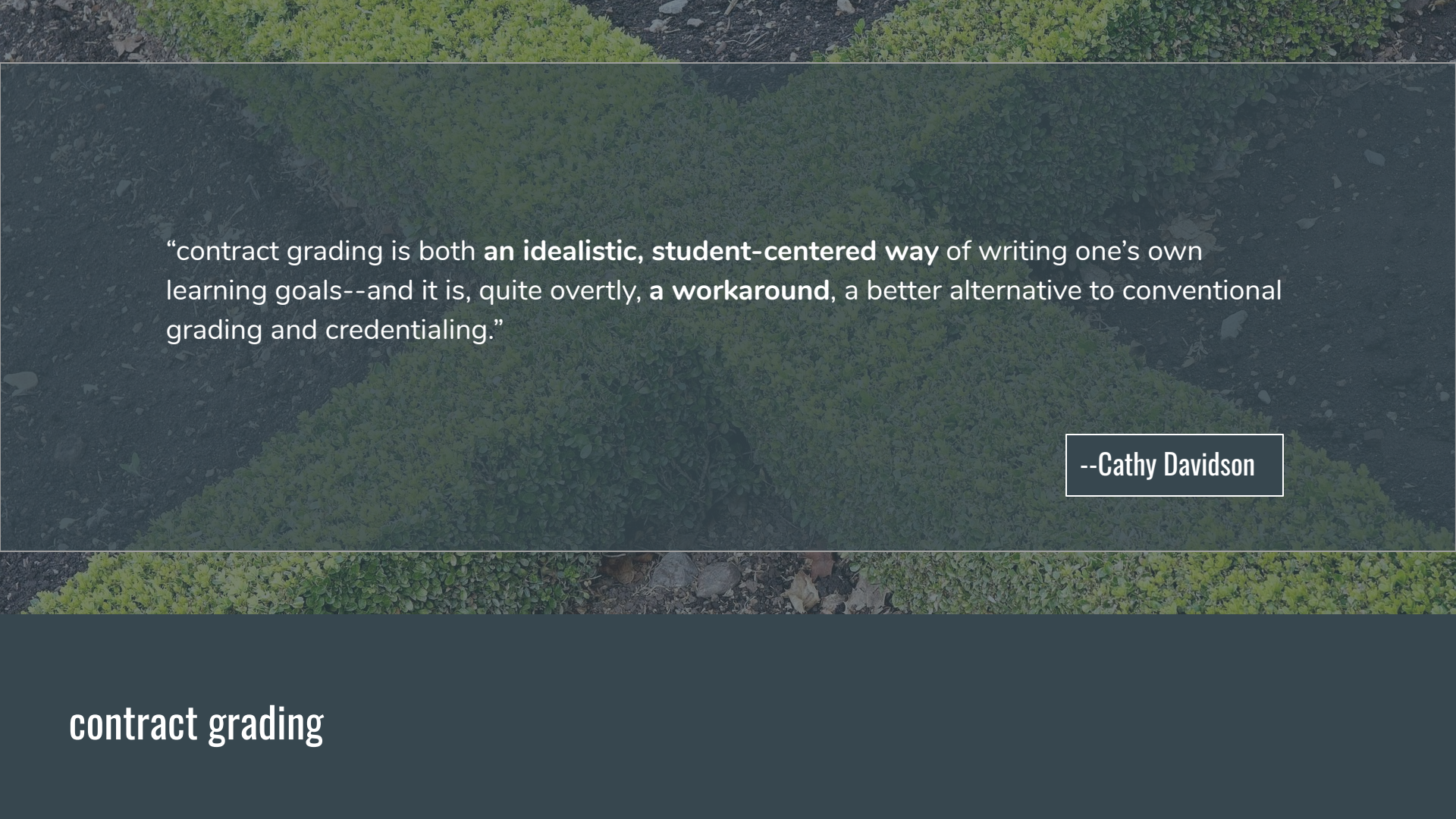
A photograph of a wooden bench in a grassy field, with a dark overlay for text.

“Even though minimal grading removes the incentive to strive for an A for excellence (though we get a fair amount of this incentive if we use a three-level scale), we get to ask students to write far more than if we had to grade everything carefully.

We get to ask them to think actively about far more of the course material.”

--Peter Elbow

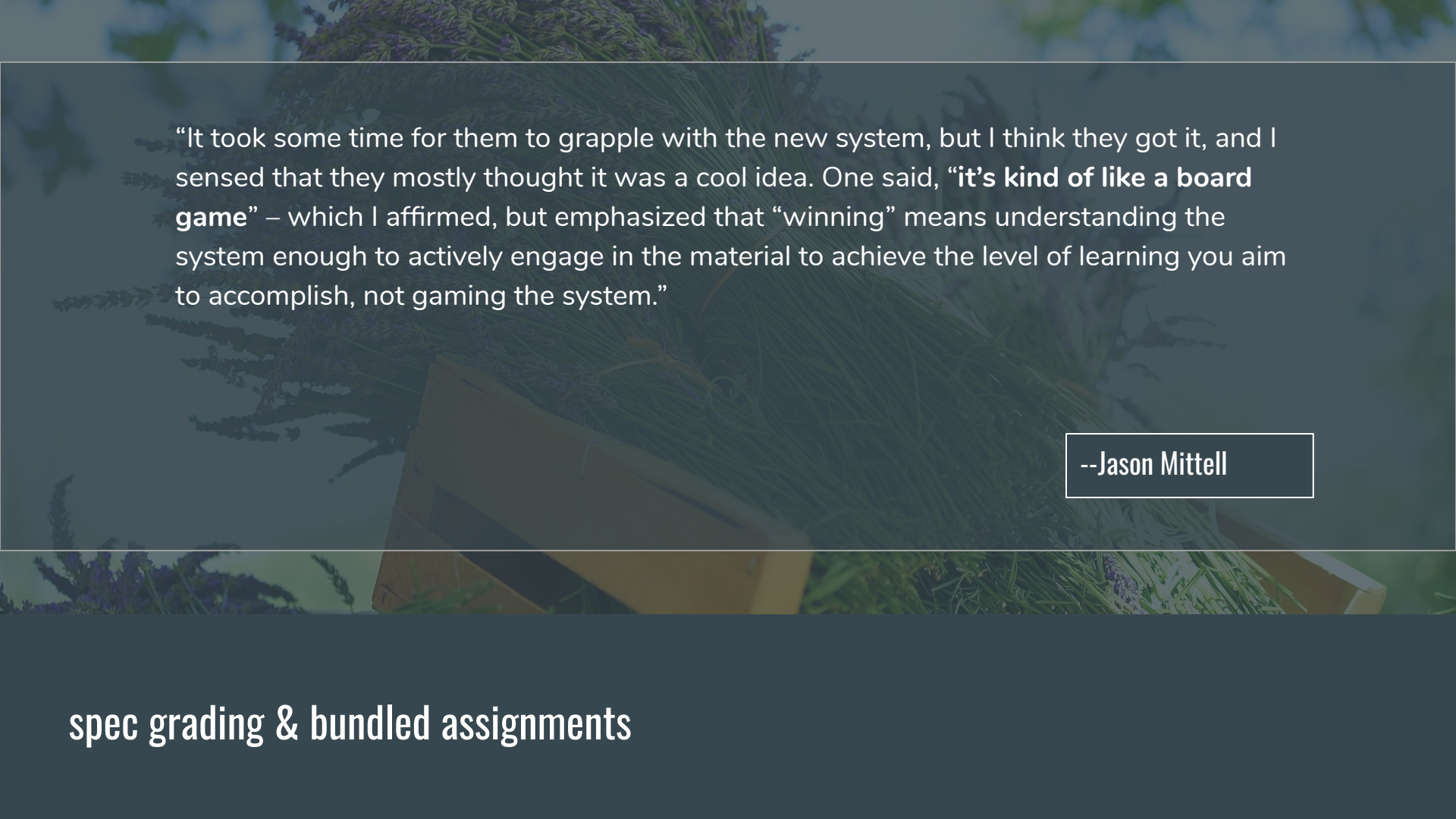
minimal grading



“contract grading is both **an idealistic, student-centered way** of writing one’s own learning goals--and it is, quite overtly, **a workaround**, a better alternative to conventional grading and credentialing.”

--Cathy Davidson


contract grading

A background image showing several wooden planters filled with lavender plants. The plants are in various stages of bloom, with some showing purple flowers and others green foliage. The image is slightly blurred and has a dark overlay.

“It took some time for them to grapple with the new system, but I think they got it, and I sensed that they mostly thought it was a cool idea. One said, “**it’s kind of like a board game**” – which I affirmed, but emphasized that “winning” means understanding the system enough to actively engage in the material to achieve the level of learning you aim to accomplish, not gaming the system.”

--Jason Mittell

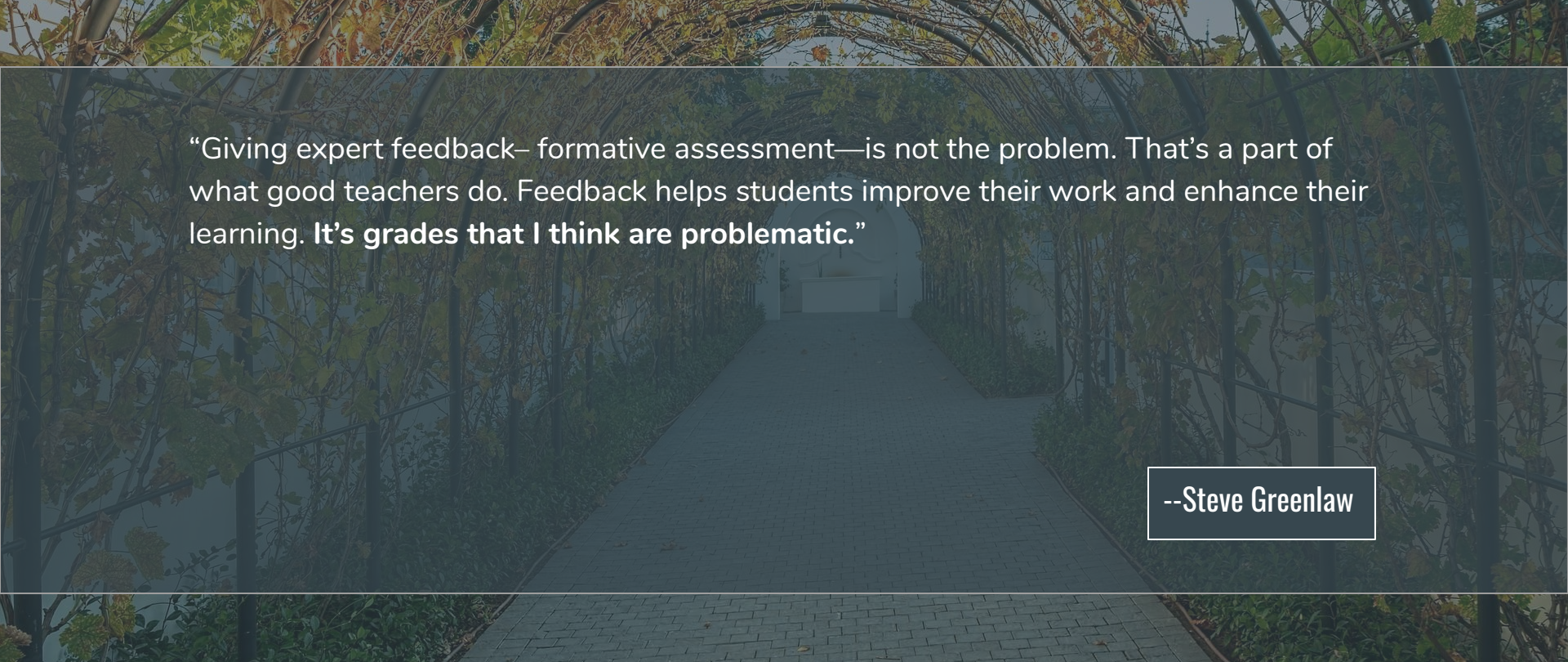
spec grading & bundled assignments



“God, I love my students. Even when I didn’t really care about the outcome,
they made a really great choice that maximized their learning process EVERY TIME.”

--Clarissa Sorensen-Unruh

ungraded exams



“Giving expert feedback– formative assessment—is not the problem. That’s a part of what good teachers do. Feedback helps students improve their work and enhance their learning. **It’s grades that I think are problematic.**”

--Steve Greenlaw

formative assessment

Examples from the Field



1. Several class discussions about:
 - a. How do you demonstrate learning?
 - b. What are grades for?
 - c. Relationship between grades and learning?
2. Several self-reflections about current learning & future plans/goals
 - a. Feedback on self-reflections \Rightarrow become individual conversations
3. Learning Management System (Moodle):
 - a. Keeps track of complete/incomplete assignments
 - b. Stores self-reflections
 - c. Stores my/peer feedback
4. When course grades have to be submitted (6 weeks & end), revisit conversations about grades/learning & review Moodle
 - a. Students articulate the grade they have earned and why (another kind of self-reflection)



Getting Your Feet Wet - tips for newbies, scaredy-cats, and nervous nellys

What part of your course can you fence off as a space to experiment, have fun, and loosen up?

- Ungraded exercises that receive full credit for effort and timeliness
- Self-directed and self-evaluated participation
- Allowing greater flexibility in assignments even if they will ultimately be graded by the professor (due dates, format, topics, groups or individual, revisions, etc.)
- Create space for students to give feedback, too

Contract Grading:

A useful middle ground when you need an A-F grade

(or, as Cathy Davison, says: a workaround)

Basic idea: Do this, get X grade guaranteed. Reduces anxiety, allows conversation about grades, opens up room for thinking beyond grades, but not so radical that it requires lots of time to adjust.

Example: The “B Contract”

If you do all of the following, you are guaranteed at least a B in the course:

- You do not miss more than ____ classes
- Complete all assignments and activities on time, according to the guidelines, and your work demonstrates effort and care.
- Consistently demonstrate effort on all peer feedback activities with the goal of being helpful and supportive to your peers.
- Substantially revise your drafts at each stage, including the portfolio.
- Carefully copy-edit all evaluation drafts by following the proofreading guidelines.

Grades above a B require doing more than the list above.

Assessment via self-evaluation: “I believe I fulfilled the contract in this way...”

see also: [“A Unilateral Grading Contract to Improve Learning and Teaching”](#) by Peter Elbow & Jane Danielewicz
and assorted examples & guidelines at [Peter Elbow’s website](#)

Rad Respondents:

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Plymouth State University '20
CoLab Student Affiliate

Clarissa Sorensen-Unruh

Chemistry FT Faculty, Central New Mexico Community College
Graduate Student (M.S. Statistics, Ph.D. Learning Sciences), UNM

Jesse Stommel

Senior Lecturer, Digital Studies & Digital Learning Fellow
University of Mary Washington



Ungrading: An FAQ by Jesse Stommel

bit.ly/usnh-stommel



Discussion



Panel Discussion & Audience Q&A

Resources

PSU Workshop Resources

bit.ly/usnh-ungrading



Coming soon to your email:

Ungrading, A Chapbook

created by Martha & Ashley Hichborn,
with contributions from viewers like you! Thank you!

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BY