

Chapter 9. Assessment's Affective Attachments

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When interrogating my affective attachments to writing and literacy assessment, I often share one of my earliest classroom memories: failing a spelling test in first grade and being punished by my mom for failing that test (Johnson, 2020). The shame of failing that test sticks to me. I still feel like the effort I put in didn't matter . . . perhaps even I didn't matter. My mom's well-intended fixation with my grades stems from her own belief that being academically successful is the only way to achieve *the good life* (Berlant, 2011). Coming from a small, rural town in southeast Louisiana and a working poor family, attaining the good life through education was always the goal. Wrapped up in the classist expectations of good grades leading to academic success and the good life—a sentiment certainly not exclusive to my single mother of two—are a range of ideas that uphold and facilitate the White supremacist, cis-heteropatriarchal, and ableist practices that sustain the institutions I occupy as a White, cis, queer, neurodivergent man. Over the years, that experience deeply influenced my attitudes toward writing, assessment, education, and my own worth. And while failing a first-grade spelling test certainly didn't make or break the rest of my life, the affective attachments I developed to learning, literacy, and assessment in that classroom continually influence my orientations, as Paulo Freire might say, to the word and the world (1968/1972).

Our affective attachments reveal historical processes, organize present embodied actions, and orient future possibilities. In this chapter, I ask, when can and where should we attend to assessment's affective attachments? I am concerned with assessment's affective attachments because I want to think about the ways our attachment to certain assessment practices “come to make sense or no longer make sense, yet remain powerful as they work against the flourishing of particular and collective beings” (Berlant, 2011, p. 13). Moreover, I want to consider how teachers and students, collaboratively, might disrupt those well-maintained but dangerously limiting assessment structures and work toward queerly-oriented assessment ecologies.

One assessment practice worth disrupting and thinking beyond and otherwise is traditional grading schemes that exclude student engagement in the creation of more robust classroom assessment ecologies. I've written about my suspicions of grading regimes before, explaining, “Grades are an imperfect system of communication and corrupt technology of surveillance that serve a neoliberal university that values control, individualism, and financial gains above the critical, creative, and rhetorical education of its students” (Johnson, 2021, p.

56). Grades and related punitive assessment models enshrine racist, sexist, classist, ableist, colonial, cis-heteronormative gatekeeping practices. Full stop. More specifically, as Stephanie West-Puckett, Nicole I. Caswell, and William P. Banks (2023) argue, “Writing assessments have also been built on and from these power systems, often designed as gatekeeping mechanisms to dissuade (and at time to actively prevent) anyone not White, male, or financially secure from crossing the academic threshold” (p. 21). Even so, our collective attachment to grading systems steams from the role such systems play in maintaining a fantasy wherein good grades signal a quality education that leads to a high-paying career, upward mobility, and “that moral-intimate-economic thing called ‘the good life’” (Berlant, 2011, p. 2). Such an affective attachment creates an impasse wherein students are oriented away from critical worldmaking tools and possibilities.

Recent scholarship in antiracist writing assessment and ungrading suggest various ways out of this impasse through assessment ecologies that are removed from traditional grading schemes and are purposeful in their engagement with students. For example, Asao B. Inoue’s (2015) ecological model for antiracist writing assessment engages students in discussions of labor and language ideology to critique the *White racial habitus* of writing assignments and assessments. Jesse Stommel (2020), for a second example, uses “process letters” for students to self-evaluate and engage in dialogue with him “not just about the course, but about their learning and about how learning happens” (p. 35). These two approaches, among others, influence the assessment work students and I undertake. Going further, I believe that engaging students in assessment, encouraging their disidentification—working on and against (Muñoz, 1999)—from comfortable assessment models, and pushing them to think critically about how and why they participate in the enterprise of formal education requires attending to assessment’s affective attachments.

This chapter theorizes and demonstrates how affect might inform an understanding of our collective attachments to certain assessment models as well as a critical tool when inviting students into the design and implementation of a queerly-oriented assessment ecology. I begin by briefly defining affect using queer relational theories that name the power of affect in the possibilities for action it generates. Then I turn to two major concerns teacher-scholars should consider when approaching the entanglements of affect and assessment. With these considerations, I take a moment to consider the affective range of assessment as well as the risks in pursuing affect within assessment ecologies. In Part II, I reflect on how students and I pursued and examined affective attachments during a digital media composing course at a primarily White institution (PWI). In that course, students and I collaboratively detached our digital composing from traditional grading structures and made space for interrogating our affective attachments in, what I now understand as, a queerly-oriented assessment ecology. I zoom in on a specific project within the course and use course documents to illustrate the affective work of assessment that occurs when building collective learning around the negotiated goals of students. Part III acts not as a conclusion but rather a call

to think about affect as a way(s) of moving assessment beyond its current attachments and attaching anew¹ through intentional processes that are beyond and otherwise queer.

To help me articulate this affective labor, I employ the seven interconnected elements of an antiracist assessment ecology: purpose, process, power, parts, people, places, and products (Inoue, 2015). These overlapping elements, according to Inoue and Mya Poe (2020), should be considered when redressing the racist oppressions and traumas of assessment practices. Inoue and Poe's seven elements of an antiracist assessment ecology, which are defined fully in this collection's introduction, open the possibility to see how and where assessment's affective attachments reorient how students and teachers engage in learning with each other. Each of these elements are bound up in affective attachments worthy of investigation, and attending to these affective attachments within the context of this chapter will help blend and bond antiracist assessment scholarship with queer theories in disruptive and generative ways.

Throughout I use relational theories of affect to frame how students recognized and engaged assessment's affective attachments with me through queerly-oriented assessment ecologies. To be queerly oriented, Sara Ahmed (2006) suggests, is to “keep open the possibility of changing directions and of finding other paths, perhaps those that do not clear a common ground, where we can respond with joy to what goes astray” (p. 178). Queer, here, works as a signifier of both disruptive troubling and generative possibility wherein oppressive practices are exposed and replaced with coalition and socially just, life-affirming practices. I must be careful here because my entangling of queer and assessment is different from important previously published scholarship wherein “queer” is near-synonymous to LGBTQ identities (Caswell & Banks, 2018). This chapter is not an investigation of the assessment of LGBTQ students but rather is an attempt to queerly-orient assessment, or to see assessment's queer orientations, through affect. Entangling queer and assessment in these ways builds on and is informed by the ecological work of antiracist assessments insofar as it calls for an ongoing recognition of and engagement with assessment's affective attachments.

Part I: They Feel It. We Feel It, Too.

Attending to the entanglement of affect and assessment requires attending to the concept of affect, first. Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg (2010) suggest that affect is the *force* or *forces of encounter* that make it possible for bodies (human and non-human) to act and be acted upon. However, affects also attach and accumulate to form distinct textures—what Ahmed (2010) calls a preserving

1. Antonio Byrd gave me this phrase while we were preparing for a conference panel presentation on “alternative assessment.” This chapter was revised with input from colleagues and panel attendees. Thank you.

stickiness—that help us feel our connections (see also Sedgwick, 2003). Affect, therefore, is more than an individual (or individual’s) feeling or emotion, it is “intensely relational, working as a connector or conduit between bodies, their histories, and their emergent possibilities” (Niccolini, 2016, p. 7). Affect sticks to us, moves us, and orients us in different ways based on the specific histories, objects, bodies, and others we are positioned alongside—attached to. These differing attachments open spaces for encounters that draw attention to and reorient our ways of collective being; that is, affect invites us to consider how we are attached to each other and what becomes possible when we recognize these attachments.

Studying affect in relation to education (and in this chapter, writing assessment), according to Bessie Dernikos et al. (2020), reveals hidden connections or yet to be made connections that can move students and teachers to learning *otherwise*. In rhetoric and writing studies, work with affect has been varied, but scholars acknowledge that our entanglement with affect calls us to act—to write—but also to trouble the domain of writing and writing instruction (Edbauer, 2008; Micciche, 2006; Nelson, 2016; Williams, 2019). In my affective troubling of the rhetoric and writing classroom, I focus on how assessment’s affective attachments come to stick to students, teachers, institutions, and curricula. If the critical power of engaging affect is the ability to render visible the connections that draw bodies to act and be acted upon, then thinking about assessment’s affective attachments invites a consideration of how attachments to certain assessment models might allow or disallow certain actions (pedagogies, learning scenarios, experimentation) and technologies on the part of teachers and students.

When attending to the entanglement of assessment and affect, there are two important considerations. First, **when we perform assessment, we are not merely reviewing words on a page or compositions on a screen; instead, we are referencing a dense ecology of histories, emotions, bodies, technologies, and ideologies.** Recognizing these attachments are key when building our classroom ecologies because, as Inoue (2015) argues, “classroom writing assessment is more important than pedagogy because it always trumps what you say or what you attempt to do with your students. And students know this. *They feel it* [emphasis added]” (p. 9). With this consideration, we must be cautious not to assume that all students *feel* the same way about our assessment model or are able to access their affective attachments from their particular raced, gendered, disabled, classed, sexual, geographic positions. Indeed, scholarly understandings of affect have been dominated by and often reflect White, Western, cis-heteronormative orientations as universal (Berg & Ramos-Zayas, 2015; Garcia-Rojas, 2016; Ritchie, 2021).

Second, **in recognizing the complex affects of assessment and its attachments, we exceed the typical arguments for objectivity and measurability that lock assessment into a double bind with judgment and punitive evaluation.** This much is clear when considering a teacher’s affective tensions, which Nicole I. Caswell (2018) defines as “the (un)conscious negotiation teachers experience between what they *feel* they should do (mostly driven from a pedagogical

perspective) and what they are *expected* to do (mostly driven by an institutional perspective) when responding” (p. 71). With this consideration, it is important, again, to be cautious with how teachers, from positions of power, might assume or even project onto students their affective attachments to certain forms of assessment. Teachers carry dense attachments to assessment that they are often called upon to present in *straight-forward* terms (on syllabi, in teaching philosophies, through scholar conversations) even when the affective complexity of their attachments push them into material conflict with standardized models.

With these two considerations—and their respective cautions—in mind, how do we think about assessment's affective attachments in ways that push teachers, students, and scholars “to attend to affect's promise and threat so that things might feel and become otherwise?” (Dernikos et al., 2020). My suggestion is tapping into the connections assessment creates through affect between teachers and students to encourage disidentification, or a “mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather . . . a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology” (Muñoz, 1999, p. 11). Affect, as a relational force, aids the examination of the overlapping affects teachers and students feel through/during/after assessments. Beyond examination, however, affect's ability to generate possibility and thinking otherwise makes it a necessary tool when composing assessment ecologies. Simply put, affect is a queer tool of assessment praxis.

In Part II, I reflect on the queer orientations and affective attachments of a digital media composing course's assessment ecology at a PWI. I deploy an antiracist assessment ecological framework (Inoue, 2015; Inoue & Poe, 2020) as an analytical tool to make sense of the work students and I were doing. The seven elements—purpose, process, power, parts, people, places, and products—provide a lexicon from which I can examine affect's role in our assessment ecology. Each of these seven elements are affective attachments that generate connections in ways that holistically impact the assessment ecology. When I taught this digital media composing course in the fall of 2018, I did not use this lexicon with students; nevertheless, the students and I built our course and assessment ecologies in ways that troubled assessment models we previously experienced and carried with us into the classroom. Thus, for this chapter, I'm using Inoue and Poe's seven elements alongside the concept of affective attachments to render visible the worldmaking students and I undertook.

Part II: Queerly-Orienting Assessment Ecologies for a Digital Media Composing Course

Inviting Students into Digital Media Composing: Purposes and Power

In the fall of 2018, I taught a digital media composing course themed as “Composing with Mobile Technologies.” The theme for the sophomore-level, general

education course was collaboratively developed with my colleague Laura L. Allen who simultaneously taught her own section. We composed a thematic description driven by the entanglement of our ethical and affective commitments and invited students to consider how “mobile devices, such as smartphones, computer tablets, and wearable devices, are ubiquitous, rhetorical technologies that we use daily to compose.” With this particular theme, we wanted students to think about the rhetorical work of composing beyond static notions of writers at desks and explore the growing influence mobile technologies exert on the way we engage with this world. More importantly, however, our thematic/curricular purpose was to invite students into conversations examining the intersections of identity, mobile technologies, and digital composition. As we explained in the course description, “Our goal is to not only discuss the possibilities available when composing with mobile technologies but also provide you with a new way to think critically about yourself, your communities, and your mobile devices.” We recognized that mobile technologies are carried and carry us in the world where our bodies—in their raced, sexed, disabled, classed complexities—become otherwise composed differently.

As I thought about the course theme, I began to wonder about *what had to be* versus *what could be* achieved in this digital media composing course focused on mobile technologies. By carrying a general education visual and performing arts credit, the course included two university-mandated learning outcomes: “analyze, appreciate, and interpret significant works of art” and “engage in informed observation and/or active participation within the visual, spatial, and performing arts.” These learning outcomes were attached to the course and challenged me, as a teacher, to think about what kind of work students and I could compose that would attend to these outcomes in ways meaningful to us. I was particularly interested in inviting students to consider how significance is determined, and challenged, in a culture dominated by mobile technologies. That is, how do our mobile technologies help us understand digital, cultural significance and how might we use those technologies to compose in ways that are significant to us and our communities?

To make learning more specific, I began to outline my own goals for the course. Through conversations with Laura, reviewing syllabi developed by colleagues, and considering my own understanding of what could be accomplished in a semester, I offered these goals for students:

1. have a nuanced understanding of how to compose with mobile technologies;
2. be comfortable thinking critically about mobile technologies;
3. be able to make connections between technologies & culture, especially the influence of mobile technologies on identities;
4. understand how rhetoric is deployed when composing via mobile technologies;

5. understand how access and design influence our mobile technologies use;
6. apply fundamental principles of rhetoric and design when producing digital texts;
7. grasp the ethical implications of composing digitally, especially in terms of intellectual property, citation, and remix;
8. respect and honor the complex ways various peoples, cultures and institutions use rhetoric and mobile technologies to compose.

With these goals, I wanted students to develop mobile digital composing practices grounded not only in technical ability but attentive to their identities in ways that were rhetorically affective. Teaching this course as a White, cis, queer, neurodivergent man in a PWI, I recognized the necessity of centering thinking that problematized prevailing narratives about mobile technologies and their neutrality as well as my own embedded assumptions about what are “fundamental principles” of successful digital compositions. As I considered the ways we often present mobile technologies as neutral communicative tools, I also contemplated how common course assessment models oriented by a punitive grading regime are often presented as neutral and objective. I decided that I wanted my curricular commitments to be mirrored in my assessment practices, and I desired to experiment with decentering course grades and co-developing the course projects and assessments with students in the course. I began thinking about the digital media composing course as a way to trouble institutionalized expectations by queerly-orienting the course’s assessment ecology. Laura had her own goals for the course, and we decided that we would both teach the course theme of “Composing *with* Mobile Technologies” but would develop separate pedagogical and assessment approaches.

As I continued developing the course, I felt strongly that a traditional grade-oriented assessment model would not accomplish this work because of its static, one-dimensional nature (Tchudi, 1997). The purpose of the course’s assessment ecology needed to be parallel to the curricular purpose of studying and challenging the ever-changing way mobile devices mediate identity and inform how we digitally compose ourselves and our communities. I oriented away from traditional grading structures and toward a “gradeless,” or “ungrading” (Blum, 2020), assessment model. To orient the course’s “gradelessness” and invite students into the building of a queerly-oriented assessment ecology, I addressed the move in the syllabus by explaining my understanding of grades as surveillance, the limitations they place on learning, and the nasty habits so many students foster just to “get the A.” However, I also clearly noted my understanding that grades do carry material impacts on students and the attachments that are affected by grades—scholarships, majors, future jobs, and the ability to graduate—and *the good life* such attachments promise (Berlant, 2011). In articulating these points to students in the syllabus, I asked them to consider the ways grades, as a limited form of assessment, become attached to us and our understanding of learning while inviting them to co-create a queerly-oriented assessment ecology.

We implemented a “feedback and labor model,” which replaced the traditional grade on each assignment, and was explained as such: “You will receive (a lot of) feedback from me and your peers throughout the semester with the expectation that you use that feedback to continually revise, rethink, and remix your work. For the most part, the only ‘grade’ you will receive during the semester will be a ‘complete/incomplete.’” Recognizing that the university would demand a final grade, I proposed an alternative method for translating the semester’s work into a final grade:

At the end of the semester, we will meet to discuss what you’ve produced, your labor, and the effect of this course on your thinking and daily practices. At that meeting, we will review your work, my various responses to your work throughout the semester, your attempts to compose something of quality, and your general fortitude and determine a final grade using the standard [University] grading scale.

When distributing the syllabus and engaging students in early conversations, I was proud of my pre-semester work, but I now recognize that I was bound up in my own negative affective attachments to grading. In my syllabus statements, I see suspicion, concern, distaste, and shame but I also see an optimism that students would work with me to detach the learning and assessments in the course from traditional grading regimes. However, the power remains with me as the teacher.

Power informs and is informed by affect. As Seigworth and Gregg (2010) point out, a common way of understanding affect is the “hidden-in-plain-sight politically engaged work . . . that attends to the hard and fast materialities, as well as the fleeting and flowing ephemera[1]” practices of power that occur and create “potentials for realizing a world” otherwise conceived (p. 7). Even with my intention to disrupt . . . trouble . . . queer normalized grading practices, simply replacing one assessment model with another maintained a power structure that excluded students and made no meaningful difference in their affective and material experiences in the course. Furthermore, a wholesale replacement of the assessment structures still preserved my own internalized commitments to disciplinary regimes and unspoken assumptions about what “success” looks like in a classroom. In building a queerly-oriented assessment ecology, I needed to “re-distribute power in equitable ways” by inviting students into the development of the assessment ecology (Inoue & Poe, 2020, p. 2). As the semester began, I invited students into the development of the assessment ecology through early conversations in our classroom that forced students to confront how their attachments to grades, learning, and assessment were not equal or even similarly accessible. We attempted collaboratively composing learning goals for the course, but our earliest attempts mirror the same difficulties and awkward silences Megan McIntyre recounts in her contribution to this collection. Students were uncomfortable

stating their own goals for the class or explaining why they maintained certain expectations—they just *felt* like this is what was expected of them.

As we moved into the semester, I continually attempted redistributing power to students in ways, I thought, made possible through the “gradeless/ungrading” model. Assessment in the digital media composing course, then, relied heavily on conversations, negotiations, and reflections from and between the students and me. These processes happened in class, through discussion boards, during peer reviews, and in written feedback. Often the process began with students in small groups considering a short project description provided in the course syllabus. Descriptions, though, seem like an overstatement as I did very little describing. More accurately, students read and contemplated short statements proposing possible projects. After sharing my proposal with the class, they would gather and discuss their ideas on the project, the technologies they wanted to learn, the goals they wanted to set, and how they could assess/be assessed. In conversation, we took time to unpack some of the potential unspoken affects and implications of the goals we attempted to set. Why this goal? What does that goal communicate, and to whom? Does this goal support or disrupt cultural narratives about race, gender, sexuality, disability, class, and geographic locale? Is setting this goal closing off or opening up a horizon for our learning? The assessment ecology for this course relied heavily on response and reflective affective attachments between students, their small working groups, the collective class, and myself. Our aim was to shift the power of assessment from me toward a collective sense of support and accountability.

Zooming In on Composition in Motion: Processes, Parts, Places, People

From our initial conversations, it became clear that students were willing to—at least to some extent—engage with a differently oriented assessment model even though they maintained some affective attachments and cautious emotions about it. We negotiated and examined our collective desires, following a minimally sketched-out set of assignments for the semester and, at the beginning of each unit, considered, shaped, and set goals *in situ* while holding space for difference and. The major parts of our assessments consisted of in class conversations, discussion board responses, peer reviews, and instructor response. Our process began with a series of conversations wherein students and I negotiated project goals and assessment criteria based on what we were learning from the course content and our in-class experiments composing with mobile technologies. These parts and processes were revisited and remade with each assignment. In the following paragraphs, I zoom in on the second project in the course, Composition in Motion. Zooming in on this project offers insight on the various ways the students and I engaged in and built an ecosystem within our larger assessment ecology that was responsive to the learning goals we individually developed and collectively negotiated.

For the second major project in the course, we considered the question, “What makes a technology mobile?” However, the students desired a project that pushed beyond what we accomplished in the first project and addressed what was left out. The first project, a mobile digital literacy narrative, asked students to maintain the goals I had set in the assignment sheet, which included closely examining how they came to learn how to use mobile technologies while also contemplating how their identities intersect with technologies. Students were, in essence, asked to compose a narrative that exposed and explored how they use technologies to mediate their embodied realities. This assignment prompt, which Laura and I collaboratively drafted, also left space for students to experiment with the technologies and genres they could use to accomplish the assignment goals, and students were invested in their agency as digital composers. For each subsequent project, the students retained this agency (the ability to choose their own technologies and genres) while collectively building and interrogating goals that focused their thinking in other ways.

When we began discussing *Composition in Motion*, students worked together in small groups before returning to a larger group discussion. Interestingly, the question that rose to the top of our conversation was “how is this project different from the first?” The students, in their questioning, demonstrated a desire to move beyond—orient away from—what they saw as goals too similar to the previous project. The need to take risks emerged, and engaging in “deliberate practice” addressed that need. According to Colleen A. Reilly and Anthony T. Atkins (2013) a “deliberate practice,” especially when assessing student’s digital composing work, “requires a process that includes trial and error, the experience of which leads to expanding proficiencies and developing expertise” (*Deliberate Practice as Process* section) and, furthermore, “assessment practices play a significant role in the development of proficiencies from the perspective of deliberate practice” (*From Rules to Risk-taking* section). The students and I moved forward with a trial-and-error period where we continued thinking about the possibilities of our next digital media project.

After our initial class conversation, students continued conversations about their goals for the *Composition in Motion* project. The discussion board was a different place where our assessment ecology could be built. Beyond the classroom itself, which is often dominated by only a few voices, the discussion board provided a space for students to articulate their thinking before engaging with their classmates. In that discussion board, I provided students with our course learning goals (previously available in the syllabus and discussed in class) as well as a bare-bones description of *Composition in Motion* that reflected the framework our previous in class discussions produced. The discussion board then prompted:

What I would like for you to do, **either individually or in collaboration with your working group**, is review these two

documents, consider how the Composition in Motion project may help you reach some of these learning goals, and provide the following:

1. An updated list of your personal goals for this project—this may include wanting to refine your video making skills, learning a new technology, exploring a new topic related to mobile technologies, etc. Be specific with these goals.
2. A short list or paragraph explaining what your expectations are for this project. This may include statements like, “I expect this project to _____,” “A strong project will _____,” etc.
3. A list or short paragraph explaining how your personal goals might line up, differ from, complicate, or compliment the “stated” learning objectives and course goals. It is okay to want something different from what the university or I said you “should want.” It is also okay to agree with the objectives and goals provided.
4. An update on your project. What are you doing? How are you doing? What have you drafted? Where are you stuck? How are you feeling? What technologies are you using? What is the next step?
5. Finally, provide a list of questions, concerns, and/or suggestions. (Optional)

With this discussion, students continued to participate in the development of the project and the assessment ecology. Here students considered where they were in the course and negotiated their attachments to the provided learning goals and considered how/if/why they would orient through their digital composing.

First, students returned to the goals set for them by the university and their instructor without ignoring their own learning goals for the project. I like considering tasks 1 and 3 together because these tasks invite students to interrogate how goals for a project (and course) are created—how desires are articulated. In some instances, students saw their own goals line up with the outcomes and goals set in the syllabus. For others, the affective strain of working within the confines of predetermined outcomes pushed (sometimes exhausted) their thinking. Second, students were asked specifically about their expectations for Composition in Motion (task 2). For some students this task translated into defining the genre of their project—“we want to produce a video trailer for a mobile app”—whereas others wrote more broadly—“I expect this project to be a unique creation.” Here we had the opportunity to analyze the ways students are defining these expectations for themselves while also working on and against concepts like “uniqueness” within the context of digital composing. Some students encouraged classmates to elaborate, which led to interesting interrogations of the affective attachments being rendered visible through the negotiation of project goals. Finally, this discussion

asked for an update on the project but oriented that update toward affect. I didn't just ask what students were drafting but how they feel about what they are drafting and the process within the large conversations of our class. Being attentive to affect, in this instance, is being attentive to the present and the ways students were orienting to, by, and through their digital composing.

From this discussion post, I found students in different places and differently affected. While the general consensus pointed toward a desire to test and improve their skills over the previous project, what I found in their discussion posts were intentional assessments of where they were, how they got there, where they wanted to go, and why they wanted to go there. The dense networks of attachments that would later appear in student projects started emerging. However, this post did not generate a stable criteria for evaluation. While students certainly made clear what they desired from the project, I could not use their responses to, for example, develop a rubric. This is a point where it became obvious to me that engaging affect within the context of learning goals and assessment does not lead to measurable criteria for evaluation but rather demands responsiveness.

As students continued their projects, we made space for formal and informal review where they offered feedback on each other's work. We often began classes with students sharing updates on their projects. These informal updates provided the digital composer's an opportunity to explain their thinking and the ways they felt inspired, excited, stuck, or unsure about what they were undertaking. Often students would explain the various composing technologies (e.g., mobile apps for video, audio, or image editing) they were engaging with, which led to discussions and demonstrations that provided different possibilities for everyone in the class. I also engaged in this collective sharing as I was often simultaneously learning different composing technologies and techniques. For more formal peer review sessions, students worked in a hybrid space: in class, small groups of students talked through ideas with each other while viewing and commenting on student projects through our class' learning management system (LMS) peer review portal.

Peer review fits into the queerly-oriented assessment ecology of my digital media composing course because it brings attention to the people composing, their intentions, and the peer reviewer's own attachments to what they are experiencing. Because the goals for this project were not enshrined through stable criteria but rather the shifting expectations and attachments of each digital composer, a traditional peer review session in which students would offer feedback aimed at improvement or use an evaluative rubric was not possible. Instead, we worked with a peer review model based on the concept of exchange. The model, based on Scott Lloyd DeWitt et al. (2016) Writer's Exchange (WEx), asked students to engage the writing through three distinct processes: *describe*→*assess*→*suggest*. For each process, the students were asked to review their peer's work slowly and with intention. When describing the work, students were prompted to provide a concise description that "capture[ed] the gist or essence of the writer's work [but

did] not rewrite or interpret the piece” (DeWitt, et al., 2016, p. 12). The process of assessing asked students to comment on what they believed were the strengths and weaknesses of the piece but also demanded that the reviewer explain how they, as a reader, defined success in the specific aspects they were commenting on. The final process, Suggest, asked the reviewer to make clear suggestions to the composer based on their previous descriptions and assessments. Specifically, reviewers were tasked with explaining why they made this suggestion and “how [they thought] the suggestion could rhetorically affect the writing” (DeWitt, et al., 2016, p. 14).

Looking back, I find this approach to peer review similar to Timothy Oleksiak's recent call for “slow peer review” as a queer praxis. Oleksiak (2020) argues that peer review can be a space for queer worldbuilding when it is performed with intention, and he calls for us to be attentive to the attachments we carry for the “improvement imperative,” which he relates to Berlant's cruel optimism. In the *describe*→*assess*→*suggest* model used in my digital media course, we did not manage to detach from the improvement imperative; however, our peer reviews made space for intentional reflection on how we define improvement and how we might determine success or failure beyond the limits of a traditional assessment structure. That is, the peer review process undertaken made the affective attachments students have toward certain conceptualizations of success more visible and, in turn, allowed the composers (and me) to ruminate on the affective impact of the Composition in Motion assignment.

With encouragement from the students, I used the *describe*→*assess*→*suggest* model as the base of my response to their compositions. Detaching myself from previous models of response that placed my teacherly voice above the rest of the class helped me approach each project as a fellow digital composer and someone aware of the various ways students negotiated their expectations and attachments. My own intentionality, then, contributed to a collective understanding with the students that the ways we orient ourselves toward success and failure are always influenced by the affective attachments we carry.

Zooming Out: “Final” Products and Assessments

When it came time to compose final assessments, the students, in their small working groups, met with me. Prior to the meetings, students were asked to write “reflective technologies.” This brief reflection, again, was a chance for students to consider their own work and the ways they recognized and/or developed new attachments to mobile technologies, identities, and composing practices. As they composed their reflective technologies, I additionally prompted them to consider the course goals and queried:

Have we achieved these goals? When and how? Are we still in the process of achieving? Have we failed? What have we learned, and what have we not learned? Where's next?

With these questions, students are invited to respond to the affective attachments we had negotiated throughout the semester. This, I think, is different from simply asking students to evaluate themselves and assign a final grade for the semester, which has become a popular practice. Instead, students confront the end of one learning event without foreclosing learning beyond and otherwise.

In their reflective technologies and in meetings, students articulated—through experience and examples—the various ways they met *their* goals and *our* goals, and the instances that could be called “failure.” Meeting in the working groups—groups that had become collaborators, friends, and colleagues—relieved pressure from “final conferences with the teacher.” Students reminded one another of times when they taught each other how to edit a video transition or times they made sense of a difficult reading. They commiserated about the difficulties they experienced and the projects that didn’t get there but still got *somewhere*. The meetings, for me, became a space where the dual purposes of the course most clearly combined into a learning event queerly oriented. Students produced provocative projects demonstrating intentional digital media composing practices meant to illuminate the ways mobile technologies inform and are informed by our identities and our communities. Students also co-created an assessment ecology invested in learning beyond the purposes of a grade. Assessment, in this case, was the work of negotiating expectations, holding space for difference, and making the most out of the possibilities generated through the variously mediated conversations between students and their instructor. Attending to affect’s attachments through the slow, iterative, and intentional interrogation of our learning produced, what I would now call, a queerly-oriented assessment ecology.

Part III: Affective Attachments Beyond and Otherwise

In the previous pages, I argued for taking affective attachments seriously when collaboratively composing a queerly-oriented assessment ecology with students. For some, I know, this account will not present itself as “queer” or, even if so, “not queer enough.” Indeed, one reviewer suggested that this approach “resonates better with expressive pedagogy than queer pedagogy.” I understand this critique; it is something I’ve often accused myself of. Many of us who pursue queer (or critical or antiracist or feminist or crip or some combination thereof) pedagogies often feel our work fails to be radical enough in dislodging the affective, material, and ideological practices embedded in the late-capitalist, neoliberal, colonial, racist, and necropolitical university.

As I continue to reflect on how students and I engaged assessment (and each other) during the fall of 2018, I attend to the ways in which my positionality influenced the way I navigated assessment *with* students. I was a White, cis, queer, neurodivergent graduate student teaching a new course and working toward a dissertation project that was infinitely impacted by the affective attachments to literacy, technology, education, and assessment. How did my reading of queer

theory and writing studies—notoriously White scholarly spaces—impact my practices? I was teaching this course at a PWI with a class of students who carried variously overlapping but often different attachments. How did this environment reinforce my Whiteness instead of troubling it? Because these attachments “do things,” which “involves an interweaving of the personal with the social, the affective with the mediated” (Ahmed, 2004, p. 28), assessment’s affective attachments are never just an individual student’s response to a teacher’s “objective” evaluation. Assessment’s affective attachments, and the labor it takes to recognize and engage those attachments in responsible and ethical ways, move us toward a collective need for queerly-oriented assessment ecologies within larger systems of learning and literacy *beyond and otherwise* but still attentive to the here-and-now. According to West-Puckett, Caswell, and Banks (2023), this is the work of the *assessment killjoy*, who seeks not only to tear down but to “investigate the writing construct(s) we know and to challenge those models that do not yet reflect the nuanced and complex spaces of writing we value” (p. 18). Intentionally being an assessment killjoy and inviting students to do the same—in a late-capitalist, neo-liberal, colonial, racist, and necropolitical university—is queer.

One aspect I’ve addressed, but certainly not enough, in this chapter is the affective, material, and ideological complexities that digital media, itself, poses to the work of assessment. In an original draft of this chapter, I did more to highlight the *queerness* of digital media for assessment, but reoriented toward the collaborative assessment that students and I intentionally engaged in. I do still think about one student who, in a post-course interview for my dissertation, suggested that the alternative assessment model worked well for a digital media composing course because the kinds of projects we composed were so much more personal than projects in her other courses. I’m still trying to unpack this particular affective attachment and its implications.

The purposes and power attached to our curricular designs and assessment practices are bound up in each other, and to create a socially just version of one requires the same of the other. Recognizing the possibilities for learning experiences *beyond and otherwise* means troubling the ways we have attached our bodyminds to certain narratives about technology and communication but also concepts like “success” and “failure” and reimagining those attachments together. To move toward a queerly-oriented assessment ecology, we—all of us involved in the literacy learning endeavor—must *collectively* find ways of being that respect and honor students and the affective attachments they carry while also disidentifying with (Muñoz, 1999) prevailing systemic, political schemes that ignore affect in favor of mythical objectivity. Assessment, we must understand, is made of innumerable affective attachments that stick to us and orient how we interact with all of our other affective histories, stories, emotions, ideologies, and ways of being. A queerly-oriented assessment ecology is, in part, about recognizing assessment is never just feedback on a project or a grade on a transcript. Because assessment’s affective attachments matter. And students know this. They feel it.

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