Forging a Path Towards More Equitable and Inclusive Assessment

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Assessment is an essential part of teaching and learning. It provides information about a learner's progress in acquiring and applying newly delivered knowledge. Grading is a type of assessment that is entrenched in most education systems in modern society. Most secondary and post-secondary institutions require instructors to record grades for each student in a course. Why? What is the function of grades? How does grading design relate to equity and inclusion?

Instructors' grading paradigms are often informed by our own experience as learners. However, conventional grading strategies are being increasingly questioned and challenged. Many scholars agree that traditional grading approaches tend to privilege the most privileged students and minimize learner agency and autonomy. Grades become part of a learner's self-identity. Centring grades can reinforce negative self-concepts for developing language and literacy learners, especially when those grades value dominant Eurocentric language norms and/or performance over progress. While grading is not expected to disappear from our education system, decentring grades is a way to shift to potentially more equitable and inclusive assessment in course design. Ungrading encompasses various approaches to this end.

This seminar will provide an overview of various ungrading approaches to assessment. Also, the presenter will share her learning from attempting ungrading in her core communications classes. Participants will have the opportunity to gain insight and engage in discussion around the potential for more equitable and inclusive assessment strategies.

Jessica Freitag is a professor in the English Department at Humber College, where she teaches core communications courses to first- and second- semester students in a wide range of programs. One of Jessica's primary interests is assessment, which she has explored through studying for her M.A. of Applied Linguistics, examining IELTS candidates, and conducting action research on collaborative student writing. Recently, she has been approaching assessment through a more equity-focused lens, implementing non-traditional assessments in her classes. While much learning and reiterations remain ahead, based on her own experience and students' reactions, Jessica does not plan on returning to traditional grading.