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MB Speaks

VOICE OF THE MANITOBA SOCIAL SCIENCE TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

Beyond the Grading Fetish: Reimagining Assessment Practices

Assessment as Compassion: Aligning Purpose and Practice to Support Wellbeing

An Exploration of Teacher Assessment Identity Using the Arts

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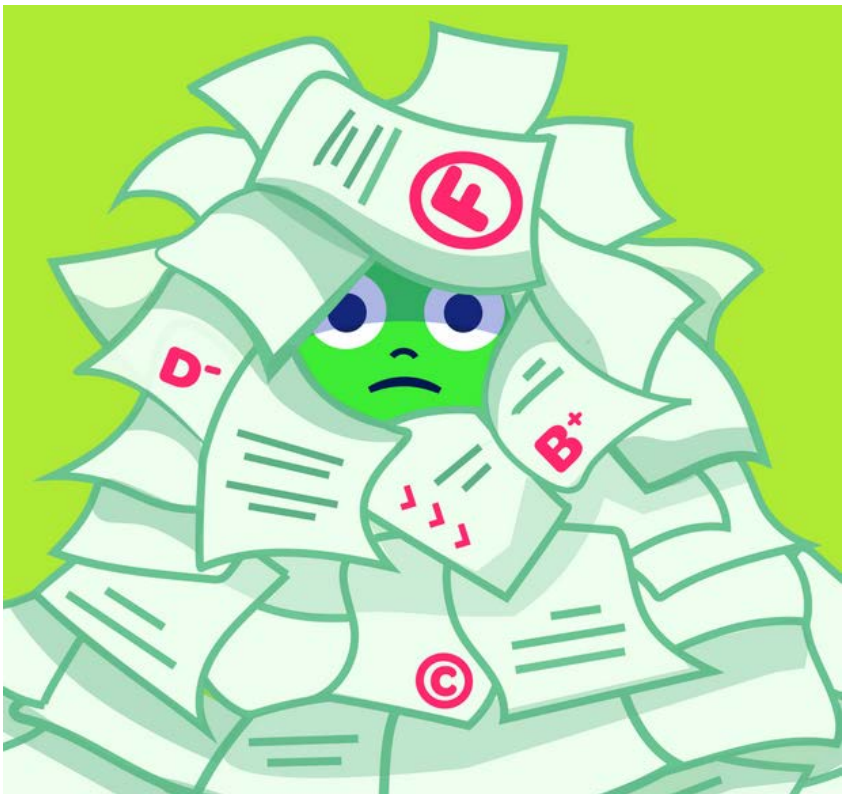

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President's Message

My name is Angela Kuhnle and I am excited to introduce myself to you as the new President of MSSTA. I am a Grade 3/4 teacher at Highbury School in Louis Riel School Division, and while my background is in Social Sciences, I teach all subject areas. I have been with MSSTA since the 2013-2014 school year and have held several different roles on the executive, with my first official role being Early Years Representative – a role that has always been very important to me. Being an Early Years teacher on an executive where the majority of members are Senior Years teachers definitely gives me the opportunity to peek into a world I know very little about, while also working very hard to ensure that the generalist teachers in the Early and Middle Years have their voices heard and their Social Sciences needs met!

In addition to our annual fall conference, MSSTA hosts and co-hosts PD and outreach opportunities for our members throughout the year. So far this year we have had two evening events and are in the midst of planning our annual spring trivia night! In February we paired with Social Studies Saskatchewan and co-hosted a documentary screening of the film *Not About Me* followed by a live virtual Q&A session with Child & Family Advocate Morgan Weinberg, the subject of the documentary, and Kelly Milner, the Director. We also helped organize an event at The Leaf, hosted by ERIM, where members were able to explore the new attraction, enjoy dinner and engage in conversations about Education Against Extremism and Radicalization, led by keynote Dr. Barbara Perry. The MSSTA executive truly enjoy planning events like these, where we bring Social Sciences teachers together to discuss important issues, explore new resources and access quality professional development in our field. I am honoured to be serving as your President and look forward to connecting with MSSTA members throughout the year at in-person and virtual events, and of course through our journal, MB Speaks!

In this issue of MB Speaks, we are exploring assessment in the social sciences, examining the implications of current assessment practices on student learning, and considering opportunities to bring students into the assessment process. Assessment is an essential part of teaching and learning; it informs my practice every single day, but I am certainly no expert in this area. As I read the nine exceptionally well-written articles in this issue, I reflected on my own perspectives of assessment. I thought about what has worked (or not worked) for me in the past, and considered how I could transfer some of the practical ideas the authors shared into my own setting with my students. I'll be honest, when I finished reading, I felt that I had a lot more questions than answers about where to go from here, but that is a sign of true reflection!

And so with that, I am very happy to share with you this issue of MB Speaks! As usual, you will find that the journal contains a diverse range of content that targets practice, pedagogy, and professional development. I hope these articles inspire you to reflect on your assessment practices, and that they leave you asking the right questions about what the assessment process could look like for you and your students going forward!

Sincerely,

Angela Kuhnle

The Tensions Surrounding Effective Assessment

-JENNA L. BAKER

When I think of assessment in Manitoba schools, my first thought goes to the tensions that persist surrounding the purpose, effectiveness and administration of assessment in our classrooms. Over the years, assessment has drifted from its pedagogical purpose--to further students' learning paths, to allow for success for all learners, and to instill Global Competencies- to one of educator accountability for stakeholder appeasement. Assessment, in many ways, has shifted from '*what is working for this child'* to '*is this teacher working'?* Due to this shift, educators feel undervalued and de-professionalized, particularly as they are expected to administer assessments that do not align with current theories in education. Moreover, in the name of data collection and accountability, these standardized, government-mandated assessments position our most vulnerable students as 'unsuccessful'. The educational and economic climate in our Province right now is ripe for tensions to be at the forefront. Govaerts et al. (2019) state that, "tensions seem to be even more salient in times of scarcity (increasing demands for high-quality performance while reducing costs) and plurality (e.g. multiple perspectives on the 'what' and 'how' in education reform)" (p.65). When we look at the curriculum and assessment as a working document that reflects the societal times in which it is positioned, we can gather an understanding of where engrained practices came from and it will better help us to question their continued purpose.

Historical Approaches to Teaching and Assessment

In order to better understand where the tensions originate, we have to look back at the history of Educational Ideologies in Canada and how social constructs and norms dictated pedagogy at the time. At the turn of the nineteenth century, education in Canada was still incredibly elitist, meaning primarily wealthy, white males were receiving any education beyond primary levels, preparing for professions in their adult lives. This was the time of Academic Rationalism; teacher-focused, with the role of student as we know

them, were considered the ideal way of determining a pupil's success.

At the end of the 1920's and into the 1930's schools saw a boom in student enrollment due to unemployment rates from the economic recession. To cope with the influx of learners from various backgrounds, schools adopted the assembly line approach to mass production, I mean education, referred to as the Social Efficiency Ideology. In this model, the teacher's job is to teach students about the skills needed for the workplace to boost economic needs.

Neither of these Ideologies considered the needs or interests of the learner and the collection of data "free of teacher-bias" was still considered the gold standard (standardized, government tests). Numerical data was used by stakeholders to maintain a "culture of excellence" and to include "the 'best-performing' individuals for later admissions decisions" (Govaerts et al., p. 69). Soon students who were deemed more academically inclined were streamed to schools that continued to teach in the Academic Rationalist way, while students who did not meet the standards were sent to technical or vocational schools. These two ideologies are deeply rooted in our current education system; many educators and stakeholders' own schooling journeys were deeply rooted in this deficit-based assessment environment, where Educators often feel the pressures to teach to the test, instead of an exploration of curricula.

During the enlightenment era of the 1960's and 1970's, Educators began to push back and we see the birth of The Learner-Centred Ideology; a progressive and radical idea that recognized children who had previously been universalized and placed in uniform rows, each had their own talents, questions, experiences and needs. This strength-based approach is a breath of fresh air for the majority of our students who don't fit the sitting in rows and taking notes crowd. Fortunately, this may sound familiar to Social Studies teachers today who incorporate Inquiry Projects, co-constructed curricula and rubrics, and feedback-based assessments (Formative Assessments) as their pedagogical framework.

Finally, in relatively modern times, we see educators inviting students to be active participants in societal change. This practice is largely influenced by Educational activists and philosophers, such as Paulo Freire. Through these theorists and pedagogues, The Social Reconstructionist Ideology emerges. Modern Educators who adhere to this pedagogical approach see Government-run or mandated assessments as a continued oppressive system meant to maintain the status-quo of the dominant [White], capitalistic [neoliberal] society (Assessor, 2011, in Shiro, 2013).

In response to his research on International Large Scale Assessments (primarily PISA), assessment scholar, Harvey Goldstein (2017) wrote that "the use of assessment as a form of social control ought to be one of the most important concerns of assessment professionals." (p. 391). Educators devoted to Social Reconstructionism "believe that the only valid assessments are those made under real-world circumstances" (Shiro, p. 192). In other-words, Social Reconstructionists ask: did change occur for the common good based on my actions/social justice plan/petition/essay to a practitioner's journal?

Looking at the history of Education, Educator Ideology, stakeholder experience and the political landscape, it is clear that the social and historical context has a large influence on pedagogy/assessment. It is important that educators and policy makers recognize these influences so that research and literature in education is mobilizing assessment practices, rather than outside social, political and cultural influences. Through these shifting ideological periods, the literature on assessment has advanced positions on the effectiveness of summative versus formative assessment practices. Moreover, this literature has offered a way to work through these tensions to ensure the best possible practice for all our students.

Summative versus Formative Assessment in Literature

As we know, summative assessment is often referred to in the same breath as Assessment *of* Learning and is meant to be the culmination of a student's demonstrated outcomes. Typically, this is administered through tests that result in a numerical value. Proponents of traditional mandated tests tote the lack of opportunity for teacher or test administrator bias, as all the questions and answers are the same. Moreover, often in standardized assessments, the students remain anonymous until the end of the marking session. Tensions arise from this form of high-stakes assessment regarding: the use and purpose of the data collected, especially by outside parties; the limited lens that tests provide into student achievement and teacher ability; and the lack of opportunity for success for our students with varying and diverse learning needs (Harlen & Deakin Crick, 2002 in Harlen, 2005).

Formative assessment is meant to inform the educator of student progress towards their learning target or goal. In this way, assessment serves as a guide for learning. As such, formative assessment is often referred to as Assessment for/as Learning. Overwhelmingly, studies show greater success in student achievement, academic attainment, autonomy

and teacher engagement when formative assessment is used to guide practice (Davies et al., 2014; Atjonen, 2014; Morton et al., 2021; Urrieta, 2007; Harlen, 2005). The literature also notes the importance of co-constructed criteria and rubrics, clear goal setting, continuous feedback from peers as well as student self-reflection and teacher conferencing. The collection of evidence found during these informal assessments, "specifically … any non-testing assessments" (Atjonen, p. 244), are used to guide next steps in a student's learning path, which may be different for each learner depending on their entry points, goals and interests. Tensions arise with this feedback-based assessment when stakeholders show concern with potential teacher bias (Atjonen, 2014; Harlen, 2005). Teachers also have concerns with the time required to enact this practice, particularly as class sizes grow (Atjonen, 2014; Harlen, 2005). Time is especially a concern when you feel the pressure to cover a large curriculum, and to meet the mandated, standardized testing goals. Also, in my professional experience, teachers stress a disjointed feeling when having to assign a numerical value to formative assessment, which to its core should be used for scholarly guidance versus social designation.

Steps for Solutions

The tensions surrounding effective assessment, and the pressures that come with it, are an ongoing debate amongst practicing educational colleagues, within schools, school boards and the public sphere, and not one that I pretend to have the solution for. However, in my brief literature review, the research points to a balanced approach of assessment, the use of both formative and summative assessment to inform teaching and learning practice (Harlen, 2005; Govaerts et al., 2019; Davies et al., 2014). The general consensus in the literature I examined states that '[i]n order for assessment to have a formative purpose it is necessary to be able to report not only the students' final performance, but also what processes students need to improve in order to raise their performance (Harlen, 2005, p. 217). In this way, summative assessment has a place, and that place is after assessment for/as learning. There is no product without process.

In order to truly become effective in their formative assessment, Harlen (2005) rightly prioritizes educator autonomy against external pressures on educators to teach to the test. How do we go about this? Studies done in polarity thinking (Govaerts et al. 2019) describe the importance of transforming our thought process from assessment as a problem to be solved, which they argue fails to sustainability address the issue, to a 'both-and' mindset (p. 66). Literature supports using the place where tension lies as a working place for building common knowledge (Edwards, 2011) and co-constructing a figured world (Holland et al.,

1998 in Urrieta, 2007). It may look something like this--Bring all players to the table- educators, administrators, directors and stakeholders- but with no power hierarchy to perpetuate struggles amongst those gathered. Our students and their diverse learning needs should be centered at this table, rather than assessment of educator performance based on student outcomes. When we turn our attention to the diverse needs of our students, we are more likely to recognize that these differences need to be represented in our assessment. Moreover, educator voice is heard and valued as the experts in the field and stakeholders are heard as continued advocates for the children.

Many of us know the question from students when we assign almost anything, “Is this for marks?” This causes further questions for educators on how do we motivate our students without number or letter grades on major assignments? When asked this, I think of my own children, still in primary, who when they are asked to draw a snowman, their first question is “*can they have a pink top hat*?” and they begin their task with excitement (most of the time). While the concept of motivation is a field of study all on its own, I am left wondering when did our older students lose the joy and pleasure that learning is meant to be? Modern education is meant to create a life-long love of learning, not an outdated ranking system that prioritizes opportunity forsome over others. Education is a journey, not an end result.

Let’s fix this together.

About the Author

Jenna L. Baker teaches grade 7 & 8 English and Social Studies at David Livingstone Community School in Winnipeg School Division. She is currently completing her Graduate Studies at the University of Manitoba with a focus on Curriculum, Assessment and Implementation with a focus on equity and representation. The rest of her time is spent with her young family, reading, and enjoying the outdoors.

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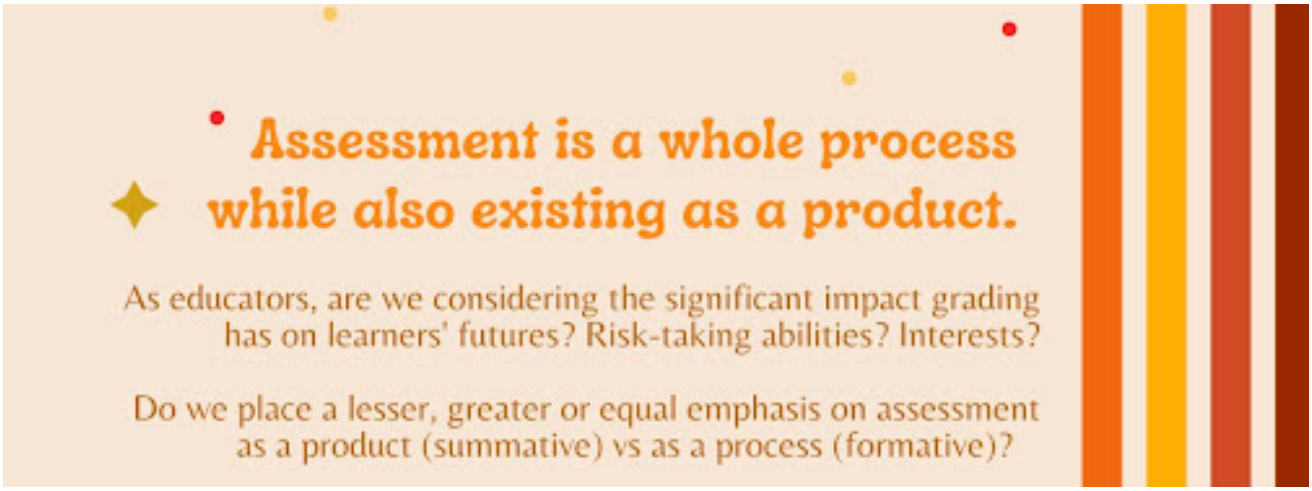
This Little Student Went to Market: Report Cards and the Neoliberal Agenda

-KATHRYN LAFRAMBOISE

If you attended school in Canada within the last 50 years, you have likely received a report card as a student. Even hearing the words “report card” is enough to send shivers down the spine. It is a document that elicits a common anxiety amongst teachers, students, and parents alike. Do the marks you have assigned accurately reflect a demonstration of knowledge? Will these marks make your parents happy or will you be in trouble? Did your child perform well enough? In Manitoba, most children receive the same structure of a report card, some kind of grade like a numerical mark, letter or percentage accompanied with a comment. Most children face the same fate of being compared to the standards of their grade level, year after year, as this document is a normalized piece of communication within our education system. We can preach “don’t compare yourself to others”, but report cards are an absolute reflection of our societal value of comparison. These report cards become transcripts that determine students’ futures based on who is deemed the “best”. However, “best” is determined by who performs well within the current system.

From the earliest years of kindergarten, students are hierarchically organized with letters or numbers that supposedly reflect their understanding, skill, and performance. We are thoroughly entrenched within this system, sending report cards into the arms of families at least two to three times a year, every year, starting in kindergarten. But, tradition should never be a reason for maintaining misguided practices.



Same Old Same Old

Our societal comfort with reducing and delineating students by numerical values, as though our students are commodities, is alarming--because it happens in the first place; because it is normalized; and, because it continues despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary (Schuetz, 1989). We have replicated a market system, where those students who "perform best" are "worth the most". We are trained in current society to look for value in numbers; we live for quantifiable data (Tuck, 2013). Receiving the best grade is seen as an award, an achievement. That achievement unlocks new levels, "better" future options, as if our current society is a twisted video game. Many families understand this wholeheartedly, and as a classroom teacher, I have been on the receiving end of many parents who panic and want their child to receive higher grades, as "their future depends on it". But, what if our future depended less on individualism and competition, and more on learning and community. As a whole, report cards value one kind of knowledge, regulated forms of expression, and 'sameness'.

Challenging Harmful Systems

As a classroom teacher, I spend an incredible amount of time deconditioning students and families regarding grades. I also work to center learning rather than grading. To do this, I spend my time giving instant feedback, holding open learning discussions, and creating next steps *with* students. I also work to break down these constructs at a theoretical level for my students and their caregivers. And still, this work to center students and learning can be undermined with a shiny, mandatory mark that I am obliged to hand out every term. This is truly a heart-sinking moment. Report cards erase the work individual teachers do to help dismantle these oppressive systems. All of that progress to center learning is undermined by a numerical value.

Report cards are a gateway and validation of

other standardized practices, like tests. Alongside report cards, other high-stakes standardized approaches are presumed to be indicators of student (and teacher) performance. However, when a student's performance on standardized tests and reports are seen to represent learning , “teaching to the test” rather than learning becomes the priority. This neoliberal landscape encourages us to believe that if we cannot quantify something, measure it, it is not worth our time (or money). Perhaps the most unsettling aspect of this is that the students–children–are being raised with these ideals and values from the start. They have come to believe that ranking and reward are natural, when grades are an imposition on learning. Every report card sporting a grade contributes to the understanding that grades are common sense, natural, when they are anything but.

Conclusion

As long as our society continues to assume value and worth in report cards and grades, we uphold settler colonialism through the focus on the measurement and quantification of learning (Tuck, 2013). We need to recognize the disconnect between our efforts to decolonize education and maintaining grading systems. It is disingenuous to maintain this system while claiming to invite varied ways of knowing and being into our classrooms. The system of grading and report cards ensures the primacy and legitimation of a single knowledge system and way of being in the world. We can communicate student progress without measurement and quantification, through the acceptance of student strengths, gifts and differences.

About the Author

Kathryn Laframboise is a middle school educator in the Seven Oaks School Division. She is a passionate advocate for fair assessment and learning opportunities. When Kathryn is not with her school community, she is focused on sustainably raising a mixed fibre flock, rescue horses, and birds. Her love of people, animals, and social justice has led her to Child-Centered Animal-Assisted Therapy certifications. Kathryn is currently a graduate student with the University of Manitoba studying the consequences of grading.

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My Assessment Struggle

-KEVIN LOPUCK

This is going to be a very raw and heartfelt account of my struggle with assessment. As a teacher with 20+ years of experience, I am comfortable stating that I am uncomfortable with my assessment practices.

For a very long time, I thought that testing was a true indicator of whether or not a student knew what I wanted them to know. Sure, there were all sorts of other assignments and projects, but the "real" indicator of a student's knowledge was the all-powerful unit test or exam – that's when you really found out whether or not a student knew what they needed to know! For years, in my history classes, I used to pride myself on running Jeopardy review sessions prior to unit tests and beam with pride when my students stayed late prior to exams to have a pizza party study session using my exam review sheet of significant dates, terms and events.
But that's all changed.

HOW DID MY THINKING ON ASSESSMENT CHANGE?

Philosophically, I now understand that there are better ways of knowing or measuring what a student knows. Four major changes:

(1) KNOWLEDGE

As a social studies educator, I view history as an interpretation of the past. That does not mean that there is no truth, that just means that there are varied and valid interpretations of the past. Students need to learn to evaluate evidence and differing perspectives in order to consider their own interpretations. Whereas my previous form of assessment required students accept a single interpretation of the past, I now recognize that I should assess how students can interpret and employ evidence. I should assess on historical thinking rather than historical memorization.

(2) UNDERSTANDING

The world is changing, and technological advances mean that we don't necessarily need to rely on rote memorization anymore--if we ever did. After all, memorization is not an indicator of understanding. Parroting memorized text is not understanding. If someone can forget something in a week, they

never really understood it. The ability to use historical details, to place them in connection with other events, and to recognize their impact on the current context, is understanding.

(3) SKILLS

Previously, all I could think about in my practice was covering content. I needed to make sure I covered every last detail of the curriculum and that students knew every name, date, place, and event. Now, however, by focusing on developing skills like the historical thinking concepts, critical thinking skills, and the ability to have constructive and democratic dialogue, I enable my students to better access the content but also take with them, not only the big picture thinking that is so important, but skills that they can apply to other contexts going forward. After all, the curriculum includes knowledge, values and skills. Covering only knowledge/content only is privileging one element of the curriculum, and ignores that you can learn content while engaging skills.

(4) STUDENT LEARNING

I once thought that having students cram for quizzes, tests, and exams was beneficial, that rote memorization was equivalent to good scholarship. I now vociferously disagree with that ideal. Such methods are disingenuous and not indicative of student learning. The stresscaused by such high stakes testing can be harmful to a student's well-being, and does not create the conditions for students to demonstrate their learning. The only thing high stakes summative assessments measure is a student's ability to perform under pressure--but that is not the skill I am teaching, so it would be unfair to assess that. But the question remains, how do we best assess our students' learning?

HOW DO I ASSESS WITHIN THIS NEW PHILOSOPHY?

Since piloting the Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability curriculum in 2011, I have varied my assessment practices greatly. As a course based in inquiry, action, and 10 enduring understandings (EU), I felt there was a lot of leeway as to what assessment methods to choose. But still, I fell back on older methods, quizzes and tests and projects with detailed rubrics. There was a disconnect between how I viewed legitimate assessment, and my classroom assessment practice. My assessment practice still privileged particular skills (writing) and did not align with the curriculum (which encourages student action, dialogue and deliberation) or my own beliefs about assessment (it privileged product over process and learning). Here is a fictionalized example of two types students in the same class:

WHAT DO THESE TWO STUDENTS REVEAL ABOUT THE DISCONNECT BETWEEN MY PHILOSOPHY AND MY ASSESSMENT PRACTICE?

Student A:

- Engages consistently in classroom discussion
- Identifies as an eco-feminist
- Struggles with mastery of inquiry projects but can, in conversation, demonstrate comprehension of all enduring understandings
- May struggle to fully complete Take Action Project but idea is at "Social Justice Oriented" level

Student B:

- Rarely engages in classroom discussion
- Does well on inquiry projects (process and assessment) but struggles to consistently demonstrate comprehension of enduring understandings
- Completes Take Action project but only at "personally responsible or participatory" level

At the end of the semester it was Student B that received the better mark, but philosophically I felt like Student A demonstrated a higher level of understanding of the course content (enduring understandings) and skills (particularly in the area of dialogue and deliberation). This caused me to reflect on my assessment practices and led me to the conclusion that those practices were not aligned with my philosophy or the curriculum.

Perhaps serendipitously, at this time my administration was encouraging staff members to explore outcomes-based assessment and evaluation. I saw this as my chance to try something different and so I joined an in-school professional learning community where we met to discuss moving our assessment practices to outcomes-based. The move to outcomes-based assessment in the Global Issues course felt freeing: gone was the reliance on testing and performance outcomes unrelated to the curriculum's Enduring Understandings. For all the course work the students did they would receive a copy of the 10 EUs and they would have to relate their coursework to those understandings. My assessment was based on using a five-point scale to measure how well the students were relating their work to the EUs and I had students do reflections on their major projects using the same five-point scale and 10 EUs. It seems to have worked, I think that student assessment (and, yes, marks) are a better reflection of how well they understand the EUs

However, this isn't a happily ever after, yet.

WHAT I'M STILL PONDERING?

Firstly, due to the nature of the Global Issues course, a lot of time is spent on discussing current affairs. I believe that this is absolutely critical in this class and have done graduate research confirming the importance of it.[1] My issue, however, is the question of how do you assess dialogue in class? Many students are able to clearly demonstrate their comprehension of the EUs while participating in classroom dialogue, but how is that reflected in their "mark"? Often, the fall-back is having the students write a reflection about that dialogue, but frequently that is exactly where a student might struggle; they are often better able to communicate this understanding verbally than through their written work. Besides, the skill we are working on is dialogue and deliberation. In the same way I assess students' engagement with historical thinking, I should also be assessing their engagement in dialogue. Doing otherwise would privilege knowledge over skill, not align with my pedagogy (which is anchored to dialogue), and would assess students on a skill that I had not centered in my teaching, written reflections.

Secondly, as teachers, we are required to make professional judgments about our student work all the time, but those judgments are made under the microscope of a system that emphasizes neoliberal models of success that are expected by parents, and often by the students themselves. I can make judgment calls about how well a student knows course content, but if I'm not able to demonstrate how I made that judgment call in a way that satisfies components of a neoliberal system, I am not doing enough (I'm reminded of an anecdote from a colleague who once told me, "No one questions a paramedic's judgment when they arrive at the scene of an emergency, they trust that the person knows what they're doing, so why don't people trust a teacher's judgment calls?). To give this a practical take, if I can tell that a student understands course content through dialogue, shouldn't that be enough? Why is it necessary to test that knowledge or force students to write it on paper?

Thirdly, old habits die hard. Even if I philosophically believe in outcomes-based assessment, what happens when students work just isn't very good? Going back to my Student A and Student B examples, I knew Student A knew the content of the course, but I was often left disappointed with their work (notice that neoliberal focus on product and dismissal of the work she had done in the process of dialogue). Her inquiry projects could be much more robust and her action project, while good in principle, was never really seen

[1] https://mspace.lib.umanitoba.ca/bitstream/handle/1993/33259/Lopuck_Kevin.pdf;jsessionid=428A75681644E78977C34BE5E12D 2A71?sequence=1

to its conclusion. How much value do we place on quality of work in an outcomes-based assessment system? How do our ideas of quality often rely on 'effort' and 'aesthetic' over understanding? Nowhere in the EUs does it talk about quality of work, so how do I reconcile this?

Finally, there is a definite frustration with giving a mark at all. So often at the mid-term or end of semester reporting period, I'm left looking at my marks and wondering what it all means. What's the difference between a student with an 88% and a 92% other than, in the neoliberal world we live in, the fact that the student with the 92% might get a better scholarship to a university that prioritizes marks over substance (and ignores the inherent subjectivity of all forms of assessment and the cultural and economic capital of students).

At the end of the day, there is no perfect way to assess and I know that I will continue to struggle with my assessment practices. But at the same time, I think that perhaps that's part of the point. The fact that I'm willing to struggle with how best to assess my students and open to radical change might be the most important part of all of this. People often say, if you are not angry you are not paying attention. Maybe, if we are not questioning our assessment we aren't paying attention.

About the Author

Past-President of the Manitoba Social Sciences Teachers' Association, Kevin Lopuck has been teaching at Lord Selkirk Regional Comprehensive Secondary School in Selkirk, Manitoba since May of 2001. Kevin obtained his Bachelor of Education degree from the University of Manitoba in 2001 and completed his Master's Degree in Education with a focus on curriculum studies in 2018. His thesis was a qualitative, phenomenological work focused on his implementation of the province of Manitoba's grade 12 Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability curriculum. He is currently a PhD student at the University of Manitoba.

An Exploration of Teacher Assessment Identity Using the Arts

-KATRINA CARBONE, SUMAIYA CHOWDHURY, ANTARA ROY CHOWDHURY, & MICHELLE SEARLE

The arts offer a distinct way of seeing (Barone, 2008) and are gaining attention for their role in holistic inquiry (e.g., Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010; MacGregor et al., 2022; Margolin, 2014). Arts-informed inquiry is distinguished by two goals: involving artistic expression during the process and allowing the form(s) to shape understanding and what is learned (Cole & Knowles, 2008). Underpinning arts-informed inquiry is the notion that different forms of data allow for different types of sense-making when it comes to complex constructs, such as teacher assessment identity. Assessment identity goes beyond the knowledge and skills required to know and do assessment, rather it captures the personal values and beliefs that shape classroom assessment practices (Adie, 2013; Looney et al., 2018).

The purpose of this study was to use arts-informed inquiry as a way to explore assessment identity. Exploring and constructing one's identity through various modalities, such as the arts, allows new understandings to emerge and may reveal hidden biases (McDermott, 2002).

The following research questions guided this study: (1) What do people reveal about their assessment identity using arts-informed approaches? (2) What characteristics and influences represent assessment identity when explored with the arts?

Conceptual Framework

Assessment identity is described as an ongoing process where educators continuously develop their skills and understanding of assessment practices (Wyatt-Smith et al., 2010). An assessment identity informs how a teacher perceives themselves as an educator, which is shaped by experiences, interactions, and discussions (Adie, 2013). By coupling concepts of assessment literacy and teacher identity, assessment identity captures the personal factors in addition to the skills and knowledge that shape assessment in the classroom.

Looney and colleagues (2018) developed an expanded conceptualization of teacher assessment identity that comprises five overlapping dimensions: (a) I know; (b) I feel;

(c) I believe; (d) I am confident; and (f) my role. Evident in the five dimensions, assessment identity is continuously "framed and reframed over a career and mediated by the context in which teachers work and live" (Looney et al., 2018, p. 446). Teachers develop, select, and effectively use classroom assessments for multiple purposes in various contexts (Kahl et al., 2013), which requires the continuous evolution of their assessment identity.

Description of Assessment Learning Context

This study took place in Ontario, where pre-service teachers prepare for the profession through 16 months of coursework and practicum opportunities. Courses include foundational, professional studies, curriculum, and concentration courses, in addition to five practicum placement opportunities. Pre-service teachers are required to enroll in one concentration course to receive further education on a topic of interest. An option is the Assessment and Evaluation Concentration which offers direct instruction about developing one's assessment identity to promote student-centered assessment practices in K-12 contexts. This concentration includes two courses (74 hours of instruction; 6.0 credits) related to the theoretical positioning of assessment and evaluation through the practical application of theory, knowledge, and skills. The lead author of this paper has been involved with the concentration for a number of years, and the other authors of the paper are members of the Queen's University Assessment and Evaluation Group (AEG; https://queens-aeg.ca/).

Pre-service teachers enrolled in other concentrations complete Foundations of Assessment (1.0 credits; 12 hours of instruction) to begin learning about assessment theory, policy, and practice. In addition to this required course, assessment learning may also be embedded throughout other curricular courses, although the degree to which is at each instructor's discretion.

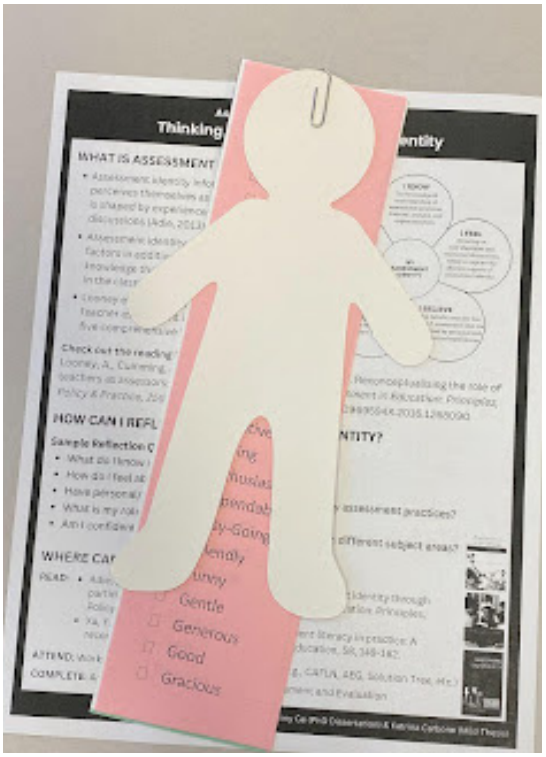
To expand opportunities for assessment learning and promote critical thinking about assessment, the AEG hosted a four-part series for Queen's University pre-service teachers and graduate students. Enrollment for this series exceeded our expectations, with approximately 130-150 participants registering for each session, the majority of whom are Bachelor of Education students, although graduate students (many of whom were/are educators) and staff/faculty were welcome. The strong enrollment for these sessions may signal a need and desire for educators to have more opportunities to learn about the multifaceted nature of assessment. Each session was intended to provide a different way to engage in thinking about assessment (e.g., panel related to assessment research;

discussion about assessment for, of and, as practices).

The first session involved collaboration with an artist to host an interactive session about assessment identity by offering an arts-informed experience. Participants were provided with information about assessment identity (next page to see handout), but no explicit assessment instruction because they were asked to reflect on their current assessment identity. Participants considered the dimensions of assessment identity (see Looney et al., 2018) while they completed an informal review of the personality traits they brought to their role as an assessor. Participants were then asked to choose three different words to describe their assessment identity and colour paper people with oil pastels to convey these characteristics. The artist provided a brief introduction to the use of colours (i.e., colours that match mood), but ultimately participants had choice in the colours they selected to portray their identity. Figure 1 depicts the assessment identity resources provided to participants (Figure 1a), in addition to an example of a paper person coloured with oil pastel (Figure 1b).

Then, participants used collage to combine images and texts from magazines to illustrate their assessment identity and highlight "what's inside" using the Sobotta Skull (Sobotta, 1909, fig. 37), a copyright free image (and great

a)



b)

Figure 1
Exploring Assessment Identity through Oil Pastels

Assessment Connections Part 1

Thinking about Assessment & Identity

WHAT IS ASSESSMENT IDENTITY?

- Assessment identity informs how a teacher perceives themselves as an educator, which is shaped by experiences, interactions, and discussions (Adie, 2013).
- Assessment identity captures the personal factors in addition to the skills and knowledge that shape assessment practices in the classroom.
- Looney et al. (2018) explicitly conceptualized teacher assessment identity as comprising of five comprehensive interlinked dimensions.

Check out the reading here:

Looney, A., Cumming, J., van Der Kleij, F., & Harris, K. (2018). Reconceptualising the role of teachers as assessors: Teacher assessment identity. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice, 25*(5), 442-467. https://doi.org/10.1080/0969594X.2016.1268090

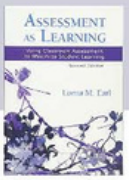
HOW CAN I REFLECT ON MY ASSESSMENT IDENTITY?

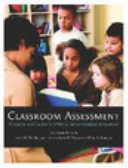
Sample Reflection Questions

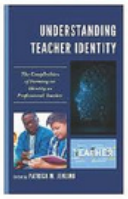
- What do I know about classroom assessment?
- How do I feel about assessment in the classroom?
- Have personal/professional experiences influenced my assessment practices?
- What is my role in assessing students?
- Am I confident in appropriate assessment strategies in different subject areas?

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

READ:
- Adie, L. (2013). The development of teacher assessment identity through participation in online moderation. Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice, 20(1), 91-106.
- Xu, Y., & Brown, G. T. (2016). Teacher assessment literacy in practice: A reconceptualization. Teaching and Teacher Education, 58, 149-162.





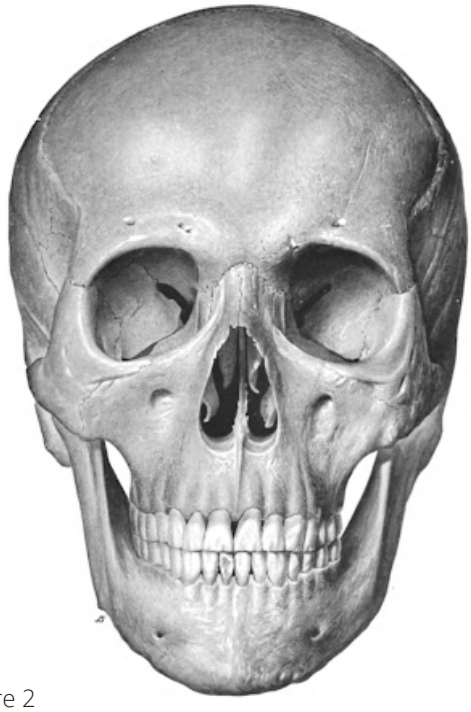


ATTEND: Workshops and Professional Development (e.g., CAFLN, AEG, Solution Tree, etc.)

COMPLETE: Additional Qualification in Student Assessment and Evaluation

Credits: Jenny Ge (PhD Dissertation) & Katrina Carbone (MEd Thesis)

a)



b)

Figure 2
The Sobotta Skull

teaching tool). Figure 2 depicts the blank Sobotta Skull (Figure 2a), and an example of one completed using collage (Figure 2b). Collage is an accessible yet flexible medium, involving the moving of pieces and physically arranging them, an exploration of materials as well as the self (Butler-Kisber, 2008). Participants conceptualize ideas as a form of visual thinking where experiences and ideas can be expressed in a medium beyond words (Roberts & Woods, 2018). As participants were creating their collages, conversations were encouraged to provoke new ideas and discuss progress. The artist frequently checked-in with participants to offer tips, help locate items in a magazine, or share advice on how to visually represent a word. Once the collages were created, participants were invited to engage in stream-of-consciousness writing about the assessment identity portrayed in their collage. Narrative explorations explore nuanced experiences which may involve the description, recollection of memories, present quandaries, and future imaginings (Lyle, 2013). After individual reflection, participants were invited to engage in a large-group conversation led by the artist. The collages were laid out across multiple tables, and participants were encouraged to walk around the room to look at the various representations of assessment identity. Collage and narrative are intermingling (Grbich, 2007) where collage with individual narratives will elicit a more holistic understanding (Burge et al., 2016).

Preliminary Findings

From our assessment connections session, we discovered that using the arts to think about assessment identity provided an avenue to

develop factual knowledge about how people think about themselves as an assessor and perceive the practice of assessment as operationalized in K-12 classrooms. The room was quite abuzz with conversations, participants saw parallels between this creative collaboration and were able to articulate ideas that assessment is not just a tool to measure the growth or development of students, but a flexible process that involves a lot of thinking and skill from educators. Amidst all the materials and mess of art-making, participants noted that assessment too was a dynamic experience that could be thoughtfully integrated throughout teaching and learning cycles. The arts enabled participants to discuss and demonstrate the complexity of assessment and to recognize that, rather than focusing on a right or wrong answer, different kinds of assessments (for, of, as) provide a process that can be used to gather evidence of student learning, provide feedback, and inform future instructional activities, and allow students opportunities to develop into metacognitive life-long learners. As participants were engaged in this creative process, they shared the importance of student-centered assessment practices to provide students in their classroom with opportunities to take risks and identified some of the tension they felt in implementing more traditional methods of assessment.

As session hosts, we noted that using arts allowed participants to recognize their biases in how they approach classroom assessment. Initially, some of the participants were expressing doubt about this creative activity and its relevance to their thinking about assessment. Many participants were focused on assessment at the end of the learning cycle to gather data (summative), but these preconceived notions were derived from personal experiences of assessment when they were students. We can only rethink assessment once we confront the traditional notions of assessment that have been engrained in our thinking.

Through the creative process, new ideas began to emerge, namely, flexibility, fairness, and creativity in assessment practices. Flexibility was one of the terms most commonly emphasized as a characteristic of how participants think about their assessment identity because it provided a way to respond to the diverse needs of students. Examples of flexibility discussed included a disposition for using technology, providing choices to learners, and balancing various types of assessment practices. Fairness was another characteristic that emerged from the session. Many participants described it as essential to assessment practices and discussed enacting fairness through transparent learning expectations, aligning instructional content with assessment activities, and staying focused on the importance of reliable and valid interpretation of student learning. Reflecting on assessment identity through the use of

arts-informed inquiry allowed participants to explore the idea of creativity and its role in classroom assessment. Many participants were eager to recreate the energy we experienced collaborating with an artist to explore a concept and subsequently wondered how arts-informed inquiry could be integrated into different subject areas or through multidisciplinary assessments. Participants told us that being creative and utilizing existing resources (i.e., museum websites, expert voices) to enhance connections in teaching and assessment were important areas for future professional inquiry.

Discussion and Significance

Assessment is essential to the teaching-learning process (Neumann et al., 2019) and can enhance student achievement, motivation, and learning (Cauley et al., 2010). Arts-informed inquiry was used in this context as a way of becoming aware of assessment as an identity while developing critical and relational consciousness through embodied pedagogical practices that sought to transform how participants think about the self in relation to assessment (Vacchelli, 2018). Through creative opportunities to explore the complexities of assessment, participants can develop their assessment identity and recognize that arts-informed inquiry provides an avenue for thinking deeply about who we are as assessors, educators, and educational researchers. We know for certain that assessment identity is not fixed, it is continuously influenced by previous experiences, current engagement, and professional development opportunities (Carbone, 2021). There are few empirical studies investigating assessment identity (e.g., Looney et al., 2018; Xu & Brown, 2016) and none that we know of that explore the contributions framed within the arts-informed inquiry. We offer this brief description of an assessment workshop in hopes that it may inspire others to see the potential for engaging in learning and exploring the capacity for assessment identity using creative strategies such as drawing, collage, and writing that are framed through arts-informed inquiry.

About the Authors

Katrina Carbone is a doctoral student at Queen's University and K-12 Ontario certified teacher. Her dissertation focuses on transforming assessment practices in higher education. In her spare time, Katrina is playing squash and volleyball, or spending time outdoors.

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Antara Roy Chowdhury is doing her MEd in Queen's University of Canada. Previously she completed her MA in ELT (English Language Teaching) from East West University of Bangladesh. She was working as the lecturer in the department of English of Uttara University, Bangladesh. Her research interested areas are social justice in education, assessment and evaluation, textbook analysis and discourse analysis. She has presented papers in various national and international conferences.

Michelle Searle holds a PhD in curriculum with a focus on assessment and evaluation.
By using mixed and multiple methods that are often infused with Arts, she gains a deeper understanding of the phenomena under study and uses this knowledge to inform policy, practice and scholarship.

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Walking Beside My Students Towards Authentic Assessment: a Renewed Mindset

-DONNA J. BARKMAN

Assessment is about growth, in all its three dimensions: past to present to future. It is dynamic, a "metamorphosis" of sorts (Williams, 2006, p. 151), both an internal and external action. Assessment necessitates cooperation, within our personal selves and worlds (Williams, 2006) and between ourselves and others and the contexts we share. It is private and communal. It is complex.

Assessment must not stand outside the daily rhythms of the classroom but rather become an indispensable thread of the learning tapestry (Black & Wiliam, 2018; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; White, 2017). Shepard (2000) states that "in order for assessment to play a more useful role in helping students learn it should be moved into the middle of the teaching and learning process instead of being postponed as only the end–point of instruction" (p. 10). Assessment is so much more than static and stale; it is a hope–filled, dynamic "process" (White, 2017, p. 2). When assessment is confined to fixed noun rather than elevated to active verb, so much of classroom life is lost.

A Renewed Mindset: Working Together Towards Higher Goals

Like my students, I am on a learning journey. Immersed together in classroom life, I have been prompted to ponder our being in the midst of assessment: who I am, who my students are, and who we are together becoming. Though the three phases of assessment—*for*, *as*, and *of*—are intrinsically connected (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006; see also Black & Wiliam, 2018), it is formative assessment or assessment *as* learning in which my research wanderings and wonderings are anchored.

My learning silently germinates in cognitive spaces but visibly emerges through my pedagogical decisions. My actions say much about my beliefs (White, 2017). When I stop to listen to a student's frustration over the way a particular task is worded, I validate who they are as an individual and learner. When I challenge them to reword this seeming dilemma in a way that fits their thinking and then,

minutes later, rejoin them to understand their thought process, I acknowledge their presence as an integral member of our learning context. When I add my thoughts to theirs, I affirm their contribution to our teaching–learning partnership. In appreciating the student's voice I acknowledge that I, too, am a learner in process. Black and Wiliam (1998b) point out "the close link of formative assessment practice both with … a teacher's own pedagogy, and with a teacher's conception of his or her role" (p. 20). Elsewhere, they state, "Instruction and formative assessment are indivisible" (Black & Wiliam, 1998a, p. 143; see also Stiggins, 2001). Formative assessment and daily instructional choices, together with being and becoming, are inseparable pieces of the pedagogical dance. Yet, as Black and Wiliam (2018) point out, pedagogy is falsely separated from discussions of assessment. I see this incongruent behaviour within my own classroom living. It becomes visible when I treat assessment as little more than a number on a test or a grade on an assignment. Focused on end result rather than process, I am prone to live unaware of the organic teaching and learning moments that make up our days.

A renewed mindset, then, begins with me. As a teacher–researcher, I am coming to see assessment in refreshed, nuanced ways, as an internal process that often, but not always, finds external expression. In what follows, I position assessment as a metacognitive process, challenging the focus on grades, and insisting on the primacy of process over product. After these theoretical assertions, I conclude with possible ways the pedagogy–assessment duo might be made more authentically visible in the classroom.

Assessment, Teaching, and Learning: A Metacognitive Process

I am coming to understand that assessment is a joint endeavour, between myself and my students. I am realizing that transformation, though it may sometimes unfold through the grand and magnificent, most often begins with the small change or the nearly imperceptible shift. These movements take place within the everyday moments of teaching–learning interactions. They are often born out of tension and question.

If change is to come, an alertness is required, a being present. Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth (2006) defines metacognition as "knowledge of one's own thought processes," which thus involves "an active process of cognitive restructuring" (p. 41). The growing implies intentionality. As I remain mindful of my tensions, questions, and next steps, I am then able to lead my students into the metacognitive spaces of their own learning.

Seeing Differently

Metacognition means we must understand differently before we can do differently. When

my students and I come to see assessment as a regular and ongoing rhythm of classroom living, rather than a device to separate the have's from the have not's, then we begin "moving beyond dependence and independence to interdependence" (Boud et al., 1999, p. 420). This renewed way of understanding assessment challenges me, and my students, to celebrate the purpose and process of assessment over and beyond a mere letter or number grade. We begin to understand assessment as more than a one–time test or assignment. This is a forward–moving mindset that provides continuous opportunities for interaction wherein "a teacher can show them [students] a vision of excellence and reveal to them where they are now in relation to that vision" (Stiggins, 2001, p. 12). A reframing of assessment places it within a context of hope, where both students and teachers feel empowered towards growth rather than crumpled under defeat (Stiggins, 2001).

Grading and Its Potential to Undermine Learning

A renewed assessment mindset challenges me to remain awake to the ways an assessment tool is used and for what purpose. As Guskey (2019) makes clear, grades are neither "inherently good or bad" (p. 45). Rather, what matters most is "the participation of the learner" (Sadler, 1989, p. 121). This necessarily calls for dialogic learning relationships. An isolated number or letter does not automatically nurture further growth but may instead "emphasize rankings or comparisons among students" (Sadler, 1989, p. 127). When tethered solely to judgment statements and empty with respect to future solutions, "accuracy–based grading may, in fact, demotivate students and impede learning" (Schinske & Tanner, 2014, p. 165). The problem, thus, is not necessarily the tool itself but the underlying notion, perhaps taken–for–granted or left unquestioned, that the assigning of a grade should in itself lead students to improvement. This leans towards a technocratic disposition apt to drive educators to exhaustion and students to care less (Schinske & Tanner, 2014). I am challenged, then, to continually clarify a reason for my doing.

Process Over Product

My purpose must be motivated by process. Guskey (2019) notes as much when he states that "grades help enhance achievement and foster learning progress *only* when they are paired with individualized comments that offer guidance and direction for improvement" (p. 46). To encourage and challenge in this way invites metacognitive action, and it is the metacognitive that must become an integral focus of formative assessment (Sadler, 1989). Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth (2006) similarly explains that this ongoing mental configuration consists in "students becom[ing] adept at personally monitoring what they are learning, and us[ing] what they discover from the monitoring to make

adjustments, adaptations, and even major changes in their thinking" (p. 41). In this space of transformation, reality meets vision, in hopeful partnership with others. When the target is visible and resources available, then students are freed to "engage in appropriate *action* which leads to some closure of the [learning] gap" (Sadler, 1989, p. 121). Where metacognitive development is nurtured critical thinking grows (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006; Sadler, 1989). And where process is honoured, values such as perseverance, respect, community living, and generosity are given the opportunity to mature within the midst of learning.

Working Together From and Within the Process

When being in school involves more than grades, when it invites individuals into community and into their future as contributing members, then process is strengthened because it is infused with higher purpose. Further, the people within the process space are granted greater dignity as they are valued for who they are and what this offers. Students become "apprentices" (Rowsell, 2016) and "insiders rather than consumers" (Sadler, 1989, p. 135). Insiders value the give–and–take of the process, realizing that growth takes place in the midst of healthy stress. Consumers focus on end results, eyes fixated on the tangible, often ignoring the valuable. I must admit, I have been that consumer; so, too, have my students. Black and Wiliam (1998a) posit that "when the classroom culture focuses on rewards, 'gold stars,' grades, or class ranking, then pupils look for ways to obtain the best marks rather than to improve their learning" (p. 142). I find this to be a challenge we must revisit often. The 'Is–this–for–a–grade?' mindset must be replaced with connected moments of purpose, each one an integral link to our learning.

This renewed way of thinking necessitates vision and ownership. The questions that White (2017) poses are helpful in the nurture of such an assessment culture: "Are learners part of the assessment and learning conversation, or are they standing outside it? Is the story theirs to create, or are they simply consuming our story?" (p. 13). The answers to these questions unfold along the way. They take place amidst "the mundane or [seemingly] non–significant tasks" (Grobler & Wessels, 2020, p. 251). It is in the flurry of the normal where synergy between teacher, student, peers, purpose, and curriculum is cultivated. Formative assessment implies a valuing of time because it is time that gifts the teacher space to appreciate and breathe life into who a student is, what they bring, and who they are becoming (Grobler & Wessels, 2020). Authentic assessment may include a grade but the context for that grade is broad and deep (White, 2017).

Pedagogical Moves That Invite Participation Into the Process

To remain authentic, assessment must be entwined with pedagogy. Stiggins (2001) highlights the complex "color palate that teachers need to manage the art of classroom assessment" (p. 9). In other words, assessment embedded within pedagogy necessitates a stance of vigilant noticing, often near–imperceptible movements, and sometimes creative doing. In the midst of an intentional awareness, our ways of assessing must encourage an appreciation for both the learner and the learning process. We must remain ever mindful that assessment is not just for the moment; its effects may be far–reaching. Both Stiggins and White (2017) remind us that our assessment choices reverberate outside the walls of our classrooms and echo into the learning futures of our students.

Understanding assessment differently, then, invites a reframing of the assessment conversation. And conversation attends to language. By re/considering word choice, we can refocus assessment in process terms and as a team effort. Framed in this way, assessment becomes an inseparable companion to our learning. No longer is it treated as an isolated "thing" (White, 2017, p. 2) but rather as an integral thread of the learning tapestry. When my own assessment language moves towards invitation and relationship, rather than judgment and false conclusion, student voice is invited into the assessment process. "Together," states White, "students and teachers can co–construct conversations and experiences that impact us well beyond our time together in the classroom" (p. 12). The power of this dialogic interaction was summed up for me recently when I heard a student, disappointed with his performance, ask, "It's about improvement, right?" Pondering this moment, I realize that in my own growth I have been giving my students vocabulary to express what learning should be all about—improvement and hope. In my own experience, phrases such as "Tell me about…" or "What was your reason for…" have uncovered meaning hidden in the details of student sketching or within the creative use of punctuation. On other occasions, dialogue has clarified misconceptions, both on the part of the student and on the side of the teacher. Intentionally opening up the assessment conversation has helped move learning forward in truthful ways. In this dialogic space, "teaching [and assessment] happens *with* students (rather than *to* or *at* students)" (Burgess & Rowsell, 2020, p. 189). Prepositions matter. Attention to language helps to reframe the assessment conversation.

Changing the Terms

Sometimes it is a shift in vocabulary that creates a more genuine assessment space; other times it is a simple, tangible tool. The silent conversation booklet, as I named it

this year, is an example of the latter. The idea was sparked by Bintz and Shelton's (2004) use of the "written conversation," a silent, pen–paper discussion that "encourages meaning exploration" (Bintz & Shelton, 2004, p. 494). This pedagogical tool piqued my interest when I found myself perplexed by a class reticent to engage in open discussion. I introduced it during our class reading of an autobiography. It worked as an entry point, a place from which to further the learning–assessment process. It was one way of removing the intangible dread of public speaking because in this activity "no talking is allowed—only reading, writing, and thinking" (Bintz & Shelton, 2004, p. 494). Students responded to each other's questions, built on each other's thoughts, and were drawn into affective spaces as they considered characters' choices or life–changing circumstances. The silent conversation became a space for students to share their own perspective and be challenged by another's. It offered a non–threatening space for both the quiet processors and the more vocal contributors to equally engage as integral members of the learning community. It was this student participation that afforded me a window into the learning and critical thinking processes of students who might otherwise have kept their thoughts hidden. Learning was made visible through student partnership.

The Reading Blitz has similarly become a motivating activity offering me insight. It, too, was born out of tension but has led to hope. Seeming disengagement had me concerned. Through a simple pedagogical move I tweaked routine and the assessment picture changed. A small piece of paper for recording, a timer for motivation, and sticky notes for celebration were the tools needed. With timer set for a short, specified number of minutes, restless students began to find the calm within to focus. The concentrated blitz of required mental energy proved doable. The visible recording of pages read or books completed offered a satisfying motivation. The Reading Blitz has become a pedagogical tool inviting students into the assessment process, making progress visible to themselves and to me. The student who thought she did not like reading finds the opposite to be true, and the teacher, who was apt to judge incorrectly, sees more clearly.

Examples such as the above allow the vibrancy of pedagogy to inform and meld with the purposes of assessment, all within the context of growing together.

Conclusion

When resources—including time and interactive space—are made available and used for continual learning, then "formative assessment can be productive and rewarding for both students and teachers" (Black & Wiliam, p. 5, 2007). Assessment requires teacher wakefulness, an intentional choosing "to look at or listen carefully to the talk, the

writing, and the actions through which pupils develop and display the state of their understanding" (Black & Wiliam, 1998a, p. 143). This implies continual attention to pedagogy, sometimes a necessary disturbing.

Assessment is about taking up a both/and mindset, one concerned with present understanding of content that simultaneously seeks to build reflective practices, moving students towards a "deep approach to learning" (Boud, 2000, p. 164). A both/and mindset understands that formative assessment "is not a method or technique, but a way of thinking about all aspects of assessment practice" (Boud, 2000, p. 165). Authentic, purpose–filled assessment is a way of being in the classroom—a way of being in relationship with people and resources and time and context.

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Beyond the Grading Fetish: Reimagining Assessment Practices

-JUSTIN D. FRASER

"*Are we being graded on this?*" "*Will this be on the report card?*" "*How many marks is this worth?*"

These oft-heard refrains, usually the first questions students ask when introduced to a new project, assignment, or learning experience, expose a troubling reality within our schools: students have been inculcated into a mode of schooling that privileges grades over learning. The result? Students demonstrate less interest in learning, a preference for easier tasks, and shallower thinking (Kohn, 2020). These pernicious effects of grading undermine a culture of deep and meaningful learning, because when we grade student work, students are tempted to work for the grade rather than for the joy of learning. Instead, how might we deconstruct conventional assessment practices in pursuit of more meaningful, just, relevant, and authentic learning experiences?

Grading, Scoring, Ranking, Sorting

Naturalized through neoliberal discourses that encourage competition over collaboration, individualism over collectivism, product over process, and disimagination over creativity, conventional assessment practices reduce teaching and learning to a system of grading, scoring, ranking, and sorting (Stommel, 2020). This capitalist assessment model aims to produce conformity by quantifying students' complex, subjective, and idiosyncratic learnings to a reductive single number on a report card. Through an overreliance on tests, exams, and assignments marked according to mechanistic rubrics, conventional assessment practices encourage competition between students and incentivize students to only produce work that they believe will result in a high grade. Further, this standardization erases and invisibilizes students' diverse interests, aptitudes, and abilities. As Ganem (2018) argues, "we should celebrate this diversity; not attempt to erase it. Standardizing and then idealizing the attribute of 'smart' by mandating defined educational outcomes for all dehumanizes all and undermines our relatedness as human beings" (p. xxii). In this way, grading strips students of their power and agency by diminishing and quantifying human complexity within the learning environment to make it machine-

readable (Stommel, 2020). This move ultimately functions as a systematic effort to remove humans from the educational process and is inherently dehumanizing.

Conventional assessment practices hyper-focused on collecting "student achievement data" embody and perpetuate a "banking model of education." Defined and critiqued by Freire (1968/2018), the banking model of education situates teachers as bank clerks who "deposit" knowledge into students. Students are expected to "receive, memorize, and repeat. . . . The scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits" (Freire, 1968/2018, p. 72). Freire argues that this model does not allow for inquiry, creativity, nor critical reflection as it positions students as passive depositories. As a result, students in this model are only valued according to the knowledge they are able to reproduce on tests and exams which invariably marginalizes their lived experiences and prior knowledge. By situating students as passive consumers of predigested knowledge—who are then graded and ranked according to standardized measures—rather than active participants in the learning journey, conventional assessment practices harm, oppress, and dehumanize students (Ganem, 2018).

Because teachers are situated as the arbiters of knowledge in the banking model of education, students are subjected, without consultation or consent, to the assessment practices of the teacher. Such a model undermines the development of critical, creative, imaginative, and inquisitive students. When students have no power, agency, or voice in their education, receiving a final grade becomes the end goal in place of meaningful learning. This in turn enables oppression by expanding hierarchical and unequal power relations in the classroom. Further, it disallows students from engaging in potentially transformative learning experiences. As a result, students are again stripped of their humanity.

For many in the education system, including teachers, administrators, parents, and students, grading is perceived as a natural and inevitable aspect of schooling. Grading persists based on assumptions about "motivation," on personal experiences of schooling, and on "tradition." However, this conventional notion of grading is a relatively new invention dating back to the early 20th century (Blum, 2020a). Therefore, if we can construct it, we can deconstruct it. But if we deconstruct it, what might we build in its place?

Decentering Grades

Foundational to any humanizing assessment practice is the centering of student voice by inviting and engaging students as full participants in the teaching, learning, and assessment process. Premised on affording power, agency, autonomy, and control to

students, these assessment practices work against the dehumanizing logics of grading in pursuit of more meaningful and authentic learning experiences. Therefore, in the following section, I will outline how I reject conventional grading systems in my practice through *ungrading* and *contract grading*.

Like all public school educators, I am required by Manitoba Education (2021) to record overall subject grades on the report card. However, this requirement does not specify the assessment practices that I must enact, nor does it prescribe how I must determine final grades. As a result, I do not grade any student work (a characteristic of *ungrading*). Instead, at the beginning of the semester, I ask students to indicate the final grade that they would like on their report card (a characteristic of *contract grading*) based on our shared commitment to center learning over grades.

As with any shared commitment, there are accompanying responsibilities. By selecting their final grade, my students agree to complete all assignments (which we will co-construct throughout the course based on their interests) to the best of their ability, actively engage in the learning process, and positively contribute to the learning environment. All of these responsibilities are intentionally subjective and qualitative in nature which affords both me and my students flexibility. For example, because ability, active engagement, and contributing positively differs for each student, what "counts" as fulfilling these responsibilities is dependent on students' unique lived experiences and prior knowledge. If a student fulfills these responsibilities throughout the course—a collective decision made by me and the student—the number I record on the report card is the number the student chose (or higher, because students can sometimes be their own harshest critics). If my perception is that a student is not fulfilling their responsibilities to the learning community, I do not respond with a low grade as punishment. Instead, I engage in dialogue with the student to collectively address the difficulties or barriers they may be experiencing in order to facilitate their learning, growth, and success. Correspondingly, I also have responsibilities. When students choose their final grade at the beginning of the course, my responsibility shifts from grading students toward fostering intentional relationships, providing meaningful and constructive feedback, curating a supportive and collaborative learning environment, and ultimately, centering student voice and learning.

After students select their final grade on the first day of class, we do our best to not discuss grades and instead focus our collective attention on the learning process. In the first few weeks of class, perhaps unsurprisingly after years of being indoctrinated into a system of grading, sorting, and ranking, students routinely ask: *"Are we being graded on this?"* However, in time, the students begin to

appreciate the freedom, flexibility, and autonomy they have over their learning when they are not being graded. I enact this by centering the interests and curiosities of my students not only through the content we study, but also by inviting students to co-construct both possible assignments as well as individualized and differentiated assessment criteria. By focusing my formative feedback on assessment criteria explicitly identified by students as important to their learning, students learn and grow in areas that are meaningful and relevant to them. Instead of relying on grades to motivate students—an inherently dehumanizing, damaging, and harmful practice—ungrading fosters students' intrinsic motivation and joy of learning. Further, this practice rejects the unilateral power structure that makes grading so oppressive by affording students power and agency in their learning (Gibbs, 2020).

For example, in a writing project, some students may indicate a desire to improve their writing mechanics, grammar, and syntax, whereas others may wish to develop their creative writing and narrative voice. No matter what assessment criteria a student selects, my formative feedback is tailored to that individual student within that specific area of learning—with no grade attached. This approach to assessment encourages creativity, critical thinking, and risk-taking. Without having to fear the arbitrary and often punitive nature of grading, students are demonstrably more willing to take risks and make mistakes—two of the prerequisites for developing radical, critical patterns of thought (Blum, 2020b).

Self-assessment is a critical component when working to decenter grades. In addition to daily conversations with students about their learning, I invite my students to complete both midterm and end of semester reflections. In these reflections, I ask questions such as: "What have you learned in this course and how did you learn it?", "What would you consider to be your greatest area of growth and why?", "What do you wish you could have done differently regarding your learning?", and "What areas do you hope to develop in the future and how will you achieve this?" All of these questions aim to develop students' metacognitive skills as they critically reflect on their learning journey, areas of growth, and possible next steps (Dosmar & Williams, 2022). I also ask students if they believe they should receive the grade they chose at the beginning of the semester or to change their grade based on how well they fulfilled their responsibilities. Admittedly, the precarity of this practice can feel uncomfortable because it entails giving up control. But control has nothing to do with learning. Moreover, our students are the best experts in their own learning and we would be remiss to not center their voices and trust them (Stommel, 2020).

In my experience, students consistently demonstrate thoughtfulness, honesty, and

integrity in the process of critical self-reflection. This is especially true when assigning themselves a final grade because students know better than anyone whether or not they fulfilled their responsibilities. Although most students are content to retain the grade they chose at the beginning of the semester, I always have some students who justifiably raise their grade because they demonstrated immense growth and learning through their engagement, dedication, and commitment to the learning community. Most of these same students remark in their reflections how much they appreciate the freedom to take risks and explore new concepts without fear of making mistakes and receiving a low grade. Conversely, there are almost always a few students who, without any interference from me, lower their grade at the end of the semester because they recognize that they did not necessarily work to the best of their abilities, actively engage in the learning process, and positively contribute to the learning community. As previously discussed, this is a consciously subjective practice. All forms of assessment—including multiple choice test questions—are subjective because they are subject to the biases, perspectives, and values of the teacher. These values are inherently embedded in the construction and implementation of all assessment formats and practices. The practice of contract grading rejects the myth of "objective" assessment practices, accounts for subjectivity, and trusts that students know themselves and their learning best. Ultimately, by critically reflecting on their learning journey, all students are afforded the opportunity to learn more about themselves, their habits of mind, the environment and processes in and through which they learn best, and areas of further growth and development. By practicing both ungrading and contract grading, the collective attention of our learning community shifts away from the harmful and oppressive nature of grading toward more deep, meaningful, and joyful learning experiences.

Moving Beyond Grades

Despite the humanizing and transformative nature of ungrading, as long as final grades are required on report cards, assessment practices that decenter grades only function as a stopgap measure. As Kohn (2020) writes, we need to "stop seeing that noxious institutional requirement [to submit a final grade] as a fact of life like the weather and start seeing it as a policy that can be questioned and ultimately reversed" (p. xvi). Therefore, I argue that our next step as critical and creative educators is to organize and mobilize in pursuit of abolishing grades at the policy level. Whether through critical dialogue with school administrators, collective pressure on policymakers, or community organizing and popular education, we have immense power to disrupt the deleterious narrative that grades are a natural and inevitable part of schooling. Research demonstrates that oppressive and

dehumanizing grading practices function as a barrier to transformative learning experiences (Blum, 2020b). Therefore, I contend that we have an ethical responsibility to develop more humanizing, just, and meaningful assessment systems with and for our students, both in the classroom and beyond.

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Assessment as Compassion: Aligning Purpose and Practice to Support Wellbeing

-CHRISTOPHER DELUCA, NATHAN RICKEY & MICHAEL HOLDEN

From designing learning sequences, to creating individual assessments, to moment-by-moment observations and adjustments, classroom assessment is at the heart of every teacher's daily practice. This focus on classroom assessment is promising because, as teachers have long recognized, intentional approaches to classroom assessment can drive meaningful improvement in student learning and teacher practice (Manitoba Education, 2006).

Yet, assessment can be time-consuming, difficult work. Globally, teachers spend an average of four and a half hours a week on assessment-related activities—only spending more time teaching and planning lessons (OECD, 2020). Further, assessment can be a substantial source of stress for teachers and students. Forty percent of teachers report facing considerable stress from the amount of marking they do, and 45 percent face similar stress about being responsible for students' achievement (OECD, 2020). Across contexts, a majority of students report fears of failure, leading to stress, anxiety, burnout, depression, and decreased academic performance and self-efficacy (OECD, 2019). As one teacher shared with us in a recent study,

> Many students are obsessed with and stressed about grades… Grades are seen as rewards that rank and separate the 'smart' students from the less capable students. Many see anything less than 100% as failure. I struggle with their lack of confidence in themselves and in their challenges with articulating their strengths and their learning.

This quote is indicative of many in our study; teachers feel their assessment practices betray their pedagogical principles.

So why are teachers and students so stressed about assessment? All too often, our assessment practice is not aligned with our teaching. The need to grade or quantify student learning can drive assessment approaches predicated on individual progress and competition, approaches that run counter to our teaching. Pedagogically, teaching is framed as a collaborative, relational, growth-oriented endeavour. Teachers form professional

learning networks like MSSTA to support one another, share promising practices, and develop their work. Assessment, though, tends to operate from an individualistic perspective: many teachers design and implement assessments alone, and students spend more than a decade in schools where grades, academic consequences, and accountability paradigms take center-stage. Despite a robust pedagogy of assessment *for* learning (Manitoba Education, 2006), many students still experience assessment as a top-down, grades-focused, judgmental process that ranks and sorts them according to their academic worth.

We propose a different approach—one many teachers have embraced to better align their purpose and practice to support student and teacher wellbeing: assessment as compassion.

What is Assessment as Compassion?

Assessment as compassion begins with the assertion that assessment is rooted in relationships. As Cowie and Harrison (2016) observe, classroom assessment can be a deeply public, personal, emotional experience for students and for teachers. Students learn alongside one another, their successes and struggles often visible to peers and adults alike. Meanwhile, teachers often make assessment decisions with the contextual knowledge of each student, adapting instruction with the goal of improving learning based on each student's individual needs. When we assess with compassion, we recognize learning as a social process of constructing understanding that happens alongside others (Manitoba Education, 2006). We particularly draw on compassion's Latin roots, meaning literally 'to endure or experience together,' as well as the Greek word *pathos* meaning 'feeling or emotion' (Harper, 2021). Assessment is already a shared, relational, emotional experience. Recognizing this fact invites teachers to align pedagogy and assessment more directly with the humanity of learning. Assessment as compassion does not mean assessment with low standards. Assessment that is rooted in relationships, responsive to wellbeing, and operates from a learning stance, still challenges students and teachers to engage in real learning and challenging curricular concepts. What assessment as compassion offers, separate from many current approaches, is that learning can be *both* rigorous and responsive to human contexts. Rigour is not beholden to individualistic, one-size-fits-all competitive models of assessment. Fundamentally, a rigorous and valid assessment regime requires analysis of evidence in context: the context of this child, this classroom, and this learning goal. Assessment as compassion emphasizes that our attention to wellbeing and relationship must be as robust as our attention to data and decision-making.

What does Compassionate Assessment Look Like in the Classroom?

Assessment *for* learning is the cornerstone of compassionate assessment. Put simply, assessment *for* learning refers to the ways in which teachers gather and use information to drive students' learning forward. In the classroom, assessment *for* learning takes four forms: effective and ongoing feedback, co-constructing learning goals, peer and self-assessment, and effective questions and conversations (Moss & Brookhart, 2019). However, assessment *for* learning is about much more than simply ticking boxes: it is a pedagogical orientation that shapes all aspects of teaching and learning.

For example, consider the recurring learning outcome "Negotiate constructively with others to build consensus and solve problems" (Manitoba Education, 2003, p. 108). This invites teachers to not only create teaching and learning moments centred on collaboration, but also to create *assessment* moments where collaboration, consensus, and problem solving are explicitly valued and developed. Assessment *for l*earning is predicated on the notion that learning and assessment are deeply integrated: feedback, questioning, self-assessment, and adjustments to teaching and learning are critical aspects of the learning process, rather than separate pieces. Assessments should reflect the learning process; individual written assessments, for example, may not capture a trustworthy understanding of students' ability to build consensus and solve problems. In spirit, assessment *for* learning re-orients the classroom as a space where teachers and students work together to develop a shared understanding of learning goals and strategies within a subject domain, reducing power differentials and promoting learner agency (Marshall & Drummond, 2006; Willis, 2011).

When teachers leverage assessment *for* learning strategies in this spirit, they cultivate participatory pedagogies, relationship building, and compassionate responses. Participatory pedagogies involve teachers and students working together to set learning goals which are meaningful for students and aligned with curricular requirements. They help students to realize the competencies that matter to them and ways to actualize them. Assessment *for* learning, a mechanism of communication about learning, becomes foundational to relationship building between teachers and students. Students learn from and with each other. This process can also elucidate each student's learning needs, allowing the teacher to respond to the whole child with compassion. Through assessment *for* learning, teachers can cultivate participatory pedagogies, relationship building, and compassionate responses—three processes that underpin compassionate assessment.

Classroom Actions

Feedback Dialogues: Effective and Ongoing Feedback

Teacher feedback plays an important role in cultivating compassionate assessment. Hattie and Timperley (2007) identify four levels of feedback. First, self feedback focuses on the student themselves, e.g., "You did great!". While well intentioned, self feedback provides students with the least guidance for their learning of all four levels. Task feedback provides guidance related to the task itself, e.g., "you need a cover page". Process feedback directs learners to underlying processes applicable to similar tasks, e.g., "persuasive arguments typically use evidence and facts". Self-regulation feedback, the fourth level, instead focuses on widely applicable learning habits, e.g., "consider editing your work before submitting it". The top three levels of feedback —task, process, and self-regulation—can demonstrate compassion by showing students you care about their progress. Ultimately, feedback is about noticing and naming students' learning. Feedback validates the learner and their learning, recognizing the strengths of their performance while also providing guidance for improvement.

Co-Constructing Learning Goals

Teachers can also foster compassionate assessment through co-constructing learning goals with students. There are several approaches to co-constructing learning goals. For example, teachers can simply invite learners to set goals, perhaps based on previous feedback or their own learning interests. Alternatively, they can work with students to analyze exemplars of performance, coming to a shared understanding of what quality performance looks like. Teachers can support effective co-construction by giving learners opportunities to explicitly demonstrate and assess their progress towards their goals (Moss & Brookhart, 2019).

Co-construction deeply engages learners with learning goals and success criteria, providing them progress touchpoints. When students have more power to construct learning goals, the process can validate the interests of the entire learning community (Bourke & Mentis, 2013). Further, supporting learners in setting individual learning goals promotes differentiated instruction, allowing teachers to respond to the whole child. This process fosters inquiry, responsibility, and collaboration, supporting a participatory pedagogy, relationship building, and compassionate responses.

Peer and Self-Assessment

Like co-constructing learning goals, peer and self-assessment can support students in becoming active agents in the assessment

process. Peer and self-assessment can foster aculture of cooperation in the classroom: students become invested in the success of others and develop tools to support one another—and themselves (Andrade, 2010). Self-assessment can be powerful in supporting learning because it helps learners internalize success criteria (Brown & Harris, 2013). Engaging in self-assessment can increase students' sense of self-efficacy, which refers to the belief that they can accomplish something —a powerful force for learning (Panadero et al., 2017). Peer assessment allows learners to gain feedback from others to refine their understanding of their own work. It is a collaborative activity that can foster positive classroom relationships. When learners support and receive support from their peers, they establish conditions for relationships based on cooperation. Together, peer and self-assessment contribute to a community of learning wherein students' peers and themselves are their best learning resources.

Effective Questions and Conversations

Effective questioning is central to assessment for learning. Questions help teachers understand how students are responding to ideas and concepts. Further, questions are powerful tools that students can learn to employ to drive their own learning forward (Moss & Brookhart, 2019). How teachers use questioning and class discussion can also shape a learning climate conducive to compassionate assessment. When teachers are the only ones who ask questions, class discussions can befairly one sided. Conversely, teachers can support learners in asking questions and responding to their peers. A powerful approach involves offering prompts for affirming another student's idea, adding to someone's thinking, clarifying a point, or following up for more evidence. The teacher can also use prompts to encourage participation, e.g., "(student's name), how would you describe …".

When teachers act as facilitators of discussion, each student has a say in the direction of the conversation. The teacher is part of the discussion, but not the focus (Moss & Brookhart, 2019). Class discussions promote a collaborative learning community where students learn from each other and the teacher. Empowering learners to ask questions and participate in discussion can provoke a participatory pedagogy and relationship building. By placing value on student inquiry, these processes help respond compassionately to the whole child.

Conclusion

Each of these assessment *for* learning strategies helps engage a participatory pedagogy, build relationships, and have more compassionate responses in assessment. Assessment is not an add-on activity to classrooms but a deeply integrated practice that drives teaching and learning. Critically, in assessment *for* learning,

teachers take on the role of facilitator of assessment rather than the primary assessor. Students become the primary agents in assessment, collecting, reporting, and synthesizing their own evidence. Rather than compromising rigour, compassionate assessment can enhance validity by being responsive to human contexts. Compassionate assessment is ultimately rooted in relationships: it both drives and is shaped by relationship building in the classroom. The result is that assessment looks more like teaching: it is collaborative, relational, supportive, and growth-oriented.

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Michael is a PhD Candidate at Queen's University, and has taught in K-12 drama, history, and teacher education contexts. His current research examines how classroom teachers use formative assessment to enhance student learning in complex spaces. His professional interests include classroom assessment, engaging students and teachers in meaningful learning, and developing stronger collaborative networks in education.

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The Quest to Ungrade

-SAMIR HATHOUT

We have a long history in this place. Whether you call it Turtle Island or North America, we have a long, flourishing, diverse history. We also have a colonial history--a history filled with select sanitized stories that attempt to erase our history of assimilation and genocide. This is a history that tries to ignore a legacy that has produced over 6000 unmarked graves of children at Residential Schools and of civic institutions that have resulted in ongoing violence against Inuit, Métis and First Nations women and girls, and those in the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community.

While some people are undeniably more grievously impacted by colonization make no mistake we are all affected by colonization. Colonization and the arrival of the West on Turtle Island has affected our worldview, our history, our languages, our laws, and the way we live and interact with the world. This results in systems that reify this worldview. This is particularly evident in our education system where we educate and assess in ways that ensure the maintenance of the current colonial system. Following the ideas of Marie Battiste, we need to move away from systems that uphold colonial thinking, and move towards holistic, lifelong, purposeful, experiential, communal, and spiritual learning. In order to do this we need to interrogate our curriculum, classrooms systems, pedagogy, and assessment. Current assessment practices risk upholding singular notions of Truth, individualizing learning, and naturalizing competition. It seems to me, if we rethink our assessment, our pedagogy and classroom systems will necessarily follow.

Learning More Than History

I often teach Canadian History. Unfortunately History is very misunderstood and many students dread their first history class, entering the room already anxious. They are afraid of the idea of regurgitating stories, dates and names, and not everyone's stories, dates and names mind you. While some students are afraid of how history does not represent them, all are terrified that at the end they will have to sum it all up in a high stakes exam, test or presentation that will ultimately stress their capacity to memorize and write. In the end,

and this is true of all classes and not just those in Social Studies, their efforts, their entire experience and learning trajectory, their family stories, their essays, thoughts and questions, their growth and dreams for the future will ultimately produce… a number. This number reductively communicates the degree to which the student has received and represents their retention of the prescribed curriculum in the prescribed format.

But, this system of reducing students to numbers does not align with the broader purpose of a good public school education. How we assess our students is ultimately connected to how we teach, treat, and include them in our public schools. That is, if we assess students in our history classes on their ability to recall information, we are suggesting: that there is a singular version of history; that we do not value critical thinking; and that we think learning can be encapsulated by a summative assessment. Whereas, if our pedagogy recognizes that history is only ever an interpretation of the past, that students actively engage with evidence to develop their own interpretations, and that learning history necessarily involves critical and historical thinking, then our classroom practice and assessment should also follow these principles. The focus on percentages pipelines students into futures of individualism, competition and neoliberal ideals fomented through years of exposure to this tacitly accepted anchor on our public education system, the numerical grade. Public school education is intended to be the great equalizer, it is supposed to be for all, for the benefit of all, and for the sustainability of a flourishing democratic society and mother earth. As a teacher, time and time again, I would see students' hopes and dreams dashed away as they saw their grades come in and they 'did the math' only to realize that they had no numerical chance of passing. For others, on the other end of the grade spectrum, doing well was somehow never well enough. As the bar to enter programs and faculties slowly creeps up and up, students' slightly deficient grades dash their dreams for a future at Universities or colleges that are themselves moving away from these methods of assessment; recognizing the inherent bias and deficiency in producing students that do not continue to ask questions after they have been given the answer. I saw in my classes how my assessment pitted student against student as they physically erected dividers between them before doing tests. These literal dividers were emblematic of a system built on competition, and a view of learning as an individualized feat. If it takes a community to raise a child, what do our community practices do to them? How do our modes of assessment and grading normalize systems that do harm--privileging ranking over learning?

My Learning Journey

As teachers, we all have the ability to make little changes in our classrooms, our little zones

of nominal autonomy. We can make changes about how we treat students when they enter the room, how we use their names and preferred pronouns, how the class is set up to be welcoming and accessible to all, or maybe even the languages that they see on the walls or hear when they are welcomed. If the connection between grading and teaching is inextricable, then for me the first step to making my assessment more decolonized, equitable, fair, and socially just was to begin with how I treated the students in class daily. I do not treat them like a number. I make my classes more welcoming through a pedagogical foundation of caring, inquiry, and inclusion. I make just a little more time for student voice and direction everyday. My first step was a baby one. It was easy for them and it was easy for me. Then I took the time to observe and feel how simply making my class more welcoming and student centered had such positive and warming affects on my students, how they interacted with each other, myself and the learning environment/experience. That act alone helped my students attend, reduced classroom management issues and made students more open to each other's narratives as they began to hear them and see them reflected around them more.

Although I started with tiny steps, the positive impact that it had on my class was clear and it set the foundation for me to continue to make more changes to my classroom practices, to make my classroom practices, pedagogy and my assessment align. For me, this journey was informed by the work of Jesse Stommel.[1] Stommel's work challenges the way students are often distrusted in assessment, and advances grading systems that are more compassionate, or move towards ungrading. I really wanted to align my practices and assessment and finally I had a starting point, and it came in the form of 'A Quest'.

Questing to Do Better

It's not a quiz, it is not a test, it's a Quest. Instead of assessing students' knowledge in the typical competitive assessment OF learning that measures their ability to regurgitate names and dates, we do Quests. Quests are collaborative open book/source assessments that focus on inclusivity and the process of producing an answer rather than just the outcome. These center thinking, inquiry and collaboration over recall, individualism and competition.

The first time I introduced my classes to the Quest, I let them vote on various assessment

[1]https://www.jessestommel.com/

options--the Quest being one option. Many of them saw the benefits and some just thought of it as simply being 'easier' than a test. After doing a few Quests and increasing the level of rigor and critical thinking in the questions, almost all, if not all, still voted for doing a Quest and attendance usually went up.

To help facilitate the quests, two students volunteer as leaders to help the students in the class organize and divide the responsibility of completing the Quest. They also help the students get back together and use their collective knowledge for a final answer and grade that can be debated to find consensus. The leaders assist in mediating opinions and making sure everyone's voices are heard and respected. Students can see that even in a community working together, leaders have to stand up and champion what is right, and that they are leaders because they are championing our collective good, inclusivity and modeling respect for all.

After each Quest, I phone the caregivers of the two class leaders that help navigate the class to success, modeling effective and respectful communication, work ethic and collaborative strategies. I refer to this as the Golden call home. The student volunteers know this call is coming. To the students the call renegotiates how they see the school and their actions in school impacting their home life and the world. To their caregivers it redefines what we actually do in schools, that we teach students that they are valued for more than what they produce.

Some of these discussions are the proudest and most memorable moments of my career, and it is simply communicating the achievements of my students to their parents. In reality this is so much more complex than any number could possibly explain, and in its complexity it begins to explain more what we are doing and trying to uphold in public schools

Not only is the Quest 'openbook', it's open source. Students decide independently what sources they value to use and sometimes have to justify their use when answering. Students have input in the method that they would like to represent their knowledge and even in some cases the nature and scope of the critically thinking oriented questions that they are addressing depending on what aspects of the original question they value. When stumped, the students can even ask the adults in the room questions, because even the teacher is a member of their community who is "a" source of knowledge, but not "the" source of knowledge. When they ask me questions during a Quest I answer them using the Socratic Dialectic, challenging their assumptions and cultivating new questions. Students all work together towards one goal, they represent their knowledge how they see fit (which respects and invites varied literacies) and they use and reflect on the knowledge that they value.

When we do Quests there is more academic success for all. When we do Quests, the room is alive with discussion, devices are humming for the right reasons, and many people are communicating and debating their ideas as they are encouraged to just kinda do what they do.

During some Quests I have heard laughter in my room during assessment along with the buzz of communication and learning. Do you hear laughter in your room when you assess? If not, ask yourself why not, and maybe it's time to make a change; I am sure happy I did.

Even the students that thought that they knew 2/10 in their mind when they came in, leave the Quest knowing more and having the methods of success modeled to them by their peers. The Quest moves the focus of assessment more towards assessment FOR and AS learning, so the time it takes can be left up to students as they are learning while they are being assessed.

Despite this method of assessment reflecting sound assessment practices that are moving towards decolonizing our classroom spaces and that reflect education's commitment to the TRC,I still have to give students a numerical grade, as outlined by Manitoba Education and by my contract. By making the focus of that grade more oriented towards assessment FOR and AS learning, I can help minimize the gap between what that grade means and what I, what we, want it to represent. This is an element of my practice where I am still learning

and continue to struggle with, and in order to make meaningful changes, I needed to turn to my teaching community.

Within the Confines of A System Steeped in Colonialism

By asking for feedback from students and in some cases incorporating students' suggestions on how to make their performance and the Quests better, I became a better teacher. But I needed more than just their suggestions, I needed my community too if I wanted to raise my practices for tomorrow's challenges.

For any teacher or anyone trying to ungrade, change their practice, or make a change in any way; I would say to them after step one; baby steps, step two is to find or create your community. Find your people and share your quests, ideas and support. That's how teachers can make change, by following the directions we give and allow the community to raise our practice up too. The first Quests look very different than those I give today, and will continue to change to meet the needs of students and society. In my school, we have cultivated a group of teachers, guidance counselors, consultants, administrators and community stakeholders that get together every once in a while at lunch to eat baked goods and chat about what we are doing, what we are thinking about and seeing in our fields, and how we are making our classes better for our students and tomorrow. Other than the strength and support that this group brings, it also showed me that I am not alone. Many other people see the problems with grading and our colonial education system and want to make change. I am not alone. You are not alone. One of the most important lessons in history was taught to me by others, by my students, so that I can teach it back to future thems.

About the Author

Samir is a husband and father. He has been teaching in Winnipeg for about 15 years at the senior years level. While he has spent most of his time teaching Social Studies, he has also taught Math, Science, ELA and Philosophy. In his spare time he likes being outside with his family and camping.

We Used to Work Alone, Now We Create Together

-BRENT SCHMIDT

I start with the assumption that the vast majority of Social Studies teachers care about their subject. I also venture to further assume that students do not automatically share a teacher's enthusiasm for the subject. I believe that if a student (or anyone, for that matter) does not care about something - such as a topic in Social Studies - they will not learn it. Even if the lesson is pedagogically sound and expertly prepared, that does not guarantee learning will occur.

Teachers do their best to make engaging lessons, by implementing the latest videos and resources, along with a diversified assessment approach. But this doesn't always inspire engagement or foster learning. Students are not empty vessels needing to be filled with ad hoc information; they need to be engaged with their subject. This requires that we focus on meaningful and authentic assessment, that we focus as much on *what* we are assessing as we do on how we assess our students. We can be thoughtful educators who engage in formative feedback throughout our students' learning process, but if what we're asking the students to do is boring or disconnected from their lives - or not a meaningful experience - then we may never actually ignite their desire to learn.

If you're a teacher, you're familiar with the adage, "you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make them drink". We do our side, the students have to do theirs, right? Forgive my pedantics, but what if the horse isn't thirsty? What if the water is unappealing or even poisoned? To shift to plain speaking, I think there's a large *appeal* issue with *what* teachers assess.

As cartoonist Ivan Brunetti says, "a good teacher, essentially, brings out good work from the students, or rather points the student toward wringing good work from themselves." I like this perspective because it puts the onus on the teacher for connecting the student to information, but the work produced is on the student. If we can make more appealing and engaging assessments, I think we can point students towards "wringing good work from themselves".

More Meaningful

Social Studies is more than the meaningless collection of dates, events, data, and opinions- it's an exercise in figuring out how human and natural systems of our world operate and interact--and how our (in)actions can impact these systems. The task to build a more peaceful, sustainable, and equitable world is the very goal of education. This translates to a world where people are far more compassionate about each other and the planet. In order to achieve this goal, teaching about citizenship simply is not enough. Students need to enact collective responsibility for the greater good.

Overall, this comes down to *engagement*. Since I began teaching I've constantly been asking myself: *how can I make school relevant, or at least interesting to students?* The idea of 'engagement' was, and still is, a fascination for me. What is it exactly? How is it achieved? How can one learning experience be engaging for a whole classroom? How could we get an individual grade for collective work? How could assessment be based on conversations, observations, reflections, and products? If I could answer these questions, then I felt my class could be inclusive, collaborative, and construct knowledge like a team. A team where all members have the opportunity to contribute.

In my quest to learn how to engage students, I explored and experimented with a variety of strategies for lesson design, delivery, and assessment; seeking student connection foremost.

The Classroom Story

While teaching in a Winnipeg high school in 2013, I discovered an innovative teaching method employed by another teacher, Gregory Chomichuk. In his classroom, I noticed my former middle school students excitedly and actively engaged in class. Intrigued, I talked to Gregory and began observing and experimenting with the method in my own classroom. We later named this approach *"The Classroom Story."*

In a *Classroom Story*, the teacher acts as lesson creator, narrator, and moderator by creating a setting, inciting an event, and crafting a general plot, and possible game elements, while infusing curricular outcomes and language. Students engage with the story and curricular content by designing characters and becoming authors, thinkers, and creators. A story is an attempt at starting and completing a shared, co-constructed narrative experience with curricular learning goals. *The Classroom Story* has become central to my pedagogical activities and teaching identity. It has encouraged me to play with content and ideas, be spontaneous,

seek out new instructional strategies, and follow students' interests. Best of all, it's helped my classroom feel like a community.

As I practiced and developed this approach, I realized that another value of *The Classroom Story* is how it serves as a springboard for inquiry and community building. The ideas, projects, and artifacts inspired by *Classroom Stories* have been remarkable.

The curriculum for Cluster 1 in grade 8 Social Studies is about prehistory and early humans with the eventual summary that once humans settled and farmed "civilization" took off. Not only is this untrue (Graeber & Wengrow 2021), in my experience it doesn't quite lay the scaffolding required to start studying the diverse cultures, peoples, places, and events that are in the curriculum over the course of the year. I think if we want to design meaningful learning experiences for students we need to ask them to do something that matters. We need to focus less on covering the curriculum, and create activities that invite students to uncover the curriculum.

There is no way we can cover all the curriculum in a year. As educators, we need to consider what matters at this moment, for our students. Instead of spending onerous amounts of time on prehistory, I start the year by facilitating a Classroom Story called "The Polis" where students are given the opportunity to create and operate their own city-states. We start small with something recognizable, then scale up. We learn about some of the key terminology and historical concepts used throughout the year - like timelines and the differences between BC/AD and BCE/CE. All the while, pupils construct their islands based on the general learning outcomes of the curriculum: power and authority; the land, people and places; historical connections; economics and resources; identity, culture, and community; and global interdependence. These are presented in ways that are meant to engage. For example, "power and authority" is covered when students choose the governing style of the city, design a leader (a character in the story) to take charge, and make decisions within the story/world. As we create and play, we deconstruct the concepts into what the learning outcomes mean, then apply them to our city-states. Throughout the activity, students made cultures, negotiated with foreign powers, constructed truces and treaties, fought pirates, studied new technologies, spied on neighbours, and explored new lands. The students held all their learning evidence in a legal sized folder full of papers with drawings, writings, maps, agreements, and letters. They also became accustomed to working collaboratively, collectively, and creatively.

By connecting the *Classroom Story* of "The Polis" to the students' desire to play, create,

and work with (or against) one another, they were consistently giving a solid effort and generally getting along with one another. My efforts were focused on facilitating student learning, acting as the narrator, mediator of agreements, and assisting students who required help. I find that when I'm running a Classroom Story, I'm constantly scanning my classroom and taking feedback from my students. I'm "on their level" interacting, answering questions, laughing, conversing, and co-constructing the learning experience.

SPQR – A Classroom Story, Story

In this particular *Classroom Story*, I gathered information, particularly through Isaac Asimov's book "Roman Republic" and Dan Carlin's podcast, "Hardcore History". Applying learnings for everyday life to make the classroom fun is all part of the development process.

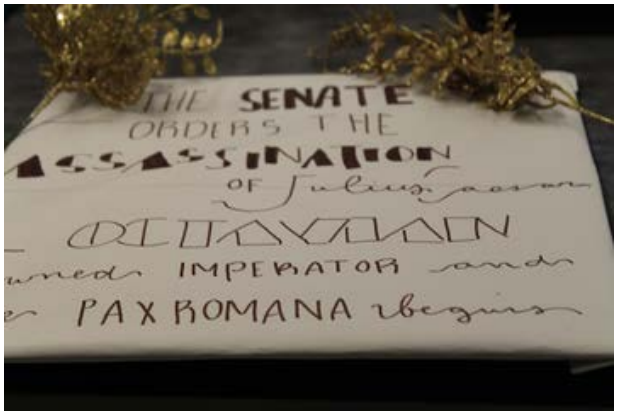
I started the new *Classroom Story* by assigning roles at random using cue cards. Roles included senators, generals, tribunes, consuls, patricians, and one philosopher, and piqued students' interest about what was coming next. After they learned a little about the roles they were assigned, I front loaded information to prime the students for what was coming up. They watched videos about ancient Roman topics while learning how to take Cornell style notes. By starting with the roles, students were more actively engaged in the content. There was a purpose; if they had more information, they would know how to act in their role. Having armed them now with knowledge of ancient Roman terminology, people, places, and events, we were ready to play with the content.

The class acted like the Roman powerbrokers: senators, tribunes, generals, orators, patricians. Together, they confronted some of the Roman Republic's historical issues and events. They had control of Rome's budget, armies, and government. With this power they defended Rome from Hannibal (even though the Romans were not nice to the Carthaginians either); engaged in foreign campaigns of conquest to enrich themselves (motivated by power, glory, or honour); and defended Rome from the northern invasion of the Cimbri and Teutons. All the while the students monitored the balance of food, slaves, wealth, and happiness of the plebeians. These topics were not taken lightly - they led to excellent conversations, which then led to connections to modern times. In this way, Socratic seminar became

part of the course without my intention. Students were conducting debates on the fly, each with their vision of how Rome should be run. Through these deliberations with their peers, students not only engaged with the content, they grappled with concepts and engaged in critical thinking. When heavy topics came up, we could talk about them. Is this not the authentic engagement we are looking for– students wrestling with tough topics, trying to connect our history to their lives and our current times?

One part of the story had us look at the historical event of Sulla's Civil War. The class turned upon itself in a vicious game of political chess, Optimates vs Populares. We played our own version of the dinner game Werewolf to simulate the danger and suspicions that were prevalent during the time, but also to have fun and play with content. Then, we finished things off by examining the events, people, intrigue, and controversy revolving around Julius Caesar. We examined his rise to power, investigated his death, and learned about Rome's transformation from Republic to Empire.

The Classroom Story activities were engaging, fun and generated *interest* in learning. The next task before us was to share the experience with others and to organize outcomes that were measurable. I will reiterate some questions from earlier. How could we get an individual grade for collective work? How could assessment be based on conversations, observations, reflections, and products? How could students have a choice about what they create but still be part of a collective effort? I was about to get my answer.



A Big Idea

What we ask students to do is very important. I firmly believe that the *what* needs to be connected to a bigger purpose. This was confirmed when I saw the documentary "Most Likely to Succeed", which featured the inspiring teacher and student work from High Tech High in San Diego. I fell in love with the idea of publicly displaying and celebrating student work. I don't mean putting student work on the bulletin board outside the room (although there is nothing wrong with that method), I'm referring to producing work that is intended to be seen, in-person, by familial and public audiences. Keeping in line with the historical theme, I decided to have the students make their own mini-museum with exhibitions based on Ancient Rome. We planned to invite friends, family, and community members to come see

our creations and engage with what we learned. When I presented the idea to students, they were hesitant, saying , “are you sure we can do this?” I reassured them we would be fine if we made sure our exhibits had the same purpose as the *Classroom Story*: to be engaging and informative. We set the date for late December, and gave ourselves a month to complete our exhibits before opening night.

Process

Students put ideas onto paper and into action. Some ideas took off right away, some ideas were quickly abandoned, and some ideas required careful developing and crafting. Overall, the two participating social studies classes put together an impressive list of exhibit proposals. These exhibit proposals became fully fleshed-out projects which were valid indicators of competence and learning. A meaningful assessment should provide multiple entry points to demonstrate learning, and I feel we were able to do that with the exhibits that were created.

We had everything covered: traditional informative displays (which were done beautifully), an interactive Colosseum built in Minecraft, a Rome quiz game made in the computer program Scratch, a Roman gods reality TV show playing on repeat in a classroom, three escape rooms based on Roman content, digital sketched artwork, and more. Topics included general overviews of the Republic and Empire, examinations of specific topics like women and children, Sulla’s Civil War, Roman beauty standards, mythology, and the life and death of Julius Caesar. Additionally, many other students volunteered to be hosts for the event which were responsible for welcoming guests, ushering people to the different rooms, explaining the ideas behind

the exhibits, and generally helping things run smoothly. In this process, we were able to use assessment to support learning. *The Classroom Story* engaged and inspired students into inquiry, and that inquiry was channeled into a project-based learning endeavour. Our focus was depth over breadth. Yet, because our

collective efforts had a common goal, we covered the breadth anyway. When students were walking around the classroom they would notice each other's hard work and ask questions about their peer's learning and creations. Students were genuinely interested in learning from one another because they were part of a collective purpose and they saw each other as partners in this process.

As a teacher, it was motivating to see kids asking questions and gathering information. That was the process I wanted–for students to gather information, confer, and then form developed ideas. Because of this process, the final products were varied and impressive. Writing conventions and organization were on point; visuals were crisp and well laid out; art was done with care.

An overlooked part of authentic assessment is that it uses the teacher's time effectively. I'm not a proponent of neoliberal education ideologies that focus on efficiency and "accountability", but that is not what "effective" means, so let's not confuse the two. Using our time effectively in this case means a teacher's time and efforts need to be respected in our quest to produce a meaningful learning experience.

While I'm running a *Classroom Story*, I'm doing learning management rather than classroom management. Throughout this project-based learning endeavour, I was there to coordinate the event, group exhibits together, make suggestions, proofread, give feedback on ideas, provide basic supplies, vet resources, circulate the classroom, conference with students, and most of all; encourage. Was it lots of work? Yes. Was it worth it? Absolutely. Not only was I able to use my time effectively - by being able to directly work and engage with multiple students and projects - but educational assistants were also engaged in the process, using their expertise to circulate the classroom and work with youths. This ensured that as a community we were tending to one another's learning needs.

The week leading up to the event we shared some previews on social media of what we were making. Students had already made sure friends and family had the date marked. We were set.

The Big Night

The exhibition was on a Wednesday. The Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday leading up involved intense preparation. The students were equally excited and scared. Admin was on board, supportive, and ready to help. The day of, admin went out and bought food for us to serve to guests and it really helped the experience. Students stayed after school to help move furniture, set up escape rooms, decorate the halls, and put up the finishing touches. Once all the setup was done and they awaited the first guests - that's when it hit them – the students looked proud; they realized they did it.

The exhibition evening was a wild success because the students took the process seriously and they were invested. Plenty of supportive parents, friends, and family came and were just as engaged as students were. They were amazed by the sheer amount and quality of content the students created. Throughout the night of the event with our guests, the students were excellent ambassadors of their own learning. They stood by their exhibits, educated guests, and delivered on our mission; make an engaging and informative evening about ancient Rome. During the event, the creations on computers were active and a source of lots of laughs. It was validating to see so many "top performers" as this project had a high percentage of exceptional pieces of student work. Students' satisfaction with self was visible as they relished in their success, standing proudly beside their work as guests circulated, asked questions, and gave compliments. On the other hand, not all students were proud of their

work. Some students noticed their shortcomings and how their ideas didn't form the way they intended. This is a valuable lesson, too.

I believe in the process, the long game. I see my time with students as one of their many stops in their journey of life. While I have my students I want them to believe that they can do big things. I think that having high expectations, and the belief they can be reached, creates a meaningful, lasting experience for students.

Conclusion

Disclaimer I don't believe that *the Classroom Story* is the solution to education or everyone's classroom for that matter. It is something that I and many other teachers have found helps us get creative with lesson and assessment design, play with the curricular content, centre on students interests, and build community in the class. I believe that there are many other ways to achieve this when we make learning hands-on, experiential, and connected to students' lives and identities.

With that all said, I owe much of my success with *the Classroom Story* to taking risks while implementing the approach. The style has become an amalgamation of my pedagogical beliefs, penchant for inquiry-based learning styles, playful approach with students, and insistence on showing off student work to others. The Classroom Story has afforded me flexibility, creativity, and engagement in my profession. I can make affordances with my lesson planning to reach out to students of all strengths, skills, and backgrounds. The classroom transforms into a living, breathing role-playing text while helping to enable all children the opportunity to contribute in their own way to create a communal learning experience.

In the past, we used to work alone. Going forward, let's create together.
I invite you to join me in learning more about *The Classroom Story*. This unique and flexible teaching and learning approach has no acronyms, is closer to play than traditional teaching, and puts students at the centre. I will be hosting a free introductory workshop about *The Classroom Story* this Spring. If you are interested in this please contact brent.schmidt@theclassroomstory.com

About the Author

Brent is a full-time teacher, continuously finding new ways to have Classroom Stories bring students together in their learning and turning these stories into projects and exhibitions. During the pandemic he started working on his M.Ed. exploring the various theories, pedagogies, and themes connected to this style. His arts-based thesis is focused on exploring the different ways Classroom Stories are created and used, and how they help classrooms with engagement, co-creation, collaboration, and creativity. He believes he is skilled in: reading fiction, talking to humans, playing and coaching basketball, scribbling and doodling, strumming guitars, gaming, consuming caffeine, and making foods. He writes and posts things at schmidtsclass.com

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Corbin's Corner

Professional Resources

-CORBIN STEINKE

Assessment Authors

Jesse Stommel:

- https://www.jessestommel.com/how-to-ungrade/ (really anything by him on this topic)

Jesse Stommel is a leader in the ungrading movement. This webpage article contains a brief history of the A-F grading system and the 100% grading system, meaningful questions to reflect on, his personal testimony for the case against grades based on autobiographical evidence, and many useful suggestions for alternative assessment strategies

Alfie Kohn:

- Alfie Kohn, "The Case Against Grades"
- Alfie Kohn, Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes

Alfie Kohn is a well established thinker and advocate for ungrading and classroom management strategies that respect the sacred humanity of students. His work challenges many of the foundational assumptions of the traditional classroom and is highly accessible. On his website you will find links to his articles, blog posts, audio/video recordings, and his books which cover a range of topics. The Case Against Grades and Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes are must-reads for any teacher who is seeking to fill their arsenal with powerful ungrading research and rhetoric

Shorter Articles

Earl, L., Volante, D. L., & Katz, S. (2011, June 17). Unleashing the Promise of Assessment for Learning. EdCan Network.

https://www.edcan.ca/articles/unleashing-the-promise-of-assessment-for-learning/

This compelling article describes the origin and potential of assessment for learning, and identifies significant barriers to widespread implementation. In summary - assessment for learning is profoundly effective, why aren't we all doing it? Professional discussions that address how and why we fail to implement best-practises are important, though often uncomfortable. They help us to refocus on our ideals, reflect on where we are and what we have accomplished, and define what needs to be done next. Read this article, then go give yourself one hour to practise self-assessment for learning.

Handbooks, Principles & Standards for Assessment

Assessment Reform Group [ARG]. (2002). Assessment for learning: Research-based principles to guide classroom practice.

http://assessmentreformgroup.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/10principles_english.pdf

Guiding principles are essential to any practice. They form a decision-making framework that help us to direct our efforts, navigate through uncertainty, and bolster our commitment to ideals. This document lays out 10 principles of assessment for learning in a visual representation. These principles remind us that the assessment for learning process is an integral part of the larger teaching-learning process because it reveals what is known, what is unknown, and how to chart a course of new learning.

Relevant Assessment Policy Documents (Manitoba Education)

Manitoba Education (2021). Provincial Report Card Policy and Guidelines: Partners for Learning Grades 1 to 12.

https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/assess/docs/report_card/full_doc.pdf

Policy is as much a root of our practice as philosophy.This document is a must-read for every teacher and it should be read very closely. It includes descriptions of subject categories that will help you to set learning goals, and clear policy for reporting accurately using standard language and framework to translate a student's evidence of learning into both a grade and comment for their report card. Here is an important excerpt to consider:

"teacher comments at all grade levels and levels of achievement (low to high) should address 'strengths', 'challenges', and 'next steps' (practical, doable, timely), as appropriate. Comments do not need to reflect all three aspects of this framework for each comment written—teacher professional judgement applies." (37)

Manitoba Education. (2006). Rethinking classroom assessment with purpose in mind: Assessment for learning, assessment as learning, assessment of learning. Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth.

https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/assess/wncp/full_doc.pdf

Rethinking Assessment is another teacher-must read! Assessment for, as, and of learning are three distinct processes that should emerge in every classroom. This document includes a detailed description of each assessment process that includes purpose, application, and fictional case studies for context. Moreover, it ends with a section that outlines strategies and important information to consider that can help you, and your colleagues, to adopt purposeful assessment into your practice.

Websites

Canadian Assessment for Learning Network: https://cafln.ca/.

The Canadian Assessment for Learning Network (CAfLN) is a community of professional educators who are committed to practising meaningful and effective assessment with their students. Their web page is a place wherein you will find a host of articles and reflections written by educators who want to share their passion for assessment and distilled wisdom from lived experiences.

Call for Submissions

MB Speaks

FALL 2023 ISSUE

“If we ask children to critique the world but then fail to encourage them to act, our classrooms can degenerate into factories for cynicism”

-Au; Bigelow, Karp, 2007

Call for Submissions *FALL 2023 ISSUE*

MB Speaks

Greetings!

You are invited to submit to the Fall 2023 Issue of the Manitoba Social Science Teachers' Association (MSSTA) Journal.

Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it, and by the same token save it from ruin which except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and the young, would be inevitable. And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, not to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world."

-Hannah Arendt

The above Hannah Arendt quote is cited in the grade 12 Global Issues curriculum, a curriculum that centers student action. Through this course, students are invited to critically engage with their world, to consider the consequences of their in/actions, and to take action to create positive changes. This is not the only social studies curriculum in Manitoba that encourages active citizenship. All K-12 social studies courses are anchored to this core concept. The introduction to the Kindergarten curriculum, along with all others, reads: "Welcome to the world of social studies, where students have opportunities to interact with each other in democratic groups and communities, and to acquire the knowledge, values, and skills they need to become active, responsible citizens within our Canadian society. As they grow and learn the skills of citizenship, they not only contribute to their learning communities, but also contribute to the betterment of our society". Not only does active citizenship frame each social studies curriculum, but the knowledge within the curriculum invites students to think about how citizens have/not taken action throughout history. Moreover, it introduces students to their rights, in particular the right to express opinions on matters and decisions that affect them. The students in our classrooms are impacted by social, economic, political and environmental issues--and feel compelled to take action. In this issue, we ask, what are social studies teachers in this province doing in their classrooms to foster student action.

Call for Submissions *FALL 2023 ISSUE*

MB Speaks

Through this issue we hope to hear about: the issues that are inspiring student action across this province, the wonderings and worries that action oriented pedagogy evokes, and the ways that educators are inviting student action.

Educators can submit to any section of the journal:

1. Pedagogy: scholarly writing connected to the issue's theme. Writers should aim for 5-7 double-spaced pages. Submissions accepted in this section will serve as the anchor essay for the entire issue.
2. Practice: class activities, lessons and/or unit plans.
3. Professional Development: events, learning resources, books, podcasts, organizations including student groups.
4. Photos: If you have any photographs of Manitoba that you would like featured in the issue, we would love to include them.

Submissions should be sent to msstajournal@gmail.com no later than August 1st, 2023. We hope to publish this issue in late September, 2023. Please send your submissions as word documents.

For immediate response to any journal inquiries, please reach out to shannon.moore@umanitoba.ca.

If you are interested in advertising in our journal, please contact us directly; we are in the process of developing protocols and policies around advertising.

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MB Speaks

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