A CRITIQUE OF CURRENT PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE:

TEACHING WRITING IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

By JESSICA A. PITT

A thesis submitted to the

Graduate School-Camden

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Arts

Graduate Program in English

Written under the direction of

Ellen Malenas Ledoux

And approved by

_____

Ellen Malenas Ledoux

Camden, New Jersey

May 2019

THESIS ABSTRACT

A Critique of Current Pedagogical Practice:

Teaching Writing in Secondary Education

by Jessica A. Pitt

Thesis Director:

Dr. Ellen Malenas Ledoux

This paper explores grading student compositions as an undemocratic and unethical practice that is detrimental to their growth as writers, particularly stunting their ability to take positive writing risks, to self-reflect on the rhetorical effectiveness of their work, and to be mindful of their own work and others' while trying to survive the competitive nature of education. I contend that disassembling the educational hierarchy through abolishing grades will cultivate a more egalitarian composition classroom whereby risk-taking, awareness of rhetorical purpose, and mindfulness are essential skills in students' repertoires as writers. I offer an alternative grading system for progressive educators working within the bounds of traditional schools who are striving to meet these humanitarian goals.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Table of Contents

V. Introduction

Your story is beautiful and the world needs true stories like this. However, as a reader, I'm craving more details in the part where you confront death. You build the suspense, but speed up the most painful--and therefore, critical--moment. Was that intentional? Is there a way to let the reader inside your pain? Is that what you were even going for?

"If I do that, will it bring my grade up?"

I fell into the understanding gradually, as if watching a crisis unfold in slow motion. In the classroom, nobody is listening. I'm not talking about a lack of "classroom management," but a lack of genuine human interaction, where someone speaks and another listens, where people are quick to lend ear and slow to react. In other words, we're missing mindfulness (from teachers as much as students). The combination of active listening and thoughtful response ("presence") is the only way to communicate authentically, which discourse necessarily requires. When we're taught the skill of presence, we are apt to curtail superficial response in favor of deep engagement, which increases effective communication skills. The more present students are, the more likely they are to commit learning experiences to long-term memory. The more present teachers are, the more likely they are to make an impact on students' growth as writers (and to enjoy the job much more!). I argue that grading student writing is the main factor deterring us from remaining present in the classroom. Grading steals presence and exacerbates inequities; as a result of grading, students and teachers both focus on superficial rewards at the expense of mindful engagement in discourse.

VI. Literature Review

    A. Risk Taking & Accountability

Scholars are concerned about alienated student writing as a result of counterproductive grading practices and have proposed changing the culture of composition classrooms to augment positive risk-taking in student writing. Since students have been taught to focus on the extrinsic reward of grades, or the "ego orientation" (Lepper; Nolen) of their academic work, they often forfeit authentic and long-term writing skills for superficial short-term gains. Though they are sometimes encouraged to take risks in their writing and to grapple with complexities, they are aware that doing so jeopardizes their chances of receiving high grades, so it disincentivizes the behavior (Inoue; Kohn; Holaday; Davis; O'Hagan; Elbow & Danielwicz; Blynt). Students are relinquishing autonomy after attempting a risk or they're avoiding the risk altogether (Kohn).

Alienation is a precarious consequence of their caution; they revise according to the teacher's suggestions albeit contrary to their own beliefs, or they assume the teacher knows better than they do (Elbow): either option is alienating because it silences the truth of what a student writer is trying to convey. Lou Labrant challenges us not to succumb to a lifetime of churning out students who produce "conventionally stated futility" (128). Progressive educators are taking a stance against traditional grading in an effort to halt the growing population of students who are content to write any words that please the teacher in the quest to 'earn' themselves an A; this cohort of skeptical educators desires

that students focus on the communicative function of composition above the technicalities (Tchudi, *Alternatives to Grading Student Writing*).

Many educators attribute risk-avoidance, the move toward standardized writing, and a noticeable decline in student motivation to the growing pressure for both student and teacher accountability. Teachers have been made to believe that grades reflect the rigor of their classroom practices and keep them accountable for a job well done (Inoue; Thomas; Elbow); they've been beguiled that students, too, are being held accountable when intimidated with grades (Thomas). However, evidence suggests that grades acting as accountability measures are egregiously inaccurate since different teachers can grade the same student paper everywhere on the scale from an A to an F, depending on their system (Guskey; Zoeckler; Kohn; Elbow; O'Hagan).

Guskey elaborates on this in great length in his book *On Your Mark*, making the overall claim that our grading system is setting students up for failure, perpetuating an unjust practice of ranking and sorting students. We sort and rank under the guise of accountability, but studies reveal surprising findings (O'Hagan; Elbow; Kohn 1999); LaBrant; Lepper): 1) students are intrinsically motivated to learn until confronted with consequential graded contexts that gradually eliminate their freedom of expression; this results in fear for some (the high-achievers) and surrender for others (those whose confidence is destroyed after some distasteful graded writing experiences) 2) students are intrinsically motivated to write until confronted with inauthentic contexts, perceived as trivial exercises 3) by training students to desire extrinsic rewards instead of focusing on inherent value, we are pruning away intrinsic motivation altogether.

Some educators, however, are fearful that relinquishing control will result in chaos, where students are free to say whatever they wish without consequence (Parini; Bartholomae). This is a justifiable fear. One of the major responsibilities of writing teachers is, of course, to hold students to high standards of writing and to teach them already vetted and effective rhetorical moves (LaBrant; Guskey; Hunt; Elbow; Bauman; Thomas); no composition teacher would argue against this goal. The argument here, however, is that it's crucial not to overlook the first step of allowing students to *say* something authentic before we teach them *how* to say it. Rhetorical moves are valuable only when they are used to say something worthwhile. Otherwise, we're teaching "the polishing and adornment of irresponsible and unimportant writing" (LaBrant).

It's also imperative that we distinguish between standards and grades; we can hold students to high standards with or without grades, but the difference is that without them, the products we're receiving from students are authentically theirs instead of marred by fear-struck writing that adheres to teachers' requests. The difference is that without the ultimate judgment of grades, there's a conversation to be had between teacher and student about what's most effective, prompting a deeper understanding of how and why those tools work, in lieu of irrefutable numbers and demands that students frequently don't understand. Without grades, students actually learn to communicate effectively instead of just maintaining the appearance that they can.

B. Alternative Grading to Progress Toward Egalitarian Classrooms

If we dismantle the educational hierarchy to give every student equal opportunity to succeed, we would create equity among peers, but also radically alter the power

structure between teacher and student. The most notable triumph of redistributing power is fighting for democracy in the classroom (Freire; Thomas; Danielwicz & Elbow; Nelson; Wilson), a key goal for teachers who believe writing itself and the teaching of writing should both be egalitarian enterprises.

Peter Elbow and Alfie Kohn are the major proponents of this radical shift in pedagogy, but a host of other educators have followed suit with alternatives to traditional grading, such as contracts (Barlow; Bauman; Blackstock & Exton; Hassencahl; Plotts) whereby grading is significantly more quantitative instead of qualitative. While details vary from one educator's policies to the next, the general premise of contract grading is that students are guaranteed a B if they complete all assignments, but they are eligible to earn an A if those assignments are completed with superior quality. Of course, adversaries are concerned about emphasizing quantity over quality, but proponents view positive risk taking and freedom of expression in student writing as more imperative than coercing polished work.

Some find contract grading too subjective still, proposing that we begin to dismantle the hierarchy through more systemic changes instead: defining the purpose of grades, aligning practices with stated purpose (and making those practices transparent), and instating only the changes which are backed by "research-based evidence on effective practice" (Guskey). Gradual systemic changes and modified grading might be necessary stepping stones before we can fully satisfy the revolutionary goal of an egalitarian classroom.

VII. Claim & Theoretical Framework

In education, there's nothing more important than student voices and no vehicle more powerful in which to communicate them than through students' written work. For this reason, we must reshape the composition classroom to be more humanitarian. This paper uses the term "humanitarian" to describe a pedagogical environment conducive to learning; that is, a place where students find empathetic, mindful, and present listeners, where they are motivated to write in anticipation of receiving authentic feedback and eager to maintain their position in a discourse that matters to them as human beings, not just as students. I will use the term "humanitarian" to describe a human-centered approach which sparks intrinsic interest, focuses student energies on the rhetorical purpose of writing (therefore engaging them with mindful communication), and prompts students to take positive writing risks.

However, the practice of grading compositions is preventing us from achieving a humanitarian composition pedagogy; students aren't at liberty to speak freely without fearing consequential grades nor at liberty to listen mindfully without compromising their own position in the ranking system. Competition opposes humanitarian goals; it demotes mindfulness to a superfluity. Until grading is removed from the composition classroom and mindfulness is valued above extrinsic reward and until students recognize their own voices as worthy of being heard, they will resist composition as an oppressive force rather than the humanitarian experience it has the potential to be. Researchers have already written extensively about our grading system that dehumanizes and commodifies, but none have emphasized mindfulness-- the combination of active listening and

thoughtful response-- as the missing component to egalitarian goals in the composition

classroom, which I argue is indispensable to making further progress.

     Many before me have observed the lack of humanity in our education system,

where students are nameless and numbered, set up for failure. In *A Guide to Composition*

Pedagogies, George describes how Critical Pedagogies[1] "envision a society not simply

pledged to, but successfully enacting the principles of freedom and social justice" (77). In

other words, Critical Pedagogy promotes a system where students are neither conditioned

nor expected to fail. Most importantly, Critical teachers strive to unveil educational

ideologies,[2] illuminating classroom practices that are perceived as natural or necessary,

but are in actuality just unchallenged beliefs carried through generations.[3] Critical

Pedagogies have influenced the praxis[4] I'm proposing: In theory, grades perpetuate an

unjust hierarchical system of oppression, turning students away from humanitarian

values, but in praxis this means running a gradeless composition classroom where writing

is uninhibited, students are at liberty to write authentically without consequence, and

teachers are mindful in their feedback on student compositions, acting as mentors rather

than judges.

---

[1] "a.k.a. Liberatory pedagogy, empowering pedagogy, radical pedagogy, progressive pedagogy, or pedagogy of hope or love" (77)

[2] Theorist Louis Althusser's concept of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs): methods of control that concentrate on ideologies, which "refers to an unconscious set of beliefs and assumptions, our imaginary relation to real conditions that may not match what we imagine" (Parker 231)

[3] Althusser's concept of *interpellation*: "being passively, unconsciously drawn into dominant social assumptions . . . [which] reproduces taken-for-granted (unconscious) cultural assumptions from generation to generation, preventing radical change" (Parker 234)

[4] Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is a call for praxis--action--not just thought

VIII. React Mindfully, No Grades Attached

Affective responses are easiest to produce with personal narrative writing since it's a genre that naturally inspires emotive response; however, even formal academic writing warrants authentic reader response that questions, argues, praises, challenges. In "The Sticking Place: Another Look at Grades and Grading," Blynt makes a powerful assertion:

> There is something fundamentally wrong with putting number or letter grades on student writing. One student has written about his father, a crab fisherman in the Chesapeake Bay whose livelihood is endangered by the rise in tourism and commercialism that besieges his hometown. The paper is written with his life's blood, on his father's soul. I know I am privileged to have read the piece. (66)

Mindfulness means staying present, being aware of the truth of a moment. Blynt honors truth by recognizing what a privilege it is to be the recipient of that particular student's vulnerability. Many, (including myself), have attempted to infuse humanity back into the system by supplementing grades with written feedback, believing it's a more humanitarian approach than the traditional system; it softens the harsh and immutable judgment of a grade. Admittedly, there's some well-intentioned self-deception in that practice because grading and judging are inextricable (O'Hagan 10). Unfortunately, our good intentions to make grades less dreadful actually do nothing in the way of mitigation for the receivers. Only when students are given feedback *without a number attached at all*, are they able to break through boundaries and take writing risks[5] (Kohn 1999). Herein

---

[5] Alfie Khon "From Grading to De-grading" : "One series of studies, for example, found that students given numerical grades were significantly less creative than those who received qualitative feedback but no grades. The more the task required creative thinking, in fact, the worse the performance of students who knew they were going to be graded. Providing students with comments in addition to a grade didn't help: the highest

lies the first few rules for praxis in my proposed humanitarian pedagogy: Mindfully

approach every student paper as a privilege and mindfully react without judgment (and

hence, without a grade).

It wasn't until Graduate school that I learned just how damaging it can be to

attach grades to student compositions, when I was assigned to write a story of grief. It

was a rare opportunity to be genuine and vulnerable, so I wrote with abandon, crafting a

story about the metaphorical death of my alcoholic father who missed most of my

wedding. I took a risk and for the first time, I felt proud to share what I'd written. When

the assignment was returned, I felt a mix of confusion and hilarity. I'd received a 90,

accompanied by a paragraph of feedback that graciously offered an authentic human

response to the content itself and then later included the following critique: "To me, at

least, you are poignantly describing a painful moment of liberation, but you described it

instead as a death."

The irony is that after reading this feedback, I had one of the most liberating

moments I can recall in my academic career: I knew I could rewrite it for a higher grade,

but I was proud of what I'd done and for the first time, I decided *not* to give up my

autonomy for an arbitrary grade because the subject meant too much for me to surrender

it. Any serious writer knows that "sound criticism, honest questions, are actually a

compliment" (LaBrant "Inducing Students to Write" 73) and for that, I was appreciative,

but I disagreed that my story was one of liberation instead of grief and didn't want to sell

out for the extrinsic reward of a grade in the higher nineties. I still should have engaged

---

achievement occurred only when comments were given instead of numerical scores
(Butler, 1987; Butler, 1988; Butler and Nisan, 1986)"

with her concerns about my work, but instead of answering her honest questions, I stayed silent because of my visceral reaction to the grade. Judgment clouded mindfulness and barred authentic dialogue. This goes a long way in supporting Kohn's point that just supplementing grades with comments doesn't mitigate the damages already done, even for a Grad student, let alone a teenager trying to navigate through high school with minimal damage to their confidence.

For this example to be effective, I must acknowledge that by no means is a 90 a "bad grade." According to a grading system without pluses and minuses (such as the one I was in), a 90 is an A. The "risk" I took to not edit the piece was, (most people would argue), minute to say the least. I believe that this fact actually highlights how far-reaching the damages are when it comes to grading, because it demonstrates that it's not only the students receiving "bad grades" who suffer from doubt and frustration with the system. Psychologically, it's damaging to be anywhere on the spectrum, from an A to an F, a 0 to 100 (Kohn *Punished* 204). We're being quantified and *no matter* the quantity, it's dehumanizing.

The reason for even the highest achieving students to incur negative consequences is that they "[i]nternalize the numbers and letters and class rank . . . conflat[ing] how they've scored with who they are" (O'Connor & Lessing 303-4). It's not that I believed a 90 is a shameful grade, but having been socialized into this system, I still looked at it and said "I *am* a 90," not "I *received* a 90." Now imagine the effect of saying "I *am* a 65" and being dared not to change something about it, so you can claim to *be* something higher.

While this might be a dramatic example, the fundamental truth is the same: The problem isn't good grades and bad grades, it's just grades.

At first, even as an adult and professional who understands grades as arbitrary measures, the 90 I'd received made me uneasy. I was blind to the authentic feedback provided because I felt the number was a glaring reflection of the ten percent I failed to achieve even while ninety percent of it was (according to that particular reader, at that moment in time) was up to par. It wasn't that I was so much a feeling "failure" as being startled by a number that betrayed the gravity of my content; I became defensive instead of receptive.

When grading papers, O'Connor & Lessing suggest "treating the subject matter as separate from the set of skills being learned . . . [because] 'There's nothing sadder than an end comment reading, 'Sorry to hear about your grandmother. C+'" (311). A comment this blunt might not be the norm, but a grade negates even lengthy and empathetic responses to a student text. This is because in order to grade, a teacher must pass judgment and maintain a position of power, in opposition to the more humanitarian goal of coaching or mentoring. When I tasked students with writing about their own moral journeys as a personal connection to *Huck Finn*, students were up in arms. They didn't want to be authentic or vulnerable (they've been trained not to be). I encouraged them to put all that aside and just write with sincerity. Here's an excerpt from one student's work:

> I guess summer going into freshman year was when my depression and anxiety were at an all time high . . . memories of my uncle who lost his fight against opioid addiction a few months earlier came flooding in. All I kept thinking was *This is exactly how he felt, alone, sad, and scared.* These thoughts drove me crazy until I gave in, until I got myself up from bed and walked down the steps to the medicine cabinet and I'm sure you can conclude what happened after that. All I

remember from that day is sitting on my kitchen floor and then being admitted into the emergency room at Cooper Hospital where I stayed for 2 days.

As teachers, we can react to student work in one of two ways. One option is to see ourselves as authority figures whose job it is to read student work looking for what to correct. The other option is to read student work as any other reader would, reacting as a person, not as an ultimate authority. I choose the latter. As far as pedagogy goes, being authentic is more likely to produce positive results than a self-defeating attempt to edit to perfection, which is "self-defeating" (Ballenger 65). The two styles of feedback for this particular student's work would look quite different:

1) Thanks for sharing. Put a colon after "felt," and think more about your word choices ("crazy"). Also, avoid cliches like "all time high" and "flooding in." Would have been helpful to include a simile or metaphor so reader can connect better. I can't imagine going through what you did! 88.

2) I'm speechless. First, I appreciate you sharing a story that I'm sure made you feel so vulnerable. It paid off. As the class listened to you read this, silence fell over the room because you were so effective in sharing your experience with us. I particularly like how you trust the reader to understand what happened instead of being explicit about it, which isn't an easy skill to master. The internal dialogue also makes the experience feel real for your readers. I can only imagine what you've gone through and for that, you're inspiring. I hope you continue to share your words so others who have struggled in the same way can see that if they hang on, there's hope. (If you'd like to keep polishing the piece, feel free to stop by and we can talk about small edits. ✓++).

With the first example of feedback, I offered a perfunctory thank you and moved on to judgment. I've successfully shut the student down, making the teacher-student boundary clear: My job is to grade you. The student will take the 88, disregard the editing suggestions, and feel disempowered. In the second mode of feedback (which I argue is much more mindful), I was able to engage with her work as a person, not a mere editor wielding a red pen. She received "full credit" for the assignment, despite room for improvement, and while still noting that edits would be useful, it reads almost an afterthought to her content.

It's not that quality doesn't matter. It does. It's just that it's second priority to content. Phrasing the editing as an invitation is a much more democratic way of responding to student work. It says 'Your piece is successful. I felt your pain and was invested in your story. There are some mechanical errors and it's up to *you* if you'd like to continue pursuing it.' It's true that in either case, she may not revise, but at least with the mindful response, she's gained something from the assignment: Her voice has been heard by an authentic listener and she's built confidence to write again in the future.

For students to be receptive to feedback, they need to feel less alienated than the grading system allows; they need to feel more like feedback is "the voice of a fellow craftsman having a conversation about a piece of work, writer to writer, neither praise nor criticism but questions which imply further drafts, questions which draw helpful comments out of the student writer" (Murray 15). There are two writers, engaging in conversation about the content and style of a piece. This is authentic response. This is mindfulness. This is why we write.

"Authentic" is in that realm of diplomatic, a fine line between praise, honesty, and insult. For example, Bartholomae explains his methods for feedback: "The way I mark papers is to be very frank, to let that frankness determine the kind of editorial conversation that you have with students, where you really treat them as adults and you say 'This is boring,' or 'This is uninteresting,' or 'This is a dead end, don't do it'" (256), which is counterproductive, if our goal for students is to have them interact with our response. They cannot do so if their piece is read with judgment instead if interest. Deliberately telling a student not to pursue a line of thought contributes to power imbalance because it's the teacher imposing an ultimatum on a student text.

However, neither would I advocate for using empty praise because "offer[ing] praise to build self-esteem . . . undermines expectations for quality, and growth in self-esteem relies on expanding quality" (Nelson 24). Truthfully, "teachers' praise and correction are simply two sides of the same coin; both modes of response position teachers as experts who direct students" (Wilson *Rethinking* 51). Regardless of the style of commentary, authentic feedback without a grade is astronomically different from feedback *with* a grade, which automatically negates any student receptiveness or authenticity; it's the difference between democracy and power struggle.So I propose another praxis-component of humanitarian pedagogy (as many others have done before me): don't grade. Engage as one person, hearing the voice of another. Be mindful of the text as the voice of a human being, not dead words on the page to be corrected.

Grades increase student (and teacher!) confusion about a text. For example, the professor's comment says "I understand that it was painful, but wasn't it also a bit

liberating?" This is the sort of authentic questioning I'd offer my own students. However, instead of engaging this question with an explanation that *no, it was not liberating*, and asking what specific instances in my story led her to that conclusion so that I could rework the piece, I was consumed with decoding: *Is the 90 reflective of my failure to make grief clear in the piece, or was it perhaps a few grammar mistakes? Or something else? If someone else had graded it and understood my grief more acutely, would my grade have been higher?* In short, "what can students learn from a B? They don't know what it is that they have done well or what it is that has kept them from getting an A. To be truthful, often the teacher doesn't really know either . . . to expect [a teacher's] gut reaction to be accurately translated into usable information by the student is unreasonable" (Holaday 38). I would add to that, asking what a student can learn from an A. What did the student do well?

According to Elbow, ranking and grading are "woefully uncommunicative" practices (*Ranking* 1994). Indeed. In the case of my own writing, I wasn't looking for praise (or even validation), but use value; the feedback my professor provided was honest and constructive, which would suffice without a grade. I believe the same can be said for high school students' writing. A mindful and engaged reader's comments are often enough to motivate students toward progress.

I concede that not all students are diligent and not all students will revisit their work because they're enjoying authentic discussion, but it stands to reason that punishing students by giving poor grades won't make them any more diligent, either. In fact, "[g]rades may motivate or scare students into doing all of their work, but the research

suggests that poor grades do little to encourage students to do better" (O'Hagan 9). While mindful and ungraded feedback on a student's writing isn't a panacea, it at least honors the number one rule in this proposed humanitarian pedagogical approach: do no harm. It's true that perhaps not all students are diligent, but at least without grades, no further damage is done; we break even. It's the already high-achieving students who fear poor grades and will work hard to ensure they avoid them while the already unmotivated students are further reinforced with their poor grades that they can't, or shouldn't, write. This is an end we should strategically avoid by avoiding grading altogether.

Instead of entering an authentic dialogue about craftsmanship or content, teachers enter a battle of grade justification and students are stuck attempting to decode, feeling impotent to ask clarifying questions without the risk of overstepping assigned roles in education's hierarchy. It's a waste of energy on both sides that would be better spent discussing rhetorical moves to improve the quality of the piece. From a Critical perspective, a teacher is not supposed to be the arbiter of what's right and wrong, but one voice in an ongoing discourse that treats student work as texts worthy of genuine response; in a Critical classroom, "teachers are not the standard against which students' knowledge and power are measured" (Parker 81). When we shift the focus from being figures of ultimate knowledge and power, we adjust our frame, understanding that student voices are as valuable as our own and this helps break down the educational hierarchy.

In an interview with two of my tenth grade students I asked why we write (names withheld for anonymity). They said we write "to share [our] opinion about something" (Student 1) and "to get our thoughts across. It's our language, it's the only way we can

express our thoughts, through writing and speaking. We do these things to communicate"
(Student 2). While in theory that may be true, we don't allow students to actually practice
writing in such a liberal way. I discovered a disheartening contradiction when I asked in
the same interview: Who is the audience when you write? Student disillusionment is clear
with Student 1's response: "If you're a real writer, you're writing for an audience so they
want to listen, but for school, you're writing for the teacher and you want to write what
they want you to write or else you get a bad grade." And Student 2? She kept it simple:
"We're writing for a teacher, definitely". These soundbites are representative of the larger
student attitude about composition; the function of writing in the real world is to
communicate authentically, but in school it's to get the highest grade possible, whether
that means forging one's beliefs or not. I see this as a grave injustice. If we're to follow a
humanitarian pedagogy where empathetic, mindful, and present listeners abound, a
crucial step is to stop grading. That way, when a teacher gives authentic feedback, it's
appropriate for the student to disagree without institutional consequences. They can
engage in dialogue without fear of repercussion. They can maintain their autonomy and
feel at liberty to authentically interact.

Eliminating the practice of grading helps create academic equity, but it also
mitigates the affective component of offering feedback on student writing. Teachers can
be honest in their feedback without the judgment of a grade, so they are free to enjoy the
task, while students are more likely to be receptive to the commentary because it doesn't
hold the weight of that judgment. In an interview with a few colleagues, they asked if my
research was an effort to protect student egos because according to them, what we really

need to do is "toughen them up" (Rowan; Stack). My objective is neither to protect their egos nor give them thick skin, but something much different: remove the barriers from authentic communication between teacher and student; if student egos are less damaged in the process, then it's a happy byproduct of that larger goal.

Part of authenticity in reacting to student composition is liking students. If we walk around angered by their incompetence, our feedback to them will be fraught with negativity and it will neglect our responsibility to interact with their ideas. Elbow makes an interesting proposition that "liking" is a tool for teaching writing. He says, "good writing teachers like student writing (and like students) . . . Good teachers see what is only potentially good, they get a kick out of mere possibility--and they encourage it" (*Ranking* 1994). If there's any skill a humanitarian teacher should have, it's liking student work and being the type of teacher who feels privileged to watch student progress instead of feeling despair at their mistakes or praising in vain. For this to be an effective strategy, a teacher must be genuine in her liking, able to condone sloppiness for the larger good of uninhibited communication.

When I took Elbow's advice, it completely transformed my experience as a teacher of composition and the experience of the students as compositionists. I was finally listening to them authentically, and vice versa. As improbable as it may seem and with the risk of sounding bizarre, I learned to enjoy reading student papers. I already like them as human beings, so looking mindfully at their work while holding back judgment wasn't a difficult task. It was liberating for all of us. Take this excerpt from one of my student's compositions analyzing *The Scarlet Letter*:

The third example of how Human nature must lead civilization and societal convention comes with Pearl. As a child, Pearl gives a unique, refreshing take on this idea, free from any potential prejudices that may have formed in the other two characters. Pearl can immediately see that what Hester and Dimmesdale did is only a bad thing because of what others tell them. This pure child's view of human nature shows how wrong the society they live in actually is. It's effectively a sort of trap where religion forces them not to be able to act like humans anymore, because if they give in to their own nature, terrible consequences will ensue.

In the past, I would have been crestfallen. (It's a strange thing we English teachers do, taking student work as a personal assault). My past self would have responded with "a kind of aggressive reaction to disappointment" (Wilson *Rethinking* 51) because we'd taken so much time to work on this paper and still, in March, on a final draft, I received a paper without one single piece of cited textual evidence. But my new ability to *like* student work and to see what was there instead of what ought to be there, ignited excitement about what he had produced and my feedback reflected this excitement[6].

It's worth a minor detour here to shock readers with a confession about this student's grade. He received a check (more details on this grading system to come), which represents the range of an 83-91 percent. Under the iron fist of a traditional grading system, a literary analysis without evidence is as good as useless. When exercising a mindful approach to grading student work, however, it's not so appalling to focus on what went well as opposed to what did not. Of course, the paper isn't as strong

---

[6] Although you stopped mid sentence at one point and you don't provide cited textual evidence at all, I'm thrilled with your argument, so I'm being lenient with those other factors. I really appreciate that you wrote on an interesting and original idea that doesn't merely lend itself to summary. One of the highlights of the essay is when you talk about how Pearl's presence in the novel helps the reader put Hester's sin into perspective. Of course my request for the next piece is that you spend more time refining the paper w/evidence and organization!

as it could be had it offered evidence, but that doesn't discredit its strengths. In hindsight, instead of saying "my request for the next piece is that you spend more time refining the paper w/evidence and organization," I would have made a more egalitarian comment that concentrated on the rhetorical purpose of providing evidence (instead of calling it a "request") with something to this effect:

> I appreciate that you wrote on an interesting and original idea that doesn't merely lend itself to summary. For me, one of the highlights of the essay is when you talk about how Pearl's presence in the novel helps the reader put Hester's sin into perspective. Some people might disagree with you, however, about Pearl's understanding that Hester and Dimmesdale are only made to feel bad because others tell them what they've done is wrong. For ex, Pearl knowingly taunts her mother by donning a seaweed "A" on her chest. Could this complicate your argument? If you'd provided evidence from the text that demonstrate some of these complexities, your readers are more inclined to believe what you're arguing.

Authentic feedback in place of grading is a cornerstone of humanitarian pedagogy. Once feedback is not only ungraded, both truthful and mindful at once, students will be receptive. Once students are receptive, they will view writing as a liberating practice that validates their own voices.

IX. Respect Autonomy and Encourage Risks

Grading is a practice that strives to exclude agency from student texts; it is a cold and (literally) calculated response to the warm and innate desire for human communication. It's not mindful of the autonomous person who crafted the piece and the practice discourages risk taking. Heretically, I suggest that we just trust their autonomy. According to the research, what's worth doing, they will do (Kohn)

Although constructive criticism is an essential part of any writing course, writing as an egalitarian enterprise means that after a dialogic exchange, a student feels at liberty to make the final decisions about her work, sans institutional consequences. I'm fortunate enough to have had this experience of reclaiming my own voice (of course, with the consequence of keeping the "lower" grade), but I'm skeptical that most high school students are able to overcome the rigid power divide between teacher and student under the traditional grading system. By emphasizing grades over student voices, grading practices rob all but the most self-actualized students of the liberty to speak and write freely. Regardless of whether they agree with the teacher's feedback or not, they revise in accordance with teacher 'suggestions.' It is true that in my own case, the risk of keeping this grade is minimal compared to students who are proud of their work, yet receive an even lower grade. If it's tough for a student to decide to keep a *decent* grade for the sake of autonomy, one can imagine the struggle to maintain their own voices who receive lower grades. To most students, 'suggestions' is merely a euphemism for 'demands' since what's at stake is the forfeiting of their place in the competition for honor roll, a higher gpa, and a prime spot in class rank.

Given societal pressures to 'do well in school,' it's unsurprising that "some children, instead of rebelling against coercion, simply relinquish their autonomy . . . [and] children who lack a sense of autonomy are likely to pick tasks that don't offer much challenge" (Kohn *Punished* 150). In a similar vein, Wilson attributes lack of student autonomy to the undemocratic idolizing of people in positions of power: "In our society, expertise bestows directive power - the authority to tell others what to do and how to do it, or simply to do it for them. We give over our agency to experts, trusting that their experience will substitute for our lack thereof" (*Rethinking* 50). In this way, students are contented to see themselves as powerless instead of challenging the ideology of teacher expertise. We can transform their compliance to mindfulness by placing ourselves as teachers in a position to be students as well. We're students of their compositions; their writing is as much a text as the published ones we assign them to read and they, too, deserve human response. If we are mindful in our reactions, they will be, too. This desire for authentic communication is natural and they'll engage in this dialogue more readily when they don't have to grapple with judgment value.

In an effort to combat submission to teacher authority and augment positive risk taking in student writing, contract grading is an option that allows students to "think about [teacher] response on its own terms-- listen to [the teacher] as reader and human being" instead of conceding (with resentment) or deferring (with humility) to the teacher's wishes (Elbow "Taking Time Out" 11). I agree with Elbow's assessment that grading contracts allow more room for risk-taking, but I see them as training wheels for the larger vision of a composition classroom devoid of grades altogether. In any case,

grading contracts are at least deemphasizing the power struggle by giving students more choice than traditional grades do and they're a good place to start.

X. Student Motivation Without a Systems of Reward and Punishment

Teachers often enter the profession under the false consciousness that without a grade, students will lack motivation to write. In interviews with every colleague in my English department, they *all* emphatically expressed this sentiment (Wilson; Cecchini; Gidjunis; Allman; Stack; Rowan; Drinkhouse). Teacher skepticism toward student drive is the inevitable effect of resisting mindful engagement with student work, and no less an effect of *student* resistance to mindful engagement with *teacher* feedback. Instead of feeling deeply unsettled by this belief, we accept it without countering, but there's no malicious intent on either side; it's an unconscious practice that's been taken for truth. Even when alternatives are proposed, like Inoue's "labor failure" instead of the more often employed "quality failure"[7], teachers hesitate because they have "a distrust in students, a lack of faith in students and their abilities to find intrinsic motivation to do this most human endeavor (to communicate and create with language)" (344). One coworker was particularly adamant that

> "the only reason a lot of them do [their work] is because it's graded. Without the grades, there wouldn't be motivation . . . [they] have been trained to expect a grade attached to an assignment and without grades, the quality of work would go way down and students just wouldn't turn stuff in since they already don't." (Gidjunis)

Another teacher said she doesn't have qualms with the system because, comparatively, we teachers wouldn't work without the extrinsic reward of a paycheck

---

[7] "quality-failure, exists in all conventionally graded courses that use judgments of quality to determine success and failure in writing . . . labor-failure, is often associated with not achieving or demonstrating a defined degree of effort, quantity of written products, and/or amount of time spent on an activity such as reading or drafting . . . Labor-failure is most often judged on a binary scale: work is done or not done, okay or not okay" (338-9)

(Stack). This is true, but the analogy misrepresents the problem. When we train students to desire extrinsic rewards for their writing, the consequences are cognitive: "Students who are extrinsically motivated and [who] choose easier tasks as a result will continue choosing easier tasks, even when the extrinsic reward is removed" (Lepper 299). We're not acting in the best interest of students to condone a grading system that produces such adverse effects. Conversely, if we encourage people to attend work for only intrinsic benefits, the consequences are tangible and the results detrimental. In the composition classroom, this is not so.

Although some educators believe students won't work except with the assurance of a grade, I contend that the reverse is true. If we encourage students to take risks in their writing and assure them it won't be graded, they will do the work because they have the freedom to do the work on their own terms. In my experience, this has generally produced much more thought provoking arguments in student writing than if they'd feared a grade or been boxed into a certain structure from the beginning (this isn't to say that we shouldn't help them improve structure later in the process). Without the fear of bad grades, students can discover the truth of what they are trying to say, even if it's contrary to a peer or a teacher's belief. Kohn makes it clear that "given an environment in which they don't feel controlled and in which they are encouraged to think about what they are doing (rather than how well they are doing it), students of any age will generally exhibit an abundance of motivation and a healthy appetite for challenge" (Kohn *Punished* 199). His assertion is difficult to deny. Other researchers have supported his finding, as well. Holaday asks the most fundamental questions to help us put this in perspective:

>Why then do students learn to jump rope? Why do they investigate insects on their own? Why are they fascinated by dinosaurs? Why do they ask *why*? My answer is that they do these things because learning is natural to human beings. Maybe the problem is not that we need to motivate students, but that we need to stop demotivating them. (38)

Students have an innate desire to learn, but only when the tasks are worthwhile (Kohn; Lepper; LaBrant; Zoeckler). The basis of perceiving a task as valuable is being mindful of its larger purpose; in the case of composition, this purpose is to communicate effectively.

In Inoue's "Theorizing Failure in US Writing Assessments," he offers a radical challenge, one (if taken seriously) will contribute not only to his end goal of embracing labor failure over quality failure, but will also aid in reintroducing mindfulness as the golden maxim of composition classrooms. In a paraphrase, he challenges us to do the following: 1) understand that we are a few of many who can determine what constitutes quality composition 2) allow students the responsibility of performing without reward 3) acknowledge the detrimental effects of grading practices 4) respect nondominant Englishes and 5) "frame what [we] experience as a productive clash at a border that [we] do not, and cannot, control" (347). Control is opposed to mindfulness. He wants us to relinquish control of the student experience, which is simply to be mindful of them as autonomous. When we liberate ourselves from the desire to control student experiences, we will be able to abolish the practice of grading. What's more, we'll be relieved of the burden of power and it will make our experience as composition teachers more enjoyable.

Teachers opposed to relinquishing control over student compositions make a valid point that the teacher is, in fact, the person in the room with the college degree; we've

earned the "right" to give grades and we've got the credentials to correct. In other words, because of our position of power, we're qualified to rank and sort. If we're not providing something for students that they cannot provide themselves, what's a teacher's purpose in the classroom? It's impossible to argue against the truth that we're the ones in the room with credentials, but this fact is not a reason to dole out punishments and rewards. Our more advanced knowledge of composition doesn't justify grading. What it does do, is allow us to offer authentic feedback with a wealth of knowledge that they may not receive from other readers. Our purpose is to be knowledgeable mentors rather than guardians.

XI. Be Accountable & Hold Accountable, Without Grades

Accountability has become a damning buzzword in education and rightfully so.

P.L. Thomas, Professor of Education at Furman University, describes how accountability

practices remove humanity from the classroom:

> We continue to commit to accountability paradigms that are demonstrably more
> harmful to education than helpful (Amerin & Berliner, 2002; Kincheloe &
> Steinberg, 2006;Kincheloe, Steinberg, & Gresson, 1997; Ravitch, 2010; Thomas,
> 2004, 2009) . . . Accountability tools are flawed, and the entire process is couched
> in a competitive and mechanistic paradigm that erases humanity from teaching
> and learning. The accountability paradigm is designed for the rugged individual to
> succeed regardless of the veracity of that myth or the consequences of crowning a
> winner at the expense of a larger group of losers. (Thomas 78-9)

Thomas is correct in admonishing accountability as it is currently practiced. As teachers,

we *do* need to be held accountable, though--and for something entirely different than

what's currently expected. What I believe we should be accountable for is teaching

students how to communicate effectively. This means that we must teach students to take

"full responsibility for what they say" (LaBrant *Teaching* 123). We need to be held to a

high standard of cultivating responsible writers who know the privilege, value,

responsibility, and consequences of composition.

The only ways we can demonstrate our success in this endeavor is through the

messiness of authentic feedback, conferences, and revisions. Currently, we're using "an

absolutely uncalibrated instrument" (Finkelstein qtd. in Guskey 2) and while we believe

grades are an effective accountability tool, "what grades offer is [actually] spurious

precision, a subjective rating masquerading as an objective assessment" (Kohn *Punished*

201). In a humanitarian pedagogy that values mindfulness as its key feature, we strive for

transparency and to do so, we need to take two crucial actions: 1) give feedback that

challenges students' thoughts, stretching them beyond their current limits 2) abandon grades altogether *and* the guilt of not providing any. If we do this, we can hold ourselves accountable for teaching composition in the most egalitarian way possible.

One of the main reasons we need to foster accountability is because it teaches students that their learning matters. A disgruntled student asks it best: "If what [teachers] are teaching is so all-fired important, why is it acceptable to learn only a whimsical sixty-five percent of it?" (Blynt 68). It's not. When students don't do well on a writing assignment and we insist that they revisit it, we highlight for them that their genuine learning is of the utmost importance; we shift the focus from competition to mastery. Mastery Learning is a pedagogical practice that has students working on a skill until they've achieved it to a certain level of competence. This satisfies egalitarian objectives because not every student learns in the same way, at the same pace, and this gives each of them equal opportunity.

Mastery learning is inclusive, but also demands quality. Echoing this, Kohn suggests that we "reduce the number of possible grades to two: A and Incomplete. The theory here is that "any work that does not merit an A isn't finished yet" (*Punished* 208). If we have to compromise with a system that demands grades, this seems like a reasonable concession. However, the dilemma then becomes how to use this method and still have student autonomy. Who gets to decide what constitutes an "A" and what constitutes an "Incomplete"? If it's still the teacher making these decisions, we've returned to where we started, with voiceless students and too-powerful teachers participating in a grading system that isn't mindful. So if we adopt Kohn's suggestion,

students would have to be part of the process of determining A's and Incompletes. They have to be taught how to reflect on their own learning, making a case for what's acceptable and what isn't. What are their standards and have they achieved them?

This mode of reflection, however, will need to be taught explicitly. In a culture where grades define success, students struggle to be reflective, to be mindful of where they're at in their learning. If we're to be held accountable for ensuring students know how to communicate effectively, then this is an exclusive skill apart from our current system of *telling* them they communicated effectively and therefore, must be separate from grades, which tell instead of ask. They need to know, on their own, whether they did or did did not accomplish their desired communication in addition to how and why.

The ability to accurately reflect is perhaps the most imperative part of the humanitarian shift in pedagogy: "[T]he greatest value in responsible writing . . . lies in the attitudes developed toward the writing and speech of others and consequently toward the great problem of communication in the present national culture" (LaBrant *Teaching* 127). To know whether someone has communicated effectively, we must be present. In other words, we must be mindful of them and willing to communicate honestly, but also to listen to their responses, creating an equal dialogue. They are writing to be read and reading to respond. If my assertion is true--that in education there's nothing more important than student voices and no vehicle more powerful in which to communicate them than through students' written work--then creating a system with only two choices (A or Incomplete) and implementing thorough student reflections is the best way to make the egalitarian classroom possible if abolishing grades altogether, is implausible.

XII. An Alternative to Traditional Grades: Experimenting With ✓, IP, and X

  In this section, I will reflect on how to take the educational research and implement it into the traditional classroom. There's a myriad of ways to begin the process of "de-grading" the classroom, but this is a reflection of my own first stage of the journey. I crafted a plan to tackle the issue and from September to now, I've been using it as a test run for how to fight the system within the system's bounds, so to speak. In many ways, it's been an exciting failure because it has led me to where I am right now, with a wealth of experiences and a craving to hone it further so that I can design a more effective practice. Here, I'll provide the framework for this first attempt to "de-grade" the classroom and although it's rudimentary, my hope is that it will inspire other educators to begin shifting their practices as well. I offer this to other teachers with the understanding that my practice still needs a great deal of work and with the admission that this is a process, one that necessarily includes risks and roadblocks. It's a work in progress that will benefit from other educators' input and innovations.

  Since I work in a traditional public school that requires number grade input into an online gradebook, I had to decide how I'd go as numberless as possible while still making gradebook entries. We must formally upload a number grade only for mid marking-period and end of marking period, so I opted to use a holistic check system for day-to-day entries (a breakdown of this system in Image 1). When I make entries in the online gradebook, there aren't any numbers at all, just a mark on the scale from X to ✓++ accompanied by individual written feedback. Aesthetically, the gradebook looks foreign, but it's a step toward deemphasizing grades to make authentic discussion about

their work the highest priority. As you can see from my gradebook screenshot (Image 2), students receive extensive feedback (the red push-pin symbol denotes a comment and if the parent, teacher, or student hovers on it, they see written feedback). The only actual number grade included for each student is for mid-marking period (M.M.P.), which is determined through teacher-student conferences. Students verbally self-assess where they believe they fall on the number scale; I either agree or disagree and offer my reasons. Ultimately, we look at a grading chart (Image 3) to decide on a number grade together for each of the four broad categories according to the score *ranges* they received. We do the math to factor in category weightings, and the sum of all four becomes their average in the gradebook. We complete the same process for the end of marking period grades.

One of the successes of this system is that students understand my priority as a teacher: authentic engagement with what student voices are producing in their writing. They know that I'm more interested in a dialogue about content than in policing their grammar. They also know I'm fair, choosing benefit of the doubt instead of delighting in my power to be a harsh grader. If they completed an assignment, they automatically earn a ✓, which is a score range of 83-91, or the equivalent of somewhere in the B range. With this system, students know that if they complete the work, they don't have to stress about a grade.

If a student is struggling with his writing, he can still work hard without the fear of being invalidated with a low mark. In this way, I believe the system makes strides toward creating a more egalitarian composition classroom. As the teacher, I can completely disagree with a student's point of view, I can challenge his evidence, I can

make suggestions and encourage more critical thinking, but in the end, as long as the work is complete, none of this is reflected in the grade, so there's no incentive for students to mindlessly agree with what I've said. They feel at liberty to take risks, knowing the only "penalty" is that a reader might not understand or enjoy the way they choose to craft a piece. In other words, "the sanctions for not doing it, or doing it poorly, are social rather than institutional" (Hunt).

This more closely approximates real world experiences, where we don't get report cards, but we *do* get feedback, from coworkers, bosses, family, friends, publications, readers, and even feedback from ourselves, through genuine reflection of a job well done (or not so). I suppose the system I'm implementing is simply contract grading, but rigged to fit the online gradebook format. Usually with a contract, students are graded quantitatively through a B, but qualitatively thereafter (Elbow & Danielwicz), which is how I designed it to be. It also coincides with Inoue's concept of "labor failure" as an alternative to traditionally graded "product failure" systems. If a student fails, it's because she hasn't done the work, not because her work has been deemed inadequate by an authority.

In hindsight, however, the check system overcomplicates a practice I am trying to simplify. Unfortunately, to compound the frustration of overcomplicating, once a teacher sets up a grading system with the online gradebook, she cannot make changes without disrupting any previous entries (including those from past marking periods). This is problematic because I realized some time throughout the course of this process that parts of my system don't align with the research. However, "[c]hanging a system like grades is

not something that can be done with a few weeks of research. Grades are part of the institution of school, and our beliefs about learning and achievement are bound up in those letters. What I am doing . . . is rethinking a system that has alienated a lot of students" (Sackstein). I'm doing my best to challenge unjust practices in the composition classroom and to support my practices with current research. Inevitably, experimentation is a risk that presupposes a few failures and setbacks. Throughout this process, I've had a number of them, but each of these failures has pushed me to refine my classroom practices. Below, I'll provide a discussion of my well-intentioned mistakes, offer the research conclusions, and design a new plan for moving forward.

A. Issue: Method of feedback

I know that students haven't been receiving enough authentic feedback on their writing in the past, so my primary concern is to fix this by providing not only a greater quantity, but better quality feedback that is reframed to focus on what students are doing well instead of what they haven't yet accomplished. Inspired by Elbow's research, I strive to *like* student writing more than I ever have previously, and allow my comments to reflect this new method of "liking." All these ends are being met.

The problem is that I am spending an awful lot of time writing reactions to student work when students can't engage with the commentary as a dialogue--both literally, because the online gradebook system doesn't allow students to comment back on what a teacher says--and figuratively, because their mark in this check system is negating my feedback the same way a number or letter grade negates; they see whatever I write as a justification for a grade rather than a sincere response. I've come to the

conclusion that while in theory, the check-mark system increases student engagement with their work because it deemphasizes grades, my "new" system has actually been the same as the old, just clothed differently. Students are still deferring to my judgment, but instead of "Did you give me an A?" they ask "Did you give me a ✓++?" despite providing paragraphs of narrative feedback. To them, the check system simply equates to traditional number grading.

They've been taught to expect an extrinsic reward, so their tendency to see the check system as a mere substitute for the numbers they're accustomed to receiving is a natural way for them to react, and it's an issue I didn't foresee. For the next grading experiment, instead of supplementing, I'll (almost) replace grades altogether with a dialogic system of feedback, including written and audio exchanges, conferences, and student reflections.

In a hybrid fashion with Kohn's suggestion to reduce grading to A and Incomplete (*Punished* 208), I'd like to try ✓ (reached standard), IP (In Progress), X (didn't do assignment). The reasoning behind this is similar to Kohn's: "any work that does not merit an A isn't finished yet," but accounts for the negative connotation of Incomplete (INC). I imagine students (especially the ones who are working really hard, but just struggling to master the skill) will be dejected seeing an INC when they know they are working as completely as they can, so to speak. It's just another way of being mindful about students' perspectives in the process. IP acknowledges the effort being put forth, but also requires mastery of the skill; it's a way to coach students to the next level and allow them to work at their own pace to achieve mastery. The ✓ symbolizes mastery

of a skill and while it *is* qualitative (contrary the contract-grading system), it's free from the power structure of traditional grades, where the teacher "gives" grades for student work, because a ✓ is determined through dialogue with the student, who is fully cognizant of why and how he's achieved the ✓. There's no "giving" of grades involved, and any justification being done is happening from three parties instead of one: teacher, student, and peers.

Not only will students receive more individualized feedback, but the purpose of the assignment will be made clear as well. One of Guskey's main arguments is that the purpose of grades isn't transparent and needs to be: "The best report cards clearly communicate what students were expected to learn and be able to do, how well they did those things, and whether or not that level of performance is in line with expectations set for this level at this time in the school year" (17). Since the online format has made student grades accessible 24/7, we can take Guskey's comment about report cards and apply it generically to "assessments" (i.e. the ✓, IP, or X that goes in the "gradebook"). These assessments must have a clearly stated purpose and audience. With the ✓, IP, X method of assessment accompanied by multi-faceted narrative feedback, the purpose of the symbols is *always* to denote whether a student has reached mastery of that particular skill or not (as opposed to punishing for late work, behavior, etc.). It also makes clear *why* they've reached mastery or why not, *how* they've reached mastery or what they still have to so to reach that point. All these details are determined through mindful exchanges and continuous revisiting of student work.

Since students and parents will have access to a Dialogue Doc (Image 4) (or whatever other method of communication the teacher chooses), the purpose (standard) is clear for each major assignment instead of the ambiguous number given in traditional grading, which crams all different grading purposes into one opaque figure. With this system, *where* the student is on the journey to mastery, is readily apparent. We too often employ grades as the primary way to communicate with a student or parent how the child is performing, but "when educators don't agree on the primary purpose of grades, they often try to address *all* of these purposes with a single reporting device . . . and end up achieving none very well" (Austin & McCann, 1992 ctd Guskey 14). Implementing a method of communication where authentic feedback is a cornerstone of the student experience should alleviate this problem of what purpose the grade (and more importantly, the assignment) serves in addition to giving more precise feedback on specific aspects of student performance.

Standards-based grading makes grades more transparent, but oftentimes it leaves out student voices in the same way traditional grading does. Students are still being told whether they accomplished something or not by an authority figure instead of being part of the process, taught how to reflect and self-assess. The key here is to use the standards-based grading method without forgetting dialogue as the most imperative component.

This process doesn't have to be completed for every assignment, particularly because it puts a burden on the teacher to constantly give feedback, but I would argue that the burden is actually less than in the traditional system; our energies are just shifted

more toward feedback and less on grades. In the school district where I work (and probably in many others), we have to have the gradebook updated every week, so the burden is equivalent if we spend once a week giving feedback on the Dialogue Doc or whether we spend once a week updating the grades; however, the outcome of where the energy is spent is astronomically different. On weeks when giving feedback to everyone is too much to keep up with, the Dialogue Doc at minimum ensures that students are self-reflecting on their own progress.

Issue: Method of feedback [8]	
Researched Conclusions	- Authenticity is crucial to student progress - Genuine feedback is motivating - Feedback should be dialogic between teacher, student, and peers - Separate skills from the content of student work - Emphasizing the rhetorical purpose of a piece is an essential component of feedback - Conferencing is an effective feedback tool - We're teachers, not editors; the corrective approach is counterproductive - Our "expertise" is better spent uncovering what students are already in the process of doing than judging them for what they haven't yet done: "*A teacher, as an expert reader, can help bring the possibilities in a text to consciousness*, helping the student become clear on how the text works, and how the author might recognize and develop, and do what he or she is trying to do [emphasis added]" (Wilson *Rethinking* 53) - Don't offer praise to build self esteem - Grades (whether traditional or not) negate even the most authentic feedback - Multimodal feedback is valuable (audio, video, written, conference)
New Plan	Decommission the traditional gradebook format, using the online gradebook to provide exactly enough information to

---

[8] (Berthoff; Blackstock & Exton; Blynt; Davis; Danielwicz & Elbow; Elbow; Gellis; Hunt; Inoue; Kohn; LaBrant; Murray; O'Connor & Lessing; O'Hagan; Sackstein; Wilson)

	comply with administrators and parents: ✓ or INC; students continue to rework material until it's a ✓ ● Provide the quantity and quality feedback necessary through student-kept dialogue docs (or another method of consistent communication). For a Dialogue Doc, the teacher provides a chart with the assignment description and formal standards to be covered. Students rewrite standards in their own words, and both reflect and self-assess for each assignment (providing specific evidence for their conclusions). Students will also keep record of any feedback received from peers or other outside sources. The teacher comments back on their work through the same chart. The process is flexible and dialogic. ● Use a more versatile format for uploading student work and giving substantial feedback, such as WordPress or Padlet (which also act as live portfolios)

B. Issue: Too many increments & Teacher-determined ranges

When I first designed my alternative system, I wanted to limit the number of grades available, but also remain fair to students. Online Genesis gradebook has it set up so we can use a check system, but each increment aligns to exactly one percentage instead of a percent range (for example, ✓ = 78, ✓+ = 87, etc.). To me, that seemed more restrictive than I wanted it to be. I could also envision the backlash to such a system, from teachers, parents, administrators, and even discomfort from my own perspective. There's no level between a 78 and an 87? As a student, I would have felt cheated and resentful.

I opted not use the prescribed check system, but designed my own to be (what I thought was) more fair by offering percent ranges instead of exact number equivalents. What I didn't know at the time is that while we believe offering more increments increases precision, research has proven the opposite, which is something Guskey illuminates in *On Your Mark*: "Essentially, as the number of grade categories goes up, the

chance of two equally competent judges assigning exactly the same grade to the same sample of a student's work diminishes significantly" (36). He also explains how even though measuring direct traits is, of course, better served with more precise gradations, the truth is that in education, we're hardly ever measuring direct traits (39). So even though I thought I was being more precise with the plus minus increments and offering grade ranges, I've complicated what would have been better left in its simplest form: ✓, IP, X. Mastered, on the way to mastering, or didn't attempt it.

The way I've been using the system is that I read students' work and then determine their grade range, which is denoted with one of the following: ✓++, ✓+, ✓, ✓-, X and then during conferences and through written reflections, students determine where they believe they fall in that range. This is successful in allowing the student to participate in the process, but ultimately, the teacher still holds most of the power by restricting the grade range. If I narrow this to ✓, IP, and X, there are really only two categories because if a student didn't do the work, an X is indisputably an X. The only remaining options are IP and ✓ (without equivalent number grades) and we determine where the student is currently through the egalitarian mindful practice of dialogue, using examples of student work as proof of their competence in a skill or lack thereof. Without the dialogue, this practice is susceptible to becoming the teacher-powered traditional grading system, under a different name. I seek to avoid this through constant authentic exchange of ideas and reflections.

Issue: Too Many Increments & Teacher-determined Ranges[9]	
Researched Conclusions	Too Many Increments • Difficult to find consistency between graders • Provides a dangerous illusion of precision for teachers and students and these imprecise measures have significant impacts on other imprecise measures (GPA, Class rank) • Teacher-determined ranges are undemocratic • Teacher-determined ranges steal student autonomy
New Plan	• ✓, IP, X for individual assignments • Students continue to rework each piece until they achieve ✓ and the check replaces an X or IP so that grades are most current to student performance • At mid marking period, we look at the evidence of mastery to determine a number grade (since working within a traditional system requires this); a ✓ is automatically in an A range and the *student* determines where on the A range s/he falls in conjunction with teacher and peer feedback; if students still have IPs up to that point, they determine where they fall on the number scale of mastery (but cannot achieve an A)

C. Issue: System not designed for mastery learning & the unfairness of averaging

My system wasn't innovative enough because it wasn't designed for mastery. I had the same reservations that so many other educators have: they'll perceive this as the easy class and not take it as seriously; I don't want to be labeled as an "easy" grader because that's an inaccurate reflection of the learning rigor taking place in my classroom; students have to be held accountable for their actions so if we don't average they may not learn responsibility; I'll mess up other systems like GPA and class rank (and potentially get in trouble for doing so). These are all valid reservations for teachers who know no other way, but even though "the practical difficulties of abolishing letter grades are real . .

---

[9] (Gellis; Guskey; Kohn; O'Hagan; Sackstein)

. the key question is whether those difficulties are seen as problems to be solved or as

excuses for perpetuating the status quo" (Kohn 1999). I'd like to look at them as

problems to be solved because our purpose as teachers is to do what's in the best interests

of students, even if that means facing challenges and being uncomfortable.

Issue: System Not Designed for Mastery Learning & Unfairness of Averaging[10]	
Researched Conclusions	● Without requiring mastery, students don't see the importance of the skills they're working on ● Teachers, administrators (and even students) are hesitant to embrace mastery learning because it removes the competition from education: If we provide enough time and support for everyone to master the material and get an A, how will we sort and rank students? ● Students aren't interested in mastery learning; when extrinsically motivated by grade rewards, students take the safest way possible instead of challenging themselves and taking risks for growth ● Averaging penalizes a student repeatedly for the same mistake ● Moments frozen in time are compounded with other moments frozen in time and don't reflect current student abilities
New Plan	● End of marking period we follow the same process for determining mastery we we did for mid marking period and the newly determined grade *replaces* the mid-marking period grade, instead of averaging with it ● Students can continue to work toward mastery level, even after a marking period is over; grades will be changed retroactively ● Encourage risk taking through modeling teacher writing and making exemplars of student work

D. Issue: Students not taught self-reflection and assessment

Self-reflection and self-assessment have always been essential moments in the

---

[10] (Blynt; Guskey; Kohn; Zoeckler)

learning process for me, and I (naively) assumed them to be natural practices. They are

not. Students are taught not to question teacher authority, so a natural byproduct of this is

the extinguishing of self-assessment and reflection. Students who feel powerless in the

unquestioned hierarchy aren't likely to reflect on what they've learned (although they do

"reflect" on where they may have lost a point or two for their grade). They are unlikely to

be accurate in their self-assessments because they've never been involved in the process

of assessment. At mid and end of marking periods I have students reflect both in writing

and verbally in conferences. They are--through no fault of their own--terrible at it.

Self-assessments this year have generally been a testament to the impotence

we've created for students: They haven't a clue what they've learned, how well they've

learned it, or why; as far as they're concerned, the teacher takes care of all that and they

are accurate in assuming so. Even if they have a sense that they are "good students," they

cannot articulate why or how. Here's an example reflection from one of my *highest

achieving* tenth graders:

> I feel like my projects turned out really good for this half of the marking period.
> My final project wasn't perfect, but I thought that my Part One project was the
> best I could've done. I feel like I deserve a high grade . . . My presentations for
> this half went very well in my opinion and I think that my grade should reflect
> that.

His reflection is filled with ambiguities that amount to little more than 'I've always been

told I'm a good student and my grades have always reflected such, so it shouldn't be any

different this time.' He's right. He is a bright and motivated student who always far

surpasses his peers in both work ethic and product quality, but when asked what his

specific strengths and weaknesses are, he's at a loss.

Thorough and specific self- assessment and reflection are vital because they can highlight specific strengths and weaknesses even for the highest achieving students and naturally segue into a plan for further improvement. They will begin to identify why and how they are good students, which is a major shift in focus from merely internalizing that one is a good student from being told so. To shift the culture of who does the assessing and how, these lessons need to be taught explicitly and modeled through teacher reflections in addition to the modeling of students who pick the skill up quickly and can help other students hone the areas in which they're still struggling.

Issue: Students not taught self-reflection and self assessment[11]	
Researched Conclusions	● Reflection and self-assessment need to be explicitly taught ● To show growth in self-assessment and reflection, it needs to be a consistent practice.
New Plan	● Have students keep a reflection journal at least twice a week so that they maintain a regular practice of self-reflection ● Teach reflection and self-assessment as a specific skill set ● Model the practice of self-reflection and assessment through teacher and student examples

E. Issue: Lack of Student Motivation

My new grading system was supposed to create a utopia where students love to learn and teachers love to teach. Had I accounted for problems of student motivation, perhaps this utopia would have come to fruition, but of course I did not. Even while deemphasizing grades through the check system, students have still been apathetic about the material. They weren't motivated *with* the grades and it would seem they aren't motivated *without* them.

---

[11] (Freire; Guskey; Sackstein)

A more true reflection, however, is that the check system too closely resembled traditional grading for them to separate it as a completely different method. Currently, high achievers work hard to get a ✓++ the same way they did for A's and are downtrodden when they don't receive that as validation; the low achievers are still demotivated by the X's the same way they were with zeroes. Though I was trying to cultivate intrinsic motivation by lessening grade obsessions, I was too ambitious for the deeply entrenched capitalistic and extrinsically-motivated grade culture our education system promotes.

The check system grade experiment, while a failure in many ways, was a success as well because I understand more intimately what obstacles are present that I hadn't originally considered and how best to tackle them moving forward. One of the major changes is to capitalize on student interests, being mindful of what is valuable to them and why, and then tailoring assignments to match. Additionally, I intend to help motivate students by making writing contexts more authentic. Once they feel the rush or disappointment of authentic readers' reactions to their work, it's a galvanizing force to produce more, and better, writing. The interactive nature of having a greater number of readers will also prompt students to be more mindful of their work, remembering that it's under scrutiny by peers (whom they want to impress) rather than the age-old stringent English teacher judgment (for which they frequently have little regard).

Issue: Lack of Student Motivation [12]	
Researched Conclusions	- High achieving students are motivated by grades as a result of fear - Low achieving students are demotivated by grades - Extrinsic rewards devalue the learning and contribute to student loss of interest in the material, not only presently, but as they progress forward - Giving students specific purposes for assignments helps foster a greater teacher-student rapport and increases motivation - Making the learning relevant to students' lives and interesting to them because it naturally increases motivation - Students are inherently motivated to learn and to communicate - Implement as many real-world writing situations as possible - If student work is read by more than just the teacher (so the consequences are social rather than institutional), they are more inclined to care about the quality of their work
New Plan	- Know what makes students tick and capitalize on those interests as learning opportunities - Make required content relatable - Allow students to choose from a menu of assignments and be receptive to student-proposed changes or alternative assignment options

---

[12] (Bauman; Blynt; Holaday; Inoue; Kohn; LaBrant; Lepper)

Conclusion

We're at the beginning of an exciting and challenging education revolution. Grading practices are finally being challenged. Student voices are finally being heard. The inequities are being identified and classroom practices are being restructured to dismantle the hierarchy in an effort to create egalitarian learning environments. Students are finally reaping the benefits of the move toward human-centered composition classrooms, where the writer is again part of the writing. Composition is more often being identified as valuable for its rhetorical purposes as opposed to its value as a "tested subject."

As educators, we can easily get swept away in revolutionary fervor, but allow the excitement to remain in discourse instead of praxis. It's possible, too that many educators will remain steadfast in opposition to the changes and they, too, will fight a hard battle. There are the remaining of us (like myself) who are eager to see change because of a heartfelt discontent with a system that is failing to provide our students with the best education they can receive. The more we learn, the more discontent we become, the more committed to making the necessary changes we are. Anyone who falls in this last cohort of educational professionals-- those who are anxious revolutionaries demanding substantial change in the composition classroom--need first and foremost to coincide praxis with the discourse, and the praxis that I contend will set all other necessary changes in motion is constant mindfulness, which is an indispensable facet of the imminent revolution.

Appendix of Images

Image 1: Check System

			CHECK SYSTEM	
96-100	A	√++	Completed w/ exceptional quality	Everything we do is on this check system. However, the categories DO have different weightings.
92-95	A-	√+	Completed w/obvious effort: quality above average	(40%) Big: Writing, Projects, Tests
83-91	B	√	Completed	(30%) Bigish: V.Q., reading checks
74-82	C	√-	Partially complete	(20%) Medium: S.S., presentations
65-73	D	-	Unsatisfactory	(10%) Small: hw, participation, prep
0	F	X	Didn't do it	

Image 2: A Visual of the Check System in the Online Gradebook

Creative Tue A 10/09 UG	I.R. Week 4 Sat 10/06 UG	M.M.P. Sat 10/06 100.0	VQ 2 Thu A 10/04 UG	V hw 2 Thu A 10/04 UG	I.R. Week 3 Sat 09/29 UG	Ann N.A. & Colu Fri A 09/28 UG	S.S 2 Fri A 09/28 UG
√++	√++	91	√++	√++	√++	√++	√+
√+	√+	89	√-	√++	√+	√+	√++
√+	√	88	-	√++	√++	√++	√+
√	√	90	√	√++	√++	√+	√++

.

Image 3: A Holistic scoring guide for mid and end of marking period conferences

	A (96-100)	A- (92-95)	B (83-91)	C (74-82)	D (65-73)	F (0)	
(40%) Big Writing, Projects Tests	Most ✓++	Most ✓+	Most ✓	Most ✓-	Most -	Most X	.4 X your grade = Total % you earned for this section
(30%) Bigish V.Q., reading checks	Most ✓++	Most ✓+	Most ✓	Most ✓-	Most -	Most X	.3 X your grade = Total % you earned for this section
(20%) Medium Presentations S.S.	Most ✓++	Most ✓+	Most ✓	Most ✓-	Most -	Most X	.2 X your grade = Total % you earned for this section
(10%) Small: hw, participation, prep	Most ✓++	Most ✓+	Most ✓	Most ✓-	Most -	Most X	.1 X your grade = Total % you earned for this section ned for this section
						FINAL GRADE	Add all the calculated Total %s from this column

Image 4: Example of a Dialogue Doc, using the Google Docs form

DIALOGUE DOC

Standard(s)	Standard In My Own Words	✓, IP, X	Reflect, using specific details to support
W.11-12.3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.			

Student Name:

Assignment Name:

Teacher Feedback:

Peer Feedback:

Bibliography

Allman, Denise. Personal Interview. 12 March 2019.

Ballenger, Bruce. *The Curious Writer*, 3rd ed. (concise). Boston, Pearson Longman,
　　2011. Print.

Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*.
　　Manchester University Press, 2009.

Barlow, R. M. "An Experiment with Learning Contracts." *The Journal of Higher
　　Education*, vol. 45, no. 6, 1974, pp. 441–449. *JSTOR*, JSTOR,
　　www.jstor.org/stable/1980762.

Bartholomae, David.*Writing on the Margins.* Bedford/St. Martin's*,* 2005.

Bartholomae, David, and Elbow, Peter. "Responses to Bartholomae and Elbow."
　　College Composition and Communication, vol. 46, no. 1, Feb. 1995, pp.
　　84–92, doi:10.2307/358872.

Bauman, Marcy. "What Grades Do for Us and How to Do without them." University
　　of Michigan-Dearborn, pp. 162-178,
wac.colostate.edu/books/tchudi/chapter11.pdf.
　　Accessed 18 July 2018.

Bencich, Carol Beeghly . "Response: A Promising Beginning for Learning to Grade
　　Student Writing." Tchudi, Heister, and Hutchinson, pp. 47-61.

Berthoff, Ann E. *Forming, thinking, writing: The composing Imagination*. Hayden
　　Book Company, Inc., 1978.

Blackstock, Alan, and Exton, Virginia. "'Space to Grow': Grading Contracts for Basic
　　Writers." Teaching English in the Two Year College 41.3 (2014): 278–293.

Blynt, Ruth Ann. "The Sticking Place: Another Look at Grades and Grading." English
　　Journal 81.6 (1992): 66–71. Print.

Brimi, Hunter M. "Reliability of Grading High School Work in English." Practical
　　Assessment, Research & Evaluation 16.17 (2011): n. pag. Print.

Calkins, Lucy, and Mary Ehrenworth. "Growing Extraordinary Writers: Leadership
　　Decisions to Raise the Level of Writing Across a School and a District."
　　Reading Teacher, vol. 70, no. 1, July 2016, pp. 7–18. *EBSCOhost*,
　　doi:10.1002/trtr.1499.

Cecchini, Melissa. Personal Interview. 7 March 2019.

Danielewicz, Jane, and Elbow, Peter. "A Unilateral Grading Contract to Improve Learning and Teaching." College Composition and Communication 61.2 (2009): 244–268. Print.

Davis, Erin K. *The Teacher as Reader: The Evolution of Teacher Response in Composition Studies*, California State University, Long Beach, Ann Arbor, 1998.

Drinkhouse, Larae. Personal Interview. 13 March 2019.

Duxbury, Alec R. "Speaking My Mind: The Tyranny of the Thesis Statement." The English Journal, vol. 97, no. 4, 2008, pp. 16–18. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/30047240.

Early, Robert, et al. *The Bartholomae-Elbow Debate and Conflicting Progressivisms in Composition Pedagogy*. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1 Jan. 2013, http://search.proquest.com/docview/1448560996/.

Elbow, Peter. "Taking Time Out from Grading and Evaluating While Working in a Conventional System." Assessing Writing 4.1 (1997): 5–27. Print.

Freire, Paulo. "Pedagogy of the Oppressed." Full Text of "PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED - ENGLISH - PAULO FRIERE", The Internet Archive, archive.org/stream/PedagogyOfTheOppressed-English-PauloFriere/oppressed_djvu.txt.

Gellis, Mark. "Grading with an Attitude." Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture 2.3 (2002): 416–19.

Gidjunis, Catherine. Personal Interview. 7 March 2019.

Guskey, Thomas R. "Making the Grade: What Benefits Students?" *Educational Leadership*, vol. 52, no. 2, 1994, pp. 14–20.

---*On your Mark*. Solution Tree Press, 2015.

Hairston, Maxine. "The Winds of Change: Thomas Kuhn and the Revolution in the Teaching of Writing." College Composition and Communication, vol. 33, no. 1, 1982, pp. 76–88. JSTOR, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/357846.

Hassencahl, Fran. "Contract Grading in the Classroom." *Improving College and University Teaching*, vol. 27, no. 1, 1979, pp. 30–33. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/27565275.

Hillocks, George, et al. *The Dynamics of English Instruction; Grades 7-12*. [1st ed.], Random House, 1971.

Holaday, Lynn. "Writing Students Need Coaches, Not Judges." Tchudi, Heister, and Hutchinson, pp. 35-45.

Holland, Robert. "Portfolios: A Backward Step in School Accountability." pp. 1-10. https://www.lexingtoninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/holland_portfol io_assessment_8_29_07.pdf. Accessed 18 February 2018.

Hunt, Russell, "Reading and Writing for Real: Why it Matters for Learning." St. Thomas University, 1993-1996.

Inoue, Asao B. "Theorizing Failure in US Writing Assessments." *Research in the Teaching of English*, vol. 48, no. 3, 2014, pp. 330–352. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/24398682.

Keller, John. "How to integrate learner motivation planning into lesson planning: The ARCS model approach." Florida State University, 2000.

Ketter, Jean S. and Judith W. Hunter. "Student Attitudes toward Grades and Evaluation on Writing." Tchudi, Heister, and Hutchinson. pp. 103-120.

Kohn, Alfie. "The Case Against Grades." *Educational Leadership*, November 2011, https://www.alfiekohn.org/article/case-grades/?print=pdf. Accessed 18 July 2018.

--- "From Grading to De-grading." High School Magazine, March 1999, https://www.alfiekohn.org/article/degrading-de-grading/?print=pdf. Accessed 18 July 2018.

---"Punished by Rewards." Houghton Mifflin Company, 1993.

Krumboltz, John, and Yeh, Christine. "Competitive Grading Sabotages Good Teaching." *Phi Delta Kappan*, vol. 78, no. 4, Phi Delta Kappa, pp. 324–26.

LaBrant, Lou. "Inducing Students to Write." *The English Journal*, vol. 44, no. 2, 1955, pp. 70–116. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/808778.

--- "Teaching High-School Students to Write." *The English Journal*, vol. 35, no. 3, 1946, pp. 123–128. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/806777.

Lepper, Mark R. "Motivational Considerations in the Study of Instruction." *Cognition and Instruction*, vol. 5, no. 4, 1988, pp. 289–309. *JSTOR*, JSTOR,

www.jstor.org/stable/3233574.

Lucas, Lisa. "Write More, Grade Less: Five Practices for Effectively Grading
Writing." Clearing House: *A Journal of Educational Strategies*, Issues and
Ideas 85.4 (2012): 136–140. Accessed 18 July 2018.

Mahon, Robert L. "A Grading System for Composition Papers." Clearing House 78.3
(2005): 102.

Mathers, Brandi Gribble, et al. "'The Teacher Said My Story Was Excellent':
Preservice Teachers Reflect on the Role of the 'External' in Writing:
'Influential Others' Play an Important Role in Shaping Writers' Views of
Themselves--Suggesting That It May Be Time to Rethink What It Means to
'Teach' Writing." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, vol. 50, no. 4,
International Reading Association Inc.

McDonald, W. U., Jr. "Grading Student Writing: A Plea for Change." College
Composition and Communication 26.2 (1975): 154–58.

Murray, Donald M. "The Listening Eye: Reflections on the Writing Conference."
College English, vol. 41, no. 1, 1979, pp. 13–18. *JSTOR*, JSTOR,
www.jstor.org/stable/376356.

Nelson, Marie Wilson. Growth-Biased Assessing of Writers--A More Democratic
Choice. Tchudi, Heister, and Hutchinson. pp. 15-32.

O'Connor, John S., and Lessing, Avi D. "What We Talk About When We Don't Talk
About Grades." *Schools*, vol. 14, no. 2, University of Chicago Press, pp. 303–18,
doi:10.1086/693793.

O'Hagan, Liesel K. "It's Broken—Fix it!" Tchudi, Heister, and Hutchinson. pp. 3-14.

Parini, Jay. "The Unbearable Importance of Grading." Chronicle of Higher Education
54.23 (2008): A38. Print.

Parker, Robert Dale. *How to Interpret Literature: Critical Theory for Literary and
Cultural
Studies*. Oxford University Press, 2015.

Plotts, Brenda. "A Simple Alternative to Grading." *The Journal of the Virginia
Community Colleges*, pp. 29-42.

Rowan, Dan. Personal Interview. 12 March 2019.

Sackstein, Starr. Hacking Assessment: 10 Ways to Go Gradeless in a Traditional

Grades School. Times 10 Publications, 2015. Hack Learning Series (Book 3).

Shor, Ira. *When Students Have Power*. University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Smagorinsky, Peter. "EJ Extra: Is It Time to Abandon the Idea of 'Best Practices' in the Teaching of English?" *The English Journal*, vol. 98, no. 6, 2009, pp. 15–22. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/40503452.

Sparks, Sarah D. *Is Professional Writing the Missing Link in High school*. Education Week. 30 October 2018. Web. https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2018/09/26/is-professional-writing-the-missing-link-in.html

Spencer, Kyle. "A New Kind of Classroom: No Grades, No Failing, No Hurry." *The New York Times*. Aug 11, 2017. www.nytimes.com/2017/08/11/nyregion/mastery-based-learning-no-grades.html.

Stack, Donna. Personal Interview. 12 March 2019.

Stellmack, Mark A, et al. "Incentivizing Multiple Revisions Improves Student Writing Without Increasing Instructor Workload." *Teaching of Psychology*, vol. 42, no. 4, SAGE Publications, pp. 293–98, doi:10.1177/0098628315603060.

Taggart, Amy Rupiper, et al. *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies.* Introduction. Tate et al.*,* 2014.

Tate, Gary, et al, editors. *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2014.

Tchudi, Stephen, Robert A. Heister, and Jamie Hutchinson, editors. *Alternatives to Grading Student Writing*. Solution Tree Press, 2015.

Thomas, P.L. "The Nearly Impossible: Teaching Writing in a Culture of Grades, Averages." radicalscholarship.wordpress.com/about/

--- "De-Grading Writing Instruction in a Time of High-Stakes Testing: The Power of Feedback in Workshop." *De-testing + de-grading schools*, edited by Joe Bower and P.L. Thomas, Peter Lang Publishing, 2013, pp. 219-238.

Quinn, Timothy. "A Crash Course on Giving Grades." *Phi Delta Kappan Magazine*, vol. 93, no. 4, SAGE Publications, pp. 57–59, doi:10.1177/003172171109300414.

Wilson, Kate. Personal Interview. 5 March 2019.

Wilson, Maja. "Rethinking a Writing Teacher's Expertise: Following Students under

the Kitchen Table." *The English Journal*, vol. 99, no. 3, 2010, pp. 50–56. *JSTOR*,
www.jstor.org/stable/40503483.

---"Why I Won't Be Using Rubrics to Respond to Students' Writing." *English
Journal*, vol. 96, no. 4, National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, IL,
http://www.ncte.org/journals, Mar. 2007, pp. 62–66.

Zoeckler, Laurence. "Moral Aspects of Grading: A Study of High School English
Teachers' Perceptions." American Secondary Education 35.2 (2007): 83–102.