

# Chapter 10. Tensions and Failures: A Story of Assessment

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As Shawn Wilson (2008) writes, “Relationality requires that you know a lot more about me before you can begin to understand my work” (p. 12). This is my positionality: I am White, middle-aged, female, mother, wife, daughter, middle-class background, first generation college educated, student, cis-gendered, heterosexual. Like Kristin DeMint Bailey, I state my positionality not to claim White privilege, but to acknowledge the privileges I have due to these positionalities. I grew up in the lands of the Anishinaabeg—the Three Fires Confederacy of Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi peoples—and I attended graduate school at a land-grant university on land ceded in the 1819 Treaty of Saginaw. I was still new to Alaska, and I was still learning about this place and the Indigenous peoples of this land, but I am honored to have lived and worked on the land of the Dena’ina. I am an outsider-insider where I lived, and most insiders have a strong sense of state pride. They loved to tell me stories of how things are different in Alaska from the “lower 48.” Being an outsider meant I had to work to earn the trust of my students. This trust, I have learned, is cultivated through building relationships with the students—listening to their stories and acknowledging their connections to this place through the land and the people. I had to be willing to become a student about all things Alaska and as I built relationships with my students and my own connections to this place, students felt more comfortable trusting me about writing. In other words, I had to acknowledge and respect their expertise in order for them to acknowledge and respect mine. It is a reciprocal relationship.

It is, however, a relationship with an inherent power dynamic that is bestowed upon my position by the institution and by my Whiteness. This power dynamic can be difficult to navigate when trying to enact an antiracist, engaged pedagogy. I want my students to feel comfortable taking risks and being honest about their learning, but I am concerned about how the institutional power dynamic limits them and me. As I build relationships and trust with students, I attempt to counteract these power dynamics by inviting students to participate in the course—readjusting deadlines as needed, helping to select topics, navigating coursework together—decentering me and centering students as much as possible. Despite students’ inclusion in the course design, as the instructor in this course, there is a tension that exists for me as I feel accountable to the institution’s expectations which are often racist and colonizing. In an attempt to disrupt the classroom and create conditions for student agency, like Alison R. Moore, I failed.

At my previous institution, I tried to implement assessment practices that asked students to focus on something they wanted to learn about writing. I wanted students to focus on concepts and ideas that they wanted to explore and play with throughout the semester rather than listing a grade, yet many students responded with earning an A as their learning goal. They seemed to believe that this letter represents “learning” rather than my judgment of their performance on specific tasks. While high grades may earn students financial rewards via scholarships and entry into specific programs, it doesn’t necessarily show learning or suggest a goal for what students hope to gain from our writing courses. This creates one of the first tensions between what I was hoping to do in my classrooms and what could (and did) actually happen: students want the highest grades and administration expects me to assign grades which show what students have learned, but I don’t know that most grading systems represent learning. Rather grades often feel like a subjective system that rewards certain White behaviors more than learning, yet students and the institution equate grades and learning. I feel that I am accountable to both my institution and my students to assign grades even when I might disagree with these systems.

Teaching is relational, and assessment is part of the relationship that students build with the course, and it holds me accountable to my institution’s expectations. However, assessment has not traditionally been about relationship-building and accountability to students’ learning; it has been more about gatekeeping as Gavin P. Johnson in this volume notes as well. In this chapter, I interrogate these tensions through my own story of assessment and failure, drawing on the work of Jack Halberstam (2011).

In my classes, I draw on Wilson’s Indigenous research paradigm as a useful framework for practicing antiracist pedagogies. He defines a research paradigm as “the beliefs that guide our actions,” and his paradigm explains that our truths are relational, accountable, and reciprocal; we can’t disconnect our epistemology, ontology, methodology, and axiology (Wilson, 2008, p. 13). I center Wilson’s work not to co-opt or to “become without becoming,” or to enact cultural appropriation (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 14). Rather, I center Wilson and other Indigenous scholars in my teaching and research to give power back to Indigenous ways of knowing, thinking, and doing. As Wilson says, “[a]n Indigenous research paradigm is research that follows an ontology, epistemology, methodology and axiology that is Indigenous,” and it must also come from an Indigenous perspective, which he argues is not necessarily an Indigenous person but is someone who “leave[s] behind dominant paradigms” (2008, p. 38). I attempt to disrupt colonizing power structures and focus on the qualities of relationality, accountability, and reciprocity in my teaching and in assessment practices, which aim to leave behind dominant—White supremacist—paradigms of assessment by inviting students to participate in how their learning is assessed. As Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012) explain, this disruption of classroom power structures is only one step in critical consciousness although it does not actually disrupt settler colonialism.

While assessment may not be a way to give land back, framing assessment with an Indigenous paradigm makes visible ways of knowing that have been erased through settler colonialism, and it makes students' voices visible in their learning. These are, albeit small, decolonizing acts.

Using Wilson's Indigenous paradigm to frame my work, as a White woman, as someone who tries to be a co-conspirator, is complicated by my Whiteness and by the settler colonial institutions where I teach. I present my work here to show the ways that antiracist work can be unsettling and complicated, and I use this Indigenous paradigm to frame my argument because, if we are going to say that Indigenous ways of knowing and doing are important to decolonization, to giving the land back and to Indigenous sovereignty, then we have to model that for our students whether we are White or non-White, and we need to practice our truths. This is a story of assessment, and failure. Like Johnson, I have long wondered how to make grades more meaningful and reflective of students' learning, because current systems of White—based rubrics and Western paradigms—and our affective attachment to these systems—that require performativity and “correctness” don't fit my truth about teaching and learning; as Johnson writes, “Grades and related punitive assessment models enshrine racist, sexist, classist, ableist, colonial, cis-heteronormative gatekeeping practices.” Yet, my positionality as a tenure-track assistant professor in a White-dominated institution causes me to try to fit my truths into the racist and colonizing structures that allow me to stay in my job. I feel that I can only push the limits so far. I think this is a real tension that many well-intentioned new professors feel.

### Relational, Accountable, and Reciprocal

While presented in a linear arc, it is important to note that this Indigenous research paradigm is recursive, too, or as Wilson (2008) explains: relational, accountable, and reciprocal. These are the qualities of his Indigenous research framework, and the qualities that I draw on for teaching and to practice assessment in my classes. Relationality means developing relationships, or making connections, with people, places, ideas. As Asao Inoue (2015) explains, these relationships affect our interactions in the classroom ecology. If my students perceive me as uncaring or if I penalize their grades for every White Standard English grammatical error, we are not going to have a positive relationship that is focused on their learning rather than their ability to conform to “the rules.” In assessment, relationality refers to the ways students make connections between their learning and the grades they receive: how well does one reflect the other? This relationship is also reciprocal in that learning and grades should reflect one another, be a give and take, but reciprocity also includes the ways that students participate in the assessment or grading process.

I believe that students should be invited into the assessment process. When I provide feedback on students' work, I begin by thanking students for sharing

their stories because I want them to know that their words, their stories, are important. This is a first step in developing a relationship with the student: I acknowledge their stories and the work they did to tell them. And I will often ask questions in my comments that encourage the student to respond either in their writing or in private messages/comments via the LMS. For example, Taylor,<sup>1</sup> a student who self-identified as being from a rural village in Alaska, responded to a question by stating that they did not “learn anything” that week because they were “behind” in their writing background:

I tried my absolute best to understand what I was being asked to do and carry out that request efficiently, yet I always felt two steps behind. To be perfectly honest, although I’m not using this as an excuse, my high school education was terrible and I’m sinfully underprepared for this entire course.

Taylor’s honesty in their reflection invited me to continue the conversation and to begin to offer resources to build their confidence in their writing because someone, somewhere along the way, has clearly told Taylor that they aren’t a “good writer” or that they are underprepared for higher education. I want students like Taylor to know that they are capable and to provide the support that they need to succeed in my class and in the institution through a continued reflective dialogue. In online courses, conversations like this help me begin to develop a relationship with the student and to help them develop a relationship with course concepts that will hopefully transfer beyond our time together.

The ability to dialogue without that conversation penalizing their final grade is essential because it makes the student’s voice visible. It brings them into the decision-making process and invites them to explain their judgment of the writing task and their labor by asking them to think about their learning and how they understood it in their writing—where the concepts worked, where they were unsure, and what they want to keep practicing. Ultimately, the student assigns a grade in their reflection—a grade which asks them to make claims about their learning and to show it with evidence from the course materials and their writing—then I record that grade (or a higher grade as some students, like Taylor, underestimate their abilities) as long as they have completed the work. By asking students to make connections between the course work and the writing that practices those concepts (e.g., citing sources, genre formatting expectations such as memos or letters, audience, tone), I am asking them to think about the relationality of what we are discussing and writing and their own learning. I want them to explain which concepts are important to them and how they might apply those ideas in their work now and in the future. These conversations also help

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1. In their informed consent, students selected how they wanted to be referred to in publications. Some chose their first names while others gave themselves pseudonyms. I will not be identifying which class they were enrolled in to further protect their privacy.

students take responsibility for their labor (Inoue, 2015). I do expect students to support their claims about their learning with evidence—general references or quotes from course readings and lectures, discussions, or writing activities. This evidence helps me to see that they have done the work while their final product shows how they are practicing their learning. The student’s written reflection asks them to grade themselves based on their learning and labor. It is difficult to demonstrate that they’ve learned something about course concepts if they didn’t do the work.

Assessment also demonstrates a shared accountable relationship between me and the institution—and this is another area of tension. For example, there are institutional expectations for me and the students: grade submissions, learning outcomes, standards to meet. I am told that students have a right to expect that their instructors are meeting institutional expectations; that every section of a class has shared learning outcomes; that they will receive meaningful grades that reflect their learning. But, for many first-generation students, like myself and for many of my students now, academia is a new community with new rules, and students don’t always know these expectations or relationships; it is my job to help students find the relationships among these institutional expectations, their learning, and how that learning is assessed. I made a complicated and conscious decision to help students navigate this institutional colonized space, and Tuck and Yang (2012) might consider this a settler move to innocence. By teaching students how to survive in these colonized spaces, I can remove my own guilt of “directly and indirectly benefiting from the erasure and assimilation of Indigenous peoples” (Tuck & Yang, 2012 p. 9). And Inoue (2015) would add that I am replicating the White racial *habitus* of these settler colonial places or ecologies. I see this decision as making visible this settler colonial space and the practices which have sought to erase and exclude non-White peoples. And my decision to make this move is further complicated because I have to concede the ways I am now complicit in this settler colonial space. Just as I acknowledge the labor my students perform in this space, I have to acknowledge that I am laboring in this place, too, and that my continued labor is, in part, contingent upon being accountable to institutional expectations even as I think about how I might work to change this space for my students now and in the future. I can try to disrupt the settler colonial space through antiracist pedagogies and assessment practices but my positionality also makes me complicit. How can making racist institutional practices visible allow students to thrive despite a system, an ecology, that was designed to exclude and erase them?

### An Ontology: What Do We Value as True?

When I consider what is real or true about assessment, my ontology, I have to acknowledge that most classroom assessment is based on artificial, White supremacist paradigms, and I am guilty of this, too, as I have held students accountable

to SLOs and asked them to frame their learning around White supremacist language. As Inoue (2021) points out in his blog post, “What gets reproduced in the use of SLOs are the habits of White, middle- to upper class, monolingual English language users . . . which then reproduces people with just those language habits in future teachers and administrators.” But this does not describe many of my previous institution’s student backgrounds: just over half of our student body of 12,202 are White, about 7.5 percent are Hispanic/Latinx, less than 3 percent are Black, almost 7 percent are Asian, 5 percent are Native American or Alaska Native, nearly 3 percent are Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and almost 12 percent identify as two or more races (University of Alaska [UAA], 2021). The makeup of the institution nearly mirrors the overall makeup of our community, although Alaska Natives make up almost 16 percent of the state’s population and are severely underrepresented at the institution (DataUSA, 2021). Yet a 2018 study reported in a local newspaper that there are 101 languages spoken in Anchorage homes (Hanlon, 2018). There is a long history of this settler colonization which has made Alaska Natives and their languages a “minority” within their own lands.<sup>2</sup>

The SLOs do not fully reflect this linguistic or cultural diversity, although the 200-level writing courses do include a SLO that asks students to “apply their understanding of writing [humanities, professions, or sciences] to the uniqueness of Alaskan or Pacific Rim perspectives.” As an outsider-insider, this SLO was difficult for me to achieve, and I mostly tried to incorporate it through readings by Alaska Native authors such as Velma Wallis and Ernestine Hayes who I brought into conversations with other Indigenous scholars like Wilson, Thomas King, Malea Powell, Andrea Riley-Mukavetz, and Qwo-Li Driskill. It was not enough, I know, but no one was able to explain how I as a non-Alaska Native and non-Pacific Rim White person should teach this “unique perspective” beyond being encouraged to include some texts by authors who are Alaska Native/Pacific Rim. Since my own positionality does not include these “unique perspectives,” I had to let their voices speak through the Indigenous scholars that I included to honor and respect my relationships with these scholars. My truth is that, like Taylor, I was “sinfully underprepared” to meet this SLO, and I worry that I did more harm than good in attempting to meet this SLO because, overall, the SLO promotes multiple settler moves to innocence (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Like Tuck (in Tuck & Yang, 2012), my presentation of Alaska Native voices was often misunderstood, first, because I am not Alaska Native/Pacific Rim, and, second, because this SLO does not consider the “problematic point of evidence about the reach of the settler colonial erasure” (p. 8). Indeed, it continues to erase Alaska Native/Pacific Rim voices by situating them within settler colonial discourses.

In her final reflection, Ruby acknowledged how I have attempted to address this SLO and also demonstrates how I bungled this SLO, “This is one thing that I

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2. See Haigh (2021) for a draft manuscript, bibliography, and timeline of Alaska Native history.

feel that I have learned a lot more about. There's uniqueness with Alaskan/Pacific Rim perspectives because the writing is based more on community and living in smaller communities. There's a closer connection to nature and natural paths in life." Ruby was responding to some of the course texts by Alaska Native authors and supplemental materials on Indigenous feminism. And in a later reflection in response to the same SLO, Ruby reflected, "I learned so much about cultural writings . . . I am proud of learning more about writing about other people, other genders, and other communities."

Her learning is problematic for me, though, because it doesn't necessarily help her "understand the uniqueness of Alaskan or Pacific Rim perspectives" nor does she necessarily "apply" those perspectives in her writing for the humanities, professions, or sciences. Rather, Ruby practices open-mindedness (Picower, 2021). She enjoyed reading (consuming) these texts but she isn't yet doing anything with them to give power back to the Indigenous voices. This is the colonial space that this SLO kept me and my students in. The SLO demands that we include Alaska Native and Pacific Rim voices or perspectives, but it doesn't really ask us to do much with them beyond consumption, a rather colonizing act in itself.

Furthermore, this SLO asks instructors to fit these Indigenous perspectives into academic genres of writing that are not relational, reciprocal, or accountable to the perspectives being shared. In asking students like Ruby to think about how these texts might apply within an academic discipline and asking students to write about these texts using disciplinary/academic genres, we have "met" the intent of the learning outcome. What we haven't done is ask students to center these Indigenous voices within their own Indigenous perspectives, their own "genres" because this SLO centers Whiteness more than it centers the Alaska Native and Pacific Rim perspectives it is intended to help students learn about.

While we must also consider what we are teaching and how those concepts and ideas decolonize our classrooms by giving land/power back to those from whom it was stolen, we also need to be cognizant about how we enact those colonizing ideals, e.g., rewarding higher academic acculturation with higher grades and following SLOs which we know are racist and colonizing. For example, traditional letter-based grading creates a hierarchy of knowledge with those who have the most academic acculturation performing at the top of the grading tier whereas those who are historically excluded do not always see their effort and labor rewarded with higher grades. I have had students who struggle with writing a traditional academic argument because they have explained that arguing against elders/scholars would not be allowed in their culture. However, am I remiss in not teaching them, then, how to write a traditional argument with naysayers and rebuttals because other classes might expect them to know this White-centered academic genre? There is a tension between what the institution demands from a first-year writing class—those traditional, White-centered "rules"—and what (at least one) SLO suggests it wants.

## An Epistemology: Our Stories Are Our Truth

Epistemology is “how we come to have knowledge, or how we know that we know something” (Wilson, 2008, p. 33). Like Wilson (2008), Powell et al. (2014), Lee Maracle (1990), and King (2003), I believe that our lived experiences—our stories—shape our reality. We know what we know because our bodies, minds, and spirits have experienced them and our relationship with these experiences has shown us what is real and true for us. Within an Indigenous ontology, this, of course, means that there are multiple truths because every person has to find their own truth through their own experiences and relationships. Unfortunately, a lot of students, particularly those who have been historically excluded, seem to have the story that they are not “good writers,” that they aren’t good learners. Their experiences have told them that writing is difficult, and they worry that they’ll never know the rules that earn As. Jane shows this in her reflection, “I think learning how to write is important to me. As stupid as this sounds, I truly don’t understand English grammar and the importance of why essays and formal letters or whatever have to be written in such a way to please someone.” It isn’t that Jane wasn’t capable of doing the work or that she was a “bad” writer, although her truth seems to be that she is not a good writer because she doesn’t know the “rules.” Although Jane seems to believe that following the rules equals “good” writing, she also questioned why those rules were in place and who made those rules. Her comment is further complicated because I don’t grade on these grammatical rules that she is most concerned with. I do focus on “pleasing someone,” though, in that my classes focus on rhetorical situations and that audience awareness is important to “good” writing. In Jane’s lived experience, Jane suggests that good writing is a set of rules to be followed even while she questions the true purpose of those rules.

My epistemology began to shift as I understood that grades were not actually relational to students’ learning. I wanted a grading model that changed the focus from “what the teacher wants” to “what am I learning” for my students, that encouraged risk-taking in writing by focusing the grade on labor and metacognition. Rosie wrote, “Even writing these [reflections], I have never done something like this for a class before (maybe once for a project) and I am learning a lot about my writing and how to write with a purpose in mind.” Students like Rosie were actually engaging with their writing and learning through metacognition. However, my grading model was flawed.

## A Methodology and Axiology, or How I Failed

In order to develop a relational assessment practice that centered students’ learning, I designed a more reflective participatory assessment that gives students more agency in determining their course grades. Students wrote a reflection on their learning after each final project and at the end of the course by responding

to a series of questions that asked them to think about how they had practiced SLOs, what they learned about writing, what the SLOs did *not* show about their learning, and then I asked them to “grade” their learning and writing process (not just their final product) throughout this project and to explain why they felt they had earned that grade. To receive the grade they suggested, I expected students to support their claims about learning with evidence from their work and course materials, which helped to show that they were doing the work. A video lecture about the learning reflections and sample responses showed students what I hoped to see in their reflections. Their labor was the ultimate factor in whether or not they received the grade they recommended.

Sometimes students were too hard on themselves, and I proposed a higher grade because their work and their reflections showed that they were practicing the outcomes, which I would explain with specific evidence in my feedback to each student on their reflection. Grades could also be lowered if they did not actually do the work but still recommended a higher grade (for example, one student recommended an A for their final grade but only completed two of three projects which, per my syllabus, stated that they could not earn higher than a C). While project grades helped students see where they were currently, only the final learning reflection provided the actual final grade as I encouraged students to reflect on what didn’t work, too, and how they learned through that “failure.” For the most part, students received the grade they recommended.

I thought that this model of assessment helped me develop relationships with students through feedback and coaching rather than penalizing them for their ability to follow rules, and I believed that students would develop their own relationships with the course content by applying the content to their own learning goals, the course outcomes, and predicting how what they had learned about writing would help them in their future academic and professional goals. I was trying to let students show how these SLOs were actually practiced and measurable. To be honest, it didn’t fully work.

The piece that didn’t work was my methodology, which still focused on SLOs because I felt that helped me remain accountable to the institution, an accountability which I know firsthand is necessary for keeping a job but also forces new teachers like myself to perform in ways that contradict what we know is true and right. That focus on SLOs didn’t help me stay accountable to my students, though, which brings me to my axiology: what is worth knowing? When I think about my assessment axiology, I felt like I had to uphold the institutional SLOs even when I knew they were upholding racist/settler colonial paradigms because that was part of the stated expectations for my continued employment and tenure track. First, I liked my job, and I wanted to keep it. Through past experiences, I’ve learned that following the rules in these places is important to staying employed, but that’s another story. Secondly, I think there needs to be some commonalities among courses with different instructors, and SLOs give the illusion of providing commonalities, or so I thought. Despite these factors, I also believed that

my department's SLOs didn't fully reflect our institution or our community. Our SLOs focused on standard White supremacist writing concepts and practices:

- Establish credibility and persuasive power for an audience;
- Demonstrate understanding that composing is a process;
- Demonstrate consistent use of a broad range of conventions and genres that conform to the goals of writing in the professions, humanities, or sciences;
- And, as explained earlier, understand the uniqueness of Alaskan or Pacific Rim perspectives.

Since these were the standards to which I was being held accountable as an “effective” teacher, I tried to incorporate the SLOs and to unpack what they might mean with/to my students. What I learned is that you cannot make a set of racist and settler colonial standards into something they are not.

As I read students' learning reflections, I saw how my methodology for assessment made teaching and learning more relational, reciprocal, and accountable in some ways but it failed in other ways: I asked students to tell their own story of learning throughout the semester, to explain their relationships with concepts, course materials, and learning activities; however, I asked them to frame it in a way that was not student or learning focused. Their judgments were still anchored in dominant White language habits (HOWL). Additionally, I still maintained power over their final grade; it was my judgment on whether or not they received the grade they recommended. I tried to maintain an equitable ecology that focused on their labor, but some students didn't represent their labor as well as others when asked to show their learning in relationship to the SLOs.

I found the students' responses to be affirming in that they were understanding important course concepts about writing from rhetorical situations to more “nuts and bolts” tasks like organizing their essays and avoiding logical fallacies. And several mentioned that their writing had “improved” or that they were “stronger writers.” Rosie explains after the first project in their course, “This writing project helped me improve my writing style and sentence structure. I cannot pull exact evidence, but I am sure you can see from my rough drafts and final drafts, there is a difference.” And Tina writes at the end of the course, “I think I have improved a lot from the start of the course and shown real growth in my writing skills. At the beginning I was not confident and now I feel better about my writing and want to continue writing.”

Even when students did not fully understand these SLOs, they found their own space—their own pockets of meaning and connections to what they were learning—to think about what their writing and how this learning might apply to other courses and other areas of their lives by acknowledging what the SLOs *didn't* show. Some students focused more on what they learned about the topics they had chosen for their written assignments because that learning was important

to their goals while others focused on their overall growth. Andre wrote in their final reflection,

The learning outcomes failed to show the general expansion of my writing knowledge. Until I started taking college courses, I was very hesitant about my writing skills, and writing was one of my least favorite subjects. Through my three college semesters, I have been [writing] a substantial amount more than middle school, and I expect to do a lot more, so it is imperative to be confident in my writing. . . . I believe [this course] significantly increased my writing confidence, and greatly expanded my knowledge of scholarly articles in particular.

Carter adds, “The learning outcomes show a general idea of what is learned in the project. What I learned aside from those was primarily that writing takes time, research, and multiple drafts.” In retrospect, this confidence and growth in their writing *should* be the focus of their learning and reflected in their final grade. Shayenne writes, “The learning outcomes don’t give room to explain my opinions on humanities, which I feel is also important.” They want to show that their own ideas, their own meaning-making, is relevant to the course even though it is not captured through the SLOs.

## A Few Lessons in Teaching and Learning

So, what comes next? Like Carter said, “writing takes time, research, and multiple drafts,” and so does assessment. My ontology and epistemology didn’t change; I knew that traditional grading practices were holding back some students, often those who have been historically excluded. In my own post-semester reflections, I realized that the way I had presented the SLOs to students may have led to some of their misunderstanding and confusion, and I began to think about how I might revise my methodology to better fit with what my students had taught me. Their reflections shifted my axiology that accountability meant being accountable to institutional SLOs; instead, I realized that students learned a lot more about writing than what was captured in four statements that upheld “habits of White, middle- to upper class, monolingual English language users”—which is my own positionality (Inoue, 2021, “The White Supremacy of SLOs,” para. 2). In order to truly decenter Whiteness in my assessment practices, I have to decenter the SLOs and my White-centered methodology. I have to listen to my students.

I will continue to refine my teaching and assessment as I keep moving away from SLOs as the center of learning and, instead, truly focus on students’ learning and writing goals. Ultimately, I want students’ final grades to show how they have grown as a writer and learner, so even if they “failed” at a concept or assignment, they learned through it. J-Co was a confident student in my fall 2020 courses, frequently pointing out that they had taken AP courses in high school

where they had already “covered” these concepts, but their writing did not always meet the levels of their confidence. Despite some “failures” in final projects, J-Co connected course materials and activities to show that they were learning the concepts—even when they did not practice it in their final written projects. In the second project reflection, J-Co explained, “Despite the recent revision, I still feel that some of my points are lacking evidences. My paragraphs may not have some smooth transitions and some incorporation of the quotes may have been awkwardly placed.” This comment demonstrates how J-Co is aware of some of the concepts we talked about during the project—claims and evidence, transitions, including source quotes and documentation—which they know are not fully developed in their final written product. They may have had difficulty practicing those concepts in their own writing, but J-Co could also look at their writing and identify what was still needed to “make it better.” Allowing students to learn from “failure” will become an even more critical component of my assessment that further shows how students are practicing relationality and reciprocity.

I’ve tried to make sure that students can claim their own space in their learning about writing by creating conditions which afford more agency to participate in how their learning is represented within the institution through continued changes to my grading practices. I want to empower students to develop their own reciprocal and accountable relationships with their learning. We do this by collaboratively crafting the ecology in which judgments and assessments of their learning and languaging take place. Rather than focusing on SLOs, I now ask students to measure their success by their own learning goals: What did you want to learn? How did you do it? What worked and didn’t work? What do you still want to learn? Their language determines how they will be assessed, and this focus on the students’ goals for their assessment holds me more accountable to their learning needs as we adjust what we should do in class based on their goals. I have to be more relational as I begin to understand and know my students more deeply. There is more give-and-take in this relationship, more reciprocity, as both students and I have to communicate what we want to happen in the classroom and how those things will be assessed. Like my students, I, too, must learn from my failure and continually seek to improve my practice.

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