Re-localizing writing assessment: sites of knowledge mobilization.

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RE-LOCALIZING WRITING ASSESSMENT: SITES OF KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION

By

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B.A., Hollins University, 2011
M.A., University of Maine, 2017

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A Dissertation Approved on

May 9, 2022

by the following Dissertation Committee:

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DEDICATION

For Rebecca, for everything.
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ABSTRACT

RE-LOCALIZING WRITING ASSESSMENT: SITES OF KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION

Charlotte Asmuth

May 9, 2022

For decades, writing assessment theorists have subscribed to the principle of localism—the belief that assessments should be designed with local contexts in mind and administered by local actors. Although this belief has ensured the validity of assessments in writing programs, it has also led to a tendency to treat assessment as a stable practice that is bound to a particular location, thus ignoring what happens when assessment knowledge and methods developed in one location travel to another distant location (as they do for campus assessment initiatives). To that end, this project traces how assessment knowledge is transformed as it travels to different locations via texts and people’s interactions with them: from writing assessment position statements to publications authored by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), from AAC&U to one university, and then to faculty assessors using AAC&U rubrics to score student artifacts for General Education assessment purposes at that university.

Through document analysis, I find that, while AAC&U’s approach to assessment appears to be aligned with writing studies’ assessment principles, the organization is
drifting away from recommending local adaptations and toward encouraging a more standardized uptake of its approach. Focus group interviews with five faculty assessors reveal the embodied practices assessors developed to manage their work and make a variety of scoring decisions as well as the textual ideologies participants brought to the work of interpreting and applying the rubrics. My analysis of participants’ utterances and gestures shows that they critiqued the rubrics for appearing to uphold a singular, normative standard (standard language ideology). At the same time, they negotiated standard language ideology themselves, sometimes making comments that perpetuated this ideology. My analysis illustrates the instability of standard language ideology, which itself is often treated as a stable phenomenon. This study has implications for large-scale assessments and writing assessment research: I argue that a knowledge mobilization framework for writing assessment makes it possible to attend to how people transform seemingly fixed assessment knowledge in practice.
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CHAPTER ONE
LOCAL, GLOBAL, ECOLOGICAL: COMING TO TERMS WITH WRITING ASSESSMENT’S KEYWORDS

Best assessment practice is undertaken in response to local goals, not external pressures. (CCCC, 2006/2014)

[If] we confine the notion of the local always to the small and the overlooked, the micro and the contextual, we run the risk of constraining the potential of the local at the same time that we explore it. (Pennycook, 2010, pp. 53-54)

Introduction: Localism and Writing Assessment

Well before the CCCC (2006/2014) position statement on writing assessment was drafted, localism—“the widely held belief that writing assessments should be among other things, locally sensitive and locally controlled” (Gomes & Ma, 2019, p. 111)—guided writing assessment practices (see, e.g., Broad, 2003; Haswell, 2001; Haswell & Wyche-Smith, 1994; Huot, 1996, 2002; Moss, 1996). Although it is tempting to construct narratives of progress that valorize localism as a more recent principle in writing assessment, historical research indicates that it would be inaccurate to do so (Behizadeh & Engelhard, 2011; Haswell & Elliot, 2019; Serviss, 2012). Indeed, assessment practitioners1 in the first half of the twentieth century (see Serviss, 2012) and

---

1 Like Serviss (2012), I use the term practitioner to refer to those who are responsible for working with assessments (often standardized) but who don’t necessarily design those assessments (p. 210).
in the second half of the twentieth century (see Haswell & Elliot, 2019, pp. 152-187) found ways to advocate for localism as they resisted the assumptions underlying standardized assessments. For example, proctors of a standardized 1920s New York state literacy test administered to immigrants used the margins of test instructions to quietly resist directives to consider only one right answer, reminding scorers to consider the language backgrounds of test takers and insisting that the tests be scored by local teachers (Serviss, 2012).

The term localism started gaining traction in 1996, when Brian Huot declared that writing assessments should be “site-based,” “locally-controlled,” and “context-sensitive” to better align with theories of writing as a context-sensitive activity (p. 562). Localism is now widely accepted by contemporary writing assessment theorists and practitioners (Adler-Kassner & O’Neill, 2010; Broad, 2003; Broad et al., 2009; CCCC, 2006/2014; Gallagher, 2010, 2011, 2014; Huot, 2002; Huot & Schendel, 2008; Kelly-Riley & Elliot, 2014, 2021; Lynne, 2004; NCTE/CWPA, 2008; Wardle & Roozen, 2012; White et al., 2015; Yancey, 1999).

Whether the purpose of assessment is placement or assessment of student learning, a number of writing assessment practices are aligned with the principle of localism. For example, some writing programs choose to assess portfolios of student writing that have been drafted and revised in consultation with others over the course of a semester (see Murphy, 1999; O’Neill et al., 2009; Yancey, 1999; Yancey & Weiser, 1997). Others have adopted a method of directed self-placement, which places the responsibility of course selection in informed students’ hands (Moos & Van Zanen, 2019; Royer & Gilles, 1998, 2003). And other writing programs have adopted Bob Broad’s
(2003) assessment heuristic, Dynamic Criteria Mapping (DCM), which is framed as a method “by which instructors and administrators in writing programs can discover, negotiate, and publicize the rhetorical values they employ when judging students’ writing” (p. 14). DCM involves writing instructors meeting to articulate their individual values about writing and then mapping out how they might position those values in relation to other instructors, the program’s mission statement, and so on (Broad, 2003, pp. 119-136; Broad et al., 2009). Each of the above practices is, in Brian Huot’s words, “site-based,” “locally-controlled,” and “context-sensitive” (1996, p. 562).

Writing assessment research has also been driven by the need to contextualize the local sites at which assessment takes place. Consequently, much writing assessment scholarship has offered “lessons learned” advice alongside reminders for readers to consider their own institutional contexts. For example, White et al. (2015) present three case studies of writing program assessment in a chapter entitled “Lessons.” In framing these case studies, they recommend readers approach them “not as ideals but as examples to be adapted and used in local situations” (p. 37). Other scholars have offered similarly detailed, contextualized case studies of writing assessment practices and have recommended heuristics for adapting approaches to local contexts (e.g., Broad, 2003; Poe et al., 2014; Scott & Brannon, 2013; Wardle & Roozen, 2012). Given scholars’ focus on local contexts, it is not surprising that our field’s position statements on assessment remind readers that the “principles of effective writing assessment . . . are highly contextual, and should be adapted or modified in accordance with local needs, issues, purposes, and concerns of stakeholders” (NCTE/CWPA, 2008) and that “[b]est

---

2 See Gomes & Ma (2019, pp. 111-115) for a brief overview of other common assessment practices associated with the principle of localism.
assessment practice is undertaken in response to local goals, not external pressures” (CCCC, 2006/2014).

While attention to local contexts has enriched writing assessment practice, it has infused assessment scholarship so much, I argue, that scholars have theorized the relationship between the global and the local in reductive ways. For example, in the above line cited from CCCC’s “Writing Assessment: A Position Statement,” the authors frame assessment practice as a negotiation between “local goals” and “external pressures,” implying that the local can operate in discrete relation to the global. The position statement figures the global as a decontextualized container that exerts outside pressure on, and at a remove from, the local. This perspective, in effect, associates the local with “the micro and the contextual” (Pennycook, 2010, p. 54) and, furthermore, with particular physical spaces that appear to be bounded and unchanging. Alastair Pennycook warns that when we treat the local as such, “we run the risk of constraining the potential of the local at the same time that we explore it” (p. 54). Sociologist Anthony Giddens (1984) has expressed similar concerns about how the “micro” and “macro” are frequently positioned in opposition to each other, as if social theorists must choose either to undertake micro-analyses of individuals or macro-analyses of social structures independent of social agents (see esp. pp. 139-144).

In a review essay, Chris Gallagher (2014) wonders if writing assessment scholars have fallen into the trap of, as Pennycook would put it, “constraining the potential of the local” (p. 54). Gallagher poses several questions, including: “In focusing on our local needs and interests, have we slipped into parochialism, cut ourselves off from meaningful engagement with others who might have something to teach us? Have we failed to live up
to the responsibilities of local control?” (p. 488). Ultimately, Gallagher suggests that localism is, too often, used to close down conversations about assessment, as opposed to beginning them (p. 505).

Like Gallagher, I believe that “our local is interconnected with other locals from which we have much to learn” (p. 487). However, writing assessment’s reification of the local has led to a tendency to treat assessment as a stable phenomenon that is bound to a particular location (e.g., an institution or classroom), making it harder to attend to how assessment knowledge and methods inevitably transform as they move and are mobilized by institutional and other entities.

**Research Questions**

This dissertation explores how assessment knowledge and methods of assessment transform as they move and are mobilized by different institutional and other entities. That is, my research questions are:

1. How are assessment knowledge and methods of assessment mobilized by different institutional and other entities?
2. How do assessment knowledge and methods of assessment transform as they move to other contexts?

To answer these questions, I examine how assessment knowledge and methods are transformed at several different translation points: First, I examine how writing assessment principles in two well-cited position statements (CCCC, 2006/2014; NCTE/CWPA, 2008) are translated with new meaning in the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U’s) representation of its approach to campus assessment (chapter three). Then, I examine how one institution (“Midwest Metropolitan
University”) has adapted AAC&U’s approach to campus assessment in their General Education assessment procedures (chapter four). I focus especially on the experiences of five faculty assessors who scored student artifacts during the university’s spring 2021 General Education assessment event. In doing so, I attend to these assessors’ embodied experiences of assessment (chapter four) as well as the language and textual ideologies these assessors brought to their work (chapter five).

***

This chapter attends to the usages of and relationships among three keywords in writing assessment theory: local, global, and ecological. Below, I describe examples of the now dominant model of writing assessment (the ecological model) and critique ecological models for how they have led to the reification of the local in assessment scholarship. I develop a more robust account of the relationship between the local and the global in writing assessment that is informed by two research frameworks: New Literacy Studies and the turn toward a “new mobilities paradigm” in the social sciences, which can help to complicate reductive notions of the local and global as discrete micro and macro contexts, respectively (Adey, 2006, 2010; Cresswell, 2011, 2012, 2014; D’Andrea et al., 2011; Fenwick & Farrell, 2012; Hannam et al., 2006; Kellerman, 2012; McCann, 2010; Salter, 2013; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Spinney, 2015; Urry, 2007). Research emerging from the mobilities paradigm treats mobility as the norm without celebrating movement, acknowledging that people and things can be differently mobile. Furthermore, mobility perspectives complicate the boundaries researchers traditionally draw among people, places, and things. Mobility perspectives thus challenge the notion of place as fixed (Sheller & Urry, 2006, p. 214), which is a predominant assumption in contemporary
models of writing assessment. While many mobility studies focus on phenomena that are routinely associated with movement (e.g., car travel, migrant workers), mobility research can also offer new perspectives on phenomena that appear to be tied to one location (e.g., assessment). Indeed, the advantage to a mobility perspective is that it makes it possible to account for global and local assessment influences even while, ostensibly, conducting research at one research site (i.e., location). Before discussing the mobility framework that underpins this study, I first describe how local and global are conceptualized in the dominant model of writing assessment: the ecological model.

Below, I critique the current, dominant metaphor and model of writing assessment (the ecological model), arguing that it has three flaws: (a) It treats the global as an ahistorical container that holds the local, operating on it from a distance; (b) it makes assessment ecologies seem inherently natural and moral; and (c) it treats ecologies as stable. Indeed, the ecological model has sharpened the oppositional relationship between the global and the local and reified the local in reductive ways. I then use New Literacy Studies theories of the relationship between local literacy practices and global contexts to theorize a more robust understanding of the local in writing assessment. I review relevant literature from mobility studies that underpins this study’s approach to researching writing assessment. I conclude by outlining the chapters in this project.

The Local and Global in Ecological Models of Writing Assessment

In her canonical article on the history of writing assessment, Kathleen Yancey (1999) uses the metaphor of waves to describe the evolution of compositionists’ theoretical and practical orientation to writing assessment. During what she calls the first wave of assessment (1950-1970), writing was assessed primarily through “objective,”
multiple-choice tests, motivated by positivist assumptions about learning. The second wave (1970-1986) was marked by the holistically scored essay, reflecting emergent process theories of writing. And the third wave (1986-1999) was dominated by portfolio assessment, aligning with process-inflected views of writing development (p. 484).

During this third wave, some writing studies scholars took up ecological metaphors to broaden constructs of writing (Cooper, 1986; Syverson, 1999) and writing assessment (Lucas, 1988a, 1988b).

The prevalence of the ecological metaphor in writing studies is widely attributed to Marilyn Cooper’s (1986) article “The Ecology of Writing.” In this article, Cooper proposed “an ecological model of writing, whose fundamental tenet is that writing is an activity through which a person is continually engaged with a variety of socially constituted systems” (p. 367). Developed to inform then-new social theories of writing, Cooper’s model aimed to expand scholars’ notions of social contexts, often construed as bounded and stabilized. In contrast, her ecological model “explores how writers interact to form systems”—systems that are “inherently dynamic,” “constantly changing,” and “made and remade by writers in the act of writing” (p. 368). While Cooper’s model accounted for the dynamic nature of ecologies and writers’ roles in remaking them, her model, I demonstrate below, has been taken up in ways that elide the mutually constitutive relationship between writers and ecologies.

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3 Interestingly, however, Haswell and Elliot (2019) claim: “With little doubt, Catharine Keech Lucas is responsible for popularizing the term ecology in writing studies. The earliest instance we can find is her coauthored study (Gray et al. 1982) published in Properties of Writing Tasks,” in which Lucas comments on the “ecological validity of holistic scores” (see Haswell & Elliot, 2019, p. 223, note 1).
One of the earliest uses of the term *ecology* in writing assessment appeared two years later, in Catharine Keech Lucas’s two-part article published in *The Quarterly*, a publication of the National Writing Project and the Center for the Study of Writing. Lucas pushed back against “the accountability model of evaluation,” arguing that it “results from an invasive, non-ecological approach to evaluation” (1988a, p. 1). That Lucas used the term “non-ecological” before even defining what she meant by ecological indicates that she believed the term to be self-evident. Her framing of the problems with this accountability approach is worth considering at length for the way that it positioned evaluators as taking control away from teachers:

>[The accountability approach] places in the hands of an external evaluator the power to determine not only whether the goals of instruction have been reached but what those goals are to be, and indirectly, by nature of the measures used, how they are to be met. The chief effect of such a model is to siphon away from the classroom teacher (and in turn the student) both the personal investment that comes from participating in setting instructional goals and the information needed to improve learning. In such a system teachers, like students, are reduced to a relatively unproductive preoccupation with what gets reported OUT, not what gets reported IN: what other people think of them, not what information they can get from observing their own performance in an attempt to improve it, the better to meet their own goals. (1988b, p. 4)

Lucas’s capitalized use of “OUT” and “IN,” and her repeated use of the phrase “external evaluators”—which she contrasted with “internal evaluation” (i.e., teachers’ assessment of student work)—created an inside/outside binary, whereby evaluators exerted external
pressure on teachers. Lucas’s ecological model of evaluation aimed to bring together “internal and external, qualitative and quantitative assessment, in which the needs of both classroom teachers and policy makers are met by teams of teachers who, working with co-operating evaluators, learn to incorporate increasingly sophisticated evaluation methodology into their observations of their own students” (p. 5). She positioned teachers as “ethnographers of the classroom” (p. 5) who both made research-informed observations of their students’ learning and who themselves were researchers. Crucial to her model of ecological evaluation was the requirement that tests “impact the learning environment in positive rather than negative ways” (p. 5), a tenet that is now well-accepted by writing assessment scholars (Camp, 1993; CCCC, 2006/2014; Hammond et al., 2019; Huot, 2002; Huot & Schendel, 2008; Inoue, 2015; Inoue, 2019b; NCTE/CWPA, 2008; Neal, 2010; O’Neill, 2015; Poe et al., 2018; White, 2007; Wood & Elliot, 2019).

Assessment scholars still invoke Lucas’s IN/OUT binary and the accompanying references to forces in/out of teachers’ control when they write about ecological models of assessment. Frequently, scholars employ ecological metaphors when doing so. For example, in explaining why she finds the ecological metaphor persuasive, Katrina Miller (2016) writes, “Ecology deals with the relations of organisms to one another and to their physical surroundings, and to claim that writing assessment is somehow ecological enables us to consider what forces both within and beyond our control might affect our assessments” (p. 167). And Asao Inoue (2015) writes that, “in any ecology, the material aspects of environments and people in writing assessments must be preserved and understood explicitly” (p. 87). Bob Broad (2009) implies that Dynamic Criteria Mapping
is a kind of “organic writing assessment” because it is “locally-grown” (p. 1). Yet Pennycook (2010) and others have pointed out the dangers of using ecological metaphors of language (e.g., language ecology, endangered language, language preservation), which are often invoked in arguments for language preservation. While Pennycook is writing about the dangers of biomorphic metaphors of language, these metaphors are equally dangerous to use in discussions of writing assessment, for they make assessment ecologies appear to be natural and elide the mutually constitutive relationship between people and ecologies. First, these metaphors treat languages as species, as living organisms, which ignores the political dimensions of writing assessment generally and the fact that people in particular shape assessment contexts. In other words, assessment contexts are not natural phenomena. Treating them as such ignores the role of human behavior in language change: language change happens not because “the language cannot adapt to a new environment,” but because “speakers of that language start to use another language in its place”—due to colonization, schooling experiences, language policies, and so on (Pennycook, p. 98). Second, as Pennycook points out, drawing on the work of linguists Deborah Cameron and Christopher Hutton, ecological metaphors of language have their roots in scientific racism (pp. 93-94). For example, at the end of the nineteenth century, Charles Darwin and others drew “analogies with the constructed family trees of language origins in order to introduce their radical theories of the origins of species and

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4 See Pennycook (2010, pp. 88-109) for an extended critique of biomorphic metaphors of language. See also Giddens, (1979, p. 9), who points out, “In functionalism, the guiding model of ‘system’ is usually that of the organism, and functionalist authors have consistently looked to biology as a conceptual bank to be plundered for their own ends.” Cf. Cooper (2014) who finds use-value in the ecological metaphor for language practices. Cooper argues that the dangers that Pennycook and others point to “largely result from popular misunderstandings of ecology and of complex systems in general” (p. 21).
humans” and “the linguistic, ethnic and racial maps of the European empires were remapped onto evolutionary theory” (Pennycook, p. 93). Given that many ecological models of assessment have anti-racist aims (see esp. Inoue, 2015, 2019b; Poe et al., 2018), it would be useful for assessment scholars to historicize ecological metaphors to inflect them with new meaning or to reimagine new metaphors for assessment.

Lucas’s call for an ecological model was not immediately taken up (Molloy, 2018, p. 75). But by 2010, the ecological metaphor had become pervasive enough in assessment circles that the conference theme for the 2010 American Educational Research Association meeting was “Understanding Complex Ecologies in a Changing World” (Molloy, p. 77). In 2012, the ecological metaphor gained traction in writing assessment, with the publication of Wardle and Roozen’s article “Addressing the Complexity of Writing Development: Toward an Ecological Model of Assessment” and has been especially furthered through Asao Inoue’s scholarship, including his co-authored guide, “How to Stop Harming Students: An Ecological Guide to Antiracist Writing Assessment” (Inoue & Poe, 2020).

Ecological models of assessment, according to Wardle and Roozen (2012), seek to more fully account for the complexities of writing and contrast a “monocontextual view of literate development” (p. 108) and its accompanying associations with a transmission model of transfer that has been extensively problematized by writing studies.

While Inoue and Poe (2012) don’t employ the term ecology in the introduction to their edited collection, the language they use to flesh out their notion of assessment as a technology echoes the ecological model they take up elsewhere (Poe et al., 2018): “Because assessment refers not only to our practices, but other things that are a part of the assessment environment, we use the term ‘assessment technology’ in this introduction to refer to the entire system, environment, and even agents that make up what most call a writing assessment” (Inoue & Poe, 2012, p. 3).

Wardle and Roozen do not cite Lucas (1988a, 1988b), although she is one of the earliest scholars to develop an ecological model of assessment.
scholars (see esp. Prior, 2018). The issues with the transmission model of transfer are (at least) twofold: (a) it treats transfer as an activity that involves moving skills or knowledge to other contexts, typically assuming that such skills/knowledge remain unchanged in the process of being transferred; (b) it treats learning as a linear process (but see, e.g., Prior, 2018). Although most writing assessments appraise student performance at a particular moment in time, Wardle and Roozen argue that writing programs ought to develop ways to assess student writers over time in their undergraduate careers as they engage in drafting and revising different kinds of writing (p. 107). At the end of their article, they sketch out what an emergent ecological model of assessment looks like at one university, suggesting that such a model needs to be “appropriate to local circumstances, stakeholders, and resources” (p. 115). Their model involves partnerships across a variety of campus sites, including the writing center, the General Education assessment program, and the writing across the curriculum program. A key part of their model involves gathering longitudinal data by, for example, asking students to keep e-portfolios for the duration of their college careers, surveying students before and after composition courses, and interviewing students at different points in their time at the university.

Theoretically, Wardle and Roozen appear to account for the mobility of literacy practices in a way that critiques the transmission model of transfer. For example, they acknowledge that literate practices and identities transform as they are transferred across contexts, instead of simply being transported to new contexts (pp. 109-110). However, in their discussion of what an ecological model of assessment might look like, they use language associated with a transmission model of transfer. As an example of what they acknowledge to be a labor-intensive (p. 117) assessment model, they describe the writing
program at the University of Central Florida (UCF), where “the Writing and Rhetoric faculty recognize the influence of the ‘extracurriculum’ . . . , acknowledging and leveraging students’ textual practices prior to and outside of schooling to inform their work with the textual practices of schooling” (p. 112). Here, Wardle and Roozen appear to assume a transmission model of transferring literacy practices, whereby those extracurricular practices—from outside school—are brought to bear on students’ work in school. While there is acknowledgment that transfer across contexts happens, in assessment, the local is again figured as discrete, bounded, while people and texts move, unchanged, in and out of these local contexts. But when people and texts move to other contexts they are inevitably transformed anew. As Donahue (2021) argues, drawing on Frédéric François’s notion of *reprises-modification* and Bakhtin’s notion of language-in-use, utterances are “always simultaneously a reuse of parts from a language system (and thus never ‘original’) and a transformation (always new)” (p. 21). So texts and the utterances represented therein are made new as they are mobilized in contexts that are not just new spaces, but new temporal occasions.

Wardle and Roozen evoke the container model of the global/local, whereby the local is associated with “right here” and the global operates outside of the local. We can see this assumption at work when Wardle and Roozen write, “The emerging ecological models of literate development continue to challenge and broaden our conceptions of writing assessment, in direct opposition to perpetual outside pressures to embrace standardized tests of writing achievement” (p. 111). In positioning ecological models as “in direct opposition to outside pressures,” Wardle and Roozen overlook the contradictory pressures (divergent beliefs about writing, course staffing issues, and so on).
that may be emanating from and circulating within putatively local contexts. Furthermore, they sometimes appear to imagine ecologies as discrete spatial spheres, not quite accounting for how an ecology is subject to change over time and in constant transformation as it interacts with other ecologies. A spatiotemporal perspective (and not just a spatial one) reminds us that even when ecologies don’t appear to change, they are renewed and, in the process, changed (i.e., further confirmed) over time. Wardle and Roozen write that one goal of their project “is expanding writing center assessment to examine how writing center consultations can serve as affordances for transfer of writing-related knowledge and experience that students bring with them from a variety of literacy sites” (p. 115). In saying so, they appear to suggest that students move from one stable literacy site to another, instead of changing the various literacy sites with which they interact.

There are two challenges to this stable inside/outside binary that are helpful to consider here: The notion of the mobility of literacy practices and Anthony Giddens’s (1979) theory of structuration. Hull and Schultz (2002), among others, challenge the inside/outside binary that appears in Wardle and Roozen’s argument, specifically challenging the divide between in-school and out-of-school literacies (cf. Dias et al., 1999). They describe this distinction as a “false dichotomy” because it makes contexts appear to be “physical space[s]” (e.g., in-school vs. out-of-school) that are “sealed tight or boarded off” (Hull & Schultz, p. 12). The context-as-container metaphor precludes us from paying attention to “school-like practice at home . . . or non-school-like activities in the formal classroom” (Hull & Schultz, p. 12).7 Instead, Hull and Schultz argue, “one

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7 See Bowden (1993), Leander et al. (2010), Prior (2003), and Prior and Olinger (2019) for additional critiques of context-as-container metaphors.
should expect to find, and one should look to account for, the movement from one context to the other” (p. 12). Giddens (1979) has also challenged the dominance of the ( ahistorical) context-as-container metaphor in social theories. To Giddens, most social theories exaggerate the role of social forces and institutions in maintaining the status quo or enacting social change. These social theories frequently treat institutions as ahistorical (global) containers that bound and determine individuals’ (local) actions. But Giddens argues that, while individuals’ actions are certainly structured by rules and regulations, institutional and otherwise, individuals do act with agency and their actions contribute to maintaining or changing institutions/the social order. After all, “social systems have no purpose, reasons or needs whatsoever; only human individuals do so” (p. 7). Giddens’s theory of structuration, then, reminds us that the local and global are always connected, and that the global/local do not simply operate in space, but also in time (i.e., history).

The ecological models discussed above assume that the global is outside of and exerting pressure on the local. In saying this, I do not mean to suggest that accountability pressures from extra-institutional stakeholders don’t exist. Nor do I mean to say that such pressures don’t have very real material effects on how we teach and assess writing. Rather, I want to emphasize that they, too, should be considered part of an ecological model of writing assessment and that they deserve careful accounting for in writing assessment scholarship. To my knowledge, discussions of ecologies in writing assessment scholarship to date tend to treat ecologies as local phenomena to be preserved from outside pressures like educational mandates to standardize, accrediting bodies, and more.
While the aims of an ecological model (to more fully account for the complexities of writing development, over time, and, in so doing, also account for writing practices that are traditionally seen as extracurricular) are laudable, dominant models still presume a stability to ecologies. In his contribution to *Keywords in Writing Studies*, Christian Weisser notes, “Though *ecology* has been a keyword in writing studies for nearly three decades, most sources continue to characterize it as an imported term associated with the natural sciences” (2015, p. 70), where it is often used to refer to natural environments (p. 67). Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, *ecology* is “often intermingled and occasionally conflated with other spatial terms like *environment*, *place*, and *location* in writing” (Weisser, pp. 68-69). Furthermore, these places are imagined as operating outside time in, at best, cyclical processes. By contrast, mobility scholar Tim Cresswell (2002) describes places as events in that they “are marked by openness and change rather than boundedness and permanence” (p. 25). This is not to say that places are not “pre-structured” in some physical sense, but to say that “places are not operational without [people’s] practices in them” (p. 24; see also Pennycook, 2010).

While Weisser’s review suggests that writing studies scholars have done considerable work to rehabilitate the concept for the field, in practice, *ecology* is often tied to notions of stable and discrete, independent locations. This is especially the case, I’m suggesting, for assessment. While Wardle and Roozen’s UCF ecological model involves an extraordinary number of campus groups—the Composition Program, the University Writing Center, the Writing Across the Curriculum Program, various departments, the General Education Committee, to name a few—and their aims are
ambitious, their ecology is nevertheless bounded within the space of an institution that is imagined as a stable, discrete, ahistorical location.

While Wardle and Roozen’s ecological model appears to be more macro-scaled (they’re looking at assessment across institutional sites), other writing assessment scholars have advanced micro-scaled versions of the ecological model. For example, Dryer and Peckham (2014) demonstrate how portfolio raters’ “decisions are influenced by the entire ecology of the assessment scene, not just by procedures intended to influence them (such as calibration)” (p. 16). Their quantitative and qualitative data reveal that this ecology is comprised of the material arrangement of the room itself, the background noise during the rating process, comments made by tablemates, raters’ own private constructs of “good writing,” their sense of the rubric’s construct of “good writing,” and even the effect of one rater’s squeaky chair on another rater’s attention. Thus, they argue, “Interpreted within an ecology of scoring, a score is not the private appraisal of an isolated artifact but is instead produced by the dynamic interaction of multiple systems” (p. 31). While they acknowledge “the dynamic interaction of multiple systems,” these systems appear to be contained within a highly localized scene: the scene of a particular assessment event.

Asao Inoue’s ecological model of assessment comes closer to traversing the macro and micro scales that the above perspectives flesh out. In his 2015 book, Inoue draws on scholarship on race and writing assessment and the ecological metaphor,

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8 They write, “[W]e envision an assessment model that incorporates portfolio creation, revision, and assessment over time and at multiple locations, and is framed with student statements that are revised at various points, with transfer of writing-related knowledge and student agency as specific aims; local surveys at multiple points (including after graduation), given in conjunction with NSSE surveys; and small longitudinal ethnographic studies of students from various programs and with various literate backgrounds” (p. 107).
arguing, “If we are to enact helpful, educative, and fair writing assessments with our students . . . 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” (pp. 2-3). Like the scholars cited above, he wants the subject of conversations about assessment to encompass more than tests themselves. To Inoue, an ecological model of assessment involves attending to “local diversities,” like the racial and linguistic diversity in particular writing classrooms (see pp. 68-75). He defines “an antiracist classroom writing assessment ecology” as

a complex political system of people, environments, actions, and relations of power that produce consciously understood relationships between and among people and their environments that help students problematize their existential writing assessment situations, which in turn changes or (re)creates the ecology so that it is fairer, more livable, and sustainable for everyone. (p. 82)

Inoue helpfully describes ecologies as “complex political system[s]” involving human and nonhuman actors. Furthermore, he acknowledges that students and others “(re)create[] the ecology” by participating in it, a perspective that acknowledges how people’s movements among ecologies inevitably transform them whether or not these ecologies appear to change. (After all, (re)creating or maintaining ecologies still involves transforming them anew.) But ecologies (as the term is generally used) are typically imagined as apolitical. The notions of sustainability and fairness ignore the ways that ecologies are typically not governed by moral principles (like fairness) or directed at sustaining particular life forms. In other words, the ecological metaphor may not be the
most useful one to employ to encourage people to see assessment contexts as complex political apparatuses.

Inoue and others have employed the ecological metaphor in scholarship that makes valuable contributions to socially just approaches to writing assessment (see esp. Poe et al., 2018). And yet, most of this scholarship still treats ecologies as stable containers. For example, Molloy (2018) reads CUNY’s 1960s Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge (SEEK) bridge program as a “precursor model of ecological and sociocultural writing pedagogy and assessment.” He argues, “These ecological and sociocultural models call for attention to the interactions between the ecologies of individual learners and the ecologies of cultures and educational systems” (p. 80), implying that individuals’ ecologies and cultural/educational ecologies are separate. Later, he references “conflicting programmatic ecologies within a larger college system and their direct impact on the learning ecologies of individual students” (p. 92; emphasis added). Here, Molloy implies a nested relationship among various ecological containers: the “larger college system” contains “programmatic ecologies” which impact individual students’ ecologies. Importantly, all of these ecologies are tacitly framed as stable in their interactions with each other. New Literacy Studies (especially Brandt and Clinton’s [2002] work), I suggest below, offers productive ways to rethink the relationship between the local and the global in writing assessment.

**Constructs of Local and Global in New Literacy Studies**

As mentioned above, one of the principles of writing assessment theory is that valid assessments are sensitive to local contexts. Literacy scholars, too, place a lot of stock in local contexts. New Literacy Studies scholars operate from a social-practice
perspective (Brandt & Clinton, 2002), acknowledging that literate activity involves situated, social practices that are always already ideological (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Barton et al., 2000; Hull & Schultz, 2002, pp. 21-27; Lea & Street, 1998). Adopting this perspective allows researchers to focus on how participants understand literacy and how they use literacy to accomplish work in, and make meaning of, their social worlds. Furthermore, it has encouraged literacy researchers to consider how apparently local and global contexts influence literacy practices. For example, Kathryn Jones (2000) considers the literacy practices of Welsh farmers negotiating a new bureaucratic form (the “animal movement form”) at a livestock auction. She suggests that the form helps the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food (MAFF) “mediate[] MAFF bureaucracy” (p. 82) and regulate, at a distance, local activity. While she acknowledges that local farmers can resist how the form positions them (pp. 87-88), she nevertheless treats the global MAFF bureaucracy as a stable context disembedded (i.e., operating at a distance), as she puts it, from local farming activity. In doing so, she, like some social-practice literacy researchers (e.g., Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Ivanić et al., 2009), treats the global like a container that holds local contexts.

Deborah Brandt and Katie Clinton (2002) have argued that some literacy researchers operating from a social-practice perspective are “exaggerating the power of local contexts to set or reveal the forms that literacy takes” (p. 338) and/or treating the global as a force outside of, and exerting pressure on, the local (p. 347). Ivanić et al.’s (2009) research on college students’ literacy practices offers a useful illustration of the double-bind scholars write themselves into when they operate under the assumption that local literacy practices are discrete. They initially frame their project as an exploration of
how students’ everyday literacy practices (used in places like the workplace or home) might be “used as resources for their learning on college courses” (p. 49; see also pp. 47-68). While they propose to look at how everyday literacies are mobilized (pp. 22-23), Ivanič et al. begin by assuming a unidirectional kind of transfer, whereby only those everyday/extracurricular practices can be usefully brought to bear on school work—and not vice versa.9

More importantly, work that operates with the original assumptions undergirding Ivanič et al.’s study risks ignoring the ways that the local is not a preexisting entity that actors step into, but is rather “created in the exertion of practice” (Brandt & Clinton, p. 348). Paraphrasing sociologist Bruno Latour, Brandt and Clinton point out that everything is local. No larger forces or larger social structures sit out somewhere in space bearing down on us: All is made of local interactions. However, local events can have globalizing tendencies and globalizing effects, accomplished often through the mediation of globalizing technologies. (p. 347)10

Brandt and Clinton’s central point, here, is that the local is inescapable. Alastair Pennycook’s (2010) description of language as an always local practice, specifically the

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9 It’s worth noting that Ivanič et al. come to realize the limitations of their approach (see pp. 169-173).
10 Prior and Olinger (2019, pp. 129-130) critique part of Brandt and Clinton’s use of Latour: They argue that Brandt and Clinton’s use of Latour “to reconceptualize literacy as a thing-in-action, ‘a transcontextualizing social agent’ (p. 351) that can bridge the micro- and macro-social. . . . conflicts with Latour’s (2005) explicit rejection of micro and macro as a legitimate architecture for society. How can Latour be invoked to bridge a gap he argues does not exist? How can a flat architecture that invites us to follow trajectories converging in and spinning off from artifacts and events—things small, mobile, massively multiple, constantly becoming—be invoked in literacy writ very large in the singular?” (pp. 129-130). Indeed, Brandt and Clinton attempt to “dissolve . . . dichotomies” (p. 338) between the local and the global that do not exist in the first place. It may be more accurate to say they’re attempting to dissolve the appearance of such dichotomies.
meaning he ascribes to *local*, is a helpful illustration of this point. Many notions of the local see it only in terms of spatial dimensions (in terms of closeness—“right here”—or distance—“over there”) and ignore the dimension of time. Spatial analyses that ignore time end up treating space as a contextual container in which events take place or a static backdrop against which events take place. But, as Pennycook argues, time and space are linked (p. 56; see also pp. 140-142): “space (place, location, context) is not a backcloth on which events and language are projected through time. Rather, language practices are activities that produce time and space” (p. 56). In short, one can’t choose to make—or not make—something local because all actions take place in a particular time and in a particular space (i.e., an always-local spatiotemporal context). To suggest otherwise would mean overlooking what cultural geographer Doreen Massey (1991) and others have called “space-time,” which recognizes that space and time are not discrete entities but are rather “mutually constitutive” (see also Lesh, 2016, pp. 449-450, 459-463).

An example should help illustrate why this perspective on the local is useful for assessment research. The WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition was originally developed to “both represent and regularize writing programs’ priorities for first-year composition” (CWPA, 2014, n.p.). The members of the task force that revised the Statement in 2014 did so in consultation with disciplinary colleagues (Dryer et al., 2014, pp. 131-135; Sills, 2018), themselves living and working in local institutions which, presumably, impact their diverse perspectives on writing and the teaching of writing. These diverse perspectives no doubt influence their uptake of the Outcomes Statement—as does the labor that all readers and writers bring to bear on the document as they work out understandings of such outcomes and rework these outcomes in their own
reading and writing practices. While many people appear to think the Statement is meant
to somehow regularize and standardize writing programs in the same way (e.g., Graff &
Birkenstein, 2019; Rice, 2009, pp. 9-12), it is meant to be reworked (Dryer & Yancey,
2019) and, indeed, inevitably will be, for standards are always reworked in their
instantiation (see Fenwick & Farrell, 2012). The task force frames the Statement as a
“living document, one that in the present could and should be adapted to local needs and
one that in the future should be revisited and revised” (Dryer et al., p. 130; see also Sills,
2018). The Statement acts as, in Brandt and Clinton’s words, a “globalizing technology”
(p. 347), for it mediates work accomplished in “other locals” (Gallagher, 2014, p. 487).

What is missing in assessment research, which mobility studies can offer, is a
perspective that does not just traverse apparently bounded macro and micro scales, but
one that takes the “macro”/“global” to be part of “micro”/“local” assessment ecologies.
In the following section, I argue that mobility studies offers useful ways to further
ecological models of assessment.

A Mobility Perspective on Assessment

I have argued above that even ecological models of assessment tend to treat
assessment as a stable, fixed practice, bound to a particular, fixed location. This
perspective risks succumbing to what cultural anthropologist Liisa Malkki (1992) calls a
“sedentarist metaphysics” (p. 31) or “sedentarist common sense” (p. 37), which treats
fixity as the norm. Mobility perspectives developed by sociologists and cultural
geographers, however, acknowledge that mobility is the norm and that it takes ongoing
Salter, 2013; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007). Importantly, these perspectives do not
intend to privilege or uncritically celebrate movement,\textsuperscript{11} nor do they intend to ignore the fact that people and things are differently mobile, as Shivers-McNair (2021) points out. Rather, they highlight how mobility “gains meaning through its embeddedness within societies, culture, politics, histories” and “means different things, to different people, in differing social circumstances” (Adey, 2006, p. 83). It is this meaning that makes \textit{mobility} different from \textit{movement}, though the two terms are often treated as synonymous (Cresswell, 2001).

Mobility perspectives are relational; that is, they acknowledge that relationships among people, places, and things are not fixed. At times, entities may appear to be fixed (immobile) and, at other times, to appear mobile in relation to other entities (Adey, 2006, 2010). But both the appearance of immobility and mobility take work and are deeply imbricated in power relations. I and others have found Tsing’s (2005) notion of friction a useful metaphor for thinking through mobility:

A wheel turns because of its encounter with the surface of the road; spinning in the air it goes nowhere. Rubbing two sticks together produces heat and light; one stick alone is just a stick. As a metaphorical image, friction reminds us that heterogeneous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power. (p. 5)

\textsuperscript{11} This misconception about mobility studies is a common one. Mimi Sheller, in a conference presentation, reflects on various assumptions about mobility studies: “I often get people assuming that what I study is ‘transport’ alone . . . and feel that I must explain that the study of mobilities is more than just transport (which is not to say that transport is not also an important aspect of it). Or I get people who assume that what I study is how the world is more mobile now, a place of liquidity and flows . . . and feel that I must explain that the study of mobilities is also historical and critical, and includes a critique of such discourses. Or I get people who think that studying mobilities is ‘Eurocentric’ and antifeminist . . . and feel the need to explain that it engages deeply with feminist and postcolonial theories, and seeks to study inequalities in mobilities, the politics of mobility, and power relations around (im)mobilities.” (qtd. in Clarsen et al., 2019, p. 114).
Friction is required to keep local and global relations in motion. Furthermore, friction enables knowledge to travel and be transformed.

Mobility perspectives also challenge typical conceptions of space and scale, complicating the relationship between the global and local. As Sheller and Urry (2006) put it,

[A] clear distinction is often drawn between places and those travelling to such places. Places are seen as pushing or pulling people to visit. Places are presumed to be relatively fixed, given, and separate from those visiting. The new mobility paradigm argues against this ontology of distinct ‘places’ and ‘people’. Rather, there is a complex relationality of places and persons connected through performances. (p. 214)

Sheller and Urry here echo Brandt and Clinton’s (2002) point that the local is created in practice. Additionally, Sheller and Urry’s perspective challenges the dominant models of transfer, referenced in the previous section, through their conceptualization of scale. While dominant notions of transfer privilege movement-as-transmission, between and among containers, mobility perspectives push beyond the container metaphor and “call[] into question scalar logics such as local/global as descriptors of regional extent” (Sheller & Urry, 2006, p. 209). Mobility scholars understand space to be configured translocally. Adey (2006, pp. 77-80) cites the example of migrants to illustrate the concept: While migrants may be from places “elsewhere,” they bring these places with them when they travel, reconstructing their new locales as home, perhaps even forming communities with other migrants.
While mobility theories are emerging in recent work in rhetoric and composition (see Horner et al., 2021; Lorimer Leonard, 2017b; Lu & Horner, 2009; Nordquist, 2017), they have yet to be brought to bear on writing assessment research. We know that assessments guide people’s movements within and across institutions—into certain courses and not others, their progress to degree, etc. 12 This is especially the case in English departments, to which a number of students circulate, often based on placement assessments. Additionally, “the evaluations of [students’] performances [in English] influence their opportunities to circulate elsewhere” (Watkins, 1989, p. 7).

This assumption has certainly guided some assessment practices (e.g., Royer & Gilles’s [1998] Directed Self-Placement model), although few studies trace what happens when assessments themselves travel (but see Maddox, 2014). But more importantly, and to the point of this project, writing assessment research has yet to take up the notions of mobility and scale that mobility studies offers. Doing so would require not only treating the global as part of an ecological model of assessment, but also accounting for mobility in two related senses: the mobility of writing assessments (across and even “outside of” the university) and the mobility of literacy practices—in ways that critique the transmission model of transfer. As this perspective might suggest, this requires complicating how we normally think of circulation in the academy.

A mobility perspective requires, Horner points out, attending to the circulation of people, things, and knowledge and how they change in the process of circulating (Blommaert & Horner, 2017, p. 7). This perspective complicates traditional notions of circulation. Working from a Marxist perspective, John Trimbur (2000) points out that

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12 Evan Watkins (1989) expands on this point at length.
dominant notions of circulation treat it as a linear process, whereby something is produced and then moves from point A to point B. But a Marxian model of circulation does not treat production, circulation, and reception as discrete events, separate from their sociomaterial conditions (Trimbur, p. 206). Rather, it attempts to account for the concrete labor that contributes to these processes as well as how that labor is occluded in the process of commodification. When a product’s use value is transformed into exchange value (i.e., the value for which it can be compared to other products), that product becomes a commodity. What’s more, Trimbur argues, under current capitalist conditions of labor, the specter of the commodity is present during the point of production. This is an argument that is especially pertinent to assessment because the prospect of assessment guides students’ writing from the start.

As an example, consider how this process works in terms of assessing student writing. A student expends material and intellectual labor drafting and revising a paper. All the while, the student’s anxiety about earning a low grade or, alternatively, the desire for a good grade are present and affect the labor that student is willing to expend; the student is aware of how their resulting grade will contribute to an end-of-semester grade that then circulates to others within and outside of the university, granting (or prohibiting) certain opportunities. The instructor comments on the paper, often translating those comments into a grade. This grade contributes to the end-of-term grade the student receives for the course, which has a certain exchange value that the student might use to receive a job, enter graduate school, etc. The student’s particular work products, the labor that contributed to the making of those products, as well as the things that student has learned are not acknowledged beyond the classroom. Only grades are recorded,
circulated, and valued. As Evan Watkins (1989) puts it, “[W]hat is circulated systematically is a grade as an index of performance whose value is read off in relation to other grades, not to the specific qualities of work” (p. 6). The student’s labor and paper are, in short, commodified through the university’s system of assessment. Importantly, the prospect of assessment has informed the student’s labor from the start. As Trimbur puts it, “[W]e cannot understand what is entailed when people encounter written texts without taking into account how the labor power embodied in the commodity form articulates a mode of production and its prevailing social relations” (p. 210).

Certain assessment models, like contract grading (see Inoue, 2019b; Kelly-Riley et al., 2020), that align with the assumptions of an ecological model of assessment fail to account for this notion of circulation. For example, when they solicit students’ responses to contract grading, which rewards the labor students exert in their writing throughout the course of the semester, Inman and Powell (2018) find that students desire grades. To Inman and Powell, students desire grades because grades are linked to how students learn to see themselves in institutional terms: “Students are primed by our educational system not to assess the quality of their own writing but to use the grades they receive to categorize themselves and to prepare for the emotions that come along with the identity these grades create” (p. 40). But neither Inman and Powell nor those who take issue with their essay (e.g., Albracht et al., 2019) take the perspective I’m advancing here: students desire grades because grades—more precisely, the notion of assessment as “judgment and the articulation of that judgment” (Huot, 2002, p. 7)—inform the production of their writing, as well as their emotions about the reception and circulation of their writing. Indeed, Bronwyn Williams (2018, pp. 21-24) points out that grades can color students’
memories of their entire writing and learning experiences in a course. Students are, in short, keenly aware of how their labor is commodified in this process. In other words, they do not so much “use the grades they receive to categorize themselves” (Inman & Powell, p. 40), but they do so to categorize their work as a more or less desirable commodity. In saying this, I do not mean to suggest that students don’t develop certain identities (“good student,” “lazy,” “bad writer,” etc.) as a result of receiving grades during the course of their education. They do, but they are also aware that grades represent a commodification of their labor. To consider Trimbur’s insights in light of assessment research, we need to not only study the consequences of assessments, but also, to put it crudely, how those assessments are made, by whom, for what ends, the manner in which assessments circulate, and the assumptions and practices that circulate with them. In doing so, we need to acknowledge that the practice of assessment informs the production of writing in institutional settings from the start.

**Chapter Outlines**

In this chapter, I have argued that dominant ecological models of writing assessment perpetuate the tendency to treat global contexts as stable containers that exert pressure on local assessment contexts, reifying the local in assessment scholarship and making it harder to attend to how assessment knowledge and practices are transformed in use. In doing so, I have attended to the inflections given to three keywords in writing assessment scholarship: *local, global,* and *ecological.* I then complicated reductive notions of the local and global as discrete micro and macro contexts in assessment scholarship by drawing on two research frameworks: New Literacy Studies and a mobilities paradigm in the social sciences.
In chapter two, I describe the methodological approach taken in this study: a text-oriented ethnographically informed methodology with a knowledge mobilization framework. I also describe my methods: (a) content analysis of two well-circulated writing assessment position statements (CCCC, 2006; NCTE/CWPA, 2008) and AAC&U rubrics and publications that describe the organization’s approach to campus assessment; (b) participant-observation of a General Education assessment event at “Midwest Metropolitan University” (MMU) that is aligned with the AAC&U approach; (c) surveys and focus group discussions with five other faculty assessors who participated in MMU’s Gen Ed assessment event.

The knowledge mobilization framework described in chapter two allows me to study how assessment knowledge is translated as it travels to different locations through texts and people’s interactions with them: from the two writing assessment position statements to AAC&U publications, from AAC&U publications to MMU, and then to faculty assessors at MMU. This knowledge is not simply transported unchanged, however. As I demonstrate in chapter three, while AAC&U’s assessment approach appears to be aligned with writing studies’ assessment principles, their take on localism is quite different. Indeed, I show that AAC&U is drifting away from the kind of localism represented in the assessment statements and toward a much more standardized approach.

Chapters four and five both draw on data from focus group discussions with five faculty assessors who participated in a Gen Ed assessment event at MMU. Chapter four begins by contextualizing the training for this assessment event, which aligns closely with AAC&U’s practices, and then turns to an analysis of my participants’ experiences of scoring artifacts during the event. In this chapter, I focus especially on my participants’
reported experiences of space-time as they assessed artifacts, which affected their work with the rubrics. These experiences are important to pay attention to because, I demonstrate, they can affect how assessors approach assessment as well as the embodied practices they develop to manage their work (e.g., going with their “gut” to make a variety of scoring decisions). In short, people’s work with texts is affected by their perceptions of space-time, an area of inquiry that is often overlooked in assessment scholarship (but not in knowledge mobilization research). As I also demonstrate in chapter four, assessors developed tactics for managing the various emotions (ambivalence, frustration) produced in the process of assessing student artifacts. I argue that space needs to be made during assessment events for these emotions to be historicized to disrupt the tendency to see them as intrinsic to certain kinds of texts and textual features.

Chapter five builds on this focus on embodied experience. In my analysis of the textual ideologies participants brought to their work with the AAC&U rubrics and their reading of a student text under discussion in the focus groups, I attend to participants’ gestures, which, along with their utterances, index particular textual ideologies. I find that my participants critiqued the AAC&U rubrics for appearing to uphold a singular, normative standard. In other words, to some of my participants, the rubrics index standard language ideology—a racialized ideology that treats languages as discrete entities that are containers for meanings and treats the so-called standard as inherently valuable/prestigious and stable/externally uniform. At the same time, they negotiated standard language ideology themselves, sometimes making comments that perpetuated
this ideology. My analysis illustrates the instability of standard language ideology, which itself is often treated as a stable phenomenon.

In chapter six, the concluding chapter, I present implications for future writing assessment research, group assessment events like the one discussed in chapter four, faculty development, and classroom assessment. Given the prevalence of AAC&U’s approach to campus assessment as well as how this approach is drifting away from writing studies’ assessment principles, I argue that writing assessment scholars need to consider expanding the company they keep if they wish to continue advocating for localism in ways that entities like AAC&U might be responsive to. Ultimately, I argue that a knowledge mobilization framework makes it possible to attend to how people transform seemingly fixed assessment standards in practice and I make recommendations for future writing assessment research projects.
CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY: TEXT-ORIENTED ETHNOGRAPHY

My study employs ethnography at three levels: as a method, methodology, and “deep theorizing” (Lillis, 2008). That is, it involves participant “talk around text” (method), multiple data sources over a period of sustained engagement (methodology), and a process of theorizing that “narrow[s] the gap between text and context” (Lillis, 2008, p. 354). My approach is guided by theorists who take a sociomaterial approach to the study of texts and literacy practices (e.g., LaFrance, 2019; LaFrance & Nicolas, 2012; Lillis, 2008; Lillis & Curry, 2010; Prior & Shipka, 2003; Smith, 2005; Swales, 1998; Tusting et al., 2019), attending to “the material aspects of texts” (Tusting et al., p. 14), the concrete labor participants exert in working with texts, and the networks of actors (human and nonhuman) that transport texts across space and time. In particular, this study takes a text-oriented ethnographic approach with a mobilities framework to study how assessment methods and knowledge transform as they are mobilized by institutional and other entities. That is, I primarily study a variety of texts (writing assessment position statements as well as reports and rubrics produced by AAC&U). This data is supplemented by verbal data from two focus group conversations with five faculty assessors who participated in one university’s General Education assessment event in spring 2021. This ethnographic approach allows me to do several things: to attend to texts, to analyze what people do with texts, to situate this activity in a particular
spatiotemporal moment, and to toggle back and forth between texts and social contexts. In short, this is not a traditional ethnography, but more like a textography, which Swales (1998) describes as “something more than a disembodied textual or discourse analysis, but something less than a full ethnographic account” (p. 1). Textographies “build their arguments through a close analysis of individual textual extracts” (p. 2), supplemented by interviews with participants. They provide another way to link text and context.

**Knowledge Mobilization Framework**

As mentioned in chapter one, mobility is typically treated as movement—a characteristic of people and things (though notably not places) that has been celebrated, denigrated and, more recently due to the global health pandemic caused by Covid-19, pathologized (see Cresswell, 2021, pp. 54-56). Movement is certainly a part of mobility, even when things appear to be immobile. Even as travel bans were put in place, universities shifted courses and other activities, like the assessment event detailed in this study, entirely online. They also used online technologies to distribute knowledge and policies about social distancing, temporary pass-fail assessment measures, and so on.

While movement is part of mobility, it is not the same. The mobilities paradigm (Sheller & Urry, 2006) detailed in the previous chapter is marked by an “insistence on the mobile character of all phenomena, however seemingly recalcitrant” (Horner et al., 2021, p. 6). Rather than assuming that the VALUE rubrics, writing conventions, my participants’ readings of them, and the values my participants bring to their work with these rubrics are stable, I assume that all of these phenomena are in flux, contingent, and, crucially, “transformed in and through practice” (Horner et al., p. 6).
These assumptions are shared by those who study knowledge mobilization, which attends to how knowledge is transformed as it is used. In contrast to the knowledge transfer models mentioned in chapter one, which assume knowledge and skills are transported, unchanged, from one place to another, knowledge mobilization is quite different (Donahue, 2021). As Horner et al. (2021) put it, “ideas move and are in the process transformed by relocation” (p. 7). Texts, “tools, technologies and bodies” play a central role in knowledge mobilization because they “make knowledge portable,” allowing knowledge to move across distances and to various entities (Fenwick & Farrell, 2012, p. 3). By the same token, texts are made possible by various movements across space-time (Nordquist, 2017, p. 14, 23).

While texts would appear to make knowledge stable, knowledge is inevitably “reconstituted with differently inflected meanings as [it] circulate[s] through new locations” (Fenwick & Farrell, p. 3). Ellis and McNicholl (2015) offer a good example in their study of teacher educators. They find that many job ads for teacher educators in England (and elsewhere) frame teacher educators as content delivery specialists (pp. 44-54). Such framing perpetuates notions of knowledge as static and stable (p. 144), which belies the ways teacher educators transform research-based knowledge in practice. Indeed, the teacher educators they study “do not simply act as a conduit for ‘research findings’ to teachers, with straightforward implications for practice, but instead their research and teaching collaboratively develops a theory of professional practice that informs and engages with the work of other researchers” (Ellis & McNicholl, p. 120). A knowledge mobilization framework, therefore, accounts for the fact that contexts,
knowledge, values, and ideologies are not static but are recursively co-constituted and remade in practice.

Mobilities scholars have argued that mobile methods need to involve accounting for objects, their movements, and how they mediate human activity (Urry, 2007, pp. 39-42). To this end, mobilities researchers have drawn on mobile methods like the “go-along,” which “attempts to (re)place the researcher alongside the participant in the context of the ‘doing’ of mobility” (Spinney, 2015, p. 232). For example, for his mobile video ethnography, Spinney’s (2011) research participants, London cyclists, wore video cameras as they commuted. Spinney sees this as a way of “seeing” and “feeling there” even when he can’t physically be there. For Spinney, the video footage acts to jog participants’ memories as they talk about cycling practices in follow-up retrospective interviews. However, cultural geographer Peter Merriman (2014) reminds us that mobile methods need not be so high-tech. Indeed, Merriman argues, the push for mobile methods risks uncritically celebrating movement and conflating high-tech mobile methods with mobilities research.

In the same way that knowledge is transformed in its mobilization, research methods are also transformed in their uptake. As such, I have not so much imported mobilities methodologies as transformed them in my adaptation. As Gramer and Sheridan (2021) note, “any ‘borrowed’ framework recursively transforms the movement of knowledge as well as the knowledge-making process and research practices across scholars, sites, and disciplines” (p. 230).
Ethnography at Three Levels

Writing studies researchers have found ethnographic approaches to studying writing in institutional settings useful for uncovering how people accomplish work with texts over time. Ethnography, widely associated with anthropologists, is an approach to understanding how participants understand the activities in which they are engaged.\textsuperscript{13} Methodologically, it demands\textsuperscript{14} a particularly high investment (in terms of time, material and financial resources, emotional labor, etc.) on the part of researchers. Researchers must reflexively and reflectively triangulate their impressions based on data gathered via several means: sustained observation at a particular site, textual analysis, and semi-structured interviews with participants (see Lillis, 2008, p. 358).

Theresa Lillis (2008) argues that writing studies scholars have often approached ethnography at only one level—as an interview method that involves “talk around text,” which “leads to only a truncated engagement with ‘context’” (p. 355). In writing studies, ethnography as method still privileges the text as the unit of analysis, treating the interview as simply supplementing the text as the primary data source. As with recent trends in high-tech mobile methods, when “talk around text” is not supplemented with other methods, it risks making the researcher feel like they can fully understand participants’ experiences. Lillis thus offers two additional levels: ethnography as methodology and ethnography as “deep theorizing.” Ethnography as methodology involves “sustained engagement” at a research site, with multiple methods of data

\textsuperscript{13} See Sheridan (2012, pp. 74-75) for a brief history of writing studies scholars’ uptake of ethnography.
\textsuperscript{14} I use this word (demands) in the same sense that Horner (2002, p. 561) does. That is, while many critical ethnographers frame the difficult choices that ethnographers must make as “ethical dilemmas” (and, primarily, ideological dilemmas), I see them as demands, or inevitable challenges, that arise from the sociomaterial conditions that inform ethnographic research.
collection, and “long conversations,” that is, “cyclical dialogue around texts over a period of time” (p. 362). Lillis’s notion of ethnography as methodology helps researchers shift “away from a container notion of context” (p. 381), making the approach usefully aligned with the relationship between the local/global that Brandt and Clinton (2002) and mobility researchers theorize.

Drawing on Blommaert’s notion of ethnography, Lillis offers a third level, ethnography as “deep theorizing,” that is meant to help “close the gap” between text and context. For operationalizing this third level, Lillis suggests using two concepts from linguistics—*indexicality*, “the specific ways in which bits of language (speech, writing) index, or point to aspects of social context,” and *orientation*, “how speakers/hearers orient to what is said and written, both aspects being embedded sociohistorically” (p. 376)—that are generally used to analyze spoken discourse, but that have potential for researchers’ analyses of written texts. I’ll offer a brief example here to illustrate the use-value of these concepts for analyzing people’s evaluations of student writing. In the following passage, a lecturer shares her evaluation of an anonymous student’s essay:

**Patti:** I . . . this one also suffered with that thing we all do value, which is clear transitions . . . [and] there was point of view shifts throughout, which is something I always hate. That’s one of my little nitpicky things. (qtd. in Scott & Brannon, 2013, p. 282)

To Patti, the student’s essay indexes disorganization and lack of clarity, and Patti clearly values clarity (“clear transitions”) and consistency (“point of view shifts . . . is something I always hate”). This causes her to orient negatively toward the student’s text; her orientation is very likely the result of repeated encounters over time with student writing,
with colleagues in meetings to discuss their teaching practices, and so on. Follow-up interviews with her might reveal this to be the case, and these interviews might reveal the source of some of her assumptions and values. Her reference to “that thing we all do value” suggests she believes her values about clarity to be universal (if not to all readers, at least to the readers she’s discussing the student text with). She may even believe this value to be ahistorical, although, as Fox (1993) and Williams (1976) remind us, values are never ahistorical. As this brief example demonstrates, ethnography as “deep theorizing” reminds researchers that closing the gap between text and context inevitably requires theorizing.

I merge Lillis’s notion of ethnography operating at three levels with aspects of institutional ethnography. Institutional ethnography (IE), originally developed by the sociologist Dorothy Smith (2005), offers a materialist framework (LaFrance & Nicolas, 2012) for studying writing and work in institutional contexts. That is, IE “foregrounds the relationships that exist between the material conditions of work practice and choices individuals make as they negotiate their situations” (LaFrance & Nicolas, p. 141). Like LaFrance, I see IE as aligned with Lillis’s notion of ethnography:

As a “deep theory” (Lillis 2008), IE offers a process of inquiry for exploring how institutions take shape. IE as methodology poses the ongoing critical work of ethnography as a simultaneous process of theorizing our work within institutional contexts and as a means to understand the actualities of that work that live below the layers of our materialist discourse. (LaFrance, 2019, p. 23)

For the purposes of my project, IE offers a framework for making sense of how individuals participating in the same activity (e.g., faculty who are using the same
VALUE rubrics to assess student work for General Education assessment purposes) might bring very different assumptions and perspectives about assessment to their work. As LaFrance and Nicolas put it, people’s “assumptions are a product of institutional history, local systems of value, and any number of other factors that may impact what an individual does” (2012, p. 138).

Given my project’s focus on analyzing institutional documents, IE makes sense: IE understands texts as mediators of human activity. Institutional ethnographers hold that institutions “exist only in actual people’s doings” (Smith, 2001, p. 163). And texts frequently coordinate people’s doings in institutional work. As Dorothy Smith and Catherine Schryer (2008) remind us, “Texts penetrate and organize the very texture of daily life as well as the always-developing foundations of the social relations and organization of science, industry, commerce, and the public sphere” (p. 116; see also Bowker & Star, 1999; Latour & Woolgar, 1979; Swales, 1998). Thus, “It is indeed hard to realize the extent to which our activities are coordinated textually” (Smith & Schryer, p. 117). While texts coordinate people’s activities and movements, texts also move, as the above discussion of mobilities research makes clear. Elsewhere, Smith (2001) calls attention to the translocal nature of documents. Texts coordinate activity translocally. That is, texts produced in one location might coordinate work accomplished in another, distant locale. For example, the WPA Outcomes Statement, revised by a committee in consultation with disciplinary colleagues (see Dryer et al., 2014; Sills, 2018), is made available on the CWPA website for writing programs to adapt to their own local conditions. A knowledge mobilization framework highlights the contingent nature of the
work of “localizing” knowledge—specifically how this the knowledge is transformed in practice.

Finally, IE is a useful approach for my project because it offers a way to traverse the relationship between more local-seeming phenomena (e.g., university General Education assessment initiatives) and apparently global phenomena, like the American Association of Colleges and Universities and the cultural movement in which it operates. At the same time, IE approaches risk reinscribing dominant notions of the global as a container for the local. After all, IE research tends to remain within the bounds of the institution. Lillis’s notion of ethnography as “deep theorizing,” paired with a knowledge mobilization framework, helps me complicate IE’s tendency to conceptualize the global in limited ways.

As mentioned above, this study involves both content analysis of texts and focus group discussions with five faculty assessors who scored student artifacts during a spring 2021 General Education assessment event at “Midwest Metropolitan University” (MMU), a pseudonym. Originally, I planned to observe the MMU General Education assessment event, to talk to participating faculty assessors, and to have multiple interviews with MMU’s assessment coordinator. This sustained engagement would be aligned with Lillis’s recommendations. However, the assessment coordinator preferred to respond to my questions over email, so I was unable to synchronously interview her. Additionally, because this study took place during a global health pandemic initiated by Covid-19 and, thus, all assessment was done asynchronously, I was unable to observe participants doing the work of assessment in-person. Still, my engagement over time with textual data in the study, complemented by focus group interviews with five faculty
assessors, approximates the kind of sustained engagement that Lillis’s notion of
ethnography as methodology calls for.

**Content Analysis of Writing Assessment Position Statements and AAC&U Reports**

**Document Selection**

In chapter three, I analyze two writing assessment position statements that AAC&U has cited as inspiring the development of their Written Communication VALUE Rubric:

- The Conference on College Composition and Communication’s (2006/2014) “Writing Assessment: A Position Statement”

Doing so allows me to understand representations of dominant writing assessment principles (such as localism, described in chapter one) and how these well-cited documents represent key stakeholders and values in writing studies. I then examine how AAC&U represents its approach to campus assessment, the Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) project. On AAC&U’s webpage, then, I focused on the tabs that were related to the VALUE initiative (see AAC&U, *VALUE*). Two longer reports, located under a research tab on AAC&U’s webpage, were crucial for understanding how AAC&U presented research about its approach to the public as well as the extent to which this approach is aligned with writing assessment principles. These two reports describe the VALUE approach to assessment, offer recommendations for campuses looking to implement it, and present data collected through AAC&U surveys:
• McConnell and Rhodes’s (2017) *On Solid Ground*

• McConnell et al.’s (2019) *We Have a Rubric for That: The VALUE Approach to Assessment.*

Additionally, I collected the three VALUE rubrics that were used in MMU’s campus assessment event in spring 2021:

• The Written Communication VALUE Rubric (see AAC&U, 2009c)

• The Critical Thinking VALUE Rubric (see AAC&U, 2009a)

• The Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric (see AAC&U, 2009b)

In chapter three, I analyze the above documents. Given that I’m also attending to how assessment knowledge and methods are mobilized at one institution, I collected the following documents from Midwest Metropolitan University:

• MMU’s *Assessment of Written Communication* report, which details MMU’s campus assessment process as well as key findings from the spring 2021 assessment event

• Email correspondence from MMU’s assessment coordinator

• Training materials (video transcripts and slides) for the spring 2021 campus assessment event

In chapter four, I analyze these MMU documents to describe how MMU implemented the VALUE approach to assessment. This analysis is supplemented with focus group data in chapters four and five.
Content Analysis of Documents

Content analysis is the “systematic reading of a body of texts” that “narrows the range of possible inferences” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 25). These “inferences are merely more systematic, explicitly informed, and (ideally) verifiable than what ordinary readers do with texts” (p. 25). Huckin defines content analysis as “the identifying, quantifying, and analyzing of specific words, phrases, concepts, or other observable semantic data in a text or body of texts with the aim of uncovering some underlying thematic or rhetorical pattern running through these texts” (2004, p. 14). A form of textual analysis as it is broadly practiced, content analysis approaches vary depending on the researcher’s epistemological orientation to texts. My underlying assumption is that content does not “reside inside a text” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 20) (which would elicit a quantitative approach and would align with the container metaphors and transmission model of communication problematized in chapter one) but rather “emerge[s] in the process of a researcher analyzing a text relative to a particular context” (p. 19). Additionally, “Texts have meanings relative to particular contexts, discourses, or purposes” (p. 24). Thus, I employed a qualitative content analysis (Altheide, 1987; Huckin, 1992; Kohlbacher, 2006; Krippendorff, 2004; pp. 87-89; Mostyn, 1985) with a relational, ethnographic approach.15

In line with the text-oriented ethnographic approach of this study, ethnographic content analysis is a highly recursive, reflexive method of text analysis. Altheide writes that it “consists of reflexive movement between concept development, sampling, data collection, data coding, data analysis, and interpretation. The aim is to be systematic and

15 See Barton et al., 2018; Huckin, 2002; Matsuda & Matsuda, 2011; Thompson, 1999; Valentine, 2017 for examples of qualitative content analysis studies in the field of writing studies.
analytic, but not rigid. Although categories and ‘variables’ initially guide the study, others are allowed and expected to emerge throughout the study” (1987, p. 68). This cyclical approach allowed me to draw on insights gained from prior focus group interviews in my textual analysis.

My analysis was relational: While I tracked which words and concepts appeared most frequently in the documents mentioned above, I was less concerned with the quantity of these instances and more so with using content analysis to better understand the relationships between words/concepts in the documents as well as the “strength of the association” between them (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 90; see also Huckin, 2004, p. 14). In my initial review of the documents, I was attentive to recurring keywords—both individual words and “habitual groupings” (Williams, 1976, p. 15). Keywords, of course, can be “contested, unsettled” and “ambiguous and divergent” in their meanings (Heilker & Vandenberg, 2015, xi), which are “inextricably bound up with the problems [they are] being used to discuss” (Williams, 1976, p. 15). On AAC&U’s website, for example, it was not uncommon to see diversity, equity, and quality used alongside each other. Given such keywords’ contested nature, it was important for me to look closely at the contexts in which these words were being used in the documents. Doing so allowed me to see that the terms were often conflated.

The process was recursive, as I repeatedly returned to focus group transcripts and my observation notes to verify what I saw in the documents. Given that some of the documents I gathered were hosted on websites, I was attentive to visuals that

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16 Corpus linguists use *keywords* to refer to words that recur frequently in a target corpus as compared to a reference corpus (see Chen, 2022). However, here, I refer to words and concepts (e.g., students, language difference) that recur in the documents as *keywords*.
accompanied them as well. As I read through the documents, in addition to noting keywords, I marked and annotated passages that appeared to point to particular assessment principles. For example, the AAC&U VALUE reports repeatedly position the VALUE approach as in opposition to standardized assessments. Thus, I reasoned that these comments signaled the principle: Standardized tests are not a valid way to assess writing (see chapter three for more).

**Participating in MMU’s General Education Assessment Event**

In spring 2020, I participated in MMU’s General Education Assessment of courses in the Social and Behavioral Sciences and Historical Perspective content areas. This involved completing an online training module, which primarily meant watching several videos in which the assessment coordinator walked faculty assessors through the rubrics, and then scoring three sample student artifacts. On February 28, 2020, participating faculty assessors met for several hours on campus to discuss the scores they had assigned these samples. This rubric norming session was meant to calibrate assessors’ understanding of how to apply the rubrics in the assessment event. One week later, on March 6, 2020, we met in the same room and spent the day assessing student artifacts. On March 10, several days before universities announced they were closing their campuses due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I met with the assessment coordinator to discuss this research project and gained her approval to study the spring 2021 assessment event and interview some participating faculty at its conclusion. (This study has, additionally, been approved by the university’s IRB.)

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17 These content areas include courses in Arts and Sciences, Business, Education, Social Work, Nursing, and Public Health (MMU Assessment Office, 2020, p. 5).
To get a better understanding of how AAC&U represents its campus assessment approach to participating faculty, in June 2020 I completed their online training to become a VALUE-certified scorer for the Written Communication Rubric. This training involved watching videos about how to use the rubrics that were produced by AAC&U, which allowed me to better understand MMU’s uptake of AAC&U’s approach.

In spring 2021, I participated in MMU’s Assessment of Written Communication, during which faculty assessors scored a randomized sample of 333 student artifacts produced in MMU’s first-year composition courses (MMU Assessment Office, 2021, p. 4). Faculty assessors were recruited from a pool of instructors who taught written communication content courses (composition instructors and other faculty who taught written communication Gen Ed courses), and the assessment coordinator reached out to some other faculty who did not teach written communication courses in an effort to involve them in Gen Ed assessment. Due to the pandemic, the entire assessment event took place asynchronously online. While I could not observe conversations among faculty assessors, I documented my reactions to the training videos and my experience assessing thirty-eight student artifacts. These notes include transcriptions of key excerpts from the training videos and observations grounded in my prior experience with writing assessment. Shortly after this assessment, in April 2021, I surveyed and interviewed several participating faculty assessors.

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18 Three assessors scored each student artifact (MMU Assessment Office, 2021, p. 8).
Survey and Focus Group Interviews with Faculty Assessors

The Survey

Survey Questions

In the survey, I asked for certain background information—for example, which department(s) respondents worked in, what their role in the department was, what sorts of courses they taught, how long they had been teaching, whether they had participated in the MMU assessment process before, etc. I also asked questions about how often respondents typically assigned writing in their courses and what kinds of feedback they offered on student writing: written comments, discussion in individual conferences with students, and discussion of student samples in classes.

Piloting the Survey

After I had developed the original survey, I sent it to two people to pilot: one graduate student colleague in the department of English and one faculty member in another department. Neither person participated in the MMU assessment. I wanted to see how a teacher not in my field might interpret some of the questions. My colleague in the English department wanted a space to write about how he discussed various terms used in the three VALUE rubrics. As he told me, he often referenced rubric terms like grammar in critical ways in his courses. I decided to use focus groups to follow-up on this question and ask participants to talk more about their uses of these terms. Two questions in particular were difficult for the other respondent to answer:

1. “What kinds of writing do you assign students?” Even though this question was followed by genre examples, she wrote, “Not sure how to answer exactly.
I usually give a set of tasks to investigate something online, read something and respond, watch a video and respond.”

2. “Have you participated in the assessment at MMU before?” She responded, “Participated? I had to put documents together when they reviewed SB [Social & Behavioral Sciences] a year or two ago.” I thus rephrased this question to make it clearer that I was asking about assessing student artifacts: “Have you assessed student artifacts for the assessment at MMU before?”

Even though I had piloted the survey, it soon became clear that participants had varying interpretations of several survey questions. Thus, certain responses to survey questions led to clarifying questions in the focus groups. For example, two participants (Melissa and Chris) noted in their survey responses that they had participated in the MMU assessment several times. However, they also answered that they had not previously seen or used the three VALUE rubrics before the Written Communication Assessment (see last few questions of the survey in Appendix A). At the beginning of our focus group, then, I asked a clarifying question, and it became clear that Chris and Melissa couldn’t really remember which rubrics they had used in previous assessments. This realization was important for me to note because it suggested that even assessors who had participated for several years in the assessment may not have been particularly attentive to the rubrics.

**Survey Distribution**

I circulated my survey to assessors via the coordinator of the assessment event. She emailed my call for participants to assessors after all scores had been submitted, on March 29, 2021. Both the coordinator and I emphasized that my study was meant to be
separate from the MMU assessment process and was not meant to inform this process. The survey remained open for two weeks, closing on April 9. Even though the coordinator sent a follow-up email to assessors, per my request, reminding them of the survey closing date, all of the responses I received were submitted within the first two days of the survey opening. Out of the other twenty-nine participating assessors, I received seven survey responses. Six survey respondents indicated their interest in participating in follow-up focus groups. One person later dropped out and did not participate in the focus groups, thus I had five total participants.

**Focus Group Interviews**

I organized two virtual focus groups in the hopes that participants would be encouraged to talk more in this group setting. I reasoned that this group setting would encourage participants to not only articulate their perspectives on the assessment event, the VALUE rubrics, and the student sample, but also encourage them to explain these views to others in the group who might disagree or push back on these perspectives. Perhaps this dialogue would even lead someone to change their mind.

I grouped the two participants from the English department in one focus group and the other participants, from Social Work, Communication, and Economics in another group. These group formations, of course, likely affected the discussions. At times, as I listened to the recordings, I wondered how the conversation might have been different had I included a person from another field in the discussion with my two participants who worked in the department of English. Nevertheless, I made the decision because the survey responses from my two English department participants were somewhat similar,
which led me to believe they might have shared knowledge, beliefs, and practices
surrounding the assessment rubrics that would emerge in the focus group discussion.19

**Directions to Participants**

Once we had found a date that worked for everyone, I emailed participants in
each group to confirm the date and send directions:

I've attached the following materials to this email:

1) These 3 VALUE rubrics: *Written Communication, Critical Thinking, and*
   *Intercultural Knowledge and Competence*
2) An anonymous student essay (I have added line numbers to make it easier for
   us to refer to in our discussion)
3) A scoring sheet (like the one that [the coordinator] used during the training).
4) A list of the questions I’m planning on asking you during our discussion. (I
   think you’ll find it helpful to read this over and think about these questions
   beforehand, but if you don’t have time to do that, that’s also ok!)

**As I mentioned before, there is one thing I’d like you to do before our meeting on [date]:** Please read the attached student writing sample and use these three VALUE rubrics to assess the student artifact. You can use the attached
scoring template to write down the numbers you would assign for rubric criteria.

No need to email me your scoring decisions before the meeting. Just come
prepared to talk about how you would assess the student text in light of the
rubrics, as well as the specific moments in the student’s writing that led you to
assign certain scores for certain categories. We’ll talk a bit about your experience
assessing artifacts for the Written Communication Assessment, too.

**The Student Sample**

The 1,078-word student writing sample was produced in an English 101 class
taught by this study’s principal investigator at MMU several years ago (see Appendix B
for a copy of the student sample). Titled “Trask and Relationship to Previous Ideas
Essay,” it synthesizes several sources: Haunani-Kay Trask’s “From a Native Daughter,”

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19 The literature on focus groups recommends that researchers group participants based on shared
experiences, in the hopes that this will prompt more discussion (Barbour, 2018, p. 68;
Thomas Kuhn’s “The Historical Structure of Scientific Discovery,” and three chapters from Lu and Horner’s (2008) *Writing Conventions*: “Reading and Rereading,” “Vocabulary: Composing the Meaning of Words,” and “Error: Working Rules.” The student’s primary goal in the essay was to, in their words, “show the relationship between Trask’s thoughts on language and knowledge as it correlates, adds to, or conflicts with the ideas from” the other sources.

I selected this sample for two reasons. First, I thought assessors would be able to score it with the Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric. Many of the artifacts I saw in the Written Communication Assessment did not address intercultural interactions and had to be scored N/A for some of this rubric’s categories. I reasoned that my participants would be able to recognize the student’s critique of Western historians’ failure to learn native Hawaiians’ language and ways of knowing as evidence of the intercultural knowledge documented in this VALUE rubric. Second, the student sample did not appear to include instances of the kind of so-called “errors” that I have seen some faculty fixate on in faculty development workshops. I hoped that this would make it more likely that our discussion of the sample would focus on what the text was doing and not so much on what the writing “lacked.”

Before sending the student sample to focus group participants, I removed any identifying information, double-spaced it, and added line numbers to make it easier for participants to reference in discussion. I did not make any adjustments to the student’s writing.
Virtual Focus Group Meetings

For the focus groups, I prepared questions to prompt participants to talk in detail about their reading of the rubrics, especially the parts that were more challenging to interpret. I also asked participants, “Is there anything important to you about writing that does not seem to be accounted for in these rubrics?” I asked this to see the extent to which participants’ constructs of writing aligned, or didn’t, with these rubrics. The second half of the focus group discussion was devoted to discussing the student writing sample that I had emailed participants beforehand. I asked participants to talk about what stood out to them in the student sample and how they might score this student sample using the rubrics and why. The full list of planned focus group questions can be found in Appendix C.

I met with both focus groups virtually, on Microsoft Teams, in April 2021. Before clicking the record button in the meeting, I made small talk with participants in Focus Group 1 (composition instructors whom I knew personally and professionally) and, in Focus Group 2, I invited participants to briefly introduce themselves and share which department they taught in on campus. I then went over the Informed Consent form and invited questions about the consent process and the study itself. I checked that participants understood that my study was separate from the MMU assessment process and that it was not meant to inform this process. I was careful, too, to tell participants that the assessment coordinator had asked to see drafts of any chapters that involved data from the assessment. I assured them that I would only identify them by their chosen pseudonyms and that no one else would view the recording except me. Because my analysis at times attends to participants’ gestures in addition to their talk (see chapter
five), I secured permission from the IRB to use screenshots from the recordings if they were de-identified.  

I asked the same set of questions of each group, with one exception: I did not ask Focus Group 2 participants what they thought the purpose of the assessment event was. I was anxious of running over the scheduled two-hour time, so I removed that question. (At the end of the interview, one participant offered her thoughts on this anyway.)

All participants kept their cameras on during the meetings, which meant that my video recording captured gestures and facial expressions, in addition to participants’ comments.

**Transcribing the Focus Group Conversations**

I uploaded both video recordings into Otter, an AI-powered software. The software generated time-stamped transcriptions of each recording that required editing. I then listened to the recordings again, pausing to edit the transcripts in several ways. The software attempted to distinguish among speakers, labeling myself and the other speakers as “Speaker 1,” “Speaker 2,” “Speaker 3,” etc. Otter did not always accurately identify each speaker. I replaced these labels with participants’ chosen pseudonyms, and I replaced references to each participant’s real name (i.e., instances of direct address) with their pseudonym. Because these were focus group conversations, there was frequently cross-talk. As Parameswaran et al. (2020, p. 642) have pointed out, “Focus groups often

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This language appears in the informed consent form that participants received: “Your interview recording and text transcription of this recording will be stored and used for future research without additional informed consent if identifiable private information, such as your name, are removed. If identifying information is removed from your recording/transcription, the recording/transcription may be used for future research studies without additional consent from you.” I used an application called Facepixelizer (see Rubber Duck Labs Inc., 2022) to blur identifying information (e.g., faces and items in the background of participants’ videos) in any screenshots included in this dissertation.
are difficult to translate into . . . text, as there are many nuances of having a group interaction.” To account for moments where another speaker interjected briefly—for example, with a “yeah” or “mhm” or a laugh—I inserted a bracketed note with the interjector’s name and comment. For longer interjections (i.e., interruptions that were more than three words) I placed the speaker’s name and comments on a separate line of the transcript. For the rare occasions when someone’s recording temporarily cut out or their comments were incomprehensible, I included the following note: [incomprehensible].

I also filled in words that the software hadn’t captured, corrected spelling, and inserted paralinguistic cues (e.g., laughter, sighs, and long pauses) that stood out to me on the videos). During this first pass of editing the transcripts, I did not adjust the punctuation that Otter applied. For excerpts that are in this dissertation, I revisited the original recordings, listened to these passages, and double-checked the excerpts and the punctuation. While I have attempted to present participants’ comments as close as possible to what I heard on the recordings (e.g., by leaving in speech fillers and false starts), I have admittedly used periods and commas in ways similar to how they are used in printed text, for readability. That is, my uses of periods and commas are not meant to signal intonation as they do in conversation analysis.

Second Pass through the Transcripts

For my second pass through the transcripts, I watched the video recordings of the focus groups while I had the transcript up on a second screen. This time, I paused to include “verbal glosses of embodied actions that stood out” in brackets in the transcripts (Olinger, 2020, p. 176). For example, at one point in the first focus group, Jake had
described the student writing sample as demonstrating a “crisp” writing style and made chopping motions with his hands as he said this. I noted this in brackets in the transcript. These and other gestures were important contextualization cues (Gumperz, 1992) in my analysis. As Olinger notes, “Given the rich and manifold meanings that embodied actions convey and create, capturing such visual data through videorecording can serve all interview-based studies regardless of research focus” (2020, p. 174).

Once I had finished doing this, I downloaded the transcripts in Microsoft Word and printed them. Because my transcripts were time-stamped, I could revisit these moments for passages that I include in the dissertation, ensuring they were as close as possible to what I heard.

**Third Pass through the Transcripts**

As I read through the transcripts, I jotted down notes in the margins about things that stood out to me initially. Moments where participants expressed opinions about the rubrics or writing that were then contested or challenged by another participant stood out to me. These exchanges were marked by comments like “I’m not sure I agree with that” or “that’s not really what I meant,” as participants attempted to stake their claims/take a stance. I also noted moments where one speaker would pick up and use a word that a previous speaker had introduced earlier. Importantly, these participants were not simply re-using these words; they were transforming their meanings in re-use (Donahue, 2021). In this initial reading of the transcripts, I was struck by how frequently participants expressed their own values about/preferences/standards for writing and how they attempted to align them with the rubric or, in some cases, distance them as incompatible with the rubric. Some participants labeled these values as personal ones, signaled by
phrases like “I think,” “I feel,” or “to me,” while some seemed to see themselves expressing disciplinary values, signaled by phrases like “as we know” or “we value.”

Following Saldaña’s (2021, pp. 58-71) recommendations for making sense of data early in the analytical process, I drafted analytic memos about some of these moments. These analytic memos gave me an outlet for offering tentative hypotheses, capturing questions and reactions I had, writing analytically about rich quotations from participants, and noting themes that cropped up in both focus groups. For example, in both focus groups, participants indicated that they saw the Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric operating from white/normative assumptions of what counts as “intercultural.” From other comments participants made about the normative nature of the rubrics, I read them to be critiquing the rubrics as upholding standard language ideology, a racialized ideology that privileges so-called standard written English (see chapter five for more on standard language ideology). I thus returned to the transcripts and began to code utterances that indexed, or pointed to, particular language and textual ideologies (i.e., beliefs about languages and texts).

**Coding for Indexicality**

I coded utterances for indexicality, “the specific ways in which bits of language (speech, writing) index, or point to aspects of social context” (Lillis, 2008, p. 376). For example, many of my focus group participants described the student text as “efficient,” “clean,” and “crisp.” I coded these utterances as indexing what Joan Turner (2018) calls the “smooth read ideology” because they imply that participants valued writing that appeared to require less labor on their part as readers. Bucholtz and Hall describe indexicality as “the creation of semiotic links between linguistic forms and social
meanings” (as cited in Davila, 2012, p. 183). While linguistic forms are often privileged over paralinguistic cues (Olinger, 2020), research (e.g., Flowers, 2016; Olinger, 2021) suggests that gestures and other embodied expressions also index particular ideologies.

Researchers have used indexicality to examine how people draw inferences about others based on their speech patterns, accents, and language use. For example, as John Baugh (2003, p. 155) has famously demonstrated, people can engage in “linguistic profiling,” the “auditory equivalent of visual ‘racial profiling’” by interpreting particular auditory cues to index a speaker as African American; in this case, linguistic profiling occurs when listeners discriminate against the speaker based on these assumptions. Writing researchers have used indexicality to study language ideologies (Davila, 2012), readers’ construction of writers’ authorial identities (Matsuda & Tardy, 2007; Tardy, 2012), and appraisals of the academic writing of scholars who work in non-Anglophone contexts and publish in English (Lillis, 2008, pp. 373-381; Lillis & Curry, 2010, pp. 135-154). In general, though, writing studies scholars rarely use indexicality as a conceptual tool, especially for written texts (Davila, 2012, p. 182; Lillis, 2008, p. 377).

Importantly, prior research indicates that indexicals are always ideologically motivated, making them an especially useful tool for this study. The linguist Jef Verschueren defines as ideological “any basic pattern of meaning or frame of interpretation bearing on or involved in (an) aspect(s) of social ‘reality’ (in particular in the realm of social relations in the public sphere), felt to be commonsensical, and often functioning in a normative way” (2012, p. 10). Ideology is “rarely questioned” (p. 12),

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21 While Matsuda and Tardy (2007) and Tardy (2012) do not explicitly reference indexicality in their studies, they do examine how readers construct particular authorial identities based on discursive features as they read. That is, discursive features index particular authorial identities for writers.
largely implicit, and “because of its normative and common-sense nature, may be highly immune to experience and observation” (p. 14). For example, Davila (2012) demonstrates that composition instructors may read so-called standard edited American English as unmarked or “nonindexical” (p. 184), and thus ideologically neutral.

Indexicality made visible the textual ideologies (Lillis & Curry, 2010; Turner, 2018) participants brought to their reading of the VALUE rubrics and student text. For example, I found several participants subscribing to the “smooth read ideology” (Turner, 2018, pp. 12-13) in their assessment of the student sample, describing it as “efficient,” “smooth,” and “clean.” And my participants critiqued the standard language ideology that they perceived in the VALUE rubrics, even as they, too, made statements that would appear to perpetuate standard language ideology.

**Conclusions**

This chapter described the text-oriented ethnographically informed approach my study takes to studying writing studies and AAC&U assessment documents as well as the focus group conversations I had with faculty assessors at MMU, an institution with campus assessment procedures that are aligned with AAC&U’s recommendations. In the following chapter, I analyze two writing assessment position statements for their representations of assessment principles, including localism. I then analyze AAC&U documents to examine the extent to which the VALUE approach to assessing writing appears to align with the writing assessment recommendations in the two position statements.
CHAPTER THREE

“MALLEABLE” AND BROADLY APPLICABLE: AAC&U’S VALUE APPROACH TO ASSESSMENT

[W]e acknowledge and embrace the dynamism that is inherent to the VALUE approach. VALUE was purposefully designed to be both an articulation of commonly held essentials representing a collective understanding of the ultimate purposes of a quality undergraduate education as well as an intentionally malleable approach to making sense of learning at an individual institution, one that could be changed as necessary to meet local needs. (McConnell et al., 2019, p. 3)

AAC&U does caution that modifying the original rubrics limits the ability to use individual campus results for national comparison, hindering the ability to use those results for accreditation purposes (Rhodes, 2010a). (McConnell et al., 2019, p. 39)

Writing studies scholars who helped develop the Written Communication VALUE Rubric have touted AAC&U’s VALUE approach to assessment (Adler-Kassner & Harrington, 2010; pp. 92-93; Adler-Kassner & O’Neill 2010, pp. 171-174). Adler-Kassner and O’Neill argue that the Written Communication Rubric “reflects three qualities we associate with best practices in assessment”:

First, it was developed by disciplinary professionals through an examination of local assessment work. Second, it is intended to be used with actual student work produced in the context of a course, and explicitly requests contexts for the materials (e.g., assignment sheets, student reflections) as a part of the collected material. Third, it is prefaced by a statement explaining that the best assessment
practices should be locally grounded, recommending that the rubric be seen as a beginning for discussions about assessment rather than the end of one. (2010, p. 173)

In publications, AAC&U’s occasional inclusion of WPAs’ praise for the VALUE approach suggests that even those who did not help develop the rubrics have found them useful for campus assessment purposes (see, e.g., McConnell & Rhodes, 2017, p. 15). Although the Written Communication Rubric was developed in consultation with writing studies scholars and takes up many of the terms used in the CWPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition, AAC&U’s publications about using the rubrics indicate that their purpose has shifted from local adaptation toward accountability and standardization across institutional contexts (Grouling, 2017). Grouling is concerned by this shift and the implications it has for public perceptions of our field: “Writing professionals need to be attuned to the way this rubric represents, and narrowly defines, our discipline to a national audience” (n.p.). She and others (e.g., Johnson, 2014; Sharer et al., 2016) have called for more attention to large-scale assessment processes like accreditation. But few in our field have studied AAC&U’s assessment approach, which has proliferated as a method of campus assessment over the last decade. Though AAC&U publications do not provide statistics on the number of institutions that have used the VALUE rubrics for campus assessment, their publications and initiatives demonstrate that this context is one for which many have found the rubrics useful. In 2017, AAC&U established the VALUE Institute “to invite any state, higher education institution, or program seeking external validation of student learning to collect samples of student work artifacts to be scored by faculty members trained to use the VALUE rubrics” (Rhodes, 2021, p. 230; see AAC&U,
VALUE Institute. A 2018 VALUE Rubric Institutional Use survey indicates that respondents primarily used the VALUE rubrics for General Education assessment purposes (McConnell et al., 2019, p. 14). Additionally, the VALUE approach to assessment is approved by all regional accrediting agencies.

Furthermore, my experience participating in a General Education assessment event involving three VALUE rubrics in spring 2020 and spring 2021 (and talking with colleagues after) suggests that writing studies scholars may no longer be as enamored with the VALUE approach. This impression is supported by focus groups I facilitated with participating faculty assessors (see chapters four and five), as well as my experience listening to writing studies practitioners respond to the VALUE approach in workshops.

Given that some writing studies scholars have described the Written Communication VALUE Rubric as aligned with best practices in writing assessment (without closely comparing them), this chapter begins by first identifying central writing assessment principles represented in two widely cited position statements: CCCC’s (2006/2014) “Writing Assessment: A Position Statement” and NCTE/CWPA’s (2008) “White Paper on Writing Assessment in Colleges and Universities.”

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22 Although Kelly-Riley and Elliot’s (2021) inclusion of an essay authored by former VALUE executive director Terrel Rhodes in their edited collection, Improving Outcomes, signals that some scholars may still see the value of the approach—or are more open to dialoguing with VALUE folks.

23 In a virtual workshop hosted by AWAC, VALUE Institute Director Kate McConnell (2021) asked attendees to self-assess their familiarity with the VALUE rubrics. One prominent writing assessment scholar identified herself as a “skeptical practitioner,” to McConnell’s delight. Other attendees were more explicitly resistant to the VALUE rubrics. In a conference presentation of her own later that year, one writing assessment scholar critiqued AAC&U’s dataset disaggregating student performance on the Written Communication Rubric skills by race and ethnicity (see Poe, 2021). Poe called this dataset “really problematic” because the lower scores documented for Black students elide the “racist logics hidden in rubrics.”

24 While NCTE/CWPA call the document a “white paper,” it is also referred to as a “statement” that is “meant to help teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders articulate the general positions, values, and assumptions on writing assessment” that both organizations endorse.
reveals that these position statements represent local contexts as static containers (as does the ecological model of writing assessment described in chapter one) and stakeholders as generic bodies circulating to and from these containers. Students, in particular, are interpellated as “object[s] of the ‘grading system’” (Miller, 1991, p. 90), instead of active participants in making assessment happen. Furthermore, the documents’ representations of language treat it as a discrete code and language difference as in conflict with so-called standard written English. These representations of language and language difference index standard language ideology, which imagines diversity as a feature of different, discrete languages. In reality, however, diversity and difference are inevitable consequences of language use.

Following my analysis of the writing studies position statements, I track AAC&U’s representation of itself as a global organization committed to diversity and equity. This global representation is at odds with AAC&U’s reality as an organization comprised of primarily U.S. member institutions. Because the position statements referenced above are cited by AAC&U as providing inspiration for the creation of the Written Communication VALUE Rubric (see AAC&U, 2009c), I then turn to key AAC&U documents to examine how AAC&U represents its approach to assessment, in particular its representation of localism, as well as the extent to which this approach aligns with the writing assessment principles represented in the CCCC and NCTE/CWPA position statements. While the VALUE approach would appear to mostly align with the principles in the writing studies position statements, except for VALUE’s inattention to language/difference, I find significant tensions between how localism is represented in

Because the document includes a number of principles, like CCCC’s, and is organized in a similar way, I refer to it as a position statement, too.
the position statements and in AAC&U’s documents. As the epigraphs above suggest, these tensions reveal that AAC&U is shifting away from encouraging local adaptation of their rubrics and is instead recommending their use without modification.

It’s important to note that, in both the writing studies position statements and the AAC&U documents, I’m attending to representations of particular principles and concepts by examining word choices and other language features of these documents to draw conclusions about what these signify. These principles may or may not be carried out in practice by CCCC, NCTE/CWPA, AAC&U, or users of these documents. (In chapter four, I consider how AAC&U’s principles and approach are carried out in practice in a university’s General Education assessment event.) However, the documents I’m analyzing here are public-facing, and on well-trafficked websites; they may be some users’ first encounter with these organizations and with writing assessment. Additionally, as Tardy (2015, p. 245) points out, when people “repeatedly encounter particular representations of social relationships, those representations may eventually become normative and assumed; such assumptions guide or shape our future actions and interactions.” For example, the writing studies position statements’ representations of language, language diversity, localism, and student stakeholders will likely circulate along with these documents, which are frequently referred to in writing programs. They may even shape how those who interact with these documents see students, language difference, and more.

Writing/Assessment Principles Represented in Writing Studies Position Statements

The NCTE/CWPA (2008) white paper on writing assessment documents principles of writing assessment held by both organizations, as well as guidance on the
appropriate, fair, valid, and reliable uses of writing assessments. The CCCC (2006/2014) position statement delineates a number of similar principles and offers recommendations for employing them in different assessment contexts. I have reasoned that, as disciplinary position statements, these two frequently cited documents would generally represent writing studies’ beliefs about writing assessment. After all, CCCC position statements “are documents of the entire CCCC organization” that “cannot be originated by one individual” (CCCC, The process). They “result from the work of a CCCC Executive Committee-commissioned task force that researches a proposed issue, drafts and revises a position statement, and presents the revised position statement to the Executive Committee for its approval in order to represent the organization at large” (CCCC, The process). Additionally, I’m analyzing these two statements because the “Framing Language” section of the Written Communication VALUE Rubric references both documents, suggesting that AAC&U consulted them as inspiration for the rubric’s creation.

Assessment Principles

The following nine assessment principles are represented in both position statements:

- Writing assessment should positively influence teaching and learning
- Literacy is socially contextualized, therefore writing assessment should be, too
- Writing assessments should be attentive to local contexts (localism)
- Writing assessment should use multiple measures
- Writing assessment should be informed by recent research
- Writing assessment should reflect what scholars know about language use and language difference
• Student stakeholders should be involved in assessment
• Machine scoring is not a valid way to assess writing; standardized tests are not a valid way to assess writing
• Writing assessment needs to communicate with a variety of stakeholders

These principles are included alongside excerpts from each document that point to these principles in table 3.1 below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Principle</th>
<th>Example from CCCC “Writing Assessment: A Position Statement”</th>
<th>Example from NCTE/CWPA “White Paper on Writing Assessment”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing assessment should positively influence teaching and learning</td>
<td>“Writing assessment is useful primarily as a means of improving teaching and learning. The primary purpose of any assessment should govern its design, its implementation, and the generation and dissemination of its results.”</td>
<td>“Writing assessment should place priority on the improvement of teaching and learning.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy is socially contextualized, therefore writing assessment should be, too</td>
<td>“Best assessment practice engages students in contextualized, meaningful writing. . . . Additionally, assessment must be contextualized in terms of why, where, and for what purpose it is being undertaken; this context must also be clear to the students being assessed and to all stakeholders.”</td>
<td>“A preponderance of research argues that literacy and its teaching are socially contextualized and socially constructed dynamics, evolving as people, exigency, context, and other factors change. The varied language competencies and experiences with which students come to the classroom can sometimes conflict with what they are taught or told to value in school. The assessment of writing, therefore, must account for these contextual and social elements of writing pedagogy and literacy.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing assessments should be attentive to local contexts (localism)</td>
<td>“Best assessment practice is undertaken in response to local goals, not external pressures. Even when external forces require assessment, the local community must assert control of the assessment process, including selection of the assessment instrument and criteria.”</td>
<td>“The principles of effective writing assessment that can take the form of classroom tests and grades or extracurricular exams measuring student writing ability are highly contextual, and should be adapted or modified in accordance with local needs, issues, purposes, and concerns of stakeholders.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing assessment should use multiple measures</td>
<td>“Best assessment practice uses multiple measures.”</td>
<td>“Writing assessment should use multiple measures and engage multiple perspectives to make decisions that improve teaching and learning.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing assessment should be informed by recent research</td>
<td>“Assessment programs should be solidly grounded in the latest research on learning, writing, and assessment.”</td>
<td>“Writing assessment should be informed by current scholarship and research in assessment.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing assessment should reflect what scholars know about language use and language difference</td>
<td>“Best assessment practice respects language variety and diversity and assesses writing on the basis of effectiveness for readers, acknowledging that as purposes vary, criteria will as well.”</td>
<td>“Writing assessment should recognize diversity in language. . . . Assessments and the decisions made from them should account for students’ rights to their own languages.”</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student stakeholders should be involved in assessment</td>
<td>“Best assessment practice includes assessment by peers, instructors, and the student writer himself or herself.”</td>
<td>“Writing assessment should include appropriate input from and information and feedback for students.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machine scoring is not a valid way to assess writing; standardized tests are not a valid way to assess writing</td>
<td>“Best assessment practice is direct assessment by human readers. . . . Automated assessment programs do not respond as human readers. While they may promise consistency, they distort the very nature of writing as a complex and context-rich interaction between people.”</td>
<td>“A single off-the-shelf or standardized test should never be used to make important decisions about students, teachers, or curriculum.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing assessment needs to communicate with a variety of stakeholders</td>
<td>“[A]ssessment must be contextualized in terms of why, where, and for what purpose it is being undertaken; this context must also be clear to the students being assessed and to all stakeholders.”</td>
<td>“Writing assessment should be based on continuous conversations with as many stakeholders as possible.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many of these principles are unsurprising for reasons I’ll briefly address here. A central focus of our field is linking theory and practice to improve teaching and learning, so it’s no surprise that CCCC and NCTE/CWPA argue that writing assessment should be tied to these efforts. And, of course, our field, like other fields, is invested in keeping practice up to date with research. A number of scholars have critiqued the rise of machine scoring and large-scale assessments, arguing that such trends fail to account for literacy as a social practice that requires human readers and multiple measures to assess (see, e.g., Anson & Perelman, 2017; Ericsson & Haswell, 2006; NCTE, 2013; Perelman, 2012a, 2012b). Four of these principles, however, deserve more attention below: (a) Writing assessments should be attentive to local contexts (localism), (b) writing assessment should reflect what scholars know about language use and language difference, (c) student stakeholders should be involved in assessment, and (d) writing assessment needs to communicate with a variety of stakeholders. As I demonstrate below, in their representations of localism, CCCC and NCTE/CWPA treat local contexts as containers that are positioned as in opposition to the global. Languages are treated as discrete entities and language difference is associated with that which is not standard written English, instead of imagined as an inevitable consequence of all language use. Students and other stakeholders are imagined as abstract, seemingly homogeneous groups, making it harder to see how they might meaningfully participate in (re)shaping assessment.

But first, because these position statements address the assessment of writing, and because AAC&U has referred to these statements in developing their own approach to assessing written communication, in the following section, I attend to how each
document attempts to link these assessment principles to principles about writing and writing development.

Writing Principles

Because these position statements address the assessment of writing, and because AAC&U has referred to these statements in developing their own approach to assessing written communication, I attend to how each document attempts to link these assessment principles to principles about writing and writing development. These attempts, noted in table 3.2 below, were less common. Indeed, only two writing principles stand out in the statements: (a) Writing is social and contextual and (b) writing ability involves a variety of skills and is not a stable construct.

Table 3.2 Writing Principles in Both Position Statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Principle</th>
<th>Excerpt from CCCC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing is social and contextual</td>
<td>“Writing is by definition social. Learning to write entails learning to accomplish a range of purposes for a range of audiences in a range of settings.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“…the very nature of writing as a complex and context-rich interaction between people”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing ability involves a variety of skills and is not a stable construct</td>
<td>“Any individual’s writing ability is a sum of a variety of skills employed in a diversity of contexts, and individual ability fluctuates unevenly among these varieties.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Learning to write better involves engaging in the processes of drafting, reading, and revising; in dialogue, reflections, and formative feedback with peers and teachers; and in formal”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Excerpt from NCTE/CWPA “White Paper on Writing Assessment”
Perhaps it is unsurprising that the writers of these statements do not do more to refer specifically to what our field’s research indicates about writing and writing ability. As position statements, their primary audience is likely practitioners in the field of English Studies who, the statement writers clearly hope, are keeping abreast of current research in the field. The CCCC statement’s Introduction concludes by recommending writing assessment “should be solidly grounded in the latest research on language learning as well as accepted best assessment practices.” Principle five expands on this point: “Assessment programs should be solidly grounded in the latest research on learning, writing, and assessment.” By consequence:

Anyone charged with the responsibility of designing an assessment program must be cognizant of the relevant research and must stay abreast of developments in the field. The theory and practice of writing assessment is continually informed by significant publications in professional journals and by presentations at regional and national conferences. The easy availability of this research to practitioners makes ignorance of its content reprehensible.

The strong language in this section indicates that the authors of this document expect professionals in the field to prioritize “stay[ing] abreast of developments in the field” as these developments are easily accessible in publications and conferences. This strong language also treats research findings/best practices as things to be transmitted to practitioners who then adopt them unchanged. Such a perspective contrasts with the knowledge mobilization framework undergirding this study, which assumes practices and knowledge are transformed as they are moved to other contexts.
Another reason the statements may not refer in more detail to writing principles is that they are meant to be flexible, adaptable documents. Much like the CWPA’s Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition, they are boundary documents. That is, they are

both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites. . . . They have different meanings in different social worlds but their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them recognizable, a means of translation. (Star & Griesemer, 1989, p. 393)

In short, boundary documents like position statements and outcomes statements are recognizable as such in different contexts, even if they are read differently by different readers. And they are meant to be adapted, re-tooled, to local contexts. Indeed, these position statements are frequently invoked in writing programs as teachers and administrators (re)consider their own assessment processes.

To help them endure, the documents’ authors can’t refer in detail to “the latest research on learning, writing, and assessment” (CCCC, 2006/2014). Still, their lack of specificity about what we know about writing and writing development makes it easier for organizations like AAC&U to position their approach to assessment as grounded in our field’s knowledge even as AAC&U inevitably transforms this knowledge in significant ways. As Fenwick and Farrell (2012) point out, citing Bakhtin and Appadurai, texts and words are “reconstituted with differently inflected meanings as they circulate through new locations” (p. 3). They add, “Knowledge is inscribed within objects such as texts, tools, technologies, and bodies. It emerges in new ways as these objects circulate
among different activities, making/dissolving connections with one another,
making/dissolving their own boundaries, and mutating as they themselves are mediated in local practices” (p. 3). As this chapter will demonstrate, certain principles in these position statements, especially the principle of localism, emerge in new ways in key AAC&U documents.

**Representations of Localism**

In chapter one, I argued that writing assessment scholarship’s treatment of the local, as exemplified in the now-dominant ecological model of writing assessment, reifies it as a particular physical space, a container, cut off from what appears to be outside of it. Indeed, in her brief history of the term *location* in writing studies scholarship, Clary-Lemon (2015) notes that its “definition has, at differing times, involved . . . ecologies of writing,” among other terms (p. 103). Although her *Keywords* entry indicates that location has expanded from a purely site-based metaphor to one that also encompasses the material and discursive (p. 104), locations still tend to be treated as determining particular literate practices. This problematic assumption ignores how people’s practices (re)make locations and grants more power to locations (or ecologies) than the people who (re)make them through their practices (see Pennycook, 2010, p. 98), including their practices of assessment.

Unsurprisingly, both position statements subscribe to the principle of localism defined in chapter one: “the widely held belief that writing assessments should be among other things, locally sensitive and locally controlled” (Gomes & Ma, 2019, p. 111). What I want to focus on here is how the statements’ representations of localism treat it as a static container and why this metaphor is problematic in practice. An example from
classroom research helps illustrate this problem: In their review of educational research, Leander et al. (2010, pp. 331-335) find that the classroom-as-container metaphor, which treats the classroom as a static place in which learning occurs, dominates. This metaphor effectively precludes the possibility of learning happening elsewhere. As Leander et al. put it, “Classrooms, or classroom-like situations, maintain their abilities to corral and organize the local in our analyses of learning” (p. 335). Leander et al. understand “learning to be not contained within individual minds [nor individual classrooms], but rather distributed across persons, tools, and learning environments” (p. 330). To understand learning (or, to the point of this project, assessment) it is crucial to attend to the distributed people, tools, and environments that make learning/assessment happen.

The NCTE/CWPA statement’s first reference to localism makes the argument that writing assessment is “highly contextual, and should be adapted or modified in accordance with local needs, issues, purposes, and concerns of stakeholders.” This reference to localism would appear to move beyond the local-as-container trope described in chapter one because it suggests that different “needs, issues, purposes, and concerns” (and not particular spaces imagined as discrete/stable) require locally-sensitive and contextual methods of assessment. However, other references to the local evoke particular spaces. For example, the white paper refers to “students present in the classroom and local communities.” Elsewhere, the white paper encourages teachers to “engage in dialogue with one another locally” and administrators to “consider the local classroom conditions students will be entering after they have been placed into a writing course, or the places in the local communities from which students come.” Here, NCTE/CWPA appears to allude to two containers: the classroom-as-container (identified
by Leander et al. [2010] as prominent in education research) and the community-as-container. This issue with this construction is that, very often, the assumptions accompanying it are that particular languages are identified as more or less appropriate/common in one container and, by consequence, it becomes harder to pay attention to language practices. Instead, as I discuss more below, languages are figured as discrete codes that do not mix, a perception that is at odds with our daily lived experiences as language users. What’s more, local here acts as a stand-in for particular, emplaced communities without regard to time or the mobility of bodies other than students entering and leaving particular classrooms and programs. Note, too, that there is no acknowledgement of students circulating back to “local communities.” Students are simply imagined arriving to classrooms and programs.

Few references to the local in the NCTE/CWPA statement refer to assessments specifically. In one reference, the writers note, “While writing assessment should be locally grown and implemented, those designing, implementing, and validating writing assessments should also stay informed of current developments in the fields of writing assessment, composition theory, and literacy studies.” The use of the transition marker while implies that the development of locally sensitive assessments could be seen as at odds with keeping up with current best practices in these fields. Best practices, it seems, are imagined as part of the global coming into contact with the local, an assumption that ignores how practices are always developed locally and how knowledge is transformed as it is used.

References to the local in the CCCC position statement also sometimes figure the local as an emplaced container. Furthermore, they, too, imply that the writers are
imagining particular entities at odds with each other. For example, these lines from the CCCC statement position “local goals” in opposition to “external pressures”:

**Best assessment practice is undertaken in response to local goals, not external pressures.** Even when external forces require assessment, the local community must assert control of the assessment process, including selection of the assessment instrument and criteria.

By “external forces,” the statement evokes entities like accreditation agencies. The “local community” (notably a singular community) referred to in the second sentence is named in a way that also figures it as abstract and yet stable, as is “the local population” CCCC imagines when they recommend “creating assessments that are sensitive to the language varieties in use among the local population and sensitive to the context-specific outcomes being assessed.” Curiously, CCCC refers to “language varieties” (plural) but “the local population” (singular), a point to which I’ll return below. Other uses of locally suggest that CCCC is associating the local with particular bounded places. For example, in fleshing out the principle “Perceptions of writing are shaped by the methods and criteria used to assess writing,” CCCC emphasizes the importance of assessments in particular “environments” being “locally determined”: “There is no test which can be used in all environments for all purposes, and the best assessment for any group of students must be locally determined and may well be locally designed.” The use of “environments” evokes particular places—“[t]he individual writing program, institution, or consortium” that CCCC names in the previous sentence—that are located in particular physical spaces without regard to their history or the individuals that comprise them. Indeed, as I argue next, various stakeholders in both position statements are represented as generic
(frequently unmodified) bodies, which circulate to and from the particular local containers just discussed. These representations elide the bodies who participate in assessment and erase the labor of key stakeholders, especially students and WPAs.

**Representations of Stakeholders**

Both position statements reference a variety of stakeholders and nearly always in a vague, generic manner. Students are the most frequently referenced stakeholders in both documents. And yet, *students* is largely used as an unmodified word (thirty times in the CCCC statement and twenty-one times in the NCTE/CWPA statement), suggesting that the documents’ writers are leaving particular institutions and programs to imagine their own student populations/bodies as they adapt these principles or that the writers were only able to see students in abstract, generic terms as they wrote about them. As several scholars have pointed out, writing studies has a long history of ignoring students’ voices and embodied experiences (Sullivan, 2012, pp. 365-367), figuring students as “presexual, preeconomic, prepolitical” individuals (Miller, 1991, p. 87) and abstract, transhistorical individuals—and representing student writing as divorced from the sociomaterial practices that are understood to shape professional scholars’ writing (see Horner, 2000, pp. 31-50). Matsuda (2006) argues that the generic notion of the student is, in fact, a raced, classed, aged, and gendered notion sustained by composition’s history of containing linguistic and other differences. Such students are not imagined to bring much into composition classrooms, where they are interpellated as “object[s] of the ‘grading system’” (Miller, 1991, p. 90). Indeed, the CCCC statement refers to “students being assessed/tested” three times, invoking students as acted on by assessments instead of as active participants in making assessment happen. Other references to students imagine
them as bodies occupying certain physical spaces—“students present in the classroom and local communities” (NCTE/CWPA) and “students in a multi-section course or majors graduating from a department” (CCCC). These latter representations of students, I argue, make it harder for assessment practitioners and researchers to involve students more intentionally in rethinking the design of assessments.

Other often mentioned stakeholders include teachers and, simply, stakeholders, the latter group being labeled in a number of equally vague ways: “a variety of stakeholders,” “as many stakeholders as possible,” “other stakeholders,” “all stakeholders involved,” “all stakeholders,” and “any stakeholders” (see table 3.3 below).

Administrators and assessment designers receive comparably fewer mentions. The CCCC statement acknowledges “anyone charged with the responsibility of designing an assessment program,” which could encompass WPAs. The NCTE/CWPA statement uses similarly vague phrases: “those designing, implementing, and validating writing assessments” and “those involved in writing assessment.” WPAs specifically are never explicitly referenced in either document. The erasure of the WPA is significant, for they oversee writing program assessment (and are often recruited to participate in campus assessment).

Table 3.3 Stakeholders Referenced in the Position Statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Number of Times Referenced in CCCC Position Statement</th>
<th>Number of Times Referenced in NCTE/CWPA White Paper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student/s (unmodified)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Count 1</td>
<td>Count 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students (modified)</strong></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- student writer/s (9)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “students being assessed/tested” (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “any group of students” (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “improperly placed students” (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “student population/s” (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “students in a multi-section course or majors graduating from a department” (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “second language writers” (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “students whose home dialect is not the dominant dialect” (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teachers</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stakeholders (generic)</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “all stakeholders”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “a variety of stakeholders”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “as many stakeholders as possible”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “other stakeholders”</td>
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<tr>
<td>- “all stakeholders involved”</td>
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<tr>
<td>- “all stakeholders”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “any stakeholders”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legislators</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Administrators</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutions</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High school writing teachers</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parents</strong></td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individuals</strong></td>
<td>–</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Curriculum designers  –  1

Assessment program designers/decision-makers  3
“anyone charged with the responsibility of designing an assessment program” (1)
“decision-makers” (2)
“those designing, implementing, and validating writing assessments” (1)
“those involved in writing assessment” (1)

Human readers  3  –

Local communities  125
(“the local population”)
2
(“local communities”)

Representations of Language & Language Diversity

Content analysis of documents can also reveal what is left unsaid or underattended to, as Huckin (2002) demonstrates. In both position statements, language more broadly and language difference in particular are quickly glossed. What’s more, when language is addressed, it is treated as a discrete entity. Identifying this treatment of language is important because, as Pennycook puts it, “to understand languages as separate, countable entities is to operate with a very particular language ideology” (p. 91), one that is at odds with our lived experiences with languages as “mixed, hybrid and drawing on multiple resources” (p. 129; see also Canagarajah, 2013): standard language ideology. Language ideologies are “representations, whether explicit or implicit, that construe the intersection of language and human beings in a social world” (Woolard, 1998, p. 3).26 As I’ll argue below, the features in the position statements index, or point

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25 The CCCC position statement included other references to “communities” that I do not count here because they are used differently, to refer to writing programs/institutions as “a community of interpreters,” “the community of faculty and students in the class,” and “programs and departments . . . as communities of professionals.”

26 See chapter five for more on language ideologies.
standard language ideology—the ideology informing notions of languages as discrete entities as well as privileging so-called standard written English over other language varieties. Lesley Milroy suggests that “the chief characteristic of a standard [language] ideology is the belief that there is one and only one correct spoken form of the language, modelled [sic] on a single correct written form” (Milroy, 1999, p. 174, as cited in Davila, 2012, p. 184). The alternative to treating languages as entities is to focus on language as the always emerging outcome of particular social practices (Pennycook, p. 125). Doing so helps us avoid falling into the trap of simply gesturing to various “contextual and social elements,” as NCTE/CWPA does, which are typically seen as influencing languages (discrete entities) or language as a “universal, noncount (‘mass’) noun” (Horner, 2016, p. 59). As we’ll see below, even when the position statements appear to allude to language practices and to advocate for language difference, they treat languages as discrete, stable entities, indexing standard language ideology.

The NCTE/CWPA statement opens by attempting to link the dynamic, “socially contextualized and socially constructed” nature of literacy, language and writing assessment. Language, however, is referenced only obliquely here and throughout the document, as it is in this opening section:

The varied language competencies and experiences with which students come to the classroom can sometimes conflict with what they are taught or told to value in school. The assessment of writing, therefore, must account for these contextual and social elements of writing pedagogy and literacy.

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27 See chapter two for a discussion of indexicality.
Here, students’ “language competencies” appear to be treated as more stable than they are. Students “come to the classroom” with them, phrasing that implies competencies are portable entities brought to the classroom space, unchanged. This assumption, too, is in keeping with the local-as-container metaphor that I described above. In reality, however, as the knowledge mobilization framework theorized in chapter two illustrates, competencies and knowledge are transformed in use. The above excerpt suggests that students’ “language competencies or experiences . . . can sometimes conflict with what [students] are taught or told to value in school.” Yet students’ competencies are not so much stable entities in conflict with the imagined classroom-as-container—a metaphor that dominates educational research (Leander et al., 2010) and composition textbooks (Bowden, 1993). Rather, they are the “always-emerging products of practices” (Horner, 2016, p. 66). Focusing on practices, as opposed to languages-as-stable-codes, helps us avoid ascribing agency to competencies or languages. To suggest otherwise is to ignore the agency of students as language users, as Horner argues.

Representations of language diversity in the NCTE/CWPA statement treat it as a similarly abstract, stable phenomenon and treat value as inherent to language diversity. Elsewhere in the document, the writers note:

**Writing assessment should recognize diversity in language.** The methods and language that teachers and administrators use to make decisions and engage students in writing, reading, responding, and revising activities should incorporate meaningfully the multiple values and ways of expressing knowledge by students present in the classroom and local communities. Assessments and the decisions made from them should account for students’ rights to their own languages (see
the Guideline approved by the Conference on College Composition and Communication in 1974 and reaffirmed in 2003).

The writers appear to associate particular “values” and, perhaps, modes (“ways of expressing knowledge”) with language varieties. Common treatments of language tend to assign language varieties particular values, despite the fact that “designations of prestige [or value] are not inherent in the dialect itself, but are externally imposed, and the prestige [or value] of a dialect shifts as the power relationships of the speakers shift” (CCCC, 1974, p. 5). While the CCCC statement referenced above, Students’ Right to Their Own Language (SRTOL), acknowledges that people assign values to language varieties, SRTOL nevertheless “adopt[s] an approach to language varieties as stable and discrete entities” (Horner, 2016, p. 65). SRTOL, after all, defines a dialect as “a variety of a language used by some definable group” (CCCC, 1974, p. 3). By associating language varieties with particular groups, SRTOL (and by consequence, the NCTE/CWPA statement that invokes SRTOL) demonstrates attention to what the linguist Michael Halliday calls glossodiversity, “the diversity of languages,” while ignoring the potential of semiodiversity, “the diversity of meanings” that might emerge from what appears to be the same language (see Pennycook, 2010, p. 97). This attention to glossodiversity, I argue, accompanies the assumption that languages are discrete codes that are inherently valuable. As I’ll argue below, this thinking ignores how values assigned to languages and other literate resources can shift.

Interestingly, in the passage cited above, the NCTE/CWPA statement notes that the “language that teachers and administrators use to make decisions and engage students in writing,” and other activities should “incorporate” the values associated with various
language varieties. Language here is treated as a notably singular, “universal, noncount
(‘mass’) noun” (Horner, p. 59). And the corresponding values attributed to it are
assumed to be fixed. But, as Rebecca Lorimer Leonard (2017a) has pointed out, the
values assigned to literate resources can shift—sometimes even from moment to moment.
Furthermore, literate resources are not inherently valuable commodities (though they are
often treated as such). Rather, “it is in fact the mobility of [these] resources—a fact often
celebrated—that causes the resources’ value to shift” (Lorimer Leonard, 2017a, p. 163).

CCCC’s position statement refers to language more often, attempting to weave it
into multiple principles. For example, in the framing introduction: Assessments “should
be solidly grounded in the latest research on language learning.” And under the principle,
“Best assessment practice is direct assessment by human readers,” the statement notes:
“Assessment that isolates students and forbids discussion and feedback from others
conflicts with what we know about language use and the benefits of social interaction
during the writing process.” This section goes on to explain that human readers (not
machine-scoring) should be employed to assess writing. While this statement appears to
attend more to language practices (“language use”) than “language minority group[s]”
(NCTE/CWPA), the CCCC statement still relegates “language variety and diversity” to
its own section:

**Best assessment practice respects language variety and diversity and assesses
writing on the basis of effectiveness for readers, acknowledging that as
purposes vary, criteria will as well.** Standardized tests that rely more on
identifying grammatical and stylistic errors than authentic rhetorical choices

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28 See Cooper (2014), MacDonald (2007), and Pennycook (2010) for alternative treatments of
language. A glance at the topic index for our field’s flagship conference (CCCC) suggests that
our field sees language as something separate from other topics of interest (MacDonald, 2007, pp.
593-595) and is something we have primarily “associate[d] with problems” (p. 595). The
NCTE/CWPA statement still follows this trend, arguing that assessments “should guard against
any disproportionate social effects on any language minority group.”
disadvantage students whose home dialect is not the dominant dialect. Assessing authentic acts of writing simultaneously raises performance standards and provides multiple avenues to success. Thus students are not arbitrarily punished for linguistic differences that in some contexts make them more, not less, effective communicators. Furthermore, assessments that are keyed closely to an American cultural context may disadvantage second language writers. The CCCC Statement on Second Language Writing and Writers calls on us “to recognize the regular presence of second-language writers in writing classes, to understand their characteristics, and to develop instructional and administrative practices that are sensitive to their linguistic and cultural needs.” Best assessment practice responds to this call by creating assessments that are sensitive to the language varieties in use among the local population and sensitive to the context-specific outcomes being assessed.

The phrase “language variety and diversity” implies that, by variety, the statement is referring to countable numbers of different languages and may be imagining diversity of languages (glossodiversity), while ignoring diversity of meanings (semiodiversity). The use of “language varieties” (plural) at the end of the passage confirms this. Furthermore, “linguistic differences” (as opposed to students) are ascribed the agency to “in some contexts make [students, specifically multi-lingual/-dialectical ones] more, not less, effective communicators.” Finally, CCCC aligns this statement with another CCCC statement that urges teachers and administrators to “develop . . . practices that are sensitive to [second-language writers’] linguistic and cultural needs.” CCCC does not, however, acknowledge that these needs and characteristics may be in flux, depending on particular contexts.

Both position statements imply that difference is something that only languages and dialects other than standard written English can achieve. Their focus is on what the linguist Michael Halliday calls “glossodiversity—the diversity of languages” (see Pennycook, p. 97). Such framing treats languages as “entities that exist outside human relations and interactions” (Pennycook, p. 105). They ignore “semiodiversity—the
diversity of meanings” (Pennycook, p. 97). In short, the writing assessment position statements treat diversity as a feature of different languages (glossodiversity) and not an inevitable consequence of language use, no matter the particular language (semiodiversity).

While CCCC’s position statement notes that the “guiding principles apply to assessment conducted in any setting,” the statement ends with a section with recommendations for these specific assessment contexts: classroom assessment, placement, proficiency or exit assessment, program assessment, and school admission. They do not, however, include a section on General Education/campus assessment initiatives like the one this dissertation studies. Program assessment is the context that is closest to General Education/campus assessment, but the CCCC statement’s description of this context suggests that their recommendations are for “evaluations of students in a large group, such as students in a multi-section course or majors graduating from a department.” Throughout this section, the document refers to “programs and departments,” suggesting that they are not thinking of the kind of interdepartmental assessment that General Education assessment involves.29 CCCC does note in this section that “random sampling of students can often provide large-scale information,” which is essentially what the General Education assessment event I studied does.

**AAC&U’s VALUE Approach to Assessment**

Before analyzing AAC&U’s representation of its approach to campus assessment, I first analyze the organization’s representation of itself on its homepage. This is

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29 Because MMU’s Written Communication courses are almost entirely composition courses, the spring 2021 Gen Ed assessment could be seen as similar to program assessment even though that is not its purpose and assessors from outside of the English department did participate.
important to do because organizational websites are often people’s first interaction with an organization and its principles. What’s more, how an organization represents itself on its website may or may not align with its actual practices. Noticing these (mis)alignments provide opportunities for rethinking organizational principles and practices. AAC&U recently renamed itself and updated its website in an attempt to represent itself as a global, international organization, committed to diversity and equity. But, as I’ll demonstrate below, this representation is at odds with AAC&U’s reality as an organization with a predominantly U.S. membership.

**Shifting Brand Identity**

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) was founded in 1915 as a national organization committed to advancing undergraduate liberal education. In early 2022, AAC&U changed its name to the American Association of Colleges & Universities. The subtle rearrangement of words in the new name is meant to reflect AAC&U’s shifting brand identity. A press release on their website quotes the president of the organization, Lynn Pasquerella, remarking on the change:

> Our efforts to advance the vitality and public standing of liberal education by making quality and equity the foundations for excellence in service to democracy are strengthened and enriched by the participation of AAC&U members located outside the United States. Our new name formally recognizes this growing global involvement in the association. (AAC&U, 2022)

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30 AAC&U is funded by dues from member institutions, although they do not specify the cost for institutions to join (see AAC&U, *Membership FAQs*). They are also funded by private/institutional donations and grants from, for example, the Lumina Foundation.
In other words, the organization’s new name is meant to acknowledge higher education’s shifting global landscape and AAC&U’s desire to appear more inclusive. By positioning international member institutions as “strengthen[ing] and enrich[ing]” the organization, AAC&U treats the international as inherently of value to the organization. In other words, there is no acknowledgment here of what AAC&U has done/will do to support international members. Pasquerella’s nod to “members located outside the United States” treats this global landscape as one marked by distant physical locations (in keeping with the container model analyzed above and in chapter one) while failing to acknowledge the globalizing work/practices ongoing in the United States. What’s more, by mentioning “quality and equity” together, AAC&U plays into long-standing anxieties about their relationship: equity is often associated with access (as it is on AAC&U’s website), which has its own uneasy relationship to quality (see Fox, 1993). As Tom Fox (1993) has argued, discussions about improving standards (read: quality) very often assume that this will automatically improve students’ access to higher education. However, this cultural trope ignores how discussions about quality (read: standards), which are an easy way to rally educators and policy makers, obscure the role of racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, and more in preventing access to higher education (see Fox, pp. 42-43). This trope is also visible in AAC&U’s new framing of its logo, which I analyze below.

In this same press release, AAC&U states that the ampersand in its logo (which has been part of the name since 1995) is now meant “to emphasize the inclusive nature of its institutional membership” (perhaps here they’re referring to the growing number of international members) and symbolize the organization’s “ongoing commitment to inclusion as a core value guiding its work.” As part of their (re)commitment to inclusion,
AAC&U also redesigned their website, which merits a discussion here, too, for it highlights the organization’s understanding of the relationship between inclusion, equity, diversity, and access.

On the redesigned website, the ampersand in AAC&U is featured prominently in corners of webpages and enlarged in the organization’s name itself. According to the press release, AAC&U intends to “mak[e] this symbol of inclusion the centerpiece of its new brand identity” (AAC&U, 2022). The ampersand, which has always been a part of the logo, is invested with new value and meaning (standing in for inclusion) in this rebranding. This rebranding is reflected in the “Newsroom” tab on the website, which includes a variety of public statements in response to current events (e.g., statements in support of Ukraine, responses to the Derek Chauvin trial verdict, and more). Notably, the majority of these statements were produced in 2020 and 2021. Only a handful of statements from 2017 and 2018 exist on this page and they, too, would appear to support AAC&U’s brand identity as an inclusive, equitable organization (see AAC&U, Newsroom). Older statements that don’t appear to align with this brand identity may have been taken down or archived elsewhere, giving the impression that AAC&U is an organization without a long history and making it harder to trace its shifting priorities.

Analysis of their webpage reveals AAC&U’s tactic of employing diversity, equity, and quality together, even conflating these terms. On an “About AAC&U” webpage, AAC&U has embedded a video clip of president Lynn Pasquerella in which she says:

One of the greatest strengths of higher education is derived from its remarkable diversity. This diversity also accounts for the strength of AAC&U. Rather than
represent the interests of a particular stakeholder group or institutional type, AAC&U supports the educational mission of colleges and universities across the global landscape of higher education. What unites us across our differences is a shared commitment to advancing the vitality and public standing of liberal education, grounded in equity and quality as essential to individual student success and to a thriving democracy. AAC&U’s initiatives, events, and resources are designed to facilitate innovation and collaboration across a vast network, both inside and outside of the academy. Working together, we can ensure that all students, regardless of where they study or what they major in have access to excellence in higher education. (AAC&U, About AAC&U)

*Diversity* remains undefined here and is identified as an inherent strength in higher education. Discussions of access, as Fox (1993) might predict, emerge alongside *quality*, *equity*, and *diversity*, and *equity* and *quality* may even be conflated here. As Fox reminds us, “access to academic and economic privilege is contingent upon meeting ‘standards’” or quality measures (p. 41). But promoting the idea that access will naturally follow if standards are met elides “the powerful forces of racism, sexism, elitism, heterosexism [and more] that continue to operate despite the students’ mastery of standards” (pp. 42-43). Sara Ahmed (2012) demonstrates that it is the mobility of terms like *diversity* (and, I would add, *equity*) that make them so prone to overuse in contexts like this one. In institutional contexts like universities, diversity workers learn to strategically attach *diversity* to other words (in this case, *quality*) and places (in this case, the landscape of higher education writ large) that are already seen as valuable (Ahmed, p. 75). And no matter how “diversity is used, it seems to be used as a way of accruing value, as what
adds value to something. Perhaps diversity creates something by adding value” (Ahmed, p. 58). AAC&U’s generic invocation of these terms make them appear to be, or appear to be in support of, a variety of good things—diversity, equity, accessibility—that are undeniably, in their framing, part of a “thriving democracy.”

Attempts to link quality and equity appear frequently on this central page. AAC&U’s brief mission statement “is to advance the vitality and public standing of liberal education by making quality and equity the foundations for excellence in undergraduate education in service to democracy.” An “Our Vision” section immediately below the mission ties “equity and inclusion” to a “vision of educational excellence . . . focused on the learning all students need for success in an uncertain future and for addressing the compelling issues we face as a democracy and as a global community.” This vision may be aspirational, however. While AAC&U appears to be expanding their reach as a more globally oriented organization, their membership does not yet reflect this new vision. AAC&U lists several hundred U.S. members (colleges, universities, and entities like MLA and APA), but only twenty-eight international members (see AAC&U, AAC&U Members).

What is troubling about AAC&U’s use of terms like diversity, equity, inclusion, and their references to “the global [read: international] landscape of higher education” is that “global engagement and diversity are put forth as important values while issues of linguistic diversity, support for international students, or multilingualism are often largely ignored,” as is the case on many U.S. college campuses and even on campuses with a
marked international focus (Tardy, 2015, p. 246). Indeed, nowhere on AAC&U’s website are language diversity or linguistically diverse students referenced. What’s more, AAC&U’s generic invocations of diversity, equity, inclusion, and global—terms they know others will likely see as inherently valuable—obscure the work they would need to do as an organization to become genuinely global/international in scope and equitable/inclusive in practice.

The VALUE Approach to Assessment

In 2005, AAC&U launched the Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) public advocacy initiative (see AAC&U, Valid). VALUE is AAC&U’s “clever acronym” for their “campus-based assessment approach” (AAC&U, Valid). The Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) project was initiated in 2007 as part of LEAP and in response to a 2006 report from the Secretary of Education’s Commission on the Future of Higher Education, also known as the Spellings Report. Influenced by No Child Left Behind legislation, the 2006 report called for using standardized tests to hold institutions accountable for student learning (Rhodes, 2016, p. 37).

AAC&U does not let readers of their publications or visitors to their website forget VALUE’s origins as an alternative to the standardized test movement. As VALUE’s Executive Director Kate McConnell explains in a video on the webpage, the VALUE initiative arose in response to “a very particular political and educational context

31 While space does not permit an extended discussion of this here, it’s worth noting that the term diversity is also often used to obscure class differences and the role that capitalism plays in this erasure (see Michaels, 2006).
32 Kate McConnell, VALUE’s Executive Director, uses this phrase in a video on the website that introduces the VALUE approach (see AAC&U, Valid).
in the mid-2000s as more and more individuals, from parents and policymakers to students themselves, began to question the value—no pun intended—of a college degree.” McConnell then briefly historicizes the Spellings Report, which called for colleges and universities to provide evidence of students’ learning upon graduation. McConnell says, “Educators generally agreed with this sentiment. Showing that students have learned because of their higher education is critically important.” While the Spellings Report looked to readily available standardized tests to demonstrate learning, AAC&U capitalized on the moment to create an alternative: the VALUE approach. In prominent letters on the webpage introducing VALUE is AAC&U’s description in a nutshell: “VALUE is an authentic approach to assessment designed to articulate and measure the skills, abilities, and dispositions that students need and that parents, policymakers, and employers demand” (AAC&U, Valid). While no evidence is cited for the claim that VALUE measures skills that institutions of higher education, educators, employers, and policymakers find valuable, AAC&U frequently claims that their assessment approach measures widely desirable skills.

There are several components to the VALUE approach to campus assessment that are mentioned repeatedly in AAC&U publications and which were employed at MMU:

- Student artifacts produced in courses at the institution are collected and scored
- Faculty assessors who are teaching these courses are recruited to score student artifacts
- Faculty go through a brief training in which they practice scoring several student artifacts, discuss their scores, and in so doing are calibrated with the VALUE

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33 There is another option: institutions can pay to submit student artifacts to the VALUE Institute for scoring by “external raters” trained to use the rubrics.
rubrics.

- The VALUE rubrics, which I contextualize below, are used to score student artifacts.

**The VALUE Rubrics**

There are currently sixteen VALUE rubrics. In promotional materials, AAC&U repeatedly mentions that the VALUE rubrics were developed by interdisciplinary teams of faculty experts and then “field tested by faculty on over 150 campuses across the country” (AAC&U, VALUE FAQs). Each rubric is a double-sided document: one side includes a definition for the broad outcome being assessed, a “Framing Language” section, and a “Glossary” of certain terms and concepts used in the rubric; the other side of the document is the actual rubric. On the rubric side, the definition for the outcome is again reproduced. Each rubric divides the broader outcome (e.g., Written Communication) into parts that can be assessed separately (e.g., Context of and Purpose for Writing, Content Development, Genre and Disciplinary Conventions, Sources and Evidence, and Control of Syntax and Mechanics). Each rubric has four columns with the following descriptors: “Capstone” (associated with score 4), “Milestones” (scores 3 and 2), and “Benchmark” (score of 1). This design is intentional and meant to reflect “VALUE’s assets-based versus deficit-based approach to scoring” (McConnell & Rhodes, 2017, p. 27). As McConnell and Rhodes emphasize, “The VALUE rubrics were purposefully designed to reflect an assets-based—versus deficit-focused—approach to

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34 The rubrics assess these sixteen outcomes: Inquiry and Analysis, Critical Thinking, Creative Thinking, Written Communication, Oral Communication, Reading, Quantitative Literacy, Information Literacy, Teamwork, Problem Solving, Civic Engagement—Local and Global, Intercultural Knowledge and Competence, Ethical Reasoning, Foundations and Skills for Lifelong Learning, Global Learning, and Integrative Learning. They are available for download at https://www.aacu.org/initiatives/value-initiative/value-rubrics.
assessing student learning (i.e., *let’s focus on what students can do and build from that solid base*)” (p. 26).\(^{35}\) In training materials and publications, AAC&U reminds faculty assessors to “start at the top of the scale with the assumption that each student artifact has the potential to show evidence of the highest level of performance” (McConnell et al., 2019, pp. 28-29). AAC&U’s focus on asset-based assessment is aligned with dominant approaches to writing assessment, which generally focus on “what students can do” (instead of seeing them as deficient).

As McConnell describes the rubrics in a video on the VALUE webpage, these “rubrics were developed to assess students’ *most* motivated, *best* work, from their *actual* classes, rather than take a snapshot of student performance on tests outside the regular curriculum” (AAC&U, *Valid*). McConnell emphasizes *most, best, and actual* to position the VALUE approach as in clear opposition to the standardized tests that educators are already prone to dislike. This discourse appears to be persuasive: According to McConnell, at the end of 2020, users at 2,744 colleges and universities in 141 countries had downloaded “more than 615,000 individual VALUE rubrics.”\(^{36}\)

AAC&U publications describe the rubrics as “meta-rubrics” in two senses. First, they are “to be used at the institutional or programmatic levels in order to assess student learning overall and over time, not for specific assignments” (Rhodes & Finley, 2013, p. 6). And second, the rubrics “can be used by all types of institutions, departments, and programs” (Rhodes, 2016, p. 38). For these reasons, the VALUE rubrics are becoming

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\(^{35}\) See also McConnell & Rhodes, p. 34; McConnell et al., 2019, p. 23, pp. 28-29.

\(^{36}\) Compare this to the statistics included in the 2017 *On Solid Ground* report: “As of December 2015, the rubrics have been downloaded more than 42,000 times by individuals representing more than 4,200 unique organizations, including more than 2,800 colleges and universities” (p. 7).
increasingly popular tools in campus assessment initiatives. Between June 2010 and June 2012, most visitors to the VALUE website reported accessing the VALUE rubrics to use them as models for local rubrics and/or to help develop departmental learning outcomes (Rhodes & Finley, p. 11). By 2018, a VALUE Rubric Institutional Use survey indicated that respondents primarily used the VALUE rubrics for General Education assessment purposes (see McConnell et al., 2019, p. 14).

AAC&U Document Analysis

To understand how AAC&U represents its approach to assessment, the primary texts I focus on below include the following, which are publicly available:

- AAC&U webpage tabs that address the VALUE approach
- McConnell and Rhodes’s (2017) VALUE report, On Solid Ground
- McConnell et al.’s (2019) VALUE report, We Have a Rubric for That: The VALUE Approach to Assessment

Under a “Research” tab on AAC&U’s website, these 2017 and 2019 reports are the two most recent and significant publications documenting findings from the VALUE approach to assessment. Like all of AAC&U’s publications, they “read as a mix of data-driven argument, sales pitch, and how-to book. Data are rarely presented neutrally,” meaning that AAC&U’s data presentation is always used to promote and “support AAC&U’s vision” (Grouling, 2017, n.p.). For instance, even when publications are listed as authored by individuals, as these two reports are, they always convey a “unified organizational view” (Grouling, 2017, n.p.). For these reasons, in integral citations, I often refer to them using the organization’s name, as opposed to the individual authors’ names.
Alignment with Writing Studies Assessment Principles

AAC&U’s VALUE assessment model appears to be aligned with the following writing assessment principles delineated in the two writing studies position statements:

- **Writing assessment should positively influence teaching and learning.** The results of the VALUE approach are framed as “giving faculty helpful information for improving teaching and student learning” (McConnell & Rhodes, p. 12). According to AAC&U, by using the VALUE rubrics, “faculty and other educators have become engaged in a shared effort to enhance pedagogy and practice” (McConnell & Rhodes, p. 31). The “singular goal of VALUE” is “the improvement of instruction and student learning” (McConnell et al., p. 6) and the VALUE approach “supplies faculty with the crucial data necessary to improve course assignments and overall pedagogy” (McConnell et al., p. v). Faculty have “continuously credited their institution’s implementation of the VALUE rubrics with inciting their desire to update their courses and assignments” (McConnell et al., p. 40).

- **Writing assessment should use multiple measures.** McConnell and Rhodes argue, “Any statewide or campus plan for assessment should be based upon authentic student work and allow for the use of multiple measures of student learning—indirect, direct, and embedded—without a single mandated statewide test” (p. 19). The VALUE approach, which relies on assessing student work produced in particular curricula with multiple rubrics, appears to use multiple measures, unlike standardized tests.
• *Writing assessment should be informed by recent research.* Although AAC&U does not refer explicitly to the field of writing assessment in the two VALUE reports, they do say that VALUE is “grounded in research and best practices derived from the learning sciences—including educational psychology, cognitive psychology, student development theory, and instructional design” (McConnell & Rhodes, p. 8). We know that the field of writing assessment has, at least partially, informed their approach because the Written Communication VALUE Rubric (AAC&U, 2009c) states, “Faculty interested in the research on writing assessment that has guided our work here can consult” the CCCC and NCTE/CWPA position statements analyzed above. Note that these two position statements do not refer to particular writing assessment studies. Rather, as I discussed above, these statements describe writing assessment principles that are understood to be aligned with writing assessment research.

• *Student stakeholders should be involved in assessment.* AAC&U professes this belief even as they acknowledge their own failure to realize it in practice. They note that they are lacking students’ perspectives on, and interpretations of, the rubrics (McConnell et al., p. 23, 41) and indicate that incorporating students’ perspectives in upcoming revisions to the rubrics is a goal (McConnell et al., p. 41, 43, 44).

• *Machine scoring is not a valid way to assess writing; standardized tests are not a valid way to assess writing.* As mentioned above, the AAC&U reports repeatedly position VALUE as in opposition to and/or better than standardized assessments. The VALUE rubrics are described as providing a “more rigorous demonstration
of what students are learning in college” (McConnell & Rhodes, p. 12), “created in large part due to higher education’s collective dissatisfaction with available standardized tests” (McConnell & Rhodes, p. 29), “an alternative to the predominant educational assessment paradigm (i.e., standardized tests)” (McConnell et al., p. 1), “transcend[ing] the shortcomings typically associated with grading and standardized tests” (McConnell et al., p. 13), and providing “a compelling rejoinder to the notion that standardized tests are the only and most reliable method for assessing student learning outcomes” (McConnell et al., p. v).

- **Writing assessment needs to communicate with a variety of stakeholders.**
  AAC&U repeatedly highlights the professional development potential for faculty (key stakeholders) who engage with the rubrics: “VALUE professional development . . . appears to promote collaboration across professional roles in college and university learning spaces (i.e., collaboration among faculty, students, institutional researchers, assessment, staff, etc.)” (McConnell et al., p. 13).37 AAC&U clearly considers policymakers and employers a significant stakeholder, too, for they frequently refer to the skills assessed through the rubrics as important to employers, in addition to educators.38

- **Writing assessments should be attentive to local contexts (localism).** AAC&U’s representation of this particular principle deserves more attention below because there are tensions between how AAC&U frames its approach to assessment (especially for local adaptation) and how publications recommend this approach

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37 See also McConnell & Rhodes, p. 24, 32, 51; McConnell et al., p. v, 13, 27, 40.
38 See, e.g., McConnell & Rhodes, p. 5, 7, 9, 12, 17; McConnell et al., p. 12, 43.
be carried out in practice.

**The Erasure of Language/Difference**

AAC&U’s VALUE approach to assessment does not consider this principle: *Writing assessment should reflect what scholars know about language use and language difference*. Language difference is never mentioned in the AAC&U publications. This may be unsurprising, given the very brief attention language and language difference receive in the writing studies position statements. The only place language is mentioned in the Written Communication VALUE Rubric (AAC&U, 2009c) is in the final row, which assesses “Control of Syntax and Mechanics.” This placement assumes language use only involves “controlling” syntax and mechanics. The “Capstone” (highest) level of the rubric for this row reads: “Uses graceful language that skillfully communicates meaning to readers with clarity and fluency, and is virtually error-free.” The other levels, in descending order, indicate that lower-scoring student work in this category uses “straightforward language that generally conveys meaning to readers” with “few errors;” uses “language [unmodified] that generally conveys meaning to readers with clarity” and “some errors;” and (at the lowest level) “[u]ses language that sometimes impedes meaning because of errors in usage.” As do the writing studies position statements, AAC&U appears to see language as a stable entity. Here, however, AAC&U’s construct of language aligns with the conduit metaphor that Michael Reddy has documented as the most common metaphor for language (see Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, pp. 10-13; Reddy, 1993). The conduit metaphor holds that “linguistic expressions are containers for meanings” and that writers/speakers simply package predetermined meanings into words and send them to receivers (Lakoff & Johnson, p. 11). Readers will recognize phrases
like “language . . . conveys meaning” as instantiations of the conduit metaphor. The issue with the conduit metaphor is that it “entails that words and sentences have meanings in themselves, independent of any context or speaker” (Lakoff & Johnson, p. 11). Language is assumed to be shipped off to receivers, who can unpack linguistic containers with meaning unchanged in the process. By asking assessors to evaluate the extent to which language in student work “conveys meaning” with more or less “clarity,” which is correlated with “errors,” the Written Communication Rubric erases the labor of readers in making meaning of student texts. Furthermore, the rubric locates “errors” in language, instead of acknowledging that readers produce errors in their negotiations of language (see, e.g., Bartholomae, 1980; Hull & Rose, 1990; Lees, 1987, 1989; Williams, 1981). AAC&U’s use of the conduit metaphor for language neglects the potential for semiodiversity—that is, the same words uttered in one context can produce different meanings. As I argued above, the writing studies position statements also appear to neglect semiodiversity in favor of glossodiversity, which treats languages as discrete, countable entities (see Pennycook, 2010, p. 97) and only grants the potential for difference to language that is markedly different from standard written English.

“Malleable” . . . and Broadly Applicable

As mentioned above, AAC&U publications appear to carefully consider this key writing assessment principle: Writing assessments should be attentive to local contexts (localism). Indeed, the first epigraph to this chapter captures a frequent comment in the VALUE reports, the claim that the approach described above is “an intentionally malleable approach to making sense of learning at an individual institution, one that could be changed as necessary to meet local needs” (McConnell et al., 2019, p. 3).
noted in the 2019 report, “[G]uidelines and ground rules may be modified to better suit the assessment needs, available resources, and culture and context of an individual institution” (McConnell et al., p. 34). Also in the 2019 document, AAC&U claims it will revise “VALUE rubric training protocols” and these “[r]esulting protocol guidelines will be made available for local campus use as well, recognizing that individual institutions may choose to modify the protocols to meet local needs” (McConnell et al., p. 44). In short, AAC&U appears to be sensitive to the fact that the material conditions of different institutions (e.g., resources of time, money, people, etc.) will affect their enactment of the VALUE approach.

In theory, AAC&U encourages adaptation of not only their advertised approach, but also the rubrics themselves. AAC&U points out that the format in which the rubrics were released, “as PDFs and as editable Microsoft Word documents,” lends them to local adaptation (McConnell et al., p. 16). In fact, AAC&U cites several publications indicating that

the majority of applications have been in modified formats. Not only were the actual rubrics often modified locally—which implicates changes to the rubric nomenclature and underlying meaning—but calibration training and scoring practices were often changed as well. This is the logical and desirable result of the initial design and purposeful distribution of the VALUE rubrics for local assessment efforts. (McConnell et al., p. 31)

Notably, AAC&U describes these local adaptations as an intended part of their approach. Important, too, is the organization’s acknowledgment that modifying the rubrics “implicates changes to the rubric nomenclature and underlying meaning.” In other words,
though they don’t put it in these terms, AAC&U appears to situate the rubrics as boundary documents, which are inflected with different meanings as they are adapted in different contexts. In a paragraph included on each of the rubrics, is this line: “The core expectations articulated in all 15\(^{39}\) of the VALUE rubrics should be translated into the language of individual campuses, disciplines, and even courses.” Their use of the word translated indicates that AAC&U expects the rubrics to be adapted for different contexts. Elsewhere, AAC&U’s take on localism would appear to be aligned with that of the writing assessment position statements. For example, in the “Framing Language” section of the Written Communication Rubric, AAC&U states:

> This rubric is designed for use in a wide variety of educational institutions. The most clear finding to emerge from decades of research on writing assessment is that the best writing assessments are locally determined and sensitive to local context and mission. Users of this rubric should, in the end, consider making adaptations and additions that clearly link the language of the rubric to individual campus contexts. (AAC&U, 2009c)

Here AAC&U recommends adapting the rubric “to individual campus contexts.”

Tensions between localism and broad applicability emerge in later documents. In the 2017 report, AAC&U hedges its findings by noting that the report’s results are “preliminary because they are not representative of all higher education institutions, all states, all students, or all learning outcomes” (McConnell & Rhodes, 2017, p. 3).

However, elsewhere in the report, their intention is to “invit[e] the higher education

\(^{39}\) When the rubrics were originally made available, in 2009, only fifteen existed. A sixteenth rubric, to assess global learning, was created in 2013 and released in 2014 (Rhodes & Finley, 2013, p. 1).
community writ large to engage in a nuanced, robust examination of the quality of student learning and to explore measures of success for all students, regardless of what type of institution they attend” (p. 17). In short, AAC&U frames their approach as adaptable, even “nuanced,” while at the same time promoting it as widely applicable, regardless of student body or institution.

The organization’s more recent recommendations for using the rubrics indicate that they are shifting even more toward broad applicability and away from local adaptation. As far back as 2013, they cautioned users about modifying the rubrics too much, suggesting that “[a]s greater modifications in the original VALUE rubrics are made, the more difficult it becomes to place local results in broader contexts of student performance” (Rhodes & Finley, 2013, p. 21), implying that part of their use is for comparing institutions. The rubrics were not originally designed for classroom use. In fact, each VALUE rubric includes this note: “The rubrics are intended for institutional-level use in evaluating and discussing student learning, not for grading.” Evidence suggests, however, that AAC&U may be starting to encourage faculty to design assignments that can be assessed (for classroom purposes) with the VALUE rubrics. For example, the VALUE webpage includes a nascent resource called “VALUE ADD (Assignment Design and Diagnostic) Tools” that will offer faculty advice for (re)developing assignments to align with VALUE rubric outcomes. The Critical Thinking VALUE ADD Tool is meant to help faculty with assignments “designed to produce student work which develops and accurately demonstrates students’ critical thinking abilities” (see AAC&U, 2021). The adverb accurately implies that there is one right way to demonstrate critical thinking and the tool’s repeated use of language from the Critical
Thinking VALUE Rubric demonstrates that AAC&U is guiding faculty to incorporate the language of this rubric in their assignments—and perhaps to use this rubric for classroom assessment purposes. The VALUE webpage promises that additional VALUE ADD Tools for the other rubrics will follow. AAC&U’s trend toward influencing assignment design is discouraging because, as Anson et al. (2012, n.p.) warn, generic rubrics can drive the creation of assignments and communication experiences from the ‘outside in’—a process in which the tail of generic evaluation standards wags the dog of principled, context-specific pedagogy. Generic criteria, in other words, lead to the creation of stereotypical assignments that best match the generality of the criteria, reifying vague, institutional-level standards but misaligning pedagogy and assessment, and removing the need for teachers to engage in reflective practice.

The VALUE ADD Tools seem meant to mediate the gradual adoption of the rubrics in classrooms, signaling that AAC&U is not only shifting away from local adaptation but also away from a goal they profess to be central to their mission: improving teaching and learning.

AAC&U explicitly addresses this tension between localism and broad application, even attempting to reframe it as a positive. Early in the 2019 report, McConnell et al. state:

[W]e acknowledge and embrace the dynamism that is inherent to the VALUE approach. VALUE was purposefully designed to be both an articulation of commonly held essentials representing a collective understanding of the ultimate purposes of a quality undergraduate education as well as an intentionally
malleable approach to making sense of learning at an individual institution, one that could be changed as necessary to meet local needs. (p. 3)

By attempting to be “both an articulation of commonly held essentials” and an approach “that could be changed as necessary to meet local needs,” the VALUE rubrics “wear the guise of local application, fooling us into believing that they will improve teaching, learning, and both classroom and larger-scale assessment” (Anson et al., 2012, n.p.). They cannot, however, improve teaching and learning if AAC&U continues to discourage their local adaptation.

AAC&U’s claim that the VALUE approach is broadly applicable is frequently accompanied by the claim that the approach is “externally validated,” and thus adds value to local assessment efforts, as the following passages demonstrate:

- Faculty, administrators, and staff continue to embed their curricula and assess student learning with dimensions from the VALUE rubrics, thus enabling localized results to be placed in a larger, comparable context within and beyond their own institutions to cultivate external validation of instructional modalities and mastery of scholarship . . . (McConnell et al., pp. 12-13)

- The ability to take the approach to scale while not losing its power for local pedagogical efforts to improve learning led to the establishment of the VALUE Institute in fall 2017, opening the opportunity to any program, college, or consortium of institutions across the country (www.valueinstituteassessment.org). Indeed, the first year of the VALUE Institute attracted participation from international universities as well. The VALUE Institute continues to provide local information to individual institutions, which builds local capacity to engage more
fully in assessment for learning, as well as provides externally valid evidence of quality of learning for accountability purposes (e.g., regional accreditation).

(McConnell et al., p. 5)

In the first passage, AAC&U argues that the VALUE approach allows “localized results to be placed in a larger, comparable context within and beyond [individual] institutions to cultivate external validation.” AAC&U thus treats institutions as local places embedded within “a larger . . . context” that offers “external validation.” The implication here is that local assessment on its own is inherently less valid without institutional comparison. In the second passage, as the creation of the VALUE Institute makes clear, AAC&U is enlarging its scope and shifting toward even broader applicability of the rubrics “for accountability purposes (e.g., regional accreditation).” They believe that their approach can be taken “to scale” and “not los[e] its power for local pedagogical efforts to improve learning.” As I’ve pointed out above, however, this is untrue if AAC&U is shifting toward encouraging teachers to align their assignments with the generic VALUE rubrics or even to use those rubrics without adaptation in their teaching.

Interestingly, as demonstrated in the next two excerpts, AAC&U sometimes employs another rhetorical move—of assigning value to the local campus assessment process and, at the same time, implying it lacks sophistication:

- Perhaps the most powerful testament to the validity and reliability of the VALUE approach to assessment comes from the individual campuses that have paired participation in the VALUE initiative with rich, local assessment of student work using the same VALUE rubrics. Many participating institutions are using data from the VALUE initiative as validation of their own local scoring of the same
student work, thereby adding a more sophisticated, robust methodological element to campus-based assessment. (McConnell & Rhodes, p. 31)

- The most sophisticated use of the VALUE rubric results were from campuses who had conducted their own scoring of the work submitted to the nationwide project; those institutions were able to then treat the data generated by nationwide scoring as external validation of the local work that had taken place with the same student artifacts. (McConnell et al., p. 40)

In the first excerpt, the “local assessment” is assigned the adjective “rich” and, in both excerpts, the “external validation” provided by the VALUE approach is framed as adding sophistication to the, presumably, not-robust “local” campus assessment. In this way, AAC&U is able to acknowledge the importance of local contexts even as they bypass the work of adapting assessment tools (which are still “the same VALUE rubrics”) to particular contexts. The “external validation” AAC&U provides is assumed to be more valuable than local efforts alone. This rhetoric is, notably, carried over from the 2017 report to the 2019 report.

**Conclusions**

My analysis in this chapter reveals that key writing assessment position statements represent local contexts as discrete physical places, thus ignoring how people’s practices (re)make local contexts and granting more power to locations (or ecologies) than the people who (re)make them through their practices (see Pennycook, 2010, p. 98), including, as we’ll see in the following two chapters, their practices of assessment. The statements’ representations of stakeholders, especially students, position them as less agentive bodies (acted on by assessment) making it harder to imagine how
students can be invited to reshape assessment practices. This lack of engagement with student stakeholders is also exemplified in AAC&U’s VALUE approach to assessment.

The position statements also represent language/s as discrete entities and imply that difference is an outcome that only languages other than standard written English can achieve. In reality, however, difference is an inevitable outcome of all language use. While the position statements profess to value multiple languages and varieties, they nevertheless treat languages as discrete codes. These representations are important to attend to because, as I argued above, they index standard language ideology. (In chapter five, I analyze faculty assessors’ negotiations of standard language ideology in the act of assessment.)

At first glance, AAC&U appears to honor writing assessment’s principle of localism. However, as my analysis reveals, AAC&U is pivoting away from encouraging local adaptation of their rubrics and instead recommending institutions use them with minimal modification, primarily to enable national comparisons among institutions. Indeed, in the campus assessment event I studied, the institution had only added an extra column to the rubrics—an N/A column for assessors to use if an assignment prompt did not offer students the opportunity to demonstrate a particular skill. Anson et al. (2012, n.p.) are concerned by how such generic rubrics “wear the guise of local application” and they “argue for the education-wide abandonment of generic rubrics.” Since institutional mandates and contexts may not always permit outright abandonment, however, we must find ways to work with them for now, even as we resist them long-term. One way to do this is to trace how knowledge is transformed in local contexts even when generic rubrics are not adapted to local contexts. Thus, in chapter four, I demonstrate how AAC&U’s
assessment approach is taken up in practice by analyzing training documents produced by MMU and data from focus groups with participating faculty assessors.
CHAPTER FOUR

FIVE SCORERS SCORING: ASSESSMENT AS EMBODIED PRACTICE

In this chapter, I examine how five faculty assessors at one institution, “Midwest Metropolitan University” (MMU), participated in a General Education assessment event in Spring 2021. MMU’s assessment process has been, in the assessment coordinator’s words, adapted from the university’s “longstanding [G]eneral [E]ducation assessment practice and modified to align more with AAC&U’s VALUE approach” (personal communication, April 22, 2022). My focus group data reveals some of the challenges assessors faced and the different approaches they took to using the rubrics. While these assessors felt free to navigate the rubrics in some ways, some of them also reported feeling constricted by the rubrics in other ways that I examine in this chapter.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the training procedures for the spring 2021 General Education Assessment event, with special attention to those aspects of the training that assessors brought up in two focus groups. I then introduce my focus group participants and, for context, describe the commenting practices they reported using on their own students’ writing. Their survey responses reveal a discrepancy between the percentage of a student’s course grade that is attributed to their written work (a fairly high percentage) and how much time participants spend explicitly discussing their students’ writing in class (a considerably lower number). This chapter then focuses on my participants’ different experiences of space-time as they assessed student artifacts at
home (instead of on campus), their embodied practices of assessment, and how they managed the sometimes-negative emotions (e.g., frustration and ambivalence) that were produced in the process of assessment. Several assessors reported using their “gut” to make different kinds of scoring decisions: to resolve a difficult scoring decision, to manage their time, and even to make easier scoring decisions. As I argue, this embodied practice deserves more attention in assessment scenarios, for it can lead assessors to foreclose changing their initial interpretations of a text and thus to arrive at a predetermined scoring decision.

Building on the arguments about the persistence of container metaphors in writing assessment (see chapters one and three), I attend to how assessors reported feeling contained by the rubrics in some senses (e.g., in terms of what counted as a demonstration of particular rubric criteria) and free to work against the prescribed uses of the rubric in other ways (e.g., not always starting at the highest level of the rubric as they deliberated scoring decisions). As mentioned in chapter two, my focus groups took place several weeks after the assessment; the coordinator wanted to wait to circulate my survey until afterwards to ensure this study did not interfere with the assessment process. My participants’ recollections may have been affected by this time gap. Still, they offer a window into how participants experienced the assessment, how they reconstructed scoring decisions, their criticisms of the rubrics, and more.

**Adapting AAC&U’s VALUE Approach at Midwest Metropolitan University**

The assessment coordinator at MMU told me that MMU’s new General Education program launched in summer 2018 (personal communication, May 6, 2021). The previous rubrics used for the General Education assessment were “adapted from the
VALUE [rubrics] over time.” Additionally, the University’s Gen Ed Task Force recommended MMU join AAC&U’s VALUE Institute, which allows institutions to compare their results. As the coordinator put it in an email to me, MMU hoped that joining the VALUE Institute would enable the university “to compare results from our internal assessments to external assessments, and eventually to the results from similar institutions.” (MMU recently wrapped up an initial three-year pilot of the rubrics to “determine if they align with our own program competencies/outcomes and will provide meaningful data around student performance” [coordinator, personal communication, May 6, 2021]).

The coordinator explained that, in the fall, she “collect[s] samples of student work for the content area(s) we will be assessing in the spring” as well as the assignments that prompted these student samples from faculty teaching General Education courses (personal communication, May 6, 2021). In the spring, she prepares training materials for the assessment event, recruits faculty to participate, and runs the training and assessment. Findings from the assessment are posted on the General Education website and sent to chairs of departments who were involved in the assessment.

As mentioned in chapter three, the only change made to the three AAC&U rubrics used in MMU’s Written Communication Assessment event was the addition of a “not applicable” (N/A) column following the zero column. The coordinator explained in a training video that this was to give assessors the opportunity to distinguish between artifacts where students may have had the opportunity to demonstrate the outcome but did not and artifacts that were produced in response to assignments that didn’t offer students the opportunity to demonstrate particular rubric criteria (e.g., multiple choice
exams or short answer exam responses). As the coordinator put it, these latter examples “may not have been a good fit with the rubric” and thus should be assigned N/A scores.

**Training Process**

The training for MMU’s spring 2021 assessment was delivered in an online asynchronous format for two reasons: the Covid-19 pandemic and “to align with AAC&U VALUE Institute practices,” which involve an online asynchronous training process (MMU Assessment Office, 2021, p. 10). Assessors had one week to complete the training and then one week to complete scoring student artifacts (MMU Assessment Office, 2021, p. 4). Training involved:

- A Welcome and Introduction Video in which the coordinator briefly described both the purpose of the assessment and two goals for the training: “Become familiar with the assessment rubrics” and “engage in practice scoring.”
- Three videos in which the coordinator walked assessors through the three VALUE rubrics being used in this assessment (Written Communication, Critical Thinking, and Intercultural Knowledge and Competence).
- Scoring four student samples for the purposes of calibrating scoring practices with other assessors.
- Another video in which the coordinator described what scores MMU’s Gen Ed Assessment Committee would assign one of the student samples and why. This twelve-minute video was meant to guide assessors toward calibrating their scoring practices with the rubrics. It replaced the discussion that normally takes place when the event is held in-person. In this video, the coordinator described particular moments from the student’s text in light of the criteria in the three
VALUE rubrics. For instance, part of what the Critical Thinking Rubric assesses is the extent to which student work questions “[v]iewpoints of experts” (i.e., the sources students are presumably working with; see the Evidence row on this rubric). The coordinator mentioned that “there’s not a lot of questioning [sources] going on in this [sample] and there are some places where the author’s writing . . . loses coherence. That brings us to conclude that performance level 2 is most appropriate for this particular work sample,” though she did not point to specific places where the Committee interpreted the student’s writing to “lose[] coherence.”

Two additional aspects of the training deserve attention here because my focus group participants referred to them in our discussion: (a) the distinction the coordinator made between assessment and grading and (b) her directives about how to apply the Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Rubric. In one training video, the coordinator relayed “some really important things to remember about assessment”:

Number one, assessment is very different from grading. So it is important for you to be looking at this from the perspective of the rubric and not from the perspective of: “This is an A, a B, a C, a D” and so forth. The assessment is really designed to take a holistic look at a student work sample to determine how well the student has demonstrated the outcomes. And this could be really challenging, especially when you have multiple components within a rubric row. It can also be challenging when a student does really well at the beginning of an assignment and not so well in other places, so you have to really look at it holistically to see how well that student is doing in meeting the outcomes. It is so important to only use
the rubric criteria to evaluate and to make sure that you are looking at each individual student work sample on its own and not comparing to others. So, avoiding norm referencing. So, no comparing between students. You’re basing each evaluation on how well that particular student work sample meets the items that are listed in the rubric. And, again, you must only focus on what is presented in the work sample.

The coordinator emphasized the difference between assessment and grading here because “[f]rom experience, it is important to remind faculty that they are looking at how well students are meeting specific outcomes instead of how well they responded to the assignment prompt. Although those things may align, it is also possible that a student did not do well in response to the prompt, but addressed the outcomes being measured” (personal communication, April 22, 2022). For these reasons, she was also careful to remind readers to be aware of their biases when scoring. She pointed to a code of ethics that reminded assessors to keep student identities anonymous and confidential. The final line of the code of ethics read: “Readers should always be aware of potential bias in assessment and how that may unknowingly influence perception of student work. (Bias includes writing, presentation, artifact content, etc.).” On this point she added:

We have to ensure that we are controlling for that bias, that we are not pulling our bias into the assessment process. And a lot of that goes back to ensuring that we are only using the instruments that we are—are designed to score here. So we are only going back to the rubric language, looking for that rubric language to see how well they are meeting those outcomes.
The coordinator repeatedly directed assessors’ attention to the rubrics (“the instruments”) and their language in the hopes that this would mitigate any biases they brought to scoring. As my focus group data will indicate, the faculty assessors brought biases toward the rubrics in addition to a bias in favor of a particular kind of writing.

Finally, the coordinator offered additional directions for using the Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Rubric that were not explicit in the rubric and which my participants discussed in focus groups. In the video explanation for this rubric, the coordinator noted that this is “probably going to be our most challenging rubric to apply” because “it is a broad rubric, and also our definition of diversity varies so much depending on the type of course that we’re looking at and the work samples that we’re looking at, and the type of assignment that a faculty member has selected for the assessment.” This rubric includes six rows that assess cultural self-awareness, knowledge of cultural worldview frameworks, empathy, verbal and nonverbal communication, curiosity, and openness (see AAC&U, 2009b). Two of these rows, the coordinator noted, should only be applied for “the global context” (i.e., non-U.S. contexts): (a) the knowledge of cultural worldview frameworks row, which assesses the extent to which student work demonstrates an “understanding of the complexity of elements important to members of another culture in relation to its history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs and practices,” and (b) the verbal and nonverbal communication row, which assesses the extent to which student work demonstrates an understanding of “cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal communication (e.g., demonstrates understanding of the degree to which people use physical contact while communicating in different cultures or use direct/indirect and explicit/implicit
meanings)” and can “negotiate a shared understanding based on those differences” (see AAC&U, 2009b). The coordinator’s additional clarifications reveal that by “global” she meant “outside the U.S.” Of the verbal and nonverbal communication row, the coordinator noted that her interpretation of this row came from AAC&U:

So our understanding from AAC&U on this particular row is that it was really designed more for global experience um types of assignments or reflection based on a study abroad, or um where we’re actually looking at engaging with another culture and how they communicate. So, this particular row of the rubric, you’re most likely going to provide a non-applicable score for anything that is not focused on global diversity.

She clarified in another video (in which she walked assessors through scoring a particular student sample) that “this row is only to be applied in the case of cultures outside of the United States.” By implying that these competencies can only be assessed in student work that addresses contexts outside of the United States, AAC&U effectively precludes acknowledging that other cultures and intercultural interactions happen within the U.S., too. Furthermore, the rubric is implicitly tying cultures to physical locations, which ignores the role people play in reproducing cultures through a range of practices that aren’t necessarily tied to locations. In short, cultures are neither stable nor discrete, though the rubric treats them as such.40 I return to this point in the following chapter in my analysis of focus group data.

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40 The coordinator told me that the Assessment Committee “recognized this flaw in the rubric during the pilot of the instrument and this led to the committee’s decision to develop a new [MMU] Diversity rubric” which is being piloted in spring 2022 (personal communication, April 22, 2022).
Survey Responses: Participants’ Attention to Student Writing in their Teaching

Before analyzing my focus group data, I’ll briefly contextualize participants’ responses to several survey questions (see tables 4.1 and 4.2 for their survey responses and see Appendix A for a copy of the survey). Given that in chapter five I analyze participants’ negotiations of standard language ideology, which is a racialized ideology, it’s important to note that all five of my participants identified as white. They represented a variety of roles in their departments: PhD student, part-time faculty, term faculty, and tenure-track faculty. At the time of this study, participants had taught for between seven and twenty-three years, so all were fairly experienced teachers. With the exception of Evie, who teaches in the English department, everyone had participated in the Gen Ed Assessment before.

In general, the regularity with which they assigned writing in their classes was consistent. With the exception of Alice, an Economics faculty member, all reported assigning writing in their classes “weekly,” though the stakes of that writing sometimes varied. For example, Jake, who teaches in the English department, assigned “small-stakes writing every week” and “major essays monthly.” Melissa, in Communication, assigned shorter “weekly meme responses” (of one paragraph) in “some classes” and, in other classes, assigned “lengthy papers due at intervals of 1-4 weeks.” Alice, the participant with the most teaching experience (twenty-seven years), noted in the survey that she assigned writing weekly in her MBA class. In a follow-up email to me, she added, “I only do writing assignments in my MBA course. . . . Since Econ is Gen Ed, [the assessment coordinator] wanted to see if we could incorporate more to tie to the assessment but it doesn’t really fit” (personal communication, March 30, 2021). Indeed, Alice reported that
she used few terms from the VALUE rubrics in her teaching, which may have led her to see no alignment between her discipline and the rubrics (see table 4.2). But Alice’s belief that the criteria in the General Education assessment “doesn’t really fit” for her discipline could also suggest that it may be harder for her to see how writing can be incorporated into her Economics courses.

Participants’ responses to several questions about how much class time they dedicated to discussing writing, as well as their methods for responding to student writing, deserve more attention here. They reported between forty to eighty percent of their students’ grades were attributed to written work. (These percentages were predictably higher for my two English participants.) Of the three methods of feedback I inquired about (writing comments on students’ writing, discussing students’ writing in individual conferences, and discussing samples of student writing in class discussions), all reported writing comments on their students’ writing, three (Evie, Jake, and Chris) discussed student writing in individual conferences, and only one (Alice) discussed student samples in class. That only one of these teachers reported discussing student samples in her class is not surprising. As Harris et al. (2010) observed over a decade ago, teachers “often seem to find it remarkably hard to picture in useful detail what they might actually do with student texts in the classroom” (p. 2). My finding is nevertheless discouraging, given that it suggests that teachers can avoid the difficulty of figuring out how to teach with student texts by “find[ing] ways of not talking about student texts at all” (Harris et al., p. 2). If my participants spent little time teaching with student texts, they also spent very little time discussing their students’ writing in class. Almost all of them discussed what my survey referred to as “writing more generally” compared to their
students’ writing. For Jake, a part-time English instructor, this disparity was significant: he spent about ninety percent of class time discussing writing more generally and only ten percent of class discussing his students’ writing. Evie estimated that she spent eighty to eighty-five percent of class time discussing writing more generally. (As table 4.1 indicates, her survey responses made it challenging to determine whether and to what extent she made time for discussing student writing in class.)

The three participants who were not English faculty spent comparably less time discussing student writing and very little time discussing writing more generally. Alice, an Economics faculty member, noted that her MBA “class is online [and] asynchronous,” so she spent “technically zero” time discussing student writing, “but there are announcements and discussion in optional office hours.” She did not spend any time discussing writing more generally. Melissa, a term faculty member who taught Communication and WGS courses, estimated she spent between ten to thirty percent of her classes discussing student writing and “very little” time talking about writing more generally. Chris suggested that he spent “the majority” of class time discussing student writing in his face-to-face classes. However, he wrote, “For online we don’t have synchronous sessions so we don’t talk about it and I provide written feedback.” Chris’s and Alice’s comments about their online classes may indicate two potential realities: (a) that they were unable to imagine how to discuss student writing in asynchronous online courses (e.g., through discussion board posts) or (b) that they were not thinking of the discussion board posts they do assign as a method of discussing student writing online. In any case, faculty who teach online may find it harder to make space to discuss student writing.
These findings are concerning for several reasons. First, a significant portion of student grades in my participants’ courses were attributed to students’ written work. In courses where this is the case, I hypothesize that when faculty and students discuss assessment criteria in light of student writing these reflective conversations will be more likely to hone teachers’ ability to talk about student writing in light of particular criteria (and thus to shape their assessment practices) and to help students better understand how to meet those criteria. Second, research has shown that making tacit knowledge and conventions explicit (through class discussions, comments on student writing, and more) is crucial for supporting students’ growth as writers (see, e.g., Anderson et al., 2015; Sommers, 1982; Thaiss & Zawacki, 2006). Third, research indicates the importance of “frequent writing for a variety of teachers and courses,” “opportunities for reflecting on their writing,” and teachers who are responsive to student writing are crucial for improving students’ writing abilities and confidence as they learn to write in the disciplines (Thaiss & Zawacki, 2006, p. 121; see also Eodice et al., 2016; Wilson & Post, 2019). My participants (and, indeed, other teachers) certainly can make tacit writing knowledge explicit by discussing writing more generally and published writing particularly without discussing student writing. But I, and other composition scholars (e.g., Harris, 2017), have found teaching with student texts (even more so than with published texts) a useful way to make tacit knowledge explicit, and to encourage students to consider how they might try out different moves in their writing. I speculate that not discussing student writing frequently in class might make it harder for faculty to find productive ways of talking about student writing, especially when they need to talk about student writing using new-to-them terms (as they do with the VALUE rubrics).
### Table 4.1 Focus Group Participant Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Focus Group 1</th>
<th>Focus Group 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pseudonym</strong></td>
<td><strong>Evie</strong></td>
<td><strong>Jake</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender/Identity &amp; Pronouns</strong></td>
<td>Female; she/her/hers</td>
<td>Male; he/him/his</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Department</strong></td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role in department(s)</strong></td>
<td>PhD student</td>
<td>Part-time faculty</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Number of years teaching</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How often writing is assigned in class</strong></td>
<td>Weekly, multiple times/week</td>
<td>Small-stakes writing every week, major essays monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kinds of writing assigned</strong></td>
<td>Free writing, short answer, discussion boards, argument and reflective essays, research, creative</td>
<td>Expository essays–narrative, compare/contrast, illustrative, argumentative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of time in class spent talking about students’ writing</td>
<td>Teaching online, 75% of the class is writing (25% reading, approx.); teaching in person, 15% of class time is writing, 85% discussing writing (with maybe a 50/50 split for homework)</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of time spent talking about writing more generally</td>
<td>80-85%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of student’s grade attributed to written work</td>
<td>70-75%, depending on the course</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods of feedback on student writing</td>
<td>Written comments, Discuss in individual conferences</td>
<td>Written comments, Discuss in individual conferences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

writing (poems, essays, drama, and fiction), rhetorical analysis, writing about writing, research papers (7-10 pages)
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Number of times participating in MMU Gen Ed Assessment</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3 or 4 (can’t remember)</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>Discuss in individual conferences</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reasons for participating in MMU Gen Ed Assessment</td>
<td>Professionalization opportunity, but also to have a better sense of how written communication is discussed in higher administration outside of my department.</td>
<td>I was invited, plus I’m a certified VALUE rubric scorer</td>
<td>Extra income</td>
<td>I was invited last year and was curious about it.</td>
<td>It seemed a good way to understand [Gen Ed] work and sharpen my understanding of the use of rubrics.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Race, gender/identity, and pronouns were collected from participants after survey distribution. All other information in this table was reported (verbatim) in survey responses.*
Table 4.2 VALUE Rubric Terms that Come Up in Participants’ Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rubric Term</th>
<th>Evie</th>
<th>Jake</th>
<th>Melissa</th>
<th>Alice</th>
<th>Chris</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Written Communication VALUE Rubric Terms</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Context</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>Purpose</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<td>Audience</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genre conventions</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disciplinary conventions</td>
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<td>Sources</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<td>Mechanics</td>
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<td>Syntax</td>
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<td><strong>Critical Thinking VALUE Rubric Terms</strong></td>
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<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
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<td>Issue/problem</td>
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<td>Position</td>
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<td>Perspective</td>
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<td>Synthesis</td>
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<td>Interpretation</td>
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<td>Conclusions</td>
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**Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric Terms**
<table>
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<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural self-awareness</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<td>Cultural Rules/Biases</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<td>Cultural worldview</td>
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<td>Empathy</td>
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<td>Verbal communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nonverbal communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
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</table>

Note: Table cells are shaded gray when a participant did not indicate a particular term came up in their teaching to visualize how often this was the case.
My study seeks to better understand what faculty are doing when they assess student work that is produced by students who are not theirs. As described in chapter two, I take a sociomaterial approach to the study of texts and people’s practices with them. Thus, I treat texts as material objects—but not stable ones—that require interpretation and people’s interactions with them as situated in spatiotemporal moments. To do so, I trace my participants’ conceptualizations of space and time as well as how they oriented toward particular objects (in this case, the VALUE rubrics and the student text discussed in focus groups). At times, as I illustrate below, some participants reported feelings of immobility—feeling stuck or hemmed in by the rubrics. They also regularly invoked the container metaphor in their discussions of the student text (see chapter five). These feelings and spatial metaphors of containment “result from, rather than simply shape, [their] experience in the material world” (Reynolds, 2004, p. 46). Nedra Reynolds argues, “The way to address and resist these containerized conceptions of space—though we can never ‘eliminate’ them—is to focus on spatial practices of the everyday—those habitual movements through space that are often taken for granted or ignored—and try to understand how they inscribe differences” (p. 45). For my study, I analyze participants’ gestures as they discussed the rubrics and the student text (see chapter five). Gestures, the embodied, often subconscious movements we make are such “spatial practices of the everyday.”

My analysis in this chapter is influenced by research that traces the role that the body and material practice play in mobilizing knowledge. As Fenwick and Farrell point out, “[K]nowledge may be moved through embodied or encultured material practices”
(2012, p. 8), all of which take place in particular space-times that people move through and experience differently. For example, Shivers-McNair’s (2021) ethnographic research in a makerspace reveals how researchers (and other bodies) can understand their mobility differently at different times as they “re-mark” their relationship to space and objects. (Im)mobility is relational, Shivers-McNair and Adey (2006) remind us. For instance, Shivers-McNair watches the co-founder of the makerspace engage in a risky laser-cutting activity, reflecting that others with less authority and less experience would be unlikely to flout safety norms to pursue the same activity. Importantly, another object in particular (her video camera) makes it possible for her to track these different relationships to mobility and objects.

People’s work with texts is also affected by their experiences of space-time. For instance, the work of the teacher educators that Ellis and McNicholl (2015, pp. 85-102) study is mediated by a variety of textual objects (observation forms, teacher placement forms, contracts, institutional mission statements, and so on) that the teacher educators encounter in their daily movements (across campus and town, in classrooms where they observe mentees). It is also deeply affected by spatial concerns. The teachers worry about “the lack of car parking space at [their department’s] new site and the problems this might cause for mentors attending meetings” (Ellis & McNicholl, p. 92). One shifts to a new office space that she shares with new colleagues and “says she feels she learns less” (Ellis & McNicholl, p. 96). They also experience and manage space-time compression in different ways. One teacher acknowledges that “things come along to fill the day up” (Ellis & McNicholl, p. 92) and experiences time as something that is lost throughout the day as new responsibilities crop up. As these brief examples suggest, our perceptions of
space and time are intrinsic to how people orient to their work. For this reason, below I analyze my participants’ recollections of their experiences of space-time as they scored student work with the rubrics.

**Experiencing Space-Time Differently**

My participants reported experiencing space-time differently as they engaged in scoring artifacts in spring 2021. The General Education assessment event typically takes place in person in a room on campus with rows of computer monitors. The assessment coordinator and other raters are typically present and, as I observed in spring 2020, raters regularly pause to nudge each other for advice or to speak to the coordinator. These opportunities for in-person social interaction were, of course, missing when the scoring process shifted to an asynchronous online format. Still, assessors could reach out to the coordinator via email to ask questions and seek clarification about how to use the rubrics. Notably, assessors were given one week to score student artifacts, whereas when the event was in-person, scoring was completed in one day. While people always experience space-time differently, even in synchronous meetings, the asynchronous online format appears to have had a more marked effect on what my participants noticed as they scored, at least in their retelling.

When I asked what, other than the rubrics, might have affected their scoring process, Jake admitted that he “misread” when the artifacts were due so he “had to move through these at a rather quick fashion” and felt “pressed for time.” His experience of time as compressed led him to move quickly as he scored. It also, he reported, led him to notice that more “complicated” assignments, those with more “moving parts,” led him to assign lower scores. Evie, too, commented about time, noting that the time it took to
assess each artifact with three rubrics led her to “go gut reaction” as she assessed, a point to which I’ll return below.

Alice, Chris, and Melissa, on the other hand, appeared to experience time differently, as more expansive. Alice mentioned that she was more aware of the assignment prompts during this assessment (compared to the previous in-person assessment she participated in). She added, “I don’t know if that was because we had a longer timeframe and we were doing it on our own that I was definitely more . . . intentional about reading all the assignments, and that’s why I think I noticed more this time how much there was a mismatch with some of them with the rubrics.” Alice and Jake both noticed something similar (how some of the assignments didn’t appear to align with the rubrics), in part due to their different experiences of time as they assessed. Melissa admitted that she, too, “definitely read the assignment prompts more.” Chris’s experience of space-time was influenced by being at home. He commented: “doing them at home I rather liked because I could stop and start. I didn’t have to do them in three hours at one setting [sic].” He added, “I didn’t feel pressured. I didn’t get tired. . . . I like doing it [at a] more relaxed pace, and I think I was certainly more intentional.” Chris admitted, though, that he found it more challenging to assess artifacts that didn’t have the prompt while he worked at home: “But for some reason, on my own sitting at home, it was like, ‘What do I do next?’” He described proceeding with assessing the artifacts but felt “awkward” and “some uncomfortableness.” These feelings may be due to the less immediate opportunities for social interaction afforded by the asynchronous assessment.

Melissa also felt herself approaching scoring with more intention due to her experience of space-time. She added: “When we did them in person, it was like, let me
just, the quicker we get these done, the quicker we can get out, and there was kind of a
general feel of like, let’s just get through them [snaps fingers softly]. So definitely, I was
paying a lot more consideration to how they really actually adhere to the rubrics than I
would have when I was there.” Melissa did not universalize her experience, though,
acknowledging, “I’m sure for other people, it’s the opposite, that they gave more
intentional effort, when they were being seen and flew through them when we’re at
home.” Though some of my participants reported approaching the assessment process
with more intentionality (due to their sense of space-time), it is difficult to say what effect
that had on the outcome of their scoring. Interestingly, the assessment report for this
event revealed that “[i]nter-rater reliability was not as strong in this assessment as it was
in the spring 2020 assessment,” which took place in person (MMU Assessment Office,
2021, p. 10). As a result, the coordinator told me, in spring 2022 the committee “reverted
back to university practice to have the synchronous meeting time in addition to the
asynchronous training, which the AAC&U VALUE Institute model does not include. . . .
[A]s a result we saw excellent levels of agreement in our most recent assessment”
(personal communication, April 22, 2022).

Assessment as an Embodied, Affective Experience: Managing Emotions

My findings indicate that even scoring anonymous students’ work can produce
complicated emotions for faculty assessors and their orientations toward standardized
rubrics produced negative feelings. These feelings certainly included frustration. For
example, Evie commented that the VALUE rubrics appeared to “demonstrate[] a very
different understanding of writing” from how practitioners in writing studies tend to think
of writing. The rubrics, to Evie, “devalue[] [writing] in some senses” because they
prioritize “mechanics and technicalities.” Jake expressed frustration that the rubrics appeared to prioritize these mechanics over a student’s personal and creative voice, which he noted was one of his own writing values. And all five of the assessors expressed frustration that many assignment prompts and student artifacts did not “fit” the rubrics. Alice, as I discuss more in chapter five, was especially frustrated with how the rubric’s language could lead to different interpretations.

My participants’ feelings also included ambivalence about what they perceived the VALUE rubrics to be inviting them to do. Evie, for instance, described the Intercultural Rubric as

such an odd rubric. And it’s so complicated, but I think the complication of it also necessitates—or indicates the necessity and the need for it. You know, it’s like if we have to assess it [short pause] and we’re not finding it [short pause]. What does that tell us?

As we’ll see in chapter five, Evie critiqued the Intercultural Rubric’s treatment of certain intercultural practices. Above, however, she acknowledges the importance—the necessity—of assessing for intercultural knowledge. While these feelings of frustration and ambivalence are not especially surprising, it is worth attending to what happens when such emotions are produced. As we’ll see in the example below, assessors sometimes shifted their negative feelings onto another object (the teacher’s assignment prompt), in the process devaluing the student text they assessed.

In part to manage the “bad” feelings she reported experiencing when assigning lower scores, Evie imagined she was assessing the instructors’ assignment prompts instead of the students’ work. For example, Evie noticed some assignment prompts
primarily invited students to “regurgitate some information,” which she believed did not give students the opportunity to demonstrate the rubric criteria. She “started feeling I was assessing the assignment more than the writers,” adding that, sometimes, “I don’t mind scoring this low because this is such a bad assignment [laughter].” Later in our conversation, Evie described how distinguishing between grading and assessment helped her manage negative emotions she might associate with assigning lower scores to student work:

**Evie:** I had to kind of get that into my brain, partly because, one, the training emphasizes that so strongly, like, you know, “it’s not the same as grading” and so it’s like, okay, yeah, I have to remind myself, that I’m not grading the student, this isn’t a grade, you know, I’m assessing this for these things. And I think I do that partly so that I don’t fall into “Well, I feel really bad giving the student a bad grade.” That’s also then shifting, I’m like, I’m not assessing this. I’m, in some ways, I’m like, “I’m not assessing the student’s writing. I’m assessing these assignments.” And I think that’s where my understanding also really shifts of the like—So it’s also a matter of, you know, if I probably could even shift that to say, “I’m grading this assignment description, I’m grading this assignment as a design, rather than, you know, grading this writing,” you know, even though we’re supposedly assessing the writing, I don’t understand it that way.

**Charlotte:** Mmm!

**Evie:** You know, where I say like, “I’m not, I’m not assessing what they’re learning. I’m assessing, like, how are we setting them up to learn,” I think is what I want to say. So it’s the, and that’s kind of where I end up getting to, it’s like,
well, I really, you know, even though I'm saying like based on the assignment, this is what’s produced, and I’m assessing on that. It’s really more of a reflection of the assignment rather than the student. And so that’s also where the grading and assessing becomes different from me.

Evie’s comments illustrate that she sees grading primarily as a classroom exercise, whereas assessment is something different. While none of the anonymous students whose work Evie assessed will ever know the scores their work received, Evie still felt negative emotions when assigning lower scores to student work. These feelings may have been carried over from her experiences as a teacher. For both teachers and students, grades can be “affective carriers of emotion” and “symbols that communicate the complexities of praise and critique, approval and disappointment, rewards and punishments” (Inman & Powell, 2018, p. 46; see also Baker, 2014; Caswell, 2014; Mahfoodh, 2017; Yu et al., 2021). It may be exceptionally hard to differentiate purposes for assessment, so tied is the activity to teaching.

In any case, what Evie is doing here is directing her emotions toward another object (the assignment prompt), to which she assigns negative value (“this is such a bad assignment”) because it invites regurgitation. This process nevertheless appears to affect how she scores student work. While I can’t know how exactly Evie came to develop negative feelings toward reductive assignment prompts, her negative orientation toward assignments that invite regurgitation (and the student texts that respond to them) has likely been built up over time as she repeatedly encountered regurgitated readings of texts

41 The students’ work is sometimes collected without their knowledge, though the coordinator pointed out to me, “Many faculty do inform students that their work is being collected for the assessment and we make our assessment practices public” (personal communication, April 22, 2022).
(perhaps even in her role as a teacher) and negative valuations of regurgitation in other spaces. Historicizing such emotions, as I recommend in the conclusion to this chapter, would be a useful activity for assessors because emotions’ histories of production tend to be erased when we assign value to an object like a text. As Sara Ahmed (2014) puts it, “‘[F]eelings’ become ‘fetishes’, qualities that seem to reside in objects, only through an erasure of the history of their production and circulation” (p. 11). Without historicizing the emotions assessors bring to their work, it becomes easier to read objects “as the cause of emotions in the very process of taking an orientation towards them” (Ahmed, p. 6).

As we’ll see below, other assessors relied on their embodied knowledge (their “gut” feelings) when they were faced with challenging assessment decisions. Sometimes they made these decisions quickly and struggled to shift their initial impressions of a student text.

Assessing with the “Gut”

Prior research has demonstrated that faculty bring their own “personalized pedagogies, or beliefs, that run deep, have emotional valence, and are relatively intractable” to large-scale assessment (Neely, 2018, n.p.). Additionally, assessment research has documented that assessment is influenced by a variety of other factors, such as “intuitive impression[s]” of texts (Lumley, 2002) and raters’ approach to the decision-making task (DeRemer, 1998; Wolfe, 2005). Group assessments, Dryer and Peckham (2014) demonstrate, are not immune to these and other influences, including personal relationships with colleagues, (in)ability to reconcile private constructs of writing with those of the rubric, and even the conditions of the room in which scoring takes place. Assessments “involve faculty values and epistemologies, and as a result the participants
may find themselves working to manage emotional responses within the task of student paper evaluation and calibration discussions with colleagues” (Neely, 2018, n.p.). My participants did report having emotional responses as they scored student work.

AAC&U designed the VALUE rubrics so that assessors would start by looking at the highest-level and then move to lower-scoring rows, as needed, in line with what they call their asset-based approach (described in chapter three). Three of the faculty assessors I spoke to, however, appeared to resist using the rubrics in this way. Melissa explained her scoring process like so:

I began by looking, you could get a general feel like, I’d read the paper and be like, “Oh, I’m probably going to start at a two with this one.” And other ones, I’m like “this might be a three, four.” So I’d start with the highest place I thought they were and look for ways that the paper didn’t adhere to that particular level. So either it was it was doing more and then look at what was required for the next column up, or it was doing less. So I’d start with my general feel for the quality of the paper to determine where on each rubric I was going to be.

Melissa started with her “general feel” of the student text and then shifted one cell to the left or right on the rubric, depending on whether the student’s work confirmed or disconfirmed her initial impression. Similarly, Evie and Jake reported going with their “gut” reactions, which led them away from using the rubrics as AAC&U intends. They admitted that, partly due to time constraints, they would “go gut reaction” (Evie) or “gut level” (Jake). As Evie noted:

And after a while, I was kind of like, well, I guess like, it says something, if this is my gut reaction, I can’t labor over it too much. Like I will, you know, there were
times I’m like, I’m just gonna go gut reaction on these [snaps left fingers softly as she says this] because I don’t have the time to, like, really sit and ponder it.

Which may be that, you know— maybe there’s merit to that. You know, kind of be like, “you wouldn’t give me this many [artifacts], if you really wanted me to belabor over it,” which, you know, probably is a whole other host of concerns.

Evie added, “Like, this is, this is definitely labor.” Her finger snapping as she said “gut reaction” suggests that this method helped her assess more quickly and thus manage the labor of the assessment process. Jake confessed that, when he was scoring, he didn’t spend too much time, deeply cogitating on any one aspect. A lot of it was gut level, like Evie said, except for some of the trickier ones, some of the nuanced ones, like “Well, this kind of could be a three, this kind of could be a two.” [Bobs head from side to side, moves hands back and forth] Uhhh I didn’t have a coin handy to flip. So I just . . . just go with guts.

Jake bobbed his head from side to side as he relayed his thought process (“this kind of could be a three, this kind of could be a two”), embodying the ambivalence and indecisiveness he felt when assessing some student artifacts. In short, these assessors went with their “gut,” as several of them put it, and moved to different cells in the rubrics as their reading dis/confirmed their scoring hunches. However, sometimes they did not allow for the possibility that their reading of a student artifact would change. When I offered that “I found it tough to juggle all the various rubrics at the same time,” Evie noted:

Yeah, yeah, I had to usually like start with the same rubric each time, like they were really for, after a while, there’d be kind of things that I would know
instantaneously and go mark it, just because I’m like, “Oh, that’s so clearly gonna be a two or whatever.” So like, especially like, if, and especially assignments where I was like, the assignment does not allow for this, I would just go mark the zeros right away, just because I knew that wasn’t gonna change.

It is significant that Evie has closed off the possibility that certain student artifacts would not move her to change her gut level score. While she said she knew her scores would not change, it was Evie’s reading/evaluation of the text that she foreclosed changing.

Importantly, these assessors’ comments about when they relied on their gut indicate that they did so for a variety of reasons: to resolve a difficult scoring decision, to manage their time, and to make easier scoring decisions. For assessment events like this one, then, it’s worth considering what mechanisms might disrupt assessors’ tendency to turn to their “gut” when faced with challenging decisions.42 Otherwise, they may be far more likely to revert to their own private constructs of good writing, to ignore rubric language (which the coordinator tried to curtail in her training videos), and, most importantly, to bring predetermined readings to student texts that influence their scoring.

**Feeling Contained**

As mentioned above, assessors understandably produced complex emotions in the act of assessment. While Evie frequently used the phrase “I feel/felt” when describing her orientation to both the MMU Assessment and the student text under discussion in our focus group, she rarely named particular emotions. This is perhaps unsurprising, given that feel is a “cognitive verb” that is not necessarily used to express emotions; it indicates

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42 After reading a draft of this chapter, the assessment coordinator commented, “[I]t is so important to ensure the training thoroughly covers the rubrics to help reviewers become familiar with the instruments and then engage in practice scoring, so that the ‘gut’ is tied to experience in applying the instruments” (personal communication, April 22, 2022).
“a lower degree of certainty” and “a higher degree of subjectivity” (Fetzer, 2008, p. 393).

Accordingly, Evie “felt” that certain criteria in the Critical Thinking Rubric would fit better in the Written Communication Rubric. She had “a feeling” that the student writer whose work I distributed was “just rewording half of” the quotations they worked with and “not quoting the entire thing.” She “felt like” the student was including “all these other people’s ideas” and not so much their “idea and perspective.” She was a bit “suspicious” of the student’s paraphrasing ability, noting “I always feel a little bad doubting the student writer.” Alice also often used the phrase “I feel/felt.” For example, she commented that she thought the student paper was “well put together. But it kind of feels to me like a successful stringing together of evidence.”

Both Evie and Alice explicitly expressed feeling contained by the rubrics. At one point in our conversation, Evie mentioned that she did not see synthesis accounted for in the rubrics. Because the Critical Thinking Rubric does include the term synthesis in one row, which assesses students’ “analysis or synthesis,” I redirected Evie’s attention to the rubric’s language. She looked at it again and said:

I think, like, the wording of it, to me, runs the risk of pigeonholed into that specific vein, without accounting for other moments of synthesis and imaginative sort of things. So I think it’s one of those, like, again, I felt very—I felt restricted in terms of what qualifies in that category.

Evie’s description of feeling “restricted” by “what qualifies in that category” indicate she felt boxed in by the rubric’s framing. Alice’s negative orientation toward assessment was expressed in similar terms. At the end of our focus group, Alice reported her “real view
of assessment,” adding that she had participated in two accreditation processes for her department before:

Alice: I think that—I think that assessment has its place, but I think it’s—I think it’s wildly overused and over constrained

Charlotte: Mmmm [noding]

Chris: Hm [noding]

Alice: putting people in boxes that don’t necessarily give you meaningful information. I mean and there’s so much—you know, I try to grade papers on a rubric. And, you know, you just don’t always fit into these nice little boxes with what people give you. You can think you’ve covered things and define them well with a rubric, but you really don’t.

Notably, Alice had a negative orientation toward assessment in general, perhaps due to her experiences with accreditation and with students’ complaints about their rubric scores in her classes, which she mentioned shortly after the comment above. The rubric’s “nice little boxes” don’t “always fit” the way people hope. Perhaps the very structure of some rubrics (with rows and columns that create boxes) lead assessors to feel constrained, or even contained, by the rubric criteria. As we’ll see in the following chapter, the assessors’ container metaphors extended to how they treated the student text in focus groups as well.

**Conclusions**

This chapter highlighted the different spatiotemporal experiences of five faculty assessors and how they used a certain cognitive and embodied technique (relying on their “gut”) to make a variety of scoring decisions. Future research should investigate what
might prompt assessors to use this technique. Perhaps assessors perceive the rubrics to represent constructs of writing, critical thinking, and intercultural knowledge quite different from their own private constructs? Perhaps assessors perceive the rubrics to be unrelated to their primary work (of teaching and researching), as some of my participants mentioned? As discussed above, my participants did not regularly make time to distribute or discuss student writing in their classes (see table 4.1). Might this make it harder for faculty to find productive ways of talking about student writing, especially when they need to talk about student writing using new-to-them terms (as they do with the VALUE rubrics)? Or: might this finding make it more likely for faculty to rely on techniques like going with their “gut” when they assess student work using criteria they did not have a hand in developing?

Given that I did not observe my participants teaching, I cannot say what shape their class discussions of (student) writing take or the effect this might have on their practices of assessment. Of course, simply increasing the amount of time spent discussing student writing in class may not affect faculty’s practices of assessment. However, given that student work is anonymized for the Gen Ed assessment event, it might help faculty to make a more regular practice of distributing anonymized student texts in their classes and discussing these texts with students in terms of what they understand them to be doing (as opposed to what features in the student texts are “good” or “bad,” since such features are not inherently “good” or “bad”). Such discussions would likely reveal the variety of readings produced as well as the contingent nature of the values readers assign texts. Asking readers to account for what they take to be more or less useful about these student texts might help them come to terms with how their sense of what is more/less useful was
developed over time and when/how it appears to change (e.g., when confronted with texts that somehow look “different”).

In this chapter, we saw faculty assessors understandably going with their “gut” to make various scoring decisions. I, too, occasionally found myself using this technique. For example, for one of the student samples used for the online training/calibration, I write, “I go with my gut and feel good about my responses” (field note, March 14, 2021). In assessment events like this one, then, it would be useful to introduce methods of disrupting this tendency to turn to the “gut,” especially since, as noted above, this can lead assessors to arrive at predetermined scoring decisions. Given that assessors reported negative feelings associated with assessment and particular kinds of writing/assignments (in Evie’s case, with those that seem to invite regurgitation), I argue that assessors need time to historicize the production of those emotions so that they are less likely to treat them as intrinsic to the texts they read and assess. Caswell (2014, n.p.) recommends that teachers use “emotional episode[s]” that arise when they are grading to take stock of what might have triggered certain emotions and how they might respond in new ways. This is a useful first step, but historicizing such emotions would further it. For example, the perception that a student text was simply regurgitating (without adding new) ideas might have triggered frustration and, potentially, a lower score. Teacher-assessors can ask themselves what types of writing or writing features seem to trigger certain emotions in them and why and what experiences may have made these emotions habituated (e.g., their own histories with writing instruction and having their writing graded in a certain way). Teacher-assessors who find themselves arriving quickly at predetermined readings can be guided to ask themselves: What might be another way to read this student text?
Those who have access to assignment prompts in large-scale assessment events should also ask themselves what subjectivities and relations these prompts invite readers (i.e., students) to take up. Perhaps then assessors might be less likely to ascribe qualities like conventional/unoriginal to student texts and instead consider that students are also taking up the role of student (which has historically invited them to relay knowledge in ways that appear to be conventional) when they respond to prompts. In this way, the work of historicizing emotions toward particular kinds of writing could be built into the assessment training and calibration process.

Of course, feelings about particular kinds of writing are also bound up in people’s language/textual ideologies. Thus, in the following chapter, I focus on the textual ideologies that my participants bring to their work with the rubrics and their reading of a student text. In doing so, I attend to the embodied nature of such ideologies.
CHAPTER FIVE

FIVE FACULTY ASSESSORS’ TEXTUAL IDEOLOGIES

If we subscribe to the view that knowledge is inherently unstable because [it is] always transformed (in language) by its users and shaped by use and context, the metaphor of containment is a serious liability. (Bowden, 1993, pp. 373-374)

This chapter begins with a more extended discussion of language ideologies (briefly discussed in chapter three) before turning to an analysis of my participants’ instantiations of particular textual ideologies as they discussed their assessment of a student writing sample. The central finding of this chapter is that my participants identified and critiqued certain assumptions they perceived in the VALUE rubrics (e.g., the assumption that intercultural interactions occur outside the U.S. and that the rubrics assume a “universal standard”). Although they challenged these notions in their critiques of the rubrics, their comments on the student writing sample nevertheless perpetuate the container metaphor identified in chapter one. Following Bowden (1993, p. 374), I argue that “the metaphor of containment is a serious liability” that contradicts the assessors’ experiences as readers who must exert interpretive labor in their work with both the VALUE rubrics and the student text under discussion. Additionally, this metaphor and some of the textual ideologies described below erase the student writer’s labor.

My data in this chapter illustrate how individuals negotiate a range of competing, diverse ideologies as they read student writing. While standard language ideology would
appear to be dominant in these negotiations, this ideology is itself less stable than it seems. Attending to this instability, as I do below, can highlight the opportunities to intervene in perpetuations of standard language ideology.

Although my participants critiqued the assumptions that they interpreted the VALUE rubrics to be asking them to make of student writing, some of them made several assumptions of their own about the student writer and effaced the student’s agency. While all of my participants described the sample as “well-written” at one point in our discussion, some of them found it harder to read particular textual features in the student sample as anything other than derivative.

**Theorizing Standard Language Ideology**

In chapter three, I cited Woolard’s definition of language ideologies:

“Representations, whether explicit or implicit, that construe the intersection of language and human beings in a social world” (1998, p. 3). Language ideologies are a useful focus for this chapter because they help us push past the local/global binaries I pointed to in chapter one. As Wortham (2001) points out, studying language ideologies requires researchers to toggle between what appear to be micro and macro phenomena: “Language ideologies mediate social identity, because people rely on their construals of what particular linguistic patterns mean in order to identify speakers as occupying recognizable social positions” (Wortham, p. 256). As mentioned in chapter two, as a methodological tool, indexicality can help researchers home in on how snippets of conversation and text “index, or point to aspects of social context—and orientations—that is how speakers/hearers orient to what is said and written, both aspects being embedded sociohistorically” (Lillis, 2008, p. 376). In this chapter, I attend to how my focus group
participants’ comments about texts (both the VALUE rubrics and a student’s text) index particular textual ideologies that are aligned with standard language ideology.

Language ideologies are, broadly, beliefs about language use that are never just about language use. They influence what we think of as good or not-so-good writing, what kinds of speech or dialects we are more likely to appraise as articulate, deficient, normal, strange, and so on. Like other ideologies, language ideologies require maintenance and often operate below the level of people’s consciousness (see Giltrow, 2003). Additionally, they are: “frame[s] of interpretation” that are “felt to be commonsensical” (Verschueren, 2012, p. 10), “rarely questioned” (Verschueren, p. 12), largely implicit, and “because of [their] normative and common-sense nature, may be highly immune to experience and observation” (Verschueren, p. 14). Verschueren’s last point is crucial to keep in mind for my findings. Indeed, several of the assessors I interviewed quickly identified the rubrics as upholding a so-called universal standard. And they criticized the rubrics for this reason, suggesting that they were aware on some level of the problematic, dominant assumption that there can be a such a thing as “standard language.” But, at the same time (sometimes just minutes later), they made comments about student writing that also perpetuated standard language ideology (SLI).

Because standard language ideology (SLI) was the dominant ideology that cropped up in my data, below I unpack how SLI treats languages as discrete entities that are containers for meanings, treats the so-called standard as inherently

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43 For examples of the stunning lengths people will go to in the service of maintaining “the standard” see Milroy and Milroy (1999, pp. 24-46).
44 While some writing studies scholars use standard language ideologies (plural) (e.g., Davila, 2016; Gere et al., 2021), I follow other writing studies scholars (e.g., Baker-Bell, 2020, pp. 14-16; Olinger, 2016, p. 127) and linguists (e.g., Lippi-Green, 2012; Milroy, 2001; Woolard, 1998) who tend to employ the singular standard language ideology.
valuable/prestigious and stable/internally uniform although it is itself unstable and diverse, requires making cognitive distortions that ignore our experiences as language users, and is a racialized and embodied ideology. At the outset, however, I need to acknowledge a crucial point made by Milroy (2001): The “standard/non-standard dichotomy is itself driven by an ideology—it depends on prior acceptance of the ideology of standardization and on the centrality of the standard variety” (p. 534). My discussion would appear to take “the centrality of the standard” for granted and, in so doing, to attribute to it discreteness and stability. In an attempt to “avoid the ideological baggage that gets attached to recognizing discreteness of varieties,” Milroy “treat[s] standardization . . . as a process that is continuously in progress in those languages that undergo the process” (p. 534). Though this project is not an investigation of language standardization, this chapter is an investigation of how SLI infiltrates faculty assessors’ work with rubrics and student texts. I’m not sure I can avoid ideological baggage that comes with writing about SLI. (For brevity’s sake, I have abbreviated the term as SLI, though this punctuation would also appear to reify it.) However, I can say that SLI is not a stable ideology. Indeed, as I’ll demonstrate below, there are what Olinger (2021) might call “cracks” in this ideology that represent opportunities for chipping away at SLI. After all, SLI is perpetuated, maintained, and resisted in readers’, writers’, and speakers’ negotiations of language, which are the always emerging outcomes of practice (Pennycook, 2010).

**Languages as Discrete Entities**

As mentioned in chapter three, one tenet of SLI is the “belief that distinctly identifiable languages can and should be isolated, named, and counted” (Woolard, 1998,
But, as Milroy points out, stability and uniformity “are arguably not properties of real languages either—they are properties of idealized states of languages, and they are, especially, properties of standard languages” (2001, p. 545). Common, well-meaning institutional practices (like surveying students to get a sense of their language backgrounds) reflect the assumption that languages are discrete because “institutional language surveys reify or fix language backgrounds in the labeling act” (Bruce et al., 2022, p. 19).

**Language as a Container for Meaning**

As theorized in chapter one, writing assessment scholarship tends to treat assessment ecologies as emplaced containers. Language, too, is frequently treated as a container for meaning in perpetuations of SLI. For example, the composition instructors Davila (2016) interviewed see “standard English” as “normal, natural, non-interfering, and widely accessible” (p. 131) in part because they see it as a clear container for meaning, indexed through their use of phrases like “clarity of thought” (p. 139). Here, “standard English” is imagined as having inherently transparent meaning, which ignores the role that labor, social relations, and language ideologies among communicators play in interpreting any symbols.

**“The Standard” as Inherently Valuable/Prestigious**

SLI treats what is claimed as “the standard” as inherently valuable or prestigious even though “the standard,” like all varieties, is endowed as such by people, institutions, and policies (Milroy, 2001, p. 532). Its prestige is influenced by social, historical, and

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45 Milroy demonstrates that SLI even underpins much research in linguistics (pp. 543-551), for “the idea of what is believed to constitute a ‘language’ can hardly escape the influence of the standard language ideology” (2001, p. 539).
material conditions like colonization (Woolard, 1998, p. 17). SLI’s privilege may also be a reflection of the fact that, as Milroy points out, *standard* is frequently used to mean “measure of achievement,” which implies a “value-judgment” (p. 532). Thus, people frequently speak of encouraging students to meet standards when they really are referring to students meeting a particular singular standard. Indeed, Raymond Williams points out that it “is often impossible . . . to disagree with some assertion of standards without appearing to disagree with the very idea of quality” (1976, p. 249). *Standards* is such a powerful operative word because standards so often remain unnamed and, thus, seem uncontestable and even ahistorical (Fox, 1993, p. 39).

**In Contrast to our Experiences as Language Users**

As ideological, language ideologies are not reliable accounts of actual language practices of groups. Linguists (e.g., Kramsch, 2009; Lippi-Green, 2012, pp. 5-23; Milroy & Milroy, 1999, pp. 63-68) and many compositionists (e.g., Canagarajah, 2013, pp. 6-11, 56-75; Cooper, 2014; Horner et al., 2011; Young, 2010) have pointed out that our experiences as language users are at odds with ideas of languages as discrete, stable, internally uniform entities. We always draw on various linguistic resources when we communicate—indeed, “the languages on which we rely are themselves amalgamations of other languages and dialects” (Vance, 2009, p. 281; see also Saraceni, 2011)—although SLI treats languages as codes that can be switched on/off or meshed, thus assuming these codes are stable, uniform, and discrete (Lu, 2009; Schreiber & Watson, 2018; Vance, 2009).
Maintaining SLI Requires Cognitive Distortions

Importantly, the cognitive distortions people enact deny their lived experiences as language users who regularly draw on various linguistic resources. Olinger’s (2021) research on faculty’s talk about their writing offers useful examples of these cognitive distortions, which she calls “self-contradictions.” One faculty writer who frequently advised writers to “show, don’t tell,” appeared to violate his own advice in his writing, sometimes telling readers of his blog that particular research findings were interesting, eye-opening, and so on (Olinger, p. 9). When Olinger asks this faculty member about the “apparent contradiction,” he explains it by saying the advice may not apply as strongly to the kind of writing he did on his blog, thus “validat[ing] the notion that good writing is context-specific” (p. 11). In the process of explaining this contradiction, he “introduced some new contradictions and redefined [his] ‘show, don’t tell’” belief (p. 9). Crucially, as Olinger points out, what is changing in her faculty informants’ descriptions is not their sense of what constitutes “good writing” but rather their “representations of the features” that constitute, to them, “good writing” (p. 18). These changing representations allow them to perpetuate the notion that good writing is a stable construct (cf. Lea & Street, 1998), instead of changing their beliefs about writing.

Such habituated cognitive distortions undoubtedly affect our assessment practices. When we continue to evaluate certain writers’ texts in a particular way (e.g., evaluating ESL students’ writing as “awkward”) it becomes harder to read particular features of their writing as anything other than “awkward” (Woolard, p. 19). Citing Irvine and Gal’s (1995) work, Woolard notes, “[A]s ‘simplicity’ proliferates in the speech of the ‘simple folk,’ that which might be characterized as complex or ornate is ignored,
compartmentalized, or even sometimes stripped from their repertoire through the process of erasure” (p. 19). As we’ll see below, some faculty assessors found it harder to read particular textual features in the student sample as anything other than derivative.

**SLI as Racialized Ideology**

As many scholars have pointed out, SLI operates as a raciolinguistic ideology (e.g., Alim et al., 2016; Baker-Bell, 2020; Davila, 2012; Inoue, 2019a; Lippi-Green, 2012). That is, language is not only used to construct race but our ideas about race influence our ideas about language use and our ideas about language. The cognitive distortions referenced above lead some people to falsely claim that white people speak “standard English,” so those who are “not white” can then be blamed, condemned, or discriminated against for ostensibly not speaking so-called “standard English.” For example, as John Baugh (2003, p. 155) has famously demonstrated, people can engage in “linguistic profiling,” the “auditory equivalent of visual ‘racial profiling’” by interpreting particular auditory cues to index a speaker as African American; in this case, linguistic profiling occurs when listeners discriminate against the speaker based on these assumptions. Linguistic profiling can also occur when listeners discriminate in favor of speakers. For example, ascription of a white racial identity can lead people to “hear” or read what they assume to be language normalcy to confirm the ascription. For the composition instructors that Bethany Davila (2012) interviewed, the ascription of a white racial identity to anonymous students’ writing led them to read the writing as unmarked. Such research demonstrates the powerful tendency to link whiteness with standardness (Davila, 2012, p. 196; see also Baker-Bell, 2020, pp. 3-4). In short, SLI is so widespread that it is treated as common sense and ideologically neutral, although it is not. SLI thus
makes it easy to devalue other languages and dialects and the people who use them without explicitly naming how racism, classism, sexism, etc. are also involved in the devaluation of people’s language use.

**Language Ideologies as Embodied**

The embodied nature of language ideologies has received little treatment in writing studies scholarship in general and in scholarship on faculty’s writing values in particular (but see Flowers, 2016; Olinger, 2021). Thaiss and Zawacki (2006) mention that some of their faculty informants “struggl[ed] to balance the claims of systematic analysis, of emotion, and of the life of the body” in talk about their writing (p. 38), but their discussion focuses on these faculty writers’ navigation of “reason v. emotion” without analyzing the role the body might play in navigating these tensions (p. 39).

Bourdieu’s notion of habitus illuminates the role of the body and practice in developing particular dispositions which, over time, contribute to the formation of language ideologies. Bourdieu defines habitus as “a system of durable and transposable dispositions which, integrating all past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions, and makes it possible to accomplish infinitely differentiated tasks, thanks to the analogical transfer of schemata acquired in prior practice” (1972/1977, p. 261). Different lived experiences and material conditions produce a different habitus, which guides, though does not determine, our present and future actions as well as how we interpret them. In this sense, habitus is both “a structuring structure” informing present experiences and practices and “a structured structure” informed by past experiences and practices, as Bourdieu puts it in later work (1979/1984, p. 170). Habitus, like ideology, frequently “operates beneath the level of
consciousness and is continually honed in the very movement of its deployment” (Wacquant, 2016, p. 66). As teacher-scholars respond to and assess student writing, read and respond to calls for proposals, develop a research agenda, and move through conference spaces where certain conversations (re)circulate, their habitus and language ideologies continuously, and often subconsciously, develop. In this sense, our practices, even those practices of assessment that seem unique or private, are never purely individual: As Asao Inoue puts it, “[O]ne’s judgment is not simply one’s own individual judgment of something. It is never simply an individual practice. It is consubstantial, interconnected, to the social world we live in” (2019a, p. 359). While habitus is durable and transferable, it is, importantly, “not static or eternal: dispositions are socially mounted and can be eroded, countered or even dismantled by exposure to novel external forces” (Wacquant, p. 66). Olinger (2021, p. 19) reminds us that our dispositions can “wiggle away” and our practices can contradict our disciplinary knowledge of and beliefs about writing, language, and so on. Indeed, this was certainly the case for my participants. Though Bourdieu’s work primarily considers how class and embodied experiences inform habitus, Inoue (2019a) reminds us that habitus is a racialized disposition, too. For these reasons, to refer to “the discursive, bodily, and performative ways we use and judge language,” Inoue (2019a, p. 357) uses the term “White racial habitus.”

Given that our embodied movements and practices over time contribute to our ongoing dispositions and language ideologies, it is crucial to attend to not only people’s talk, but also their gestures. Two studies have informed the approach to gesture analysis taken here. As Olinger’s (2020) synthesis of research on the conduit metaphor’s
entailment reveals, “metaphoric gestures are key to understanding beliefs about language and communication” (p. 172). Gestures offer, by extension, a crucial—if often unexamined—way into understanding how language ideologies work. Olinger’s research on writers’ representations of style demonstrates that their gestures index positive and/or negative relationships to styles, which she treats as “influenced by participants’ language ideologies” (Olinger, 2016, p. 125). For example, one of her participants describes scientific research writing as “boring,” dry, and rigidly sequenced, illustrating her negative stance toward this style by “slic[ing] her flattened hand down through the air in successive steps, enacting the style’s cut-and-dried nature” (Olinger, 2021, p. 12). Such rigid gestures illuminate people’s representations of style (and language) as perhaps more fixed than it is in practice, indexing SLI.

Flowers’s (2016) work provides another window into how gestures index particular spatiotemporal relationships and illuminate language ideologies. She shows how both proponents and opponents of a city’s push to make English its official language evoke the local/global binary for their own ends. For example, proponents of the policy “position[ed] themselves in opposition to the global” (p. 487), which they imagined as a distant location from which multilingual speakers arrived. Opponents of the policy, on the other hand, argued that multilingual speakers have always been present (i.e., local) in their community. In describing their positions, both groups’ gestures index particular spatial (e.g., close versus distant) and temporal relationships (e.g., now versus in the past). As Olinger’s (2020, 2021) and Flowers’s (2016) work suggests, attending to gestures can illuminate the embodied nature of language ideologies and might shed more light on the formation of SLI/the “White racial habitus” (Inoue, 2019a).
As mentioned above, people’s language ideologies may be less stable—and more diverse and conflictual—than they typically seem. That is, individuals negotiate a range of competing ideologies (sometimes, my data below demonstrates, in one extended conversation). Attending to this instability, as I do below, can highlight the “cracks” (Olinger, 2021) in language ideologies so that we might better chip away at SLI.

**Resisting Containment, Slipping into “White as Norm” Assumptions**

Table 4.2 (see chapter four) indicates that, with the exception of Chris (a social work faculty member), my participants did not draw on the terms from the Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Rubric often in their teaching. In fact, Jake’s and Alice’s survey responses demonstrate that they never use terms from this rubric in their teaching. Evie said in our focus group that *curiosity* and *empathy* (two terms from this rubric) are values that are important to her as a teacher, though she added that they come up in class conversations and “don’t get folded into my assignments.” For Evie, this rubric “feels super problematic.” As she acknowledged, even the assessment coordinator at MMU seemed to find the rubric’s use “murky.” Thus, it is not surprising that all five of my participants said they found the Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Rubric the most challenging one to navigate. Evie, a white composition instructor, described her issues with the Intercultural Rubric like so:

I remember when, when I was doing the assessment stuff and doing the training, you know, it was like, you know, they’re, like, for intercultural things they’re always talking about outside U.S. and, but all of it was so coded white as norm for me. I was like, yeah, but like, you know, the example you give in the training,
like, these Hispanic culture things these could also happen in the U.S. in Hispanic communities, um or Latinx communities. And, and like a lot of things I would be reading, like, I’d be like, “Well, I feel like, you know, if I don’t mark this as signs of intercultural things, like, I’m also kind of ignoring certain cultures.” Like, I think, for example, like reading essays where, like, people were kind of talking about code switching or um Black English, and you know, so there was a, there’s a lot wrapped up in that, that, you know, as much as the University also recognizes that this rubric isn’t quite perfected yet, it also feels super problematic. And I wrestled with it a lot. Just because, you know, because of the things that you know, you’re quote unquote supposed to be marking, or what qualifies in that space, and then what as a result gets neglected, that I think also demonstrates really important work that the students are doing, and ideas that they’re tackling.

Several minutes later, when she started to talk about specific rows on the Intercultural Rubric, Evie continued:

When they say other cultural perspectives or, like, the verbal nonverbal communication [row] in the training. It was so specific, like, non-U.S. outside U.S. because they’re wanting that global. The globalization kind of thing. But, you know, that’s not the same as intercultural, like, you know, those those have very, very different connotations. And even again, you know, like, there’s a lot of globalization, you know, globalization doesn’t just happen outside the U.S.

46 Here, Evie is referencing a student writing sample that analyzed a literary character coming-to-terms with her Hispanic identity. This writing sample was used in the training for faculty assessors.
As Evie described the training directive to only assess “cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal communication” that take place “outside [the] U.S.” for this row on the Intercultural Rubric (see AAC&U, 2009b), she moved her hands away from her and pushed them downwards, illustrating her sense of the rubric’s spatial assumptions (that these intercultural exchanges happen outside the U.S.; see figure 5.1. Some of the below images are difficult to see because Evie moved her hands rapidly and, at times, out of view of the camera). She then sliced her hands downward when she said “in the U.S.,” bouncing them for emphasis as she added “in Hispanic communities.” Her gestures here underscore her sense that the rubric is upholding particular spatial relationships (inside versus outside the U.S.).

**Figure 5.1** Evie gestures as she describes her issues with the Intercultural Rubric. The text is positioned to appear below the co-occurring gesture.

for intercultural things, they’re always talking about outside U.S.

In the data excerpt above, Evie acknowledged that the Intercultural Rubric ties cultures and globalization to particular physical locations (for example, in the U.S. versus out of the U.S.) and her discomfort with the rubric’s assumption that certain intercultural interactions happen only outside the U.S. In short, this rubric adopts a containerized
perspective of where intercultural interactions can occur. Evie resisted the assumption behind the document that cultures are bound to particular locations (while still using the container metaphors inside/outside). She said cultural interactions can happen “in the U.S.” in the case of the Hispanic/Latinx cultural interactions and Black English examples she offered. Note, too, that earlier she described this rubric as “coded white as norm.” In saying this, Evie appeared to read the rubric as upholding SLI, which associates standardness with whiteness as the invisible norm.

In my second focus group, Melissa, a white faculty member who teaches Communication and WGS courses, critiqued the rubrics in a similar way. She commented that “all three of the rubrics start from a very normative mainstream voice and perspective”:

The other thing I meant to say that I struggled with, too, was that all three of the rubrics start from a very normative mainstream voice and perspective? And so like in the write—Written Communication [Rubric] for example, it was interesting to me how the Intercultural [Rubric] wants you to assess the student’s cultural background and determine whether or not they recognize it, but the Written Communication [Rubric] doesn’t ask you to reflect on the student’s potential cultural voice, and how that informs their writing. So it kind of it it sort of starts from the idea that there’s this universal acceptable norm, which I’m always going to have problem with. So.

Melissa’s critique of the Written Communication Rubric is that it separates a writer’s “cultural voice” from their writing (relegating the former to the Intercultural Rubric). As Melissa said that the Written Communication Rubric “sort of starts from the idea that
there’s this universal acceptable norm,” she raised both her hands, in a rigid, flattened
gesture, to eye level and bounced them lightly for emphasis (see figure 5.2). She verbally
refused the idea that there is such a thing as a “universal acceptable norm,” using this
gesture to illustrate the concept. Several minutes later, she reiterated this point, saying
that her “biggest problem with the Written Communication [Rubric] is that it assumes a
desired universal standard. And then asks you to assess . . . how well the paper adheres to
that universal standard.” As she said “desired universal standard,” she raised her right
hand to eye level, much like she did earlier, and bounced it lightly for emphasis (see
figure 5.2). She repeated this same gesture a third time when she used the phrase in a
similar context. Melissa’s gestures index a particular embodied relationship toward the
so-called standard (perhaps one that associates the standard with high quality) and may
reflect a disposition that has grown more durable over time after repeated encounters with
it in schooling and elsewhere.

Figure 5.2 Melissa gestures as she says the Written Communication Rubric “starts from
this idea that there’s this universal acceptable norm” (left image) and “assumes a desired
universal standard” (right image)

Several minutes later, shortly after I asked if there was anything important to the
assessors about writing that did not seem to be accounted for in the three VALUE rubrics,
Melissa expanded on the point she articulated in the above excerpt. On this point, she referenced an article she read several years ago:

I read a really interesting article several years ago that I have thought about ever since that was basically made the argument that students who are educated in higher-performing primary secondary schools can write a “good paper,” in that it adheres to all the rules of grammar and construction of the paper, but they’re actually not really very good writers, because they lack any innovation or creativity to their ideas, or they lack any kind of—

As she uttered the phrase “higher-performing . . . schools,” she raised her right hand above her head (not unlike how she raised her hand earlier to underscore the “desired universal standard,” albeit this time with an open palm). And as she said “good writing,” she raised her fingers to form scare quotes (see figure 5.3 for images of both gestures). At this point, Melissa’s video froze. When she appeared onscreen again, she continued, this time explicitly linking the “normative mainstream” to whiteness:

article that I had read, basically [saying that] today, students who are educated in normative mainstream, high-performing schools, aka white schools, wealthy white schools, can write on the surface . . . [It] looks like a well-written paper, because it adheres to all the rules of grammar and syntax. But when you actually read the paper, it’s like, they didn’t really say anything, there’s no innovation or creativity to their voice. There’s no way in which they engage. It’s just really concrete. And not—it’s not expansive at all.47

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47 Melissa did seem to make some hand-waving gestures here, too, but her internet connection was slow so I was unable to capture them.
Melissa buys into the idea that high-performing schools are not only wealthy but populated by white students who “can write on the . . . surface” (i.e., conform to punctuation conventions). By “well-written,” Melissa seems to allude to writing that, as she put it “adheres to all the rules of grammar and syntax.” At the same time, her scare quotes for “good writing” and her comments indicate that she appears to believe that writing involves something more than this on-the-surface adherence (such as “innovation,” “creativity,” and “engage[ment]”).

**Figure 5.3** Melissa gestures as she says “high-performing” (left image) and “good paper” (right image)

I see two ways to read Melissa’s suggestion that a text can be grammatically/structurally “well-written” but still “not really say anything.” First, Melissa may be implying that the form and content of a text can be treated separately and that the form is merely a decorative container that holds the content (or doesn’t). This language-as-container metaphor implies that meaning is shipped off to receivers, who unpack that meaning and receive it unchanged. In this metaphor this unpacking requires no labor from readers and languages are assumed to be stable, internally uniform, and discrete. Those same assumptions underpin SLI. Another possible reading is that Melissa finds it problematic to only pay attention to the form of a text (see her scare quotes for “good writing” in figure 5.3). In either case, while Melissa references some generic ideas that link a certain
kind of mechanically skilled writing with whiteness (which is her reading of the article she’s talking about), she does not take issue with the idea that mechanically skilled writing can be associated with whiteness.

In other comments, Melissa linked the so-called standard to whiteness. She mentioned in passing another faculty member who is frustrated with having to teach to “that universal standard,” again raising her hands high, this time moving them in front of her face at eye level. She continued: “Like it’s basically the white standard. The European standard is the standard that she has to teach to.” Here, Melissa uses “European” as a blanket term that she associates with whiteness. She did so again, when she reiterated, “The assumption is that all of the students submitting artifacts are from a European perspective.” She wondered how to “address that with an international student.”

Melissa critiqued the rubrics for upholding a universal, white standard and for inviting assessors to make certain assumptions about the student writers whose work they read. At one point in our discussion, Melissa raised the question of how any assessor working with the Intercultural Rubric could know a student writer’s “cultural frame”: “How am I supposed to know what their cultural frame is to know whether or not they’re recognizing their own cultural biases?” Still, less than an hour later, Melissa herself made some assumptions about the student writer under discussion in our focus group, reading them to be “a native English speaker.” Her comments below indicate that she (like other instructors [see Davila, 2012]) may associate certain kinds of writers (native English speakers) with unmarked writing. As she discussed the student writing sample, Melissa admitted that she read the student writer to be a native English speaker. She volunteered:
Melissa: The grammatic voice, like it was, it was very consistent with a—and I recognize that I’m making a lot of assumptions—but it read very much to me like a native English speaker.

Chris: mhm.

Melissa: There was a lack of—there was a sufficient level of formality with a lack of stiffness of phrasing that I often see in international students. Melissa pointed to her previous experiences with international students having a “stiffness of phrasing” and contrasted that with what she did not see in the text—in other words, she read the text as unmarked, hence her assumption that the student may be a native English speaker. Tellingly, Melissa did not ascribe a racial identity to this student. Based on her previous comments associating grammatically or structurally “well-written” texts with white students (recall her comment about schools with wealthy white students), it is possible that she read the student as white, though this goes unstated. It’s worth pointing out that at other points in our conversation, Melissa (and others) repeatedly gendered the student writer using she/her pronouns, although none of us knew the actual gender identity of the student. Melissa did not point to excerpts from the student’s writing that led her to read the student writer as female or a native English speaker. Regrettably, I did not think to ask at the time, though I now see the moment when Melissa admits “I recognize that I’m making a lot of assumptions” as an opportunity for me to intervene and ask more about the origin of those assumptions.

As demonstrated in the above excerpts, Evie resisted the Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Rubric’s containerized notions of where certain intercultural interactions occur (globally, i.e., outside the U.S.). Both she and Melissa also seemed to
resist the rubrics’ assumptions of a universal standard that they both briefly but explicitly linked to whiteness. As we’ll see below, however, they (and my other participants) made comments about the student writing sample that index particular textual ideologies that would seem at odds with their critiques of the rubrics.

**Five Faculty Assessors’ Textual Ideologies: Valuing Writtenness**

My coding for indexicality process focused on the textual ideologies (Turner, 2018) that assessors brought to their reading of the rubrics and/or the student sample (see chapter two for more on this process). I define textual ideologies as beliefs about how texts function (e.g., as transparent containers for meaning, as requiring interpretation, etc.). I focus on them here because I was struck by how often my participants described the student sample as generally “well-written,” and yet offered quite different evaluations of it. They all appeared to value what Joan Turner (2018) calls *writtenness*, an ideological, “cultural ideal, whose values are implicit rather than explicitly espoused” (p. 7). Writtenness is indexed by evaluative terms like “efficient” “smooth” and “clear” (which my participants used to describe the student text). Writtenness is unmarked in good writing (Turner, p. 20) and only becomes an issue in writing that “draws attention to itself,” often through putative “errors” or unconventional style choices (Turner, p. 21). Additionally, writtenness as a cultural ideal is treated as ahistorical (Turner, pp. 33-54). But, as scholars have pointed out, this cultural ideal of essayistic prose took shape in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, when texts were treated as “natural” representations of the material world that were “self-sufficient,” meaning no more or less than what they “say” (Trimbur, 1990; see also Bazerman, 1988, pp. 59-79; Olinger, 2021, p. 3).
My participants made comments that indexed three textual ideologies: the smooth read ideology (Turner, pp. 12-13), the text-as-container ideology, and (less often) the text-as-interpretive ideology. Below, I define and illustrate these three ideologies in turn as I analyze participants’ comments about the rubrics and the student sample.

**The Smooth Read Ideology**

The smooth read ideology is indexed by describing reading experiences in terms of “metaphors of movement, which ideally should be unencumbered and therefore smooth” (Turner, p. 13; see also pp. 235-240). Turner suggests, “This ideology is realized in common metaphors in metatextual commentary, which construct an image of the ideal reading experience as moving along a smooth path. Somewhat ironically, it is in the detraction from the ideal, in having the path blocked, or movement hampered, that the ideal itself is indicated” (p. 236). Readers who use metaphors like *stumbling, sluggish,* and *dense* imply they dislike texts that offer “a rougher ride” (Turner, p. 13). By the same token, descriptors like “smooth” and “efficient” (used by my participants) also index the smooth read ideology. Typically, this ideology is signaled “when the attention of academic readers is drawn to the prose itself, rather than the message being conveyed” (Turner, p. 238). Ideally, for these readers, “the prose is so smooth that the eye and the mind glide past it without noticing it” (Turner, p. 236). In other words, this ideology values writing that does not call attention to itself through so-called errors or unconventional stylistic choices. It treats this kind of writing as “unmarked.” As mentioned above, research indicates that composition instructors can read “standard English” as unmarked and to associate such unmarked language with whiteness (see Baker-Bell, 2020, pp. 3-4; Davila, 2012).
By treating writing like so-called standard English as “unmarked” and “smooth to read,” the smooth read ideology elides the labor that writers exert in writing and which readers exert in reading. My analysis calls attention to this labor in order to demonstrate and push back on how these ideologies are reproduced. The smooth read ideology is crucial to make explicit because it sneakily upholds so-called SLI without actually naming it as such. Terms like “smooth” and “efficient” are, in this sense, usefully vague for faculty to deploy. Like Turner, I hope that making these metaphors explicit can, as she puts it, “weaken their ideological power” (p. 12; see also Lillis & Curry, 2010, pp. 161-164).

As table 5.1 indicates, all five of my participants made comments that indexed this ideology. The composition assessors, however, were more likely to make comments about the student’s prose. Evie offered that she would give the student writing sample a higher score on the Written Communication Rubric because the writing “is snappy, it is very clean.” From other comments Evie made about the student’s writing, I infer that it was the student’s skillful integration of quotations that led Evie to read the writing as, in her words, “clean,” “smooth,” and “efficient.” At one point, she remarked that she had written this note to herself as she was reading the student sample: “Yep, reads clean. I got through it really quick.” Similarly, Jake described the student’s prose as “crisp,” “structured well,” “efficient,” and having “punch” and “snap.” Notably, while Jake said the student sample “would have scored rather high on the Written Communication” Rubric, he did not explain this observation by pointing to language in the rubric. He simply said this was because the writing was “crisp,” “thorough,” and “structured well.”
Melissa, Chris, and Alice made comments that praised the student text’s structure. Melissa commented that the student “really smoothly segues right into the quote” at one point and that their writing “flows logically.” Alice, too, praised the student’s writing as “well-written” and “well-put-together.” Notably, one of Melissa’s comments about the student text appeared to contradict other comments she made about what she valued in writing. In our discussion, Melissa noted that participating in the MMU Assessment had influenced her own grading practices. When I asked how so, she responded: “it’s reinforced my belief that . . . the grammar is less important than the ideas that are presented, assuming that [students’] grammar is at least well enough for me to understand what the hell they’re talking about.” Her comment suggests that attending to grammar is not something she prioritizes in her comments on student writing (unless it interferes with her understanding of their writing). But Melissa’s initial impressions of the student sample belie these comments: “My first impression was that it was a well-written piece, didn’t have a whole lot of grammatical errors. I thought the student did a good job of expressing themselves.” Melissa first commented on the text itself (“it was a well-written piece”) and what she did not see in it (“grammatical errors”). She then shifted into praising the student. Her first comment about the student’s writing mentioned grammar, which she claimed to see as “less important.” But in her assessment of the student text, she appeared to associate good writing with the apparent absence of grammatical errors.
Table 5.1 Smooth Read Ideology Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Comments on Student Sample</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evie</strong></td>
<td>“So it scored very high on the second half of the Written Communication [Rubric] because like Jake said, it is snappy, it is very clean.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“It’s very clear. I was like the function, I know the function of this, I know where it’s going. . . . I do have a very clear sense of . . . . where they’re going.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“It’s efficient.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Yep, reads clean. I got through it really quick.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“it was making a very clear, deliberate shift there.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“It was like really put together like sour—like reading, like outside source, reading, outside source in ways that made sense. But then I never saw it fully come to fruition like, feel like I wasn’t seeing things come to fruition.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jake</strong></td>
<td>“I’d like to say that even though this isn’t on the rubric [chuckles], I mean, this this had this writing had some snap to it. This out of this, this had this had punch [punches right hand downward as he says this]. It did. It was [snaps fingers]. Gosh, I don’t mean West. Side Story [hums a little tune] snaps [snaps fingers]. You know, it was it was crisp, the writing was crisp overall. And um [pause] this would have scored rather high on the Written Communication, I think, because of that, it just seemed um [pause] it seemed thorough. And, and of course it was it was structured well.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The student text has “snappiness.” “Just the way that that way that flows the way that I guess it’s just not necessarily acrobatic punctuation, but it’s more or less um . . . efficient.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“It’s very efficient. And that’s and that’s something that that I look for, is this an efficient use of words? And that’s where the snappiness comes in.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“it’s crisp”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“It’s nice and crisp and yknow fits the fits the Written Communication Rubric well.”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Melissa

“‘My first impression was that it was a well-written piece, didn’t have a whole lot of grammatical errors. I thought the student did a good job of expressing themselves.’

“Because for the most part, it’s it’s a well written paper, it’s well organized, it flows flows logically, arguments are well supported with credible evidence that’s appropriately cited.”

“the graceful language to me is that she does a really good job of integrating the quotes, so that they flow—she says language is not merely a passageway to knowledge, it’s a form of knowing by itself. That includes a quote. So it really smoothly segues right into the quote, and uses the quote, to build on the thing that she’s making an argument about.”

“it’s a little bit more prose-y. . . . I mean, it’s less straightforward and more graceful because to me, a non-graceful paper would be one that constantly says, ‘So-and-so notes that, here’s the quote, let me talk about it,’ as opposed to smoothly integrating the quote right into her own sentences, while clearly still identifying it as quote. That was part of how I interpreted it as graceful language.”

Chris

The student writer’s quotations “were so well-integrated. It almost sounded like they were hers.”

Alice

“I agree that it is well put-together. But it kind of feels to me like a successful stringing together of evidence.”

“I do think it’s well-written. And I do think they pulled a lot together nicely. But it still reads to me, like mostly a summary of other people’s work with a few connecting pieces that the writer was able to make.”

**Text-as-Container Ideology**

What I’m calling the text-as-container ideology refers to the belief that texts are containers for meaning and, consequently, that form and content can be separated. This ideology is related to the smooth read ideology in that a smooth read is seen as making it easier for readers to “unpack” a text’s meaning. Given the prevalence of the conduit metaphor, the most common metaphor for language, described in chapter three (see also...
Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, pp. 10-13; Reddy, 1993), it is not surprising that assessors relied on euphemisms that treat form and content as separate.

Assessors often commented that student work or assignments did not, in their opinion, “fit the rubric.” While “fit” can imply that they were conceptualizing texts as containers, it can also imply that they were imagining a misalignment between the rubrics and the assignment prompts/student artifacts. Thus, in table 5.2 below, I leave out these references to texts not fitting/aligning with the rubrics, but I include references that more explicitly conceptualize the rubrics as containers. For example, Alice commented that “longer [artifacts] were maybe easier to fit into the rubric.” Her use of the phrase “fit into” indicates, to me, the notion that the rubric is a container that can more or less easily hold artifacts. Similarly, Melissa wondered how she was “supposed to pull out all of that intercultural and critical thinking stuff from” shorter student artifacts. Her use of the phrase “pull out” calls to mind a container from which rubric criteria can be extracted.

Jake, Melissa, and Alice made comments that suggested they think form and content can be separated. For instance, Jake shared some advice he offers his students: “don’t just be one of these people who you find something looks good in the source, you just throw it into your paper inside.” As he said this, he made a tossing motion with his hands in front of his torso, as if he were literally throwing something into a container. While the focus of Jake’s comments appear to be on what is inside the container, the paper is conceptualized as a kind of container.

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48 Their observation is aligned with one that is apparently made by other faculty assessors. When I asked the MMU assessment coordinator if faculty assessors experienced any challenges during the assessment, she responded: “The primary challenge that I hear from our assessors is that the assignment does not fit the rubrics” (personal communication, May 6, 2021).

49 I was unable to capture this gesture in a screenshot. Due to the angle of Jake’s camera at this moment, his hands moved out of view of the camera quickly.
One of the more common phrases assessors used, though, was to say that a text can be well-written, but not “say anything,” as if texts could be containers devoid of meaning even after readers have brought labor to bear in interpreting them (see table 5.2). In Jake’s words, “A student can score high three and four on a rubric. But their writing not actually say anything.” And in Alice’s words: “somebody could be checking the [Written Communication Rubric] boxes, and have their organization and their presentation, and their formatting. And they’re saying nothing in the paper.”

In pointing to these examples, I do not wish to suggest that container metaphors are more prevalent than normal in these assessors’ comments. Rather, I see these comments as important to attend to because they illustrate the persistence of container metaphors in discussions about texts (student texts and otherwise). Bowden (1993) points out that such metaphors are a “serious liability” if, as I and others do, “we subscribe to the view that knowledge is inherently unstable because [it is] always transformed (in language) by its users and shaped by use and context” (pp. 373-374). Container metaphors, in contrast to this view, treat texts as fixed containers for knowledge, imagining that texts and knowledge can be stable in the first place as they circulate. As I’ll argue below, when used to discuss the student sample in focus groups, comments that evoke container metaphors effaced the student writer’s agency as well as assessors’ own interpretive labor.
Table 5.2 Text-as-Container Ideology Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jake</td>
<td>“…as I tell my students, don’t just be one of these people who you find something looks good in the source, you just <strong>throw it into your paper inside.</strong>” [Here he makes tossing motions with his hands in front of his torso]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“A student can score high three and four on a rubric. But <strong>their writing not actually say anything.</strong>”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>“Some some of the assignments were like a page-and-a-half. How am I supposed to <strong>pull out</strong> all of that intercultural and critical thinking stuff from a page-and-a-half?”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“…looks like a well written paper, because it adheres to all the rules of grammar and syntax. But when you actually read the paper, it’s like, <strong>they didn’t really say anything</strong>, there’s no innovation or creativity to their voice.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I’m so over reading papers that are packed with flowery prose to make the word count or the page count <strong>that don’t say a thing.</strong>”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>[On her process when she was reading shorter artifacts] “They were just more shallow. The assessments were more shallow. I mean, there was just none. You know, I assessed them the same way. <strong>They just went a lot quicker, because there wasn’t anything to assess.</strong>”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In some disciplines, “you can shine on a professor with a <strong>really pretty sounding paper that doesn’t say anything.</strong>”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>[On his scoring process] “But I when I read the artifacts, you [to Melissa] use the word ‘quality.’ I don’t really look for quality, I just <strong>look for what’s in the rubric.</strong> Uh ‘quality’ always speaks of grading to me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>“…somebody could be checking the [Written Communication Rubric] boxes, and have their organization and their presentation, and their formatting. And <strong>they’re saying nothing</strong> [brings hands apart in front of her] in the paper. But they’ve checked all those boxes.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I would say the longer [artifacts] were maybe <strong>easier to fit into the rubric.</strong> There was more to work with. Not necessarily that they were better, there was just more to work with.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“I just think her conclusion is lacking for impact. So it’s okay, but it <strong>doesn’t really say anything.</strong>”</td>
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*“Well-written, but . . .”: The Effacement of the Student Writer’s Agency*

While the assessors all, at one point, praised the student text as well-written, three of them sometimes followed this comment with the phrase “but . . .” and pointed to
something that the text lacked. Evie, Jake, and Alice referred to the text as well-written and then, sometimes, promptly hedged their praise with a comment that evaluated it as insufficient in some way (see table 5.3). Joan Turner (2018) calls such commentary a “mitigating move, softening the blow of a criticism, or compensating for other drawbacks” (p. 68). This rhetorical move indicates that “the message is: ‘The writing is good, but . . .’” (Turner, p. 67). Importantly, this “mitigating move” treats form (writing) and content as separate. For example, Evie praised the student’s paraphrasing and work with sources and then added, “but it was sooo mechanical after a point.” Similarly, she complimented the student’s summary (“good summary”), following this with: but “doesn’t necessarily go beyond that.” Alice, on the other hand, tended to praise the student’s writing in general (as, e.g., “well-put-together” and “well-written”), and then expressed doubts about the student’s contributions: “I’m not convinced. . . . I can’t contribute so much of this to the writer.” Jake also appeared unsure that he could attribute the claims made in the text to the student writer. He described the student text as “nice and crisp” and said it “fits the Written Communication rubric well,” and quickly added that the student was “reporting what . . . they’ve read.” These assessors, in short, tended to praise the student’s prose but made comments that, in effect, devalued the work the student was doing in the text by describing it as more conventional and less original (i.e., more of the same). But even work that appears to be more of the same requires agency and labor on the part of writers. Furthermore, such writing is still different, for it is (re)produced in a new spatiotemporal context (see Lu & Horner, 2013). I return to this point below in my analysis of a moment in the student text that produced different readings among assessors.
In our focus group conversation, Melissa and Chris offered a quite different interpretation of the student’s work. Below is their discussion of the student’s conclusion paragraph, in particular the student’s decision to end with a quotation, with which Alice took issue:

Alice: . . . to me, you know, your conclusion and your recommendations, that’s you’re kind of pulling it all together and leaving your final mark. And so to end it with a quote. I mean, I just think her conclusion is lacking

Charlotte: mm

Alice: for impact. So it’s okay, but it doesn’t really say anything.

Chris: And I don’t disagree with that. But in terms of ending with a quote, she basically summarizes it and emphasizes her opinion by using the quote.

Alice: She does, but

Chris: is the way I read that

Alice: Yeah, but why not just say it yourself with your own language?

Melissa: fear of being accused of iuh [sic] stealing somebody else’s ideas, maybe? I mean it because—because I agree with Chris that last, the last thing she says is that the “historians need to put down their books, learn the language and listen to the stories,” which is the argument that Trask was making throughout the paper, that the writer’s supporting, that the stories are, are important, and Hawaiian language has yet to be written because the stories haven’t been listened to. So while she uses a lot of quotes, I felt like they were really selectively chosen to support the perspective and argument that she was trying to advance.

Alice: Yeah, I I can see that. Um

Melissa: And tha—without the prompt too, I don’t know, like—you know, some professors want you to quote heavily, some have a limit on how much you can quote, some want you know, it’s—so without the prompt, it’s hard to know whether or not she was excessive, at least for me, it was hard to know. Although I also get Alice’s point like that if you’re supposed to—it’s like, I teach public speaking, right? If you’re giving the speech, you should give the speech not some video, for example. If you’re writing the paper, it should be your words, and not so much be—it should be a synthesis of your sources as opposed to direct quotes from them.
Charlotte: So it’s it sort of sounds like Chris and Melissa, may be reading her concluding quotations as a move to align—as a move for the student writer to align themself with Trask as a closing kind of thing? Yeah

Alice: yeah. I mean, I can see that.

Chris: that’s my take. And you know, her, she has a professional supporting her opinion. So she uses the quote for that. So I see it just as a reference, bolstering her argument.

[longer pause]

Charlotte: Yeah. Alice, did you have anything else you want to add in response to them?

Alice: No, I mean, I, I see that. And I mean, that’s, that’s fine. I mean, I can see where that’s—where she’s aligning herself, I still think that she could have done it on her own. Um you know, if my students ended their papers with a quote, and a conclusion, and again, you know, it could be ‘cause there’s no prompt, but um it’s just, to me, it’s not her own—there’s not that much there that’s her own work. That she could have just done more on her own, I feel. But it’s fine. I mean, it’s, it’s clear, I agree with you guys, that she’s aligning that way and using it intentionally.

Alice read the student’s conclusion as, in her words, “lacking” because it does not include enough of the student’s “own work.” Importantly, Chris and Melissa read the student’s decision to end with a quote differently—as a purposeful choice. Melissa offered an alternative perspective in response to Alice’s question about why the student didn’t end with their “own language,” one that interpreted the student choosing to support the sources they work with for two reasons: “fear of being accused of . . . stealing somebody else’s ideas” and to deliberately align with Trask’s ideas. Melissa acknowledged, “[W]hile [the student] uses a lot of quotes, I felt like they were really selectively chosen to support the perspective and argument that she was trying to advance.” Chris’s comments indicate that he read the student to be quoting Trask for another reason: as a published author, she is “a professional” that “bolster[s]” the student’s argument. In the
above excerpt, Melissa and Alice both try to see things from each other’s perspective. However, fifteen minutes later, Alice admitted that she “can’t attribute much of this to the writer” and “there just wasn’t enough there from the writer,” suggesting she saw the student over-relying on quotations.

Melissa and Chris appear to be acknowledging what Lu and Horner (2013, p. 596) would call “the student’s practical sense of the conditions and relations appearing to demand responses at the micro-macro scene of [their] life in the past, present, and future.” That is, Melissa reads the student, at the time of their writing, as aware of the potential charge of plagiarism that could be lodged at them for appearing to align with a published author without quoting that author. (Indeed, the student’s past educational experiences and relations with teachers may have given them good reason to hold this belief and to anticipate these consequences.) And Chris imagines the student, at the time of their writing, seeing the benefits of “bolstering” their argument with the voice of “a professional.” While Alice eventually expresses some agreement with Chris’s and Melissa’s readings (“I see that,” “I agree with you guys”), she seems to have a harder time seeing that the student’s use of a quotation could be read as the student nevertheless “having done it on her own” (in the sense that the student made this decision) even if this doing appeared to be derivative. As Lu and Horner (2013, pp. 584-585) argue, “[A]gency is manifested not only in those acts of writing that we are disposed to recognize as different from a norm, but also in those acts of writing that are ordinarily recognized as producing simply ‘more of the same’: conventional, unoriginal, ordinary, conformist” (see also Pennycook, 2010). Through their reading of an anonymous student text that has historically been read as “highly conventional” (p. 586), Lu and Horner
(2013, pp. 583-584) point out how “the labor of writers ‘unmarked’—that is those identified as mainstream” (and, in this case, writing identified as apparently conventional) “itself goes unremarked.” Some of the assessors in my focus groups (namely, Evie, Jake, and Alice) who deemed the student’s writing “well-written, but” lacking in some way did not acknowledge that the construction of features they described in derivative terms is still labor the student exerted, and even perhaps what the student was aiming for.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Praise</th>
<th>Insufficiency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evie</td>
<td>“I felt like the I got a sense from the reader that they understood the material and they had really dec—they had really good structure. And they you know, juxtapose things in a way that made sense, like they had good, like, organization, they had good understanding of like, okay, here’s how these quotes go together.”</td>
<td>it felt like it was just here’s all these other people’s ideas, and like, you know, definitely do get a sense of their position through that.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“It’s very clear. I was like the function, I know the function of this, I know where it’s going.</td>
<td>but I was also like—I don’t—it’s still not a thesis. Like, I still don’t see a position.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The student’s paraphrasing is “consistent throughout, which makes me think part of this is just the student—is part of the student’s skill,</td>
<td>it was sooo mechanical after a point.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Reads clean. I got through it really quick.</td>
<td>mostly summary up to this point.”</td>
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<td>“It was like really put together like sour—like reading, like outside source, reading, outside source in ways that made sense</td>
<td>then I never saw it fully come to fruition like, feel like I wasn’t seeing things come to fruition.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“[E]verything they were given to write about does engage with these ideas… You know, we’re talking and then thinking about different linguistic differences and how much linguistic difference and</td>
<td>I was very conflicted in term—like, you know, again, it’s like the student is clearly buying the sources they’re to write about, and these are being given about that. So I don’t know how much of it is</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
understanding of ling—lingualism, or multilingualism and translingualism. So to me, there was a lot of it going on in the surface.

| Jake | “Good summary. And I’d say a lot of comparing draw conclusions,” |
|      | “I liked the conclusion,” |
|      | “So and it’s it’s it’s crisp. Now it may not—it might be dull, it might be boring and might not really we might not see what the student we might see the student but still that, that aspect of it. It seems um that that impresses me on that end.” |
|      | “It’s nice and crisp and yknow fits the fits the written communication rubric well” |
|      | “the rest of the writing is clear, has the punch.” |

| Alice | “I agree that it is well put together.” |
|       | “I do think it’s well written. And I do think they pulled a lot together nicely.” |

|        | the student and how much of is the material.” |
|        | doesn’t necessarily go beyond that.” |
|        | for the fact that it ends in a quote, which drives me batty.” |
|        | when I’m not sure if I see the student’s or hear the student’s voice…” |
|        | They’re reporting, basically that they’re reporting what, what they’ve read.” |
|        | it doesn’t want me to ask any more questions, or it doesn’t leave me with a feeling of ‘Wow, I want to do something about this’ or um ‘I really learned something today.’ Or ‘I—it seems like this student learned something in this exercise.‘” |
|        | it kind of feels to me like a successful stringing together of evidence. More than that she extended that much, she or he.” |
|        | it still reads to me, like mostly a summary of other people’s work with a few connecting pieces that the |
Yes, there are some statements from the writer. I’m not convinced... I can’t attribute so much of this to the writer.

The writer’s conclusion is “okay, it doesn’t really say anything.”

Note: The but before comments indicating insufficiency nearly always appeared immediately after the praise. Occasionally, another sentence or phrase came before it, but the “insufficient” comments always appeared in the participant’s same conversational turn.
Melissa’s comments on the student text were in general different from her peers because she focused most of her comments on what she read the student to be doing in their writing. Consider her reading of a particular excerpt from the student sample in which the student signposts their purposes (see figure 5.4 below for the student excerpt).

**Figure 5.4 Excerpt from Student Writing Sample**

The purpose of this essay is to show the relationship between Trask’s thoughts on language and knowledge as it correlates, adds to, or conflicts with the ideas from the three chapters in Lu and Horner on “Reading and Rereading,” “Vocabulary,” and “Error: Working Rules,” as well as Kuhn’s essay “The Historical Structure of Scientific Discovery.”

Of this sentence, Melissa noted, “So even in the very first paragraph, she establishes the credibility and applicability of her evidence and her sources, and how she’s going to compare and contrast those to this other perspective.” By contrast, Jake and Evie (both composition instructors) had a different reaction to the student’s signposting, one that seems linked to their suspicion that the student is responding to certain assignment parameters in a derivative way. As we discussed the student sample, Jake wondered aloud, “Would it be fair to say that this is tailored for the rubric?” (though he didn’t specify which rubric). Evie wondered in response: “how much of this [prompt] is, you know, you have this many words, and you have to, like, make these connections ‘cause like, you know, there was not really a thesis, it was just the like, ‘These things are related!’” As she made this last statement, her voice rose to a higher pitch, imitating a student eagerly asserting some connections in response to a prompt to do so. She concluded: “And then that felt very, it felt very assignment driven.” Jake concurred, calling the student sample “assignment-y,” to which I replied:
Charlotte: Well, yeah, yeah, it was probably in response to someone’s um assignment. If you all look at the first paragraph lines six to nine, when the student says, “The purpose of this essay is to show the relationship between Trask’s thoughts on language and knowledge, as it correlates, adds to…”

Jake: [rests his cheek on his hand and makes a mock snoring sound when I start quoting the student]

Evie: [giggles in reaction to Jake]

Jake: Oh man, the minute—I’m sorry, the minute they—the minute I see that in anybody’s writing, I’m thinking “oookay.” [Smacks head lightly with palm of right hand as he makes an exasperated facial expression; see figure 5.5] All right, this is—.

**Figure 5.5** Jake taps his palm against his head in exasperation in reaction to the student’s signposting.
Evie acknowledged that the student’s signposting is “very clear” and that she understood “the function of this, I know where it’s going.” She added, “And, you know, as frustrating as it sometimes is, this is the convention we are seeing in our own discipline, so I’ve loosened up on this quite a bit,” implying that signposting is a tactic she personally dislikes but is resigned to due to its conventionality in her discipline. Even though such signposting is, she admitted, a “convention we are seeing in our own discipline,” she confessed that she read the student’s move as “a pretty clear signal that, like, ‘Here, let me regurgitate the assignment prompt back to you,’ as students are wont to do.” In short, Evie was more inclined to read the student’s signposting as a derivative move more so than an act of agency on their part even though all acts of writing, even the apparently conventional, are agentive (Lu & Horner, 2013).

Evie even speculates that a question the student poses in their essay—a question that could potentially indicate their “perspective coming through” (Evie’s words)—may have been “something that came up in class discussion,” implying that this question may not indicate the student’s perspective after all. She points to the following question that the student poses several paragraphs after their signposting: “How does Trask’s ideas on language and knowledge relate to the previous ideas of using appropriate language, proofreading, working rules, and discovery in our writing, while considering the expectations or perceptions of readers in the interpretation of our writing?” On this question, Evie commented:

**Evie:** Like, even though that might also be a little bit—something that came up in class discussion and whatno—like, you know, these kind of things, and especially the also the structure of the paper
**Jake:** mhm

**Evie:** feels very . . . tailored to the assignment. So that tells me it’s written for the instructor, nobody else, because it’s going to follow this formula. And do that, and that’s no fault of the student. That’s, you know

**Jake:** mhm

**Evie:** that’s the assignment.

**Jake:** That’s the assignment.

It’s worth reminding readers here that I did not have or distribute the assignment prompt that the student text was produced in response to. Nevertheless, Evie and Jake both appear to imagine the prompt to be inviting a derivative response to course texts despite the cue the student offers readers, and they place blame on the assignment to avoid denigrating the student text. Anis Bawarshi (2003) points out that “one of the tricks teachers often expect students to perform in their writing involves recontextualizing the desires embedded in the writing prompt as their own self-generated desires,” to make their writing appear “self-prompted” (p. 134). In Jake’s and Evie’s eyes, the student did not do this: the student writer’s signposting (and question) seems to reiterate a line of the prompt (perhaps a directive to “show the relationship between Trask’s thoughts on language and knowledge as it correlates, adds to, or conflicts with the ideas” cited in the course texts) and, thus, betrays their subjectivity as a student who has been prompted.

Often, writing prompts are treated “as a conduit for communicating a subject matter from the teacher to the student, a way of ‘giving’ students something to write about” (Bawarshi, p. 127). But treating prompts in this way, Bawarshi argues,
is to overlook the extent to which the prompt situates student writers within a
genred site of action in which students acquire and negotiate desires,
subjectivities, commitments, and relations before they begin to write. . . . As such,
we cannot simply locate the beginning of student writing in student writers and
their texts. We must also locate these beginnings in the teachers’ prompts, which
constitute the situated topoi that the student writers enter into and participate
within. (p. 127)
As Bartholomae (1983) puts it, assignment prompts are “where writing begins.” Evie’s
comment that the student text reads as “assignment driven” and Jake’s comment that it is
“assignment-y,” along with their discussion, imply that they see student writing that
betrays itself as responding to a prompt as somehow less agentive, more reductive.

A moment after the above exchange, Jake suggested that the student’s signposting
indicated to him that the student “know[s] . . . what they’re supposed to do.” Evie
concurred, adding that the student “know[s] how to write for the grade.” Prior research
illustrates the powerful tendency of instructors to try to imagine the unknown writers
whose papers they score in assessment contexts (e.g., Hamp-Lyons, 2007; Wiseman,
2012, pp. 164-166; see also Dryer, 2012). Thus, it is not surprising that my participants
tried to map motives onto the student writer. What is surprising, however, is that this
tendency was more pronounced for the two composition instructors, who ascribed the
motive of a grade to the student’s signposting instead of imagining they had any number
of other purposes: to guide readers through an argument, to try out academic writing
conventions like signposting, and so on.
**Text-as-interpretive Ideology**

Finally, the text-as-interpretive ideology refers to the belief that texts require interpretation by readers. This interpretive work requires labor that is shared by readers and writers. If the previous two ideologies hold that writers are primarily responsible for ensuring a smooth read or ensuring their messages (i.e., containers) are unpacked, this ideology redresses that labor imbalance, acknowledging that the burden is shared. Rarely did my participants make comments that index this ideology (see table 5.4).

When Jake wrestled with how to score the student sample using the Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Rubric, Evie interjected:

And I think though, I think what Jake’s getting at is definitely a very similar conundrum of the stuff I’m grappling with, but I also inter—you know, it’s also a matter of the interpretation of the rubric. Like, and then thinking about, you know, depending on where you fall in your—in where you choose, where you choose to align yourself in that conundrum, I think, will vastly determine on that.

Evie here explicitly acknowledges the rubric (like all texts) requires interpretation that affects how readers use it. While this may sound like an unsurprising realization, comments that treated the rubrics as occasions for interpretation (and not so much as stable texts/containers) were comparably rarer in my data. Evie made this comment at the end of our discussion, after making other comments that indexed the smooth read ideology and the container ideology. While she seemed resigned to “grappling with” this “matter of . . . interpretation” and acknowledged that assessors had a certain amount of agency in the process (it depends on “where you choose to align yourself”), Alice expressed frustration with the variety of possible ways the rubrics could be interpreted. In
fact, several times in our conversation she mentioned that the rubrics could benefit from “refinement” and revision, adding that she and others had different definitions of “the specific words that are in some of those boxes,” which “automatically puts us in a different . . . scoring framework. Whereas if [the rubric terms] were broader, that might not happen. And we might see more convergence.” She quickly added, “Uh I don’t know. I mean, I could be completely wrong.” Alice’s comments indicate that she believes it is possible that texts can be interpreted in the same way if their phrasing is changed. This belief is indicative of the language-as-container metaphor, which treats meaning as something inherent in words. Alice’s experience of not sharing the same definitions of particular rubric terms as her peers contradicts the viability of the container metaphor. But instead of changing her perception of language, she tries to find a way to reconcile it with the container metaphor, suggesting that revising the rubrics might reduce the number of interpretations. It’s important to note here that, in other contexts—for example, her approach to reading for her own research or her reading of student texts—Alice may not operate with the assumption that revising language in a certain way will make it more likely for readers to interpret texts in similar ways. However, as noted in the previous chapter, she did express frustration with rubrics’ “little boxes”: “You can think you’ve covered things and define them well with a rubric, but you really don’t.” It’s worth investigating the extent to which the structure of some rubrics (as having boxes/grids) leads assessors/readers to feel boxed in and contained, as some of my assessors confessed to feeling (see chapter four).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evie</td>
<td>“And I think though, I think what Jake’s getting at is definitely a very similar conundrum of the stuff I’m grappling with, but I also inter—you know, it’s also a matter of the interpretation of the rubric. Like and then thinking about you know, depending on where you fall in your in where you choose, where you choose to align yourself in that conundrum I think will vastly determine on that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>“But I mean, Alice is absolutely right. [The Written Communication Rubric] doesn’t define [graceful language]. So it’s really what what constitutes graceful is really subjective. It goes back to that idea of the discipline that you’re in.” “the assessor’s uh perspective is going to impact the assessment. I mean, Alice and I work in very different disciplines. And we’re, we’re—we’ve trained ourselves to look for very specific different things that fulfill the obligations for our disciplines and so I don’t think my assessment or hers is more accurate than the other. I think it’s just a reflective—reflection of our particular teaching styles and perspectives.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>[On Written Communication Rubric] “I mean, then you have what ‘uses graceful language.’ You know, well, what’s the definition of graceful language? [smiles all around] Right? [Chris laughs] That’s subjective. And sometimes graceful language isn’t all that helpful to getting your point across to Melissa’s point. So I guess, you know.” “I would love to see the rubrics re [short pause] vised in a way—and I don’t know if we can do that, because I guess these are standardized things that have to mean certain things to the accreditors. But I wish that they could be um [pause], I guess, broader, somehow not so specific with the specific words that are in some of those boxes. Because to me when I’m assessing, and, you know, and of course, I think we see that Melissa had a definition and I had a definition in our heads, and they weren’t necessarily the same. And that automatically puts us in a different, different scoring framework. Whereas if they were broader, that might not happen. And we might see more convergence. Uh I don’t know. I mean, I could be completely wrong. I’m just talking off the top of my head from the conversation.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions

The discussions analyzed above demonstrate that the assessors brought sometimes competing textual ideologies to their reading of the student sample. Their comments indexing the smooth read ideology efface not only the student’s labor in writing the text, but also their labor in reading it. As Evie commented, “I got through it really quick.” In assessment conversations like these and in faculty development sessions, it would be useful for faculty to regularly identify the textual features that lead them to evaluate a text as “clear,” “smooth,” and even “mechanical” or “derivative.” Doing so might help assessors start to shift away from these vague catchall terms and toward developing a more productive vocabulary for talking about student writing—or at least to be more specific about what they mean by “clear,” “smooth,” and so on. It’s worth pointing out that the two assessors who tended not to make comments effacing the student’s agency (Chris and Melissa) both talked about the student text in terms of what they understood it be doing (and less on what it was not doing) and offered different interpretations of why the student might be making particular writing moves. Melissa, additionally, was the assessor who most frequently directed our attention back to the student’s text instead of talking about it in more general terms. However, she did not point to excerpts from the student’s writing that led her to read the student writer as female or a native English speaker.

Even Melissa, perhaps the most generous reader of the student writing sample, made assumptions about the student writer (reading the writer as a female native English speaker). Whether this student identifies as such is not the point. Rather, the point is that Melissa read the writing as unmarked (in her words, it lacked “stiffness of phrasing”).
and, thus, indexing native English speaker status. Melissa’s awareness that her interpretation of the student writer as such is in fact an assumption (“I recognize that I’m making a lot of assumptions”) represents an opportunity for further reflection and discussion that I, regrettably, did not fully probe in the moment. In similar conversations (whether in faculty development scenarios or calibration sessions for assessment sessions like the one under consideration) these are moments to intervene and ask more about the origin of those assumptions: What about this student text and her history as a teacher/assessor led her to read the writing as that of a female native English speaker? Can she point to textual features that she associates with women and/or native English speakers?

Acknowledgments that texts require interpretation (rare in my data) constitute opportunities to chip away at SLI. For example, when Alice suggested that were the rubrics revised they might prompt more similar readings, I could have probed this assumption more. In the following chapter, I describe the implications of this study and make additional recommendations for writing assessment research, faculty development, and teaching.
CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This dissertation has attended to an overlooked phenomenon in writing assessment research: how assessment knowledge is mobilized by different entities, including prominent position statements in our field, AAC&U, an institution (MMU), and several faculty assessors who transformed this assessment knowledge in practice in their interactions with AAC&U rubrics. I began by pointing out that writing assessment’s treatment of localism has reified the local, treating it as sites at which assessment takes place (even in ecological models of assessment) and making it harder to see how people, texts, and entities “outside” local institutions (e.g., AAC&U) change seemingly stable assessment knowledge in the process of enacting it.

As my analysis of documents in chapter three revealed, AAC&U is drifting away from recommending that institutions adapt their approach to local contexts, as writing assessment position statements recommend. In light of this finding, below I recommend ways for writing studies scholars to engage in dialogues with AAC&U and other organizations outside of our field. I described how MMU has adapted AAC&U’s assessment approach, highlighting the embodied nature of assessment and the textual ideologies that assessors brought to their work with the rubrics. My findings indicated that assessors turned to their gut to make a variety of scoring decisions and to manage the emotional labor of assessment. Chapter five revealed how assessors negotiated standard
language ideology (itself an unstable ideology) and shifted among a variety of textual ideologies as they discussed a student writing sample. In doing so, I did not mean to condemn my participants for appearing to occasionally perpetuate standard language ideology. Rather, I read them to be navigating positions that the rubrics invite them to take up, which is worth researching further.

**Recommendations**

This project has implications for large-scale assessment events (like General Education assessment processes), classroom assessment, and writing assessment research that I outline below. Many of these suggestions may sound like recommendations for how to approach discussions with various stakeholders and thus may not appear to intervene in more systemic issues that dog writing assessment in particular and efforts to change institutions more generally. However, those who might despair at the persistence of efforts to standardize from entities like AAC&U would be wise to remember that standards and language ideologies are perpetuated, maintained, resisted, and transformed through readers’, writers’, and speakers’ negotiations of language, which, Pennycook (2010) reminds us, are the always emerging outcomes of practice.

**Large-scale Assessments**

This project has implications for large-scale assessments like MMU’s Gen Ed assessment. Because the spring 2021 assessment training was online and asynchronous, faculty did not have the chance to discuss the student writing samples with which they were calibrated. (The assessment coordinator realized this and plans to incorporate a synchronous component to upcoming trainings even if they remain online.) In large-scale assessments, faculty need to not only discuss and “react to student writing samples,” but
also and crucially, in Anson et al.’s (2012, n.p.) words, “react to their reactions” by reflecting on and discussing the assumptions behind them and their hopes for their students’ writing. I argue that an additional step of reacting to these secondary reactions by, for example, historicizing the origins of these reactions and the emotions produced in response to certain kinds of student writing should be added to this process. Doing so among a group of teacher-scholars representing different disciplines is important because faculty who are acculturated to the conventions and norms of their field often see them as invisible. Interacting with others who share different assumptions and disciplinary expectations can surface our own tacit knowledge and assumptions (see Broad, 2003; Broad et al., 2009; Lea & Street, 1998; Thaiss & Zawacki, 2006). More importantly, such conversations might illuminate the instability of writing values that are frequently seen as universal and stable.

Additionally, in training sessions and discussions that are part of large-scale assessments, more opportunities need to be created for faculty to link particular textual features to rubric criteria and other descriptors. Faculty assessors can be invited to respond to questions like: Can you point to particular features in this text that lead you to describe it as [smooth, efficient, etc.]? Without the opportunity to link textual features to descriptors like “smooth” “efficient,” etc., it’s easier to see so-called standard English as “abstracted, idealized, homogenous” and stable (Lippi-Green, 2012). By consequence, it’s then harder for people to challenge standard language ideology and to develop different beliefs about language.

As mentioned in chapter three, Midwest Metropolitan University recently adapted AAC&U’s Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric by creating a new
Diversity Rubric that is currently being piloted. This is a promising step toward localizing an apparently global approach to campus assessment, especially since this rubric was developed in light of feedback from faculty assessors. The new Diversity Rubric appears to acknowledge that intercultural interactions can occur in U.S. contexts, too. The following is a brief excerpt from one row of this rubric:

**Cultural Self-awareness:** Articulates complex insights into cultural identity (e.g., norms, biases) in local and/or global contexts.

Whereas the Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric left the assumption that intercultural interactions happen outside the U.S. (i.e., “globally”), this rubric makes the containerized assumptions explicit (local stands for U.S. and global appears to stand for non-U.S.). The spring 2022 pilot of this rubric might reveal how faculty interpret this new language and the extent to which they see it as relevant to their teaching.

If not in these assessment events, then in faculty development sessions, more time needs to be dedicated to reflecting on and questioning the language we use to talk about writing and how it obscures language ideologies (especially descriptors like “smooth” and “efficient,” which perpetuate the smooth read ideology). After all, it is harder to contest language ideologies when they’re invisible.

**Classroom Assessment**

An underlying argument throughout this project is that writing studies practitioners can and should find ways to engage with what are typically seen as assessment concerns external to classroom practice, department learning outcomes, and more. In my experience, outcomes are frequently seen as just such an external concern.
This may be the case because, as Gallagher (2012) points out, outcomes are hopeful predictions about what students will be able to do at the end of a particular experience (e.g., a course, the completion of a major). They are not guarantees that a student will get there (Gallagher, 2012, p. 44). As Gallagher notes, “Teachers may dutifully reproduce those outcomes on a syllabus or assignment, and students may dutifully provide evidence that they’ve achieved them in their work products, but rarely do the outcomes become a meaningful and intimate part of teachers’ and students’ experiences” (2012, p. 45). Furthermore, predetermined outcomes can bar attention to “emergent consequences” (Gallagher, p. 45) and they absolutely ignore the material conditions in which teachers and students work (as many teachers’ experiences during the pandemic should suggest).

Like Gallagher, I recognize that those of us who work in postsecondary education and assessment cannot simply abandon outcomes nor can we fully resist the sorts of General Education assessments engaged in this study. There are, however, more meaningful ways to engage with these apparently external concerns than ignoring them. For example, Gallagher proposes a method of articulation, whereby teachers map their own writing values and hopes for their students onto the program’s outcomes (2012, pp. 54-55). This would provide opportunities for discussing and recursively revisiting these values in light of the outcomes to underscore potential tensions as well as any changes in teachers’ values over time. Students, too, can be involved in such efforts: Gallagher suggests that teachers can invite students to reflect on their educational goals at various points throughout the semester and to put their goals in conversation with course goals and their previous writing (2012, p. 55): at the end of the semester, students can be encouraged to document things they learned in courses that may not be represented in the
course outcomes. The goal here is to help students and teachers be more attentive to the emergent (i.e., not predetermined) consequences produced in the course. Such data would provide a useful window into how students (and teachers) experience particular courses that could then be used to revisit and revise outcomes.

Importantly, this method is also one way in which students can be involved in assessment conversations. As chapter three in particular demonstrated, it has been strikingly difficult for those of us in writing studies and in organizations like AAC&U to imagine how to productively engage students in rethinking assessment.

**Future Research**

My focus groups took place several weeks after MMU’s General Education assessment event, which likely affected participants’ recollections. Thus, future research could invite assessors to document their reactions to the assessment as well as how they used their time in “real-time” in time-use diaries. Supplementing focus group discussions of student texts with think-aloud protocols, in which assessors read and think-aloud in response to student writing as they navigate the rubrics, might provide additional insight into assessors’ decision-making processes. As mentioned in chapter four, assessment researchers, too, could conduct language and literacy history interviews with faculty assessors—longer, cyclical conversations that illuminate how their “current practices and perspectives can be understood within the broader sociohistorical context of” their lives (Lillis & Curry, 2010, p. 43; see also Lillis, 2008).

Given that, as my and other research (e.g., Flowers, 2016; Olinger, 2021) demonstrates, embodied actions can index orientations toward language ideologies,

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50 See Edgington (2005) and Wolfe (2005) for examples of think-aloud protocols in assessment research.
future studies of assessment should continue to attend to these actions. In her research, Lamont (2009) observed grant peer reviewers looking to their co-panelists “for subtle nonverbal signals concerning the value of proposals (eye rolling, shoulder shrugging, nodding, smiling admiringly, and so on)—signals that help them ‘satisfice’ or make the best choices possible given the limitations of their own knowledge and their current context” (p. 50). What might these embodied actions reveal not only about language ideologies, but also about the embodied nature of decision-making in assessment?

In chapters one and three, I attended to what I called keywords (e.g., *local*, *global*, *ecological*, *students*, *language*) in writing assessment theory and position statements. My textual analysis involved close reading of these documents. Such analyses could usefully be supplemented by corpus-driven inquiries into writing assessment scholarship. Given that such scholarship has, over the last decade especially, turned toward considering how assessment can be in the service of socially just aims (see esp. Gere et al., 2021; Hammond et al., 2019; Inoue, 2015; Inoue & Poe, 2012; Kelly-Riley et al., 2020; Kelly-Riley & Elliot, 2021; Moos, 2021; Poe et al., 2014, 2018), a corpus-driven inquiry into what terms are used in this scholarship and how would be useful: What other inflections do writing studies scholars give terms like *fairness* and *ecology*? To what extent is our construct of fairness similar to or different from that of the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (see AERA, APA, & NCME, 2014, pp. 49-72)? Reading this scholarship “at a distance” with the aid of corpus tools would offer a better sense of how our field uses these terms, many of which have been adopted from other fields. This, then, is another opportunity for knowledge mobilization research in assessment.
Future research could employ methods like those used by Sills (2018) to study the process by which documents like MMU’s Diversity Rubric are adapted from AAC&U’s rubrics, drafted, and revised. In his research, Sills interviewed members of the CWPA Outcomes Statement Revision Task Force to reveal the discussions and process behind the document’s revisions. Recently, a task force revised the CWPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition again; the resulting document is titled “Toward Anti-Racist First-Year Composition Goals” (see Beavers et al., 2021). Public conversations indicate that this revision experience has been more fraught than the previous one (see Inoue, 2021). What would interviews with task force members reveal about the challenges of reworking this document and working to mobilize new knowledge in our field? Such research might also usefully illuminate the perspectives that committee members brought to revising various iterations of our field’s assessment position statements (CCCC, 2006/2014; NCTE/CWPA, 2008), but only if our field makes it a more common practice to list committee members’ names on websites and to archive the different versions of these statements online. It would be valuable but challenging to attempt this with people who participated in developing the VALUE rubrics: In older publications (e.g., Rhodes & Finley, 2013, p. 5), AAC&U directed readers to (now-defunct) webpages that listed all of the individuals who contributed to developing the VALUE rubrics.

As mentioned in chapter three, AAC&U recently revised their website and changed the organization’s name. When I visited their website in 2022, many of the materials I had seen in 2021 were no longer there. I can, however, access their former website through the Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine.51 What would a comparison of

51 Older versions of AAC&U’s website are available at this address: https://web.archive.org/web/20220504185859/https://www.aacu.org/
the former and new web pages reveal about the organization’s shifting priorities? Such research would be an important addition to this project because it would allow a closer look at how an entity that may appear to be abstract/stable is itself mobile, changing, and run by people with potentially different priorities. Perhaps such research could reveal opportunities for writing studies professional to intervene and help reshape AAC&U’s approach to campus assessment.

Though scholars like Ed White (2019, n.p.) are hopeful about the progress made “toward reconciling the goals of assessment stakeholders,” I’d argue that writing assessment scholars need to expand the company they keep if they wish to continue advocating for localism in ways that entities like AAC&U might be responsive to. This could involve attending the annual Assessment Institute hosted by Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, a conference on higher education assessment at which writing studies scholars do not have a significant presence. This could also involve partnering with the three organizations that are involved in revising the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*—the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Organization, and the National Council on Measurement in Education. The 2014 edition of the *Standards* received feedback from a number of organizations and institutions (see AERA, APA, & NCME, 2014, pp. vii-ix), but not from prominent organizations in writing studies, like CCCC, CWPA, and NCTE. Contributing to upcoming revisions to the *Standards* is another way to broaden our reach, as other writing assessment professionals (e.g., Adler-Kassner, 2012, pp. 135-136; Adler-Kassner & O’Neill, 2010) have advocated.
In addition to expanding the company they keep, writing assessment scholars would be wise to consider these questions: Since institutional mandates and contexts may not always permit outright abandonment of generic tools like the VALUE rubrics, how do we work with them for now even as we resist them in the long-term? How can we better involve students in rethinking the design of assessments? Future assessment research that adopts a mobility perspective on assessment and literacy practices might offer promising responses to these questions because such a perspective treats all of us, students included, as knowledge mobilization agents and knowledge makers.
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APPENDIX A: SURVEY

1. What department(s) do you teach and work in?

2. What is your role in this department?
   - Part-time faculty
   - Term faculty
   - Tenure-track or tenured faculty
   - MA student
   - PhD student

3. For how many years have you been teaching?

4. What courses do you teach at [MMU]?

5. Do you assign writing in your classes?
   - Yes
   - No
I'm not sure how to answer this question

6. Please elaborate on your response.

7. If you do assign writing in your classes, how often do you assign writing? (e.g., weekly, every 2 weeks, monthly?)

8. If you do assign writing in your classes, what kind(s) of writing do you assign students? (e.g., argument essays, memos, reports, literature reviews, reading notes, speeches, webtexts, etc.)

9. What percentage of your time in class is spent talking about your students' writing?

10. What percentage of your time in class is spent talking about writing more generally?

11. What percentage of a student's grade in your class is attributed to their written work? (as opposed to non-written work like participation, attendance, multiple-choice exams)

12. Do you write comments on your students' writing?
13. Do you discuss students' writing with them individually in conferences?

- Yes
- No

14. Do you discuss samples of your students' writing in class discussions?

- Yes
- No

15. Please check the box next to any of the following terms that come up in your teaching (i.e., in comments on student work, in class discussions, or in assignments)

- Context
- Purpose
- Audience
- Content
- Genre conventions
- Disciplinary conventions
- Sources
- Evidence
- Mechanics
- Syntax
- Critical thinking
- Issue/problem
- Position
- Perspective
- Hypothesis
- Thesis
- Analysis
- Synthesis
- Interpretation
- Evaluation
- Assumptions
- Conclusion
- Outcomes
- Implications
16. Have you assessed student artifacts for the [Gen Ed] Assessment at [MMU] before?

☐ Yes
☐ No

17. How many times?


18. Why did you decide to participate in the Written Communication Assessment?


19. Have you seen or used the Written Communication VALUE rubric before the . . . Written Communication Assessment and training?

☐ Yes
☐ No

20. In what context have you seen or used the Written Communication rubric before?


21. Have you seen or used the Critical Thinking VALUE rubric before the . . . Written Communication Assessment and training?

☐ Yes
22. In what context have you seen or used the Critical Thinking rubric before?

23. Have you seen or used the Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE rubric before the . . . Written Communication Assessment and training?

   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No

24. In what context have you seen or used the Intercultural Knowledge and Competence rubric before?

25. If you are willing to be contacted for a virtual focus group interview in the near future, please include your name and email address in the space below. [Focus group interviews will take place on Microsoft Teams, where they will be recorded, and will last between 1 to 1.5 hours. Participants will be compensated twenty-five (25) dollars per interview hour for their time. Any additional time will be pro-rated.
APPENDIX B: STUDENT WRITING SAMPLE

Trask and Relationship to Previous Ideas Essay

In her essay, “From a Native Daughter,” Trask said that she believed the Western scholars got the history of Hawaii wrong because they didn’t take the time to learn the language of the native people. She questioned why they neglected to learn the language. She stated that language is, “not merely a passageway to knowledge, it is a form of knowing by itself” (395). The purpose of this essay is to show the relationship between Trask’s thoughts on language and knowledge as it correlates, adds to, or conflicts with the ideas from the three chapters in Lu and Horner on “Reading and Rereading,” “Vocabulary,” and “Error: Working Rules,” as well as Kuhn’s essay “The Historical Structure of Scientific Discovery.”

When Trask was a young girl, she was taught two different versions of the history of Hawaii: 1) by her parents and 2) by the school teachers. Through stories her parents taught her the life of the old ones, “how they had sailed thousands of miles to make their home in the sacred islands, flourishing until the coming of the haole (whites)” (394). She was also taught that “the land, like the air and the sea, was for all to use and share as their birthright” (395). Through the books and teachers, she was taught that “Captain Cook had discovered Hawaii and the ungrateful Hawaiians had killed him, cursing the Hawaiians
with disease and death.” (394). Trask admitted that the books won out over her parent’s teachings in her younger years.

After she completed her postsecondary education and returned to Hawaii, however, Trask began to question the accuracy of the historian’s writings about her ancestors and the culture of Hawaii. Much like missionaries, whose purpose is to colonize people with their own image in mind, the historians had ascribed a concept of “feudalism upon the Hawaiian chiefs, characterizing them as feudal landlords and the people as serfs” (396). The purpose was to “degrade a successful system of shared land use and to make it appear that the notion of private property would be beneficial to the Hawaiians” (396). Trask believed that the historians in doing this to her ancestors, had stripped them of their mind, spirit, and culture.

As Trask continued to reread what the scholars had written about the history of Hawaii, she began to see a pattern emerge in their writings, which led her to have an epiphany of the historians and their Western view, “that ownership of the land was the only way humans could relate, one person had to control both the land and human interaction” (397). When the historians wrote of the Hawaiian culture, they were writing of their own society. Trask said, “for so long, more than half my life, I had misunderstood this written record, thinking it described my own people. But my history was nowhere present. For we had not written. We had chanted and told stories through our memory” (398).

How does Trask’s ideas on language and knowledge relate to the previous ideas of using appropriate language, proofreading, working rules, and discovery in our writing, while considering the expectations or perceptions of readers in the interpretation of our
writing? In learning the history of her people, Trask initially admitted that the books won out over her parent’s teachings, however when she completed college and began to reread the written history she discovered an anomaly which led her to question the accuracy of the historian’s writings about her ancestors and the culture of Hawaii. This relates to Kuhn’s essay in which he stated, “the process of discovery extends in time” (322), because we are continually discovering new things as we read and reread. While continuing to reread the written history, she realized that the Hawaiian history had still not yet been written.

Trask believed the key reason the Hawaiian history remained unwritten was because the Western scholars didn’t take the time to learn the language of her native people. When the historians ascribed the concept of feudalism to characterize the Hawaiian culture, they allowed their European attitudes and beliefs to strongly influence the accuracy of their writings. If the historians had bothered to learn the language, they would have understood that land takes on the same “o” possessive as one’s body and one’s parents, it was inherent to the people. As stated by Lu and Horner, “word choice can affect not only the quality of our writing but also how we think, feel, and even live in the world” (95-96). Words have different meanings when used in different contexts or languages, therefore, it is critical that we understand the different meanings of words in their native language to ensure we are using them correctly and meaningfully in our writing.

Not only did the historians fail to learn the language, they also failed to use any meaningful techniques in validating the accuracy of what they had written. For example, if they would have had a native Hawaiian proofread their writing, they would have
caught the philosophical error that land was inherent to the people, not owned by feudal chiefdoms. Land takes on the same “o” possessive as one’s body and one’s parents and not the “a” form which is applied to material objects, such as food. Lu and Horner also tell us that there are errors in which there is clear agreement, such as a misspelled word, “while others are a matter of interpretation” (200). Clearly, the historian’s interpretation of the history and the Hawaiian people’s stories were not in agreement with each other. Trask attempted to present a different history than what was written in the books, however the current day historians refused to accept the songs and stories as historical evidence.

In conclusion, it is important to look at all sides of a subject that you are attempting to understand. Writers tend to interpret and relay information based on their own attitudes and beliefs as well as those of their society and culture. Trask believed that language is critical to accurately portraying knowledge. As evidenced in this essay, the historians depicted the Hawaiian’s culture as they saw their own society and because they failed to learn the language they did not accurately portray the history of her people. Trask concluded that, “the Hawaiian story remains unwritten, it rests within the culture, inseparable from the land” (401 and she suggests there is another possibility, “that historians need to put down their books, learn the language, and listen to the stories” (400).
APPENDIX C: PLANNED FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What do you think the purpose of the Gen Ed Written Communication Assessment event was?

2. Are there parts of the *Written Communication, Critical Thinking, and Intercultural Knowledge and Competence* VALUE rubrics that are more confusing for you or more challenging to parse? If so, which parts?

3. Is there anything important to you about writing that does not seem to be accounted for in these rubrics?

4. Did any factors other than the rubrics influence your scoring decisions as you were reading? [If so, which ones?]

5. In as much detail as possible, can you describe your approach to using the rubrics to assess student artifacts during the Gen Ed Assessment event? (i.e., did you have printed copies of the rubrics on hand? How did you navigate the rubrics as you were reading/assessing? Did you refer to them often? Not so much? Was there a particular rubric or place in each rubric that you always started with?)

6. Do you recall any student artifacts being difficult to assess? [If so, what made them difficult to assess?]

7. Did your typical approach to navigating the rubrics change when you were assessing those challenging student artifacts? [If so, how so?]

8. Which terms from the *Written Communication, Critical Thinking, and Intercultural Knowledge and Competence* rubrics come up the most in your teaching? How so? (i.e., in conversations with students, comments on their work, assignment prompts)

9. Let’s take some time to discuss the student sample I emailed you before our meeting. How did you score this sample using these rubrics, and why?

10. Is there anything else you’d like to discuss regarding assessment/these rubrics that we haven’t had the chance to talk about yet?
CURRICULUM VITAE

Charlotte Asmuth

EDUCATION

Ph.D.  Rhetoric and Composition | University of Louisville, 2022

  *Dissertation:* Re-localizing Writing Assessment: Sites of Knowledge Mobilization  
  *Committee:* Bruce Horner (Director), Andrea R. Olinger, Susan Ryan, Chris W. Gallagher

M.A.  English, Composition and Pedagogy | University of Maine, 2017

  *Thesis:* “Constructs of Reflection in Six First-Year Composition Classrooms”

B.A.  English | Hollins University, 2011

RESEARCH & TEACHING INTERESTS

writing assessment; composition pedagogy; writing program administration; writing in the disciplines; the politics of language difference

PUBLICATIONS

Peer-Reviewed Essays


Conference Review

**PRESENTATIONS**

Peer-Reviewed Conference Presentations


“Reading is (Also) an Activity and a Subject of Study: Writing about Reading Online.” Writing about Writing Standing Group-sponsored panel at the Conference on College Composition and Communication. Virtual, April 2021.

“Scaffolding Peer Review in an Online Writing Course.” Teacher to Teacher event at the Conference on College Composition and Communication. Virtual, April 2021.


“Organizing Without a Union: Negotiating Managerial Discourses” (with N. Claire Jackson). Conference on College Composition and Communication. Milwaukee, WI, March 2020 [accepted, conference canceled due to COVID-19].


**Selected Workshops and Campus Talks**

“Making Sense of Language Difference and Error in Student Writing: What It Might Be,
and How We Might Address It” (with Bruce Horner). Invited virtual workshop for the Composition Program. University of Louisville, March 2021.


TEACHING

University of Louisville (2017 – present)

BUS 301: Business Communication (2 sections)

ENGL 309: Research Writing in the Disciplines (1 section)

ENGL 102: Intermediate College Writing [Distance Education] (2 sections)

ENGL 102: Intermediate College Writing (2 sections)

ENGL 102: Intermediate College Writing [for international students] (1 section)

ENGL 101: Introduction to College Writing (3 sections)

ENGL 101: Introduction to College Writing [for international students] (1 section)

University of Maine (2014 – 2017)

ENG 315: Research Writing in the Disciplines (1 section)

ENG 101: College Composition (6 sections)

ADMINISTRATIVE POSITIONS

Assistant Director of the BizComm Writing Lab, College of Business, University of Louisville, 2021 – 2022
Assistant Director of Composition, Department of English, University of Louisville, 2018 – 2019

Mentor to First-Year Graduate Teaching Assistants, Department of English, University of Maine, 2016 – 2017

AWARDS & HONORS

University of Louisville

Barbara Plattus Award for Excellence in Graduate Teaching ($500), 2019 – 2020. Awarded annually to two Graduate Teaching Assistants in the English Department.

Dr. M. Celeste Nichols Award ($250), 2020. Awarded annually to several graduate students at the University for professional development.

Student Champion, 2020 – 2021. Student-nominated award for teachers who provided support during the pandemic.

Faculty Favorite Award, 2019 – 2020, 2020 – 2021. Student-nominated teaching award.

University of Maine

Ulrich Wicks Teaching Fellow ($16,000), 2016 – 2017. Competitive one-year appointment (third year of funding) that is awarded to one English M.A. candidate upon the completion of their second year of study.

Outstanding Teaching Assistant, 2015 – 2016. Awarded annually to one Graduate Teaching Assistant in the English Department.

SERVICE

Profession

Stage 1 Proposal Reviewer, 2021 & 2022 CCCC

Stage 1 Proposal Reviewer, 2021 NCTE Annual Convention

Global Society of Online Literacy Educators’ 2022 Conference Committee, 2021

nextGEN Listserv Moderator, 2020 – 2022
University

General Education Assessment (Assessor), University of Louisville, Spring 2020 & Spring 2021

LGBTQ+ Faculty and Staff Association, University of Louisville, 2019 – 2022

Department

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, Department of English, University of Louisville, 2020 – 2022

Hiring Committee, TT Assistant Professor in Literature and Book History, Department of English, University of Louisville, Spring 2021

Racial Justice Task Force, Composition Program, University of Louisville, 2020 – 2022

PhD Peer Mentor, Rhetoric and Composition Program, University of Louisville, 2018 – 2020

Pedagogy Workshop Series for the Composition Program (Chair), University of Louisville, 2017 – 2019

English Graduate Organization (Faculty Liaison), University of Louisville, 2017 – 2019

Undergraduate Studies Committee, Department of English, University of Maine, 2016 – 2017

EDITORIAL EXPERIENCE

Research Assistant for Bruce Horner, Endowed Chair in Rhetoric and Composition, University of Louisville, 2019 – 2021. Conducted research, prepared abstracts, and participated in editorial work.

Copy Editor, *Teaching and Studying Transnational Composition*, edited by Christiane Donahue and Bruce Horner (MLA, forthcoming)

Assistant Editor, *Best of the Journals in Rhetoric and Composition* (Parlor Press, 2021)

Instructional Editor, *Cardinal Compositions* (UofL journal for student writing, 2021 issue)
SELECTED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

AAC&U VALUE Institute Certified Scorer, Written Communication Rubric, 2020

Certificate in Online Writing Instruction, University of Louisville Composition Program, 2020

Graduate Teaching Assistant Academy Part II, University of Louisville, Spring 2018

“College Writing”: From the 1966 Dartmouth Seminar to Tomorrow, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH, August 10 – 12, 2016

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)
Global Society of Online Literacy Educators (GSOLE)
Association for Writing Across the Curriculum (AWAC)
Association of Teachers of Technical Writing (ATTW)
Association for Business Communication (ABC)