Students, Teachers and Alternative Assessment in Secondary School: Relational Models Theory (RMT) in the Field of Education

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Abstract

The quality and types of relationships formed between students and teachers has been shown to play an essential part in the personal and academic success of students (Davis, 2003; Pianta, 1999). Little, however, has been done to determine the role that assessment plays in teacher-student relationships. Drawing upon the work of cultural anthropologist Alan Fiske (1991), I explore the ways in which certain basic forms of relationships (known as Relational Models*) are initiated and maintained in secondary school through the use of alternative assessment methods – narrative evaluations, portfolios, rubrics, and end-of-year presentations – in place of traditional letter grades. In his Relational Models Theory, Fiske posits that human relationships and social systems are culturally-specific implementations of four elementary Relationship Models: "Authority Ranking", "Communal Sharing", "Equality Matching", and "Market Pricing". Here, I discuss how the non-traditional assessment methods used at a progressive secondary school in California allow relationships between students and teachers to shift away from an exclusively authority-based system (the Relational Model of Authority Ranking), towards a more nuanced model of negotiation (Market Pricing) and communal input (Communal Sharing) – ultimately leading to more empowered and involved students.*

Introduction

The quality and types of relationships formed between students and teachers has been shown to play an essential part in the personal and academic success of students (Davis, 2003; Pianta, 1999). Little, however, has been done to determine the role that assessment plays in teacher-student relationships. In part, this is because the importance of assessment as a social activity within a community of learners, rather than simply a

means of accountability and measurement, has only recently been acknowledged. As noted by Gipps (1999), "Fifteen years ago, it would not have been considered relevant to [write about] the socio-cultural aspects of assessment. Testing… was seen as a technological activity based in psychometric theory with its emphasis on replicability and generalizability" (p. 367).

In recent years, there have been various attempts to theorise assessment in classrooms as a social activity (Cooper & Dunne, 2000; Pryor & Torrance, 2000). Wolf, Bixby, Glenn III, and Gardner (1991), for instance, note that "if we take assessment events like graduate thesis orals or the review of scholarly papers as serious models, we would see that assessment, not just learning, can and perhaps ought to be a highly social experience" (p. 56). Similarly, Gipps (1999) analyses assessment as a socio-cultural dynamic which plays out on both a broader societal level (see also Broadfoot, 1979; Filer, 2000) and on an interpersonal level within the classroom. It is the latter realm of micro-activity with which I am concerned here.

In this paper, I draw upon cultural anthropologist Alan Fiske's (1991) Relational Models Theory (RMT) – never before applied to the field of educational research – to explore the ways in which certain basic forms of relationships (labeled by Fiske as "Relational Models") between teachers and students are initiated and maintained through the use of alternative assessment methods. I discuss how the assessment methods used at Progressive Secondary School (a pseudonym) in California allow relationships between students and teachers to shift away from an exclusively authority-based system (the Relational Model Fiske calls Authority Ranking), towards a more nuanced model of negotiation (Market Pricing) and communal input (Communal Sharing). Ultimately, I argue that by allowing students to take more ownership over their evaluations, they learn to view assessment as a valuable tool for growth rather than merely an arbitrary judgment handed down by someone in authority.

Theoretical Frameworks

Relational Models Theory

Relational Models Theory (RMT) was developed in the 1980s by Alan Fiske, a cultural anthropologist who posits that human relationships and social systems are culturally-specific implementations of four elementary Relationship Models: Authority Ranking, Communal Sharing, Equality Matching, and Market Pricing. His theory arose as a synthesis of several basic social theories (including Weber's analysis of political authority and Piaget's characterisation of stages of moral development), and was an attempt to describe a universal "generative grammar" of social relations which people across the world use to "guide their own social initiatives and to understand and respond

appropriately to the social action of others" (1991, p. 3). Factor analyses have since confirmed the validity of Fiske's Relational Models Theory as an effective means of categorising discrete yet correlational types of social interactions (Haslam & Fiske, 1999).

Fiske and Haslam (2005, p. 270) define the Relational Models (RMs) as follows:

- Communal sharing (CS) is an equivalence relation, in which people attend to something important they have in common. People in each group are the same in respect to the matter at hand; outsiders are different.
- Authority ranking (AR) is a linear hierarchy in which people are asymmetrically differentiated in the current context.
- Equality matching (EM) is a relationship in which people keep track of additive differences, with even balance as the reference point.
- Market pricing (MP) is based on a socially meaningful proportionality, where the ratio may concern monetary value, utility, efficiency, effort, merit, or anything else.

Fiske (1991) notes that "each culture implements the four RMs in many distinct ways and in different combinations… Even when two cultures use the same RM, they are likely to implement it differently" (p. 269). RMT can thus provide a useful heuristic for understanding both universal patterns and cross-cultural differences in relationships.

RMT can be applied to countless social situations. Decision-making, for instance, can either be done communally (through consensus), authoritatively (with decisions handed down from above), through equality matching (where everyone has an equal vote), or through the "invisible hand of the market. Similarly, work can be done communally (everyone pitches in to help get something done), authoritatively (one person directs everyone else), through equality matching (people take turns working at a job), or through payment. In recent years, RMT has been applied to areas as diverse as domestic households, human resource systems, depression, and personality disorders (Haslam, 2004), and as broad-reaching as human biological drives (Lawrence & Nohria, 2002).

In this paper, I apply Relational Models Theory for the first time to the field of education. There are countless ways in which Relational Models could be studied within a school setting: for instance, one could look at how discipline is meted out; how decisions are made in a classroom; or how students interact with each other socially. Here, however, I am looking exclusively at RMT in relation to assessment.

I believe RMT can be particularly useful as a tool for socio-cultural analysis of assessment, given that it strategically forces one to look beyond the paradigmatic authoritarian

relationship between teacher and student, in which the teacher is "naturally" considered in control of grading his or her students. If Fiske's hypothesis that all human relationships can be categorised as one of four Relational Models holds true, then it should be possible to determine the ways in which assessment as a lived cultural experience in schools might transcend Authority Ranking. RMT provides a convenient way to categorise the nature of relationships that may emerge when evaluation is no longer strictly in the purview of the teacher, and students have a greater voice in the process. Perhaps most importantly, it allows the process of assessment to be viewed as a culturally-specific socio-cultural phenomenon (Rogoff, 2003) which can encompass a number of different relational dynamics depending on local specifics.

For the purposes of the this article, I created the following initial typology of assessment vis-à-vis Relational Models Theory and applied it to the original research I conducted at a progressive secondary school in California:

- Authority Ranking: Assessment is handed down from teacher to students. The teacher has the final say on who receives what. Assessment may sometimes be viewed by students as arbitrary or unfair.
- Market Pricing: Assessment is viewed as "proportional value" given to students according to a clearly defined set of requirements. Grades or marks are "earned".
- Communal Sharing: Assessment is reached through consensus and common goals. Students and teachers work together to discuss how well a student is doing, and what improvements need to be made. Students, teachers, and parents share the common goal of a student's success.
- Equality Matching: Students assess teachers, and teachers assess students in an equivocal relationship; alternatively, students assess each other.

I've chosen to focus exclusively on teacher-student dyads in relation to assessment, though the Relational Models formed between and among students are worthy of future analysis.

Alternative assessment

As noted by Garcia and Pearson (1994), a wide variety of terms – including performance assessment, alternative assessment, authentic assessment, portfolio assessment, and dynamic assessment, among others – have been used by educators to label assessment methods not associated with formal standardised testing. "Alternative assessment" refers specifically to any non-testing assessment methods which both demonstrate what students can do and inform future instruction (O'Malley & Pierce, 1996), while "authentic assessment" is generally defined as assessment involving "engaging and worthy

problems or questions of importance, in which students must use knowledge to fashion performances effectively and creatively" (Wiggins, 1993, p. 229). In this paper, I use both alternative assessment and authentic assessment interchangeably. While neither one is a perfect term, taken together they accurately point to both Progressive's strategic use of a host of alternative strategies in place of letter grades, and its emphasis on the use of assessment methods which relate authentically to both students' schoolwork and their overall lives.

Since the publication of Black and Wiliam's (1998) seminal meta-analysis of the benefits of formative analysis (defined by the authors as "encompassing all those activites undertaken by teachers, and/or by their students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged", (pp. 7-8), the need for teachers to provide meaningful, ongoing feedback to students has gained a tremendous amount of attention (see, for example, Popham, 2008). Only recently, however, has the potentially symbiotic relationship between formative and summative assessment begun to be explored (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshal, & William, 2003), despite the fact that "the difference between the two are not matters of principle so much as of timing" (Biggs, 1998, p. 107).

With that said, while the assessment methods discussed in this article are considered summative rather than formative (given that they represent the "sum total" of a student's abilities during a project, semester, or Division), they actually transcend this distinction: formative rubrics on projects (see appendix one), for instance, are integrated into a student's summative narrative evaluation (see appendix two), with both in turn discussed by students during their end-of-year presentations. Progressive Secondary School remains relatively unique in its emphasis on using authentic assessment methods not only throughout the school year to inform instruction, but as the very basis of its schoolwide summative assessment practices (for a few exceptions, see Darling-Hammond, Ancess, & Falk, 1995; Levine, 2002; Meier, 1995).

Methodology

Research site

Progressive Secondary School is a private, coeducational, college preparatory school located in Southern California. It is a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) – an organisation dedicated to "creating and sustaining personalised, equitable, and intellectually challenging schools" (CES, 2006) – and follows many of the CES guidelines for "authentic assessment". Their assessment practices include the following:

- "The Habits of Mind and Heart": The Habits of Mind and Heart are the basis of Progressive's philosophy and assessment. They include the lifelong

habits of mind (perspective, evidence, connection, and convention) and heart (service to the common good, collaboration, and ethical behavior).

- "Standards-Based Markings" (Does Not Meet, Approaches, Meets, Exceeds Standards): "DAME" marks (my abbreviation) are used to denote student progress in each subject area, for each Habit of Mind or Heart.
- Rubrics: Detailed checklists of criteria are given to students for each project they work on. These criteria are subdivided into the seven Habits of Mind and Heart. Teachers provide additional narrative feedback at the bottom of each rubric, telling students what they have done well on, and what they need to continue to work on (see Appendix 1).
- "Narrative Evaluations": In addition to receiving standards-based DAME marks on in-depth rubrics, students are given lengthy narrative evaluations three times a year for each subject area, which detail their progress in the Habits of Mind and Heart (see appendix two).
- Portfolios: Student work (along with accompanying rubrics and evaluations) is kept in a portfolio, and defended every other year in a public presentation.
- "Gateways and Senior Exhibitions": Students publicly defend their portfolios every other year in a process known as a Gateway in 8th and 10th grade, and a Senior Exhibition in 12th grade.
- "Parent-Teacher-Student (PTS) Conferences": 2-3 times a year, PTS conferences are held, in which students explain their narrative evaluations to their parents, and parents can ask their child's homeroom teacher in-depth questions.

Finally, it should be noted that the student body at Progressive is divided into Divisions rather than grades: Division 1 (D1) is a transition year for 6th graders; D2 houses 7th and 8th graders; D3 houses 9th and 10th graders; and D4 – also called the "Senior Institute" – houses 11th and 12th graders. Each student is assigned to an advisor, who looks out for their interests over the two years they are in a particular Division.

Data collection and analysis

Data for this study was collected at Progressive between spring of 2005 and spring of 2006, as part of a larger project looking at students' perspectives on authentic assessment. Multiple methods were used, including a survey, semi-structured interviews with students and teachers, field observations, and document analysis. I relied on continuous comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1999) to help me make sense of my data – that is, data analysis was ongoing and flexible, rather than occurring at the end of my data collection.

To gain preliminary information about students' perspectives on the assessment methods used at their school, I asked advisors to administer a two-page survey to their students. Of the 16 high school (9th through 12th grade) advisors at the school, 10 chose to administer the survey to their entire class, with a total of 115 out of 180 students (~64%) completing it. Questions included the following:

- How much do you like getting narrative evaluations and portfolios instead of grades? (circle: Not at all/They're okay/I really like them)
- What do you like best about getting narrative evaluations instead of grades? (open ended)
- What do you like least about getting narrative evaluations instead of grades? (open ended)

Although none of the survey questions asked students to directly comment on their teachers, many of the open-ended responses revealed students' appreciation for, or frustration with, the ways in which their teachers assess them. For instance, 7 students responded that what they like best about getting narrative evaluations and portfolios instead of grades was the fact that they are more personalised ("They tell the whole student! Not a simple *letter*"). In response to what they like least about getting narrative evaluations and portfolios, 18 students complained that they are too vague ("Some comments need to be clarified with the teachers").

After reviewing survey responses, I conducted 26 personal, semi-structured interviews with students who had indicated on the survey that they were willing to participate in this way. All questions were designed as "signpost" questions (Lawy, 2003) meant to trigger student discussion of relevant issues; when appropriate, I asked students to elaborate upon their responses. Interviews lasted between 25 minutes to an hour, and included the following questions specifically related to students' relationships with teachers:

- How do you think the use of narrative evals and portfolios affects your relationships with your teachers? How does this compare with when you got grades?
- Do your teachers ever ask you to assess them?
- Is assessment at Progressive fair? Why or why not?
- Do you think your teachers are qualified to assess your work? Why or why not?

Interviews were tape-recorded in full view of students, and students were given a written copy of the questions to refer to during the interview. I assured students that they did not have to answer any questions they were not comfortable with, and

encouraged them to ask for clarification when necessary. Finally, once interviews were finished, I asked students if they had any questions for me.

Later in the study, I interviewed six teachers about their experiences with using alternative assessment methods. Questions included:

- Within your experience, what kind of effect do you think alternative assessment methods have on students, either positive or negative?
- How do you think alternative assessment methods affect your overall relationships with students?

Finally, an additional (and invaluable) source of data was gathered through field observations, particularly of students' end-of-year presentations. In spring of 2005, I observed and took extensive field notes on three 8th grade Gateways, three 10th grade Gateways, and four Senior Exhibitions. In spring of 2006, I observed, tape-recorded, and transcribed three 8th grade Gateways, 3 10th grade Gateways, and 15 Senior Exhibitions. Although 8th graders were not included in my broader survey data or interviews, I observed a few of their Gateways as well in order to gain a sense of how expectations for students change over the years. All names of students and teachers in the discussion below are pseudonyms.

Data from the original study yielded an enormous variety of codes and themes, given that students and teachers were encouraged to share as many of their thoughts on the alternative/authentic assessment (AA) methods used at their school as possible. The broad categories that emerged – and a representative sampling of sub-categories within each one – were as follows:

- The historical trajectory of AA at Progressive (including how it was first implemented, and how it has changed over the years)
- Progressive's unique school community (including advice for new students, its advisory system, community involvement projects, internships, leadership opportunities, comparisons with previous schools, project based learning, and student-teacher relationships)
- Specific thoughts and feelings on the various components of AA (such as parent-student-teacher conferences, DAME marks, Gateways, the Habits of Heart and Mind, narrative evalutions, peer assessment portfolios, rubrics, and self-assessment)
- Parents and AA (including parents' own comments during Gateways, students' thoughts on their parents' attitudes towards AA, and teachers' thoughts on parents' attitudes towards AA)

- Teachers and AA (including such concerns as maintaining consistency in assessment, documentation issues, frequency of assessment, the labor intensivity of writing narrative evaluations, the scope and sequence of assessment throughout the schoolyear and across grades, team collaboration with other teachers, and overall perceptions of what it's like to implement AA at Progressive)
- Issues related to AA (including how AA plays a part in college applications, competition and comparison between peers, disagreeing with evaluations, the fairness of AA, AA as a form of feedback, the personalisation of AA, AA in relation to the "real world", the stress of receiving AA, and thoughts on terminology related to AA)
- Students and AA (including academic effort vis-à-vis AA, personal growth and improvement, learning from one's mistakes, and self-confidence)

Once an RMT typology was created, findings within the above categories were then analysed for evidence of Fiske's Relational Models, with relevant data emerging from multiple categories and sources.

Results

Authority ranking: Predominant relational model.

Despite a handful of experiments which have tried to eliminate hierarchy from teacher-student relationships altogether (see, for instance, Neill's (1995) description of his Summerhill School), Authority Ranking – an inherent "relationship of inequality" (Fiske, 1991, p. 14) – continues to dominate the teacher-student landscape in most schools. Although a few students interviewed during my study feel that teachers are not especially qualified to assess them, the majority accept it as "natural" that their teachers are the ones in charge. Students may not always agree with their teachers' opinions on their work – and some students may try to negotiate for higher marks – but most simply accept their teachers' authority to assess as the inevitable "way things are". There is thus a clear, mostly unquestioned predominance of Authority Ranking as the essential Relational Model between students and teachers at Progressive, at least in the realm of evaluation.

Even the metaphors traditionally used to describe teachers have, as noted by Manke (1997), "named the teacher as autocratic ruler, drill sergeant, factory manager, [and] leader in battle", with students referred to as "subjects, recruits, laborers, [and] soldiers" (p. 5). While much has been written recently about shifting power relations in the classroom to reflect a more communal and equitable environment (Manke; Shor, 1996), Authority Ranking nonetheless continues to dominate.

Don, a science teacher at Progressive, contributed his own metaphor of teachers and assessment at Progressive, stating that the methods used:

> . . . feel more along the lines of a lawyer or a doctor, because you really – when you're interviewing a patient, you write down their symptoms, you take notes, and then you talk with them about what you need to do to get better, and that kind of thing. So it's more along the lines of that professional level of documentation. (Interview, June 13, 2006)

Thus, Don views himself as an expert diagnostician whose job is to analyse students' symptoms or issues, and document them for students' use. Such a metaphor positions him as a person in authority over students, someone who is able to accurately diagnose them.

Indeed, although students and teachers at Progressive tend to develop closer, more casual bonds than usual in larger high schools (many teachers are addressed by their first names), this closeness is always mediated by the fact that teachers remain paid professionals who are contractually and morally obligated to provide fair evaluations of students' work. As Jennifer (a new teacher at Progressive) said to me:

> I have a very strong relationship with my advisory students, [one] that is social and personal instead of academic. [But] then you get into the classroom and it becomes academic, and you see a really different side of kids. Like, especially with some of the students that expect to get all Meets or a couple of Approaches, [they say to me], "Jennifer! Approaches here! Whoa! Why did I get this?" and then [I have] to be like "No, that's not the kind of relationship we have right here, and, like, that's your grade". (Interview, June 14, 2006)

Wes (a senior) corroborated this, saying, "No matter how close we get, it's still a teacher, it's still a student" (interview, May 15, 2006). The ramifications and nuances of Authority Ranking vis-à-vis assessment in schools are discussed in much greater detail below.

Market pricing: The negotiation of assessment.

Market Pricing, as described by Fiske (1991), is a "relationship mediated by values determined by a market system". In such a relationship, "people typically value other people's actions, services, and products according to the rates at which they can be exchanged for other commodities". Market Pricing implies "the libertarian ideology of absolute freedom of rational choice, together with the sanctity of voluntarily negotiated contracts or promises" (p. 118).

Viewed through the lens of Market Pricing, assessment could be seen as a straightforward negotiation between teacher and student, with a grade or mark something earned by

students based on a certain level of academic proficiency given in return (see Lichty, Vose, & Peterson, 1978). In such a model, teachers would provide various marks (Does Not Meet, Approaches, Meets, or Exceeds) to students depending on the proportional quality of the work students turn in. This is in contrast with norm-based assessment (such as grading on a curve), in which a student's performance is compared with that of his or her peers.

At Progressive, given the schoolwide use of rubrics for every assignment, students can take matters into their own hands, following a set of prescribed criteria leading to success. All they have to do to earn good grades is to produce a high enough quality of work. The use of detailed rubrics (see appendix one) and other checklists at Progressive – the "conceptual tools" of the community (Rogoff, 2003) – is an essential component of teachers' attempt to make it absolutely clear what is expected of students, and what they must do to succeed. As described by Ardovino, Hollingsworth, and Ybarra (2000):

> Rubrics make clear to teacher, parents, and students what is needed to produce quality work. By providing students with well-designed rubrics *before* beginning an assignment, teachers avoid misunderstandings. In addition, students know what is required to produce quality work since the expectations are spelled out in the rubric. (p. 26, italics in original)

In his D2 Gateway, Kevin described his intention to start using his rubrics more consistently, so that he could choose to earn the marks he wants:

> Last year I would leave everything off until the last minute, and I would not do some of the conventions that were required, because I did not have time or I did not check the rubric, as you have seen in my seventh grade work. This year, before I turn in a project, I always check over my rubric before turning it in, so I know that I have met all of the conventions. Next year, I hope to get my work done early enough to the point where I can look over the rubric and choose some of the conventions and Exceed in them. This way, I'll be done with all of the requirements, and I'll be able to Exceed in some of those as well. (Observation, June 2, 2006)

Thus, Kevin describes himself as moving into a position of empowerment vis-à-vis his evaluations, acknowledging the agency he possesses when it comes to selecting, or earning, the grades he is aiming for.

The interpretation of criteria-based assignments, however, is highly subjective (Sadler, 2005), and students at Progressive are aware that assessment at their school is not black-and-white, as illustrated in the following example. During the beginning of the 2005-06 school year, D2-instructor Ms. M. did an introductory lesson with her students

on rubrics, in an attempt to refamiliarise them with the assessment system. She asked her students to taste three different types of chocolate chip cookies and rate them according to different criteria, using the DAME marks. At one point, when her students expressed different opinions on how highly to grade a certain criterion (for instance, the "chocolateyness" of a cookie), Ms. M used this as an opportunity to explain that the same thing might happen at Progressive when it comes to assessment: another teacher might evaluate something slightly differently than her, which would necessitate a discussion to determine the "best" rating.

Authority Ranking thus sometimes sneaks into the presumably clear-cut Market Pricing system of rubrics and DAME marks. During an interview, when looking at an English evaluation he had received with less than stellar marks, Joel explained to me, "This is from Ms. B, who's also my advisor… She actually told us that because she's also our advisor, she's trying to push us a little more" (February 8, 2005). Melanie noted something similar when she said:

> Something I've sort of encountered this year is that my literature teacher grades way differently than my literature teacher last year, so I've had to sort of figure out what she wants, and I'm still not completely sure. (Interview, May 18, 2006)

Joel and Melanie's statements complicate the notion of rubrics as straightforward criteria which students can easily decipher in order to earn the marks they want; indeed, Melanie's statement that she has "had to figure out" what her teacher wants clearly indicates an RM of Authority Ranking. Both quotes show that while Joel and Melanie – like all other students at Progressive – are encouraged to take ownership of and critically assess their marks, the process of determining which criteria are used to evaluate their work remains very much in the hands of "authority".

Communal Sharing: Coming to Joint Decisions.

While Authority Ranking – and, to a certain extent, Market Pricing – are the primary Relational Models of assessment at Progressive, Communal Sharing plays a part as well, given the firm emphasis on students, teachers, and parents working together to achieve the common goal of student success. Parents, for instance, attend Parent-Teacher-Student conferences several times a year, receive detailed narrative evaluations about their child's performance, and attend their child's Gateways and Senior Exhibition.

Students themselves are given the opportunity, in their presentations, to contribute their own thoughts on how well they have done over the last two years. Indeed, one of the school's primary goals – noted in an informal interview with the school's

director (April 29, 2005) – is to shift the burden of responsibility for success onto the students, and away from the teachers. Ideally, students should be able to demonstrate this shift in their Senior Exhibitions, as George did when he explained:

> [One of my stretches, or areas of weakness] is that I need to show my work in all of my classes. … For a while, I didn't understand why I had to do that, because I thought, "The teachers, they're [just] being really annoying, because I have the right answer, and they should just accept that." But really, it's not for the teacher, it's for me – because … when I do something wrong … I have to be able to go back through that and to see where I made the error, and how I can correct the error. (Observation, June 6, 2006)

Thus, although it took years, George was finally able to interpret the feedback he received from his teachers (regarding the need to show his work) as relevant and meaningful to his own success, not just as an arbitrary and random whim of their authority. In this sense, he was able to successfully transcend the dilemma inherent in Raychaudhuri's (1998) provocative poem "Self-assessment", in which the narrator notes, "My red folder / in the fourth year / suddenly / out of nowhere / wants me to assert / what I achieve / in school / 'in my own words'. / How can I blow the trumpet / they've taken from me?" (p. 75). The goal at Progressive is to "give back the trumpet" to students.

Teachers try hard to prevent their students from thinking about DAME marks as something they have "gotten" from their teachers. In Will's Senior Exhibition, for instance, he caught himself referring to the "three Exceeds" and "four Meets" he had gotten on his math rubric; once he realised what he had said, however, he immediately rephrased it to state, "I **exceeded** three habits and **met** four other habits, excuse me!" This rhetorical shift was met with delight by a few of the audience members – including his advisor – who cheered him on.

One area of assessment where Communal Sharing between teachers and students is noticeably lacking is in the creation of the school's standards and criteria themselves. According to the school's director (interview, June 20, 2006), Progressive's Habits of Heart and Mind have been a communal work in progress between teachers since the school's inception, but this process hasn't necessarily involved explicit student input. Thus, any Communal Sharing between teachers and students evident in Progressive's assessment system lies exclusively in the realm of interpretation and internalisation rather than creation.

I did witness one exception, however. During her tenth grade Gateway, Grace admitted that in the past, "doing the best I could translated into doing exactly what my teachers wanted" (observation, June 3, 2005) and cited this as an unhealthy focus on external

motivations. In an attempt to begin recognising her own criteria for success as a student, Grace prepared a personal rubric for herself, which she handed out to audience members. In the "Comments" section, Grace wrote:

> This rubric demonstrates standards for myself that I believe I need to meet in order to be a "good" student. These concepts and criteria are entities I will take with me into Senior Institute. These notions are ones I truly desire to adhere and live up to. All are standards that not only deal with the product but the process and internal experience I have while working. My personal goals and standards for myself are ones I hold in high esteem and have great motivation to meet (observation, June 3, 2005).

Some of the standards Grace included in her personal rubric are fairly conventional; under "service to the common good", for instance, she wrote, "The student maintains integrity and work ethic while working in a group environment" and "offers help to other students when appropriate" – both commonly used descriptions for this Habit of Heart. But, in keeping with her personally recognised goals, Grace wrote the following two Habits of Heart standards for herself:

- Collaboration: The student reflects on teacher feedback while maintaining self-assurance in decisions. The student does not depend on others but utilises others when truly needed.
- Ethical Behaviour: The student focuses on personal behaviour and does not allow [herself] to react to external actions.

Thus, Grace used the assessment tools given to her (rubrics and the Habits of Heart) to outline goals for herself as she moved into the next Division at Progressive. However, her initiative seems to be the exception rather than the rule in terms of the development of personalised, student-driven standards and criteria at the school.

Equality matching: Equal relationships.

Equality Matching is perhaps the least applicable candidate to explain formal assessment at Progressive, starting from its very definition as "an egalitarian relationship among **peers**" (Fiske, 1991, p. 14, emphasis added). Students and teachers in most primary and secondary schools are not peers; as Jennifer (a teacher cited above) noted, despite the strong "social and personal" relationship she has with her students, when it comes to grades, she reminds them that her role is to be evaluative rather than friendly.

Although I was aware of the lack of Equality Matching between teachers and students when it comes to assessment, I nonetheless hoped to gain some insight into potential reciprocity between teachers and students at Progressive. Thus, during interviews I asked students whether or not they ever assess their teachers. It was made abundantly

clear from students' responses, however, that this hardly ever happens, and, when it does, it is often done in conjunction with students evaluating the merits of an overall unit of study. Those teachers who **are** open to receiving explicit written feedback from students on their teaching style – such as Mr. E. (according to an interview with Joseph, May 26, 2006) – are the exception rather than the rule; even then, the feedback Mr. E. receives remains informal, and does not carry the same kind of weight as students' assessments. Thus, while a relationship approaching Equality Matching happens occasionally at Progressive in terms of assessment, it never really reaches full form.

On the other hand, much of what leads up to formal assessment at Progressive is very much predicated on equality, which in turn may affect how students respond to their evaluations. Elly – a student with a profound verbal disorder – is a particularly poignant example of this. During her Senior Exhibition, Elly spoke openly about her difficulty with accepting criticism and feedback before coming to Progressive: "I would slam the door in my mom's face", she admitted (observation, May 25, 2005). When her advisor asked her to reflect on what started her progress towards being able to accept "positive criticism", she said that the biggest shift happened when her mom took her out of public school, and she finally had a teacher at Progressive who asked her what she thought. For Elly, then, being asked her opinion on a subject – that is, being treated as an equal by her teachers – started her on the road towards self-reflection. This in turn eventually led to her acceptance of constructive feedback from teachers.

Discussion

Viewing student-teacher relationships through the lens of Relational Models Theory, it is possible to see the existence of all four Relational Models, yet one in particular (Authority Ranking) clearly remains dominant. Indeed, as noted by Gipps (1999, p. 385), "alternative forms of assessment do not, of themselves, alter power relationships and cultural dominance in the classroom". Yet the prevalence of Authority Ranking at Progressive is mediated by both the school's attempt to make assessment requirements more transparent (Market Pricing), and by encouraging student ownership of marks (Communal Sharing) (though actual creation of the marks themselves remains firmly a teacher-directed initiative).

Clearly, however, it is possible to shift the dynamics of assessment away from a strictly top-down approach, towards an environment of evaluation in which students play a larger role. In their typological analysis of teacher feedback to young children, for instance, Tunstall and Gipps (1996) note a basic distinction between feedback which is either evaluative (judgmental) or constructive (task-specific). At Progressive, assessment encompasses both dimensions, with teachers providing evaluative marks on rubrics and

narratives, and constructive assessment occurring during Parent-Teacher-Student conferences and Gateways – when students take a more active part in making sense of their own work.

Even within the power dynamics of Authority Ranking, however, there are further distinctions to be made. Raven (1993) has noted that authority can stem from one of the following "bases of power":

- coercive power (threats of punishment);
- rewards (tangible or verbal);
- the legitimacy of one's position;
- one's expertise;
- reference (personal qualities of an authority); and
- informational power possessed by one in authority.

The first two bases – coercive power and the (exclusive) use of rewards to establish authority – are not a basis for the Relational Model of Authority Ranking, which is predicated upon the explicit recognition of an authority's legitimacy (Fiske, 1991, p. 14). Of the remaining bases, one might posit that a teacher's authority to assess is maintained through either:

- the legitimacy of a teacher's position (which necessarily implies, in the eyes of students, the ability and right to judge them)
- a teacher's expertise in a given subject area
- a teacher's personality or charisma
- the privileged information a teacher possesses about a student.

A detailed analysis of students' perceptions of teachers' authority to assess them through the lens of the Bases of Power Theory is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of the present article. It should simply be noted that, despite the dominance of Authority Ranking as the primary Relational Model of assessment at Progressive, there are multiple ways in which students perceive the notion of authority. Meanwhile, Fiske himself (personal communication, December 6, 2005) questions whether Authority Ranking in any given community can be considered "legitimate" without the establishment of Communal Sharing between participants – a notion which merits further exploration.

An additional distinction can be made between "*power with* the pupil" and "*power over* the pupil" (Gipps, 1999, p. 380, italics in original). The use of both Market Pricing strategies (for instance, clearly designed rubrics) and Communal Sharing opportunities (Gateways and Senior Exhibitions) at Progressive allows assessment to become a more collaborative

effort, with power shared between teacher and student rather than lying exclusively in the hands of teachers.

Although Authority Ranking remains the dominant Relational Model in the realm of assessment, it should not necessarily be implied that this is bad or morally objectionable. As described by Fiske (1991):

> The morality of Authority Ranking consists in an attitude of respect, deference, loyalty, and obedience by subordinates, complemented by the pastoral responsibility of the authority to exercise his or her strength to provide security and protection for subordinates **and to give wise directive guidance**. (p. 117, emphasis added)

This last component of Authority Ranking – the administration of "wise directive guidance" – is an essential part of assessment, and reminds us that there is a role for more experienced mentors when it comes to providing meaningful feedback. Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that classrooms can be seen as "communities of practice", in which students act as apprentices under the guidance of more experienced masters (teachers), who, as Sadler (1998, p. 80) neatly outlines, bring their superior content knowledge, skill in "working out ways to elicit revealing and pertinent reponses from students", knowledge of criteria and standards, and past experience with judging students' work to the table.

As mentioned previously, the line between formative and summative assessment at Progressive is somewhat blurred, and is worth mentioning again in this discussion. As in most schools, students at Progressive receive "final" evaluations and rubrics from their teachers, which in turn are calculated by the school's counselors into traditional grade point averages for the purposes of college admissions. However, students are discouraged from focusing on these numbers; as one of the school's counselors told me, "When kids come up and ask for a transcript, we say sure and print it out and hand it to them. I say [to them], 'This is your property!' But we don't send them home; we don't send home a transcript automatically with the grades; we don't do anything of that nature" (interview, May 25, 2006).

At the same time, all of the detailed narrative information provided in the evaluations and rubrics is designed to transcend mere summative purposes, and to act as formative feedback for students. This emphasis on assessment as informative feedback rather than reified evaluation plays an important part in the dynamic of Authority Ranking between students and teachers at Progressive: on the one hand, teachers still have the "upper hand" when it comes to giving students final "high stakes" marks which go on their permanent record; on the other hand, students are encouraged to simply view the assessment they receive as meaningful feedback which will help them improve in

the future. As noted by Harlen (2006, p. 105), "Feedback to students is most effective in promoting learning if it involves them in the process of deciding what the next steps should be, so they are not passive recipients of the teacher's judgments of their work".

Students cannot necessarily manipulate their final marks at Progressive any more than students receiving traditional grades can; but students are encouraged, as described above, to engage critically with their teachers' feedback. This shifts the dynamic of Authority Ranking into one of Communal Sharing, which is closely aligned with what Wenger (1998) refers to as "negotiability" within a community of practice. Wenger notes that full investment in any given community (such as a classroom) involves "ownership of meaning", in which participants negotiate a personal understanding of a given concept or skill, and internalise this as part of their identity (in this case, identity as a student). But this ownership is more than personal; it ultimately "refers both to an experience of holding some meanings as our own and to social relations of ownership with respect to others who might also claim some say in the matter" (p. 201). Thus, owning one's marks can be viewed as a communal process in which students engage in negotiation with their teachers (and others in the audience during Gateways).

Limitations and Conclusion

This article has focused exclusively on the Relational Models in existence between primarily white, upper-middle-class students and their primarily white teachers at a private progressive high school using alternative assessment methods; clearly, my findings are specific to this particular "subculture" and set of local cultural practices. Fiske's (1991, p. 269) point, cited earlier, that "even when two cultures use the same RM, they are likely to implement it differently" makes it clear that the very nature of the Relational Models at Progressive would look different at another school site.

In the future, data on Relational Models should be gathered at high schools with more diverse student and teacher bodies, and fewer alternative assessment methods. Schools employing more traditional assessment methods – such as letter grades and exams – would presumably show a much greater reliance on Authority Ranking between teacher and students, since, as Stobart (2002) notes, "high-stakes testing encourages dependence on the teacher" as an authority figure (p. 184). The role played by gender in the creation and maintenance of Relational Models could also be investigated, given that it has been shown to play a part in the wider socio-cultural landscape of assessment (Murphy & Ivinson, 2005).

As I have shown in this article, Authority Ranking need not – and arguably should not – remain the only Relational Model vis-à-vis assessment, and alternative assessment methods help to ensure that this is the case. By giving students the chance to participate in the process of their own evaluation through end-of-year presentations

(Communal Sharing), and ensuring that they clearly understand the requirements for receiving – or earning – certain grades via detailed rubrics (Market Pricing), students at Progressive are ultimately encouraged to take charge of their own growth and learning as students.

Appendix 1

Sample Rubric with Marks and Teacher Comments

Rubric Name: *Cuckoo's Nest* Timed Writing **Student Name:** Tania W. **Advisor:** Ms. N						
Convention	**Evidence**	**Connection**	**Perspective**	**Common Good**	**Collaboration**	**Ethical Behavior**
Uses correct spelling, grammar, and paragraph structure – **APPROACHES** Writes logically, concisely, and clearly – **MEETS** Avoids 'I' statements and personal feelings – **MEETS** Integrates quotes appropriate into essay – **MEETS** Avoids repetition and redundancy – **APPROACHES**	Uses effective textual evidence to support arguments in a clear, logical manner – **APPROACHES** Communicates a strong grasp of character and plot when discussing evidence – **MEETS** Describes scenes, characters, dialogue accurately and in detail – **MEETS**	Avoids summary and strives for analysis of evidence – **APPROACHES** Actively connects evidence to the argument – **APPROACHES** Writes a successful conclusion that connects the themes of the essay in an original way – **APPROACHES**	Thesis allows student to go in depth with his/her argument – **APPROACHES** Starts each paragraph with a topic sentence that indicates the argument of that paragraph – **APPROACHES**	Meets all daily/weekly reading assignments – **MEETS** Works in a manner that helps maintain the learning and working atmosphere in the classroom – **MEETS**	Follows directions in class and directly answers each essay question – **APPROACHES** Writes neatly and clearly, making the essay accessible to the reader – **MEETS**	Does his/her own work – **MEETS** Strives to do his or her best, strives to take intellectual risks, and appropriately pushes his/herself – **MEETS**
Overall: Strongly Approaches	**Overall: Meets**	**Overall: Approaches**	**Overall: Approaches**	**Overall: Meets**	**Overall: Approaches**	**Overall: Meets**

Comments: Tania, one way to make your essay on laughter better is to answer the prompt. This is KEY. You need to pick a motif and then argue why or why not it is effective. Your intro does not even use the word motif. Your essay has many good examples of laughter, and thus your evidence is strong, but you don't ever actually say whether your evidence proves that the motif is effective or not (which was the whole point of the essay). Once you clearly write a thesis statement using the language of the prompt (which was also a problem in your essay on Eleanor Roosevelt's quote), you need to dive right into PROVING your argument, not summarizing plot or writing vaguely about character. You need topic sentences to paragraphs that explain the ARGUMENT of the paragraph and tie back into the language of the thesis. Then, at the end of your body paragraphs, you need to write a sentence that ties back to the thesis and underscores how your evidence proved your point.

You actually have two decently-written essays here, and your Convention is quite good (but no 'you' statements or contractions, please!). The issue is not your organization or your writing, but rather the force and coherence of your thesis throughout the essay itself.

You have been wonderful in class and with homework. You have been attentive, positive, engaged, and focused. You actively collaborate with your teacher and classmates (when appropriate), and you are a model in these ways. Class discussion and collaboration are key for succeeding in this class, so you have built a strong foundation for yourself.

Appendix 2

Excerpt from Sample Narrative Evaluation

Progressive Secondary Program: Honors Humanities
Modern United States History: Mid-Year Assessment

(Author's Note: In the following evaluation the letters E, M, A, and D are used in place of "**E**xceeds expectations, **M**eets expectations, **A**pproaches expectations, and **D**oes Not Approach expectations)

Student Name: Julian B. **Grade:** Eleventh Grade **Teacher:** Ms. S. **Advisor:** Mr. D. **Date:** January 2007

Habit of Convention:

The ability to acknowledge accepted standards in any area in order to be understood and to understand others. The student:

E	M	A	D	Skills and Content
	X			Uses proper mechanics, usage, and grammar.
	X			Demonstrates dynamism, eye contact, vocal projection, clarity, enunciation, and appropriate pacing in oral presentations/class discussions.
	X			Creates legible, colorful, and neatly organized visual aids.
	X			Follows conventions for using PowerPoint.
	X			Makes appropriate use of visual aids and primary documents.
	X			Uses conventions of teaching a lesson.

Comments: Julian is meeting in the Habit of Convention.

Habit of Connection:

The ability to look for patterns and ways that things fit together in order to use diverse material to form new solutions. The student:

E	M	A	D	Skills and Content
	X			Analyzes the connections among documents, events, people, and ideas.
		X		Explicitly develops connections between the evidence and the essay prompt.
	X			Draws conclusions based on data
	X			Demonstrates understanding of the meaning and implications of evidence.
	X			Connects historic events to contemporary problems and issues.
	X			Demonstrates logical, clear, and organized thinking.
	X			Presents evidence in a logical and sequential way.

Comments: Julian is approaching the standards for the Habit of Connection.

(Author's Note: marks in the other five Habits are deleted here due to space constrictions)

Strengths: Julian's public speaking skills are one of his strengths. He was able to give his entire presentation on Past and Present: Roots of the War on Terrorism with a focus on Iraq and the Gulf War without any notes or even looking at some of the PowerPoint slides. He even knew the statistics by heart. For the lesson on Vietnam and the Cold War, he made excellent use of visual aids, the white board and a film, and directed the class in an engaging "chalk talk." Julian's best work with evidence is demonstrated in the presentations mentioned above and the written work created in an untimed situation. His Power Point Presentation included evidence from the text and from his research. His answers to questions from the class on the history as well as on current events demonstrated that he had prepared not only by researching the history, but by also paying close attention to the latest events in the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars.

One of the interesting ironies about Julian's work is that the Habits of the Heart include some of his greatest strengths, and his greatest challenges. (See below for the challenges.) The strengths lie in his sincere desire to learn and to respond to feedback with a positive attitude. For example, his first honors essay has a thesis that seems to be that the US entered both wars (with Iraq) for wealth and power. This doesn't address the prompt. He probably had a thesis in mind that addresses the prompt, but it is not expressed clearly or effectively. However, Julian takes great care with reading through his rubrics and discussing his learning as is indicated by the fact that all his essays, after the first one, directly respond to the question being asked. His excellent assessment on his honors Document Based Question on Truman's decision to drop the atomic bomb was due to his willingness to turn it in to the teacher and to his peers for feedback, to write multiple drafts, and to adhere to all the suggestions.

Growth that is even more noticeable is in Julian's Habit of Perspective. His thesis on the first honors paper, an analysis of the research for the PowerPoint Presentation on Past and Present: Roots of the War on Terrorism, did not even approach the standard because it did not address the issue of "extent of influence." However, all his later essays reflected an effort to pay close attention to the prompts, and taken as a whole, demonstrate how his Habits of Collaboration and Habit of Ethical Behavior – putting forth his best effort - work together to result in improved work.

Stretches: Timed writings, written under more stressful conditions, are more of a challenge for Julian than his untimed work and demonstrate some inconsistencies. For example, the timed writing on the Cold War has sufficient evidence but it is not all accurate; in contrast, the evidence in his timed writing on the Roots of the War on Terrorism is accurate, but there is not enough of it Another stretch evident in Julian's written work is in the Habit of Connection. Both his timed and untimed writing demonstrate a stretch with connecting the evidence explicitly and directly to the thesis. Even his honors Document Based Question on Truman's decision to drop the atomic bomb, his best written work to date, with ample and accurate evidence, does not explain how all the evidence supports his thesis. So, even though his thesis is very clear and directly addresses the prompt, the analysis of how the evidence proves it is too limited. Analysis seems to be one of the greatest challenges for honors students, and Julian's dedication to learning and the progress made so far indicate that he will improve with continued effort.

Probably the most important stretches for Julian are in the Habits of the Heart. Recommendations are for him to work on his collaboration with his peers in terms of the feedback he gives them, and for him to take on more of a leadership role in and outside the classroom. Some of his feedback to his friend on his Position Paper was counterproductive. For example, he suggested changing the language to make events like the Cold War, the Korean War, and a denial of self-determination less important. There was no reason given as to why, and it actually hurt the paper to make those changes. Also, he praised inappropriate analogies when he should be encouraging the use of more sophisticated, historical connections. Rather than writing that an analogy to a "little kid...(and a) bully," is "good," one to Poland and Hitler or another historical event should have been recommended. For higher-level thinking and writing of a position paper, an historical analogy is much better. Most important, however, is that the paper does not have a clear thesis that addresses the prompt, and Julian didn't even comment on that. However, as Julian himself is improving in this area, he will probably get better at supporting others to do the same.

The final stretch and recommendation for Julian is for him to offer more leadership in the classroom. He is clearly respected and liked by other students, but as an honors student much more is expected of him. He needs to speak up and contribute more positively to the classroom. He is often distracted by a few of his friends, with whom he inappropriately shares private jokes and laughter during class, and as a result ends up distracting others and hurting rather than contributing to the Common Good. He can take the initiative to sit with other students, or in a location where he isn't tempted to send non-verbal messages to his friends. He has so many good ideas and a great deal to offer, yet he often does not speak out beyond answering questions with simple sentence answers. Although he does ask some clarifying questions and gives feedback during and after student presentations, asking probing questions to take the conversation deeper would be more appropriate for an honors student. He could also take more initiative by raising new questions, by sharing more insights from his own knowledge, experience, and research in class discussions, and by encouraging others to participate.

It is recommended that Julian work on bringing positive changes to the classroom.

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