

Antiracist Genre Systems: Creating Non-Violent Writing Classroom Spaces

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This article takes up Black critical geography, Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS), and trauma-informed pedagogy (TIP) to argue that preventing rhetorical violence in our classrooms cannot be accomplished without ensuring students feel safe bringing their whole selves into the classroom. Specifically, Black theorizations of space and genre systems help us think about the relationship between wellness and anti-Blackness as a geographic and spatial problem. Drawing on antiracist pedagogy and trauma-informed pedagogy, we demonstrate that aligning genres and practices with a set of visible, explicit antiracist commitments through the interlocking social actions of the syllabus, assignment sheets, class communications, community agreements and commitment statements, and formative and summative assessment can help in creating non-violent spaces that affirm marginalized students' identities and promote all students' well-being.

A Shared Commitment Statement

Our embodied selves move about this world with different senses of safety. The ways our bodies are perceived and the ways of thinking we set forth collide with any spaces in which we move and the respective positionalities of our students and colleagues on campus. In a global society shaped by a long history of racism, anti-Blackness, and legacies of white colonial and imperial violence—all of which have continued and are exacerbated under the conditions of COVID-19—it feels as though we have little power. Similarly, the institutions of academe, the university, and other vestiges of colonial infrastructure cause many of us feelings of powerlessness, voicelessness, and alienation. They push the most marginalized and vulnerable of us out of education spaces altogether. But we have hope in a collective desire for the destruction of all systems of oppression and the liberation of all oppressed persons; when hope fails, we simply care. We advocate a responsibility to antiracism and the cultivation of classroom and campus spaces that are safe for marginalized students, especially Black students, faculty, and staff. Preventative care and harm reduction are tactics most readily accessible to the marginalized and dis-

empowered to interrupt systems of power at local levels—in classrooms, universities, and communities. In short, it is the way we keep each other alive and safe.

Introduction

Scholars such as Nedra Reynolds introduced theories of critical geography to the field of writing studies in the early 2000s, offering writing studies scholars new ways to think about writing instruction as space- and place-based. In drawing on geographic thinking, notably Edward Soja and Henri Lefebvre, Reynolds illustrated for the community how to theorize space as more than a context in which or upon which things happen but rather where people and human processes reside. More specifically, she helped teachers and researchers in the field look to new spatial practices that can be imagined alongside students. Spatial thinking helps us anticipate student response—by centering student positionalities (Reynolds)—and consider our classrooms as social sites of interconnected and overlapping relationships.

Considering ongoing calls for antiracism and linguistic justice (Baker-Bell; Baker-Bell et al.; Maraj; Royster; Young), the discipline must revisit the idea of writing classrooms as spaces and situate our conversations within antiracist frameworks. This special issue's focus on well-being presents an opportunity to engage with calls for action as guides for supporting student and faculty well-being in writing classrooms and across campuses. We cannot truly support well-being without a fully antiracist and justice-oriented approach to writing, research, teaching, and action in the world.

Approaches to well-being typically attend to fulfilling an individual's needs for wellness (e.g., happiness, health, security, comfort, etc.) and address physical, psychological, and other environmental factors that disrupt an individual's experiences of well-being. Extending this definition, our approach to well-being offers a more expansive mode for thinking of others through the language of safety. For us, all questions of well-being are questions of being and feeling safe, secure, and supported within social spaces and social relations; though safety is perceived as accessible to all, the world is predicated upon safety for some.¹ Black and marginalized persons are often denied access to safe spaces and are constantly confronted by individuals and conditions that dismiss their needs and subjectivities and actively make them unsafe or at risk for additional harms. Recognizing spatial un/safety as inherent and central to conversations of well-being goes hand-in-hand with the work of antiracism and imagining more just and liberated classroom practices.

Black writers and theorists recognize that anti/racism is an ongoing, embodied experience. It is impossible to talk about students' literacies and ways

of speaking without acknowledging that Black students experience classroom spaces in very different ways than white students. Jacqueline Jones Royster's canonical 1995 Conference on College, Composition, and Communication (CCCC) chair address speaks to the ways our departments and universities drown out the voices and subjectivities of marginalized people and students in favor of white speakers, which results in alienation and heartache at being made to feel invisible or silenced: "Their experiences are not seen, and their voices are not heard. We can find ourselves participating, sometimes consciously, sometimes not, in what Patricia Williams calls 'spirit murder'" (39).

In writing about the effects of racism, Black composition scholars (Gilyard; Kynard) clearly point to the ways anti-Black racism does harm in educational settings and how higher education spaces like the American university are often mis-aligned with Black students' visions for a better social world. Researchers of Black critical literacies and rhetorical education (Logan; Richardson) also speak to how Black communities have developed alternative literacies and genres of resistance to dominant education practices. And Black scholars situated in curriculum studies (Ohito and Brown) have collaborated to discuss Black faculty and students' safety and the im/possibility of safety at predominantly-white institutions (PWIs). Ohito and Brown argue that Black faculty's classrooms are "Black affective networks" that offer refuge and a place of healing to Black students and faculty as a means of surviving the university. These insights—as well as insights from Black writers and literary critics such as Toni Morrison²—point to the need to theorize trauma-informed pedagogy (TIP) in relation to Black critical geography and antiracism.

Racist geographies of education have meant that many marginalized students have never felt safe in education spaces, notwithstanding the learned practice (as a means of survival) of assessing their own un/safety, environmental risk, and potential for being harmed while navigating a racist society. Considering conditions of un/safety in classrooms provides a critical foundation for thinking of (and caring for) all aspects and contexts of students' well-being. We approach a larger question of what it might mean to be able to consider non-white people's safety in absolutes rather than in measures of proximity to relative progress by disillusioning researchers from the idea that safety is inclusive and guaranteed to all. In other words, we ask: How can Black and non-white people always be and feel safe?

The collective experience of trauma in higher education points to how we can think of inclusivity and safety from a geographic perspective as well as an individual perspective (Tayles). Focusing on marginalized students' experiences—through Black critical geographies and TIP—recognizes that making safe, antiracist classrooms means more just changing instructors' mindsets. Instead, we are interested in locating this work in the genres of classroom

activity. The praxis we offer here visibly changes instructors' genre practices to account for what students have experienced in past classrooms. It also invites students into the process of building classrooms that they—and instructors—can constitute mutually as a safer space.

Using a tripartite theoretical framework, we focus on the genre ecologies of writing classrooms—namely, the interlocking social actions of the syllabus, assignment sheets, class communications, community agreements and commitment statements, and formative and summative assessments. This paper offers methods for improving all students' well-being, where all signifies antiracist practices that protect classrooms from remediated violence and harm and demonstrate the potential of equity for all rather than for some.

Critical Geography, Genre Systems, and Trauma-Informed Pedagogy

Although typically thought of as disjointed disciplines, geography and writing studies share theoretical foundations for space (Lefebvre). Both disciplines have witnessed critical and cultural turns following the 1960s that forged a generation of radical scholar-activists collectively committed to the cultivation of critical theory and methodologies for addressing how particularities of embodiment (e.g., race, gender, sexuality, etc.) dialectically construct individuals' positions, experiences, and relationships to space and to others within space. From this history emerged critical geography, which is marked by a move in geography from a fixation on mapping (i.e., staking claim to static space) toward an understanding of space as inherently social and shaped by human social processes, interactions, and experiences.

Black critical geographers, like Black rhetoricians and other critical scholars (e.g., critical race, critical legal studies, etc.) have always attended to specificities of race and experience, centering their projects around how and for whom space is constructed and how constructions of space are intended to disproportionately harm Black people. Black theorizations of space help us think about anti-Blackness as a geographic and spatial problem; additionally, Black theories of space reveal alternative ways of thinking about the production of space and of imagining new spaces and places. For example, in *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*, Katherine McKittrick argues that:

While Geography, space, and place are useful to thinking about ways in which we are differently “in place” and implicated in the production of space, they are also useful in signaling the alterability of “the ground beneath our feet”... And staying human, these struggles suggest, offers a different entry point into human geography: one that recognizes the alterability of humanness, space, and place, and one

that imparts the understanding that this alterability is a pathway into new geographic practices. (146)

Black geographers like McKittrick point out how social actions occur within specific spaces and how such social actions (and thus spaces) might be altered in ways that promote more human(e) interaction and possible antiracist futures. Because classrooms and campuses exacerbate colonial legacies of harm and dehumanization, the praxis of being and staying human can support student well-being and spatial safety.

Black compositionists have cited McKittrick's engagement of Black women's geographies and Black feminist thinking to resist the racist geographies of classrooms and campuses, forward new pedagogies that "contest the ways that space is (re)produced" (Kynard 139), and empower marginalized students and faculty to show up as their full selves in the classroom. Black critical geography models how colonial and imperialist histories and traditions produce classrooms as violent spaces that endanger the well-being of students and faculty and deny them full use of their embodied, cultural, and linguistic knowledges. To dismantle and undo the ecologies of whiteness within our classrooms, we must delve further into the intersections of geography and writing space so that educators can identify the racist geographies and ecologies of learning.

For writing studies scholars, McKittrick's work points out how genres contribute to social actions within alterable spaces. Much recited in RGS literature is the idea that genres are not fixed text types but typified social actions to recurrent situations. In other words, genres are communicative responses that help us navigate rhetorical situations. They constrain us and provide us agency (Bawarshi), and they produce social relations and possibilities for social action because

a genre is not just a pattern of forms or even a method of achieving our own ends. We learn, more importantly, what ends we may have . . . we learn to understand better the situations in which we find ourselves and the potential for failure and success in acting together (Miller 165).

Because genres proliferate, transform, or emerge over time, they serve as touchstones to locate social culture, changing attitudes, sites of conflict, persisting societal and legal structures, and important events across history. Indeed, genres have been deployed as a means to shape society and social interactions; conversely, we also shape and (re)invent genres to meet new social goals.

RGS scholars have developed a number of ways to study genre types, intergeneric features, the social actions giving to and linking genres, and the ways genre knowledge is learned, resisted, and deployed across contexts (for a

review, see Tardy and Swales; Bawarshi and Reiff). Likewise, RGS researchers have looked to the concept of an activity system—“any ongoing object-directed, historically conditioned, dialectically structured, tool-mediated human interaction” (Russell 510)—to understand the ways groups work toward shared goals. For our work on classroom geographies, we are interested in the ways genres operate as an interlocking system of social actions—i.e., genre systems—within educational spaces.³

Charles Bazerman has defined genre systems as “interrelated genres that interact with each other in specific settings” (97). Genre systems include a finite grouping of authorized genres “because the access conditions of the actions of each require various states of affairs to exist” (98). Even in more fluid conditions, such as classrooms, Bazerman explains how genres function:

handouts in college classes describing writing assignments are typically followed by questions and answers about the constraints of assignments, advisable procedures and the appropriateness of various ideas for projected papers. Then if all goes according to plan student papers, following the generic constraints established by the handout, are handed in. Then teacher marginalia is returned, concluding in some evaluation encapsulated in a grade. (98)

Bazerman’s characterization demonstrates how ideology is closely connected to the work of genre systems. In his characterization, the teacher is the agent of action related to an initial task and the arbitrator of negotiating meaning surrounding the task constraints and options. The success of the social action, in this formulation, is dependent on students fulfilling desired social actions without further negotiation.

Genres, of course, do not provide singular social actions but offer a range of possible “uptakes” (Freadman). As Bawarshi writes, uptake is not merely a response, but also taking up objects from a set of possible relations: “by ‘holding’ genres together, uptakes enable meanings that are made possible from that set of relations, [and] they are also capable of disrupting these relations” (246). In writing about uptake and translanguaging, Bawarshi explains how examination of uptakes can reveal the complexity of power in communicative relationships:

every genre uptake is taking place within certain asymmetrical relations of power and material, economic, and historical conditions, within and across linguistic as well as spatial and temporal locations, to achieve specific goals. (247)

There are numerous ways to study generic uptakes in classrooms and beyond, like uptakes of resistance (Dwyer) or disruptakes (Dryer; Messina).

Disruptakes describe how citizen-writers purposefully challenge genre-based public participation through “uptake affordances that deliberately create inefficiencies, misfires, and occasions for second-guessing that could thwart automaticity-based *uptake enactments*” (Dryer 70) and how online discourse communities’ response tactics seek redress from media/entertainment industries (Messina). Likewise, students may not respond to course genres in the way that instructors anticipate and may experience harm from genres and expectations for response. Instructors must consider how genres extend relations of power that alienate or intimidate students from engaging their embodiments in writing exercises and how genres unintentionally reimpose restrictive ideologies about writing, reproduce experiences of educational harm, and endanger students’ well-being.

Students demand and deserve educational experiences that embrace and engage the full range of their subjectivities and empower them through antiracist approaches to genre systems. Reconsidering genres alone is not enough to alter classroom geographies for antiracist ends; negotiating classroom practices means little if course content and teaching remain linked to traditions of harm. Empowering students also necessitates recognizing past harms, experiences of “spirit murder” (Royster, citing Williams, 39), and other contexts of trauma.

Psychologists identify trauma as resulting “from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening;” such experiences have “lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being” (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration 7). Expanding antiracist genre systems with TIP frameworks would address aspects of student well-being and safety like “spirit murder” by situating social histories and placing students’ experience and its improvement, rather than instructors’ intentions, at the forefront.

In *Trauma Doesn’t Stop at the School Door: Strategies and Solutions for Educators, PreK–College*, Karen Gross connects trauma to learning, writing that trauma disrupts a student’s “learning success and quality educational outcomes in an ongoing manner throughout the person’s participation in the educational system” (17). It’s important to recognize that while psychologists often distinguish trauma from a range of other concerns such as general anxiety, educational researchers have been more expansive in their use of the term. From our perspective, an expansive understanding of trauma is important for acknowledging the long-standing effects of racism without pathologizing students. Expertise in trauma studies notwithstanding, we can all orient ourselves to a responsibility to care and to everyday practices of care for students, their embodiments, and their experiences with the world.

To help teachers understand the effects of trauma on learning, professional organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) have developed materials on trauma-informed teaching—what Sakeena Everett defines in a recent special issue on *Cultivating Healing-Centered ELA Classrooms* as “teaching that views trauma through ecological and cultural lenses and recognizes how context plays a significant role in how students and teachers perceive and process traumatic events in educational settings” (9). Trauma-informed pedagogy (Davidson; DeBacher and Harris-Moore; Tayles) offers a set of methods for us all to improve our teaching in ways that acknowledge how student-teacher interactions and classroom spaces are shaped by power and privilege, understand the ecologies of student safety as campus-wide concerns, and prioritize an ethos of teaching based upon practicing care in/as pedagogy. Specifically, TIP builds off principles in trauma-informed care:

- Safety or ensuring psychical and emotional safety
- Choice
- Collaboration and power sharing
- Trustworthiness through clarity, consistency, and interpersonal boundaries
- Empowerment through validation (Fallot and Harris)

Trauma-informed pedagogy points to ways that we can reimagine the social actions of classroom genre systems within writing classroom spaces to think of students’ well-being. By situating the writing classroom as an antiracist space and altering course genres (i.e., assignments and assessment practices) in kind, we can find multiple antiracist avenues and care-oriented practices for the teaching of writing. In turn we can think more closely about how remediating genres can prioritize student well-being by attuning instructors and students to alternative response processes.

The Classroom Genre System

We locate the geographic alterability of the classroom through classroom genres (syllabus, assignment sheets, class communications, commitment statements, and assessment genres). Rather than seeing each of these elements in isolation, we see them as an interlocking system of communicative action, as illustrated in Figure 1. In this canonical formulation of the classroom genre system, teacher talk surrounds and shapes the genre system, be it orally or in writing, through the will of the individual teacher or sanction of the writing program/general education committee.

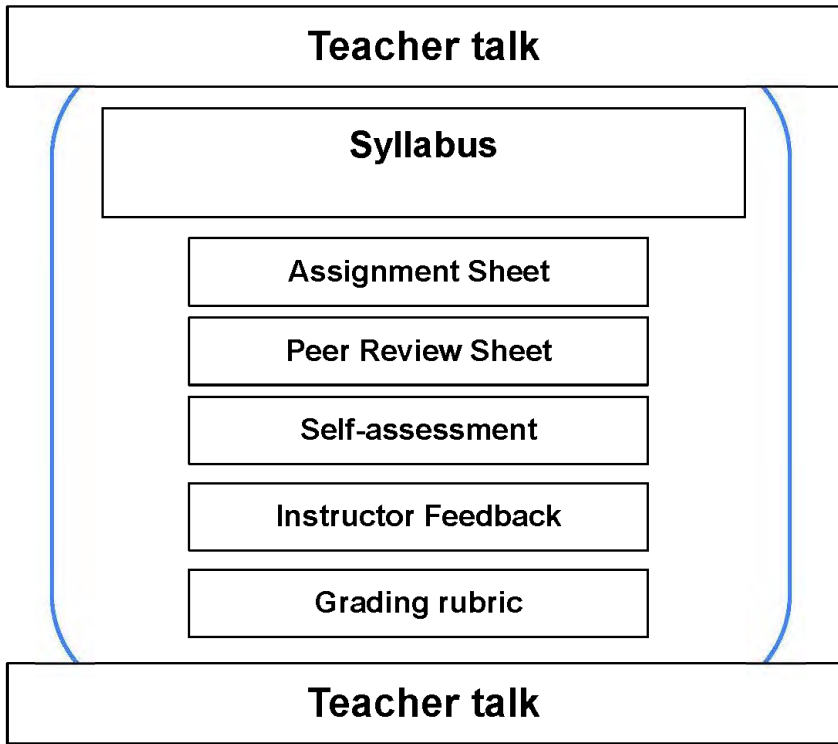








Figure 1: Canonical classroom genre types

Figure 2, on the other hand, identifies the typical and possible antiracist social actions of those interlocking textual artifacts from the classroom genre system.

Figure 2: Canonical and Antiracist Social Actions of the Classroom Genre System.

Textual artifact	Canonical components and <i>antiracist extensions</i>	Canonical Social Action	Antiracist Social Action
 Syllabus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Course description Faculty contact info. Required texts Attendance Lateness policies Assignment descriptions Grading policy Course schedule <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commitment statement Community agreement 	Attunement of writer to the writing classroom as an authoritative space, situated within colonial structures and limiting notions of knowledge and “appropriate” writing.	Reexamines course goals and instructor teaching pedagogies with a mind toward cultivating a series of commitments to students, linguistic justice, and safety.
 Assignment Sheet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Timeline Description Learning goals Grading Expectations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexible word/page counts Composing process descriptions Dialogic evaluation and revision 	<p>Attunement of writer to writing genres explored in the course, standards for evaluation and un/success, and expectations for writing performance.</p> <p>Disrupts critical pedagogies, in particular students’ relearning of writing as a process, rather than as a series of products.</p>	Recenters writing assignments as an ongoing, expanding process of knowledge-building through interconnected assignments and references to course concepts and student discussions. Treats assignment sheets as complementary conversations to and spaces of experimentation with course ideas.
 Rubrics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specifies traits of assignment that will be assessed Identifies performance categories for each trait <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capacious traits Asset-based performance descriptions Co-constructed 	Attunement of writer to the textual performance described in the assignment sheet through a seemingly objective tool.	Challenges the invisible ideology of academic writing by demonstrating the capaciousness of writing constructs, placing writer agency at all levels of performance, and shifts the power of who gets to decide what is evaluated.
 Teacher Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addressed to writer Begins positive Offers criticism Suggests next steps <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accessible technology Embodiment 	Attunement of writer to the textual performance described in the assignment sheet through the textualized “voice” of instructor authority	Shifts the embodiment of feedback to oral and multimodal performances that allow for dialogue, physical safety, and negotiation.
 Peer Review Sheets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guiding questions for review Additional reader questions for author <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Author statement Author review 	Works to attune writers to the textual performance described in the assignment sheet through teacher authority (guiding questions) and reader awareness (questions for author)—i.e., additional questions that remain unresolved by the guiding questions.	<p>Author statements lead with the student’s goals for a writing task. Those are positioned with the guiding questions.</p> <p>Author reviews allow students to assess peer review and encourage additional viewpoints.</p> <p>Authors choose the kind of response they need at a particular moment <i>and with a particular reader</i>.</p>
 Self-assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Task that points student to reflect on their process or a set of defined elements related to a learning outcome. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guided prompt connected to the learning goals for the assignment Positionality statement 	Invites author reflection on their goals, processes, products, and extensions (forward and backward) of the writing task and resulting learning.	<p>Creates trustworthiness. Reflection is not soul-searching.</p> <p>Positionality in relation to a project allows students to surface pieces of their identity that shape what they see and write. Break from objective notions of knowledge-making.</p>

Syllabus

The syllabus is a genre that proverbially writes the classroom space and the relation-

ships between individuals within it. In *Genre and the Invention of the Writer*, Bawarshi theorizes the course syllabus as a “master genre” that constructs and constitutes the classroom space, because it “locates teacher and students within a set of desires, commitments, relations, and subject positions . . . [and] manages the set of genres that will enable its users to enact these desires, relations, and subjectivities” (2003, 117-118). Based on Bawarshi’s definition, syllabi are coercive, or operative, genres—they organize, construct, and discipline classroom behavior. As the first text encountered in writing classrooms, the syllabus organizes hopes for the course and expectations for students and instructor(s), specifically conveying instructors’ pedagogies, content valued in the class, and instructors’ commitments to learning-outcomes and students’ well-being.

Possibilities: Geographic and generic alterability for syllabi would add “negotiation and flexibility in the classroom” rather than regulating action (Womack 501). Melissa Tayles engages geographic alterability of the syllabus through universal design (UD), drawing on principles such as negotiation, flexibility, and accommodation to alter the tone of the syllabus from an authoritative or prescriptive text to one that invites students into a mutual dialogue. For example,

I aim to create an environment where you feel safer to take risks, share your challenges and victories, and express your ideas throughout the writing and learning processes we will be using this quarter. [...] When we are all in attendance and participating in the classroom, we are allies. The perceived risks of participating in and contributing to class will reward you and the classroom community. (308)

For Tayles, altering the language in her syllabus to extend the notion of commitment and mutual agreement did not mean losing structures like deadlines and timely submission. Instead, her practices allow her to work alongside students to cultivate practical, understanding, and more habitually safe ways of being in the classroom.

Commitment Statements: Commitment statements communicate an instructor's values as they pertain to the classroom environment, as seen in Figures 3 and 4.⁴

MY TEACHING PHILOSOPHY/STYLE

Building a community of practice. This is a space for multilingual writers to support each other and learn from each other. In this online course, you will have various opportunities to engage in peer reviews and other activities.

Don't be afraid of making mistakes. In this safe space, our goal is to help each other to grow as multilingual writers. I myself is also a multilingual person who speaks English as my second language. As your instructor, I present myself as a role model, a facilitator, and a co-constructor of knowledge. I am not here to judge, but instead to support you and to grow with you.

Writing is a process. Good writers treat writing as a process, and good writing is often done with multiple revisions and constant reflections. In this class we will have multiple drafts in writing, and I will grade you based on your final draft. In other words, **what I value the most is your growth in this process.**

Pro-multilingual class environment. **In my class, all languages are welcomed in the classroom as long as you use them as tools to enhance your academic excellence.** If desired, you are free to use your first language in earlier drafts of the writing. I respect and welcome your home language and culture and hope to create a pro-multilingual class environment where students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds can feel safe and comfortable to participate.

Figure 3. Sample Commitment Statement by Qianqian Zhang-Wu, Assistant Professor of English and Director of Multilingual Writing at Northeastern University. Included with permission.

LANGUAGE DIVERSITY STATEMENT

The graduate students of the English Graduate Association (EGA) commit to an ethic that centers, encourages, and uplifts language difference and linguistically diverse writing and speech. Occupying dual roles as “student” and “teacher” with varying research interests and writing styles, we simultaneously navigate and bear witness the tensions between traditional academic writing and our own identities. Similarly, we recognize that conventions of Standard American Edited English writing and English Language Learning impede access to academic spaces for our students and, ultimately, exclude student writers who are non-white, non-wealthy, non-Christian, and occupy unstable positions of citizenship with or without documentation. That is, our students most victimized by this system occupy one or multiple zones of oppression, being non-white, of a non-Christian religious belief or spiritual practice, learning English as a language beyond their first language fluency, and/or identifying as gender-nonconforming, trans, or woman.

As graduate student teachers of composition, we explicitly stand with our students, especially our students of Color and multilingual or translingual writers who are disallowed language use when white students often do not experience the same barriers. We vow to operate from a united commonplace: ***Language diversity is the right of all student writers and learners.***

Figure 4: Sample Commitment Statement by Tieanna Graphenreed and Amber Simpson. Included with permission.

The commitment statement is a text type that lends itself to a reification of core pedagogies and positions in writing studies that already promote student safety (e.g., writing as a process) by providing students comfort and offering a space of healing to their writerly identities. With a mind toward process, commitment statements also encourage positive relationships with writing and a growth mindset for students. Statements also help instructors expand process-oriented thinking into linguistic justice.

In the specific rhetorical context of the multilingual writing course, Qianqian Zhang-Wu advocates that students from diverse linguistic, cultural, and geographic backgrounds use their writing as a way of translanguaging to enhance their engagement with writing prompts (Figure 3). Using herself as a relatable model, Zhang-Wu welcomes students to use speech that feels best for them and underscores that translanguaging is a useful, inventive, and generative resource in their writing journey. With this commitment, students' generic uptakes become participatory as opposed to prescriptive, allowing students to opt-in/out of English-dominant writing as they choose. The classroom space proffered by Zhang-Wu's commitment statement stands contrary to typical English-Only writing classrooms to which most students' have become accustomed and fear.

Curating commitment statements for course syllabi does not need to happen in isolation but can be a collective effort amongst like-minded colleagues. The Language Diversity Statement (LDS) in Figure 4 was a graduate-student led effort at a large, land-grant PWI in the South that proclaimed a long-held romanticization of the Confederacy and has had its fair-share of racist, anti-Black, and xenophobic incidents on campus. Like Zhang-Wu, the LDS makes an effort to align pedagogies with students' well-being by addressing the disproportionate impact of unfair assessment policies on multilingual, translingual, and international students and acknowledging marginalized students' physical and linguistic unsafety at the university. Both samples model classroom alterability by considering writing as embodied and engaging linguistic diversity to refuse racist geographies of classrooms and campuses.

Assignment Sheets

Like syllabi, assignment sheets signal students' and instructors' relationships to expected writing performances. For many students, assignment sheets are genres that prescribe rules for writing and stabilize assumptions about what their writing should and should not do. Often instructors' pedagogies do not intend to stifle creativity and experimentation; however, friction emerges because instructors treat course assignments and assignment sheets as teaching materials themselves rather than supplements to course discussions or experiments with course concepts. Even when choices are offered, writing

assignments feel more akin to tests of proficiency in academic language and rhetorical skill as opposed to sites of exploration and dialogue.

Assignment sheets must be (re)positioned by instructors as conversations between course materials, rhetorical education practices, and classroom discussions. We see three distinct ways to alter assignment sheets to mirror process-oriented writing pedagogies and promote student well-being:

- Institute flexible word/page counts, either through a wide range or a minimum model. In either example, instructors might encourage students to write as much as they need with a caveat regarding feedback: “Submissions should be at least X pages, but I will not read beyond page X.” This approach would give students the flexibility to explore their ideas and consider the expectation of instructor feedback as they organize their papers.
- Treat assignment sheets as descriptions of the composing process, guided by a set of thinking questions related to course goals and enhanced with multiple examples for students to model in their own writing. Instructors may also employ (in assignment design) or invite students to engage in multimodal approaches by experimenting with different mediums, literacies, and technologies for writing and speaking.
- Describe evaluation as dialogic, rather than as a marker of success or failure. Dialogic evaluation would require honest, transparent connections between teachers-student(s), students-students, and student-self assessment, including offering possibilities for resistance; we offer strategies later in this paper.

Altogether, instructors must ask themselves how their assignment sheets act as complimentary genres to scaffold or supplement student knowledge and ongoing conversations with course questions.

Classroom Assessment Genres

Classroom assessment genres encompass a range of text types, including peer review sheets, self-assessment, teacher feedback, grading rubrics, and numerous others. In the space of this article, we cannot address all of them. In fact, when we began to name the communicative forms related to classroom assessment activity, it became clear how much space that evaluation takes up in the writing classroom genre system.

As described in Figure 2, peer review sheets, self-assessment, teacher feedback, and rubrics typically attune writers to an assignment’s goals. While consistency is important in creating a sense of trustworthiness, attunement to only one set of standards, ideologies, or ways of thinking—often undergirded

by whiteness—does not generate a sense of trust. In a 2021 infographic, with Mya Poe, Asao B. Inoue described the foundations of antiracist assessment values and practice:

- What we think of as good writing is socially, culturally, and historically constructed by groups of people with particular language habits; thus, the assessment of language is political.
- Our judgments about writing are always bound within an historical and evolving system of racial hierarchy that reinforces white supremacy.
- All writing and style conventions, composing processes, argument structures, and genre conventions are shaped by white supremacy and legacies of oppression and trauma to BIPOC.
- These oppressions and traumas are often reinforced through assessment practices.
- Antiracist writing assessment attempts to redress these injustices.

Inoue has used the term ecology to link the people, practices, parts, power, and place of the writing classroom. Inoue argues that “in order for a classroom assessment ecology to be sustainable, fair, and resist racism, it needs to critically question the structures and assumptions that make up the reading and judging of all students and teachers in the classroom . . . it requires that the assessment ecology is one of settlement, one in which everyone has a stake in making it livable, fair, and sustainable” (80). The challenge to make classroom assessment genres “livable, fair, and sustainable”—i.e., safer—is an invitation to reimagine the ways that classroom assessment genres operate within classroom spaces.

Rubrics

The most visible form of classroom assessment, beyond grades, are rubrics. Even when rubrics are not linked to grading, they still have the force of authority in that they appear to define objective traits for evaluating written products. In his corpus analysis of 83 writing rubrics from writing programs at U.S. public research universities, Dryer showed that “in all traits, at all performance levels, readers’ experiences of the texts are presented as intrinsic qualities of those texts” (26). Moreover, Dryer found that “agentive students disappear in lower performance categories . . . in eliding students’ potential agency in ‘failing’ to meet standards, the documents in this corpus present their criteria and performance categories as uncomplicated means to an ideologically neutral end” (23, 27). The canonical traits of writing that Dryer finds named in writing rubrics—grammar, evidence, thesis, style, organization, critical thinking, audience, and assignment—are only a fraction of the

possible traits that we might consider when evaluating writing. Consider the possibilities not named in most scoring rubrics:

Imitation

Risk

Growth

Curiosity

Collective ownership

Incorporation of peer feedback

Correct technical terminology

File name and time of submission

Integration of visual data

Coherence

Cohesion

Pronoun usage

Punctuation

Cultural Alignment

Stance

Paraphrasing

Social action

Ethical use of data

Some of these traits are mundane (e.g., file name and time of submission) but often affect students' grades on projects. Other traits—like collective ownership, ethical use of data, and social action—are highly valued by many writing teachers but also go unnamed (and unrewarded) on rubrics. Breaking free of the constraints of standard traits offers possibilities for non-violence while also inviting students to think about what they value in writing. When we invite students into the process of collective rubric design with the goal of breaking canonical categories, we take the power of rubrics and use it to empower and validate ways of knowing and being that are historically marginalized in writing classrooms. As Carmen Kynard writes, despite being “enmeshed with traditional geographic arrangements . . . different ways of knowing and writing constantly contest the ways that space is (re)produced, and this includes the space of classrooms and, thereby, the academy” (139). By reorienting assessment genres, we center students' well-being by affirming

their embodiments and experiences and attributing value to these aspects of their writing processes and to their work in the larger world. In doing so, we recognize our students' importance as collaborators in academic endeavors, and we model for students ways to recognize similar opportunities for agency and alterability within and beyond writing classrooms.

Teacher Response

In classroom genre systems, rubrics and teacher feedback often work together, linking a score to a trait and then to narrative comments in the form of a short note to the student, marginalia, and/or comments in the rubric itself. There are different opportunities for antiracist action in linking or delinking rubrics and teacher feedback. For example, Inoue has advocated for "dimension-based rubrics" that "call for multiple readers (students and teachers) to explain in context their own habitus, the divergent assumptions they make as they make them in judgments" (392). So, instead of identifying a trait such as "evidence" and a standard such as "evidence and reasoning are adequate to support claims and incorporate academic sources," a dimension-based rubric would offer a set of questions about the trait: "what evidence and reasoning do you see here? What evidence and reasoning do you not see or hear in the draft? Where do your ideas of evidence come from?" (392). In other words, dimension-based rubrics offer another possibility for exposing the seemingly neutral ideology embedded in rubrics.

While rubrics generate a lot of conversation, the most long-standing form of evaluative action in the writing classroom is teacher feedback. Richard Straub's research on response concluded that "there is no one best way to respond to student writing" and encouraged writing teachers to assume a variety of response identities, advancing those that invited rhetorical readings of texts and asked students questions about their texts, rather than merely dispensing critical judgment (24). More recent research on response points to new response technologies like screen capture technology with audio (Anson et al.). Technologies like Zoom, Slack, and Discord are fraught with surveillance challenges, but they also invite possibilities for antiracist action because they alter the physical location of the writing classroom to synchronous and asynchronous virtual spaces. For students who face social anxiety meeting in teacher offices, video conferences and texting technology allows them to gain agency from safe spaces. Finally, TIP strategies for in-person conferences are useful in making face-to-face teacher response feel safer—namely, leading with student concerns, meeting during the day, leaving office doors open or meeting in common spaces, and positioning bodies (distanced, side-by-side, angled, or across the table) so that students feel safer.

Peer Review

Peer review is an assessment practice that teachers often use to share power with students. But rather than use peer review as an opportunity for empowerment, it too often reinforces hierarchies through worksheets of highly orchestrated sets of questions that guide student readers in offering feedback and include spaces for students to ask additional questions. Such peer review sheets can serve as proxies for teacher authority by offloading specific ideological commitments into coercive textual production.

However, there are multiple ways to make peer review a place of empowerment, especially when the class has drafted its own community agreement that specifies how individuals in the class will address each other, deal with conflicts, and respect each other's written work and emotional labor. Positioning peer review as an invitation from the writer to a named reader changes the social action of peer review by inviting students to think about the possibilities for response identities. In "High Stakes and Low Stakes in Assigning and Responding to Writing," Peter Elbow offers a range of response identities. On one end of the spectrum is "zero response," of which Elbow writes "Most students come to appreciate the chance to write with the knowledge that they will be heard but will not have to deal with my response" (9). From zero response, Elbow identifies a range of increasingly more critical response techniques, ranging from minimal, nonverbal, noncritical response; supportive response—no criticism; descriptive or observational response; minimal, nonverbal, critical response; and critical response, diagnosis, advice (10). Elbow writes that as we move of the response range, from zero response to critical response "the more we need to ask the crucial pragmatic questions: Is this comment worth it? How much response do I need? How much criticism will be useful? What is the likelihood of my effort doing good or harm?" (10).

In providing a range of possibilities for response, Elbow reveals the range of potential social actions related to response and how some of those social actions are potentially more harmful than others. Elbow is not asking us to not abandon critical response; he's asking us to understand the potential connection between critical response and harm and teach peer review in ways that provide safety, choice, and even collaboration. We have adapted Elbow's approach in our own classrooms, allowing students to choose the kind of response they need at a particular moment and with a particular reader. Sometimes readers, including teachers, need to sit in silence and simply listen.

Self-Assessment

Self-assessment and reflection have been touted as a means to improve learning and provide students agency in their own student learning (Yancey). Cer-

tainly, reflection is one of the cornerstones of antiracist work. It is through reflection that we come to understand ourselves and our actions in relation to others. Sometimes, however, reflection in writing classrooms is directed through general prompts about writing process or through a common prompt (for example, a portfolio reflective statement). General reflective prompts about process invite students to look inward only at one dimension of writing, not the social construct of writing itself. Common prompts are often attached to outcomes assessment or even high-stakes testing. In such cases, Scott has questioned the social action of reflection when it becomes “a highly intractable generic mode” (24). In studying students who had taken the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) portfolio assessment in the early 2000s, Scott observed that “the composition of the reflective letter is best described as bureaucratic practice—a socializing process that reproduces the values of the sponsoring institution” (5).

We want to advocate for four approaches to reflective prompts: First, any statement of self-assessment for the purposes of scoring in outcomes assessment should be explicitly connected to the teacher’s learning goals for the task. This allows students a sense of safety in knowing what the focus on a reflective text should be. Second, reflective statements need to allow space for the student’s goals for the task, not just the teacher’s goals. Third, reflection need not be limited to letters or essay text types—other text types from hip-hop (Hall) to testimonio (Noguerón-Liu and Hogan) can function as reflective text types. Finally, reflexive tasks should invite connection not just to the writing and learning process but also students’ identities as researchers and community members. Even in research contexts, genres like positionality statements can function as productive reflective activities. Writing multiple positionality statements in relation to different kinds of research projects exposes the construction of our research efforts and how our relationship to research ethics can change with different kinds of research projects.

Implications for Instructors and Students

Opening courses with any of these re-envisioned genres and spatial practices holds four implications:

Implication 1

Build collective action among instructors and students: from instructor to each student, from instructor to all students, and from student to student. Commitment statements set terms and map conditions across rhetorical contexts for interpersonal relationships, (in)appropriate behavior, (un)successful performance, and other expectations. In doing so, commitment statements produce conditions that instructors and students must face in order to es-

establish a classroom that is safer for nonwhite—and especially Black—students. Namely, instructors and white students must confront an understanding of the classroom as a historically white and colonial space—an implicit and explicit understanding that is showcased in the linguistic behaviors and literacy experiences of nonwhite and Black students.

Implication 2

Embrace discomfort and disturb old ways of thinking. Embracing discomfort in assessment practices means relinquishing those ideologies that we have internalized that have led to our own success but often led to the failures of others. By disturbing those old ways of thinking, we disrupt interlocking evaluative actions.

Implication 3

Forge a sense of allyship. Learning when conversations necessitate silence versus language and action is an ongoing project. If we want our students to learn without violence, we must learn ourselves without violence. White fealty is not allyship. Innovation and change toward antiracist action is.

Implication 4

Consider embodiment(s). Reject a sense of whiteness as the center of the course—a sense that only looks to the tightly controlled space of a white-centered classroom. Instead, translate the energies of our classrooms into rhetorical education and civic participation in the everyday world. Activities such as commitment statements invite teachers to articulate how they decenter whiteness and white languaging in mind, in speech, and in body.

This call for antiracist action in the field of writing studies invites us to reconsider the geographies of writing classrooms. Through the mundane, the invisible, and the bureaucratic textual forms of the classroom genre system, we can locate antiracist action and work to make classrooms safer spaces. Critical pedagogies that attend to students' safety and well-being, decenter whiteness, and refuse structures of surveillance must remain in our curriculum.

Critical geography can help us (re)examine classroom spaces and consider the impact classroom practices have on students' physical, mental, and emotional experiences. Creating non-violent spaces that affirm marginalized students means that instructors must change course genres to align with a set of visible, explicit commitments to writing students. As with commitment statements, the reorientation of course syllabi, assignment sheets, and classroom assessment—genres that function as participatory rather than prescriptive texts—establishes the classroom as a space premised upon alterability, flexibility, and mutual understanding. When students participate in the negotiation of course

policies, classroom conduct, assessment criteria, and other classroom-based genres, instructors empower students' rhetorical agency, embrace difference, and produce conditions for safety that improve students' overall experience. As the civic premise of rhetoric in education dictates, we encourage you to foster care for and amongst your students, and in doing so invite them both to care and to demand care in other spaces in society.

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Notes

1. Our approach to well-being and safety is wary of prescriptive notions of well-being (i.e., what is supposedly good for someone) or encouraging mechanisms for white comfort. We focus on the impact of un/safe conditions in education spaces and alternatives to exclusionary, violent, and authoritative classroom practices.

2. Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark*, for example, is referenced by geography and rhetoric scholars alike to explain how the United States and global societies are wholly racialized.

3. Generally, we use system rather than ecology in this piece to delimit the classroom genres under discussion. Bazerman's terminology is more useful for our purposes here because ecological formulations (e.g., Spinuzzi) extend past the authorized genres of the syllabus, assignment sheets, peer review sheets, and rubrics, to include the unauthorized or informal communicative acts such as student text messages, Slack channel conversations, and so on.

4. Commitment statements are also useful for establishing a set of mutual commitments between instructor(s) and students using community agreements. Instructors can draft agreements alongside students at the start of the course and use these agreements as touchstones for classroom conduct and expectations.

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