A Social Justice Framework for Anti-Racist Writing Assessment: Labor-Based Grading Contracts

URL: http://tinyurl.com/uoantiracisthandout

Asao B. Inoue
Workshop on Labor-Based Grading Contracts
For the University of Oregon

The purpose of this workshop is to offer labor-based grading contracts for writing intensive courses as one way to create more inclusive classroom writing assessment ecologies. This method aims to do two things that tend to create unfair, exclusive, and white supremacist grading practices in college classrooms:

- **Reduce dramatically unequal racialized power dynamics** in the way locally diverse students' writing is judged by teachers. These power dynamics move through a dominant, white, middle class discourse that is informed by a white racial *habitus*, or a dominant whitely Discourse.
- **Eliminate standards-based grades** on writing (or grades based on comparisons to a dominant white Discourse) by replacing them with labor-based grading.

Some Resources

- Labor-based Grading Contract Template
- Labor Log for Students
- Labor Journal (one entry a week)
- Charter for Compassion

Labor-Based Grading Contracts' Benefits

While I've shown how labor-based grading contracts programmatically reduce course failure rates in racial formations of color while also improving their abilities to approximate a dominant white discourse, labor-based grading contracts do the following for writing intensive classrooms:

> Labor-based grading contracts construct the writing assessment ecology in a few ways that are important to antiracist agendas that look to honor linguistic diversity and counter white language privilege in the classroom. They:
>
> - Eliminate all grades but the course grade
> - Separate all feedback and evaluation of writing from the course grade
> - Calculate course grades by labor only (i.e. time on tasks and words written or read)
> - Ask students to pay attention to how, when, where, and in what manner they labor for the class
> - Create less-coercive conditions for reflection on power, linguistic differences, and rhetorical choices in writing and its judgement

- Produce course grades by amount of labor done by students, which if students negotiate the terms of the contract, is usually seen as fairer than conventional grading systems.
- Avoid producing so called quality-based grades on any writing, while allowing for a range of standards of quality to sit side by side in the the classroom.
- Avoid many of the harmful and racist consequences of conventional grading ecologies by not using the dominant white discourse as the standard for grades.
- Offer environments for negotiating language differences in student writing and judgments by juxtaposing a variety of standards of writing in feedback -- i.e. a number of Discourses and their *habitus* must be articulated in feedback, revealing how there is no one clear way to write.
- Do not require that a teacher use a single standard to determine course grades, yet standards are used by readers to make judgements on writing (produce feedback)
- Provide students with opportunities for critical negotiations of language use and judgments of Discourses.
- Allow for dimension-based rubrics, not standards-based ones.

Dimension-Based vs. Standards-Based Rubrics

Standards-Based Rubrics	Dimension-Based Rubrics
- Uses hierarchies to value language practices and Discourses - Informed by a dominant white racial Discourse or *habitus* (a single standard of quality) - COIK (Clear Only If Known) - Used to evaluate level of performance, grade, or determine proficiency Example: "uses appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to explore ideas within the context of the discipline and shape the whole work" (AAC&U Written Communication VALUE rubric)	- Avoids hierarchies in valuing language practices and Discourses - Asks readers to explain their racial *habitus* along discursive dimensions - COWE (Clear Only When Explained) - Used to rhetorically listen, and understand a variety of paradoxical language performances Example: "How did the writer use sources and data in ways that were helpful/effective for you as a reader?"

Dimension-based rubrics:
- Can/Should be co-created (negotiated) with students;
- Do NOT define standards or expectations for how to write, but identify dimensions of writing that students will explore, develop, and be judged on in a variety of ways;
- Require multiple *habitus*, or a range of Discourses, to use fully;
- Demand that readers explain HOW and WHY they come to their judgments -- the point of feedback on any draft, then, is not *the judgment made* but *how or why that judgment came to be*;
- Allow for the interrogation of dominant whitely Discourses, as well as others.

A Few Examples of Dimension-Based Rubric Items
- Construct a **purpose**
  - make your motives evident in your writing, both to the reader and yourself (make your purpose clear and understandable by providing details that relate to your draft's purpose)
  - understand the purpose for writing each assignment, and make sure your writing reflects this purpose and is able to convey it clearly to the reader
  - paper should be relevant to the audience / paper should only be relevant to itself
  - actually believe in the argument that you construct / care about the argument that you construct / write in a way that makes the reader perceive you as caring about the topic
  - convince the reader that your idea is viable
  - take risks so that you can explore new techniques
  - make a clear thesis, then stick to it (Do not drift away) / always return to your thesis

- In what ways does the draft **engage (or captivate)** you as a reader?
  - How does the writer appeal to emotions or pathos in order to engage with readers?
  - What is the reader meant to take away after reading the draft?
  - What is the purpose of the draft (so what?)?
  - Some readers engage when they read shocking statistics or anecdotes
  - Some readers engage when they see relatable pieces (connections seen between various ideas or sources used in the draft that create new meaning)
  - Some readers engage when they find new information
  - Some readers engage when they see the writer go in depth on their ideas or theories used