Chapter 6. I'm the Problem, It's Me: A Story of Reflection and Failure from a White Girl Writing Teacher

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I tell myself that I am an intersectional feminist and that I am not like others—unaware of my privileges and insistent that I am not part of the Whiteness problem that permeates our society and the fields of knowledge-making like liberal arts, and especially writing and composition. I say that I am aware of and account for the intersectional aspects of myself: I am a White, late-thirties, graduate school educated, able-bodied, heterosexual, cis-gendered female from the suburbs in Northern California. I also consider myself an antiracist writing studies scholar. An intersectional, antiracist, White girl writing scholar and teacher. Is that even possible? I say yes, of course. And, that it *must* be possible. I feel that because of my positionality—a White scholar in a predominantly White field—my writing pedagogy *must* be intersectional and antiracist. These are not practices that are additive or something we can delve into if we feel like specializing in them. They are foundational to the field and our practices. I provide these details about my scholarly commitments to acknowledge that I am invested and seeking accomplice-level engagement when it comes to dismantling White supremacy and Whiteness in my daily life and in my writing pedagogy (Green, 2020).[1] However, I have often failed. How radical can a White girl writing teacher really be?

Because of my privileged positionalities, I see calling out and challenging Whiteness in writing pedagogy as my most important responsibility. As White writing scholars, "we have to acknowledge our multiple identities (within ourselves and across the classroom community), our particular disciplinary lenses within an interdisciplinary context, and pedagogical tools to foster that shift in our students, and also to help them figure out what power and hope they have to work toward social justice" (Ortiz et. al., 2018, p. 110). I have to harness that shift for students through my own teaching practices while also occupying and benefiting from many spaces of privilege in my daily life and in the university.

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1. In "Letters on Moving from Ally to Accomplice," Neisha-Anne S. Green coins the term "accomplice" in order to draw a distinction between the performative allyship of White writing scholars and teachers and the necessary participatory activism needed to enact concrete, material equity. Green argues that "accomplices take the necessary risks that really move towards inclusivity, diversity, equity, and equality" (*2020*, p. 288).

I acknowledge that I, like everyone to some degree, have work to do, and that's okay. So, I must be in constant conversation with myself asking: How is it that, even with the best of intentions and investments in diversity and equity, I still perpetuate White language supremacy in my writing pedagogy? To address this question, the chapter explores how writing scholars and teachers like me, a White cis-gendered female, can engage in critical self-reflective work in order to cultivate intersectional, interdisciplinary, and, antiracist writing pedagogies.

A Failed Attempt at Creating a Collaborative Assessment Ecology

In my writing courses, I draw from Paulo Freire's and Ira Shor's notions of liberatory, student-centered collaborative learning; Gloria Anzaldúa's work on the fluidity of identity, language diversity and intersectionality; and Asao Inoue's constructions of antiracist writing assessment ecologies and their push against habits of White language (HOWL). For me, when I think about and attempt to cultivate collaborative assessment ecologies, I acknowledge that our courses still operate within university/institutional expectations and curriculums that we know uphold White language supremacy (WLS). So, while I use a version of a grading contract that emphasizes feedback and revision rather than points and percentage-chasing grading, I must still award students letter grades at the end. I am beholden to university and department language and practices, in the end, even if what we do in the classroom attempts to disrupt those practices. Because of this, my first step in creating a collaborative assessment ecology is having students engage with and create an awareness of the inextricable associations between race and language, illustrating a need for our writing assessments to be antiracist and equitable at their core (Inoue, 2015a, p. 29). So, in an attempt to combat my complicity in WLS, in myself and in my writing pedagogy, I build collaborative processes of providing feedback and revision into my courses. I, like you, know that writing assessment teaches students how to write—and that I teach my students how to write more through feedback than anything else. So, I thought, if assessment is crucial to understanding how to write, then why are students often left out of the process?

Collaborative Rubric Design Activity

For each major project in my writing courses, a rubric catered to the specific task is created. The rubric is the main assessment tool for all stages of the particular assignment and students will use it as a guide for composing their writing, as a template for giving peer feedback during writing workshops, and I use it to provide students feedback on the drafts of the project that they turn in to me. Since I frontload my first-year writing courses with Freire, Anzaldúa, and Inoue, I signal to my students (through readings and discussions) that White thinking

and White stories are *not* the center of knowledge-making and language.[2] I come from the camp that students can handle these kinds of texts and these kinds of conversations—and they do—every time. Reading diverse texts is often the first place students are expected to engage with/in a student-driven classroom and they do so by working closely with academic texts writing instructors work with. An approach like this is essentially what Douglas Downs and Elizabeth Wardle discuss in *Writing About Writing* (2020), where students explore assumptions about writing and do research on different kinds of writing, making writing itself the subject to focus on rather than other topics or issues. I also want to note that, in a chapter and collection focused on judgment, I have included various student reactions and voices without direct quotations or names, so it is still me interpreting their responses and reflecting on them. I have tried to stay as true to their words as possible.

Drafting the Rubric, Stage One: Analyzing and Deconstructing the Prompt

In the first stages of the collaborative rubric activity, students are introduced to the prompt, a literacy narrative that asks students to compose a narrative about something that mattered to them as a child and connect that object, experience, or person to their development as readers and writers. It tells them that narratives should have a beginning, middle, and end, and that the narrative can be written, visual, audial, or a combination. Students are asked to first read the prompt to understand what it's asking and then ask them to read it again and annotate it like they would an article or essay we read for class and summarize its rhetorical situation. In stage one, students simply read the prompt and do so twice, in different ways. The first reading should be done *with the grain*, which instructs students to seek comprehension: What's the argument? What am I looking for? What immediately stands out? Then, students go back and read *against the grain*, which instructs students to interrogate the text: What's confusing? What doesn't seem to make sense? What don't I know that I need to know?[3] Students have previously done this reading exercise with the Freire, Anzaldúa, and Inoue texts we read in the first few weeks so they come into rubric design familiar with such practices.

All three of these critical scholars help frame critical reading and thinking through practice. Freire (1970) asks students to think about the systems of power they're in in higher education and how those structures impose dominant group

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2.   I usually assign, say, Chapter 2 of Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Anzaldúa's "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" chapter from *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), and the Intro/Chapter 1 and Appendices from Inoue's *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies* (2015a).

3.   This is what Peter Elbow explains as the "believing and doubting game" in *Writing Without Teachers* (1973).

norms (re: White) and exclude marginalized voices (p. 80-81). Anzaldúa (1987) gets teachers and students to think about but through the lens of language being inextricably tied to one's intersectional identity—and, especially, important—her assertion that robbing a person of their language is a violent act; one that strips someone of their personhood. Her text switches between English and Chicana Spanish—a direct challenge to reading with the grain, since through her text, students must read against and challenge their notions of traditional, normed academic work (p. 58-59). And Inoue specifically asks students *and* teachers to think about how they replicate those dominant, White, power systems when we grade and assess language. Each scholar not only gives students and teachers critical perspectives from which to think about language and writing but also gives them critical practices to use in teaching and composing. So, when we go into analyzing a prompt, for instance, it's my aim that students will now be thinking about systems of education, language practices, and identity in deconstructing, intersectional ways.[4] However, at this moment, they are still mostly thinking rather than doing.

   After reading and analyzing the prompt, students individually annotate the prompt, taking note of anything that stands out or seems important in order to achieve the task at hand. They only learn to identify the purpose, audience, voice, tone, and genre for the project but also think critically about how such components of language are dictated by the dominant, normative, elite, White, ableist habits of language (Inoue, 2015a). Students have read pieces of Inoue's first chapter in *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies* so they get a history of what he terms a White racial habitus that permeates language and writing assessment.[5] Having conversations with students about how audience and audience expectations have been decided and controlled predominantly by White male administrators and others in similar positions of power opens up discussion of subjectivity and positionality organically and in connection with who and how we assess and practice language.

Drafting the Rubric, Stage Two: Putting the Rubric Together Collaboratively

In the second stage, students form small groups and individually share their summaries of the prompt with each other. After each person shares, it's up to the group to come up with a list of what the prompt I've created is asking them to

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   4.   It's important for me to note that most of the campuses I've taught at have large White and Latinx student populations and a small Black student population. One larger omission from this curriculum is Black writing scholars, and while not intentional, it illustrates how readings that we teach matter in exploring the intersectionality of identity and language.

   5.   Students are also introduced to antiracist writing assessment via the grading contracts that I used in my courses, so from the beginning of the course they are already immersed in such language and histories.

do (like three to four bullet points) and then another list with how they can go about accomplishing those things. These two lists become the basis for the rubric we create. They consist of two key components: what's being asked and how to demonstrate those things. At the end of the generative small group work, students then choose one or two representatives from their group to write their lists on an open google doc projected to the whole class.

As a class, we look for trends across groups and formally decide two main categories for the rubric. Interestingly, students have created essentially two categories for assessment. Category 1 includes *what* will be evaluated, a checklist of sorts, and Category 2 includes a scale for *how* each item on that checklist will be evaluated, meaning what kind of feedback they're looking for and how they'd like their writing assessed and/or what would be most valuable to them. I then take what they've constructed, place it in the rubric function on Canvas—maybe add words or phrases for clarification (this is where my expertise, and yes, implicit bias comes in)—and prepare to show it to the whole class the next day. On that final day, we review how it looks in its final form in Canvas and make any changes we see fit. We've moved a bit into doing things in this stage rather than just thinking about language diversity—but are we doing things that matter? Are we making an actual antiracist assessment ecology, or just saying that we are?

Drafting the Rubric, Stage Three: Instructor Revision, HOWL, and Critical-Self Reflection

While I set out to include and collaborate with students in this assessment practice, it turns out that most of this assessment ecology that I'd claimed to be inclusive and collaborative is still mostly dictated by me. I've created the prompt that they read and base their rubric creation from and then I still have the last say in the final form of the rubric that I'll ultimately use to assess their writing. The only inclusion I've done is ask them to deconstruct *my* prompt, put together rubric criteria, and then review it again myself before I use it. Most of this assessment ecology is *me* doing the assessment even though students get to help create the rubric. Again, we can describe my own positionality in relation to Marilyn Frye's (1992) notion of Whiteliness and its paternalistic power hoarding, two characteristics of White supremacy culture and White language supremacy. Essentially, even in my good intentions, students in this ecology are being measured and judged and, in turn, I'm using their work for my own purposes.

For me, the major goal of collaborative rubric design is to engage with the demographic of students currently in front of me and their academic, career, and personal goals and move away from what Inoue calls Habits of White Language, or HOWL.[6] These habits are conditioned and constitute ways of doing language

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6.   See an extensive breakdown of HOWL in Inoue's *Above the Well: An Antiracist Argument from a Boy of Color* (2021).

and its practices. Habits such as an "Unseen, Naturalized Orientation to the World" illustrate how Whiteness operates as the default way of being in language practices. It's "an orientation, a starting point, of one's body in time and space that makes certain habits, capacities, practices, languages, and ideas reachable" and "it assumes, or takes as universal, its own proximities or capabilities to act and do things that are inherited through one's shared space" (Inoue, *Habits of White Language).* White language, as seen in this definition, often takes precedent in teaching and assessing language. English departments and writing programs were developed on the basis of standardized, White discourses, and students—regardless of their own intersecting identities and language habits—are taught that in order to be considered literate, they also needed to learn and perform HOWL. White language supremacy is not thought of as an add-on or addition to the curriculum compared to equitable and fairness-based practices like antiracist writing assessment; White language supremacy is foundational, which makes anti-White language supremacy practices essential pedagogical practices for White teachers and scholars of assessment.

Much of what the collaborative rubric activity engages with is this first habit of White language as I, the White girl/teacher subjectivity, am leading. The activity illuminated how much "university speak" (i.e., HOWL) and discourse is reflected in *my* writing prompt, not just in the students' writing because they were really still just reiterating how well a task or skill was being done according to my own internalized White language supremacy rather than investigating the social and ideological constructs last lead to assessing writing in certain ways. Because I have not framed the purpose of the activity and our interrogation of language and assessment practices in such ways, students do what they've been trained to do and perform the language of the university by using the language of the writing prompt in the rubric. And I'm the one that created the prompt. Since I don't frame the assessment activity, it makes sense when I consider I've performed the language of the university and of standardized education my entire life because I am still, in various ways, acting as a White girl scholar. The two most prominent HOWL in the rubric that students created are Ruled Governed, Contractual Relationships and Clarity, Order, and Control.

The first HOWL apparent in my rubric design activity: Rule Governed, Contractual Relationships attaches importance to "laws, rules, fairness as sameness and consistency so fair classrooms and other spaces are understood to be ones that treat every individual exactly the same regardless of who they are, how they got there, where they came from, or what their individual circumstances are" while little to no importance is given to "interconnectedness with others, relatedness, or feelings in such classrooms or in other arrangements, activities, and relationships (Inoue, *Habits of White Language*). Individuals keep difficulties and problems to themselves because the important thing is the contractual agreement made, which is about consistent (the same for everyone) policy" (Inoue, *Habits of White Language*). My students were simply highlighting the White discourse

I was promoting them for in the classroom. Here's the rubric we created for the literacy narrative prompt:

> Rubric for Literacy Narrative:
> 1. How well does the content of the narrative provide detailed descriptions of event(s) using imagery and descriptive language?
> 2. How well does the structure of the narrative follow logical chronological order of events and/or processes? Does the narrative have a beginning, middle, and ending?
> 3. How well does the writing demonstrate a use of voice/tone appropriate for a narrative?
> 4. How well does the narrative forward an important claim or observation with which the reader should walk away?

I am trying to engage the literacy conversations from the texts we begin the class with by asking students to reflect on their histories and relationships with literacy. However, when re-examining the rubric we produced as a class, the "how well does this do that" kind of question still ends up activating my own HOWLing. That kind of question depends on my own judgments and assessments of students' writing, maintaining a hierarchy of judgment in which the reader, the instructor, dictates the habits of language most valued. It reads like every other rubric my students have seen in writing classes like this one.

Despite its attempts to work dimensionally, as Inoue (2015a) describes it, and guide "readers (judges) to explain their observations and demands that multiple readers read and provide observations" and to "not assume that there is a standard by which we can judge or rank any dimension of writing" (para. 6), focusing on just the design of the rubric and not *how* it will be implemented caused the activity to fall short of active antiracist engagement. I had created a rubric that involved students, sure, but I had ended my practice at creating the rubric (including their diverse voices) and not thought much about how then it would be implemented to support antiracist assessment ecologies. Students, then, in my collaborative rubric activity, reproduced the standardized English I was seeking to deconstruct and dismantle but am still, essentially, complicit in it. Students have been so trained and immersed in White language supremacy that they fear going against it. During this activity, students often reiterated that they just want to get an A, however possible.

Letter grading concerns were at the forefront of students' minds, placing an immense amount of power in the hands of the instructor. Students see the instructor as the gatekeeper of their grades that the university expects them to have in order to be considered successful and worthy. And, as a producer of HOWL myself, I almost instinctively "cleaned up" the rubric in order for it to be in line with student learning outcomes and my own White teacher positionality. While students have done exactly what was asked of them—they picked apart the

language of the prompt in order to put the same language in the rubric—it doesn't give much leeway for addressing the prompt in any *other* way. It's still essentially my way because I have final say in its edits and application. I am still the power that will use and apply the rubric to assign students an assessment or grade so they can fit into the criteria of the program or the institution. The rubric students created also HOWLs, as Inoue puts it, since the prompt itself is rooted in habits of White language.

However, my reflections move beyond the White language habits embedded in my prompt and rubric. The failed attempt, here, is more about the assessment ecology itself and who is doing the judging and how those judgments circulate in that ecology. My White girl habitus *is* the nature of my judgments in general and in the writing classroom—and those judgments are still used and circulated by students. They are still listening to me HOWL at them and the ecology encourages them to stay in line with me and be conditioned in my ways. Since the rubric assumes my position as final judge and, therefore, my own HOWLing, it aids in circulating my HOWLing as well.

Additionally, the activity reinforces another White language habit: Clarity, Order and Control. This habit, according to Inoue's HOWL (2021) asserts that "rigor, order, clarity, and consistency are all valued highly and tightly prescribed, often using a dominant, standardized English language that comes from a White, middle-to-upper-class group of people" and does the opposite of what Anzaldúa argues, forcing "language [to] be separated from those who offer it" while little value given to "sensual experiences, considerations of the body, sensations, and feelings" (para. 16). Standardized English, as Baker-Bell (2020b) points out, relies on and reinforces White discourse as the preferred, formal, normal, articulate way of doing language—the epitome of literacy. Phrases such as "detailed descriptions," "beginning, middle, end," indicate that students understand a set of rhetorical conventions and style, if that style is rooted in a five-paragraph essay format and doesn't really consider multiple genres or modalities of writing as it assumes one kind of structure and logic in the reader's head, my head. A beginning, middle, and end, essentially, is a discourse that's influenced by a Westernized and White linear sense of order that can and should be chronologically composed.

In the construction of my own prompt, I'd assumed a White supremacist notion of order and narrative, something that likely happens often, considering the prevalence of White writing teachers in universities today. Including students in the process of creating assessment tools does loop them directly into the writing process and allows them to explore the relationships between identity, language, and power. Inclusion in the rubric design process gives students a chance to be included in their assessments. I thought that simply including students in the process usually attributed solely to the instructor would pretty much magically do the work of removing racial bias through the osmosis of it not being only White folks in the room. I thought that it's the nature of their inclusion—their ways of knowing and being—in the assessment ecology that does the critical work of

antiracist and anti-exclusionary language practices. I was kinda right. But also pretty wrong. As Inoue notes in the first chapter of this collection, "a rubric may start as something in the ecology that represents writing expectations, but later in the process of peer review becomes a heuristic that makes a process of response," essentially training students in judgment. And, since these kinds of rubric design activities "[offer] opportunities for students to reflect upon their own relations to larger racialized languaging next to who they understood themselves to be as embodied writers," I'd achieved my purpose of awareness and engagement in understanding linguistic diversity, HOWL, and WLS.

However, like Megan McIntyre's experiences as a White writing teacher in Chapter 3, I haven't particularly been left out of the academy and its HOWL, but rather, I have been raised in and reinforced them, making my assessment practices and judgements *rooted* in them. We didn't necessarily have a lot of money when I was growing up, but I was always considered "good" at reading and writing because my positionality in the world reinforced that a White, settler colonial language was constructed as the superior language. I had access to it and it was reinforced my entire life. I had the luxury of having rather positive and joyful experiences with writing throughout school and it wasn't until graduate school that I was introduced to my complicity WLS. And this is where I first ran into trouble in the creation of a collaborative assessment ecology. I really had no idea how much I was reinforcing WLS habits through my own linguistics practices and overall acceptance of and lack of challenges to the system. I was behaving more like a typical White liberal elitist, thinking that my essentially superficial and performative notions of inclusion were enough to absolve me of responsibility. Like McIntyre, who "assumed that giving students the opportunity to participate would be enough to make [the] assessment process more equitable," I was influenced by my good memories of writing and reading as a White student. I'd never been taught that my "language habits and rhetorical practices are inappropriate for classrooms or wrong" like Black and Latine students have throughout their lives—and that's where a necessary component of my pedagogy, as a White girl writing teacher, is critical self-reflection, especially when it comes to my built-in WLS judgment.

A White Girl in the Writing Classroom

In the summer of 2018, I spent a week in a seminar at the RSA Summer Institute. It was my first institute ever, as a newly-minted Ph.D. candidate, and the seminar I'd been lucky enough to get accepted into was called "At the Intersection of Rhetorics and Feminisms." I was struck the most by the presence of White women scholars, myself included, in a seminar focused on feminism and *intersectionality* as rhetorical theory and praxis. Perhaps the generic conception of intersectionality as a cross of rhetoric and feminism rather than a theory that examines intersecting and interlocking axis of identity, systemic structures, and how bodies

interact with material things like policies and resources resulted in a co-opting and mainstreaming of a people of color theory for White folks' ends. The White women in the seminar seemed to be both aware and unaware of their Whiteness and the material conditions that Whiteness created. It was easier for us to ignore the ways our own Whiteness created particular consequences; they, we, in our minds, were part of the solution, not the problem.[7] We, as self-proclaimed inter-sectional feminists and antiracist scholars, led with how we were different from other White women scholars—we were *not* ready to discuss or focus on how we were still complicit in those norms and discourses, even as we were being called out for them in real time. When the few scholars of color in the seminar spoke up, often to tell of an experience with racism in their careers or at their universities, I could *feel* the White women in the room disconnect from the conversation. We're not *those* White folks, we thought.

In this seminar, a woman of color spoke up about her feelings of being shut down during small group discussions. The dismissive behavior toward her had been enough for her to tell the seminar leaders that she did not want to continue participating in the seminar. I know all of this because, when she returned, she spoke to the entire room about it. She told the room how she felt slighted, shut down, and silenced by White group members during small discussions—as if she and her work didn't merit the same breath and time of other scholars in the groups. While watching others like me in the room recoil in discomfort, I caught myself putting my head down and disengaging from the conversation. I felt more ashamed than accountable. I recoiled, not wholly in an act of disagreement, but rather from discomfort.

The theme of the institute that year was hospitality, so the irony astounds that this seminar would lead to some of the most difficult and uncomfortable discussions of racism and sexism. The seminar had the *intent* to be hospitable but, here, our traditional (re: White, Eurocentric) rhetorical practices were actually still furthering inhospitable spaces and othering. Because of what they embody, White bodies like mine are often silencing, belittling, loud, exclusionary, interruptive, disrespectful—and often get cast under the veil of "well I'm here so at least I'm trying" or, "we're all bad feminists, that's the point!" Or, even "we can mess up and know we'll be forgiven because that's the point of feminism!" All utterances of what I heard White women scholars say at some point in the seminar. Most of us sitting there and thinking that simply by being in the seminar that made us not part of the problem. These are declarations that many of us make in academia, myself included, especially when it comes to our approaches to teaching and assessing writing.

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7. It's easy and almost like a reflex for White women to scapegoat White men without applying the same critical lenses to ourselves. A majority of White women voting for Trump in 2016 illustrates how we'll often choose the securities awarded to Whiteness and misogyny.

Most spaces are hospitable to White bodies and our practices and policies reflect that. This is the problem with holding onto our righteous authority or expertise. That authority, as Marilyn Frye's notion of Whiteliness describes, and/or expertise has been conditioned in standardized English language practices and is most apparent in how we assess student writing according to a standardized, White discourse and conventions (Inoue, 2015a). In "White Woman Feminist," (1992) she had been taught and conditioned to be a judge and overseer of societal norms. She writes that,

> Whitely people generally consider themselves to be benevolent and good-willed, fair, honest and ethical. The judge, preacher, peacemaker, martyr, socialist, professional, moral majority, liberal, radical, conservative, working men and women—nobody admits to being prejudiced, everybody has earned every cent they ever had, doesn't take sides, doesn't hate anybody, and always votes for the person they think best qualified for the job, regardless of the candidates' race, sex, religion or national origin, maybe even regardless of their sexual preferences. (p. 85)

In this Whiteliness, White folks can and do excuse a lot of problematic behavior and ways in which they've been conditioned to reinforce or police structures of Whiteness and norms. Such norms, as Frye explains, teach Whitely and Christian folks like herself that they know right from wrong and that they had "the responsibility to see to it right was done; that there were others who did not know what is right and wrong and should be advised, instructed, helped and directed by us," leading to a conditioned behavior that people should "await the judgment or instruction of another (White) person who does" (p. 85). These conditions and norms influence, of course, are reflected in the ways in which we teach and assess language and writing.

Since our positionalities, our ways of knowing and being, intersect with one another through our judgments of and with language in classrooms, involving students in writing assessment brings our various and ever-changing intersectional and politicized subjectivities into play in conspicuous or self-conscious ways. However, the example I've illustrated in the previous sections is not a successful example of student-teacher assessment collaboration—and that matters. The failed attempt led to my own reflection and awareness of how, even in my best of intentions, I still perpetuate the White supremacist language practices our departments and universities are immersed in. This chapter provides a template for how White writing scholars and teachers can engage in the same kinds of critical self-reflective work they so often ask of their students in order to cultivate antiracist writing pedagogies.

My White girl subjectivity and other intersecting positionalities matter in how I, as the writing teacher, am situated in and perpetuate White, mainstream, normative discourse. So, then, each student's own intersectional positionality

matters to how they are situated and constituted in the assessment ecology. Altering the nature of the assessment ecology shifts power dynamics and, in an attempt to challenge my own White girl subjectivity, I invite students in to design the rubrics we'll use in class to assess writing in various stages. The idea of including students in rubric design works to deconstruct the teacher-as-authority and students-as-receptors relationship. And, I wanted to create an assessment ecology that would challenge my own and my students White language supremacy habits.

When I took my first teaching composition course in the early 2010s, those whose work I read as experts in the field were scholars like Peter Elbow, Linda Flower, Donald Murray. They had one thing in common: they were White writing scholars. Many of these scholars discuss the importance of collaborative and inclusive work but without specific engagement with our own subjectivities, say, in the way scholars of color like Freire or Anzaldúa do. Even recently, the popular *Naming What We Know* (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015) provides excellent threshold concepts for composition pedagogy yet doesn't discuss subject positioning in relation to the key threshold concepts, thus creating a revision of those concepts just a few years later. In the 2020 revision, *(Re) Considering What We Know*, J. W. Hammond and colleagues assert that *writing assessment must be ethical*. Meaning, writing assessment practices must be centered around fairness. Since many writing programs are still largely made up of White writing instructors, many programs might make their assessments of students' writing—their assessment ecologies—unfair and unintentionally unethical. If we place fairness at the center of writing assessment practice, then we require White writing instructors and scholars of assessment to intentionally and critically reflect on their own Whiteness.

In his 2016 CWPA plenary address, Inoue argued that, "race and language are closely associated, and when we judge language in order to categorize and rank, the act of judgment becomes racist in our world. It's racism by consequence, not by intention" (p. 135). Race and language go hand in hand because they remain in a constant power struggle and ask non-White students to continuously perform the dominant White discourse in order to be successful in and beyond the university. And, since White scholars still make up the vast majority of writing programs, White writing teachers need anti-White supremacist language practices just as much as, if not more than, students. The typical writing student has become more diverse, but faculty has not. White writing scholars' ability to navigate shifting complexities in identity are crucial to doing meaningful antiracist and intersectional assessment work in writing pedagogy because without these kinds of practices we remain complicit. White writing instructors might have good intentions, but our actions can still be racist despite those intentions as our White bodies that replicate and perpetuate Whiteness are always there, and we might reproduce harmful linguistic practices out of our own conditioning, whether intentionally or not.

It's our job, then, as teachers of language and self-proclaimed inventors and promoters of linguistic diversity to be *accomplices*, *co-conspirators*, not complicit

or compliant (Chávez et al., 2012). The writing classroom offers a unique space for the disconnect between ally and accomplice to be addressed because of our status as a knowledge-making field. And, because of our close interactions with students, one way to accomplish this kind of work is *with* the students we have in front of us. Diversity efforts might appear in universities and writing programs. For instance, there has been a significant paradigm shift in recent years to even acknowledge Black Lives Matter and other social justice movements and include them in the narratives of a university. Even with such changes, there still remains a disconnect between acknowledgement/intention and lack of tangible progress and change in those universities and writing programs invested in diversity, equity, and inclusion. It is easy to make claims that you're acting in diverse ways or with inclusion in mind without substantial programmatic and pedagogical changes. Writing programs and writing teachers may make proclamations that their courses are focused on antiracist practices, yet still reinforce White language supremacy through various policies and grading policies, in particular. Since the writing classroom offers a space where knowledge, identity, and language intersect, it becomes an essential place to enact intersectional and antiracist practices that lead to changes in how we construct and use language. Despite many writing teachers' best efforts, intersections of identity still come into conflict and clash against a normed, standardized White discourse.

When You Know Better, Do Better

Of the three large, West Coast writing programs I have taught in, two have majority Latinx student populations and a majority White faculty population that's reflected in the writing program hiring and student population dynamic, which puts White language experiences, material conditions, perspectives, and how they language at the forefront of language practices and pedagogies.[8] Literacy, as we know from Chicana scholars like Anzaldúa, is inextricably tied to our identities. As Baker-Bell (2020a) argues,

> By linking the racial classifications of Black and White to language, I am challenging you, the reader, to see how linguistic hierarchies and racial hierarchies are interconnected. That is, people's language experiences are not separate from their racial experiences. Indeed, the way a Black child's language is devalued in school reflects how Black lives are devalued in the world. Similarly, the way a White child's language is privileged and deemed the norm in school is directly connected to the ways that White culture is deemed normal, neutral and similar in the world. (p. 2)

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8. Student and faculty demographic information taken from Sacramento State University website and University of California, Merced website.

Baker-Bell's argument, here, is that how we treat language in the classroom reflects how we treat people through their language outside of the classroom. There is little separation between identity and language, as Anzaldúa argued, to take away one's language is to take away their identity—an act of violence against a person's being in the world.

White instructors, then, are embedded in the privileged ways in which Westernized, settler-colonial societies view standardized discourse, making antiracist and anti-White supremacist language practices—such as critical and reflective subjectivity work—essential for White scholars and teachers in order to create antiracist assessment ecologies in which students can thrive. My students, in their deconstructions of the rubric and the language used, weren't so much highlighting what *they* thought was most important to do in the project, they were highlighting what I, the instructor, deemed most important in the prompt. I'm beholden to student and program learning outcomes that are beholden to university initiatives. How radical could I really be, then? In what ways has the White language supremacy of my classroom, outcomes, discipline created immovable boundaries so that myself and my student just go along with the herd? Or, really, how compliant in HOWL/university speak am I, still?[9] Or, really, *really*, how willing am I to risk the safety of my White body in the university? My most important finding—the practice of engaging students in rubric design—forced *me* to see how *I'm* complicit in White language practices, even though I believed myself to be challenging and radical in allowing students to participate in assessment but they're involvement was still minimal, at best, and tethered to my own HOWLing and the White language supremacy of course outcomes and academic discourses that influence the development of the course as a whole.

Each criterion on the rubric we created is what I'd initially conceived of as a problem-posing question. However, through further research and reflection, I understand that, sure, each question on the rubric is a good question but not necessarily a problem-posing question in relation to antiracist writing assessment. Each question doesn't actually pose a problem about language or its judgment. And, for Freire, to problem- pose is to pose questions that help us investigate two or more interconnected views. In the case of this rubric and in antiracist writing assessment practices, the problem-posing questions the rubric should get at are the relationships between identity and language. As Inoue (2015a) explains, one part of the problem-posing question investigates structural and social ideas of language while the other part of the question considers the personal and individual aspects of language. Here, we see again, the paradox of the White girl subjectivity I've traced throughout this chapter. The rubric illustrates what's expected

9.   Joy James and Edmund T. Gordon have a really great chapter on how we function in the academy that relates to what I gesture at here. "Afterword: Activist Scholars or Radical Subjects?" *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship.* Eds. C. R. Hale & C. Calhoun. University of California Press, 2008.

because of normed writing conventions and student outcomes and it should also grapple with the ways that each student and teacher want to exercise their own agency in language.

Take, for example, one of the rubric dimensions: "How well does the structure of the narrative follow logical chronological order of events and/or processes? Does the narrative have a beginning, middle, and ending?" In order to actually problem-pose, the question on the rubric should help both the instructor and the students consider where a convention like "logical chronological order" comes from, what they are in contrast to, *and* set those findings next to how we perform that convention in our own writing. Instead, the rubric could consider questions that pose questions about language and its judgment, not just how well something is done. Questions like: What structure does the narrative take? What is its order and what expectations of order does it adapt or resist? That Freire chapter they read at the beginning of the course popped up again and again in rubric design. I consistently heard from students that they liked and related to the notion of asking open-ended questions because it helped them "totally think better" to quote one specific first-year student, yet I still wasn't getting at the root of anti-White supremacy languaging practices because I was using Freire and the problem-posing method superficially.

How Radical Can a White Girl Writing Teacher Be?

As White writing instructors, critical self-reflection on our own positionalities and how they interfere with and contradict our intentions to be antiracist and intersectional is necessary work. It's a reminder that we have work to do, and that's okay. Part of enacting antiracist, intersectional language practices is to know your role in complicity and working to get out of it. Not only did my prompt need some serious intersectional feminist and antiracist (decolonizing, queering, etc.) framework and centering, but I also needed to add a key component that upheld my antiracist intentions—critical self-reflection. I found that I needed a kind of discourse analysis reflection component in my collaborative rubric design effort.

What I mean by this is that it would've helped if students and myself took more substantial time to *reflect* on the rubric design process themselves. Using HOWL as a tool for deconstructing standardized discourse, in the ways I've illustrated in this chapter, would help guide students and teachers in the kind of critical self-reflection needed in collaborative rubric activity. Getting students and teachers to examine habits of White language works to deconstruct those habits even in White, homogeneous classrooms, as it puts the focus on critiquing the exclusionary practices of White language habits instead of adding on and adding in diversity or diverse voices performatively. Essentially, the same structure could be implemented: the instructor, in collaboration with students, would interrogate and investigate the prompt for HOWL and then we'd revise the prompt based on what we'd discovered, with the goal of removing that "university speak" prior to

engaging in rubric design, as an initial step, but overall, working to alter the writing assessment ecology of the writing classroom.

How much more beneficial would it be to discuss *how* and *why* we're reproducing and valuing the privileged literacy of the university? This is, after all, some of the arguments that the scholars we read early on (Freire, Anzaldúa, Inoue) vehemently call out. If we develop these practices early, say in teacher training, then they become foundational to learning and teaching and dismantling White supremacist discourses through writing pedagogy. I'm not the only one who stands to benefit from such an activity. I know, now, that this needs to be part of my intersectional and antiracist practices in my writing pedagogy and have since added it to the overall activity. My argument, here, is to show that the critical self-reflection and examination and deconstruction of habits of White language is necessary for White writing instructors to combat and dismantle their own complicity in the White, Eurocentric traditions on which the field was founded. The work continues.

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