



PROJECT MUSE®

Classroom Writing Assessment as an Antiracist Practice:
Confronting White Supremacy in the Judgments of Language

Asao B. Inoue

Pedagogy, Volume 19, Issue 3, October 2019, pp. 373-404 (Article)

Published by Duke University Press



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/733095>



Classroom Writing Assessment as an Antiracist Practice

Confronting White Supremacy in the Judgments
of Language

Asao B. Inoue

How can college writing teachers engage in antiracist writing assessment work with their students? To some degree, my central concern in this article is a response to Taiyon J. Coleman et al.'s (2016) discussion of white supremacy and structural racism and their work for equity at Minneapolis Community and Technical College, a concern on which I think all writing teachers should dwell. We live, learn, and teach not simply in the racist ruins of bygone eras but in schools and disciplines firmly built and ever maintained by white supremacy. Whether we are teachers of color or white teachers, white supremacy in our judgment practices of student writing influences all of us. White supremacy is structured into the ways everyone reads and judges writing. We are all implicated, no matter how we identify ourselves or our political beliefs. In the concluding section by Coleman, she writes, "If we as teachers of writing normalize (read, accept) the dominant presence of constructed whiteness in the field and discipline among our students and colleagues, how might that consciously or unconsciously affect our teaching in the classroom and the assessment of students?" (Coleman et al. 2016: 367).

How does a normalized whiteness affect our classroom writing assessment practices? The broadest answer is obvious. Normalized whiteness contributes to white supremacy in language practices in the academy and society

and produces racism. It colonizes. And of course, normalized whiteness is not referring to the skin color of teachers or students. As the literature on whiteness explains in a variety of ways, whiteness in this context refers to a set of structures in our reading and judging practices. These structures have historically been associated with white racial formations, so they have uneven consequences for various student racial formations when used as a standard by which to evaluate and grade all students.¹ So the better question is, how can we understand and address white supremacy in classroom writing assessments with students?

My question and its discussion below are not ignorant of the intersectional nature of these kinds of issues. I limit my discussion mostly to race and racism, realizing this limitation. Paolo Freire ([1970] 2005: 15) argues the importance of confronting class and race together, while Adrienne Rich ([1986] 1994: 218) argues that we cannot separate race, class, and sex oppression, since they are “experienced simultaneously.” Perhaps Kimberle Crenshaw’s (1991: 1245–46) work in battered women’s shelters in the Los Angeles area demonstrates intersectionality’s importance in antiracist projects, showing the compounded effects of various dimensions of oppression. Thus, we are not just our race, gender, sexual orientation, or class location. Our privileges and oppressions intersect along many separate but converging lines and can be quite different in various geographic and temporal locations. Thus, I assume that there are intersections in any given historically specific, geographic classroom and that we cannot talk about race without implicating class, economic status, even sexual and gendered identities. And yet, I must form an agenda with a strong and clear purpose. I choose antiracism, knowing that the work is intersectional.

Intersectional or not, in the field of composition studies there are few if any substantive discussions of whiteness or race in any of the otherwise very good discussions of classroom assessment, including Pat Belanoff’s foundational article “The Myths of Assessment” (1991); Libby Allison, Lizbeth Bryant, and Maureen Hourigan’s *Grading in the Post-process Classroom* (1997); Frances Zak and Christopher C. Weaver’s *The Theory and Practice of Grading Writing* (1998); Linda B. Nilson’s *Specifications Grading: Restoring Rigor, Motivating Students, and Saving Faculty Time* (2015); Edward White and Cassie A. Wright’s *Assigning, Responding, Evaluating: A Writing Teacher’s Guide* (2016); or any of the work around the reading and valuing of student drafts (Straub and Lunsford 1995; Anson 2000; Huot 2002; Broad 2003). Let me be clear: The problem of white supremacy in college writing classrooms is a writing assessment problem in part because we have

not yet addressed it in the scholarship. It can be approached by rethinking our assessments, by seeing and enacting classroom writing assessments as racially diverse ecologies that are paradoxical. This problem is one centrally concerned with how to avoid the default ways in which white supremacy is already part of the judgments of language no matter who we are or where we come from. If we have succeeded in the academy, if we teach writing, we always risk participating in white supremacy because to some greater or lesser degree we have all been colonized by the academy.²

In this article, I argue for classroom writing assessment practices to be conceived of and engaged in as social justice projects because writing assessments are ecologies in which we can—and perhaps should always—explore the nature of judgment itself as an intersectional racialized discourse. I demonstrate one application of an antiracist writing assessment ecology through a practice I call “problem posing the nature of judgment and language.” I then discuss the problem posing of two ecological places that students and I pay close attention to as racially charged places, and I end by offering a story of my own classroom to demonstrate the complexities of antiracist writing assessment ecological work.

Places of White Supremacist Judging

In his important treatment of race and racism in Western cultures, David Theo Goldberg (1993: 41) argues that historically the discourses of race and racism are a field of discourses of “racialized expressions,” very similar to Edward Said’s (1979: 94, 116) description of Orientalism as a discourse that is populated by *idée reçue*, or received ideas (common sense), that become truth through their circulation about and on a subject. Goldberg (1993: 49) argues that the grammar of racist discourse historically works from “preconceptual elements” that enable racist expression. These preconceptual elements center on one major kind, the Aristotelian impulse to classify and order things and people into hierarchies. Not so ironically, both Goldberg and Said are speaking of racialized subjects, of bodies, or people who become raced through discourse on and about them. Michael Omi and Howard Winant (2015: 111) describe such sociohistorical processes, which are discursive and material, as racialization. This dynamic of racializing through discourse is similar to the racing of figurative and material places in the writing classroom and the way those places race those who inhabit them (Mills 1997; Wilkins 2007; Inoue 2015). In short, writing assessment creates places, figurative ones and literal ones in classrooms, papers, rubrics, and writing groups. These places work on us, as we work on them. One important element that constructs

these places is the discourses of judgment that form these places' purposes, processes, and products (or learning consequences). If the discourses are racialized already and a part of the sociohistorical processes of racialization, then we must pay attention to them as such because they help create places that dialectically (re)create and hierarchize students and teachers.

The racing of spaces and places is not a novel idea. The norming of desirable spaces as white has occurred historically by racing spaces; thus, spaces dialectically race bodies that inhabit them (Mills 1997: 41–42). In the field of architecture and urban design, Craig L. Wilkins (2007: 7) similarly argues that space, “one’s ability to perceive it, access it, etc.—becomes an essential element in the construction of identity and . . . entire societies.” What this leads him to see are the ways whiteness constructs desirable spaces in society (9); therefore spaces become key ways people are racialized (17).³ If you inhabit a particular place, you take on the characteristics associated with that place, and vice versa. Similarly, George Lipsitz (2007) shows that in the United States, urban and other spaces have been racialized; thus, they spatialize race. Through various studies, he argues that a white spatial imaginary constructs value as primarily exchange value (15), while communities of color operate mostly through use value, since usually the exchange value of property has been denied people of color (17). In fact, one might see a strong link between white supremacy and the primacy of exchange value in all markets, including the writing classroom, where the unit of exchange is grades and where grades are based on a white racial standard.

This white spatial imaginary that favors exchange value has led to racial inequalities in environmental living conditions, inheritance, and housing practices, all favoring whites and disadvantaging blacks and Latinx. It accounts for the patterns of racial segregation and the economics that follow those patterns (i.e., wealthier white suburbs and poorer black and Latinx urban areas). These socioeconomic patterns in where people live, in property values, and in tax bases create schools and other educational opportunities that are generally more favorable for whites. It also creates linguistic patterns in students through their contact with certain schools, resources, and teachers. Ultimately, the racing of places at every level too often creates Aristotelian hierarchies of languages, bodies, and places that are either normal (white) or worth less than normal. This offers one explanation for why household income and SAT scores correlate so strongly (College Board 2016: 4; Rampell 2009) and why race was found to be the strongest predictor of SAT scores in 1.1 million University of California students (Geiser 2015: 20). Grading and ranking writing by a single standard, as I discuss below, participates in

this kind of racist discourse of judgment because it too easily and often uses a white racial standard that is reproduced in racially white educational and civic spaces as a unit of exchange that allows students to move up and on, moving from one preferred socially white space to the next.

Clearly, through various overdetermined, structural ways in our society and schools, the discourses of judgment that create the assessment places in classrooms still participate in Goldberg's racist discourse and race bodies and languages. All writing assessment ecologies create places that are racialized through the discourses of judgment enacted through them. If we are not careful, our assessments will collude with Lipsitz's white spatial imaginary, creating conditions that perpetuate white supremacy and racism through hierarchical categorizing, which is in large part what judgment is, as I explain below. This makes engaging in antiracist writing assessment ecologies with our students necessary, since if we do not, by default we engage in white supremacist writing assessment ecologies. We create places of white supremacy. And yet, I do not deny that individual schools, classrooms, or teachers' situations are complex. I do not want to create an either/or choice for writing teachers, but this assessment problem is a paradox. Most of us, by necessity, must judge our students' writing in spaces of contradiction.

Antiracist Methods through Language Interactions and Structures

I have explained the theory of writing assessment ecologies in another place (Inoue 2015), so I give only the broad brush strokes here. Any writing assessment done in a classroom, including written feedback on drafts, grading, and summative or formative assessments, forms a writing assessment ecology, or living network, in which at least seven elements can be identified, designed, and manipulated. These elements are often consubstantial with one another and morph into one another at different moments in any ecology's history or duration. As shown in figure 1, these elements are power, purposes, processes, parts, products, people, and places (Inoue 2015), with place the most important element because it is a synecdoche of the entire ecology and helps us see the ways language practices that form racializing places in classrooms also become white supremacist.

To make a writing assessment ecology antiracist, then, we must find ways to see, critique, and use the dominant, white, middle-class discourse of the classroom for the benefit of all students in the classroom, which means it cannot be the standard against which all are measured. Seeing our writing assessments as ecological can allow students and teacher to design and engage in "brave" places (Arao and Clemens 2013: 141) that do uncomfortable work

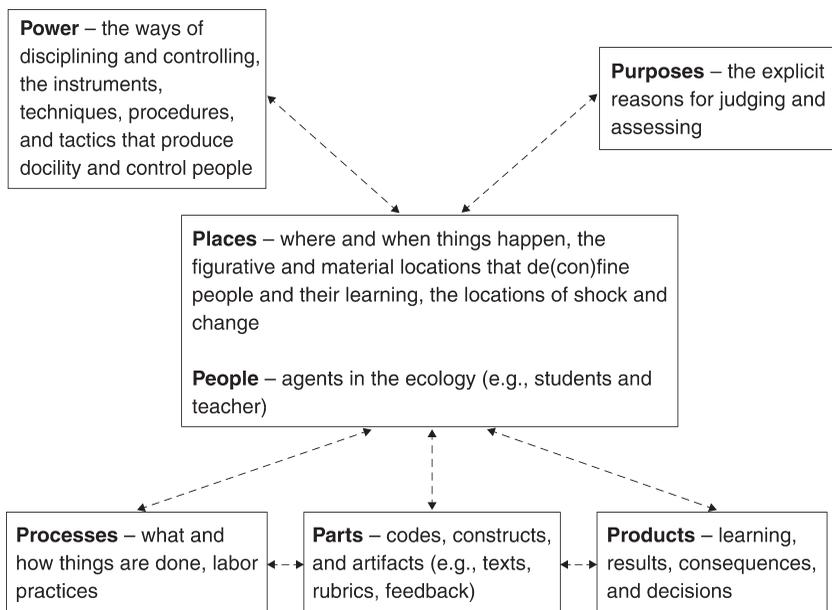


Figure 1. The seven elements of a writing assessment ecology. From Inoue 2015: 76 (reprinted with permission)

around race and racism in the judgment of language. Our assessment ecologies must be safe yet uncomfortable. It is in the manipulation of these seven elements that we design antiracist projects that are more than good intentions, that are safe enough to explore criticality and dominant academic discourses (DADs), and one measure of their criticality is the degree to which students and teachers are uncomfortable about the nature of judgment occurring in the ecology.

An antiracist writing assessment ecology must be able to not only recognize the dominant discourse as racially white but also keep it from harming some students and privileging others. It turns judgment itself both away from students, as in not grading or ranking them or their writing against a single standard, and toward them, as in making judgments of language more about their own dispositions to read, value, and write, often in racialized ways. In short, the purposes of assessment change quite dramatically (see table 1), moving away from measuring to rank or to make a decision about students' abilities—how close they are to a standard or norm—and toward other purposes. These new purposes are ones more mutually defined by both student and teacher, ones that critique, ones that stop measuring students and start

Table 1. Antiracist writing assessment ecologies can turn judgment away and toward students in order to investigate white supremacy in language norms and judgment.

Antiracist writing assessment ecologies simultaneously . . .	
Turn judgment <i>away</i> from students by	Turn judgment <i>toward</i> students by
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not grading writing • not ranking literacy performances or students • not using one standard for literacy when assessing drafts/writing 	attending to the way judgment itself is about the students' and teacher's: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • racialized dispositions • values • languaging practices • investigating personal and larger, structural reasons for making judgments

understanding them and their languaging. We might think of this difference as one between the purpose of conventional classroom assessment—which is to ask, how well did this student do in this literacy task?—and an antiracist assessment purpose, which might ask, what do I see and hear this student doing, and what do I think the student wants to do? The difference is in the subjects judging and the objects being judged. Antiracist writing assessment tries to pay attention to and be critical of the objects of assessment: who or what is being judged and by whom.

These purposes are in line with what the philosopher John Rawls (2001) suggests societies do when deciding on the principles of “justice as fairness.” Rawls says that, for a society to be just, everyone must have a “fair equality of opportunity” (43). This means that access isn’t enough, that everyone must have a fair shot at success and engagement through that access. Iris Marion Young (2011) offers a clearer articulation of this problem in society and points to structural change as the solution to social injustice. She explains that social structures in society are not objective and unbiased. They constrain and block opportunities by their nature, yet the fact that “structures constrain does not mean that they eliminate freedom; rather social-structural processes produce differentials in the kinds and range of options that individuals have for their choices” (55). Her point is the old Marxian idea of determination. Essentially, Marxian determination says that the hegemonic, in this case structures that make up the assessment of student writing in a classroom, both sets limits or boundaries and exerts pressure in a particular direction (Williams 1977: 84, 87) on students and teachers. Thus, injustice or unfairness can happen in the evaluation or grading of writing in a classroom when the teachers and students do not attend closely to how the assessment ecology (e.g., process, parts, and power relations) creates uni-

versal boundaries for acceptable writing and unevenly pressures students to meet that standard, or pressures teachers to use the same standard in grading practices on everyone in order to rank or grade them. Additionally, where teachers come from, what discourses and linguistic dispositions they inherit from their family and training, their relation to Lipsitz's white spatial imaginary, all determine a part of the assessment ecology in how teachers judge.

Countering Rawls, Young offers a social justice practice that acknowledges both the individual who interacts in society, the "interactional," and the structural that frames and constrains those interactions, the "institutional." In other words, we judge ourselves by how we treat and deal with others and "how we contribute by our actions to structural processes that produce vulnerability to deprivation and domination for some people . . . with limited options compared to others" (73). This method leads to a two-fold purpose for antiracist assessment: (a) to assess our own judgments, our own dispositions and reading practices around language, our interactions with others through the processes of reading and feedback in a writing class; and (b) to consider how our own judgments about language contribute to larger structural processes that may deprive or dominate some in the ecology, that may perpetuate white supremacy.

So according to Rawls, judging student writing by only a DAD, like some version of a Standard Edited American English (SEAE), ain't providing a fair shot for everyone, knowing what we know about our students and the changing demographics in US higher education and what we know about the racialized consequences of a white spatial imaginary. We have to find a way to make our classroom writing assessment ecologies primarily about learning and struggle, and not about measuring and ranking by using a single standard, while at the same time recognizing that there are standards and norms others use against us in other ecologies.

And let's not fool ourselves. Standards are always used *against* people. The standard is what is being preserved when it is used in classrooms. That's the Aristotelian nature of a standard. One is measured against it. Take the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) VALUE rubric on written communication (AAC&U, n.d.), a thoughtful and researched rubric, intended to facilitate locally driven, evidence-based measures of writing on college campuses. But if used in classrooms or large-scale assessment, rubrics like this narrow the field of language and rely on deeply held, often unconscious habits of language that are historically connected to those who made this rubric, the white institutions and places that cultivate and reward folks for using such language habits, and those who end up using

such rubrics in their classrooms and schools. A good rubric is only as good as those who use it. In short, rubrics that identify so-called proficiency or levels of writing ability by their nature are exclusionary if used to assess, evaluate, or grade student writing and are already hardwired into the machine of whiteness. To their credit, the AAC&U VALUE rubric is framed not as ready-made rubrics for classroom uses, not for grading, but for institutional uses and, as the AAC&U notes, “should be translated into the language of individual campuses, disciplines, and even courses” (n.p.). However, the rubric is still hierarchical, still guides local teachers toward particular linguistic dispositions and habits of language. The language of an individual campus will not change these features very easily.

I do not disparage or criticize those who made the AAC&U VALUE rubric. I know half of the good, conscientious scholars who developed it. I respect them and their work deeply. But as expert and well intentioned as I’m sure they are, these are all white women, none of whom have done any work on race, racism, or whiteness. How is it possible that they can provide enough perspectives on a rubric that realistically is going to be used to judge the literacy performances of millions of students of color?

Let me say this more bluntly, to push you to be uncomfortable and brave: why must we trust the good intentions of white women? Intentions only control our reactions to conditions. They don’t change the racism and white supremacy structured into our disciplines and habits of language. Intentions help us with Young’s interactional but not institutional determinations. The institutional is the other half of the paradox. So I’m saying that, as good and smart and well intentioned as these scholars are, these things are not enough to set standards for all students. These scholars did not create the system, but they are created by it and in turn begin to recreate it. They are not to blame for white supremacy that the rubrics reproduce, but paradoxically, they are part of the problem.

It’s not just the AAC&U’s rubrics that have this problem. Any standard of writing will end up being unfair and usually white supremacist. Bell curves illustrate this tendency perfectly. Rounding up, a standard distribution, or bell curve, dictates that about 3% of all rankings or scores will rest in the highest category, or the “A” category in grading curves, which is three standard deviations from the mean, or the perfect middle score. Meanwhile, about 14% of all scores or rankings will rest in the category just below that (the high “B” category), or two standard deviations from the mean. So 17% of all scores in a classroom will get all the As and high Bs distributed in the classroom, or four students in a class of twenty-five. The rest will get some-

thing lower, with most (68%, or 17 students) resting within one standard deviation from the mean on either side—these are the categories of grades between 85% and 65% (mid- to high Bs, Cs, and high Ds). So as you can see, measuring everyone using a bell curve creates conditions in which only a few students are allowed to achieve in the ways demanded or expected in the academy (As and Bs), regardless of the standards used to make those grades. Standards, when working the way they are designed to, reproduce distributions of bodies in a very particular way.

Universal standards linked to grades in writing assessment ecologies are not just exclusionary. They also stifle creativity, student agency, and risk taking. I won't get into how to remove grades from one's classes (see Elbow 1993, 1997; Inoue 2014), but you should know that what I offer works best when nothing in the ecology is graded. This is possible even in schools and programs that demand end-of-course grades. Many have discussed why grades are harmful to all students and their abilities to learn (Kohn 1993, 2011; Elbow 1993, 1997; Bleich 1997). Others have discussed ways to eliminate or delay grades in writing courses and assignments through portfolio systems (Elbow and Belanoff 1997; Yancey and Weiser 1997; Hamp-Lyons and Condon 2000) or through grading and learning contracts (Mandel 1973; Smith 1999; Reichert 2003; Shor 2007; Danielewicz and Elbow 2009; Inoue 2014). Getting rid of grades on writing, as many writing teachers know intuitively, allows the ecology to refocus people's purposes for judgments and feedback toward other ends than acquiring grades or following orders, ends that are more critical and antiracist. It is hard to be critical in uncomfortable ways, to question the very judgments of others on your own language, if your questioning is graded, if there is a standard by which your drafts or questioning itself are measured.

Given the above, the new purposes for students and myself in problem-posing assessment ecologies are twofold, and they coincide with Young's method that focuses social justice work by being primarily about interactions in reading or judging practices and about the larger language structures that determine readers' judgment practices. The first goal is for students to explicitly inquire into judgments about themselves and their writing in ecological places, which has significant bearing on the nature of those places themselves. I discuss two ecological places below, and they both reflect back on the racialized *habitus* (or structured dispositions to read, value, and write) of students and teacher.⁴ These two places are a class-developed rubric and the assessments by peers in the class that use that rubric to offer feedback to writers. The second goal for the assessment ecology is to explore

paradoxes in peers' judgments of drafts in order to understand the sources of difference (various *habitus* embodied in feedback), the sources of valuing, how various readers make judgments, and from where those judgments come. The first goal focuses on interactions between students, between reader and writer, and between reader and text. The second goal focuses on the structures that shape and determine the judgments of language that are outside individuals (yet come from them), as well as outside instances of discourse, or texts, yet are exemplified through those texts.

The Practice of Problem-Posing Judgment

The practice of problem posing, as you might guess, comes from Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* ([1970] 2005: 96–97) in which literacy workers help learners pose problems about language through “generative themes” around language use. Victor Villanueva (1993: 54) describes Freire's as a practice of student self-assessment: “The way to arrive at critical consciousness, for Freire, is through *generative themes*. Generative themes are critical assessments of *limit-situations*, the myths that maintain the status quo.” But problem posing for assessment purposes isn't about just any myth that maintains the status quo. It focuses students' attention on generative themes, “critical assessments,” about the judgments on their own language, which includes the teachers'. For Freire, these critical assessments come through interactions between literacy workers and community members. For the contemporary writing classroom, they come from the interactions among students and between students and teacher. By calling attention to everyone who judges in the ecology, problem-posing judgment as an assessment practice makes assessment about understanding and critiquing all *habitus*, including the teachers'. This means that the subject position of teachers is just as important as that of students.

Freire's ([1970] 2005: 112) description of the process of data collection and analysis in the community by that community and his literacy workers is strikingly similar to Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln's (1989) famous fourth-generation evaluation process. Guba and Lincoln, however, provide a partial method for engaging in problem posing as an assessment practice. Their process uses a “hermeneutic dialectic circle” to acquire various judgments (what they call “constructions”) by as many stakeholders as possible in order for a socially constructed evaluation to emerge (152). Their process works from assumptions about judgments and meaning making as socially constructed and produces a collaborative description/evaluation that takes into account as many of the stakeholders involved as possible. But their process tries to

create consensus, a single, final construction, which can look like what classical testing theory calls a “true score,” a fictitious score for a performance that is said to be most accurate and valid for the decision being made on the performance (i.e., a score determined without error). Of course, the vast majority of compositionists today understand that language and meaning are socially constructed and contingent; thus, there can be no true score or one true evaluative construction for anything—there are multiple.

While Guba and Lincoln’s final construction is not a true score, since they work from collaborative, poststructuralist assumptions of meaning—and thus “error” is simply difference, not deficit—a single evaluation on a draft in a classroom ecology can act in positivist ways since only one interpretation, score, or evaluation is emphasized and used. Like classical testing theory, this can lead to positivist assumptions about the nature of language valuing and judging. Ironically, this is what Guba and Lincoln were trying to avoid. I believe, however, that writing assessment that strives toward antiracist agendas can use difference and disagreement in ways that do not require consensus, that do not ask for a single construction, but, in fact, demand something quite different. Writing assessment that means to be antiracist can examine multiple constructions or judgments in an assessment ecology, comparing their values and dispositions to reveal their interactional and structural natures. So instead of a hermeneutic, dialectic circle that produces one construction on a student’s essay, we might call the process a hermeneutic, *polylectic* circle, in which, like a bee gathering pollen, many different constructions are gathered and all used to build criticality and future practices.⁵ It refocuses attention in the ecology on the various kinds of pollen, not the honey that it makes.

Others in composition theory have discussed the need for difference in collaborative and feedback activities, in terms of only writing pedagogy and practice, not assessment. There are pedagogies and theories about contact zones and borderlands (Anzaldúa [1987] 1999; Horner and Lu 1999) and about how to use difference and negotiation productively in classrooms (Trimbur 1989; Horner 1992; Lu 1994). Most begin with Mary Louise Pratt’s (1991: 34) “contact zone” metaphor, or “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths.” Pratt is criticizing discussions like Kenneth Bruffee’s (1984) on collaboration in the classroom, in which he works from unqualified versions of Michael Oakeshott’s “unending conversation” (638–39) and Richard Rorty’s concepts of “normal” and “abnormal” discourse in communities (640–41). In its original

conception, Pratt's contact zone is not benign. It draws upon and describes the classroom as a politically charged, ecological place of colonizing and racial conflict, of the hegemonic. Thus, it is apt to call typical classroom writing assessment ecologies projects of linguistic settler colonialism.

Gloria Anzaldúa's ([1987] 1999) concept of borderlands can offer a refocusing of Pratt's contact zone toward antiracist ends and away from colonialist ones. Anzaldúa pays attention to race, focusing on the border between the United States and Mexico, a border between white and brown, English and Spanish, the dominant and subaltern. It is also a place of struggle and conflict, of "un choque [shock], a cultural collision" (100). Seeing writing assessment ecologies as always already generating and embodying raciolinguistic borderlands that attend to the geographic, linguistic, physiological, political, and figurative help us see how antiracist assessment ecologies might pay attention to such aspects of the ecology and their influences on the nature of judgments, seeing those judgments as polylectically constructing the borderland through a posing of interactional and structural problems about those judgments in order to find practices that may be more liberating or transformative in the future. This means that a draft or a rubric is an ecological borderland place of raciolinguistic, cultural, political, and social struggle. The feedback I give can be engaged with as a borderland place in the assessment ecology that opens conflict and difference with students and other readers by being self-conscious of my own subject position as a teacher of color, a Japanese American cis man from a poor, single-parent background, raised in Las Vegas, Nevada, who took on a white racial *habitus* in his languaging, although not completely.

Problem posing as an assessment practice is more than simply letting everyone have a say in the evaluation of student writing in an assessment ecology or identifying one's social location(s) in feedback. We shouldn't be fooled into thinking that offering access to judgment in a writing classroom *is* access to a hermeneutic, polylectic circle, or that those in our classrooms are the only voices that need hearing in any given assessment moment, especially when our society has already filtered many out of college, normalizing the *habitus* that makes up our classrooms. What about those who didn't make it, or cannot make it, into our classrooms? Isn't it worth considering how "outsiders" to our assessment ecology may judge us? In fact, outside perspectives are necessary for criticality. In writing classrooms, the circulation of judgments, bodies, and artifacts implicate a range of *habitus*, all of which are a part of the assessment ecology, even if only by defining the boundaries of what is acceptable, unacceptable, present, or absent. The more we let exist

and count for something in the ecology, the more *habitus* are part of the hermeneutic polylectic circle, the more uncomfortably critical a place the writing classroom can be when it interrogates the nature of judgment and language.

To illustrate, consider conventional assessment ecologies. In them, judgments and language are circulated by starting with assigning drafts and discussing rubrics and then drafting, getting feedback, revising, and submitting drafts for a grade. We tend to think the more cycles of revision we can provide for in an ecology, the better that ecology is in helping students learn to write. The typical purpose for such assessment ecologies is to produce standardized writing and, by association, standardized or normalized (to a white, middle-class standard) students. In contrast, antiracist writing assessment ecologies whose purposes are to acknowledge and push against white supremacy in language practices offer chances to see the acts of writing and judgment as aspects of a cycle of production that includes particular kinds of students, dispositions, and *habitus* and then write among those *habitus*, drawing on them to make more sense and meaning. To see this cycle of production, we must interrogate our judgments as racialized and embodied ones that circulate too, calling attention to each reader's subject position, their raciolinguistic habits enacted in feedback to colleagues. The method must be a collaborative one based on dissensus and being uncomfortable yet safe, or brave, within a self-acknowledged settler colonial borderland. Many in the classroom may still have the goal of learning the dominant English, but some may not, and most will embody to some degree a white racial *habitus*, regardless of the racial or social identity they identify with or are perceived to be by many, and regardless of how critical they are of learning SAEs or the hegemonic position that white racial *habitus* hold in schools. Problem posing the nature of judgment offers this kind of uncomfortably critical and paradoxical racialized assessment work.

But to interrogate judgments from locally diverse *habitus*, we also need a bit of theory about judgment. In the context of holistic scoring, Richard Haswell (1998) explains the three main ways readers judge texts holistically: classical, exemplar, and prototype categorization. According to these theories, our judgment practices are categorization practices, the same kind that created all the racism that Goldberg and Said discuss. Classical categorization says that we judge by looking for the “non-accidental properties of a new instance and matching them with the unique set of properties that define the correct category” (245). Each category then has a set of known, ideal features and a reader attempts to match the features seen or heard in the present text with known, ideal features. Exemplar categorization says that people

Table 2. Haswell's three categorization theories of judgment articulated for problem posing purposes

-
- **Classical:** nonaccidental properties and known ideal features (e.g., scoring guides and prescriptive rubrics)
What ideal textual features is the reader using to judge this text or form expectations about it?
 - **Exemplar:** intact memories of a most representative example in our head
What ideal text is the reader using to judge or form expectations about this one?
 - **Prototype:** idealized construction, an ideal text made up of an assemblage of several texts
What various ideal texts are used by the reader to judge or form expectations about this one?
-

“categorize by comparing a new instance with intact memories (‘exemplars’) of similar instances” (247). Thus, we read a text looking to see how closely it fits to significant features of a most representative or best example of the category. Prototype categorization says that we “judg[e] how similar the yet-to-be-categorized instance is to abstract schemas [we] have of the best example or most representative member (prototype) of possible categories” (246). The prototype for any category is then an “idealized construction,” a “convenient grammatical fiction” (246; see also Rosch 1978: 40). So we don’t actually use a real example when we judge instances; instead, we use convenient fictions, prototypes in our heads that are cobbled together from various examples.

As table 2 shows, thinking about how we make judgments by considering them processes of categorizing can open up a number of questions, problems to pose, about individual judgments or claims made on student texts by colleagues and the teacher. For example, we can ask about a reader’s claim that an introductory paragraph is unclear or inappropriate: What idealized construction is the reader comparing that introductory paragraph to? What kind of writer wrote that ideal paragraph, of what gender? What does this writer look like, and why does the reader think this ideal construction or ideal text is most comparable to the present one? How similar is the present reader to the ideal writer, or how close are the *habitus* embodied in the ideal text(s) and those of the reader making this judgment? Where might the reader most often find instances of that paragraph in the reader’s own reading past? These questions can lead to investigating real instances and then making observations about who those writers are: Where did they come from? How did they come to be able to write what they did? What personal and social histories did they have that may have given them language habits that in turn allowed them to write in the manner that they have? For what purposes did

those writers write the ideal texts being used as prototypes or exemplars, and do they match ours? Why has their writing come to be seen/heard as ideal, or as the norm? What might be attractive or desirable about the exemplar or prototypes to the reader making this judgment? Where did these desires for this kind of text come from? Who benefits from such textual desires and how?

Another set of useful tools for ecologies to label and understand judgment come from Daniel Kahneman (2011), a Nobel Prize-winning psychologist who explains through decades of research how our brains think and make many other kinds of judgments. Two heuristics he discusses may be helpful. Kahneman explains that our brains have two ways of making decisions and judgments, a fast way and a slow way. The fast way is the dangerous way but the one we most often use, and we use heuristics to do so. One fast heuristic that our brains use Kahneman calls “what you see is all there is,” or WYSIATI:

It explains why we can think fast, and how we are able to make sense of partial information in a complex world. Much of the time, the coherent story we put together is close enough to reality to support reasonable action . . . [but] neither the quantity nor the quality of the evidence counts for much in subjective confidence. The confidence that individuals have in their beliefs depends mostly on the quality of the story they can tell about what they see, even if they see little. We often fail to allow for the possibility that evidence that should be critical to our judgment is missing—what we see is all there is. Furthermore, our associative system tends to settle on a coherent pattern of activation and suppresses doubt and ambiguity. (87–88)

This heuristic, which Kahneman discusses through careful psychological studies, reveals the same insight that Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969: 116) theorize in their rhetorical concept of presence. They explain when discussing the selection of evidence and other data for arguments that “the very fact of selecting certain elements and presenting them to the audience, their importance and pertinency to the discussion are implied.” What is present in a text, by default, is understood to be most pertinent and important to the discussion at hand. Additionally, Kenneth Burke’s (1966) concept of terministic screens gives us a similar rhetorical theory matching WYSIATI and rhetorical presence, and it reveals a crucial downside to how our brains make decisions. Burke says that by their natures the terms and ideas we use to communicate or persuade are a reflection of one version of reality, which also makes them a selection of it, which in turn makes it a

deflection of other realities (45). So when we judge what we see, we have, if we are not careful, also judged by what is not seen or present. While both rhetorical presence and terministic screens are about writers communicating to audiences, the research revealing the heuristic of WYSIATI suggests that we can use these rhetorical theories to understand and interrogate judgment as well.

At the macrolevel of the assessment ecology, WYSIATI reveals that, if we aren't slowing our thinking down, gathering enough data about our real students in front of us, looking carefully at that data, interrogating as much evidence as possible about the beliefs that warrant our judgments, encouraging doubt about that evidence, posing rival hypotheses from those we start with, asking questions to readers, particularly to those who are not like us—if we don't stop and pose problems about how we make judgments about language—we will use only the information that is most apparent to us and suppress doubt and ambiguity. WYSIATI explains why what we see is usually not all there is and gives us good reason to continually pause and pay close attention to our judgments and where they come from, that we need to prompt ourselves to even do this, as our brains will often want to think fast and suppress doubt about our initial judgments of things.

WYSIATI, therefore, provides another set of problem-posing questions that can help interrogate the judgments of texts: What exactly is this reader seeing or hearing in my draft? What does my reader think is *only* there? What does my reader think that my draft says is the most important or pertinent ideas, details, or data to consider in this discussion? What does my reader think is not present or deflected? What concepts and nomenclature does my reader see or hear in my draft that the reader thinks is important? What else is there behind the details that I think my reader is reacting to? What is present but not heard by my reader, given the reader's comments to me? What are various readers seeing or hearing in my text that may be different? Do some readers see or hear things that others do not? What *habitus* allow for such sightings/hearings and create blind spots and silences?

Another heuristic Kahneman (2011: 129) discusses is the availability heuristic. It is similar to WYSIATI but with a twist: this heuristic explains the “process of judging frequency by ‘the ease with which instances come to mind.’” It typically substitutes one question or problem for another. For instance, we might ask ourselves if there is more crime in the United States today than twenty-five years ago. The answer is no: statistically, violent and property crimes per 1,000 citizens have fallen since the early 1990s, according to a recent Pew Research study (Gramlich 2019). But ask the casual person

on the street, and you'll find, as the Pew study found, that most US citizens feel there is more crime today than in the past. This answer comes from a substitution of the question asked with a different question, one that the respondent likely feels he or she can answer: "Have *I seen* more instances of crime recently?" Because it is easy to call to mind many instances of crime in our communities, given the kinds of stories focused on in the news media, these limited data distort our sense of actual crime statistics, and we neglect data that counter our immediate conclusions about high crime today.

If data we have available to us are what we use to make decisions on drafts, like what a particular introductory paragraph is doing (or supposed to be doing) in a draft, then we may find that we have substituted a different question for the one we were trying to answer. This substitute question may too often reproduce white supremacy in our judgments of writing. We may only be asking, have I seen paragraphs like this work well in drafts? This is not the same question as, is this the most effective way to start this draft? or how does this paragraph work in this draft? or even, how do I make my understanding of introductions fit what this writer is doing? If it isn't clear, I find that the last two kinds of questions help avoid hierarchical and white supremacist judgments that the availability heuristic produces in all readers. The availability heuristic can trick us as readers into substituting a question that relies on our embodied white racial *habitus*, reproducing white supremacist educational spaces, ones we recognize and have inhabited by necessity in school and society. The heuristic uses what we personally know about texts we've already seen, a corpus of categories, prototypes, and exemplars that are produced by historically white supremacist institutional spaces. We ask of each draft, is this good writing? But really, we don't have enough information to answer that question, so our brains ask a more answerable question, have I seen writing like this as good before?

And like Haswell's categorization theory and the WYSIATI heuristic, the availability heuristic offers ways to pose problems about judgments on writing, ways to interrogate the *habitus* of readers by asking about the questions they may be substituting when they explain their understandings of a writer's text: Do I (the writer) have enough information to pose a problem about this reader's judgment of my text? Has the reader said enough to me for me to understand what is available to the reader in reading my draft? What judgment or evaluation question is this reader actually answering for me in the reader's feedback? What dispositions or ideas about this text has this reader used to gather or find the evidence for the reader's claims or judgments of my draft?

Ultimately, the practice of problem-posing judgment, particularly through its interrogation of the ways our minds make judgments on drafts, shows us why it may be crucial for writing classrooms to cultivate antiracist writing assessment ecologies, ones that confront white supremacy in judgment practices. Because of the historical presence of white discourses, prototypes, and exemplars in everyone's schooling and training, a white racial *habitus* in all of our judgment practices in and out of the academy is normalized. White habits of discourse are all we see and hear in our educations, so they become all we think there is or should be, even when some of us don't match up to them. They are all that are available, all that are present. They are the terministic screens by which we all make and apply our standards of good or preferable writing. We then might adjust the meaning of Kahneman's acronym, WYSIATI to mean "whiteness you see is all there is."

Two Places in an Antiracist Ecology: The Rubric and Assessment Letters

In my classrooms, all problem posing occurs through the familiar genre of letters. These problem-posing letters are the culmination of the cycle of drafting and feedback. Eventually, the drafts fall away and we are left thinking not about what to do next in the drafts but about how judgment and language work differently for various readers and why. The point of the practice is to get to the problem posing, the dialogue about judgment and language—that's the assessment part—not to produce so-called better drafts. We think together about the nature of judgments, how their peers see the language in their drafts, how various readers read the draft at hand, what details get attention, and from where those reading dispositions come. The draft is only the occasion to engage in a dialogue about judgment, about racialized *habitus* in our languaging.

When we problematize the ecological place of the rubric, we start by identifying together whiteness as a discourse and a *habitus*, although I don't use Pierre Bourdieu's term with my students. We talk about whiteness as a set of structuring structures, durable dispositions to value and language, ones that often seem commonsensical and natural. I call them "habits of white discourse." We use Catherine Myser's (2003) short article on whiteness in the discourse of bioethics, among others, to create a kind of map or table that describes the dispositions of whiteness in language and judging. When time is limited, I offer a handout on the habits of white discourse (see appendix A). It is our working description of a white racial *habitus*.

By attending to the nuances of our rubrics, we look for the ways we've assumed white dispositions in both how ideal readers judge drafts and how

ideal writers construct and arrange those drafts for readers. At these early stages, we often add descriptive or qualifying elements to our rubrics' dimensions that emerge from our problematizing them. The rubrics I'm referring to are likely not typical in writing classrooms. They are not scoring guides or analytic rubrics, all of which I call "standards-based rubrics." Those are rubrics that typically describe an ideal reader's expectations of drafts and place them on a ranked scale of some kind (e.g., graded A, B, or C drafts) or give points to them, similar to the AAC&U VALUE rubric. My classes, however, build dimension-based rubrics. Dimension-based rubrics articulate the dimensions of writing that students wish to explore and develop in a given writing assignment. They are similar to single-point rubrics (Fluckiger 2010; Gonzalez 2014), only they do not define expectations for a grade or passing or proficiency along each dimension described. Instead, they describe the dimension and its tensions in the group of readers in the class who will use the rubric. Here's an example of what one might find on a standards-based rubric (like a single-point rubric or a scoring guide) next to a similar element on a dimension-based rubric.

Standard: Evidence and reasoning are adequate to support claims and incorporate appropriate academic sources.

Dimension: What evidence and reasoning do you see or hear? What evidence and reasoning do you not see or hear in the draft? Where do your ideas of evidence come from?

Standards make students have to ask, what do you want me to do, what are you looking for, or how do I get the grade I want? They rely on a white racial *habitus* (usually unstated and assumed) or some version of a DAD as the standard. A lot is unspoken in a standard because it assumes a primary perspective or subject position to interpret it, by default a white, middle-class one. This makes most (if not all) standards-based rubrics white supremacist.

Dimension-based rubrics, on the other hand, call for multiple readers (students and teachers) to explain in context their own *habitus*, the divergent assumptions they make as they make them in judgments. They are more about readers reading (the pollen), not texts meeting predefined expectations (the honey). It opens up to conflict and difference. It turns to difference and opposing judgments much like Barry Kroll's (2008) useful discussion of the aikido move *tenkan* in arguments. Kroll makes a compelling case for teaching

argument using aikido principles and bodily movements because the martial art of aikido is based on not harming others, even protecting attackers; thus, when used as a rhetorical practice it helps us understand and see from other perspectives, particularly opposing ones. Kroll explains the *tenkan* move this way: “A circular movement in which the defender turns outside the attack to a position alongside the aggressor, shoulder-to-shoulder and looking in the same direction, so that from a position where they initially confronted one another as adversaries, they have moved so that they share a point of view” (465). In this vein, dimension-based rubrics are heuristical, not prescriptive and normative; they are generative and open, not restrictive and closed. They cannot tell us how a draft can succeed since success is too multiple and determined by the interaction of the *habitus* embodied in reader, text, and writer. Yet, they still use all the *habitus* in the assessment ecology, even a dominant white racial *habitus*. They don’t exclude students learning a DAD or SAE; they just keep teachers and courses from using such standards against students and allow ecologies to interrogate such standards and judgments. So rubrics, and our problematizing of them, are used as an ecological place of tension, a borderland where we start to understand our own dispositions used in our judgments of language in order to have more informed ways to practice writing.

In their problem-posing letters to me on their peers’ judgments of their drafts, the second ecological place, I ask the students to consider all the problems or differences in judging as paradoxes, as conflicting judgments that are all reasonable. I ask them to consider how from some point of view a person can reasonably hold each observation, particularly ones that conflict with each other. For example, I may ask students to compile several conflicting judgments or observations made about their drafts by their peers in feedback or assessment letters and other comments written on drafts. They choose one or two pairs or triads from this list of judgments that seem to be talking about the same things in the draft (say, the rubric dimension above) and explicate them, describing how they see each judgment being made by each reader. Why did each reader come to a different and perhaps contradictory conclusion about the same aspect or passage of the writer’s draft? We discuss this explicating as a conversation that is meant to reveal paradoxes in how readers read, not the right interpretation or evaluation of the draft. So in my exchanges with students, which begin with this problem-posing letter to me, I constantly push students to avoid looking for the best or right answer, the best evaluation of their draft. Instead, I ask them to walk in the reader’s shoes, which sometimes means they must ask those readers questions about their

assessment letters, which includes me. The real work here, I explain, is not the draft they may be revising but how everyone appears to be making judgments on that draft. Sometimes, the differences are not in the actual claims made about the draft but in the ways each reader explains the judgment or claim to the writer in the feedback letter, that is, in readers' individualized *habitus* enacted in judgments. Thus, the differences are in the partially idiosyncratic assumptions, values, and dispositions students bring to the text in order to make meaning with it.

To help students, I ask them to create tables and lists in order to compare words, assumptions, and judgments in visual and linguistic ways. For instance, we might take the list of attributes of a white discourse in appendix A and look for judgments made on our drafts by peers that seem to use or assume some of them. To do this, we might use some judgment tools (e.g., categorization theory, WYSIATI, and the availability heuristic) as heuristics to help us figure out how readers came to the judgments they did, and then match those judgments to the habits of whiteness. This work would build a new table with another column that places peers' judgments next to descriptions of a white racial *habitus*. This version of problem posing casts the problems posed about judgment as ones about the white (or whitely) dispositions we all carry in our reading practices, no matter our raciolinguistic or social locations. It's not about shaming or blaming readers for engaging in a white discourse, or directing students away from a DAD. Our work is about interrogating the structures that make language and judgments—understanding what we all have learned about language to some degree and how we judge language from various habits, some white, some from other dispositions.

I turn our discussions in the problem-posing letters to investigating whiteness as a set of structures that we all live with, that many need in order to make sense of language, that some have less access to, and that complicate some people's material and linguistic positions. It reveals the DADs often expected of us in other ecological places as hegemonic and not a universal standard. Problem posing does this work not to reject DADs but to open up more critical decisions about our languaging by revealing the nature of language judgment. If you want to drive the linguistic car of a DAD really well, you have to know how it's built, how it runs, how to modify it, and how to trick it out—and realize that you can also walk. This makes my antiracist assessment ecologies more about learning to language by learning the nature of judgment in our world, its connection to the habits of whiteness, and not about teaching a DAD, while working with the reality that these things are not mutually exclusive. An antiracist assessment ecology can do both.

A Borderland Place in an Antiracist Assessment Ecology

Taking my cues from critical race theory (see Delgado and Stefancic 2000), I now turn to storytelling to illustrate in a cursory way the borderland places of problem posing in a writing assessment ecology that attempts to be antiracist.

It is a first-year writing class of mine. We are investigating white privilege. We listen to Macklemore & Ryan Lewis's rap song "White Privilege II." It's confrontational and reveals white guilt. It questions Macklemore's (Ben Haggerty's) own white privilege. We read the Conference on College Composition and Communication 1974 statement on "Students' Right to Their Own Language" and Rosina Lippi-Green's "Linguistic Facts of Life" (Lippi-Green 2012: 6–7). I ask them, do we have white language privilege in school, in our classroom? They write. I don't let them off the hook. We read more. They write more. We look at Myser's article on whiteness in bioethics discourse. We reflect on our rubric, one we made a few weeks before. I ask them to find ways the rubric could be used to judge with white habits of language. How might we be using white language privilege in our judgments? How fair is this practice to everyone in the classroom, a classroom that is mostly students of color. Lucas, an African American male in the class, offers a reflection and table (see table 3).⁶ He reads his reflection, and we talk through his table that compares habits of whiteness to traits we put on our rubric, things we said we valued. The discussion is hard to have; many students are silent unless I call on them. I realize my paradoxical power play in calling on some students, a professor of color, talking about whiteness in language practices, asking students of color questions.

We discuss an excerpt from Lucas's reflection in table 3. In it, he thinks about the traits we generated that described in contradictory ways the rubric dimensions and how they may be influenced by habits of whiteness pervasive in school:

For my first section (styling), my first trait was adding a sense of individuality in our writing. I added the quote in which Myser talked about hyperindividualism being a key in White Anglo-Saxon Protestants. I found this connection interesting because I can look at this two different ways, one, we strive to be individuals to avoid being categorized with something else, or also we categorize what being an "individual" constitutes. How is this possibly measured? Do we have some preemptive notions of what an individual should be? If so, then this is secretly restricting individualism in a sense.

Table 3. Lucas's table referencing his readers' comments on two rubric dimensions and habits of whiteness as a discourse. Quotations are from Myser 2003

Styling	Whiteness traits
Give a sense of individuality (make it your own)	"Hyperindividualism is the major cultural distinction of White Anglo-Saxon Protestants" (5)
Be clear and concise (i.e., read what you write from another perspective. Does it make sense? Does it ramble for no reason? Be your own editor)	"Self-reliance; self-sufficiency; self-control" (7)
Make our writing flow properly and have a sense of unity	"Do not know how to cope with the uncontrollable in selves, society, or nature" (7)

Lucas identifies a paradox in judging or identifying the new, the individual, the original by seeing how we also need known categories of such things. We need exemplars and prototypes to compare people and their writing to. Without such things present to us as readers, something like "give a sense of individuality" to one's writing style in a draft is unrecognizable. And yet, to have such "preemptive" notions of style limits writers and their texts. How do we define and judge individualism, self-reliance, and the uncontrollable? What is so bad about the binaries to these ideas? This is the heart of our discussion, the heart of discussions of a white *habitus*.

It is the second class session. We've had a weekend to read. We're talking about Lucas's reflection. A white male student, Ken, who is always diligent, smart, calm, asks in a metered voice: "Why do we have to learn this in this class? Why do we have to label language as white?" Immediately, a black female student near him, Kelly, turns to him and says in a louder voice, "To check your privilege." Ken's smile flattens. Everyone is silent for a few seconds. Kelly doesn't seem mad at Ken, but clearly excited. He is still quiet. I fight my urge to smooth this over, to make everyone comfortable, to reconcile, to smile. I feel the tension in the room for a few seconds. I want that tension, even though it feels uncomfortable. I'm trying to be brave. I think, that's a good question. I think, that's a good answer. I think, it's not the whole question or the whole answer. I acknowledge both contributions as good ones, necessary ones in our class. Both students are acting bravely and compassionately. I try hard to form words that don't take a side, but I have a side. I realize my own whiteness in my response, to be calm, to not take a side, to not show my own politics here. And yet, I want to jump up and down in front of them, to yell loudly, Live in my skin for a fucking day! Feel

my brown words as if you were me and you spoke as me. I want them to feel the white supremacy, not see or hear it. I want to hug Ken and Kelly. I want more from the interaction, but I sense we've all had enough. The class moves on. I ask them to write.

After class, I'm still thinking about the interaction. I resist the feeling that I could have had a better response than next to nothing. I think of Ice Cube's classic hip-hop song "Check Yourself":

You betta check yo self before you wreck yo self
'Cause I'm bad for your health
I come real stealth
Droppin bombs on your moms
Fuck car alarms

The song is a response in some ways to police racism, to the 1992 race riots in LA. It's a black response to white privilege. I think, a better response I might have offered in class would have been to yell and cry, to tell them: we study whiteness in a writing class because there *is* motherfucking white language privilege, and we better check our language privilege before it wrecks us. But this would revise Kelly's response, salvaging a difference in the borderland, answering for her, when she doesn't need me to do so, and in fact doing so very well may be a whitely response on my part. We must all be brave in this ecological place. And maybe this is what I learn from the session. Not all our lessons are for our students.

But when the lessons of problematizing *are* for students, they offer critical engagement with what we value in writing and how a white, racial, hegemonic discourse informs everyone's dispositions to language, how it's hard to move forward through contradictions. In a later class session, we look at Jonathan's problem-posing letter about the feedback on his recent draft. Jonathan is a white, middle-class student. He is considering how various readers would judge the personal in academic discussions. He implicates his own racialized disposition to not include it in his writing and the sources of his reasons as informed by a set of white racial dispositions:

[Jessica says,] "I know you don't like to use personal stories but I think that if you had one for this topic, it would have been great to add. A personal story . . . sometimes makes things interesting for the reader." Jessica told me that I should have added a personal story, and I think this is a very interesting idea. It seems that without a personal story my work seems to not have the value [a white habit of hyperindividualism] emphasized so much, but if I were to add a personal story I feel

like the rationality of the argument would go out the window. I feel like whiteness has influenced writers to see personal stories as truth because whiteness influences people to believe that “meaningful issues and struggles of life all lie within the self.” This alongside the belief that the individual is “seen as dominant in relation to the natural world.” I believe this could mean that my self-control could show the meaningful issues and struggles in my life but I am not too sure. I think this is the reason that I should not use any personal stories. If I did decide to use a personal story, I feel like it could influence my writing too much because it would show the struggles of my life and I do not think this is a good idea. The idea of adding a personal story would add bias to the situation, in my opinion. I see whiteness in myself here because I am trying to “emphasize thinking versus feeling,” and by doing so I see personal stories as only bias, even though they could potentially add value to my writing. If I were to add a personal story, I think it would take away from my argument and decrease the value of the facts that I bring forward.

Jonathan’s ideas are complex and thoughtful, like Lucas’s. He is not really coming to conclusions about his writing, only thinking through various judgments on his writing, and his own white *habitus*. Like Lucas’s problem posing on the rubric, Jonathan’s on Jessica’s comments on his draft reveal to him a paradox in how his draft will potentially be understood and judged (i.e., read). He is unsure about the white habit of using the personal to make meaning or truth in his draft (hyperindividualism) and seems to suggest that he’ll stay away from such white habits as a writer. And yet, he doesn’t fully see that his focus on presenting a “rational” voice and draft is also a habit of whiteness, an attention to an individualized, rational, controlled self (see appendix A). And yet this isn’t completely true either. Jonathan is getting closer, though. What we haven’t discussed in class, what is hard to discuss, is that these habits cannot be decontextualized. They must always be read in context, through specific examples. How judgment from these habits is deployed matters. How they are used to make judgments on texts turns these habits of whiteness, which are inherently benign, into practices that reproduce white supremacy. So taking Jessica’s advice, adding a personal story, isn’t white supremacist or racist in and of itself because it focuses on the individual. This is what Jonathan is trying to avoid. He’s trying to be ethical in his writing practices, as Jessica is in her judgment practices. And they are confronting the paradoxes in judgment.

Confronting white supremacy is always paradoxical. Like pimpin’, it ain’t easy. In my view, these kinds of classroom discussions and activities are the first step toward an antiracist world, people recognizing how they fit into larger structures that structure them and their ways of being with language.

Jonathan, Ken, and Kelly are doing antiracist work. They are problematizing the nature of judgment, and I think it makes them better people, more ethically minded people, people who are practicing paying attention in particular ways in order to be individuals who live bravely in diverse communities by starting with the ecology they live in right now, which is our classroom.

Appendix A

Habits of White Discourse

The habits of whiteness below should not be used in an essential way, as a static, monolithic construct. Whiteness is a category of experience in the world—it’s phenomenological—so it changes and is in flux. Think of these habits as an orientation to the world, making the first habit below most central. The test of a habit as white supremacist, for instance, is in how it is deployed in the world and what effects that doing (the habit) has on spaces and bodies.

- **Unseen, naturalized orientation to the world—an orientation (or starting point) of one’s body in time and space that makes certain things reachable;** assumes (or takes as universal) proximities (capabilities to act and do things) that are inherited through one’s shared space; an oxymoronic haunting, leaving things unsaid/unstated for the audience to fill in, that contains multiple contradictions (is ambiguous) in how it can be understood; a style of embodiment that is invisible to the person or voice; a way of inhabiting spaces that is comfortable (allows the person to “sink into the space” around the body); the space becomes an extension of the white body and its discourse in such a way that it is hard to distinguish where the white body ends and the world begins; any utterance may participate in this orientation to the world by how the utterance operates in the space (does it sink in?) and what its effects are.
- **Hyperindividualism—self-determination and autonomy** are most important or most valued; self-reliance, self-sufficiency, and self-control are important; individual rights and privacy are often most important and construct the common good; the truth is always good to hear, no matter how painful, good, or bad it may be (each individual has the right to know the truth).
- **Stance of neutrality, objectivity, and apoliticality**—assumes or invokes a voice (and body) or its own discourse as neutral and apolitical, nonracial, which might use some of the other habits to reinforce this neutral and objective stance.
- **Individualized, rational, controlled self**—person is conceived as an **individual who is rational, self-conscious, self-controlled, and determined;** conscience guides the individual, and sight is the primary way to identify the truth or understanding; social and cultural factors are external constraints to the individual; meaningful issues and questions always lie within the self; individuals have problems and solutions are individually based; both success and failure are individual in nature; failure is always attached to the individual

and often seen as weakness; control of self is important, as are work and staying busy, or being industrious and productive; unsure how to cope with the uncontrollable in selves, society, or nature.

- **Rule-governed, contractual relationships**—a focus on the **individual in a contractual relationship** with other individuals; focuses on “informed consent” and negotiation of individual needs; individual rights are more important and nonpolitical, whereas socially oriented values and questions are less important and often political (bad) by their nature; attachment to laws, rules, fairness as sameness; the contractual regulates relationships; little emphasis on connectedness, relatedness, feeling, interconnection with others; individuals keep difficulties and problems to themselves.
- **Clarity, order, and control**—a focus on **reason, order, and control; thinking (vs. feeling)**, insight, the rational, order, objective (vs. subjective), rigor, clarity, and consistency are all valued highly; thinking/rationality and knowledge are nonpolitical and unraced and can be objective; antisensuality is valued, while there is a limited value of sensual experiences, considerations of the body, sensations, and feelings; a belief in scientific method, discovery, and knowledge; deductive logics are preferred; usefulness and pragmatism are important measures of value and success.

Notes

1. I use *racial formation* in a slightly different way than Michael Omi and Howard Winant (2015: 109), who define it as “the sociohistorical process by which racial identities are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed.” While they focus the term on the formation of identity and social groups, I use it to refer to actual, material bodies in time and space, so I emphasize the “lived out” part of their original conception.
2. It is not always the case that writing assessment ecologies are racist, particularly if the teacher is of color. Because of their subject position relative to white hegemonic structures, Latinx, Black, Asian, or Native American teachers cannot be racist, but they can enact white supremacist structures through their judgment practices in the assessment ecology. I thank Alexandria Lockett for reminding me of this insight at a UNCF/Mellon Teaching and Learning Institute in Austin, Texas, at Huston-Tillotson University, a historically black university.
3. I realize there is a difference in the literature between spaces and places. My use of *place* does not require such a distinction.
4. Pierre Bourdieu (1984: 170) defines *habitus* as both a structuring structure and a structured structure, durable dispositions that mark us. In one sense, *habitus* is a way to describe the judgment of people, how we organize our reading and judgment practices of ourselves and others. This means that the term might include three kinds of dispositions that are racialized in the United States: discursive or linguistic,

- material or bodily, and performative. For a discussion of *habitus*, see Bourdieu 1977, and in light of the judgment of language in writing classrooms, see Inoue 2015: 42–51.
5. I realize that the word *polylectic* refers to the gathering of pollen from many different plants, but I'm using a literal translation of the word that offers something more than a binary exchange that dialectic might suggest from its use of *dia-*, meaning across or passing through. The prefix *poly-* means many, and the root *lectic* comes from the ancient Greek word *lektos* (λεκτός), meaning to speak or say. So *polylectic* can mean many words or speakers that coexist.
 6. All students quoted have given me permission to use their words and names in this article.

Works Cited

- AAC&U (Association of American Colleges and Universities). n.d. *VALUE Rubric for Written Communication*. www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/written-communication (accessed 18 May 2017).
- Anson, Chris. 2000. "Response and the Social Construction of Error." *Assessing Writing* 7, no. 1: 5–21.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. (1987) 1999. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. 2nd ed. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.
- Arao, Brian, and Kristi Clemens. 2013. "From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces: A New Way to Frame Dialogue around Diversity and Social Justice." In *The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections from Social Justice Educators*, edited by Lisa M. Landreman, 135–50. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Bleich, David. 1997. "What Can Be Done about Grading?" In *Grading in the Post-process Classroom: From Theory to Practice*, edited by Libby Allison, Lizbeth Bryant, and Maureen Hourigan, 15–35. Portsmouth, UK: Boynton/Cook.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, translated by R. Nice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of The Judgement of Taste*, translated by R. Nice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Broad, Bob. 2003. *What We Really Value: Beyond Rubrics in Teaching and Assessing Writing*. Logan: Utah State University Press.
- Bruffee, Kenneth. 1984. "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind.'" *College English* 46, no. 7: 635–53.
- Burke, Kenneth. 1966. *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Coleman, Taiyon J., Renee DeLong, Kathleen Sheerin DeVore, Shannon Gibney, and Michael C. Kuhne. 2016. "The Risky Business of Engaging Racial Equity in Writing Instruction: A Tragedy in Five Acts." *Teaching English in the Two Year College* 43, no. 4: 347–70.
- College Board. 2016. *2013 College-Bound Seniors: Total Group Profile Report*. reports.collegeboard.org/pdf/total-group-2016.pdf.

- Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1991. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43: 1241–99.
- Danielewicz, Jane, and Peter Elbow. 2009. "A Unilateral Grading Contract to Improve Learning and Teaching." *College Composition and Communication* 61, no. 2: 244–68.
- Delgado, Richard, and Jean Stefancic, eds. 2000. *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*. 2nd ed. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Elbow, Peter. 1993. "Ranking, Evaluating, and Liking: Sorting Out Three Forms of Judgment." *College English* 55, no. 2: 187–206.
- Elbow, Peter. 1997. "Taking Time Out from Grading and Evaluating While Working in a Conventional System." *Assessing Writing* 4, no. 1: 5–27.
- Elbow, Peter, and Pat Belanoff. 1997. "Reflections on the Explosion: Portfolio in the 90s and Beyond." In Yancey and Weiser 1997: 21–33.
- Fluckiger, Jarene. 2010. "Single Point Rubric: A Tool for Responsible Student Self-Assessment." Teacher Education Faculty Publications, paper 5. digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1004&context=tedefacpub.
- Freire, Paulo. (1970) 2005. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, translated by M. B. Ramos. New York: Continuum.
- Geiser, Saul. 2015. "The Growing Correlation between Race and SAT Scores: New Findings from California." Center for Studies in Higher Education Research and Occasional Paper Series 10, no. 15. www.cshe.berkeley.edu/publications/growing-correlation-between-race-and-sat-scores-new-findings-california-saul-geiser.
- Goldberg, David Theo. 1993. *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Gonzalez, Jennifer. 2014. "Know Your Terms: Holistic, Analytic, and Single-Point Rubrics." *Cult of Pedagogy* (blog), 1 May. www.cultofpedagogy.com/holistic-analytic-single-point-rubrics/.
- Gramlich, John. 2019. "Five Facts about Crime in the U.S." *FactTank*, 3 January. www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/03/5-facts-about-crime-in-the-u-s/.
- Guba, Egon, and Yvonna Lincoln. 1989. *Fourth Generation Evaluation*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Hamp-Lyons, Liz, and William Condon. 2000. *Assessing the Portfolio: Principles for Practice, Theory, and Research*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Haswell, Richard. 1998. "Rubrics, Prototypes, and Exemplars: Categorization Theory and Systems of Writing Placement." *Assessing Writing* 5, no. 2: 231–68.
- Horner, Bruce. 1992. "Rethinking the 'Sociality' of Error: Teaching Editing as Negotiation." *Rhetoric Review* 11, no. 1: 172–99.
- Horner, Bruce, and Min-Zhan Lu. 1999. *Representing the "Other": Basic Writers and the Teaching of Basic Writing*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Huot, Brian. 2002. *(Re)Articulating Writing Assessment for Teaching and Learning*. Logan: Utah State University Press.
- Inoue, Asao B. 2014. "A Grade-less Writing Course that Focuses on Labor and Assessing." In *First-Year Composition: From Theory to Practice*, edited by Debra Teague and Ronald Lunsford, 71–110. Anderson, SC: Parlor Press.
- Inoue, Asao B. 2015. *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies: Teaching and Assessing for a*

- Socially Just Future*. Fort Collins, CO, and Anderson, SC: WAC Clearinghouse and Parlor Press.
- Kahneman, Daniel. 2011. *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.
- Kohn, Alfie. 1993. *Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Kohn, Alfie. 2011. "The Case against Grades." *Educational Leadership* 69, no. 3: 28–33.
- Kroll, Barry. 2008. "Arguing with Adversaries: Aikido, Rhetoric, and the Art of Peace." *College Composition and Communication* 59, no. 3: 451–72.
- Lippi-Green, Rosina. 2012. *English with an Accent: Language, Ideology, and Discrimination in the United States*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.
- Lipsitz, George. 2007. "The Racialization of Space and the Spatialization of Race: Theorizing the Hidden Architecture of Landscape." *Landscape Journal* 26, no. 1: 10–23.
- Lu, Min-Zhan. 1994. "Professing Multiculturalism: The Politics of Style in the Contact Zone." *College Composition and Communication* 45, no. 4: 442–58.
- Mandel, Barrett John. 1973. "Teaching without Judging." *College English* 34, no. 5: 623–33.
- Mills, Charles W. 1997. *The Racial Contract*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Myser, Catherine. 2003. "Differences from Somewhere: The Normativity of Whiteness in Bioethics in the United States." *American Journal of Bioethics* 3, no. 2: 1–11.
- Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. 2015. *Racial Formation in the United States*. 3rd ed. New York: Routledge.
- Perelman, Chaim, and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca. 1969. *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. 1991. "Arts of the Contact Zone." *Profession* 1991: 33–40.
- Rampell, Catherine. 2009. "SAT Scores and Family Income." *New York Times*, 27 August. economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/08/27/sat-scores-and-family-income/.
- Rawls, John. 2001. *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*. Edited by Erin Kelly. Boston, MA: Belknap Press.
- Reichert, Nancy. 2003. "Practice Makes Perfect: Contracting Quantity and Quality." *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* 31, no. 1: 60–68.
- Rich, Adrienne. (1986) 1994. "Notes toward a Politics of Location." In *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose, 1979–1985*, 210–31. New York: Norton.
- Rosch, Eleanor. 1978. "Principles of Categorization." In *Cognition and Categorization*, edited by Eleanor Rosch and Barbara B. Lloyd, 26–48. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Said, Edward. 1979. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage.
- Shor, Ira. 2007. "Critical Pedagogy Is Too Big to Fail." *Journal of Basic Writing* 28, no. 2: 6–27.
- Smith, John A. 1999. "Contracting English Composition: It Only Sounds like an Illness." *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* 26, no. 4: 427–30.
- Straub, Richard, and Richard F. Lunsford. 1995. *Twelve Readers Reading: Responding to College Student Writing*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton.
- Trimbur, John. 1989. "Consensus and Difference in Collaborative Learning." *College English* 51, no. 6: 602–16.
- Villanueva, Victor. 1993. *Bootstraps: From An American Academic of Color*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

- Wilkins, Craig L. 2007. *The Aesthetics of Equity: Notes on Race, Space, Architecture, and Music*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Williams, Raymond. 1977. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Yancey, Kathleen Blake, and Irwin Weiser, eds. 1997. *Situating Portfolios: Four Perspectives*. Logan: Utah State University Press.
- Young, Iris Marion. 2011. *Responsibility for Justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.