How to Engage in Antiracist Classroom Writing Assessment

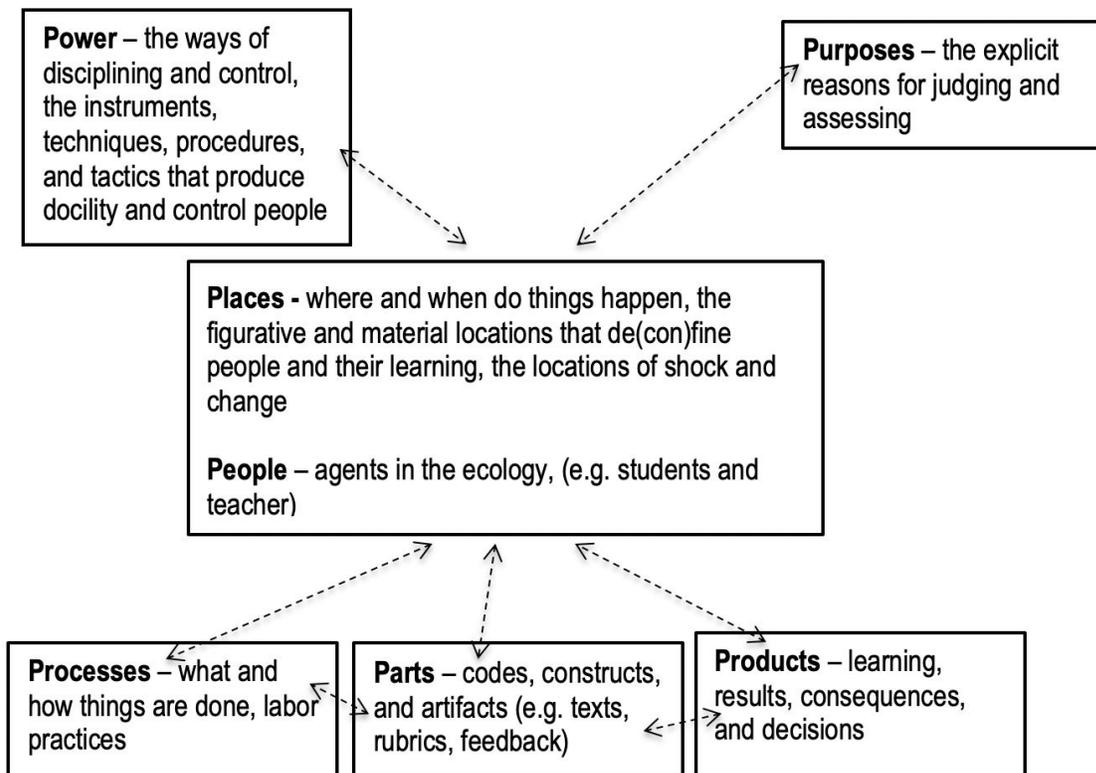https://tinyurl.com/WAVA-Handout

Workshop for Writing Across Virginia (Oct 21, 2020)
Asao B. Inoue, Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, Equity, & Inclusion for CISA (asao@asu.edu)
Arizona State University, Tempe/Polytechnic/Downtown
Reflective & Feedback survey: https://tinyurl.com/WAVA-survey

Designing Classroom Writing Assessment Ecologies

The figure below (Inoue, 2015, p. 176) represents classroom writing assessment as seven ecological elements that can be designed or rethought in any writing course. These elements are not discrete, but a part of a "complex system" (Dobrin, 2012; Cooper, 2011). Each element affects and often transforms into others. This means that any writing assessment ecology is more than its parts, just as each part is more than what it appears to be at its face.

Power – the ways of disciplining and control, the instruments, techniques, procedures, and tactics that produce docility and control people

Purposes – the explicit reasons for judging and assessing

Places - where and when do things happen, the figurative and material locations that de(con)fine people and their learning, the locations of shock and change

People – agents in the ecology, (e.g. students and teacher)

Processes – what and how things are done, labor practices

Parts – codes, constructs, and artifacts (e.g. texts, rubrics, feedback)

Products – learning, results, consequences, and decisions

- **Purposes** -- Why is assessing happening, or what are the reasons for assessment?
- **Power** -- In what ways are disciplining, control, and norming (to some standard) enacted?
- **Parts** -- What are the codes, constructs, and artifacts used and produced?
- **Processes** -- How are judgments accomplished and what happens with them?
- **People** -- Who is involved in judging and how much control in judging do they have?
- **Places** -- What material and figurative sites are created that affect people?
- **Products** -- What indirect and direct consequences are produced or expected?

Considering Labor-Based Grading Contracts

One way to change your classroom's writing assessment ecology toward a more explicitly antiracist one, one that can do more social justice work, is to get rid of grades, and the standards that go with them, on writing by using a labor-based grading contract system. They can:

- **Reduce dramatically unequal racialized power dynamics** in the way locally diverse students' writing is judged by teachers. These power dynamics move through a dominant, white, middle class discourse that is informed by a white racial *habitus*.
- **Open the ecology to more than one dominant set of language standards**, which creates conditions to use other ways of languaging to critique dominant standards, while still understanding them.
- **Eliminate standards-based grades** on writing (or grades based on comparisons to a dominant White Discourse) by replacing them with labor-based grading, which also provides conditions for students to exercise more fully their rights to their own languages in the classroom.

Some Resources
- Labor-based Grading Contract Template (https://tinyurl.com/LB-GradingContract2020)
- Labor Log for Students (https://tinyurl.com/laborlogxii)
- Labor Journal (one entry a week) (http://tinyurl.com/yc89unpc)

Labor-Based Grading Contracts' Benefits

Labor-based grading contracts offer the following benefits for writing intensive classrooms:

- Produce course grades by the amount of labor done by students, which if students negotiate the terms of the contract, is usually seen as fairer than conventional grading systems.
- Avoid producing so-called quality-based grades on any writing, while allowing for a range of standards of quality to sit side by side in the classroom.
- Offer environments for negotiating language differences in student writing and judgments by juxtaposing a variety of standards of writing in feedback -- i.e. a number of Discourses and their *habitus* must be articulated in feedback, revealing how there is no one clear way to write.
- Do not require that a teacher use a single standard to determine course grades, yet standards are used by readers to make judgements on writing (produce feedback)
- Provide students with opportunities for critical negotiations of language use and judgments of Discourses.
- Allow for dimension-based rubrics, not standards-based ones.

Labor-based grading contracts construct the writing assessment ecology in a few ways that are important to antiracist agendas that look to honor linguistic diversity and counter White language supremacy in the classroom. They:

- Eliminate all grades but the course grade
- Separate all feedback and evaluation of writing from the course grade
- Calculate course grades by labor only (i.e. time on tasks and words written or read)
- Ask students to pay attention to how, when, where, and in what manner they labor for the class
- Create less-coercive conditions for reflection on power, linguistic differences, and rhetorical choices in writing and its judgement

Investigating Our Orientations Toward Student Writing

In "White Woman Feminist," Marilyn Frye, drawing on Minnie Bruce Pratt (1984), **Whiteliness** or **whitely dispositions**, which might be thought of as a part of habits of whiteness, and they amount to the following:

- **Being a judge and peacemaker**: a disposition toward giving responsibility and punishments, being the preacher and martyr, taking responsibility and the glory.
- **Self-understood benevolence**: a disposition toward seeing oneself (and other whitely people) as benevolent, good-willed, fair, honest, and ethical.
- **Being procedurally ethical**: a strong sense of right and wrong, usually rooted in dispositions toward forms, procedures, due process, and rules as the basis of the ethical; to be good, one acts according to the rules, which is understood as principled.
- **Authority**: a disposition toward running the show, or aspiring toward it, and a belief in one's infallible authority in most matters. (Frye 153-54; Fox 202)

REFLECT: How do any (or all) of these whitely dispositions show up in your own past experiences of rewarded and unrewarded writing? How have you justified them in the past as a student or teacher?

Habits of White language are historical and used not just in texts but to judge them and the people who are associated with them, like our students. (For a full description of these habits, see https://tinyurl.com/habitsofwhitelanguage5).

- **Unseen, Naturalized Orientation to the World** -- This is an orientation, a starting point, of one's body in time and space that makes certain things reachable. It assumes, or takes as universal, its own proximities or capabilities to act and do things that are inherited through one's shared space. It can be understood as an "oxymoronic haunting," leaving things unsaid or unstated for those in the classroom to fill in.

- **Hyperindividualism** -- This is a stance or judgement that primarily values self-determination and autonomy as most important or most valued. It often centers or assumes values of self-reliance, self-sufficiency, and self-control, which tends to also support logics like "survival of the fitness," "free and open markets," and competition as proving grounds for discovering the best or most ideal.

- **Stance of Neutrality, Objectivity, and Apoliticality** -- This is an orientation that assumes or invokes a voice (and body), or its own discourse, as neutral and apolitical, as non-racial and non-gendered. This is often voiced in the style of a "god-trick," which is a universal vantage or viewpoint by which to know something else in a nonpolitical or purely objective way.

- **Individualized, Rational, Controlled Self** -- This is a stance or orientation in which the person is conceived of as an individual who is primarily rational, self-conscious, self-controlled, and self-determined. One's own conscience guides the individual. Sight (ocularity) is the primary way to identify the truth or to understand something (i.e. seeing is proof; seeing is understanding; seeing is believing).

- **Rule-Governed, Contractual Relationships** -- This habit focuses on the individual in a contractual relationship with other individuals, either formally or tacitly, that tends to be understood as benefiting the individuals in the contract, not the whole community or group. This can be seen in syllabi as one kind of assumed social and educational contract that is dictated by those in power (teachers and schools) for the assumed benefit of individual students.

- **Clarity, Order, and Control** -- This habit focuses on reason, order, and control as guiding principles for understanding and judgement, as well as documents and instances of languaging. Thinking and anti-sensuality are primary and opposed to feelings and emotions. Thinking, rationality, and knowledge are apolitical, unraced, and can be objectively displayed. Words, ideas, and language itself are disembodied, or extracted, from the

people and their material and emotional contexts from which the language was created or exists.

REFLECT: Pick 2 of these habits of White language to consider closely. How did they show up in each of your experiences of writing? How do you (re)enact them in your classrooms?

Resources

On compassion and mindfulness:

- Charter for Compassion (http://tinyurl.com/y72ld646)
- Handout on the research on compassion and Brave Spaces (http://tinyurl.com/y9ylxf2b)
- Karen Armstrong's Charter for Compassion Website (https://charterforcompassion.org/)
- The Science of Happiness podcast (Dacher Keltner), Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley (https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/podcasts)
- Video: "What is Mindfulness?" by Kabat-Zinn (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HmEo6RI4Wvs)
- Mindfulness of Breath info and activity (http://www.freemindfulness.org/breath)
- "Three Insights from … Compassion Research" by Emiliana Simon-Thomas (http://tinyurl.com/yayjor6k)
- Video: "Studies in Compassion Research" by Richard Davidson (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=il7W3A8uRxk)
- Self-Compassion by Kristen Neff (https://self-compassion.org/the-three-elements-of-self-compassion-2/)
- Infographic: Scientific Benefits of Compassion by Emma Seppala (http://tinyurl.com/ya3z9rdr)
- Arao, Brian, and Kristi Clemens, "From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces" (http://tinyurl.com/ycvkvpnl)
- Barbezat, Daniel, and Mirabai Bush, *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education*, (Jossey-Bass, 2014)
- Jackson, Brian, *Teaching Mindful Writers*, (Utah State UP, 2020)
- Nestor, James, *Breath: The New Science of a Lost Art*, (Riverhead Books, 2020)
- Wenger, Christy, *Yoga Minds, Writing Bodies: Contemplative Writing Pedagogy*, (WAC Clearinghouse, 2015)
- Wright, Robert, *Why Buddhism is True: The Science and Philosophy of Meditation and Enlightenment*, (Simon & Schuster, 2017)

Classroom materials:

- Sample Materials related to using Dimension-Based Rubrics for assessing student writing:
  - Sample dimension-based rubric: (http://tinyurl.com/y9xpndwr)
  - Labor instructions for student assessment letters: (http://tinyurl.com/ybj8s7ny)
  - Sample student assessment letter 1: (http://tinyurl.com/y82nqbvs)
  - Sample student assessment letter 2: (http://tinyurl.com/y9thayfg)
  - Sample student assessment letter 3: (http://tinyurl.com/y7guwf9k)
- Handout on Habits of White Language and Judgement, version 5 (https://tinyurl.com/habitsofwhitelanguage5)
- 2020 CCCC Special Committee on Composing a CCCC Statement on Anti-Black Racism and Black Linguistic Justice, Or, Why We Cain't Breathe! "This Ain't Another Statement! This is a DEMAND for Black Linguistic Justice!" https://cccc.ncte.org/cccc/demand-for-black-linguistic-justice, July 2020.
- Inoue, Asao B. "Asao B. Inoue's Infrequent Words," website and blog. www.asaobinoue.com.
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- Presentation: "How to Engage in Antiracist Classroom Writing Assessment" (https://tinyurl.com/WAVA-Handout)

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