INTRODUCTION: WRITING ASSESSMENT ECOLOGIES AS ANTIRACIST PROJECTS

How does a college writing instructor investigate racism in his classroom writing assessment practices, then design writing assessments so that racism is not only avoided but antiracism is promoted? What I mean is how does a teacher not only do no harm through his writing assessments, but promote social justice and equality? In the broadest sense, this is what this book is about. It's about theorizing and practicing antiracist writing assessments in classrooms.

My assumption is that writing teachers should carefully construct the writing assessment ecology of their classrooms both theoretically and materially. In fact, we should continuously theorize and practice writing assessment simultaneously. So this book is about antiracist classroom writing assessment as theory and a set of practices that are productive for all students and teachers. I realize that thinking about race or racism in one's pedagogy and assessment practices will rub some readers wrong. They will say we need to move past race. It's not real, so we shouldn't use it theoretically or otherwise in our assessment practices. I do not deny that race is not real, that there is no biological basis for it, but biology is not the only criterion for considering something as real, or important, or worth discussing and addressing in our assessments. Because of this important concern by many who might read this book, I dedicate the first three chapters to addressing it in several ways. I think all would agree that we want classroom writing assessments to be antiracist, regardless of how we individually feel this project can be accomplished. This book is my attempt at finding a way toward this worthy end.

My main audience for this book are graduate students, writing teachers, and writing program administrators (WPAs) who wish to find ways to address racism in their classroom writing assessment practices, even those who may not be sure if such phenomena exist. In other words, I have in mind writing teachers who wish to cultivate antiracist writing assessments in their writing classrooms. Thus there are two strands in this book of interest to writing teachers: one concerns defining holistically classroom writing assessment for any writing teacher, which can lead to better designed and implemented writing assessments in classrooms; and one is about theorizing writing assessment in ways that can help teachers cultivate antiracist agendas in their writing assessment practices. In my mind, these are really the same goals. We cannot do one without the other. If we are

to enact helpful, educative, and fair writing assessments with our students, given the history of whiteness and all dominant academic discourses promoted in schools and disciplines, we must understand our writing assessments as antiracist projects, which means they are ecological projects, ones about sustainability and fairness, about antiracist practices and effects.

Thus all writing teachers need some kind of explicit language about writing assessment in order to create classroom writing assessments that do all the things we ask of them in writing courses, and have the ability to continually (re)theorize and practice them better. Additionally, I see an audience in teachers who are looking to understand how to assess fairly the writing of their diverse student populations, which include multilingual populations, working class students, disabled students, etc. More specifically, I am interested in offering a usable theory of writing assessment that helps teachers design and implement writing assessments that are socially just for everyone. My focus, however, will be racism. I realize that race and racism are different things. Race is a construct. It's not real. But there are structures in our society and educational institutions that are racial. These structures help construct racial formations in the ways that Omi and Winant (1994) explain, which I'll discuss in Chapter 1.

Racism, on the other hand, is real. It is experienced daily, often in unseen ways, but always felt. We may call the racism we see something else, like the product of laziness, or just the way things are, or the result of personal choices, or economics, but it is racism. There are social patterns that can be detected. Thus, I do not use racism as a term that references personal prejudice or bigotry. I'm not concerned with that kind of racism in this book. I'm concerned with structural racism, the institutional kind, the kind that makes many students of color like me when I was younger believe that their failures in school were purely due to their own lacking in ability, desire, or work ethic. Racism seen and understood as structural, instead, reveals the ways that systems, like the ecology of the classroom, already work to create failure in particular places and associate it with particular bodies. While this book could focus on any number of dimensions that construct diversity in our classrooms, I have chosen race (and antiracism as a goal) because it has salience for me as a teacher, past student, and scholar. I am a teacher of color, a former working class student of color, who attended mostly or all-white classrooms in state universities. Racism was a part of the scene of teaching and learning for me, a part of my day-to-day life. I know it still exists, even in writing classrooms where good, conscientious teachers work.

But this could be my own demon, my own perceptions of things. Why articulate a theory of writing assessment around antiracism and suggest others use it? Why not let the second half of the book's title, teaching and assessing for a socially just future, be the main subject of the book? Beyond the ethical need to

eradicate racism in our classrooms, racism is a phenomenon easily translatable to other social phenomena that come from other kinds of diversity in our classrooms (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, linguistic differences, ethnic differences, disability, etc.). The dynamics are similar even though the histories of oppression are different. These other dimensions, of course, intersect and create what we often think of when we think of race, because race isn't real. It's fluid and broad. It's a construct we see into the system, which at this point the system (re)constructs through these other structures, like economics and linguistic differences (from a dominant norm). So the ways race and racism function in writing assessment, in my mind, epitomize larger questions around fairness and justice. Furthermore in the U.S., the default setting on most conversations, even about justice and fairness, is to avoid the racial, avoid speaking of racism. So I choose not to. The conversation needs to happen. It hasn't in writing assessment circles.

I'm mindful of Stephanie Kerschbaum's (2014) work on the rhetoric of difference in the academy. I realize I could be engaging in what she calls "taxonomizing difference," a theorizing that often "refuses to treat racial and ethnic categories as monolithic or governed by stereotypes by recognizing the variation within categories," but the categories offered tend to be "relatively static referents" (p. 8). This denies the individual ways that students exist and interact in language and in classrooms. Or I could be engaging in what Kerschbaum calls "categorical redefinition," which "focuses on producing more refined and careful interpretations within a specific category"(2014, p. 10), for example, my insistence throughout this book on seeing the Asian Pacific American students at Fresno State as primarily Hmong students. Both rhetorics of difference, according to Kerschbaum, can allow the researcher or teacher to place identifications and associate cultural and linguistic attributes to students instead of allowing any differences, and their nuances within supposed racial or ethnic categories, to emerge through actual interactions (2014, p. 9). So one dance I attempt in this book is to talk about race and racism in writing assessments without forgetting that every individual embodies their racial identity in unique linguistic and other ways. But there are patterns. We must not lose them in our attempt to acknowledge individuality.

More important, if you can see the way racism is one product of all writing assessments, then you can see the way biases against non-heterosexual orientations might be, or certain religious affiliations, or gender bias, or economic bias. The dynamics are similar. They are all dynamics of power, but they are not historically the same, and they are not just about bias or attitudes toward people. I'm not, however, suggesting that these dimensions of difference are equal in social weight or consequences, that the oppression experienced and felt by

students who proclaim a Christian identity is on par with the issues that male African-American students on the same campus face, nor am I suggesting that any of these dimensions are separable. Of course, we cannot simply think of a student as one-dimensional, as her race, or her gender, or her sexual orientation, or her class upbringing. All these dimensions intersect and influence each other, creating individuals within groups who are as unique and different from each other within a racial formation as they are from those of other social groups. Kimberle Williams Crenshaw (1991) explains this phenomenon as "intersectionality," a dynamic of oppression in which multiple structures intersect, such as issues of class, economics, culture, and race. So when I speak of race in this book, I'm thinking in localized terms, ones that assume local racial formations' economic and other patterns as much as I'm thinking of racial structures. So while this creates diversity within locally diverse populations, we can still find patterns in those populations, as well as a few exceptions. The patterns come mostly from the structures people work in, and particular racial formations tend to be affected and moved by particular structures. This creates the racialized patterns. So I'm not interested in the exceptions, only the patterns. As a culture, we (the U.S.) focus too much on exceptions, often fooling ourselves into believing that because there are exceptions, the rule no longer exists or that it's easily broken by anyone with enough willpower or hutzpah.

In popular culture and talk, race is often a synecdoche for a person's physiognomy, heritage, culture, and language, even though these things cannot be known by knowing someone's self-identified racial designation, or by their physical appearance, or some other marker of race. Race is also easily seen by most people as a construct that should not be held against a student, nor should it be used to judge the merits of their labors, yet few deny that most large-scale writing assessments are racist, or at least reveal different performance patterns that are detected when results are disaggregated by racial formation. Many have already discussed the negative effects of various writing assessments on students of color (Fox, 1999; Inoue & Poe, 2012a, 2012b; Soliday, 2002; Sternglass, 1997; White & Thomas, 1981). Others have investigated the effects of a variety of large-scale tests on students of color (Hong & Youngs, 2008; Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Madaus & Clarke, 2001; Orfield & Kornhaber, 2001; Plata, 1995). We can find racist effects in just about every writing program in the country. 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 Standardized Edited American English (SEAE)[1] with populations of people who do not use that discourse on a daily basis— judging apples by the standards of oranges. Racism has always been a part of

writing assessment at all levels.

Some may argue that I'm painting this picture of racism in writing assessments, in writing classroom assessments particularly, too broadly. I'm lumping the accurate judgment of performance of say some Blacks who do not perform well into the same category of writing assessments as those assessments that may exhibit cultural, linguistic, or racial bias in the judgments or decisions made. To put it bluntly, the argument is that sometimes students do not write well, and they should be evaluated accordingly, and sometimes those who do not write well will be Black or Latino or multilingual. Just because a writing assessment produces patterns of failure or low performance by students of color who participate in it doesn't mean the assessment is racist. This is an important argument. I do not argue to let students slide academically because they happen to be by luck of birth a student of color.

On the other hand, I see a problem with this argument. Why do more Blacks, Latinos, and multilingual students relatively speaking perform worse on writing assessments than their white peers in writing classrooms? At Fresno State, for instance, between 2009-2012, the average failure rate for Blacks in the first-year writing program was 17.46%, while the average failure rate for whites for the same years was 7.3% (Inoue, 2014b, p. 339). Whites have the lowest failure rates of all racial formations, and this is after the program revised itself completely in part to address such issues. That is, these are better numbers than in the years before. I realize that there are many ways to fail a writing class beyond being judged to write poorly, but these internally consistently higher numbers that are consistent with other writing programs suggest more, suggest that we cannot let such numbers pass us by just because we can assume that teachers are not biased.

I'm not saying we assume bias or prejudice. I'm saying let's assume there is no bias, no prejudice. Now, how do we read those numbers? What plausible assumptions can we make that help us make sense of these data, what rival hypotheses can be made? Do we assume that more Blacks, Latinos/as, and Asians at Fresno State are lazier or worse writers than their white peers? Is it the case that on average Blacks, Latinos/as, and Asians at Fresno State simply do not write as well as their white peers, that there is some inherent or cultural problem with the way these racial formations write? Or could it be that the judgments made on all writing are biased toward a discourse that privileges whites consistently because it is a discourse of whiteness? Could the writing assessment ecologies be racist?

I am mindful of the concern in the psychometric literature that mean scores (like those I cite above) do not necessarily constitute test bias (Jensen 1976; Reynolds, 1982a, 1982b; Thorndike, 1971). I'm not concerned, however, with test bias in the psychometric sense, which amounts either to intentional bias on the part of teachers, or a disregard for actual differences that do or do not

exist among populations of people (Inoue & Poe, 2012b, p. 352; Reynolds, 1982a, p. 213). In one sense, I'm concerned with writing assessment as a much larger thing, as an ecology that is more than a test or an essay or a portfolio or a grade or a rubric. I'm concerned with what might broadly be called fairness in the ecology , which is a measure of its sustainability. In an important article on how legal definitions of disparate impact can be used to understand assessment consequences, Poe, Elliot, Cogan, & Nurudeen explain fairness: "the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* provide four principal ways in which the term fairness is used: lack of bias; equitable treatment in the testing process; equality in testing outcomes; and the opportunity to learn" (2014, p. 592). I'm most concerned with the second, third, and fourth items, but the first is also a concern, only not in terms of individuals but bias in the ecology. For Poe and her colleagues, they see much of fairness in assessments hinging on whether an assessment has disparate impact, which can be understood through an assessment's methods. They explain:

> *the unintended racial differences in outcomes resulting from facially neutral policies or practices* that on the surface seem neutral. Because discrimination flows from the test design, process, or use of test scores, rather than from the intent of the test giver, disparate impact analysis focuses on the consequences of specific testing practices. (2014, p. 593)

In the end, Poe et al. see that "good decisions about our writing assessment practices for all students means attending to the various ways that we understand the impact of assessment on our students" (2014, p. 605). Yes. This is the impetus for antiracist writing assessment ecologies, fairness.

But wait, aren't we talking about the academic discourse that we've all agreed students must come to approximate if they are to be successful in college and elsewhere. This is what Bartholomae (1985) has discussed, and that perhaps more students of color have a harder time approximating than their white peers. If we are beyond the old-fashion bigotry and bias, then what we are saying is that there is something wrong with the academic discourse itself, something wrong with judging everyone against an academic discourse that clearly privileges middle class white students. In fact, there's something wrong with judgment itself in writing classrooms. Is this racism though? Is promoting a local SEAE or a dominant discourse that clearly benefits those who can use it properly, a racist practice?[2] When you're born into a society that has such histories of racism as we have, no matter what you think, what you do personally, you will participate in racist structures if you are a part of larger institutions like education, like the discipline of composition studies, or the teaching of writing in college. This doesn't

make us bad people, but it does mean we must rethink how we assess writing, if we want to address the racism.

What should be clear at this beginning point is that racism is still here with us in our classrooms. You don't have to actively try to be racist for your writing assessments to be racist. As Victor Villanueva (2006) explains in an article about writing centers, we don't live in a post-racial society. We live in one that has a "new racism," one that uses different terms to accomplish the same old racial hierarchies and pathways of oppression and opportunity. 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. Baring a few exceptions, composition studies and writing assessment as fields of study have not focused enough attention on racism in classroom writing assessment. In the following pages, I attempt to make racism a more central concern in thinking about and designing classroom writing assessment.

MY PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This book attempts to theorize and illustrate an antiracist writing assessment theory for the college writing classroom by theorizing writing assessment as an ecology, a complex system made up of several interconnected elements. I ask: how can a conscientious writing teacher understand and engage in her classroom writing assessments as an antiracist project with her locally diverse students? My answer is to see classroom writing assessment as an ecology with explicit features, namely a quality of *more than*, interconnectedness among everything and everyone in the ecology, and an explicit racial politics that students must engage with. Additionally, this antiracist assessment ecology contains seven elements that can be reflected upon and manipulated. This means that when we design our writing courses, we must think first about how writing assessment will exist and function in the course, how it constructs the ecology that students and teachers work and live in, how it is sustainable and fair. In fact, I assume that all writing pedagogy is driven by the writing assessment ecology of the classroom, no matter what a teacher has done or how she thinks about her pedagogy, no matter what readings are discussed. 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. Additionally, writing assessment drives learning and the outcomes of a course. What students take from a writing course may not be solely because of the assessments in the course, but assessment always plays a central role, and good assessment, assessment that is healthy, fair, equitable, and sustainable for all students, determines the most

important learning around writing and reading in a course.

In Chapters 1 and 2, I lay some groundwork for a theory of antiracist classroom writing assessment ecologies that addresses diversity and racial formations, and explain the metaphor of ecology. In Chapter 1, I discuss the importance of the concept of race as a nexus of power relations and the significance of racial formations in the U.S., defining racial *habitus* in the process. I identify specifically the hegemonic, the white racial *habitus* that is pervasive in writing classrooms and their dominant discourses. Additionally, I define racism, since it figures importantly in antiracist writing assessment ecologies. The focus on a white racial *habitus*, however, is important in understanding how writing assessment ecologies can be antiracist projects because it focuses attention on dispositions in writing and reading that are separate from the white body, structures that reproduce themselves in a variety of ways, yet historically these dispositions are associated with the white body. I end the chapter by defining local diversities, since diversity itself is a term fraught with problems, one of which is that it means such a broad range of things depending on what school or classroom one is referring to. I focus on racial diversity and give examples of locally diverse student populations at Fresno State in order to demonstrate the usefulness of the term. If classroom writing assessment ecologies are a way to conceive of antiracist assessment projects, then a clearly understood notion of local racial diversity is needed.

In Chapter 2, I theorize antiracist classroom writing assessment using Freire's problem-posing pedagogy, post-process theory, Buddhist theory, and Marxian theory. The chapter defines antiracist classroom writing assessment ecologies in three ways, as "more than" their parts, as productive, even limitless in what students can do and learn; as a system that is characterized by the interconnectedness of all that makes up assessment; and as a Marxian historic bloc, which uses Gramsci's famous articulation of the concept. Ultimately, I show how antiracist writing assessment ecologies provide for sustainable and fair ways to assess locally diverse students and writing, ways that focus on asking students to problematize their existential writing assessment situations by investigating the nature of judgment. These investigations compare a white racial *habitus* to those found in the classroom among students.

In Chapters 3, 4, and 5, I detail the elements that make up classroom writing assessment ecologies, use the theory to explicate my own classroom writing assessment practices, and offer a heuristic based on the ecological elements that can help teachers reflect upon and design their own antiracist classroom writing assessment ecologies. In Chapter 3, I explain the elements of a classroom writing assessment ecology. These elements can be used to explain, parse, and design any ecology. These seven elements are power, parts, purposes, people, processes,

products, and places. Understood in particular ways, these elements offer richly explanatory potential for teachers. Among them are relationships that can also be explored in a similar way that Kenneth Burke (1969) describes ratios between elements in his dramatistic pentad. Seeing the relationships between elements in a writing assessment ecology can help students and teachers consider local consequences of the assessment ecology they co-construct. My discussion of these ecological elements is not meant to replace terms like validity or reliability, but enhance them, particularly for the writing classroom. I do not, however, attempt to make these connections or elaborations, as I believe writing teachers do not need such elaborations to design good, antiracist writing assessment ecologies, nor do their students need such language to participate and shape those ecologies.

In Chapter 4, I illustrate my theory of writing assessment as ecology by using it to describe and explain my own classroom, a writing course I taught in the fall of 2012 at Fresno State. I look most closely at several students' movement through the ecology from initial weeks to exiting the course, showing the way they reacted to the ecology and its unique writing assessment elements. I show how an antiracist ecological theory of writing assessment informs my class design, and helps me see what students understand and experience as more fully human beings, and what products they leave the ecology with. While I do not argue that my course was able to create an antiracist classroom writing assessment ecology, it comes close and offers insights into one. Ultimately, I argue that much can be gained by teachers and students when they think of their classrooms as antiracist writing assessment ecologies more explicitly, and I suggest ways that my classroom begins to do the antiracist work I encourage in this book.

In the final chapter, I offer a heuristic for antiracist writing assessment ecologies that I hope will be generative for writing teachers. The heuristic distills the previous chapters' ideas into a usable set of questions that may help teachers design and test their own antiracist classroom writing assessment ecologies. The heuristic is based on the discussion from Chapter 2 and the seven elements from Chapter 3. While I offer an extensive set of questions, they are only meant to be generative, not exhaustive. This closing discussion offers ways to think about the heuristic and what it offers and what critique the heuristic may provide to conventional writing assessment ecologies. I close the book with a few stories of writing assessment ecologies from my own past as a child and young adult in hopes that they reveal why racism and whiteness are important to consider in any classroom writing assessment ecology.

My project in this book, then, is to think holistically about what classroom writing assessment is or could be for teachers and students. It's about seeing

classroom writing assessment in its entirety, not just parts of it, which we often do when discussing it. While I'll suggest here and there ways to think about writing assessment in large-scale settings, even use a few large-scale writing assessment examples, such as placement decisions or high stakes tests, large-scale writing assessment design, implementation, or validation are not the focus of this book. I do believe that an ecological theory of classroom writing assessment offers ideas toward large-scale writing assessment and its validation, but I am not engaging with discussions of large-scale writing assessment or its validity in the way that others have concerning cultural validity (e.g., Huot, 2002; Inoue, 2007, 2009c; Messick, 1989; Moss et al., 2008; Murphy, 2007; Ruth & Murphy, 1988).

In one sense, I am gathering together in one place vocabulary that writing assessment folks have used in various ways for years. We just haven't put it down in one place, assembled everything together to show what the entire ecology looks like and how it is experienced by students and writing teachers. We certainly haven't named it as an ecology, or considered it as an antiracist project. The closest we come is Ed White's *Teaching and Assessing Writing* (1994), but his account avoids a detailed discussion of race, cultural diversity, or multilingualism. And his discussion isn't about theorizing classroom writing assessment as a whole, or as an antiracist project. White is more practical. This is just as true for White's *Assigning, Responding, Evaluating: A Writing Teacher's Guide* (2007). Both are important introductions for teachers and WPAs when designing classroom writing assessments, or program assessments, but they don't attempt to theorize classroom writing assessment holistically and as an antiracist project in the way I do in this book. They don't draw on any literature outside of writing assessment or composition studies to make sense of race, racism, or whiteness, as I do.

One might argue that my project does not create new theory or understandings about writing assessment or its validation, classroom or otherwise. It simply repackages the same theory already adequately described by others applying yet another set of terms, ecological ones that are unnecessary. This is not true. By recasting writing assessment as an antiracist classroom ecology, I offer insights into writing assessments as complex systems that must be thought of as such, revealing them as more than what they seem, and suggesting what we might do better tomorrow, especially if we want to promote antiracist agendas. Understanding classroom writing assessment as an ecology that can be designed and cultivated shows that the assessment of writing is not simply a decision about whether to use a portfolio or not, or what rubric to used. It is about cultivating and nurturing complex systems that are centrally about sustaining fairness and diverse complexity.

While a teacher could use a theory of writing assessment as ecology without

having an antiracist agenda for her classroom, I have couched my discussion in these terms because an antiracist agenda in the writing classroom is important and salient to me and many others. Some writing assessment theorists would speak of this goal in terms of designing a classroom writing assessment that is valid enough for the decisions a classroom teacher intends to make, say to determine a course grade and a student's readiness for the next course. They might speak of bias or disparate impact. I have purposefully stayed away from such language, although I have engaged in that theorizing in other places by discussing the way writing assessment can be theorized as a rhetorical act that can be mapped to the ancient Hellenic discussions of *nomos-physis* (Inoue, 2007), and by discussing writing assessment as a technology that helps us see racial validity (Inoue, 2009c).

However, I have found that many writing teachers are turned off by the language of psychometrics, and it doesn't make any clearer what we need to do in the classroom, nor does it help students understand their roles and responsibilities in the ecology without a lot of reading into the literature of educational measurement and psychometrics. Additionally, these discussions are more concerned with program assessment, not classroom writing assessment, the main difference being that the latter is conducted exclusively by teachers and students for their purposes, purposes of learning. So using the language of psychometrics and educational measurement is not directly helpful for classroom writing assessment, even though it could be. A different set of accessible terms are needed for teachers and students. In fact, the old psychometric terms can be a barrier for many teachers to thinking carefully about classroom writing assessment because most are not familiar with them and many see them connected to positivistic world views about language and judgment.

I have been tempted to use the language that Patricia Lynne (2004) uses to help redefine the psychometric terms used in writing assessment, which agree better with the common social constructivist assumptions that most in literacy studies, English studies, and composition studies hold about language and meaning. Lynne's terms are "meaningfulness" and "ethicalness," which she uses to replace the psychometric concepts of validity and reliability. Lynne explains that meaningfulness references the "significance of the assessment" and "structures the relationships among the object(s) of writing assessment, the purposes of that assessment and the circumstances in which the assessment takes place" (2004, p. 117). Meaningfulness urges two questions for teachers to ask: "why is the assessment productive or necessary or appropriate?" and "what [do] assessors want to know and what [do] they need to do to satisfy their defined purposes?" (Lynne, 2004, p. 124, 125).

Ethicalness, on the other hand, "addresses the broad political and social is-

sues surrounding assessment," and "organizes and provides principles for understanding the conduct of the participants and the procedures for evaluation" (Lynne, 2004, p. 118). It can urge writing teachers to ask: "who is involved in the decision-making?" and "what procedures will the assessment requir[e]?" (Lynne, 2004, p. 138). Lynne's terms are perhaps more usable and friendly to writing teachers generally, but they don't explicitly account for all of the elements that move in and constitute any ecology, elements that writing teachers should be aware of since they are part of the ecology's design. These terms also do not account for the relationships among elements in an assessment that make it more fittingly an ecology. As Lynne's questions suggest, her terms account for an assessment's purposes, people, power (politics), and processes (procedures), but not explicitly or systematically, not in interconnected ways, and it could be easy to ignore or take for granted the parts, products, and places within classroom writing assessment ecologies. Most important, Lynne's terms do not account for whiteness, or the ways local diversities complicate the judging of writing by a single standard, even though her terms could.

If there is one ecological element that may be the best synecdoche for the entire ecology, it is place. Antiracist writing assessment ecologies, at their core, (re)create places for sustainable learning and living. This is their primary function, to create places, and I think we would do well to cultivate such assessment ecologies that self-consciously do this. Ultimately, I hope to show less conventional ways of understanding and enacting classroom writing assessment, since conventional ways have not worked well in reducing the racial hierarchies and inequalities we continue to see in schools and writing classrooms. Conventional 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.

Let me be very clear. Racism in schools and college writing courses is still pervasive because most if not all writing courses, including my own in the past, promote or value first a local SEAE and a dominant white discourse, even when they make moves to value and honor the discourses of all students, as the Conference on College Composition and Communication's statement of Students' Right to Their Own Language asserts (CCCC, 1974; reaffirmed in 2003). I will discuss in Chapter 1 why this is still the case, although given what we can easily see in SAT scores, college admissions, and failure rates in writing programs, the case is made by the racialized results we live with today, where students of color do worse than their white peers. And unlike many teachers who see critical pedagogies alone as the way toward liberation and social justice for students of color and multilingual students, I see things differently. The problems of racism in writing classrooms are not primarily pedagogical problems to solve alone. *Rac-*

ism is an assessment problem, which can only be fully solved by changing the system of assessment, by changing the classroom writing assessment ecology. Thus assessment must be reconceived as an antiracist ecology.

But when I say "writing assessment," what exactly am I talking about in this book? For writing teachers, I've found no better way to describe the range of judging that teachers do than Stephen Tchudi's (1997) description in his introduction to *Alternatives to Grading Student Writing*. Tchudi characterizes the degrees of freedom in various acts of judging student writing, which move from a high degree of freedom and low degree of institutional pressure in acts of responding to a limited degree of freedom and high degree of institutional pressure in grading. He offers four basic acts of judging, which I refer to generally in this book as "writing assessment":

- **Response**. "naturalistic, multidimensional, audience-centered, individualized, richly descriptive, uncalculated";
- **Assessment**. "multidimensional, descriptive/analytic, authentic, problem solving, here-and-now, contextualized criteria, formative/process-oriented";
- **Evaluation**. "semi-deminsional, judgmental, external criteria, descriptive/analytic, rank ordering, future directed, standardized, summative";
- **Grading**. "one-dimensional, rewards/punishments, rank ordering, not descriptive, a priori criteria, future directed, one-symbol summative" (Tchudi, 1997, p. xiii)

Thus when I refer to activities, processes, judgments, or decisions of assessment, I'm speaking mainly of the above known kinds of judgment, which all begin with processes and acts of reading. As you can see from Tchudi's descriptions, response is freer and more open than assessment, which offers an analytic aspect to judgments on writing but less freedom than responses. Meanwhile, evaluation is even more restrictive by being more judgmental and summative than assessment, while grading is the most limited of them all, since it is one-dimensional and not descriptive.

We must be careful with using such distinctions, however. Thinking about classroom writing assessment as essentially a kind of judgment or decision whose nature is different depending on how much freedom or institutional pressure exists in the judgment misses an important aspect of all classroom writing assessment that my ecological theory reveals. All of the above kinds of judgments are based on processes of reading student texts. Assessment as an act is at its core an act of reading. It is a particular kind of labor that teachers and students do in particular material places, among particular people. This means that the nature of any kind of judgment and the institutional pressure present is contingent on

the ecology that produces it and the ecologies that surround that ecology. So while these distinctions are useful, they become fuzzier in actual practice.

WHY ECOLOGY AND AN ANTIRACISM AGENDA?

You may be wondering, what am I adding to the good work of writing assessment folks like Brian Huot, Peggy O'Neill, Bob Broad, Ed White, Bill Condon, Kathleen Yancey, and others who have written about writing assessment in the classroom? While very good, very conscientious scholars and teachers who have much to teach us about validity, reliability, the nature of judgment, portfolios, and reflection (self-assessment), none of these scholars use any race theory, postcolonial theory, whiteness theory, or Marxian theory to address racism in writing assessments of any kind, but especially writing assessments in the classroom. To date, I have seen nothing in the literature that incorporates a robust racial theory, Marxian theory, postcolonial theory, or a theory of whiteness to a theorizing or practical treatment of classroom writing assessment. My ecological theory of writing assessment incorporates such theories because such theories offer a way to understand the ecology of people, environments, their relationships, and the politics involved.

Thus what I address is the fact that students of color, which includes multilingual students, are often hurt by conventional writing assessment that uncritically uses a dominant discourse, which is informed by an unnamed white racial *habitus*, which we see better when we use analytical tools like postcolonial theory, whiteness studies, and Marxian theory. A theory of writing assessment as ecology adds these theories to our thinking about classroom writing assessments. Thus it doesn't matter if teachers or readers see or read student writing with prejudice or with a preference for whiteness in their classrooms. It doesn't matter at all. What matters is that the assessment ecology produces particular results, determines (in the Marxian sense) particular products, reinforcing particular outcomes, which make racist cause and effect difficult (even impossible) to discern. What matters is that writing teachers and students not only have a vocabulary for thinking about writing assessment in its most complete way, but that that vocabulary be informed by other pertinent theories. Having such a vocabulary offers explicit and self-conscious ways to problematize students' writing assessment situations, a central activity in antiracist writing assessment ecologies.

I've made a bold claim above about some very fine writing assessment scholars, so let me illustrate how racism in writing assessment often gets treated (or avoided) by scholars and researchers by considering one very good writing assessment scholar, Brian Huot, one we would all do well to listen to carefully. My goal is not to demean the fine work of Huot. In fact, I am inspired by his trail-

blazing, by his articulation of key connections between writing assessment and student learning, and his advocacy for composition studies as a field to know more about the literature of writing assessment (mostly the psychometric and educational measurement literature) in order to do our work better, but I argue that we must now cut a broader trail, one that offers us additional theories that help us explicitly understand racism in writing assessment.

In his important work *(Re)Articulating Writing Assessment for Teaching and Learning*, Brian Huot (2002) discusses writing assessment as a field and a set of classroom practices. In Chapters 3 and 5, he focuses explicitly on classroom writing assessment. In Chapter 3, he argues convincingly that writing teachers need to teach students how to assess writing themselves in order to help students become better writers. He says, "[a] crucial missing element in most writing pedagogy is any experience or instruction in ascertaining the value of one's own work" (2002, p. 67). In short, we must teach assessment to students, so that they can understand the nature of judgment and value, which in return makes them more critical and effective writers. To do this, he promotes what he calls "instructive evaluation," which "involves the student in the process of evaluation … in all phases of the assessment of her work" (2002, p. 69). Instructive evaluation focuses attention on how judgments are made through the processes of reading student texts. In many important ways, I have tried to take up Huot's call by engaging students in the full cycle of writing assessment through a cycle of rubric creating, drafting, judging, revising, and reflecting on the ways students read and make judgments on peer's texts (Inoue, 2004). I call it "community-based assessment pedagogy," and I still use a version of it today, which I show in Chapter 4. I extended this pedagogy by arguing for writing teachers to teach the rhetoric of writing assessment (Inoue, 2010), which offers students ways to understand the nature of valuing and judgment, which provides them with ways to write from more critical and informed stances. So Huot—and particularly *(Re)Articulating*—has helped me to understand a long-term pedagogical and scholarly project, of which the present book is a continuation.

But in his discussion of teaching assessment to students, or involving them in the full cycle of assessment, there is no mention of the ways that the judgments possible or the dominant discourse that informs those judgments are already constructed by racial structures, for instance, a white racial *habitus*, or a dominant white discourse, which we might for now understand as a set of linguistic codes and textual markers that are often not a part of the discourses of many students of color, working class students, and multilingual students, but is a part of many white, middle-class students' discourses.

To illustrate, imagine that we are Olympic-level sprinters, and we've been tasked to bring together all the athletes from the Olympic games in order to

determine how good of an athlete everyone is by measuring how fast everyone runs a 400-meter sprint. We use this measure because it seems a good measure to us. We are conscientious and caring. We really are trying to be fair-minded to all so we judge everyone by the same standard, but we only know how to judge a 400-meter sprint. It's what we know. Sure, we will do fine. Sprinters will be judged highly, but what of those curlers, or the snowboarders, or the swimmers, or the archers, or the skiers, or the tennis players, or the water polo players, or the wrestlers? You get the idea. In the name of finding a consistent (i.e., fair) way to judge everyone by the same standard, we have made an unfair assessment of athletic prowess by narrowing our definition of what it means to be an athlete, by ignoring the diversity of athleticism. Racism in the writing classroom often works in similar ways. We define "good" writing in standard ways that have historically been informed by a white discourse, even though we are working from a premise that attempts fairness.

In fact, when writing classroom assessments do not account for whiteness or the dominant discourse's relation to various racial formations in the class, and that discourse is used to make judgments on writing and writers, racism is bound to happen. It is systemic that way. Consider Huot's closing words on using assessment to teach writing:

> Using assessment to teach requires the additional steps of having students apply discussions of writing quality to their individual texts or compile criteria for individual papers that they can discuss with a teacher or peer group. Students can only learn the power of assessment as they can other important features of learning to write—within the context of their own work. Learning how to assess entails more than applying stock phrases like *unity, details, development,* or *organization* to a chart or scoring guideline. Students and teachers can use these ideas to talk about the rhetorical demands of an emergent text, so that students could learn how to develop their own critical judgments about writing. This creation of a classroom pedagogy for assessment should provide students with a clearer idea about how text is evaluated, and it should work against often nebulous, underdeveloped, and unarticulated ideas they have about why they like a certain piece of writing or make certain revisions. (2002, p. 78)

Certainly, this is a good way to understand writing assessment in the classroom as pedagogical in very tangible ways, important ways, ways that as I've mentioned above I've been inspired by. I'm invested in this kind of pedagogy of

assessment. I do not knock this aspect of Huot's ideas: that we teach students how to understand the nature of judgment in informed ways, ways that begin with their own writing, but the above articulation avoids discussing race as an important part of the student's subjectivity as a reader and writer, and thus as an important part of the inquiry into the nature of judgment.

Given this, I pose a question: when students discuss writing quality or compile criteria for a rubric, when they use ideas like "unity, details, development, or organization" to "talk about the rhetorical demands of an emergent text" as more than "stock phrases" —all excellent things to do—how will they negotiate the ways that any "text is evaluated" against a dominant white discourse? How will they confront the fact that most of the time evaluation, whether it's a teacher's or students', in a writing course means a set of hegemonic dispositions toward texts? How will they understand past or present evaluations of texts, of their own texts, as more than an individual's failure to meet expectations or goals, but also as a confluence of many other structures in language, school, and society, forming expectations they (and their teacher) have little control over?

While I do not think Huot means for this to happen, I can see how a class that engages in such a pedagogy can easily turn into a class that asks students to approximate the academic dispositions of the academy (whatever that may mean for that class) without any explicit way of interrogating the system that asks for such texts, or such evaluation of texts. I can see the course missing important opportunities to interrogate the dominant discourse as normative, or interrogating the hegemonic ways of evaluating texts in classrooms, some of which are rhetorical in nature. It is one thing to investigate how a judgment is made and how to articulate one's judgments in order that they may help writers in some way, but it is an entirely different reflective process to investigate the ways judgments on our writing, and the judgments we make, participate in larger normative discourses that have uneven effects on various groups of people, that privilege some students over others. And it is yet another thing to link these ways of judging to the historically reproduced dispositions of whiteness.

Huot's good theorizing misses these opportunities, which leaves open the chance for racist effects in the writing assessment. He seems to be more concerned with students' inability to articulate their judgments of texts in ways that are rhetorical (again, a good thing to focus on in a classroom), but this is at the expense of seeing those rhetorical ways of judging as hegemonic, as historically connected to broader dispositions toward texts that are not necessarily universal but rather are part of dominant white academic discourses, which sets up a hierarchical system of privileging through the valuing of texts. The hierarchy, while not intended to be, turns out often to be racist.

To his credit, Huot does not ignore racism in writing assessment altogether.

In Chapter 5, Huot centers on the most important process of any classroom writing assessment, reading and forming feedback to students about their writing or themselves as writers. Through a look at the literature on response, he notes that the field has no formal theory of response. What we have are various accounts, as good as they are, of how to respond to student writing, such as Straub's important work (1996a; 1996b; 1997; 2000). He concludes about the literature of the field: "the focus is once again only on practice, with little attempt to see response within a theoretical, pedagogical, or communicative context" (p. 111). In his move toward a theory of reading and response, a start at filling this theoretical gap in the literature, Huot discusses Arnetha Ball's (1997) very good study on the reading practices of African-American and European-American teachers, which turns out to be different along racial lines. He admits that at least in this case, "teachers with different cultural orientations saw very different things in student writing" (2002, p. 117). This, however, is the end of his comment. He moves from summarizing Ball's study of race in a writing assessment, which he reads as culture, to talking about Sarah Freedman's (1984) work, which talks about the culture of schools generally, how they construct roles and expectations for students and teachers. After Freedman, he discusses Faigley's (1989) important essay, "Judging Writers, Judging Selves," which helps him identify the ways that readers are situated historically and so have historically changing tastes that affect the way we read and judge student writing.

Huot's transition from Ball to Freedman is telling in the way he treats race, and by implication racism. He says, "[i]t's important in talking about the influence of culture in teacher response that we not forget that school itself is a cultural system bound by specific beliefs and attitudes" (2002, p. 117). True enough. No argument here. But what about racism, isn't that an historical set of beliefs, tastes, and practices too? There is no connection to race or racist practices. Ball's findings do not come up again. It is important to note again, however, that race is not real, but racism is. And it's racism that must be considered first.

This avoidance of any deep treatment of racism in his discussion becomes more problematic near the end of this otherwise fine chapter. Huot builds to a very intriguing model for teachers and students for "moving toward a theory of response" (2002, p. 132). There are five elements to the model, but there is no explicit way to interrogate or understand racism in practices in the model. The model offers as its most important term, "context," which is informed surely by the work of Ball and his earlier discussion. Not surprisingly, context is the center of the visual model, and the other four elements revolve around it, influencing it. Context is described as: "Particular writer, particular moment of a particular work in a particular curriculum, particular institution, particular issues, and particular audiences" (Huot, 2002, p. 132). With all these particu-

lars, one might think that teachers shouldn't ever think in terms of larger social patterns or effects, or should treat every reading and response scene as one in which we cannot judge it next to others. This means that every judgment, every assessment of every student is unique. In this way, the model attempts to resist being racist by using the abstract liberal tenant of individualism (e.g., we are all unique). It theorizes that the particulars of any context determine what we do, how we read, why we read, what meaning or judgments we can make, etc. But it resists acknowledging in any way race or racism as a phenomenon, resists noticing or acting on larger patterns. By referencing individualism, by referring to all students as individuals, the model loses the ability to see broader patterns by any number of social dimensions. It resists seeing and acting against racism as structural. To many, this model would amount to not seeing racism, ignoring it, then saying that it doesn't matter. It may not matter, but you cannot know that until you investigate it.

There are many good things about Huot's theorizing of context for reading and response; however, treating every student as a unique student, as a particular student, isn't in contradiction to seeing racism as affecting our students of color, seeing larger, broader patterns that reveal the uneven relations to the dominant discourse and the judgments it promotes as unevenly tilted in favor of white students. But this nuance, even in a very nuanced and complex model for reading and responding, is lost because of the way Huot does not treat racism in his discussion. In part, this is because those in the field of writing assessment do not have vocabularies to help them discuss racism.

Most important, Huot's avoidance of considering racism in his discussion is the larger cause of this theory of reading and responding to lack a necessary attention to an antiracist agenda, which I know he would want to promote. Through it all, Huot, like most others, never attempts to understand context or historically changing values in reading, for instance, through other theoretical lenses that could help reveal racism, such as those of postcolonialism, whiteness studies, and Marxian theories, which could reveal ways that historically changing tastes and values may be influenced by historically changing racial formations in various schools, or the particular manifestation of whiteness in an assessment, or the historical structures of racism that affect who goes to school when and where at what times in U.S. history. This lack of treating racism makes it invisible in this otherwise very good theory of reading and response, which is the thrust of Huot's chapter.[3]

ABOUT THE RESISTANCE TO RACISM

I get a lot of resistance to explicitly thinking about race and racism in dis-

cussions of writing assessment, or I get silence, which I take as one form of resistance. This probably is an unfair assessment of some, I realize, but these discussions in hallways, classrooms, conferences, and over email are a part of why I write this book. And I feel it necessary to address these resistances in this introduction as a way to conclude it.

What troubles me are people who look at racial inequalities, look at racism in writing classrooms and programs, like the numbers and statistics I show later in this book and say, "how do we know that is racism?" My mind often whirls at such questions. Forget for a moment how it happened, inequalities are here. No African-Americans in your classes, few in your school. Where are the Native Americans? Most who are there, do not do well. They fail. Why? Isn't it enough to see such patterns? Does it really matter whether readers envisioned Latino or Black writers when they judge blindly the writing on the SAT writing exam or the English Placement Test (EPT) in California, which I discuss later in this book, or the writing of African-American students in first-year courses at Fresno State, the ones with a higher failure rate than any other racial formation? Here's what matters to me. White students uniformly and historically do better on most if not all writing assessments, large-scale or classroom. It may not be intentional, but it is racism, and it is a product of the writing assessment ecologies we create. Do not get me wrong. I do not blame white students or teachers. I blame writing assessments.

Richard Haswell disagrees with me to a degree, but he voices an important critique of the use of racism as a concept and goals in writing assessments. In his review of *Race and Writing Assessment* (Inoue & Poe, 2012a), Haswell's (2013) central critique of the book is that there is a contradiction in any investigation of racism in writing assessments. He says, "People cannot go about eliminating racism without constructing the notion of race, and the construction of race can only further racism" (Haswell, 2013). A little later, he makes an even more direct claim, which can be read as a criticism of the present book and its antiracist project: "any writing assessment shaped by anti-racism will still be racism or, if that term affronts, will be stuck in racial contradictions" (2013). What follows are a discussion of four "racial aporias" that we live with because we live with the contradiction of race.

The fourth aporia that Haswell identifies is one about the subject position of the researcher or teacher in an antiracist writing assessment project, such as the one this book attempts to articulate. He states it this way: "Writing scholars position themselves outside institutional racism to understand it but their understanding concludes that there is no outside" (2013). The point that Haswell is making is that no one can escape their own racial subjectivity or the structural influences in society and school that make up what we call race and racism. We

taint our own efforts at antiracist writing assessments. Of the contributors of the collection, Haswell claims, "None of them voice the possibility that this pervasiveness of racial formations might include their own relations, conceptions, and identities," and he concludes, "the editors note that their book, which repeatedly castigates the stylistic criterion of high academic English as a racial formation, is entirely written in high academic English" (2013).

I do not deny these observations at all, but they do not make an antiracist project of any kind, including an antiracist writing assessment theory, impossible to do or wrong-headed. On the contrary, because we are all implicated in racism in our classrooms and in society, because race is already constructed for us historically, because racism already exists, because we already live in racial contradictions, we should be engaging in antiracist projects. The use, for instance, of a Standardized Edited American English (SEAE), a hegemonic discourse, is not an indicator of racism on my part because of what and why I say what I do. No, my discourse is an indicator of my subversive success at making a local SEAE and dominant discourse my own, making that discourse less white and more universal by diversifying it, and pushing us all to interrogate our uses of it in our classrooms. I've worked hard to have the voice I have in the academy, made some linguistic sacrifices, changed my ways with words and my dispositions toward texts, but I'd argue my voice and what it says changes the academy too, just as others' voices have.[4] SEAE, of course, is often a racial marker, a marker of whiteness, but not a marker of one's racial formation, nor a marker of racism unless it is used against students in a writing assessment as the standard. Its use by a researcher or teacher isn't necessarily a racist act, neither is identifying those standardized structures as racialized, and people who historically have been racialized by them. The point isn't to get rid of race. Race is one way we mark diversity and complexity, difference. The point is to get rid of racism, unfair racialzied hierarchies. Haswell would have me avoid race completely in hopes that it withers and dies for lack of attention, which then creates a nonracist world. But to deny race is just another way to deny diversity, which is natural and needed in all systems. So it is how writing assessments deploy discourses and judgments that make them racist not our references to difference.

As Haswell notes, there are contradictions, aporias. SEAE is learned, but not always by choice. I will be the first to admit that I lost my ghetto English a long time ago (but not the swearing) for the wrong reasons, for racist reasons. I cannot help that. I was young and didn't understand racism or language. I just felt and experienced racism, and some of it was due to how I talked and wrote in school. I was captivated by the kind of English I read in the first few books of my literary life, *White Fang*, *Lord of the Flies*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. It sounded smart and clever, even magical, magical in the ways that Gorgias speaks of

language in his famous fragment, *Encomium of Helen*. Language bewitched me quite literally. Part of that spell had racist components. Since then, I've come to see that language as a hegemonic discourse that, like all others, can be helpful and harmful depending on how it is used and what it communicates.

I don't expect everyone to see my project as the best beginning to antiracist writing assessments, but don't tell me there isn't racism in writing classrooms. Don't tell me we can ignore it and that doing so will make it go away. Don't tell me we shouldn't see race and that's the answer to racism. Doing so tells me that my experiences of racism in school and out are just figments of my imagination, that they must have been something else, that we just cannot know if there is racism anymore, that we just have to ignore it and all will be well, that we just wait a little while longer. As a middle-aged man, I know better. Waiting is complicity in disguise. I've seen and experienced too much. It ain't my imagination. Any denial of racism in our writing assessments is a white illusion. It upholds a white hegemonic set of power relations that is the status quo. It is in the imagination of those too invested in a white racial *habitus*, regardless of their racial affiliation. Hell, I denied it when I was younger. I had to. It would have eaten me alive, and I likely would not be able to do what I do today if I hadn't. More aporias around racism.