McKee, Heidi and Danielle Devoss. *Digital Writing: Assessment and Evaluation.*

<http://ccdigitalpress.org/dwae/index.html>

1. Poe’s “Making Digital Writing Assessment Fair for Diverse Writers” and 2. Reilly and Atkins “Rewarding Risk: Designing Aspirational Assessment Process for Digital Writing Projects”

Reading response—Discussion/Clarity Questions:

While I may have (read: definitely did) misunderstood the scope of Poe’s fairness assessment, I am trying to make some aspects of her theoretical approach productive for my own smaller-scale purposes in FYC; however, I am having a difficult time doing so. Though, I feel a bit “out of my league” when it comes to comprehending assessment theory, I will try my best to ask the “right” questions. There are definitely some aspects of her argument that I need clarity on, such as how “assessment as technology” functions as opposed to “assessment with technology.” Her discussion of these concepts threw me for a loop and I feel as though I’m missing the crux of her argument by not understanding these key ideas. The way she’s framed it in her argument is that writing as technology is defined as “being something put together for a purpose, to satisfy a pressing and immediate need or to solve a problem” (Poe n.p.). She then goes on to define technology as assessment in terms of George Madaus’ conceptualization that these assessments are “culturally constructed realities” (Madaus qtd. in Poe n.p.). While I agree with this, I’m not sure what bearing on the actual assessment this conceptualization has. How does it affect the assessment and the students’ identity? Are we culturally constructing student identities through uncritical/unfair assessments? Then of course, she discusses the exercise of “technology with assessment,” which to me seems far more uncritical than the previous practical concept because—as far as I understand it—a digital program assesses students’ digital writing instead of the instructor. This I find this method enormously problematic because I feel as though this method cannot take context into consideration when assessing the digital writing. Also writing is not a “test” that can simply be marked as “correct or incorrect” so I’m not sure what kind of practicality this method has. Could this method benefit our students in any way? Could it allow for a fair assessment if revisions to the digital program were made?

My bottom-line issue with Poe’s chapter is that I am still left wondering how fair, valid, and reliable assessments can be designed and implanted in my own classrooms because I struggle with this concept of “fairness.” I am always trying to individually meet students “where they are” when it comes to assessment but I’m not sure I have any checks and balances in place to ensure that I am—in fact—achieving that across-the-board fairness. I’m worried that I am reifying hegemonic social codes through assessment and I’m still left wondering how I can effectively work toward a more egalitarian assessment approach.

Discussion Questions:

1. In Poe’s chapter she discusses programmatic assessment and how they need to be formatted and practiced in a fair manner that is consistently valid, reliable, and fair for all demographics and identity groups rather than simply privileging the already-privileged identity groups. However, my concern is that this structure could make racial, classist, and ableist assumptions about students. In her article, she only discusses the ethnic and racial side of fairness—however, how can these same fairness assessment practices be applied to students from working-class/first-gen backgrounds? Do we have to combine fair assessment strategies for various identity groups in one assessment? Is that even realistic? How will that “look” and how can it be carried out in the FYC classroom?
2. Reilly and Atkins’ chapter on using assessment is a fascinating and edifying read; insofar as, they walk their audience through Atkins’ own classroom experience with encouraging students’ risk-taking with new technologies through the use of a productive assessment. However, there is a massive focus on “authenticity, insofar as, Atkins’ had his students producing texts that were for and external community business; so—seemingly—the students felt more engaged by the assignment because there were “real-life” consequences. I struggle with this notion of authenticity because it seems like such a difficult thing to achieve. In other words, instructors who develop these kinds of assignments have the community currency and academic clout to make these community relationships occur; however, are Atkins and Reilly suggesting that the main way to encourage risks (aside from having students dictate the assessment criteria) is by having students respond to a non-academic rhetorical situation? That’s logistically strenuous on both the external community group/member and on the instructor too. Ultimately then, my question is—is the student-led assessment criteria enough to encourage risk-taking or is the authentic rhetorical situation necessary to jolt students out of the purely academic-assessment driven mind-set in order to engage the project in a progressive and productive way?