

# Chapter 7. Attending to the Elephant: Whiteness in Collaborative Assessment

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Despite my best efforts to lead with a story centering anything other than White perspectives, I open this chapter autobiographically. I do so with hesitant deliberateness, if such a thing exists, knowing that even if as a writer I deliberately center something other than White racial identity, *I* am the one doing the centering. It is *my* voice, a voice informed by experiences of being racialized White—the racial identity that is normalized as *no* racial identity—that’s being amplified. “That’s the . . . steel cage we’re in,” Asao Inoue once said (2019, p. 357). And that is a privilege attended by great responsibility. And while I don’t want to belabor the biographical details that paved the way for the teaching story I tell in this chapter, those details matter. Asao and I discussed this dilemma a lot as we developed this collection: Sometimes, we *need* to center the experiences of White racial subjects in order to reflect upon and problematize them. People who’ve benefited from White racial subjectivity *especially* need to do this work—yet so many of us who actively fight racism and self-identify as antiracists avoid talking about our experiences with subjectivity in meaningful, productive ways. We leave out important details in the service of “antiracism,” when it very well might be that the most impactful antiracist actions White people can take involve shining a light on how our subjective histories influence our perspectives—and, for educators, our pedagogies, curricular decisions, and habits of judgement. Perhaps one key, then, is to know when to center one’s White positionality and when to set it aside.

In the section that follows, I share a good deal of relevant biographical background to provide context for my shifting orientation toward antiracism when I was part of the assessment ecology I reflect on throughout the rest of the chapter. The chapter focuses on one particular assessment ecology because the radical approach I took to assessment that semester, and the palpable failures and lessons of that approach, are what inspired this collection.

## A Biographical Foundation

Although I didn’t recognize them as such until my 30s, I’ve been attuned to the material and psychological impacts of systemic racism, especially racism, from adolescence. I am a White cis-gender woman who grew up in a racially diverse, working-class neighborhood in Kankakee, Illinois, 60 miles south of Chicago. Despite the fact that “a White person stating her race is often a further demonstration of White privilege (Ahmed, 2004)” (Kim & Olson, 2017, p. 132), I believe in the necessity of “declar[ing] my race and other identity markers because

ignoring the ways in which my race manifests itself is also an act of White privilege. To work against the racist structures I benefit from, I must ‘stay implicated in what [I] critique’ (Ahmed, 2004, n.p.)” (Kim & Olson, 2017, p. 132). For that reason, throughout this reflection I attempt to call out my racialized experiences and perspective while also trying to avoid centering Whiteness, something I have struggled to do and continue to practice.

As I entered middle school in the early 1990s, I began to notice that our school district was stigmatized for its violence and underachievement and that the stigma was connected to race. We had police security and metal detectors before the Columbine massacre, when school shootings became a thing. To be honest, I’m not sure which came first: the escalating violence, or the daily presence of police in our hallways. In high school I witnessed the impacts of racial stress—usually bloody fights—nearly every day, but I witnessed that stress and those fights as a bystander. Knowing kids my age were experiencing such profound stress was deeply unsettling to me, but I did not believe I could do anything to relieve it, nor did I understand it. I in no way understood how I might be contributing to it—the central concern for me now as someone who strives toward antiracism in life, including my teaching.

Fast forward 20 years, when in graduate school I began to study critical race theory (CRT), which “set[s] out not only to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies but to transform it for the better” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 8). CRT fundamentally changed my understanding of race and racism, shifting my attention to the structural, systemic, and often hidden ways that racial signifiers or meanings are linked to social structures and everyday experiences, what Michael Omi and Howard Winant call “racial projects” (2015).

Reflecting on my past and present experiences through the lens of CRT helped me begin to recognize how I’ve participated in and/or benefited from *racist* projects. For example, I began to notice the expectations I had for being exempted from punishment when I could not get a parking ticket overturned. I also started noticing that my conception of violence failed to account for the less visible but systemic ways that Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) are injured and abused by White supremacy. My conception of violence had been limited to acts of aggression that I could see and/or hear and that were usually accompanied by outrage—acts that most often were associated with Black people in the news and in my schools growing up.

These realizations gave new meaning to a memory I previously had dismissed as absurd: in a whole-school assembly during “Silence the Violence” week in my high school, Black students argued that African American history should be offered as an alternative to our required U.S. history course—which told only a whitewashed history of European colonization—or should at least comprise a huge part of that course. Some kids got in a fistfight during that assembly, which I always thought was ironic. But CRT shows me that the real irony was the inherent violence—the structural, “silent” violence—of “Silence the Violence” week itself. That institutional focus aimed to address and extinguish only one kind of

violence, the intentional, physical violence that had been used to stigmatize Black students. In a chapter about the violence of assessment, Josh Lederman and Nicole Warwick emphasize one problem with this narrow lens: “[W]hen one looks only for intentional harm as indicating violence, the existence of structural violence becomes invisible. Focusing on intent may actually misdirect our attention from the indirect, structural violence that exists in these systems” (2018, p. 234). What I could not see at the time is that “Silence the Violence” week obscured systemic issues: not only the very curricular issue Black students in the assembly were raising but also the theme’s role in perpetuating racist tropes about Black students. Those tropes pointed to Black students’ behaviors as the primary issue administrators needed to contend with instead of the everyday, systemic violence Black students endured and the support they needed and deserved to thrive.

The Black Lives Matter movement, which began as I was learning about and reflecting on CRT in grad school, further catalyzed this realization and made me aware of the urgency of antiracism. The 2014 and 2015 Ferguson and Baltimore riots compelled me to think critically about the “silent” violences that sparked and fueled those riots in the first place: the racist assumptions people make about Black men, the prison industrial complex, the disproportionate number of childbirth-related deaths of Black women and disproportionately high Black infant mortality rates, and more. Around this time, I also took a graduate course in sociolinguistics, where I learned about standard language ideology and its role in discrimination through the work of Rosina Lippi-Green (2011). These events and studies were kindling for a sort of internal revolution, and Inoue’s chair’s address at the 2019 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) lit a match.

## The Best-Laid Plans . . .

In Fall 2019, I began a one-year visiting assistant professorship at a large community college in a wealthy, predominantly White Chicago suburb. As I planned my courses that summer, I thought about the racial and ethnic diversity of the students at this college (48% White, 27% Hispanic/Latino, 12% Asian, 7% Black or African American) and the lack of such diversity among the administration and faculty, who were predominantly White. I knew that my subject position as a White teacher of mostly BIPOC students was part of the problem of White supremacy, and I obsessively ruminated on something Inoue said to White teachers in his CCCC chair’s address:

You perpetuate White language supremacy in your classrooms because you are White and stand in front of students, as many White teachers have before you, judging, assessing, grading, professing on the same kinds of language standards, standards that came from your group of people. It’s the truth. It ain’t fair, but it’s the truth. Your body perpetuates racism, just as Black

bodies attract unwarranted police aggression by being Black. Neither dynamic is preferred, neither is right, but that's the shit—the steel cage—we're in. The sooner we can accept this fact, the sooner we can get to cutting the bars. (2019, p. 357)

I wrestled with how to account in my teaching for the racist violence tied to my White body. Part of me figured the only way to avoid perpetuating this violence would be to find a new vocation. Yet I knew that antiracist writing instruction is seriously needed, especially in the first-year composition courses that most students are required to take and that community colleges offer as affordable alternatives to gen-eds at four-year institutions. Having been trained to think critically about racialization, racism, and languaging, I felt responsible for doing this work, compelled to do it. So avoiding it wasn't an option, something Inoue made clear when he said, "The sooner we can accept this fact, the sooner we can get to cutting the bars" (2019, p. 357). I had to find ways to counter that violence by decentering my authority and by decentering Whiteness.

Inspired by Ibram Kendi's definitions of racism and antiracism, which he argues are "a marriage of . . . policies . . . and ideas," I decided to apply what I learned in graduate school in a comprehensive way, something I hadn't done before (2019, pp. 17-18). I developed a course theme of the intersections among language, identity, and power and prioritized three pedagogical strategies that I thought would counteract systemic racism in writing courses. I tried to:

- Focus readings and assignments on diverse languages, identities, and power relations. Most of our readings would decenter Whiteness through the perspectives and voices of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.
- Create conditions that construct students as decision-makers and agents of assessment, thereby decentering my authority. They would create our grading policy, together. I would serve as a sort of sounding board through the process, asking questions and identifying potential problems to help us aim for fairness and accountability. Ultimately, I would let them decide what policy would best achieve that goal.
- Center judgement and assessment as students' processes of learning (see Huot, 2002; and Inoue, 2004), which would help us to challenge and, I hoped, intentionally decenter White standards. Students would share authority over how their writing would be assessed. I would train students through assignments and activities to read and evaluate each others' work generously yet critically. I would ensure that these assignments and activities would help students meet the department's mandatory course objectives, but students would meet them mostly through their practices of assessment, that is, through the languaging they brought to the classroom. I knew that having those objectives in the first place was antithetical to student agency, but I hoped that we could find a radical way to upend them, fulfilling them even as we critiqued them.

I thought that the best approach to decentering the authority attached to my White body would be one centered in collaboration, which I knew I couldn't force but felt I should try to cultivate. I thought the co-creation of a grading policy with students would both 1) disrupt the racial hierarchy created through the act of grading that the White(ly) teacher of predominantly BIPOC students usually engages in and 2) provide opportunities for discussing racism in writing assessment. I hoped students would tie their grades only to completing/submitting the work I'd assigned, not to the assessment mechanisms we would co-create. I also hoped that our assessment practices would develop students' awareness of the judgements they make about their own and others' languaging, revealing to them how racism functions in writing assessment. To facilitate students' development of this critical language awareness, I would teach them about standard language ideology and its racist logic from Lippi-Green's work (2011), asking them to reflect critically on the assessment standards, metrics, and materials that, together, we produced. I envisioned a vibrant class, energized by discussions of identity and power and the differential stakes our language use held for us. And for several weeks in the Fall of 2019, my vision seemed to materialize.

For the first two weeks of class, students and I read about, discussed, and wrote about the problem of grades and some potential solutions, like ungrading and labor-based grading. Together, we created a grading policy that accounted, as much as we could, for students' individual and collective desires. To do this, students wrote about the ideas that most appealed to them and about their desires for our class, and they discussed them in small, self-selected groups of three to four students. Each group then negotiated a proposed grading policy. In a whole-class discussion, we used those small-group policies to negotiate our class policy. We did this work over a few class periods. During our work, I asked questions and posed problems to clarify details and fill gaps. Our co-created policy would be open to revision if needed but would give us a solid start.

One of the challenges I encountered in these first couple of weeks was students' desire for the external motivator of teacher-graded writing. Students—who were primarily BIPOC—wanted to know “how they were doing,” saying that teacher-given grades tied to assessments of the quality of their writing were what motivated them. But antiracism required me to unsettle not only that traditional power dynamic but also judgements of writing based on standards that reflect White middle-class values as well as connections between those judgements and students' grades (as indicators of success). So I tried to strike a compromise with them, one where my assessments had tangible value (their request) but upheld my commitment to delinking my judgements about their “real” writing (which I considered to be only their major assignments) and their grades: I would assess their assessments. For each of our major writing projects, 25 percent of their grade would come from their peers' assessment of their writing, and 75 percent would come from my assessment of *their* assessment of others' work. I created a rubric for my part of the evaluation that we used for the whole semester. If it

sounds complicated, it was. But I thought I could make it work, even though I wanted so badly to avoid tying grades to judgements about writing. This was the best compromise I could come up with on the fly.

From there, we began to read, talk, and write about the course theme, with which students were really engaged. I decided what their first major project would be (a cultural identity narrative), but students chose their modes and media for completing the project. My goal with this open-ended assignment was to expand students' ideas of what counts as "writing" in our digital era and make space for rhetorical practices not traditionally seen as "academic." We read texts by diverse authors (including Gloria Anzaldúa, Louise Erdrich, Amy Tan, and Vershawn Ashanti Young, among others) that inspired the first project and decided together, through a process like the creation of our grading policy, what we'd like to see in such a narrative. We then created a rubric that we'd use to assess each others' drafts at multiple stages. Students used this rubric to write their own narrative and to assess their peers' narratives. Their peer assessments would consist of completing that rubric and writing a letter explaining their assessment to the writer.

I tried to make our assessment metrics, materials, and processes clear. Before students ever did their peer assessments, I created a rubric that I would use to assess their assessments. I shared this rubric with them and solicited their feedback on it in class, making changes to the language for "clarity" and "fairness" (concepts I now recognize as HOWL) based on their responses. I gave the "final" rubric to them ahead of time, so they would know exactly what I was looking for in the assessment letters they were writing for their peers. This way, I hoped that they would be able to write their narratives however they liked, that they would not feel constrained by typical academic expectations for standardized American English (what Alim & Smitherman, 2012, refer to as White mainstream English) or for specific genre features and modes.

We did a practice round of assessment, which I gave feedback on just like I would for the graded assessment. Together, we looked at some examples of their assessment letters alongside my feedback, discussing where the assessment writer made the moves identified in my rubric, where they started to make those moves but didn't do them fully or well, and where they didn't do them at all. But students were so confused. They didn't understand what I was looking for or how that might translate into their writing. I thought that most of them did, because the feedback I got through various formative course-assessment tools indicated that they did, and because students generally didn't ask questions about what we were doing no matter how I invited those questions (anonymously and not, in writing and in discussion, independently and in groups, and so on). But I was wrong.

Halfway through the semester, my class sort of internally combusted. After our official (graded) round of assessments for the cultural identity narrative resulted in low grades on this first project—grades that students insisted should be tied to the assessment of their writing—students were frustrated and stressed

out. Many of them felt like failures. I found out through an exit slip (a formative assessment tool for surveying students), and I remember feeling sidelined, distressed, worried about how I'd salvage the class's morale and my end-of-term student evaluations. Because of my precarity as a visiting assistant professor on a one-year term, these evaluations mattered—a lot. But more than that, the *work* mattered. I didn't want students having a negative experience with something meant to support and motivate them, to *build* their confidence.

Inspired by Inoue's 2019 address—in which he framed compassion as “asking the deep attending and problematizing question: Am I causing you to suffer?” (p. 366)—I planned a listening session for our next class. I would practice what he called “deep attending,” “open[ing] space for those of us who have only been listening but would like to speak, and be heard.” (p. 363). In email two days before the session, I acknowledged students' frustrations and concerns, told them those frustrations and concerns were important to me, and explained my goal for the listening session: to recalibrate our expectations of the class and each other, together, and figure out where we wanted to go from there. I asked questions for students to think about and come prepared to discuss; shared a brief version of my perspective as a writing teacher working within a system that requires course objectives and grades; and told them we'd spend the rest of the class session discussing their questions and deciding whether and how we wanted to revise the writing projects portion of our grading policy.

The next class was one of the most meaningful teaching experiences I've ever had. Most students participated, sharing their concerns and frustrations with the implications of our co-created policy, and I shared with them the tensions between my teaching values and institutional constraints. Together, we negotiated a revised grading policy, changing the assignments portion to completion grades only (with ungraded, formative feedback) and leaving the attendance and participation policies the same. By the end of class, the affect in the room seemed to have shifted profoundly, at least from my perspective. I felt much more at ease than I was before class began, and students were more talkative and lighthearted. For me, the dynamic shifted because students were finally speaking up, opening up—I could finally hear their perspectives. For students, predominantly Black and Latinx students across gender lines, the dynamic shifted because they felt heard. Something they said stuck with me: They *assumed* that people don't listen to them, and even if people do allegedly listen, these students' words don't *matter*. This was another kind of “silent” violence they were accustomed to, the violence of being ignored, of educational authorities insisting on the superiority of our own perspectives to theirs.

### ... Sometimes Offer Unexpected Failures/Lessons

As I reflect on that assessment ecology, I see how *Whiteness*, which Marilyn Frye (1992) defines as “a deeply ingrained way of being in the world” (n.p.) and Dae-Joong Kim and Bobbi Olson add is an “epistemological worldview, a lens of judgment” (2017, p. 124), impacted the ecology. The racial power dynamic remained

unchallenged until the semester was halfway done, and the grading policies and assessment practices “we” made early on merely reproduced the racist structures I was trying to unsettle. My purposes were antiracist, but other elements of the ecology (the parts and processes) were not. As I write this, I see the following (undoubtedly incomplete list of) failures in my process and design of an antiracist assessment ecology and the lessons those failures produced.

### Acceptance (But Not Resignation) Is a Responsibility

I did not understand or do what Inoue meant when he suggested White teachers must *accept* the reality that we “perpetuate White language supremacy in [our] classrooms because [we are] White and stand in front of students” so that we can begin dismantling it. I was ignorant of the fundamental distinctions between how racism is perpetuated by my [White] body, which I can’t control (2019, p. 357), and by Whiteness, which I can work to control. Although I was aware of the racial power dynamic in the classroom and the tension that’s inevitable when a White person has authority over BIPOC students, I did not want to accept that this dynamic will *always* exist given our history with power and racialization. I became so preoccupied with trying to change something over which I have no control—how BIPOC students would respond to my White body and its relationship to power in our assessment ecology—that I missed what I *could* control: the policies in our class that reproduced White language supremacy.

### Whiteness Is a Critical Concept that Requires Deep Understanding

I lacked a deep understanding of Whiteness and what it means to center Whiteness—that is, White perspectives and behaviors. As a result, I failed to see how I was centering my perspective—one that ignored the significance of my race in my experiences as a college student who would’ve loved to make the policy determining my grades—in my teaching. I wanted a democratic policy-making experience in my class, but I subconsciously minimized the authoritarian regime BIPOC students are accustomed to in the U.S. education system. In turn, I subconsciously minimized the significance of the histories with White teachers that many BIPOC students would bring to our class and that would greatly impact the assessment ecology. In all actuality, I’m another White woman teacher telling students I’m listening, that things are different in my class, but to them it probably all looks and feels the same as it always has. The power I tried to hand over to them likely felt superficial. I suspect that my radical approach to assessment didn’t work because students didn’t trust my White self to hold up my end of the deal and/or didn’t trust that they would learn under this grading system. I also suspect that my White body’s linkages to Whiteness led students to believe their words didn’t matter in our class, even while I thought I was communicating the opposite. Students’ perspectives matter, and we cannot quickly reframe them. Full stop.

## Other Shared Identities Don't Alleviate Racial Disparities

I made the decision to explore a new alternative to Inoue's antiracist, labor-based grading (2019) based on a shallow understanding of what labor-based grading is and could be. I was vaguely familiar with his approach and rationale, but I had not read about it in depth and did not have time to do so right then. I assumed that labor was necessarily measured in time spent and quantity produced, which I as a working-class student would have found overwhelming, possibly debilitating. Time was a resource I did not have much of nor did I know how to manage well as a first-generation woman college student and oldest of four children who shared many of the family and work responsibilities that community college students face. I assumed that because I had personally experienced these pressures, I could accurately anticipate my students' anxieties and make a judgement that labor-based grading would not work for them. I failed to recognize how this Whiteness tendency to co-identify with students who were raced differently from me made me overlook or minimize pressures I hadn't personally experienced due to White privilege—pressures to write in ways that felt unnatural, even oppressive, to me, pressures that labor-based grading eliminates. As a result, the decisions I made reinforced my own White agency as teacher and judge in this assessment ecology, even as I was consciously trying to do the opposite.

## Whiteness Is Not Limited to White People

I devised my alternative approach to collaborative assessment on a faulty premise: that if students controlled the assessment ecology, and the majority of the students were BIPOC, then the ecology would be antiracist. This premise wrongly assumes that Black, Indigenous, and People of Color are unlikely to reproduce *de facto* Whiteness. In other words, I assumed that because BIPOC students were likely aware of how race impacted their experiences in school, they would also understand—and be ready, comfortable, and willing to speak out against—how grading systems and traditional assessment practices preserve a racist status quo. I also wrongly assumed students *could* control the ecology, that their agency was not impacted by *my* body's affective attachment to Whiteness, as I discuss above. In hindsight, I see that I was trying with this collaborative approach to *circumvent* racist power relations, something I cannot do because of how deeply ingrained Whiteness is in the U.S., instead of making those power relations present with students, noticing them in the ecology for students to critique and perhaps counter.

## The Central Issue Is the Linkage Between Judgements and Value

I enabled a grading policy where my judgements about writing were still connected to *value* (i.e., grades), and this evaluation impacted students' lives. I had not

considered students' written assessments that I agreed to evaluate and grade as legitimate "writing," but students considered them as such. So while I thought I was sufficiently decoupling the judgements of a White authority figure from the writing that mattered, all the while giving students the graded assessments from a teacher that they said they wanted, I was not challenging the racist structure that let *me* decide which writing mattered and which writing didn't. Even students' thinking and reading—their *judgements*—were being judged and graded by a White woman. I was also working within a system that dictates what students must learn (and demonstrate that they've learned) from a particular elite, White, monolingual vantage point. For example, the departmental course objectives influencing my assessments reproduced HOWL, largely because of their references to "appropriateness" and "suitability," terms that assume a Whiteness "unseen, naturalized orientation to the world" (Inoue, 2021, n.p.). They demonstrated other HOWL as well. As course-wide objectives, they "assume[d] or invoke[d] a voice (and body), or its own discourse, as neutral and apolitical, as non-racial and non-gendered . . . a view that is outside the person speaking or expressing the ideas" (Inoue, 2021, n.p.). As is the case for all department-wide course objectives I've ever seen, there was no accounting for the identities of the people who created the objectives and the contexts and histories that they invoke, no recognition of the legacies they reproduce. They focused on the individual student's expected abilities by the end of the course, and not on the evolution of the class community. I de-prioritized these objectives in the syllabus, placing them near the end, but they still impacted our assessment ecology because they existed.

### Change Takes Time—For Everyone

I assumed students could resist conditioned ways of thinking about grades in the span of a few weeks. Students were conditioned to see grades as measures of learning, and punitive assessment was most likely all they had been used to; how could I expect them to "problematiz[e] their existential writing assessment situation" (Inoue, 2015, p. 134) in such a short amount of time well enough that they could use it to devise an antiracist grading policy?

### The Benefits of Hindsight

In short, this whole experience of finding that my antiracist purposes for an assessment ecology were counteracted by the people, places, and parts of that ecology has yielded ever-deepening insights about my own Whiteness, even though I try hard to change it. Whiteness is why I trusted my experiential knowledge about grades without sufficiently problematizing how White privilege impacted that knowledge. Whiteness is why I prioritized this personal experiential knowledge over the carefully theorized, constructed, and tested recommendations of an assessment scholar and critical race theorist of Color. Whiteness is why I could not come to terms

with the necessity of using the power I was given in a racist system to make anti-racist policy decisions. But here's the rub: antiracists, by definition and regardless of whether their power was unearned, use that power to draw attention to racial inequities in policies and counteract *the policies themselves* (Kendi, 2019). They do this because as Inoue's ecological theory helps us see, policies create people—their biases and dispositions—who in turn create policies. That is, by changing racist policies, which means changing the ways power circulates in the ecology, we change the rhetorical contexts within which our assessment practices happen—the Places element of the assessment ecology. In so doing, we change the People, because “people who inhabit places in a writing assessment ecology tend to be influenced by those locations” (Inoue, 2015, p. 139). In this way, every action we take, including antiracist actions, reverberates throughout the ecology.

Having witnessed the implications of assessment-ecology elements working against each other, I see my reluctance to use my teacherly authority to change racist policies as a kind of “silent violence” in itself. Instead of redressing the violence of assessment by decoupling grades from judgements about students' writing, that is, I let the harmful policies get created and play out. Although my discomfort with being a White woman teacher of BIPOC students was grounded in a simplistic understanding of Whiteness (and admittedly was tinged by White shame and guilt), I prioritized my discomfort over the antiracist responsibilities I have to BIPOC students. This silent violence, in short, resulted from my own White agency as teacher and judge in this assessment ecology, even as I was consciously trying to dismantle these things.

“Like fighting an addiction,” writes Kendi, “being an antiracist requires persistent self-awareness, constant self-criticism, and regular self-examination” (2019, p. 23). So what is the significance of my subjectivity in my collaborative assessment ecologies, ecologies that have explicit social justice or antiracist goals? My subjectivity defines my alignment with racist structures and the ways in which I can and must challenge those structures—as well as the ways I can't and shouldn't. For me as a White teacher, it means I must trust my training and all that I've learned from BIPOC scholars, to humbly acknowledge what I do and don't know and make sure to account for the impacts of how I am raced, and to make antiracism the primary focus of every element of a writing assessment ecology—even when I feel uncomfortable using unearned power to do this work. Our subjectivities matter because they inform what we focus on, why we do what we do, and how we go about doing it. And part of being an antiracist accomplice means I defer to the wisdom of teacher-scholars of color who are showing me how to do this work, who are telling me that we all need to become comfortable with chaos and humbly find a way through it. For the purposes of grading and assessment, that means I decouple grades from all assessments of writing quality from here on out, regardless of who my students are and no matter how deeply they desire graded assessments. I work with students to determine how their labor should be measured. As I do this work, I ask questions for clarification and

give students time to respond, intentionally resisting the urge to fill the silence I find so uncomfortable—the silence that maybe is inevitable when BIPOC students are determining whether and how open they should be with a White teacher. I wait for and attend to *students'* languaging, their “agency—. . . an act with consequences” (Morrison, 1993, para. 11), and I respond generously, bearing in mind my tendency toward HOWL and actively resisting it in mind and in word.

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