Berlin, New York, Baghdad
Assessment as Democracy

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Free speech and participatory democracy have come under siege in the post-9/11 world and the aftermath of the U.S. attack on Iraq. To remain active participants in deliberative democracy, we are responsible for protecting our own rights and those of others. Those rights include the right to voice opinions, especially but not exclusively dissenting opinions, in public arenas. In this article, I propose assessment as a form of participatory democracy, both within and beyond the classroom. This view of assessment articulates a foundational understanding of agency and deliberation. Developing the concept of assessment as democracy will help us to practice our practices in ever-widening circles of purposeful civic engagement.

The classroom represents a site where teachers have daily responsibilities and immediate impact. Assessment is a way for teachers to discover what their students know—and don't know—and how they learn. Moreover, assessment allows teachers and students to see additional perspectives, to dissent and respond to dissent, to deliberate as a community. Knowing what has value and what doesn't is an essential component of using assessment to write and communicate in a participatory democracy. Soliciting and listening to student voices results in teaching and learning that is truly student-centered. Practicing what we teach, we may find that citizenship, literacy, and agency intersect in the classroom for us as well as for our students, in the necessarily untidy and challenging work of deliberative democracy.

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James Berlin (1994) wrote but one piece on assessment during his brief but brilliant career. It was a revision for publication of the paper he delivered at the 1992 Portfolio Assessment Conference at Miami University. In it, Berlin envisioned the portfolio as a subversion of assessment, a postmodern artifact whose multiple products and genres allowed a more truthful representation of the writing used to educate an informed citizenry. Whether he used postmodern, Marxist, or cultural studies theory, Berlin's goal was to foster an open, free discourse for an educated democracy. In the decade-plus since his death, we have witnessed an explosion of mandated assessments that would hardly honor his goal of delivering literacy instruction to help future generations participate in a deliberative democracy. Berlin's vision for an educational experience steeped in civic engagement and political awareness could hardly be more poignant in our post-9/11 world.

The terrorist attacks heightened every American's awareness of what it meant to be an American, uniting us at first and later illustrating our difficulty in articulating a coherent response to this new reality. Regardless of who or where we were, most Americans were strongly affected by the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Those living 1,000 miles away had perhaps five or six degrees of separation from immediate personal tragedy. Those who lived or worked in New York City had none. My cousin, working across the street from the Twin Towers, ran down the stairs, ran 12 blocks to the dock, and caught the last ferry home, the last one for days. The public schools in Hastings-on-Hudson, where my sister and her children live, sent teachers and aides home on school buses to ensure that all children would be met by someone. The children saw smoke in the sky. In the weeks to come, cities counted their dead. For those of us who lived further from Ground Zero, the tragic facts and meanings of 9/11 unfolded on television, the Internet, and the radio. Wherever we live, all of us—in Red Cloud or Brooklyn, Fairbanks or Dallas—remember where we were. Our personal and civic lives were riven forever into life before the World Trade Center attacks and life afterward. As a nation, we at first experienced a rare unity in shock and bereavement and, in many quarters, outrage.

That unity did not last long. Fear and outrage led to waves of public rhetoric, sometimes Orwellian, on democracy, freedom, and rights. Although the idea of democracy had, in the post-Cold War era, attained for many American citizens the luxury of abstraction, after September 11 this abstraction became immediate and material, midnight corn fields exposed by lightning. We have become riven by what West (2004) called "democratic longings," longings that both reflect and transcend the boundaries of the historical present (p. 203). The concept I want to begin exploring on the way to a theory of assessment as participatory democracy is the right to free speech—part of the "inalienable" right to liberty. There is reason to believe that the right to free speech is no longer self-evident for American citizens, if, indeed, it ever was.

For example, U.S. senators who questioned the White House creation of a global war on terrorism in the wake of September 11 were silenced by counter-questions assailing their patriotism. The White House also took a strong line against including information or disinformation from our enemies on television. As Scholes (2002) said, although Americans are famous for not listening to alternative viewpoints, "we have never made it a national policy not to listen to them until

now" (p. 168). Yet, free speech is ostensibly one of the democratic rights the "war on terrorism" aims to defend. The right to free speech—to dissent and inquiry—was in this case sacrificed, perhaps temporarily, for its own protection.

On many of our campuses, the right to open discussion has been assailed by legislators, administrators, faculty, and students, among others. For example, only an 11th-hour decision from the appellate court of North Carolina allowed first-year students at the University of North Carolina to discuss their assigned summer reading, *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations* by Michael Sells.[1] On a smaller scale, the HOPE Network, an official student organization at the University of Washington, Tacoma, found itself in the middle of a free-speech brushfire during the winter of 2002; Bruce Ellison, a civil rights activist, was co-sponsored by HOPE to speak on civil liberties and the U.S. Patriot Act. The undergraduates serving on the university's Student Fees Committee tried to block Ellison's talk because of his ideological "agenda."[2] Listening to other perspectives, as Scholes notes, has never been what we as a people do best. It is not perhaps necessary to conclude that in the wake of September 11, some speech has become, to paraphrase Orwell's *Animal Farm*, freer than others.

The monumental and ongoing task we share is, of course, to understand our world and the people in it, especially those we do not see and know, those with ideas we find unfamiliar, even repugnant. We can only understand our own position in a post-9/11 world when we can understand the position of other terrorist victims. The consequences and implications of enacting or failing to enact this understanding of others goes beyond the classroom. Yet the writing classroom has always been a busy intersection for democracy, literacy, and agency. Teachers have particular responsibilities to help students commit themselves to what Ahmad (2002) called "analysis, comprehension, and some norms of consistency," to listening to other points of view, as part of being literate and responsible citizens. Such literate citizenry requires intellectual precision of all sorts. If teachers eschew this task, they will, as Orwell (1946/1981) warns in "Politics and the English Language," become passive and muddy-headed. Sloppy language leads to the "invasion of one's mind by ready-made phrases" (p. 168); this rhetorical invasion leads in turn to passive citizens ripe for literal invasion by those who use "democracy," "freedom," and "justice" with the intent to conceal and manipulate (p. 162).

All Assessment Politics is Local

I argue here that assessment offers a way to enact participatory democracy, sustain debate in the classroom, and keep public discussion open. Envisioning assessment as a democratic practice asks one to articulate the role of agency in evaluation more boldly. Doing so provides a daily strategy for enacting democracy and issues an invitation to discuss ideas fruitfully with those who disagree, allowing one to use assessment issues as way of practicing democracy. Understanding writing assessment as a strategy for participatory democracy may seem grandiose, a way to make assessment scholar-practitioners more important than they really are by positing significant roles for them beyond our classrooms. Yet, assessment has always been political, perhaps never more so than when its advocates celebrate

what Huot and Neal called the assumption of its ideological neutrality. Large-scale assessment plans reflect political calls for reform and for accountability; they also enact national narratives of social progress and political power. In her book, *The Power of Tests: A Critical Perspective on the Uses of Language Tests*, Elana Shohamy (2001) illustrated "that tests have become an arm of policy reform in education and vocational training as well as in immigration policy" (p. 19). If anything, tests have a history of being used as interested agents of social action (Huot, 2002).

The first historical example of large-scale assessment animated by socially progressive goals and reflecting political power is, in fact, the first recorded example of a qualifying test, that of imperial China. Anthropologist F. Allan Hanson (1993) discussed the way the civil service exams, open to almost all residents, "became the most important avenue to position, power, and prestige" (p. 186). These exams represented a tidal wave of social progress: For the first time, professional advancement was based on test scores, on merit, rather than on parentage. Yet the examination was not a single event but an entire system of examination. Having passed it, a test-taker had to re-take it every 3 years, and there were tests at all levels of professional advancement.

This civil service exam demonstrated, among other things, the way standardized, large-scale, high-stakes tests problematize theories of human agency. As Anthony Giddens (1984) said, there is "no more elemental concept than that of power" (p. 283). Although humans act as "knowledgeable agents" (p. 281), the choices for civil service test-takers were painfully binary: take the test and increase your professional possibilities, or don't take it. The richer choice open to test-takers was whether or not to subvert the exercise of control and power that the exam represented. To cheat or not to cheat? Cheating on the civil service exam was, as Hanson described, legion, despite safeguards to prevent it. Indeed, any high-stakes standardized assessment that does not value creativity or individuality is a swamp for abuses of academic integrity. In *The Big Test: The Secret History of the American Meritocracy*, Nicolas Lemann (1999) reports equally ingenious cheating methods employed on the Test of English as a Foreign Language, another narrow entry point to broad professional opportunities (p. 242). Yet the civil service exam in historic China or more recent uses of the SAT in America reflect the socially progressive goal of opening up opportunities for egalitarian and democratic purposes.

The socially progressive intentions of standardized large-scale assessments arrived with less savory goals, including those of consolidating and exercising political power. Hanson argued that standardized tests create the qualities they purport to measure, supporting Foucault's (1977) claim that examinations link the formation of knowledge to the formation of power. Even more telling, for our purposes, is Foucault's assertion that the same examination system that monitors individuals "also situates them in a network of writing; it engages them in a whole mass of documents that capture and fix them" (p. 189). The civil servants of ancient China became embedded in the large-scale, ongoing—indeed, "infinite"—examination system, with ever-growing files and records of their testing histories. What Foucault called this "turning of real lives into writing" became, he argues, procedural strategies for "objectification" and "subjection" (p. 192).

As part of this subjection, the Chinese civil service examinations and their frequency were a forceful, if invisible, display of power and control: "The examination did not simply mark the end of an apprenticeship; it was one of its permanent factors" (p. 186). One school tested its students every day. The constant barrage of examinations now seems a distinctively American form of institutional power, due in part to our historical faith in positivistic—what Broad called "scientistic"—methods of analysis. In addition to standardized entry tests such as the SAT and GRE, there also are graded exams and preschool interviews, placement tests and admissions essays, exit exams and vocational tests. Hanson (1993) told the story of a colleague who asked a friend if she was nervous about taking the GRE: "'Well,' was the response, 'I'm an American. I was born to be tested'" (p. 1). The frequency of examination as well as the examinations themselves convey the limited agency of the test-taker and the ongoing power of the testing institutions. Similarly, the ceremonial and ritualized nature of the exam also represents the exercise of disciplinary and institutional power, as a way for institutions to exert their control over individuals.

It is worth noting that these rituals of control are contemporary rather than just historical. Their echoes fill any university's hallways, as well as the heads of the test-takers. "Do not break the seal of your exam booklet until you have been instructed to do so." "Fill in the bubbles completely." Moreover, the control evoked by these ritualized instructions is present in essay exams as well as in standardized tests: "Remove everything from your desk but your blue examination book." Protocols for graded papers are another example of the challenges to agency our students face. ("Put the staple in the upper-right hand corner." "Use 12-point font." "I require 1-inch margins.") They are being taught "conventions," but they are also being taught, in Elbow's (2000, p. 4) words, the rewards of compliance and the costs of resistance. These contemporary examples of assessment rituals and the frequency of examinations suggest the difficulties students encounter when trying to act like writers rather than subjects or students.

Although significant differences exist among the assessments of imperial China, 18th-century France, and 21st-century America, large-scale standardized tests (in themselves and in their ubiquity) "fix" individual qualities like butterflies in museum cases. Huot and Williamson (1997) call on us to "make explicit the importance of power relationships in assessment" and the archival accumulation of scores (whether born of tests, portfolios, or rubrics), as well as our national dependence on qualifying exams, are about the power to define a person and to limit his or her possibilities. Similarly, Lemann's history of the SAT is in some ways the story about what happens when the significance of power relationships in assessment remains implicit. Originating as a U.S. Army intelligence test, the SAT was seen by its creators as a benign, if ambitious, means of fitting people to do their nation service: a kind of intelligence test that would create a democratic elite by showing people where they could best serve their country. The great social experiment of the Educational Testing Service intended to create a nation of workers happy in their work, educated for what they should do.

The SAT had repercussions that even its most ambitious advocates could not have anticipated, not least Hanson's notion that Americans are immobilized by

tests, anchored in a sea of controlling paperwork. As Lemann narrated, the quintessentially American story of expanded opportunity clashed with the simultaneous narrative of a scientific system for identifying the first among equals—those who scored highly on the SAT—and positioning them for the rewards of the governing class. It became clear that the meritocracy encrowned by the SAT was not a natural meritocracy. (Hanson, among others, argued that standardized tests serve only as accurate measures of the income level of the test-taker's family.) Nor did it increase opportunity or even distribute it equitably. The SAT's founders had hoped that the test would help the nation transcend matters of money and politics. Instead, the SAT has become another measure of wealth and influence; for example, and this is only one example, well-to-do parents shop for medical experts willing to diagnose their college-age child with a learning disability so that he or she has more time to take the SAT and can, as a result, achieve higher scores (Callahan, 2004).

All assessment politics is local. The socially progressive goals of the Chinese civil service exam and the American SAT have pungent contemporary resonance as we grapple with the charge of Huot and Williamson (1997) to make explicit the significance of power relationships in assessment. Not a month goes by without a cry for help on the Writing Program Administrator listserv (WPA-L), when a first-year composition director or a new assistant professor hopes for quick advice on how to assess a program: "My chair (dean, president, chancellor) wants me to come up with a plan for department (program, college) assessment, by Friday, and I've never done—can anyone . . . ?" These are local politics, surely, yet they are part of the same narrative: "They" want assessment action from "us" so they can use it to demonstrate acquiescence to political calls for rigor, accountability, and school improvement; yet "They" are strangely uninterested in our professional expertise or the value of assessment to discuss and articulate goals and means to attain them. (That we may be hired to hustle together assessment plans when we have no expertise in the field is itself telling.)

Political pressures come from above, like rain. They drench teachers in questions of agency and control. Students become subjects and objects, rather than agents and actors, and so do their teachers. As Darling-Hammond pointed out, assessment and instructional policies drop down from the top of the hierarchy: a teacher becomes a "technician" who serves as a "conduit for instructional policy, but not as an actor" (cited in Murphy, 2002). Like those at all the other levels of educational bureaucracy, teachers are meant to enact the policies and practices designed by others, political and administrative figures at an increasing distance from knowledge about how students teach and learn . . . and even further from assessment as a field of inquiry. "Teacher-proof," as Sandra Murphy noted, has become a commonplace of educational administrative discourse: lessons or assessment strategies so implacably fixed, so "fool-proof," that even a teacher can't ruin them.

Assessment and the Classroom

The writing classroom is a curious site for the practice of democracy, because many teachers believe they already know everything students think and believe. They read their students' papers, after all, hear them discuss assignments, ask questions, offer ideas, and contest grades. Yet despite their experience and expertise, despite their scholarly commitment to writerly agency, teachers often do not know what students know, what they think, and what they believe about how they learn and are assessed.[3] Although the responsibility to discover what their students know and how they learn has clear pedagogical purposes, it also represents a way of practicing democracy. Assessment, as Broad (2003) has reminded us, is about what one values, what is important. Making assessment a visible and important part of writing pedagogy involves students in discussions and considerations of value about their texts and discourse more generally.

The challenge of realizing democracy in public education resonates through Shaughnessy's (1977) ground-breaking *Errors and Expectations.* Shaughnessy's most famous claim is that errors in the work of basic writers have meaningful patterns, should teachers be smart enough to see and understand them; yet her work also argues forcefully that adult learners "can alert us easily and swiftly to the effects of instruction. They work, in this sense, collaboratively with teachers," urging us to "discover the most efficient ways of presenting what we would have them understand" (p. 291). Shaughnessy challenges teachers to examine their assumptions:

> unless he can assume that his students are capable of learning what *he* has learned, and what he now teaches, the teacher is not likely to turn to himself as a possible source of his students' failures. He will slip, rather, into the facile explanations of student failure that have long protected teachers from their own mistakes and inadequacies. (pp. 291-292)

Her other assumption, tart and impassioned, that "we need not learn everything at our students' expense" (pp. vii), demonstrates the power of assessment and other research to provide teachers with information on literacy and its teaching to meet the needs of all students, with assessment as a means of enacting equal educational opportunity for democracy.

Twenty-five years later, teachers are still facing Shaughnessy's challenge to listen to what students say they need in order to become better writers. Hillocks (1995) analyzed the behavior of a teacher whose class has not gone well. The teacher blames the failure on students' inattention and lack of interest in learning. Quoting Tolstoy who believed that all students' problems could be attributed to their teachers' teaching, Hillocks calls this brand of pedagogy teaching as protected activity. Although student voices are often missing from writing assessment literature, there have been many persistent calls for including students in the discourse of assessment. For example, using postmodern theories of interpretation James Zebroski (1989) demonstrates Bakhtin's "fervent ontological pluralism" (p. 35) by reading and assessing a single student's essay ("Disabled Unemployment") from four perspectives. Listening to the voices he hears while reading a single essay allows

Zebroski to read and assess from various representative positions teachers and scholars of writing hold. Reflecting much of the then burgeoning scholarship on critical pedagogy, Zebroski favors an ideological reading that includes "history's judgment on the unemployed and on those who create their unemployment" (p. 44). More than two decades before Zebroski reads and evaluates his student's writing in four ways, articulating four different judgments that position his student in varying distances from participatory democracy, Shaughnessy called attention to the needs of writers who had answered the City University of New York's (CUNY) offer for an open admission education. In striking contrast, CUNY now employs placement exams that exclude the students Shaughnessy writes about, even though there were data that supported admitting students who after one class performed well (Gleeson, 2000).

Although the details, implications and consequences of CUNY's failed open admissions policy are beyond the scope the article, it is important to note that issues of assessment are central to the decisions made by CUNY to enact and retract open admissions and that these decisions have a social, political, and ideological impact as an institution opens and then closes its doors to the underclass. These two assessments affect different groups of people in different ways, but overall they privilege those in power and impede the progress of those individuals already at disadvantage. In this way they affect democracy.

As Smith (1997) noted, 20 years after Shaughnessy, students are not inevitably central to student-centered learning. Smith identified, for example, a great silence on the schism between educators' goals and those of their students. He urged teachers to take their students seriously by "honoring the choices they make and, indeed, deferring to those choices if at all possible. To do otherwise is "undemocratic at best, if not infantilizing and frankly oppressive" (p. 317). Simply asking his students why they went to college, for example, gains Smith useful data that, in turn, informs his methods and approaches.

O'Neill and Fife (2001) noted in their review of the literature on responding to student writing that teachers continue to conceive of response in very narrow terms and that they know precious little about what students think of the way we respond and assess their writing. In her essay, "A Sociocultural Perspective on Teacher Response: Is There a Student in the Room?" Sandra Murphy (2002) lamented the lack of representation for students in the research and theory about responding to student writing. Murphy argued not only for allowing students a voice in their own assessment and responses but suggests that the ways in which students understand their teachers' written comments constitutes "the missing link" in research on feedback, valuing reflection for its ability to provide us with "a window on the student's thinking" and voice (p. 80). More dialogic assessment not only gives students a voice in the powerful discourse of assessment, but it also supplies teachers with the information necessary to make the best decisions about students.

In *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*, Yancey (1998) focused on the ways in which students experience the education designed for them. She reminds teachers that what they are teaching is not always what students learn:

> We have a disquieting awareness that what the students experience in any course may
> be different from what we intend; even as they sit in a classroom, students may not
> be receiving the curriculum we think we deliver. (p. 171)

Yancey (1998) distinguished among kinds of curriculum: delivered curriculum, experienced or received curriculum, and lived curriculum that students bring to class. Students always learn. But "we have asked students not what they have learned, but *whether they have learned what it is that we expected them to learn*" (Yancey & Weiser, 1997, p. 12). Assessment is a way to ask students what and how they learned. Student comments lead us to exploration any crevice or canyon that opens up between their curricula and teachers' curriculum.

For example, a teacher might be tempted, at the start of next quarter, to ask students not only why they came to college, as Smith does, but what smart people know or do. "Students' theories of what it means to be intelligent," finds the National Research Council (1999),

> can affect their performance. Research shows that students who think that intelli-
> gence is a fixed entity are more likely to be performance oriented than learning ori-
> ented—they want to look good rather than risk making mistakes while learning. (p.
> 20)

Performance-oriented students, the report also said, are those who struggle when courses become more demanding. Achieving good grades and avoiding error, these students find themselves trapped like a mule between two stools when challenged by more difficult concepts. Learning requires one to risk error. Creating "evaluation-free zones" as Elbow (1997) called them increases a student's willingness to take chances and a teacher's ability to provide effective instruction.

Approaching writing instruction and assessment as a form of democracy is important because it makes one ask different kinds of questions about assessment. These questions and answers matter because they assume that students and faculty have equally instrumental roles in the project of writing instruction and assessment. Students learn not only from what teachers say, but from what they don't say, from what they do, what they don't do—and from what the students themselves do. Brooke's (1987) essay "Underlife and Writing Instruction," underscores that students create a culture around their classroom experiences that can often hinder or help them succeed but about which teachers have no knowledge. Students as agents have their "[k]knowledgeability embedded in practical consciousness [that] exhibits an extraordinary complexity—a complexity that often remains completely unexplored in orthodox . . . approaches" (Giddens, 1984, p. 281). Assessments require student agency, and a recognition of the received curriculum and the experienced curriculum.

If Shaughnessy (1977) asked teachers to see student-writers—and to see themselves—as agents, rather than as objects, Huot (2002a) extended these assumptions in his concept of instructional assessment in which learning to assess one's own writing and the writing of others is a way to learn how to write. He argued that the ability to assess writing is critical to the ability to write well. Moreover, a student who develops an assessment of his or her rough draft has learned more about the draft and practiced a writerly skill that he or she owns and can use again. The abil-

ity to assess and revise enables an undergraduate to move from student—from glum and voiceless object—to writer, from completing assignments for grades to inventing and executing projects of his or her own design to receive an audience-aware response. This move is liberatory. Not only does a writer have his or her work assessed, the student gets to assess his or her own work and learns how evaluation can improve his or her writing.

The intention to make classes environments for deliberative, participatory democracy is often at odds with teachers' conception and ignorance of assessment. As Huot (2002a) pointed out, "we require evaluative skills from students which we do not, for the most part, teach" (p. 68). The quality of peer-group discussions and decisions about which papers to revise for a portfolio or issues to address in revising can often be related to how well developed and practiced students' concepts of assessment are. (It is rather like urging students to proofread: I often survey my students to find that 90% have been told by teachers to proofread their work, but only 5% have been taught to proofread.) Grades agitate against instructional assessment as a strategy for student agency. Asking students to assess work that has been graded has a postmortem and remediating feel that reduces the possibilities for learning. Grades, as most teachers have observed, tend to fossilize both student writing and teacher feedback (Huot, 2002a). Helping a student learn to assess his or her own work, on the other hand, focuses on agency and action. Instructional assessment and assessment as a form of participatory democracy call for a pedagogical commitment to agency, action, and ideas in motion.

Increasingly, the college classroom has become a microcosm of the nation rather than a hiatus between high school and real life. Notions of "voice" and "collaboration" have local and global meanings from which neither students nor teachers may in honor retreat. Post-9/11 culture, including the aftermath of the U.S. attack on Iraq, has seen many Americans embrace a kind of patriotism. In the name of that patriotism, free speech ("frank and fearless speech," inquiry) and participatory democracy have come under siege. American Muslims, immigrants, and other people of color find their constitutional and human rights subsidiary to the cause of homeland security. College professors who question U.S. government policy in public—or teach an Islamic text—find the right to free speech, public debate, and dissent elusive rather than protected.

Rhetorically, the attack on Iraq has been linked to the attacks of 9/11 in arguments that fail to demonstrate "adherence to some norms of consistency" (Ahmad, 2002) or even conventional writing classroom standards for the use of evidence and avoidance of logical fallacy. It is important, now more than ever, to consider the ways we protect our rights and those of others, specifically the right to remain active participants in democracy, the right to voice opinions in public, and the right to engage in deliberative discussion for and about the public good. These are, after all, among the rights that we hope to sustain globally as well as locally, whatever our politics. Although there are many ways to engage these goals, the classroom represents the site where teachers have daily responsibilities and immediate impact. The classroom is a site where teachers can practice assessment as participatory democracy.

Assessment and Civic Engagement

"Assessment," White (2001) observed, "is too important to be left to the assessors" (p. 308). Assessment scholars and writing teachers believe they are the most qualified to assess student learning in their courses, programs, and universities. They struggle against the current political emphasis on measurement and standardization, often seeing colleagues in educational measurement as bean-counting, retrogressive enemies of the people. One of their frustrations is their accountability to those without special knowledge of writing assessment and learning theory. Although they are the most knowledgeable about their students and the teaching of writing, they are seldom seriously consulted about important writing assessment decisions. Yet deans and legislators, along with faculty colleagues in other fields, may believe that these assessment strategies (or their absence) are necessarily self-serving, designed to celebrate their work and keep their jobs, that they are, in their resistance to the language, practices, and politics of "accountability," mulish dreamers, even foxes guarding hen houses. Portrayals of writing teachers as resistant to science, naïve and Luddite, are common in the literature and go back more than 60 years.

White urged teachers to become more adroit at acknowledging other perspectives, noting that the understanding of and respect for alternative views they encourage in their students does not always emerge in their own professional practice. It is, White suggested, a mistake to act as if "our classrooms were the world and still expect to participate in the crucial decisions about assessment that affect our students and our classrooms so profoundly" (p. 317). The WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition and the CCCC Position Statement on Writing Assessment explicitly recommend the inclusion of other perspectives—from various "stakeholders"—at many levels of assessment development and practice. Berlin wrote that the "point of education in a democracy is to discover as many ways of seeing as possible, not to rest secure in the perspective we find easiest and most comfortable" (Cited in Yancey, 1998, p. 149). It is of course easier to urge students to see and respect multiple perspectives than it is for teachers to do so themselves). For example, I emerge from many faculty meetings ruefully aware that our discussions have not been marked by a "respect for diverse perspectives" that we identify as student learning goals on our course descriptions.

It behooves teachers to acknowledge that their university dean or state legislators have differing perspectives, purposes, and constituencies. Engaging in ongoing democratic practices—deliberative and respectful consensus-building—is part of understanding assessment in the context of an ever-widening, increasingly public circle of participants. White (2001) urged those in assessment to understand the perspectives of various stakeholders and address them explicitly, as part of an ongoing, if sometimes contentious, collaboration that has the best interests of the students in mind. Listening to other perspectives may not, as Scholes (2002) said, be what Americans do best, but our inability to do so has consequences beyond as well as within the classroom.

Consider a conversation I overheard years ago in the hallway of the University of Puget Sound. A colleague was shocked by the ignorance of her students. "They

don't even know what a *protagonist* is," she said. "Well," said her companion, "tell them." Teachers may, I think, allow themselves some griping about what their students don't know, and it is a teacherly right, if not duty, to complain about their legislators. But, as White suggested, teachers can also learn from those alternative perspectives, just as they urge their students to do, and determine what pedagogic strategies might be most effective as a result of their learning. ("Tell them.")

It is important, of course, to acknowledge the role of power relationships in these discussions. The onus is on the powerful to listen to the less powerful. Teachers have the power and, I suggest, the responsibility to solicit the voices of students. However, when their work brings them to the table with university administrators and legislators, those at the top of the structural heap, the onus is on them to do the more careful listening, to solicit teachers' perspectives (R. May, personal communication, September 30, 2002). And, as with assessment in the classroom, the one who solicits—invites, enables—a range of perspectives is then obliged to respond constructively to them. In that way, the exchange is more than an exercise in appearing to listen. To be effective, assessment and democracy must be dialogic.

The question of how to distinguish between constructive and pointless engagement with powerful "others" is germane to assessment and democracy. Brantlinger (1999) remembers, only half-jokingly, the fear that swept through the Indiana University English Department when a Miltonist suggested dropping the Shakespeare requirement for majors.[4] Brantlinger recalled the *Toledo Blade* articles that "pilloried" Kent State University (KSU) English faculty members for doing the same thing. The KSU faculty members were depicted as "sinister bardicides" or "blithering idiots" (p. 682). It is a mistake for teachers to shrug off *all* challenges and criticisms. True, some are not worth engaging. But some are, including a question about the role of Marxist theory in literary criticism from a cross-campus colleague:

> If we English professors can't explain what we do to intelligent colleagues in other disciplines, then those colleagues won't defend us at the trials where the Lynn Cheneys and *Toledo Blades* of the world would like to arraign us, especially when they discover that we have excluded Shakespeare from our requirements. (p. 688)

Deciding when and whether to collaborate, how and with whom, is a matter of identifying differences on the road to building consensus, as Dewey (cited in Fishman) envisioned.

Key to the process of building consensus is a shared willingness to appreciate other perspectives. Such discussions—in the hallway, in the classroom, in the Capitol, on editorial pages—indicate a willingness to serve as public intellectuals in a participatory democracy. For example, Smith suggests that our views on gatekeeping

> share two unexamined assumptions. The first is that questions of gatekeeping…*can be settled by writing teachers themselves*. . . . The second assumption is that we can settle these questions without ever asking students what *they* think. (p. 301)

If Berlin came, in time, to acknowledge that English teachers are not always as influential as he thought, he nevertheless asked them to "take seriously our duty as

public intellectuals inside and outside the classroom" (Yancey, 1998, p. 180). Assessment goes to the heart of education in a democracy.

Assessment as Democracy

I define *assessment* as a form of participatory democracy, then, if and when three elements are present. First, agency: unlike traditional, summative forms of assessment, formative and instructional assessment require everyone involved to act, to speak, to listen, and to engage. Second, the ability and willingness to deliberate together—in a communitarian frame of mind, with a focus on inquiry (not technology that focuses on evaluating the greatest number of papers for the least investment)—is key to understanding assessment as a form of democracy. Third, assessment should be dynamic, vibrant, full of contradictions and negotiations, textured or, as (Hopkins) put it in "Pied Beauty," "dappled." A strong participatory democracy is untidy and challenging; rich and robust, within or beyond the classroom, a living mosaic, shifting and evolving.

A commitment to assessment as democracy also requires imagination. Educators must imagine the perspectives of university administrators or legislators, the single mother at the convenience store and retired man on a fixed income, their colleagues and neighbors. If educators are unable to understand and respect their positions, they are hardly likely to imagine the perspectives of people they haven't met, those in Rwanda or Afghanistan or Iraq. My analogy is, at its core, problematic: most American assessment scholars, after all, have no individual relationships with Afghanis. They would be building relationships from scratch rather than improving or restructuring relationships (R. May, personal communication, September 30, 2002). Nevertheless, it is difficult to help students learn to imagine the world and listen to other perspectives, to grapple with and learn from disagreement, if educators only do it themselves when the stakes are low.

Deliberative and communitarian acts of imagination require "frank and fearless speech." This speech and deliberation help teachers reach beyond simple, reductive binaries or the seductions of stasis. In *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics*, Anthony Giddens (1994) posited "a world with no others," meaning of course not a world containing only one person, but one in which everyone is part of the same community: "A world with no others is one where—as a matter of principle—we all share common interests, just as we face common risks" (p. 253). It is unproductive, as Rose (1997) suggested, to suppose that such a world can emerge in response to the work of a generation, ours or another. Yet democratic imagination and action can bring what Cornel West (2004) called "hard-won progress" (p. 218).

Agency, citizenship, and literacy intersect in the writing classroom, a site for participatory democracy. Scholes (2002) said:

> A good person, in our time, needs to have the rhetorical capacity to imagine the other's thought, feeling, and sentiments. That is, though not all rhetoricians are good people, all good citizens must be rhetoricians to the extent that they can imagine themselves in the place of another and understand views different from their own. (p. 168)

Understanding assessment as a form of participatory democracy is a way to imagine the real by, first, soliciting and listening to student voices and then by engaging additional perspectives, listening to the world of university administrators and politicians, as well as the world of our neighbors. From these modest daily practices—these opportunities to practice our practices—teachers can extend their imaginations, their teaching and learning, from Berlin to New York to Baghdad.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. Interviews with UNC first-year students, including those who were opposed to the assignment, said they were glad they had read the book: "If they objected to the book, it was generally because it was boring, not because of any belief that it proselytized" (*Zemike,* 2002, p., A14). Said Michael Neidich "The fact is, we're at a liberal arts school, that's supposed to open our minds. . . . You're supposed to get a new perspective." Concluded Manisha Devasthali: "I like seeing people out here discussing their opinions. . . . You see everyone else's point of view, instead of just your hometown's."

2. In response to the arguments of student leaders Rose Lemke, Crystal Peterson, and Mark Dodson, as well as those of their faculty advisor, Rachel May, the Student Fees Committee rescinded its objection and apologized. The prelude to the event was arguably as educational as the event itself.

3. For example, Nick Carbone and Margaret Daisley's survey of teachers and student attitude about grades illustrate a disparity between what the two think grades are and should be based on.

4. The Shakespeare scholars agreed. Students take Shakespeare whether or not the courses are required, but they needed a little more encouragement to take Milton.

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