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Utilizing Anti-Racist Pedagogy in the Modern U.S. Classroom

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Utilizing Anti-Racist Pedagogy in the Modern U.S. Classroom

Introduction

For decades, scholars and educators have been looking at ways to make the U.S. classroom an equitable learning environment. Racism is one of the many deficits in society that make education, and the world at large, inequitable. The racism we often think about is overt. Yet racism functions systemically and manipulates institutions like education in more covert ways. Because people do not imagine the same level of overt racism in education, they often think it is not there anymore. This paper aims to outline the problem of systemic racism and how it affects assessment practices in the ELA classroom. Further, I will identify ways to implement anti-racist pedagogy into the current literacy practices in the ELA classroom, in conjunction with the standards and frameworks that govern them in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The language we teach and value in society is what scholar Asao Inoue calls Standard Edited American English (SEAE), and what this paper calls standard English, which is the more formal, academic language valued in schools and in assessment of student writing. Black, Brown, Indigenous, Hispanic, and Asian American people often use different language variations. According to Translators Without Borders, “There are between 350 and 430 languages spoken in the United States of America, making it one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world” (Language Data for the United States of America). Yet schools often fail to take this into account when designing instruction.

Despite tremendous linguistic variation across the country, Standard English remains the academic standard of language in today’s classroom. It is embedded into state and

nationwide frameworks, such as what we work with here in Massachusetts, making it both unavoidable and the most “valuable” language for a student to be literate in. Charity Hudley and Mallinson address this inequity in their work *We Do Language*, writing that this English is “often viewed as the target for how students should express themselves in school settings and how adults should express themselves in professional settings” (20). Many middle-class and upper middle-class white students primarily grow up speaking a version of English at home that more closely resembles standard English, meaning that when they are in school they are already familiar with the rules of standard English and are quick to be seen as literate. Other students with different home language variations who are not as familiar with school language come to school less prepared for success than their white peers, often taking longer to achieve the literacy rates of their white peers, even if they are literate in another linguistic variation. Where this most affects students is in existing assessment practices.

Background

Understanding the structural racism this project is concerned with, especially in the context of education, can be challenging as it is more nuanced than it is explicit. Firstly, we must look at values in society. Historically, upper class white people have always been validated for how they use language and, further, build power through language use. It is not that white America is fluent in standard English; it is that the way white America speaks has been designated as standard. In Inoue’s book *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies: Teaching and Assessing Writing for a Socially Just Future*, he notes that it is white people who have had the “privilege to speak and write the most in civic life and in the academy” and “Whose words have been validated as history, truth, knowledge, story, the most throughout history” (30). History is documented by white people; literacy has been granted to white people and thus has dominated

the language of power and what is deemed as “right,” correct, and proper. The classroom does not escape these consequences. Because standard English deriving from upper class white populations governs the modern classroom, many students, especially BIPOC students, may have less access to the literacy standard, standard English, than their peers, and consequently can be penalized for it. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) *Report for Reading* showed that only 15% of Black 8th graders met proficiency levels in 2019, the lowest reported percentage for any race or ethnicity. In comparison, white students were at 42% proficiency. Assessment data like this suggests that the United States school system is still structured around inherent racial and socioeconomic bias.

This kind of racism is a system that operates seamlessly in education. Inoue writes that “[r]acism seen and understood as structural...reveals the ways that systems...already work to create failure in particular places and associate it with particular bodies” (4) which manifests itself in rates of achievement. The systemic racism inherent in much of our ELA curriculum, often located in assessment practices, leads to “judgments of student writing that use a local [standard English] with populations of people who do not use that discourse on a daily basis” (Inoue 6), thus catering to middle class white students in the classroom who have more access to this discourse. Mary Ann Corley notes “literacy is more than the acquisition of reading and writing skills; it is also a social practice or social currency, and, as such, a key to social mobility” (2). Thus, this urgent problem takes opportunity away from marginalized communities and upholds a system of white supremacy, specifically within the U.S. classroom. This way of thinking suggests that standard English is the only acceptable and valuable literacy practice in the classroom and diminishes students' languages or dialects practiced in their own lives.

Measurement of fluency in standard English is just one of the practices that becomes a basis for determining value or “merit” in assessment of student work. Large-scale standardized testing itself is based in efforts to subordinate non-white populations. Reports pointing to an achievement gap between BIPOC and white students in standardized testing should come as no surprise: “Historically, students of color have scored lower on standardized exams than their peers” (Couch II, Frost, et al. 5). As early as the 19th Century, Carl Brigham introduced testing as a way to show the superiority “of the Nordic race group” (Rosales and Walker). From there, what has defined “the standard” has been based in, as Inoue defines it, the white (and typically middle-class) habitus. Inoue clarifies why this has been perpetuated even in current classrooms saying “[c]onventional writing assessment practices rarely if ever dismantle the racism in our classrooms and schools because they do not address whiteness in the dominant discourse as hegemonic and students’ relationship to it” (14). We must acknowledge that what makes up our evaluation of student texts is both subjective and influenced by a dominant discourse, one, as should be clear, that is inherently racist. Understanding this, rethinking assessment of student-produced texts and writing in the context of that distinction is where we can make progress. As Inoue argues “We cannot eradicate racism in our writing classrooms until we actually address it first in our writing assessments, and our theories about what makes up our writing assessments” (9). Thus, anti-racist practice must directly confront and disrupt these norms and patterns in the classroom by changing the pedagogy that allows this racism to operate.

Pedagogical Practice

Pedagogy refers to one’s teaching practices. It is a general umbrella term for the particular teaching approaches an educator uses. Its broadness speaks to the mindset teachers

apply to different strategies of teaching not limited to classroom setup and management, feedback, assignments, and perhaps importantly, assessment. There are numerous pedagogies each tailored with particular values and goals. Its purpose is to enrich learning experiences by applying specific theory-based teaching practices to achieve an intended outcome. Pedagogy does not stand alone, however; it is intertwined with learning theory. A learning theory is the basis of a school of thought while pedagogy often refers to how this theory is applied in a learning environment. For instance, there is theory on anti-racism and how it better learning, and anti-racist pedagogy that applies those ideas into teaching styles. Pedagogies themselves do not exist without their own intentions and ideologies. They aim to provide a particular lens of theory and practice to the classroom but are used interchangeably and collaboratively with other pedagogies.

Because of this, there are various types of pedagogy seen in the US classroom. Pre-service teachers are flooded with information on these pedagogies and are constantly being told what the best classroom practices look like. Decades of research inform these practices and serve as useful guidelines for teachers to follow. Often pre-service teachers hear about constructivist, behaviorist, integrative, teacher-based, student-based etc., pedagogies. To reiterate, each of these has its own methods, practices, and intentions. These pedagogies are standard in the training to become a teacher. However, when we think about anti-racist pedagogy or culturally responsive curriculum, or even Critical Race Theory, the perception of pedagogy changes. Anti-racist pedagogies recognize racism as “a product of racialized structures that themselves tend to produce unequal, unfair, or uneven social distributions, be they grades, or access to education, or the expectations for judging writing” (Inoue 53) and use this understanding to disrupt the cycle that structural racism produces. Specifically in the ELA classroom, this theory provides a lens to

look at racism found in our own perception of proficient literacy while its pedagogy urges students and teachers alike to examine both the root of this and its consequences. Doing so helps to create an equitable classroom in which the covert racism has been exposed and disrupted. The implementation of anti-racist pedagogy might be, but should not always be, as simple as acknowledging that the way we write in a classroom is based in roots of racism and fostering a discussion on that. Simply put, it is a frame to examine racism's prevalence overtly and covertly in education.

We use different curricula every day in the classroom to accomplish different things. Anti-racist pedagogy examines and rejects racism in school, that is its function in the class. One classroom cannot use only anti-racist pedagogy exclusively because one pedagogy does not address all the needs in any given classroom. However, teachers should be paring it consciously with the rest of their practices. We are only seeing anti-racist pedagogy and CRT as new ideas because learning needs have changed and society has become more understanding and willing to acknowledge this issue that has always existed.

CRT, in particular, which informs both anti-racist pedagogy and culturally responsive curriculum, has become banned in many states and school districts due to its controversial yet entirely accurate claim that America was built upon structural racism and pervades everyday life. The NAACP Legal Defense Fund identifies this controversy as “a coordinated backlash to the realization of a true multi-racial democracy in America” (“Critical Race Theory”). In brief, people do not want to acknowledge racism not only within this country but in the current pedagogy we implement in schools. Anti-racist pedagogy and CRT aim to address gaps in equitable education, not push agendas of any one political party. It is important to understand that these are pedagogies and practices, not one way of thinking that aims to govern the entire K-

12 curriculum. Rather, this pedagogy offers a lens to examine the racist bias in educational practices.

This is not to say that anti-racist pedagogy practices themselves are new. Rather, BIPOC educators have been at the forefront of implementing these practices and advocating for the equitable education this project builds upon. However, when we think of popular progressive practices, many of them have been curated by white educators and researchers (Delpit). Scholar and educator Lisa Delpit critiques this in her book *Other People's Children*. When these pedagogical solutions are created by white people to solve equitable education, using research from predominantly white people, it lacks the thorough understanding of educational racism, BIPOC experience, and global awareness needed to make change. Delpit notes that education for under-represented students “can only be devised in consultation with adults who share their culture” (45). Even the most progressive education standards that attempt to address educational inequity have continued to fall short and often never address the root of the problem (our inherently racist pedagogy).

So, this paper does not attempt to make new conclusions and experiences about how best to teach BIPOC students. As Delpit puts it, BIPOC educators, students, and families have been advocating for how to teach all students best for decades. The vast majority of scholars referenced in this paper including Delpit, Inoue, Jeanine L. Williams, Anne H. Charity Hudley, and Paulo Freire, to name a few, are all people of color and committed educators who have been doing the groundwork and outlining the changes we can make to education. This research aims to gather their findings and apply them to a current K-12 educational sphere. This project applies their insightful knowledge about BIPOC student experience and expertise on curriculum and learning to actual K-12 settings (accounting for frameworks and classroom practices).

Current Scholarship in the Field

As established, social justice curricula is starting to be implemented, identity-based practices are popping up in schools, and the student is starting to be seen as an individual. But our system is still racist. Under-represented students, namely students of color and financially at-risk students, are consistently falling behind and scoring lower than their counterparts on assessments. According to the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, both Hispanic and Black students ages 16-24 dropout of school at higher rates than their white counterparts ("Percent of High School Dropouts"). If we see a pattern of failure, we must do something about it. These statistics are not showing that white students are better or smarter, but that our current pedagogical practices that operate without our racist education system cater to a middle-class white habitus.

The work these scholars produced went beyond the new wave of curricula and offered ways to decolonize the ELA classroom by expanding on what literacy and writing look like when it is inclusive of all language varieties, when assessments are equitable and conscious of how they judge students, and addresses when and where racism manifests in the classroom. While the scholarship written in this field has addressed the needs and benefits of this type of pedagogy, it lacks application in real life settings. Often, educational pedagogy is applied to an ideal classroom, not one that operates within a system of frameworks and regulation. This project aims to contextualize this pedagogy within that system.

An example of anti-racist practice that functions particularly well in an idealized setting is Asao Inoue's ideas on labor-based grading. This suggests students should be assessed on the successful completion of labor rather than merit to combat racist assessment practices. Merit, or

the measurement of success we hold students to, is often a testament to how well they can mimic the devices of standard English. By rewarding students for their labor, it creates the chance for equitable assessment and allows for dialogue about language skills without penalizing students. This anti-racist pedagogy addresses inequitable practices within the classroom and reframes how we assess students' skills and success without being based on one standard of language. He brings up profound ideas about students' writing performances being “unrankable because they inter-are” (116). Here, “inter” refers to the interconnectedness of all experiences, including how one’s race shapes this experience. So, writing performance is an interconnected piece of work that encapsulates every experience a student has had, making the work and its individual nuance difficult to rank. In Inoue’s writing ecology where good writing and bad writing does not exist and is replaced with writing from experience within one's own habitus and how it fits into an interconnected world, all writing is acceptable. This idea, while liberatory, is not entirely achievable within a structured classroom. However, in Inoue’s ecologies, classrooms of students and teachers are responsible make the standards of which they judge work on. Society has historically made this standard coincide with dominant white discourse.

This idea, though truly equitable, is far from a classroom reality in most cases. Inoue recognizes this and offers discussion and transparency about judgment and standards. He engages in deep, critical discussions about who creates standards, why they are used to judge work, and what purpose they serve with higher-education level students. To some degree, this can work in a secondary education classroom. However, other scholars such as Delpit understand how important these judgments and standards have in a more practical way. Delpit writes, “The language associated with the power structure - “Standard English” - is the language of economic success, and all students have the right to schooling that gives them access to that language”

(68). She argues that not giving students the skills to be literate in standard English is to take away opportunity at success.

Criticism of Delpit's idea that we see more of today is that this thought process is restricting students to white norms once again. However, Delpit expands on this idea by noting that access to this language is powerful for all students, which can consequently be liberating. She suggests "using European philosophical and critical standards to challenge the tenets of European belief systems" to "transform dominant discourses for liberatory purposes" (162). Delpit develops this further writing, "If you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier" (25). So, when students have access to the language valued by society, in this case standard English and dominant white linguistic forms, students can gain access to success and opportunity. Standard English will remain present as the idealized language in academic and professional settings in the United States. So, as Delpit suggests, all students should have the right to access this literacy. This directly counters Inoue's philosophy of writing practice as an unrankable representation of someone's existence in the world. For K-12 students, part of that existence is defined by school and learning how to function within it. Teachers must then understand student's writing and literacy as a product of who the student is, and not value or devalue it for its proximity to English. Rather, teachers should teach standard English as a tool to succeed in certain spaces while addressing and embracing other literacies as valuable tools in different spaces.

If Inoue and Delpit seem to offer opposing arguments for what should happen in the ELA classroom, other scholars offer what might be seen as a middle way. Students must have access to the language of power but cannot be limited to this language alone without perpetuating systemic racism. Charity Hudley and Mallinson find that teachers must recognize "the

importance of explicitly instructing students as to the norms and conventions of standardized English while building their understanding of non-standardized varieties of English” (36). So, teaching standardized English is necessary and liberatory as it is what is currently in place in our education system. However, as noted by Charity Hudley and Mallinson as well as Inoue, we must also teach, and value, more linguistic variations in the classroom and reflect this in assessment practices. It is evident that having the tools to access this dominant discourse can be powerful for all students, but it must be approached with the conscious thinking and discussion provoked by scholars like Inoue. This project works to bridge these ideas of anti-racist linguistic freedom and access to power and literary success, it will do so in a way that works under the context of frameworks and standardization in the secondary classroom.

When we look at frameworks that shape curricula across the country, the true limitations of K-12 are revealed. For the purposes of this project, I am looking specifically at my own state where I will one day teach, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Overall, a lot of the Massachusetts ELA Frameworks are written with vital literacy skills in mind. While there is evidence of unconscious racial bias weaved into a few of the standards, namely the presentation of oral and written skills, a lot of the standards become racially biased through their implementation not because of the actual language of the frameworks. What is mostly racially biased here is the insistence on standard formal English and insistence of westernized dominant white thought practices. This means that we must address the value of language in the classroom and the assessments we produce because of it. Moreover, what is most exciting is that an examination of these standards shows there is actually room within the frameworks to implement anti-racist pedagogy. The shift must come with how we implement these frameworks. The task now is to see how it can be operationalized within these guidelines—because the guidelines are

not going away. Understanding the language in these guidelines may help educators utilize the flexibility most do not realize is present in these standards. Moreover, this project will build upon the established schools of thought this initial research worked upon to create tangible practices for teachers to implement in their classroom.

Framework Goals and Preface

The goals of the framework are explicitly stated; their purpose is to “define college and career readiness expectations” (“Massachusetts Curriculum Framework”). This is an important distinction from broader goals of education that seek to build informed, capable students. Rather, these frameworks are in place to set expectations for professional readiness whether in higher education or career settings. The type of readiness these expectations address falls into five main categories. They are Reading Standards for Literature, Reading Standards for Informational Text, Writing Standards, Speaking and Listening Standards, and Language Standards. Each of these areas of standards pertains to important literacy skills learned in the classroom. However, when applying the goals of the frameworks to the standards, it becomes clear that there is an expectation for how all students should be reading, writing, speaking, listening, and using language. There is an implication that “college and career readiness” means that students must be literate in one set of governing frameworks that do not account for bias, personal experience, or literacy outside of the white homogeneous structure in order to be considered “ready” for life beyond secondary education. Readiness, then, equates to a broader cultural expectation that, as I have previously argued, is situated in white, middle-class habitus. It is here that we can see why Delpit resonates: she recognizes the wider society a student will enter into and her goal is to prepare BIPOC students to navigate—and succeed—beyond the classroom.

And Delpit is not alone. Many would argue not having a standard to hold all students to will create a lack of literacy levels and readiness that is necessary for life beyond secondary education. As we know, there is a language of power present within both academic settings and professional career settings. This language of power caters to dominant white discourse in society, and this is what these frameworks also cater to which is seen when looking through the actual language embedded within the frameworks. This presents a dilemma seen in many conversations of anti-racist education. On the one hand, students must be prepared for a world that operates within the white dominant discourse and having standards to be literate within this discourse is useful. On the other hand, this practice reproduces the same predictable, inequitable outcomes as it always has. To make these frameworks useful and equitable to all students, it must be presented as a tool to help students succeed within a certain context, rather than a tool that is seen as standard to literacy in all areas of life.

There are two ways, then, to use these frameworks within the classroom in a more equitable and empowering way. The first of which is to teach students about using white discourse in settings like higher education and professional careers, while explicitly stating why this discourse is used and the history behind it as Charity-Hudley and Mallinson articulate. Secondly, these frameworks can be used as guiding literacy skills that all students need but can be tailored to make space for multiple literacies aside from what is seen in dominant white discourse. The skills of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and using language are all vital to creating literacy and are rightfully placed as the focus of the ELA frameworks. These skills, however, can be tailored to anti-racist practices of teaching literacy.

Framework Analysis

This research will focus on select Massachusetts ELA Frameworks from the Grades 9-10 Reading and Writing Standards. These were intentionally chosen as 9-10th grade is a middle ground for secondary education which covers 5-12th grade. Moreover, reading and writing standards were chosen not because they are the most important literacy skills, but rather because they are the skills that are most affected by structural racism and bias within secondary ELA classrooms. The following standards are meant to reflect core skills within the curriculum that are needed in order to succeed in our current secondary education system.

Framework #1: Reading

Reading Standards for Literature [RL] and Reading Standards for Informational Text [RI] Key Ideas and Details

RL.

1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what a text states explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
2. Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of a text.
3. Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

RI.

1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what a text states explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
2. Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of a text.
3. Analyze how an author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the presence or absence of connections between them.

The skills outlined in the Key Ideas and Details Reading Standards for Literature are namely citing textual evidence to support text analysis, determining a theme and analyzing its development, and analyzing characters. The Key Ideas and Details Reading Standards for Informational Text are identical to this with the exception of ELA.9-10.RI.3 which asks for

analysis of events and idea construction and progression. These frameworks include important literacy skills for students' success in a secondary education setting. While it may seem these frameworks refrain from using restrictive or biased language, they are rooted in a very Western idea of thinking. Scholars Stephanie de Oliveira and Richard E. Nisbett explain that "The dominant way of thinking in many Western cultures can be described as analytic" (782). Within these frameworks, the skill focuses on the idea of demonstrating critical thinking skills in this Westernized way. The frameworks here imply that to determine the theme or central idea of a text, students must analyze and come to conclusions in a specific format that does not necessarily correlate with each student's cultural way of thinking.

Moreover, the wording of these frameworks positions this as the *only* way to analyze or determine meaning from a text. Because the frameworks chose to identify this as the most important way to read a text, they are reinforcing the ways systemic racism works to disempower students within the modern education system. Because assessment is crafted around what is deemed most important to know, which is identified through these frameworks, this then becomes colonizing and punitive for students who do not necessarily follow or subscribe to Western ways of thinking. This is not to say, however, that teaching this method is inherently wrong.

The main issue lies in the fact that it is seen as the only way to teach this skill. If we are to give students the tools to succeed in our Western world today, they should be practicing these skills. However, our schools often only teach these specific ways of teaching and neglect others. This is what perpetuates the very Westernized, and often white, ways of thinking, reading, writing, analyzing, speaking, and listening within the classrooms. By positioning this as just one

way to teach reading, and not the only or best way to teach it, *and* by offering students the opportunity to express reading skills in other ways, this becomes much more equitable.

While these frameworks are rooted in Western thought, their wording allows enough flexibility to be implemented in more equitable ways. However, many classrooms today use these standards in accordance with Westernized thoughts and continue to keep their classroom spaces colonized. A common implementation of this is when asking students to determine key ideas and details within texts, teachers often ask open-ended questions and ask students to support their answers with facts and quotations from the text. This comprehension skill is prevalent in nearly every English classroom a student will encounter throughout school. Dominant white, and Westernized, culture demands logic and evidence for inferences made by people both within and outside of the classroom. So, students must be familiar with having to defend and justify their answers using logical reasoning in order to be successful in the classroom. What teachers do not recognize when implementing this is that there are certain students, particularly white students who have been raised in Western practices and ideologies, who have been more exposed to this skill and are more equipped to answer these questions. Students who do not naturally fall into patterns of white habitus may struggle with the skill more than their peers, and thus need more understanding and direct training with this skill. Simply assessing all students based on this skill again becomes punitive and perpetuates the colonized classroom as some students are more prepared and adept to use reading skills in that way.

Yet what is perhaps a bigger issue with this is that teachers do not go beyond this skill and allow students to come to inferences not based directly within the text, which excludes life experience and deters students' relationships with a text during the actual reading process. Anti-racist scholars acknowledge this and urge educators to expand their practices in order to engage

all students within the reading process more. Reading “is contextual and dependent on the reader’s purposes, goals, experiences, positions, and dispositions”, yet this is not taken into account when asking students to answer comprehension questions about a text (Williams “Constructing Anti-Racist Reading Pedagogical Practices”). We often discourage students from using personal experience to answer a question about comprehension, even if this experience contextualizes reading in a way that enhances comprehension. So, “Antiracist reading puts these positions and dispositions at the forefront. It rejects notions of reader objectivity and acknowledges that how we think about, interpret, and derive meaning from a text is based on our racialized experiences.” (Williams “Constructing Anti-Racist Reading”). This practice directly disrupts the frameworks’ insistence on objectivity and brings in the context and dispositions that help many students. Not only does it disrupt bias in the frameworks, but also the Western analytical “thinking style” that “is characterized by a strong focus on the attributes of individual objects and the assumption that objects can be understood independent of their contexts” (de Oliveira and Nisbett 782). This practice does not value contextualization, and often leaves students who rely on their dispositions to help with the meaning making process behind. Allowing for students to bring this into the classroom in the ways Williams suggests combats this inequity.

Possible Solutions and Suggestions

This understanding addresses the anti-racist solutions and suggestions for classroom practice and builds off this understanding to further modify current assessment practices. A popular notion within the ELA classroom is that there is no one right answer when it comes to interpreting text. While there are many incorrect or misinterpret understandings of a text,

interpretation is meant to be up to individual readers. The classroom often omits or discards interpretations and opinions that do not align with specific teaching goals. While a student may present a completely valid and well formulated interpretation of a reading, teachers may not give it the same value as the answer stated in a textbook. Reliance on textbooks, standards, and frameworks have strained what is deemed acceptable in the classroom and what students readily bring to the classroom. So, assessments and assignments that lead students to multiple interpretations, or allow for students to create this meaning-making on their own, is extremely important in the classroom. This emphasis on reader-response pedagogy is growing and the value individual meaning-making is becoming more prevalent in the classroom. This is an exciting and hopeful practice for anti-racist pedagogy to be implemented with in the classroom. Until this becomes common practice, it is important to understand how assessment models affect student comprehension.

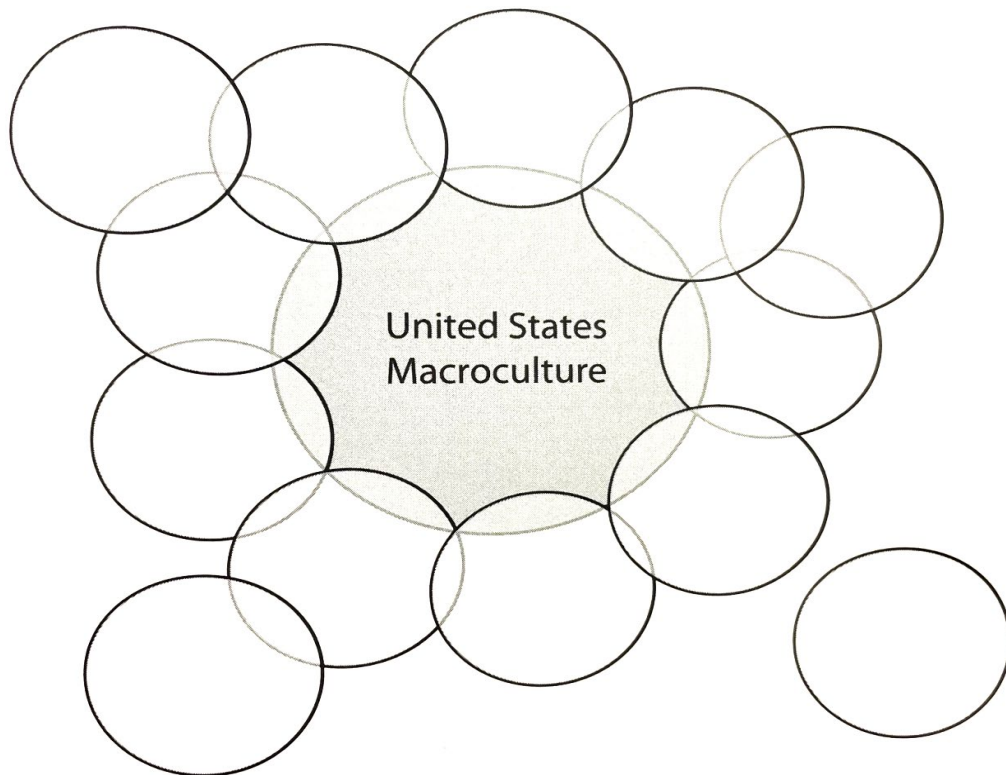
While the current assessment model of having students identify meaning based on the text alone and using evidence is important, it must be expanded. Currently, this assessment practice is seen as the only correct way to analyze a reading within our secondary education system. While it is an important skill for students to know, we cannot allow students to think this is the one correct way to analyze, doing so will perpetuate the punitive and colonizing qualities we see in our current assessment practices. When teaching this skill, teachers need to be direct in asserting that this is just one of many ways to analyze a reading. Teachers are then responsible for demonstrating different ways to express reading comprehension and meaning making within a text, such as drawing on personal life experience. What many teachers fail to understand is that a student determining the meaning of a story, or analyzing a character based on their own lives and how they can relate to, or critique such aspects, is demonstrating the same level of reading

comprehension that more seemingly objective answers using citation from the text are. These conclusions are just being arrived at in different ways.

One resource teachers can use to accomplish this is by directly comparing and contrasting the world of the text to dominant culture. Charity Hudley and Mallinson identify ways for students to compare microcultures with the macroculture of the United States. This conversation allows students to both think about what the dominant culture in the United States is. Students will use their own knowledge in context to relate the cultures and characteristics of a text with that of the dominant one in the United States. Moreover, it allows students to think about how a text affirms, differentiates, or compares to this culture. It can further “increase students’ awareness of how they use language within cultural spheres” (Charity Hudley and Mallinson 44). This exercise brings back contextualization that Western analytical thought, as seen in the Frameworks, often leaves out. This can open up the understanding of a text for students in a powerful way by allowing them to think about the cultural and historical context the text is being produced in, which can aid a student’s understanding immensely. Below are examples of diagrams that can be completed in class to implement this practice.

From
and

Hudley



Mallinson's *We Do Language* "Language and Culture: Having Courageous Conversations", 2014.

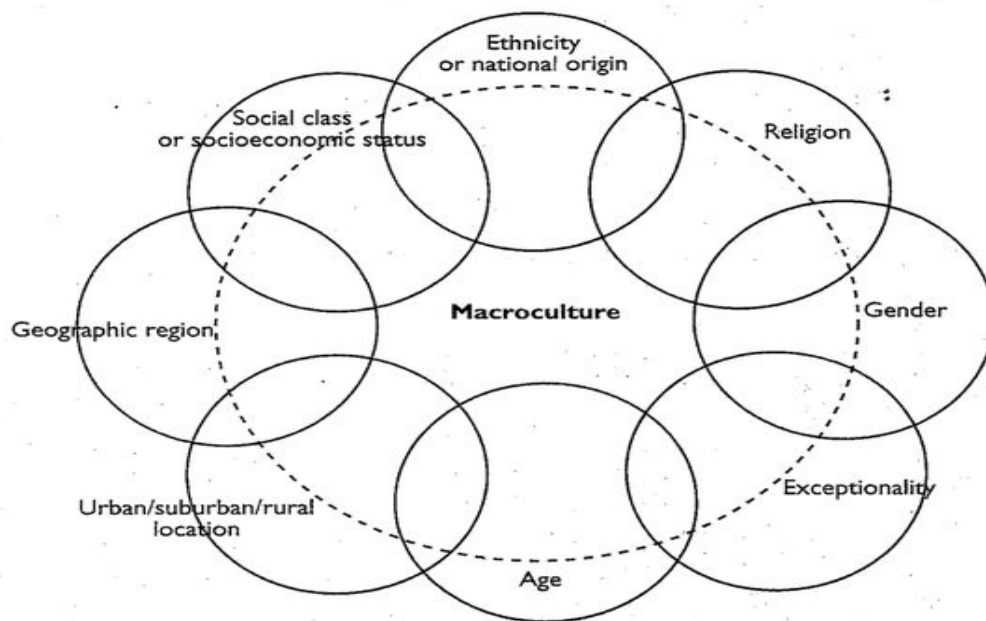


FIGURE F-1
Cultural identity of an individual (adapted from Carpenter, 1990).

Another solution is for teachers to incorporate qualities not necessarily valued in formal academic culture, such as contextualization, personal experience, and prior cultural knowledge into formal and summative assessments. Reading comprehension questions can look like what classrooms are currently using (the meaning of a text comes from the text alone and should be found and justified using only evidence from the text), as long as they are alongside reading comprehension that allow for different modes of meaning-making.

Delpit addresses various ways students pose questions and how those variations show comprehension throughout different groups of students. Discussing current findings, she notes Black students “were unaccustomed to responding to the “known answer” test questions” so when asked “direct factual questions which called for feedback of what had just been taught”, students “contribute[d] very little information” within the classroom (56). This clearly emphasizes the bias in Western analytical thinking within the frameworks as groups of students may not culturally identify with this type of question. It is important to understand that not all students will approach this factual style of reading comprehension question with the same amount of exposure and usage. We can still work to teach students how to answer this style of questioning specifically, especially in the instance of standardized test practice. However, we must be transparent about why this style of questioning is so prevalent and offer additional reading comprehension questions that make space for different linguistic styles within the classroom. Delpit continues by explaining that “questions probing the students’ own analyses and evaluations” promote active and involved responses (57). This notion described by scholars such as Williams is proven in this case. Student’s own experience and evaluations are powerful and not always conducive to the factual, limited contextual style that Western analytical thought practices have, which is what our frameworks are rooted in.

When thinking about actual reading comprehension assessments, teachers can make small changes that are inclusive of the current frameworks as well as other styles of questioning that are relevant and accessible to all students and their knowledge. This change can look as simple as a question asking “What is the central meaning of this passage? Use evidence from the text to support your answer” being changed to “What is the central meaning of this passage? How do you know?”. Both of these questions are open-ended; however, the latter allows students to use the logical reasoning and analytical skills that make the most sense to them, including their own contextual experiences and personal disposition whereas the first questions restrict students to the text. Both kinds of questions can be useful in different circumstances, as long as there is space and clear reasoning for both of them within the classroom.

Real World Implementation

Boston Public Schools recently released a report titled *Impact of a Justice-Oriented Assessment on Student Experiences* describing the formulation and implementation of anti-racist, justice-oriented practices into reading comprehension. Their research aimed to expand the updated “passages used in its grade 6-12 reading Benchmark assessments to better reflect its cultural, racial, and socioeconomic diversity” by “drawing reading passages from the community (e.g., local museums, student newspapers, prominent graduates)” (Lyons et al. 5-8). This goal was intended to have students “feel valued,” and, ultimately, through “the engaging nature and familiarity of the context, students will be able to more easily demonstrate their knowledge and skills (i.e., assessment performance will improve)” (Lyons et al. 8). The articles here were chosen for the specific set of students at hand to make it more accessible. The authors featured

within these articles, reflecting the students served at the school, will likely speak in more familiar ways to students and present more accessible than other texts.

What this paper is more concerned with, however, is how BPS altered the reading comprehension questions to be anti-racist and justice oriented. The study used an article about coral reefs as the control sample formulating basic reading comprehension questions similar to what students would find on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) standardized test. One question read “Which sentences from ‘[Redacted Passage Title Here]’ BEST shows that people must work together to save coral reefs?” (Lyons et al. 11-12). The initial modified version of this, using an article titled “Climate Change in Racial Injustice”, read as follows: “Which sentence from ‘Climate Change in Racial Injustice’ BEST shows that environmental racism is an important topic for youth of color to speak about” (12). The researchers noted the change in this question “has students considering both the injustice behind environmental racism and the power that youth, and youth of color in particular, have to make a change in their communities to disrupt existing inequities” (12). This assessment question draws upon relevant student knowledge and considers familiarity with lived experience about this topic rather than solely being based on the best. While students must use the skill of looking to the text for knowledge, relevancy and personal interest within the subject is piqued within this question.

The following diagram comes from the research report and offers anti-racist reading comprehension prompts and items asked to students.

Item Number	Item Type	Item Stem/Prompt
1	Selected Response	What is the main idea of "Climate Change Is Racial Injustice"?
2	Selected Response	According to "Meet a Young Activist of Color," how do youth activists MOST help the environment?
3	Selected Response	Which sentence from "Meet a Young Activist of Color" BEST supports the idea that young people of color can make a difference in their communities?
4	Selected Response	<p>Read this sentence from paragraph 4 of "Climate Change is Racial Injustice".</p> <p><i>"The episode begins with the idea that, 'climate change is racial injustice,' and focuses on the idea that pollution and the environment impact communities differently."</i></p> <p>What does the word <u>injustice</u> mean?</p>
5	Selected Response	How do the authors of the texts interpret youth activism in different ways?
6	Selected Response	Which sentence from "Climate Change is Racial Injustice" BEST shows that climate destruction is an important topic for youth to speak about?
7	Selected Response	<p>Read this excerpt from the passage "Climate Change is Racial Injustice."</p> <p><i>The students cited in their reporting research that shows climate change, including rising temperatures in cities and poor air quality, disproportionately affects non-white neighborhoods. Black communities face dangerously high levels of pollution and are more likely to live near landfills and industrial plants that pollute water and air and harm quality of life, according to a 2018 report from the Environmental Protection Agency.</i></p> <p>Which statement BEST summarizes the evidence in the excerpt?</p>
8	Essay	<p>Write an informative essay that explains why talking about climate destruction is important and why young climate activists of color are crucial to this conversation. Use information from both texts to develop your response. In your essay, be sure to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly introduce your topic and ideas; • Use evidence from the text to support your thinking; • Include a concluding statement to summarize your response.

"Item Stems for the Culturally Responsive Assessment Form", *Impact of a Justice-Oriented Assessment on Student Experiences* (Lyons et al. 2021).

Framework #2: Writing

Grades 9–10 Writing Standards [W] Text Types and Purposes

To fully contextualize the following frameworks, it is important to analyze its intention, as stated by the frameworks themselves. It reads as follows:

The intent of Writing Standards 1–3 is to ensure flexibility, not rigidity, in student writing. Many effective pieces of writing blend elements of more than one text type in service of a single purpose: for example, an argument may rely on anecdotal evidence, a short story may function to explain some phenomenon, or a literary analysis may use explication to develop an argument. In addition, each of the three types of writing is itself a broad category encompassing a variety of texts: for example, narrative poems, short stories, and memoirs represent three distinct forms of narrative writing. Finally, although the bulk of writing assigned in school should address the purposes described below, other forms of writing—for example, personal reflections in prose or poem form, scripts of dramas or interviews—should have a place in the classroom as well. To develop flexibility and nuance in their writing, students need to engage with a wide range of complex model (109)

This process allows us to understand these frameworks as a suggestion with room to interpret and bring in a variety of text, media, and writing styles within the classroom to produce varied, thoughtful writing pieces from students. This preface is powerful in understanding the meta-narrative of white homogeneity within our education system, and how it is a subconscious choice to subscribe to it and perpetuate it. As this wording in the framework expresses, there is, and should be room for flexibility and linguistic dexterity in the type of materials and assignments given to students. Moreover, it recognizes that effective writing does not have to use one specific set of writing styles or skills in order to be a successful text. It implies that the following frameworks should be utilized as a base model with room to interpret, expand, and change for the purpose of the writing assignment.

What problematizes this is the actual implementation of standards because of their limiting wording. As seen below, the standards subvert the message of flexibility found in the preface by only providing a limited number of writing styles with very specific, westernized white standards. However, the preface urges educators to go beyond this rigidity and use these guiding models as a base that can be manipulated to the needs of a writing assessment. When analyzing the following standards, it is important to keep in mind this process that encourages the kind of flexibility and scope that will encompass practices conducive with anti-racist pedagogy.

1. Write arguments (e.g., essays, letters to the editor, advocacy speeches) to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
2. Write informative/explanatory texts (e.g., essays, oral reports, biographical feature articles) to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
3. Write narratives to develop experiences or events using effective literary techniques, well-chosen details, and well-structured sequences.

These frameworks articulate three types of writing for students (argumentative, informative/explanatory, and narrative) along with the specifications on how this writing should be produced. Under each framework are about 5-6 sub-standards containing specific writing elements and goals for each writing type. These three variations of writing reflect the most common practices seen in the classroom today. Similarly, these are the writing pieces students can be expected to produce for standardized testing, in this case the MCAS. Understandably, these frameworks address the type of testing students will be required to pass in order to graduate and prepare students for that. While this paper cannot fully address the inequity within the standardized testing system of Massachusetts itself, it can identify ways that standardization

negatively affects classroom assessment practices in inequitable ways by placing emphasis on western styles of writing only.

The first standard regarding argumentative writing articulates that students should produce claims from a variety of media and use valid and relevant evidence to support their claims. This skill is similar to the reading comprehension skills that fall under Key Ideas and Details in RI.1-3. Again, this is a very Westernized analytical process that students are asked to engage with. The second standard has students write informative and explanatory pieces. The main goal here is for students to provide objective and accurate descriptions of complex pieces of writing. This requires students to be proficient in reading comprehension that centers around standard English in order to provide the best summaries and reports of complex texts. Lastly, and perhaps most different from the other standards, is the narrative writing piece. Students must develop creative writing around experiences using specific literary elements as identified in the frameworks. While this is the most creative option, students are still being asked to use specific literary elements that are most often used in dominant white discourse and linguistic patterns. The limitation in types of writing within the standards is evident. Although the frameworks themselves acknowledge this limitation and encourage flexibility within the provided standards, it excludes a lot of non-western types of writing and does not give teachers a full scope of what they could be doing in the classroom with student writing.

What is more problematic however, is the implementation of specific guidelines rooted in Western ways of writing. It both omits other variations and styles of writing and values Westernized writing styles as better and the only way to write. This is mostly seen within the sub-standards detailing how each writing type (argumentative, informative/explanatory, and narrative) should be written. For example, within the narrative writing standard “Write narratives

to develop experiences or events using effective literary techniques, well-chosen details, and well-structured sequences” (ELA.9-10.W.3), there are two sub-standards that read “Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.” and “Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole” (ELA.9-10.W.3.b-c). While these standards seem like they can be applied differently in order to incorporate various requested forms of writing, actual classroom practice shows that these specific techniques must be rooted in dominant white discourse in order to be considered successful.

Delpit recalls a study that demonstrates this implemented bias. The research found that “There was a tendency among young white children to tell “topic centered” narratives – stories focused on one event – and a tendency among black youngsters, especially girls, to tell “episodic narratives” – stories that include shifting scenes and are typically longer” (55). This reveals a fact that classrooms seldom take into account: other cultures' differences in language use. While there are many ways different groups tell stories, consider Native American oral tradition, the classroom values limited ways to do so. Written, topic-centered stories following white linguistic customs are the most popular literature in schools and widely considered the correct or standard way to tell a story.

The value placed on dominant white linguistic customs and teachers' perceptions of it ultimately is what harms students. This study reinforces this revealing that white educators' attitudes towards these narratives differed than Black educators (55). In regard to the episodic narratives, Delpit writes, “white adults were uniformly negative” with comments such as “terrible story, incoherent” and “[n]ot a story at all in the sense of describing something that happened” (55). On the contrary, Black adults found the story was “well formed, easy to

understand, and interesting, with lots of detail and description” (55). Although the Black child’s story was more “nonlinear” than the white child’s story, the Black teachers found this to be a positive attribute (55). Both children’s stories used aspects directly identified within the standards as appropriate for narrative writing. However, the stories were received very differently because of their form.

Seeing as most teachers are white women, we can consider the reactions of the white adults as indicative of attitudes within the secondary education setting. The white teachers found the story better if it was more closely formulated to white linguistic standards and the further away from this, the more negative the feedback was. This clearly represents a detriment to non-white students who do not naturally write in white linguistic patterns, thus marginalizing them within the classroom. The frameworks call for “well-structured sequences” (ELA.9-10.W.3), which most teachers would consider to be present in topic-centered stories as shown from the study. Episodic stories on the other hand, may use “multiple plot lines” (ELA.9-10.W.3.b) which may be seen as “incoherent” despite being in the standard (Delpit 55). Although the use of multiple plot lines, pacing and sequencing are not explicitly defined in usage by the frameworks, many teachers would view topic-centered stories as being able to “sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole” (ELA.9-10.W.c) better than episodic stories as it is what we value in dominant white discourse.

Teachers often disregard the flexibility in the frameworks and only apply them to Western and dominant white ways of thinking, reading and writing. Again, this flexibility refers to the fact that the frameworks do not specifically identify a “well-structured sequence[e]” as being a topic-centered style of sequence. Teachers may devalue other types of sequencing and writing styles that they are less familiar with and label them as less than in comparison to the

white standards of writing. It is the value society inherently places on white homogeneous writing styles that keeps this bias perpetuated, not the frameworks themselves in many cases. If we can use the flexibility encouraged by the frameworks, we can take away and minimize the idea of white discourse being the only correct and valued discourse.

Writing Assessment Practices: ELA's Greatest Inequity

Assessment is considered a key factor in the education system. It is how we view, rank, and categorize students- which can be dangerous in a classroom that is not equipped to address bias. Assessment of writing can be marginalizing for many students as seen in the study discussed by Delpit. Scholarship has criticized this fact. Inoue addresses this stating “We live in a racist society, one that recreates well-known, well-understood, racial hierarchies in populations based on things like judgments of student writing that use a local [standard English]” (6). Acknowledging writing assessments are part of the reason why racist systems are reproduced can be a significant understanding for many teachers. If the history of writing assessments and how they function to perpetuate colonizing and racist systems goes unrecognized, the systems perpetuate. The way we view language, especially in the classroom, being dominantly white and not inclusive or representative of others, reveals “there is something wrong with the academic discourse itself” (Inoue 8). Because of this, “judging everyone against an academic discourse that clearly privileges middle class white students” is inherently wrong (Inoue 8). So, the goal here is to implement systems that address this clear bias in assessment practices by implementing anti-racist practices that disrupt the perpetuation of the colonized classroom.

There are many ways educators and scholars have identified to do this. While there is not one specific method that will work for every classroom, there are practices that can be

implemented within any group to mitigate the effects of this racism and disrupt it from existing unacknowledged. As Inoue astutely points out, within a system (education at large, a classroom, a text, an assessment), “there are no unbiased parts, but parts that have explicit biases that students and teacher explore and discuss together, then use to pose problems about the judgment of language (in this case, reflection as a construct)” (132). What is most important to remember here is that education suffers from systemic racism, it is embedded and unavoidable but not unrecognizable. Teachers must make a shift in how they confront this within the classroom. Classroom discussion as a tool for identifying bias and racism can be extraordinarily powerful. Within writing assessments, this can be done by examining the practice as a whole with students.

When student writing is judged, teachers often fail to address why they are judging that writing and what informs those judgments. Posing questions to students about what kind of writing they consider effective can be a powerful introduction to talking about the kinds of writing valued in society. Different answers students may bring in class will allow the teacher to think about what students themselves consider to be writing and how they naturally judge the writing one way or another. This conversation helps students to “understand the nature of valuing and judgment” (Inoue 17). Inoue furthers this understanding by encouraging teachers to involve their students in “rubric creating, drafting, judging, revising, and reflecting on the ways students read and make judgments on peer’s texts” (17) as a way to familiarize students with the assessment of writing. When students are familiar with what the process entails, they are more prepared for their own writing to be assessed.

Possible Solutions and Suggestions

Formulating Assessments

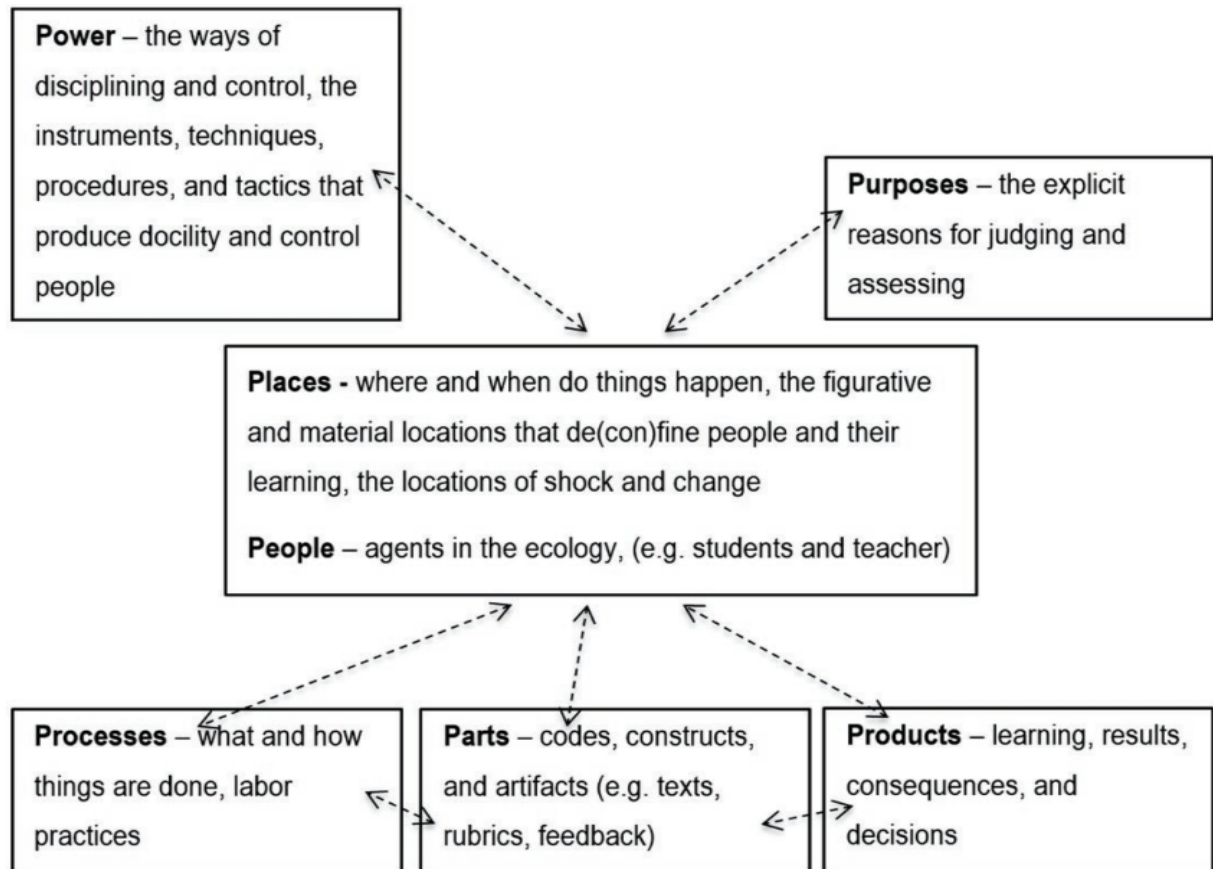
Teachers seeking to disrupt racism in writing assessments cannot stop there, however. Both Inoue and the writers of *Ain't Oughta Be in the Dictionary: Getting to Justice by Dismantling Anti-Black Literacy Assessment Practices* emphasize the importance of student participation during actual assessment creation (Randall et al.). These scholars urge that both teachers and students should have a clear purpose for assessing student learning. To do this successfully, there must be a classroom culture that allows for “students’ viewpoints [to be] highlighted through discussion and debate, differences are celebrated rather than squelched, and no single understanding of language is presented as “the truth”” (Godley and Minccini 323). Involving students within the actual process of assessing work, including their own, and valuing what students bring to the classroom, will help to mitigate the effects of cultural erasure and assimilation (Randall et al., 596). This kind of work means teachers cannot assume an all-knowing, and all authoritative role within the classroom if they want to be culturally sustaining for all students. Both teachers and students must be able and willing to acknowledge others' valuable insight and use it to help form their own opinions and thoughts.

This inclusion must be intentional. Students’ lives and experiences should be considered when formulating writing assessments. Randall, Poe and Slomp’s article articulates what a successful assessment practice includes. Successful assessments ensure “(BIPOC) students are deliberately integrated (not simply valued or as an afterthought) in every planning/ development phase of the assessment” (Randall et al., 596). This is something many teachers overlook in assessment formulation. Considering students' lived and linguistic experiences will help to recognize whether an assessment is effective or not. The Boston Public School’s research report further addresses this. The research notes, “assessment can value the students it's intended to serve by drawing on the cultural wealth that students bring with them into the classroom” (Lyons

et al. 7). Other scholars affirm this, specifically drawing on “BIPOC students’ funds of knowledge” as a consideration in assessment formulation (Randall et al., 596). Further stated, assessments should “allow [students] to demonstrate their competence in a variety of ways through community cultural wealth” (Randall et al., 596). The BPS report offers “the skills and assets associated with speaking more than one language or language variant, being connected to a large familial or community network, and resisting dominant negative messages” (7) as valuable considerations of what students bring to the classroom to inform assessment practices. By drawing on all of these facets, teachers can begin to produce meaningful writing experiences for students.

Inoue identifies seven interrelated elements to consider when formulating writing assessments. While Inoue works within ecologies, or larger systems that work to confront and deconstruct racism within the classroom by thinking of every assessment as an anti-racist project (Inoue “Introduction”), this project considers the structure of the secondary education system. Consequently, true writing assessment ecologies are not sustainable in this environment that is regulated by mandatory standardized assessment, literacy acquisition assessment, literary canon of text, required text, frameworks, and district discretion. Instead, it considers the same elements Inoue uses and aims to apply them to the secondary education writing assessment practice.

The elements are as follows:



“Seven interrelated elements constitute a writing assessment ecology” *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies* (Asou B. Inoue 2015).

As Inoue’s diagram shows, the elements of a successful assessment practice are all interconnected. Teachers should be considering each of these seven elements within their assessment formulations. Every assessment contains these elements, whether teachers realize it or not. What many teachers focus on is the processes, parts, and products in an assessment. These elements correlate to the more technical aspects of standard secondary education assessment. Teachers must think about what they want the outcome of learning to be, how they will get there, and what materials will be needed to get there. What is not as frequently considered is the role of the people in the assessment formulation, the power within an

assessment, and the purposes of the assessment as a whole. Teachers do not often consider the relationship between assessments and students, especially in terms of agency. The concept of involving students in assessment creation, consideration, and implementation gives agency back to students within the assessment practice. Moreover, teachers often fail to recognize the power with an assessment. Whether this be their place as a teacher evaluating students' work or the assessment itself as biased and devaluing students. Secondary educators do not often consider who or what possesses power when it comes to an assessment. There may be a classroom where half the student population has power within the assessment, while the other half does not, simply based on an unrecognized bias within the assessment.

As mentioned before, teachers rarely invite conversations about judging writing within the classroom. By making the purpose of a writing assessment explicit to students, you can give students power and agency within this assessment practice. If students know their writing is for an audience that does not require standard English, they may be better equipped to demonstrate their knowledge. If an assessment's purpose is to be written for "college or career ready" purposes as stated by the frameworks, students will know to implement skills they've been taught whether it be using standard English or writing in western analytical styles. However, there should be a dialog present about why standard English is considered appropriate or correct for that occasion, and the history behind that. Addressing this in a discussion will help students gauge what kind of sphere they are writing in and what linguistic tools they need to use. Moreover, if students are involved in the purpose of an assessment it will become more meaningful and relevant to them. Defining the purpose of an assessment can be difficult within secondary education because some assessments are not necessarily helpful or relevant to all

students but are required. Making it explicit is the first step in allowing students to voice how they should be assessed for that particular purpose.

Another incredibly useful assessment formulation resource for educators comes from Randall, Poe and Slomp's *Ain't Oughta Be in the Dictionary*. It offers a checklist of 8 elements for educators to consider along with questions that can prompt teachers to build a stronger, more equitable assessment.

Goal: Articulate to my students a commitment to justice in my literacy assessment practices.	<p>In my own words, how do I define justice-oriented literacy assessment?</p> <p>Have I shared my definition of justice-oriented assessment practices with my students, using examples to clarify complex ideas?</p> <p>How am I engaging students in ongoing discussions about the assessment process and the role race has historically played in literacy assessment?</p>
Positionality: Reflect upon my own assumptions	<p>What racial identity do I bring to my teaching? What histories and values inform that identity?</p> <p>What assumptions do I possess about my students? About language and literacy?</p> <p>Have I engaged students in this same self-reflexivity process?</p> <p>What do I hope will come of my students and their learning through experiencing justice-oriented assessment?</p>
Community: Consider who is being assessed and what community identities they bring.	<p>What are the community contexts, resources, hopes, dispositions, experiences, and backgrounds of my students?</p> <p>How has knowledge of these community contexts informed the assessments I design for my students?</p> <p>How have I invited my students to participate in these conversations?</p>
Power: Name those groups who hold the power, or are being privileged or harmed, by the assessment	<p>How do the literacies and languages being brought into the classroom to assess students sustain their identities?</p> <p>Whose identity is being rejected, devalued, or obviated through my assessment practice?</p> <p>If one language or literacy is being privileged over another, how have I attempted to disrupt this imbalance of power?</p>
Construct: Identify and analyze the literacy and language construct that I am assessing.	<p>How well do I understand the construct I am assessing?</p> <p>What purpose does the construct serve?</p> <p>How stable is the construct across social, cultural, or racial contexts?</p> <p>How does the construct perpetuate hegemonic values that result in supremacist language values?</p> <p>How are dominant hegemonic language habits and standards of language associated with the construct identified and critiqued in my classroom so that all students feel safe and welcomed?</p>
Processes: Evaluate the procedures I will use for assessing literacy and language.	<p>Is there student involvement throughout every stage of my classroom assessment design, implementation, and use?</p> <p>Does the assessment embrace complexity of language and literacy, rather than turn away from that richness?</p> <p>Have students been provided the opportunity to demonstrate learning in a variety of ways?</p> <p>How do I engage with students in self-assessment through processes of dialogue about our different ways with words and language habits?</p>
Responding and grading: Examine the processes and procedures I intend to employ for evaluating student responses	<p>How does my process of feedback reflect that I have deeply listened to others first in order to understand the politics of language and judgement at play in my classroom?</p> <p>How have I taught students to judge writing in ways that accept difference and result in justice-oriented evaluative practices?</p> <p>How have I investigated that no particular student population is disadvantaged by the assessment tasks, criteria, and responding/grading procedures?</p> <p>Have I considered the response processes of my students to ensure students across racial and cultural backgrounds encounter assessment that welcomes different processes? And ensure that grades are awarded with an understanding of diverse response processes?</p>
Consequences: Carefully consider the consequences of an assessment.	<p>Do I have a plan for analyzing the outcomes of this assessment to ensure justice for each population impacted by the assessment, its design, use, and inferences?</p> <p>Have I considered the anticipated intended, unintended, immediate and long-term consequences of my assessment decisions and choices?</p> <p>How has my use of power to design and use classroom assessments resulted in opportunity for all students?</p> <p>How does my definition of justice-oriented assessment practices align with the actual assessment practices that result in justice for my students?</p>

Rubrics

Anti-racist writing assessments consider the penalizing quality to current secondary education grading practices. Inoue notes, “evaluation rubrics and dominant discourses valued in ideal texts, have historical associations with a white racial habitus, which usually end up privileging students who come to the classroom performing those dispositions already and disenfranchising local diversities” (174). Again, the grading practices we have tied to assessment are often punitive and further students marginalization from the classroom. These rubrics explicitly state the key skills students need in order to be considered successful writers and comment directly on how well students can do this. These elements often deal with organization, grammar and syntax, content comprehension, writing voice and style, etc. Each element is subjective and done differently within different cultures and language patterns, yet the standard English benchmark restricts each student to these categories and how well they can perform standard English within these categories. Thus, “It is through everyday assessments—rubric and checklist criteria, comments on papers, and peer reviews—where students are told that their home literacies and languages have no place in educational settings” (Randall et al., 594-595). To help mitigate these effects, it is important to return to the conversation of audience and purpose brought forth in the previous section.

To say rubrics have no place in the secondary education classroom would be a bold claim, one the majority of teachers would disagree with. Rubrics can be an excellent tool for making expectations clear and explicit to students. For many students, it is helpful to know what they need to do in order to succeed on an assessment. However, what is actually on a rubric, or assignment, may end up penalizing and disenfranchising some students. For instance, a rubric

that requires standard English for a formal academic assessment may disadvantage students who are not in that linguistic background. To combat this, it is important for teachers to make explicit why they must use standard English for this specific assessment. Moreover, they must spend more time going over the conventions of standard English rather than assuming it is known by students. This alone will help to make that facet more equitable.

Inoue thinks of rubrics as an opportunity to explore the value of language within the classroom. He writes, “a rubric could be translated or used to identify and question deviations of a local [standard English] but not as error or writing done wrong. Instead, the rubric could be a way to notice and validate local non-SEAE practices” (132). This implementation of a rubric can be very powerful for secondary education students who seek to feel seen and knowledgeable within a classroom. Allowing students to explore language variations and apply their own lived experience to that assessment of language is very powerful. Here, deviations are celebrated and not following a rubric is a positive attribute of linguistic dexterity. This reading allows “differences from the dominant discourse [to be] read as meaningful and productive” (Inoue 132). When students are able to view rubric as not always punitive, but rather as an opportunity to learn specific aspects of a language, it takes away some of the penalizing and harmful practices that can occur.

Grading

Rubrics are not the only way that teachers grade writing assessments in secondary education. There are teachers who will simply read student writing and give it a grade with no rubric or clear expectations in place. This is equally as inequitable. Writing is such a subjective process, and grading often values what a teacher thinks is important, not how a student is using language to express their ideas. Granted teachers have a lot of knowledge, many have not recognized their own bias within reading students' writing, many teachers are subjective and partial to how they like things written, and cannot always provide objective writing feedback.

There are a number of ways that anti-racist pedagogy addresses this. Inoue uses the system of labor-based grading previously discussed. This system, that values labor over perceived merit or quality, can be tailored to work in secondary education settings. Again, the secondary education classroom cannot implement this as an ecology in the way Inoue does due to the nature of K-12 limitations. However, implementing different types of grading for specific assessments is a useful anti-racist practice. Labor based grading can work well for long projects within a classroom. Students and teachers can discuss the parameters needed to make this project successful and determine the amount of labor required for students to put into the assessment (Inoue). In the system used by Inoue, "If a student met the contract's labor guidelines, she would earn a "B" course grade, no matter what" (188). Below is the example of the particular labor

guidelines put forth by this group.

Table 3. The grading contract calculated course grades by the amount of labor students produced

	Absences	Late Assigns.	Missed Assigns.	Ignored Assigns.
A	4 or less	5	0	0
B	4 or less	5	0	0
C	5	6	1	0
D	6	7	2	1
F	7	8 or more	2	2 or more

Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies (Asou B. Inoue 2015).

For this particular class, they agreed on the number of absences, late assignments, missed assignments, and ignored assignments students completed throughout the semester. Keeping track of important classroom items this way is a useful tactic not many teachers utilize. Instead of calculating a student's grade based on the quality of their work, students are graded on the effort they are putting into the work which encourages more student engagement and growth. This does not mean students can go through this practice without the contents of their work being successful. In this example, Inoue keeps the amount of work for an “A” and “B” the same but “if a student wanted an “A,” then her two projects would have to be twice the length and depth as her peers shooting for a “B.”” (188). There are still methods to cultivate deeper, richer engagement with writing for students, without penalizing students who are not as naturally adept at writing, especially in academic writing spheres.

This particular example of contract labor based grading is utilized in a college classroom where students and teachers are not implemented state wide standards into every day teaching practice. To modify this system for a K-12 setting, teachers would likely specify the kind of work students would be responsible for and if the work meets the predetermined requirements.

For instance, this system is practical for grading work not heavy in content such as vocabulary homework assignments, do-now's, free-writes, and work teachers often grade based on completion alone. Teachers have been implementing fixed grading scales for years such as “pass/no pass”, “check minus, check, and check plus”, “satisfactory/non satisfactory”, etc.. This pedagogy would encourage teachers to come to the agreement of what “pass” or “check” “satisfactory” means in the classroom. By allowing students to be a part of assigning merit to their work, it gives students the chance to understand what is most important in the work they are being asked to complete. This can then transition into larger assignments and assessments by having students understand what labor is required of them to achieve a specific grade.

The system of specification grading works similarly to this. Instructional Designer Jennifer Parker defines this system as “binary grading that is based on up-front, clearly communicated pass/fail expectations” (“Specifications Grading: A Method for Improving Student Performance”). This kind of pass/fail is seen with many implemented low-stakes writing assignments in secondary education schools. The key here is having those clearly communicated expectations for writing. These expectations are “aimed at B-level work or better, with the ultimate goal of elevating all students’ performance” (Parke “Specifications Grading”). Not automatically assigning numerical grades or letter grades to student writing, does not mean that students are not being evaluated based on the content of their work. The expectations set in place by these grading systems demand that students put in intentional labor into their assignments, whether that be completing drafts, numerous revisions, or completing other extra steps to be considered complete, students are still working towards improvement of writing skills.

What is equitable about this kind of writing practice is that it takes the punitive quality of writing assessment out of students' lives. Moreover, Inoue found that these practices “moved students away from focusing on grades, and refocused their attention on their labors, in particular on the processes of reading, writing, and assessing their own and others’ drafts” (188). This is promising for many secondary education teachers. If there are ways to get students engaged in their writing, while also being a more equitable option that considers students as a holistic person, it is worth trying within the classroom.

Conclusion

What is most pertinent for educators to realize is that there are multiple practices operating within the education system. The dominant practice we currently see revolves around

standardized, evaluative practices to ensure all students are on the same level, test scores and data analysis, a historic literary canon, and valuing professional, academic language which is standard English. This standard academic practice is in place to promote unified ways of thinking, reading, writing, analyzing, and speaking. There are linguistic codes to this practice that all derive from white discourse and thus makes this practice one that requires a form of assimilated whiteness in order to be successful. Students should have the goals of this standardized learning and literacy made clear to them. Students should understand that what is taught in schools is a power code pervasive in academic and professional spheres, or, in other words, students should be taught that literacy in dominant white discourse as a tool to succeed in a world that it is required.

Then there are the progressive teacher practices that Lisa Delpit talks about. Although she wrote over a decade ago the sphere of progressive educators who do not want to enforce standardization still exists. This sphere contains assessments that do not correct student language, even when necessary, by failing to address audience and purpose.

Then there is the practice of disrupting the academic norms. In this practice of disrupting racism, there is space made to explicitly look at literacy beyond white discourse. Students can read texts and analyze them through different lenses. Within this practice, the classroom becomes a place of culturally sustaining, anti-racist dialogue. In this practice, students connect with literacy from all linguistic backgrounds and begin to understand how different cultures, languages, and genres use language in different and meaningful ways. This practice fosters students' critical thinking skills by putting their real-life experience, perspectives, and opinions in a place of power within the classroom. Students learn how to use their own voice in a system that only accepts one kind. Classrooms in this practice operate by recognizing that “students need to

learn how to choose between the most effective oral or written dialect for any social situation rather than how to master one standard dialect or form of literacy” in order to become more successful thinkers beyond the classroom (Godley and Minnici 322). Yet just because the latter is perhaps the most progressive and equitable classroom practice does not mean it is the only one worth implementing.

Educators will have to interact and pull from many different practices. There is no one correct way to implement these practices. However, there has been one dominant way these practices have been implemented. Now, the goal is to take the findings from these different anti-racist practices and apply them to the common practices we already have. There are ways to implement each of the solutions and suggestions identified within this paper in a subtle, yet incredibly effective way for students. Utilizing these anti-racist pathological practices can be invaluable for students, and educators must realize this will be done within the current education system we reside in. When we think about education as not one thing or the other, but a combination of tools that will provide the best, most equitable outcomes for students, we will start to see more progress.

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