

Liberating Grades/Liberatory Assessment

by
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I liked having an input on my grade. I am the only person that [sic] knows how much effort and time I put into my work. -Lisa, high school senior

How do we instill in our students the ability to be effective judges over their own learning? Part of that process for me means supporting a shift in students' thinking about conventional, traditional ways of grading--the teacher keeps record of assignments completed and assigns a grade based on that criteria. As most of us know, grades do not accurately reflect back to students what they have learned or acquired throughout a given course. As a liberatory educator (Freire, 1970) in English education, one who attempts to create equanimity throughout all elements of classroom practice, I strive to empower students to act on and transform their worlds through acts of cognition and action. This means that I must also reconsider the grading process and how I assess student learning.

Most teacher educators who embody social justice pedagogy rethink their assessment practices as they shift from assignment to assignment. Most reconsider the most effective way to match assignments to fit the grading. To impose one view on students distorts knowledge, teaching and learning. Critical pedagogues need to construct environments that allow for maximum flexibility of thought, dialogue and practice on major educational issues and provide students with real experience of each. How many of us though, have reached the point when we know that what we are assessing reinforces the message that assessment is a manifestation of power? On the one hand, we are expected to assign grades, and on the other, we know that assigning grades is a subjective act that splits the internal existential "I learn for me; I am responsible for my own acts" from the external "I learn for you." This separation of body from mind in the learner is antithetical to social justice teaching. How can we reconcile this split?

Over my fourteen plus years of teaching I have begun to reconsider my beliefs around assessment. Assessment is not easy and most educators feel the struggle over best practices of assessment. In my attempt to reconcile the body/mind split, I decided to try out an idea with two groups of students simultaneously: my public high school advanced placement (AP) English literature course of thirty students and fifty education students at the university taking a course with me on race, class, and gender in the secondary language arts. I would ask them to each assign themselves grades for the term based on the criteria as decided upon by the entire class. Buy-in therefore was a fundamental component of this process.

Several questions have occurred to me over the years when my students have asked me questions about their grades. Although I provide detailed rubrics which specify expectations and the points assigned to each task, it does not cover all of the questions students inevitably ask. Therefore, as I approached my students with this arduous task to self-assign grades, I framed my thinking with several questions that I hoped we'd unpack together: How can I demystify the grading process? What does a grade mean? Can there

International Journal of Critical Pedagogy, Vol 1 (2) (Summer 2008), 160-171.

be liberatory grades and can grades ever be liberatory? And, while I make the shift in my praxis, is it too much to assume responsibility for changing others' attitudes towards grading?

Buy-In: High School

I feel that giving myself a grade was a somewhat difficult task. I didn't always know if I was grading myself fair or reasonably. At some times I thought I was grading myself too high or missing some of my mistakes, making my grade higher than it should be. -Liliana, high school student

Young adults often feel disenfranchised from society because of their lack of power based on their age, ethnicity, appearance, sexual orientation, national origin, ability, and social class. Similarly, youth often feel disempowered in the school system because of the power structure of teacher *over* student. Desiring students to be part of the assessment process can act as an invitation into their brooding awareness as a person of power. In my classroom, I strive to share power with my students, and to cultivate in them the desire to be informed about their rights and responsibilities both in the school and society at large. I also want students to leave my classroom understanding their own power and ability to make a difference in any environment. Asking them to assign themselves grades, would challenge the dominant power of teacher as the almighty transmitter of knowledge which is consumed by students and scribed into a grade. The act of self-assigned grades could help students develop a sense that power can be equal and transformative--a Democratic ideal. Developing this rationale along with students challenges their subservient status while it also displaces the teacher as the almighty arbiter. Youth, with an empowered sense of self, can act on and transform the worlds in which they live.

I want to help graduate students who have a better sense of themselves and the world around them and want them to have power with their own learning process. To me this meant that I had to consciously open them up to how learning and assessment align. Guinier and Torres (2002) describe the process of "power with" which comes from and means the "psychological and social power gained through collective resistance and struggle through the creation of an alternative set of narratives. It is relational and interactive" (p. 141). For us, assessment has great potential to become a genre of liberation.

The concept of liberatory assessment is not new. Its roots reside in democratic education and liberatory pedagogy (Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1970), authentic and collaborative instruction (Purcell-Gates, 2000, 2001; Purcell-Gates, Degener, & Jacobson, 2002) and family literacy and self-regulated learning (DeBruin-Parecki, Paris & Seidenberg, 1997). Together, these fields promote how education and learning intersect with students' world-views and schemas. As such, I draw heavily from these perspectives and build upon what students bring with them from their sociocultural backgrounds when making curricular choices. Assessment in my classroom is framed around how students draw allusions between course material and their outside lives. This means that students, generally more often than not, develop assessment practices along with me, and that I include them in critical conversations about state standards, school

standards, and how these things should align with what the students themselves hope to gain from the learning process.

Senior AP Literature: Confusion

In my senior high school AP literature course I decided that I would tackle grades differently for the third quarter. Prior to this juncture, I had assigned grades based on criteria that students and I had mostly developed together. By this point in the year, students were well aware of my pedagogy but that did not prepare them for what I was about to ask them to do. I began class on that day by telling my students that I had to assign grades, that they were going to give themselves their own grades, write a justification for why they assigned themselves a particular grade, create criteria as a class and demark the different levels of A, B, C, D grades, and then show me what they devised by reading what they wrote in a one-on-one conference.

Immediately Ashley (all names have been replaced by pseudonyms) the class over-achiever sputtered, “But, but, but Dr. Miller that’s weird.” “Cool, this rocks,” said Ryan, our surfer boy from southern California. “I want to know what you think of my learning,” said Sarah, whose parents put pressure on her to achieve high marks. I calmly assured the class, “I want you all to be excellent judges over your own learning and of your processes as learners.” I was convinced I’d assuaged them, but when I peered out into a sea of confused and yet eager looking eyes, I thought maybe this wasn’t such a good idea after all.

So I asked them to brainstorm with me aloud what they thought a grade meant to them and then what they thought would be important criteria for which they could assess their own learning. I was committed to letting this discussion take as much time as necessary. Hands eagerly shot up around the room. “A grade tells my parents how well I am doing in school and gives me privileges at home,” said one student. “Grades demonstrate what I’ve learned and what you think of my learning—oh and they are my tickets to college,” said another. “Grades don’t mean anything; they’re subjective and biased,” said a third. I thought, “Aha,” this student gets it. With such an array of answers, I knew students were ripe candidates to further our discussion.

First, through a chalk talk on the board, I explained that the marking criteria are the tasks they are learning and then how that determines a grade. I asked them what they thought they should be graded on for the semester. Their responses included: comprehension (what they learned and improvement), participation, effort, attendance and completed assignments. Then I explained that for us to enter into this relationship about assessment there were several things I needed from them so that we could try to create a level playing field. I asked them to write a detailed and thorough justification that explained what they thought they should earn on each aspect of the grading for the course requirements--per our discussion and the description for the course as set forth in the syllabus: attendance and participation (10%), tardies (10%), in-class assignments (30%), homework (30%), midterm and final exam (20%). Next, I asked them to write a grade after each justification, and then write an overall grade with an explanation if they felt that the grade they had given themselves did not match what the total came to. I then asked them if there were any other components that they felt should be included in the grading. Lastly, I asked them if I should have veto power and what that would include.

After reading through their responses, we returned to the board for another chalk talk. I learned that there were only two important criteria that all students felt they wanted to be evaluated on: (1) comprehension of the material and (2) completion of all assignments. I asked them in a brainstorm session to collectively define what each of those meant to them. Students decided that comprehension meant understanding as it intersects with personal learning style. It was their opinion that each person was aware of how they really understood something and that no external voice could know that. The second criteria was completion of assignments which meant that since they kept a running list of the assignments they had or hadn't completed during the quarter and that the grade assigned did not matter, it was the actual completion of the assignment that mattered. When we discussed my potential veto power, students responded that if I did not agree with the grade they'd assigned themselves that we would conference and try to come to a resolution. And so, they wrote me their second letter--what grades they thought they each deserved (see Table 1 for the grades the students thought they deserved compared to the grades I thought they deserved).

College: Buy-In was Difficult

Giving college students an opportunity to self-assign grades is an effective model for how to empower young people. Although I do not feel that I am the best judge of my learning, only I know how much effort I put into the semester. I think I'll try this with my own students. -Susi, college student

Although I knew asking my university students to assign themselves grades was risky, my education students appeared relieved when I first asked them to give themselves grades as I knew that much was demanded of them in their teacher education courses. Many of them smiled at the mention of the task while a couple of them who had been hypercritical from the get-go said, "What a waste of time. Why did we even put all this effort in?" This remark affirmed the rift in education between non-student centered pedagogy and one that is student centered. I recognized herein the pregnant importance of generating an expansive view on the significance of liberatory teaching and assessment.

I followed the same steps with these students as I had done with my high school students in the AP course. When I asked them what a grade means to them, responses also varied. Similar to my high school students, one student commented, "Grades tell me how much I have learned as it meets your expectations." Another student remarked, "Grades are a bunch of bullshit and they only separate the haves from the have-nots." A third student remarked, "Grades tell me the level at which I am working and something I have great pride in."

I then asked them on which criteria they should be evaluated and almost all of them responded by referencing the criteria and course requirements in the syllabus: attendance & participation (10%), written pedagogy (15%), homework and in-class assignments (10%), reflexive journal (20%), final evaluation and reflection on pedagogy (15%), and final examination (30%). The course requirements included: attend class regularly and participate fully in oral and written in-class activities, fulfill the requirements of the written pedagogy, keep up with weekly chapter readings in the reader and the course syllabus, fulfill the requirements of the reflexive journal, fulfill the

requirements of the final evaluation and reflection upon your teaching pedagogy, and fulfill the requirements of the final exam.

Students kept the discussion going for over an hour about whether or not what I had asked of them was an accurate measure of their learning. I actually sat back and took notes and watched these education students grapple with what experienced teacher educators still struggle with. Students readily took each other on with definitions of pedagogy, with diverse beliefs around assessment and what it means to really complete an assignment. After some time, they narrowed their decision to three criteria upon which they wanted to be evaluated: attendance, completion of assignments, and development of pedagogy. A spokesperson was chosen for each of the criteria to explain their rationales. Mark, a leader in the cohort, explained that students were expected to show up to class otherwise they would miss vital material. Nina, a no-nonsense student, shared that assignments were designed to highlight learning essential material for use in their own teaching. Lastly, Miguel, a respected and hard working peer, shared that the class decided that since developing a pedagogy is critical to their practice as teachers, that they wanted to be assessed on improvement, enlightenment, and comprehension of texts, concepts, theories and reflexivity. I challenged them to a question by posing, “How can I assess you on improvement when you are each truly the only ones who know how far you’ve come in this class?” After some discussion it was decided that their pedagogies would be evaluated on their own internal assessment of learning and comprehension. And so, they wrote their letters--what they thought they each deserved.

Student Reflections

Table 1: Discrepancies between average grades I gave and student self-assessment.

High School Students in AP Course		University Education Students	
Scores I assigned n=30	High School Students’ Self-assessment	Scores I assigned n=50	University Students’ Self-assessment
A- 10	A- 6	A- 12	A- 6
B- 15	B- 22	B- 36	B- 40
C- 5	C- 2	C- 2	C- 4

Table 1 indicates the discrepancies between the grades I gave the students and their own assessment of what grade they thought they deserved indicated in their letters. There was little difference between high school and college feedback in the letters. However, what was most striking was the honest effort that students appeared to put forth. For the most part, the grades that students assigned themselves were lower than the grades I had previously recorded for them. In those instances, I met with students to discuss their self-reflections and reached an agreement that suited both of us. I suspect that my disposition about grading was more lenient than theirs and that I had an internalized sense about outcomes they lacked. But even with that background knowledge, I suspect that much of what we teach and expect students to learn in the given disciplines reflects a social construction of knowledge. With that in mind, I strive to be more equitable and inflate grades because I recognize that we lack parity on many social, demographic, gendered,

cultural, and linguistic levels. The shared process of grading gave students a sense of power and an awareness about what criteria, negotiation, and accountability can mean to their lives. Because the grades I gave were often higher than how they self-assessed, the discrepancy between our scores became a teaching tool to unpack expectations and norms about assessment in the classroom.

All students wrote me letters. Table 1 indicates that the responses divided unevenly across both the high school and college classes although there was a similar spilt of numbers at each teaching level. Responses fell into several taxonomies about what it was like to self-assign a grade: awesome (15), hard (9), easy (11), unique (10), pressured (7), tempted to lie (5), uneasy (7), and several wanted me to tell them what I thought (21). One high school student who thought she should earn an “A” wrote: “I think it was a little weird to be giving myself a grade, and I was sort of trying at first to be modest, but then I just put what I honestly thought I deserved. I also think I’ll be able to approach other situations that have been difficult.” Another high school student who was uncertain about what to give himself wrote, “I do not believe I can accurately judge myself, as I probably have a bias in my process. I will either judge myself too harshly or not harshly enough.” A college student responded:

Although I believe that I can be more critical than a teacher that is not inside me, to grade myself I feel that I will still need support of someone who knows more than I do. But grading myself takes pressure off of doing well for the instructor and puts more pressure on working harder for me.

One of the college students wrote in her letter about her development of pedagogy:

This one is hard. I don’t feel I can accurately judge myself on this until I have the opportunity to put it into practice. But I have been thoughtful, done my journal entries, been willing to assess and reassess myself, been open to embracing others’ ideas and suggestions that can help transform my praxis. I feel that I could have done more outside research to inform my theoretical basis. I am grateful that I had this opportunity to self-assign a grade as it has given me confidence in how to take the steps towards something I want to resolve. I think I deserve an “A.”

The college student just quoted (who gave herself an A) actually earned a “B” in the class. It wasn’t that she had a distorted understanding about the expectations of the class or in her lack of meeting the criteria, it was that her ideas never seemed to include the qualifiers that we often see in well-researched materials (which is reinforcing a social construction about a “correct and agreed” upon way to share knowledge). On one hand, she did meet the criteria that her classmates agreed upon, and on the other hand, her pedagogy *lacked the development* that many of her peers experienced. That gap does not minimize her growth, but it does speak to how we can measure students against their own growth and where they are when we walk into the classroom. In fact, in all cases where students self-assigned grades that were lower than what I gave them, I found this to be the most common reason for the discrepancy. This begets a deeper issue of whether we should assess students based on individual growth-- which is embedded within cultural

and linguistic backgrounds, as well as access to certain forms of privileges? Or, do we assess as we always have--based on a collective criteria--which may not necessarily take into account cultural, linguistic and privileged backgrounds? Is it fair to measure student against students when no two students have ever had exact experiences? The most difficult part in this adjudication process was to offer a reason for assigning them a grade that was lower than what they self-assigned and I found myself falling back on some hypocritical thinking when it came down to the reasons-- in the end, it seemed almost impossible to stray from what we know to be the agreed upon venerable standards that have been created to establish set norms and criteria without taking into account students' backgrounds. I admit my own struggle here to be totally fair, when in fact, the class agreed that their pedagogies would be self-assessed based on growth and yet I critiqued them for lacking in qualifiers.

Although some students struggled with this process, the act of self-assessment sent messages to them. Many noted in their responses that had they been informed about grading themselves from the beginning of the year, their self-direction and motivation would have likely increased. Students also recognized that they do have agency in the classroom and that that agency empowered them to understand its efficacy for other contexts of negotiation. They also shared an awareness of how school can give, or at least reinforces a subservient status to youth, and how shifting the dynamic between youth and adult can impart a sense of agency in their lives outside of school. This agency, they finally understood, challenges dominant paradigms of power and thereby challenges the status quo.

Resistance to Liberatory Assessment

By no means is a liberatory assessment going to be effective in any classroom let alone amongst colleagues whose beliefs about teaching are strictly merit based. In fact in looking back on this research with my students, most seemed quite uncomfortable with assigning themselves grades. I speculate that this stems from several reasons about compulsory schooling. Students, from an early age, are trained to accept teacher feedback as omniscient and thereby become dependent on their assessment of what is considered right and wrong. The longer students have remained in a meritocracy, the more accustomed they become to this dynamic. Secondly, students tend not to be invited into the assessment process because of the perception that they lack expertise over content and are therefore poor judges over their own learning. It's been my experience that when students are invited into the process of self-assessment, and have an understanding that their input is key to the final outcome, it shifts both the dynamic of the classroom as well as opens up a space for critical dialogue around what is valued in any given assignment. However, this can be problematic when first introduced as students have not been taught nor do they necessarily have the tools to be experts over their own learning. Third, our society imparts a dominant practice based on external input as a means to validate individuals. As such, individuals tend to look to others for validation and may be bereft of skills that can help empower them internally. Lastly, some teachers have been taught to "manufacture" students (Apple, 2000) who serve dominant culture while others have been taught to challenge this ideology. Those who have embraced a "manufacturing" or

monological practice perpetuate the severing of students' bodies from their minds as they become passive recipients of knowledge and victims of teacher-assigned grades.

Although many students welcomed the opportunity to self-assign grades and express, "I liked having voice over my own grade," for the most part, most felt uncomfortable doing so. Perhaps this discomfort stems from the tradition in which students are schooled--to receive teacher-generated grades. Perhaps, it also stems from the notion that students are not schooled to have agency or voice in the classroom, and fear a potential flare-up when challenging a teacher on a grade. Even so, many students willingly accept teacher-assigned grades. On this, one student wrote:

I felt that grading myself was a difficult task. I didn't always know if I was grading myself fair or reasonably. At some times I thought I was grading myself too high and missing some of my mistakes, making my grade higher than it should be. I would have just preferred that the teacher would have told me what I earned.

This student's response presents the consummate issue that many students had; that they were not qualified to assess themselves. While this perspective is quite valid, it begets a deeper issue on power differentials in the classroom. Assessment is power and how we do the assessment sustains the dynamic wherein students lack agency and are forced to turn to adults for feedback about what is knowledge and who generates knowledge (Apple, 2000). If we invited students to challenge this traditional dynamic of assessment, then perhaps we might shift some dynamics in society about critical reflection. However, to keep students in such a dynamic is to marginalize potentially emerging ideas that have validity and have the potential to shift dynamics in schooling. Obviously, we are far from being ready for such change.

It was also interesting that most of my students graded themselves more critically than I would have. When I compared teacher-generated scores to self-assigned scores there was typically a discrepancy between the two. It seems that self-critique is a dimension of research and can help liberatory pedagogists understand how to develop assessment practices that align with particular implementations of pedagogy.

Retrospect and Validity

Throughout the process of collaborating with my students on self-assigning grades, I learned valuable lessons that have informed my own praxis about assessment. I recognized some flaws in my actions which if recognized earlier would have likely fostered greater buy-in and have led to greater student benefits. In retrospect, I should have told students from the beginning of the semester that they would be invited to participate in grading themselves and then I should have developed individualized learning plans. Specifically at the secondary level, I would have assessed their strengths and weaknesses in reading and writing as they aligned with state and national grade level standards and competencies. At the university level, I would have spent more time developing a critical consciousness around how power dynamics manifest in schools and youth disenfranchisement—about which most of my students lacked awareness. For both levels, I would have asked them what they hoped to learn for themselves, what they

wanted to improve, what they wanted to take from the course, what they needed from me, and then supported them in achieving those outcomes.

I also turned to several colleagues at each school site to see if they would have their own students participate in self-assessment. All but one colleague (at the university) found it too threatening (to the power structure) although several agreed that it was an “innovative” idea. No one particular person admonished me not to do it, rather, *should I be challenged*, I was directed to carefully look at how NCTE standards aligned with why I wanted to have students self-assess. Based on my colleagues’ responses, I deduced that we have a long way to go before we are ready to truly embody liberatory pedagogy.

Another issue that arose is the split between effort versus merit. If effort is something we may value and merit is the “normalized” outcome, is it possible to reward effort equally when students come from such varied demographics? Perhaps we might consider putting more emphasis on what effort means and making that a standard in our classrooms and infuse effort with the venerable standards we are expected to uphold. Although we live in a merit-driven society, that should not preclude splicing elements of standards into an effort-based curriculum. We might need to reflect on how to unveil effort and level it to the degree possible in our classrooms. We also might want to consider how our own classrooms straddle the divide between effort and merit, dialogue and invite our students to both the positives and negatives of each idea, and let them work with us to unpack the deeper layers.

With the continuance of *No Child Left Behind*, some might argue against liberatory assessment practices because it may not be perceived as valid to our space-time. In fact, such practices may be all together out of synch with this space-time. However, when we embrace a liberatory pedagogy, if we do not align our assessment practices with such practices, then we perpetuate the mind/body split and ill-prepare students with an understanding of their imminent power to transform the worlds in which they engage. A student who embodies the benefits of liberatory pedagogy has great potential to act on and transform dynamics of power that sustain dominant culture. For an educator to be half of a liberatory pedagogue is to further feed the system of education that survives on mechanizing and dehumanizing it’s recipients. Learning how to blend assessment to pedagogy is to provide an authentic educational experience.

Assessment as a Genre Promoting Social Action

According to Bazerman (1997), genre in literary study can frame social relations and social action: “The recognition of genre typifies possible social intentions and actions, as one realizes a letter of complaint is a possible response to some commercial injustice” (p.21). Therefore, genre studies can be used to empower voices of students. Genres can act as frames to both guide and shape the social interactional work of participants or learners and give shape to social actions through the ways they interpret the world (Bazerman, 1997; Hicks, 1997). Since genres are frames for social action, if we situate liberatory assessment as a genre, it has the potential to act as a catalyst for social action and transformation. Acted upon, liberatory assessment can be a tool that is used by students to act upon the world in order to transform it.

If we consider liberatory assessment as a genre for social action, I ask, Can grades ever be liberatory? Is it even possible when students are entrenched in a system that

expects them to live up to the standards and outcomes necessary for meeting national assessments? If we answer that a grade can never truly be liberatory, then we must rethink our beliefs and practices around assessment and seek to push the boundaries of what a grade means and how we grade (Bartholomae, 1980). This means that we can have discussions with our students and colleagues about national assessments and state tests in order to bring awareness to this contradiction in school achievement. While there are outcomes that teachers and instructors have no control over, teaching students about what exams mean as part of an agenda promoting meritocracy can help them think critically about what it is they want to learn. So although our hands may be tied to some degree, that does not prevent us from instilling within our students the ability to deconstruct the educational system in which they are entrenched and from teaching them to work from within for self-liberation. Jessica, a high school student's statement epitomizes what self-assessment can do for the learner:

Giving myself a grade was an empowering process which made me feel as if my education was in my own hands, rather than having someone else decide how much I have learned and grown. I care more about pleasing myself in terms of scholastics than someone else, and if I can live up to my own expectations, I will be more fulfilled than if I were living up to someone else's.

Liberatory Assessment

We can now surmise a definition of liberatory assessment as the practice of assessment that invites students to become judges over their learning, that enters both teacher and student into a shared and more "equitable" dynamic of the dialogical (Freire, 1970)--a sharing of ideas in order to make meaning of something. Based on the findings from this study, I offer several recommendations that can foster liberatory assessment:

- Balance recommendations with commendations on all assignment feedback.
- Consider cultural schemata when evaluating assignments.
- Consider that what a student does or doesn't do is not error but rather is a developmental stage of the learner.
- Provide detailed comments as much as possible and look at skill and comprehension improvement over time.
- Individualize assignments as much as possible and develop an individualized learning chart with the student-- then develop assessments with the students.
- Periodically invite students to write progress reports on what and how they are growing in relation to their learning chart and ask them what they want to continue to become more adept at in individual or group conferences.
- Accentuate your curriculum with multiple opportunities for self-reflection.
- Teach the importance of internal validation. This can be approached through existential literature, films, poetry, short stories, philosophers, artists, and activities.
- Provide assignment choices that promote self-direction, meld the body to the mind, foster inner-motivation, and invite students to develop the assessments along with the instructor.

Future studies need to be conducted on liberatory assessment as a genre. We should examine the dialogical relationship between the teacher and the student as it intersects with the development of and the attributes of assignments and how that relates to assessment practices. Recognizing heuristically the intersectionality between the assignment development and the assessment is critical to meeting student needs. A further study might also examine the socialization and the cultural gentrification of assessment and the importance of reconsidering how to resocialize students' and teachers' beliefs about assessment. More importantly though, is a return to a spiritual center inside all of us where we learn to believe in and validate our own learning and whereby internal validation trumps the external (Palmer, 1998).

Liberatory assessment as a genre frames student awareness and consciousness and brings attention to it in the classroom. To dedicate time and attention to teaching students about assessment and to place value on it in the classroom, fosters a sense of its importance and its potential for student empowerment. I cannot always tell if I am making a difference, or am enacting an entirely liberatory pedagogy, but I do hope that students leave my classroom with a sense that they have power, and with that power comes responsibility to not misuse that power. I challenge all educators who value a liberatory pedagogy to align it to their assessment practices. While I make the shift in my praxis, it may be too much to assume responsibility for changing my students' and peers' attitudes toward grading. It will take many more conversations, research, and a shift in our collective thinking about youth being effective judges over their learning before we can share the assessment process with them. More importantly though, we must encourage the development of people who are able to make moral decisions about right and wrong and who do not perpetuate dynamics that lead to the abuse of power. If not carefully discussed, self-assessment could backfire and students could abuse the system, but if we work with them to think about how their actions can challenge dominant hierarchies of power, it may lead them to make decisions that are about the common good. Therefore, by talking about abuses of power, to explore abuses of power, and to revisit how "absolute power, corrupts absolutely" (Lord Acton), we invite them to become agents of change.

I close with Bartholomae (1980) whose research on writing assessment may provide some clues for us as we attempt to rethink assessment practices. He suggests that what is often perceived as error by a teacher is in fact not error, but a byproduct of cultural schemata, or simply a miscue. Perhaps, more importantly about Bartholomae's research is that he suggests errors provide insights about the writer's language and culture. As we shift our beliefs to reconsider student work as an offering that provides insight about learning as a "byproduct of cultural schemata," then perhaps we may ease the reins on what materials and how we deem materials should be assessed; and then can begin to foster a shift with our students that enables the body and the mind to work synchronistically towards liberatory assessment. As we make this shift from the "I learn for you," to the existential "I learn for me; I am responsible for my own acts; I can make a difference," we support the activation of both the body and mind of the learner and empower them to help transform assessment practices.

Acknowledgments:

I want to thank my dear friend Amanda Godley from the University of Pittsburgh for robust discussions during our buddy writing time and for pushing me in my thinking about self-reflection. I also thank the initial reviewers of this manuscript for their suggestions on revision.

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