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Beyond Retrofitting

Networking Cripistemologies for Radically Inclusive Writing Assessment

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Abstract: This article explores the limitations of current writing assessment models through a crip lens, critiquing the ableist assumptions embedded in traditional and alternative systems, such as labor-based and engagement-based grading. Drawing on Inoue's (2024) concept of crip labor and my own engagement-based grading contract (EBGC), this article examines how these models, while attempting to increase equity, still operate within the ableist structures of higher education. The author argues that true equity in assessment requires radical transformation, centered on the dynamic, diverse, and often unpredictable ways students engage with learning. The article introduces a crip assessment ecology that values radical flexibility, relationality, and disclosure, emphasizing the importance of embracing the varying forms of engagement that emerge in the classroom. By engaging with critical disability theory and praxis, this article advocates for rethinking assessment as a process that disrupts normative ideals and promotes inclusive, accessible, and transformative educational practices.

Keywords: Disability, labor-based assessment, engagement-based assessment, crip assessment, accessibility

> "Ableism is everywhere: not that it overwhelms all of the good schooling can do, not that it invalidates your teaching or your research, but that we are all responsible for looking for it, recognizing our roles in its circulation, and seeking change."
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> —Jay Dolmage (2017), *Academic Ableism: Disability and Higher Education*

Introduction: CCCC 2024

On the second leg of my flight to Spokane for CCCC 2024, I am forced into hyper-awareness of the ways that bodies are constrained and (dis)abled by the spaces they occupy, especially those spaces which privilege normativity as transparently as an airplane. Even in the aisle seat, I feel claustrophobic and agitated; the space around me expands, but mostly contracts, with the movement of other bodies as anxiety inches steadily from my trembling hands up into my throat. Traveling is difficult for most people who experience psychiatric disabilities, but my discomfort is also exacerbated by chronic pain. My joints have stiffened into rigid, unnatural angles against the contours of the seat; a slow, burning sensation has taken root in my cramped abdomen; and no amount of shifting or repositioning relieves the throb in my lower back. It's the kind of pain which disorients, distracts. I'm not able to focus long enough to run through my presentation on the flight, nor did I have time during the layover, which I spent desperately trying to recalibrate. But recalibration depends on a negotiation of my body's needs that's made impossible by normative spaces. It's hard to regulate my nervous system under the fluorescent lights and loudspeakers, and the terminal seats aren't much bigger than the ones on the plane.

Things are only marginally better at the conference. I form a deep, abiding appreciation for the presenters who include access invitations at the beginning of their sessions, but I never feel sufficiently emboldened to occupy those crowded rooms in the ways that make sense to my body. When the MLA-CCCC Joint Task Force on Writing and AI presents their second working paper on policy development, the assigned room is packed. I arrive early to secure a chair, anticipating the session's popularity. I know that my spent body will not last long in a floor seat. Before the presentation begins, I speak with another attendee about my research on engagement-based contract grading. We have a thoughtful and energizing conversation about the intersection of disability and writing assessment, and I relish the ease and amity which so often characterize interactions between those of us personally invested in accessibility. He invites me to consider submitting a proposal for a special edition of the *Journal of Writing Assessment* on neurodivergence, disability, and alternative writing assessment, and I feel entirely gratified. Our conversation marks a welcome departure from the routine ableism of academic conference spaces. Amongst all of the disciplinary, regulatory structures of normativity that constrain disabled scholars' experiences, we've invoked a kairotic moment from which to imagine, construct, and privilege disabled perspectives and experiences. Within that moment, I feel charged by the possibilities afforded by my disabled bodymind, grateful for the ways that it strains and labors against the limits of normative logic.

Then the conference facilitators announce a room change. Because I'm already seated at the back, I'm one of the last to exit the first room and shuffle into the second. By the time I arrive, there aren't any chairs left, so I seat myself cross-legged on the floor. My knees begin aching almost immediately. I want to leave, but I feel anchored to the carpet. Already, rows of people are settling in behind me, and to push my way towards the door now would feel disruptive, discourteous even. Before the presentation begins, one of the facilitators invites those who need a chair to request

one, but I know that I won't. It's one thing to reserve a chair ahead of the session and another thing entirely to ask someone to get up and give you theirs after they're already seated. I'm also hesitant to expose myself to the extravisibility that attends disabled individuals' acts of disclosure (Goode, 2007). I'm not sure how my request for a chair will unsettle or upset the expectations others might have of my body, and I'm reticent to spend the remainder of the session feeling self-conscious and ashamed. So, I remain on the floor for the 45 minutes that follow. By the time the Task Force is introducing the discussion portion of the presentation, my joints are practically screaming for relief. I use the transition as an opportunity to sneak out early. I had wanted to pose a question to the panel, to clarify how classroom policies for AI usage might be more mindful of disabled and neurodivergent students' composing practices, but I'm not able to withstand the discomfort any longer. I leave feeling frustrated and dejected. The bitter recognition of my body's incongruence within normative space feels cruelly magnified by the fleeting sense of belonging I'd experienced before the presentation.

Tracing Ableist/Disableist Institutional Logics

The experience I recount above offers a material example of the ways that ableism and disableism operate in academic spaces to marginalize and exclude disabled individuals. It is these twin mechanisms, outlined by Dolmage (2017) in *Academic Ableism: Disability and Higher Education*, through which the institution creates a hierarchy of onto-epistemological orientations in which ability is privileged (ableism) and disability is relegated to the margins (disableism). As Dolmage and other critical disability studies scholars have articulated, students and faculty are not merely disabled within academic spaces but are disabled by them and the normative ways of being and knowing which they reify (Brueggemann et al., 2005; Cedillo, 2018; Erevelles, 2000; Konrad, 2021; Miller, 2016; Price, 2011). Thus, the institution has historically operated to suppress and discipline disabled knowledges and experiences even as it exacerbates the material conditions of disability. This phenomenon is exemplified by my experience at CCCC where the material space of the conference room amplified my physical disability to the extent that I was unable to participate in the discussion portion of the session.

The process of discounting disabled ways of being and knowing is perhaps most visibly expressed through the assessment practices which are sanctioned and legitimized within higher education. While numerous studies have implicated traditional assessment in the exclusion and marginalization of disability (Fuller et al., 2004; Hanafin et al., 2007; Madriaga & Goodley, 2010; Milic Babic & Dowling, 2015), thematic analyses of disabled students' experiences with assessment emphasize its significant role in sustaining and propagating mechanisms of academic ableism and disableism (Nieminen, 2023). Nieminen's (2023) study finds that traditional assessment models privilege normative bodyminds and "[label] abnormality, enabling only predetermined, ableist ways of being and becoming a student" (p. 630). Therefore, assessment operates to discipline disabled students towards normative, abled academic performances, erasing or penalizing ways of being and knowing that arise from the positionality and experience of disability.

The ableist and disableist logics of the university trickle down into writing assessment as well. At the most fundamental level, literacy standards operate to exclude certain bodies from accessing the "steep steps" of higher education and then are "used to shape those bodies and minds that get up the stairs" (Dolmage, 2008, p. 18). Traditional, quality-based assessment which constructs a hierarchy of literate performances necessarily disciplines students towards normative

(abled, but also white, middle-class, and heteropatriarchal) expressions of literacy. In their webtext on universal design and writing pedagogy, Dunn and De Mers (2002) describe the ways that the conventional writing classroom has historically privileged physical writing over other intellectual processes, reinforcing a limiting, inflexible definition of composing that excludes disabled writers' various multimodal practices and knowledges. By centering the written product, traditional approaches to writing assessment elide the processes by which many disabled students learn, compose, and communicate. Additionally, normative expectations for how students experience time when writing (Wood, 2017b) or the technologies they use to facilitate their composing practices (Wood, 2014) contribute to the marginalization and disciplining of disabled writers. In these ways, traditional approaches to writing assessment are imbricated with the ableist and disableist logics of the wider institution.

While composition scholars have increasingly turned to alternative assessment models in an effort to disrupt inequitable, normative evaluation practices, many of these approaches remain constrained by ableist and disableist institutional logics. Even well-intentioned frameworks often function as retrofits, correcting access barriers without fundamentally reimagining the values, temporalities, and performances that might take up space within the assessment ecology. As a result, the work of designing writing assessment through disability remains undertheorized. The purpose of this article is to begin imagining such alternatives by tracing the process through which I, a disabled scholar and writing instructor, have arrived at my current assessment practices. I offer one avenue for enacting more inclusive and accessible writing assessment, namely in the practice of networking cripistemologies, or valuing and holding in relation the multiple, situated ways of knowing that emerge from disabled and neurodivergent embodiments and theorizing assessment from the particular network of cripistemological identities that converge in the writing classroom. To explicate my philosophy for networking cripistemologies, I first examine prominent models of alternative writing assessment and their limitations as authentic forms of accessibility praxis. I then outline cripistemology as a framework for theorizing assessment through disability and for understanding engagement as embodied, dynamic, and infinitely expansive. Finally, I describe the specific pedagogical practices I have taken up in my own classroom to network across cripistemologies, demonstrating how access intimacy, strategic disclosure, crip engagement, and radical flexibility materialize truly liberatory and accessible futures for writing assessment.

Current Models for Inclusive Assessment

Two approaches in particular, engagement-based and crip labor-based assessment, have emerged to offer meaningful entry-points for countering ableism and disableism in writing assessment. Below, I summarize each approach before examining their limitations as viable options for authentic inclusivity and equity.

Engagement-Based Assessment

Since the introduction of labor-based assessment (LBA), Inoue (2022) has acknowledged the ways that his assessment model might be problematized through a critical disability studies lens. And scholars have eagerly taken up his practice of problem-posing to both interrogate the ways that LBA reproduces inequity and theorize adjustments that account for disabled students' labor practices. In her critique of LBA, Carillo (2021) conceptualizes an engagement-based assessment (EBA) system, which substitutes engagement for labor at the center of the assessment ecology. She

argues that while using labor as an assessment measure instantiates a single normative standard of able-bodied, neurotypical performance, centering engagement allows instructors to attend to the many ways of being, knowing, learning, and languaging that disabled students' manifest in the classroom. Carillo's engagement-based grading contract (EBGC) is therefore designed to "offer a range of ways that students might engage with the course" (p. 56) in order to avoid universalizing normative conceptions of time, labor, and performance. The EBA ecology Carillo (2021) outlines is designed to cultivate flexibility and recognize a multitude of ways that students engage in learning and knowledge production. Other scholars have taken up Carillo's model for EBA. Most notably, O'Meara (2024) finds that students in her upper-level English course have a positive affective experience using an EBGC and that the assessment approach increased accessibility especially for neurodivergent students.

The values of EBA outlined by Carillo (2021) and other critics of LBA serve as the foundation for the assessment system that I currently use in my own writing courses. In order to account for disabled students' various languaging and composing practices, I use an EBGC that offers multiple access points for students to engage with course materials and the learning community (see supplemental materials). Each main course activity allows various options for completion. For example, students may attend the in-class peer review workshop, attend the University Writing Center, or submit asynchronous written feedback on their classmates' drafts to receive credit for the course activity related to peer review. Similarly, multimodal options are available for most assignments.

Additionally, and in recognition that traditional participation standards normalize and privilege able-bodied, neurotypical performances (Gomes et al., 2020; Kryger & Zimmerman, 2020), the EBGC emphasizes engagement over participation. Using Gomes et al.'s (2020) framework of structured options and minimum thresholds, I offer students nine "engagement opportunities" which encourage them to embrace their various ways of being, knowing, learning, and communicating to engage with course material and with each other. Nonnormative modes of engagement are affirmed in other ways too. Instead of assigning labor logs, which fail to acknowledge the time and energy required by disabled students to access and negotiate academic spaces (Konrad, 2021; Kryger & Zimmerman 2020), I offer students an opportunity to communicate about their engagement practices through weekly check-ins. This system builds upon similar models from Gomes (2019) and O'Meara (2023) and has served as the assessment tool in my courses from Spring 2023 to Spring 2025.

Crip Labor-Based Assessment

Since I designed and began implementing my EBGC, Inoue (2024) has responded to critiques of LBA with a new model for alternative writing assessment. In particular, he addresses concerns from Kryger and Zimmerman (2020) and Carillo (2021) by proposing a theory of crip labor which "considers the ability to labor as universal but flexible, open-ended in terms of what it looks like, feels like, or is expected to be or produce" (Inoue, 2024, p. 22). Crip labor builds on previous queer and disabled conceptions of crip time (Price, 2011; Samuels, 2017; Wood, 2017b) and meaningful failure (Halberstam, 2011; Inoue, 2014), maintaining an emphasis on the conditions of laboring in order to tease out, test, and, potentially, reject normative standards of labor. The preserved emphasis on labor, in this case crip labor, reflects Inoue's reservations about EBA which he fears might easily regress to quality-based judgements without appropriate

attention to students' labor practices. He identifies several potential problems with Carillo's (2021) theory of EBA: the overdetermination of students' choice in engagement, inconsistency in labor time across engagement options, and the difficulty of designing useful, communicable measures of engagement from which to perform assessment.

Based on his theory of crip labor, Inoue (2022) outlines a model of crip labor-based assessment (CLBA) to address criticisms of the inherent ableism and disableism of LBA while avoiding the substitution of engagement for labor at the center of the assessment ecology. In order to effectively crip the LBA ecology, Inoue embeds intentional discussions of disability into his grading contract's introduction and negotiations, creates more flexibility around due dates, and reframes labor measures into ranges of time rather than a singular, prescriptive number of minutes on task. Many of these adjustments meaningfully respond to the inequities that critical disability scholars identified in LBA. The sustained emphasis on collaboration, negotiation, and flexibility articulated in Inoue's framework for CLBA offers increased opportunities for students to more fully embody disabled ways of being in the writing classroom and presents a useful orientation for scholars interested in pursuing more accessible assessment practices. His response to Carillo in particular, surfaces important questions about EBA; however, it also reveals the ways that ableism and disableism are deeply ingrained in the ways that many of us conceptualize disabled students and their engagement practices, even as we work towards building more just and equitable systems.

The Erasure of Disabled Knowledges in Alternative Assessment

One issue that emerges from an analysis of these two alternative assessment models is the minimization of disabled students' awareness of their own engagement practices or preferences. One of Inoue's (2024) primary concerns with EBA, that students might not know how to make choices about the forms of engagement available to them, elides the lived realities of disabled students, many of whom have been making critical decisions about how to access and negotiate assessment ecologies for most of their academic lives. In the writing classroom in particular, disabled students often practice crip forms of engagement with normative writing processes through collaboration (Lee, 2025), resistance to temporalities that reify ableist conceptions of productivity (Chen, 2023), and unconventional approaches that embrace the advantages of neurodiversity (Pope, 2016). In fact, responses to my own EBA model indicate that students are not only aware of their preferences regarding engagement, mode of instruction, communication, and workflows, but capable of making agentic choices regarding engagement informed by those preferences.

Concurrent to piloting the EBGC discussed above, I conducted a series of IRB-approved surveys to ascertain students' attitudes towards and perceptions of EBA (protocol #21827). The purpose of the study was to gauge how students' affective experience of EBA evolved over the course of the semester as they adjusted to the grading contract. To examine students' perceptions of and experiences with my EBGC, I conducted a descriptive, cross-sectional survey study. Three surveys were administered across the semester: one at the beginning of the course, one at the midpoint, and one at the end. The study was conducted during the Spring 2025 semester across three sections of W131, a first-year writing course at Indiana University Indianapolis. Survey questions asked students to reflect on their understanding of the assessment system and course policies, their perceptions of the system's fairness, the relationship between the assessment approach and their learning, and any concerns or challenges they experienced while navigating

the EBGC. Survey responses were analyzed using thematic analysis, with responses coded for recurring patterns and major emergent themes related to access, engagement, and assessment. While a comprehensive discussion of the theoretical frameworks and methods used to collect and analyze data in that study lies beyond the purvey of my current discussion, I offer one significant theme that emerged from survey responses, namely, that many students leverage awareness of their engagement practices and preferences to make critical choices within the assessment ecology.

Many respondents indicated which engagement opportunities in the EBGC were desirable or undesirable to them based on their own engagement preferences ("it's hard to engage in class;" "submitting a question online for class discussion isn't for me;" "I don't like how we have to go to the writing center or schedule a 1:1 meeting"). Contrary to Inoue's (2024) concern, responses to my EBGC demonstrate that students possess meta-awareness of their engagement practices and are capable of making agentic decisions within the assessment ecology based on that awareness. In fact, some respondents expressed frustration with the ways that the EBGC constrained their engagement practices ("there needs to be more engagement opportunities;" "It would be nice if there were more things to do for people who aren't as talkative;" "adding some more activity options and this contract would be amazing"). These responses challenge Inoue's (2024) misconception that students lack critical awareness of their engagement practices and preferences; however, they also legitimize his concern that students' choices might be overdetermined in an EBA system. The list of engagement opportunities included in my EBGC, while more expansive than traditional expectations for participation, necessarily delimits the forms of engagement that might emerge organically within the assessment ecology and normalizes prescribed ways of being, learning, and communicating. In the responses included above, students readily identified and critiqued this limitation of the EBGC.

Another problematic issue with CBLA arises from the normative assumption at the core of the system: that commensurate labor time across engagement produces equity within the assessment ecology, or that it produces at least more equity than is afforded in either LBA or EBA. Because engagement is largely an affective experience, students, perhaps especially those who experience disability, consider factors beyond labor and time that might include things like energy or interaction when making decisions about how to engage in a course. These factors may be more important in their decision-making process than labor time. For example, a student with social anxiety who makes decisions about their engagement practices based primarily on levels of required interaction may choose to attend an individual 60-minute session at the writing center instead of participating in a 45-minute group peer review workshop. In this example, one peer review modality is more accessible than the other for a neurodivergent student, and it's this accessibility that informs the student's choice, not labor time. If we take seriously this student's knowledge of their own engagement preferences then, we might conclude that incommensurate time on task does not necessarily produce inequity for that student. Alternatively, removing the option to attend the writing center because it is not commensurate in labor time to the peer review workshop strips that student of the opportunity to labor and engage in the way that feels most accessible to them. In this case, the emphasis on labor time has not avoided the ableism/disableism of traditional or labor-based assessment. Instead, it has introduced inaccessibility, thus inequity, into the assessment ecology for that student.

The issues that emerge from an analysis of EBA and CLBA—the delegitimization of disabled knowledges, the normalizing pressure to enact certain (normative) engagement practices, and

the privileging of labor time over other affective factors that shape students' choices—reveal the ways that current models for alternative assessment maintain and even reinforce the ableism and disableism of traditional assessment. And the question at the center of Inoue's concerns about EBA remains: how can instructors possibly imagine, quantify, communicate, measure, and assess all the forms of engagement that might emerge in the assessment ecology? While this question echoes Inoue's (2024) logistical concerns about enacting EBA, it also suggests the complicated reality that underlies efforts towards more equitable assessment: that no current model of assessment, traditional or alternative, can possibly account for all of the nonnormative ways of being, knowing, and learning that might emerge in the classroom and that all of the systems which arise from the ableist/disableist project of the university necessarily reproduce ableism and disableism through the continued erasure of disabled knowledges and practices.

Interlude

When I presented on engagement-based grading contracts at CCCC 2024, I had not yet read Inoue's (2024) monograph on CLBA. In the routine commotion of the Spring semester, I hadn't had enough time to carefully examine or sit with his critiques of EBA before I arrived in Spokane for my session. Instead, my presentation focused primarily on the positive findings from my study: that students reported less stress surrounding grades, increased agency and involvement in learning, and greater flexibility in the ways they engaged with the course. I organized my discussion around those findings because I wanted to name and affirm the benefits of EBA, to position the model as a viable alternative for participants grappling with inequities in their own assessment ecologies. I was gratified to find that many participants were receptive to and invested in problematizing writing assessment through the lens of disability. However, I was unprepared for the ways that our dialogue would complicate the tidy narrative I had constructed around EBA, my belief that it provided a viable and effective solution to inequity in writing assessment for disabled students. A few participants mentioned considerations from Inoue's (2024) new critique, in particular his concern that students' choices for engagement might be overdetermined within the EBA system. Their comments troubled the certainty with which I had framed my own assessment practices before and during the presentation. I left the session, and later the conference, with seeds of unease sprouting in the back of my mind, unsettled by the possibility that my assessment system still harbored the ableist and disableist logics of previous models.

I spent the plane ride home from Spokane reading Inoue's (2024) chapter on EBA. My response was twofold: I reacted defensively at first to his critiques of an assessment approach I both employed and advocated, but I also came to recognize that much of my initial reaction was fueled by frustration at the continued minimization of disabled students' self-knowledge. As Inoue (2024) situated labor time as the principal measure for assessment, I recalled the normalizing pressure of ableist logics historically exacted on disabled students. The insistence on labor time as the primary consideration for engagement reflected how my own ways of knowing and being had been constrained as a disabled student and scholar. Reading the chapter engendered the same anxiety I experienced at the CCCC-MLA Joint Taskforce session—that I was unable to occupy or perform in academic spaces in prescribed ways and that others' understanding of my body and ways of moving through those spaces superseded my own. Synthesizing my experiences at the conference and my reaction to Inoue's (2024) response, I came to suspect that labor time instantiated yet another, albeit new, normative measure by which to assess students' performances,

and that the insistence on labor time within a CLBA ecology diminishes disabled students' ability to agentically and meaningfully know and act upon their self-knowledge surrounding engagement. And while that somatic embodiment of both the frustration of reading Inoue's (2024) chapter and the unease I felt at the conference enabled me to critically evaluate CLBA, it also catalyzed a larger process of problematizing other alternative assessment approaches, including my own.

When I returned to the classroom, the problems and tensions that Inoue (2024) identified with EBA were made hypervisible. The very fact of my grading contract, which listed prescribed modes of engagement for students to choose from, determined and delimited the engagement practices that might emerge from my classroom. In constructing engagement this way, I realized that my system risked replicating the same problem I had critiqued in CLBA: that it relied on the discounting of students' self-knowledge in order to render engagement quantifiable, communicable, and assessable. Despite my intentions to reduce inequity for disabled students, I had still failed to carve meaningful space for nonnormative ways of being and knowing into the assessment ecology. Over the course of the Spring semester after I returned from CCCC, I realized that by failing to legitimize disabled students' self-knowledge and engagement, my assessment system materialized and reproduced the ableist/disableist logics historically enacted by traditional assessment systems. This reality felt magnified by my experience at CCCC—by the ways my disabled bodymind was constrained within the conference space, and by the sense that my nonnormative ways of moving and being there kept me from contributing to a conversation vital to our field. Yet the contrast between that exclusion and the earlier exchange I had about alternative assessment also illuminated a pathway forward. I held onto how valued I had felt in that moment before the session, how buoyed I was by the recognition of my perspective. If I wanted to work toward greater equity for disabled students in my own classroom, I realized I needed to begin from disabled knowledges—my own and my students'—as the ground for creating meaningful inclusion.

Cripistemology as Entry-Point

The predominant issue with the two alternative assessment systems that I analyze in this article is that they constitute retrofits of models that are steeped in and perpetuative of ableist and disableist logics. Retrofits refer to the adjustments, accommodations, and adaptations that are added on to existing structures, material and conceptual, to create access for/when disability arises (Dolmage, 2017). Retrofits provide a powerful metaphor for the ways that the university constructs itself with able-bodiedness in mind and disability as an afterthought. Dolmage (2017) argues that retrofits "are not designed for people to live and thrive with a disability, but rather to temporarily make the disability go away" (p. 70). Like the wheelchair ramp added on to a pre-existing building to give disabled students access to always-already disableist and ableist academic spaces, assessment tools, like Inoue's (2022), like my own, built off of traditional assessment models allow students to "achieve around disability or against it, or in spite of it" (Dolmage, 2017, p. 70) while maintaining the normalizing pressures of able-bodiedness. As my analysis reveals, EBA and CLBA treat disability as an issue within assessment to be solved or remedied so that the assessment system continues to carry out its primary function of categorizing, ranking, and evaluating academic performances. My EBGC and Inoue's (2024) new model of crip labor-based assessment do not create meaningful accessibility for disabled students because they operate on and from traditional, ableist values and ethics surrounding assessment: that the universal is preferable to the individualized, that all experiences or performances can be measured, quantified,

or even articulated, that a single assessment tool can possibly account for all of the disabled ways of being and knowing that converge in a classroom. They ameliorate disableism for a task, an assignment, a single academic performance, or a course while the rest of the university continues its tradition of marginalizing disability.

Therefore, the only way to achieve true equity and accessibility is to radically and holistically retheorize writing assessment from the ground up, imagining transformative futures for the relationship between the writing classroom and disability. For me, this process of imagining and enacting more inclusive assessment practices clarified in the months after my presentation at CCCC. In recognizing the distinction between conditions which affirm disabled knowledges and those which marginalize them, I realized that I needed to begin from disabled knowledges in order to begin imagining a radically different, and hopefully more equitable, approach to writing assessment. In short, I needed to design assessment practices with disability in mind so that disabled and neurodiverse identities are always already a part of the assessment ecology (Browning, 2014). To do so, I locate cripistemology as an entry point to inclusive and accessible writing assessment. The concept of cripistemology was introduced by McRuer and Johnson (2014) in their virtual roundtable on the convergence of queer, feminist, critical race, and disability epistemologies. McRuer and Johnson (2014) situate the concept of cripistemology within a larger tradition of emphasizing disabled voices and experiences in the production of "first-person knowledge about topics that concern disabled people and communities" (p. 158). While higher education has historically situated disabled individuals as "objects of study" (Snyder & Mitchell, 2006, p. 198) and refused to recognize disability as an "important form of critical knowledge-production within the university" (Titchkosky, 2011, p. 70), cripistemological frameworks enable disabled individuals to know and work from their preexisting ways of being and knowing.

My own definition of cripistemology encompasses ways of knowing that emerge from the subjectivities, lived experiences, and embodiments of disability. This definition is informed both by McRuer and Johnson's (2014) roundtable and Dolmage's (2017) emphasis on the power of disability subjectivity to expand cultural knowledge of different (body)minds. I conceptualize cripistemology as knowing disability but also, perhaps more importantly, knowing through disability as well. In this article, I have thus far articulated an interpretation and evaluation of current alternative assessment models that I arrived at by relying on a particular cripistemological orientation, one informed by the experience of embodying and negotiating disability in academic spaces like conferences, but also in other institutional spaces. In the section below, I outline my theory of networking cripistemologies and describe the specific pedagogical practices which emerged from this process of imagining assessment through cripistemological frameworks in order to theorize an assessment system which begins from disabled knowledges.

Networking Cripistemologies for Inclusivity in Alternative Writing Assessment

Our attempts to design new crip assessment models are necessarily shaped by our location within the university and the constraints of the institution's operations. Additionally, assessment practices are carried out by institutional actors who are limited by their own experiences with and understanding of disability. While my own cripistemology offered a generative entry-point for clarifying the issues with EBA and CLBA, creating radically inclusive and accessible assessment requires instructors to move beyond their singular subjectivities, disabled or otherwise. I argue that enacting equitable assessment practices requires us to network between/across/amongst the

various cripistemologies that emerge and interact within a given assessment ecology. In doing so, we move towards futures which value the knowledges that arise from disability and create more opportunities for those disabled knowledges to multiply and expand. Below, I describe four practices that I have employed to more effectively network cripistemologies within my EBA system: cultivating access intimacy, enacting strategic disclosure, redefining crip engagement, and embracing radical flexibility.

Access Intimacy

My process of networking cripistemologies in the writing classroom is grounded in the cultivation of access intimacy, a concept coined by disability justice scholar Mia Mingus. Mingus (2011) classifies access intimacy as the intimacy shared among disabled individuals who possess "an automatic understanding of access needs out of [the] shared similar lived experience of . . . ableism." Mingus' term names the feeling of safety, recognition, and mutual understanding that emerges when access needs are anticipated, respected, and prioritized, when they are treated as integral component of our relational lives rather than as problems which need resolving. Access intimacy occurs when the knowledges and lived experiences of disabled individuals are invariably received and affirmed, similar to my experience speaking with one of the editors of this special issue at CCCC 2024. In that moment of reflexive recognition and identification, there was no need to justify or translate my cripistemological orientation; the validity of disabled knowledge was treated as an axiom instead of a paradox creating a space from which nonstandard ways of knowing operated freely and generatively. Importantly, however, access intimacy is not limited to interactions only among disabled people. While it is often facilitated through shared lived experience, access intimacy can also be cultivated amongst those who generally recognize the importance of care and interdependence to their relationships and communities (Mingus, 2017) and who conceptualize accessibility as a vital and necessary tool for collective well-being.

In this way, access intimacy is distinct from what Mingus (2011) describes as obligatory access, those begrudging, retroactive, or compliance-driven accommodations that position disability as a disturbance to normative systems. In my examination of both labor- and engagement-based assessment, I often found that strategies for increased accessibility reflected the problematic nature of obligatory access. Accessibility was treated as a static value that could be accounted for and addressed with fixed, prescriptive solutions. This approach delimited acceptable and sanctioned modes of engagement and learning, restricting opportunities for disabled knowledges to surface and proliferate. Within a framework of networked cripistemologies then, the ethos of the assessment ecology serves to materialize meaningful, authentic access intimacy, rather than obligatory access, through situated, dynamic, and flexible responses to the access needs, cripistemologies, and engagement preferences that coalesce within a particular community. In the writing classroom, this kind of access intimacy does not require complete accessibility for everyone all the time, a goal that is largely unachievable particularly within the ableist logics of the university. Instead, it asks members of the classroom community to prioritize and practice a shared willingness to recognize, negotiate, and respond to access needs as they emerge.

I ground my theory of networked cripistemologies in access intimacy because it affirms the epistemic value of disabled lived experience while reframing access as a collective, relational practice with endless, expansive possibilities for enactment. In terms of writing assessment, this means that instructor should strive to create more opportunities for cripistemological affirmation,

adapt their assessment practices to their local contexts and the unique positionalities that arrive to their classes, and model access as a philosophy of interdependence that moves beyond checking the boxes of institutional compliance. When approached this way, access intimacy has the potential to interrogate and disrupt the ableist and disableist structures surrounding the writing classroom by transforming the conditions through which access is imagined and enacted. By centering access intimacy within the framework of networked cripistemologies, I try not only to privilege a shared commitment to "connection, justice, community, love, and liberation" (Mingus, 2017) but also to work toward liberating the classroom from the logics of normalization that undergird institutional assessment and toward more just, equitable, and humane futures.

Disclosure

The cultivation of access intimacy requires members of a particular community to openly share, or disclose, their disability positionalities and access needs, but the stakes of disability disclosure are "fraught with risk" (Wood, 2017a, p. 85). Disabled students already experience the stigmatization of disability and struggle with access fatigue within the university; they may also resist disability identity for a myriad of reasons. Therefore, it's important that faculty recognize the complexity of disability disclosure and "position themselves as purposefully responsive agents" (Wood, 2017a, p. 90) in moments of disclosure. I argue that it is of equal importance that instructors situate themselves as proactive agents within the dynamics of disclosure by practicing disclosure themselves in strategic ways that cultivate access intimacy.

As an undergraduate student struggling to negotiate disability within the university, I didn't disclose my disabilities with my professors or advisors because I didn't know how to articulate my experience of difference to people who I perceived as embodiments of normative expectations for academic performance. And I didn't discuss my chronic pain or psychiatric disabilities because no one else was talking about theirs either. Research indicates that faculty members experience similar reticence to disclose mental disability in academic spaces. A cross-institutional survey of higher education professionals conducted by Price et al. (2017) finds that only 21% percent of respondents have disclosed their mental disability to department chairs. A fourth of the respondents also indicated concern that requesting accommodations would affect tenure or promotion decisions. Twenty-two percent worried how their peers would respond or behave toward them going forward. Open-ended responses to Price et al.'s (2017) survey suggest a pervasive fear of stigma or negative professional outcomes upon disclosure of mental health disability. Of particular significance was the study's discovery that only 20% of faculty members disclosed mental disability to their students.

This reality aligns with my experience as an undergraduate. I certainly don't recall any of my professors disclosing mental disabilities to their classes, and I wonder if I would have struggled as silently as I did had the existence of disabled academics been made more visible to me. However, I don't mean to negate the very real and very valid concerns of faculty members with mental disabilities who worry about the negative consequences of disclosure. Discussions about mental disability that do not involve self-disclosure can also facilitate the kind of classroom environment in which students feel safe and encouraged to disclose their own experiences with mental disability. In her thesis on the significance of the student-instructor relationship in disclosing mental health problems, Haverkamp (2020) demonstrates that a strong degree of communicative openness perceived within the classroom correlates positively to students' likelihood of mental health

problem disclosure. More specifically, instructors that facilitate positive, recurring discussions about mental health are more likely to receive disclosures from students about their own mental health issues. Recurring discussion of disability might produce similar results for the students' likelihood of disability disclosure.

Bleich (1998) argues that disclosure "asks us to take notice of the historically grounded suppressions, denials, and lies that accompany received cultural traditions and received knowledge" (p. 12). This means that disclosure encompasses expressions of both personal and institutional realities. Relying on Bleich's conception of disclosure, Breneman et al. (2017) define disability disclosure as "a political act that can create opportunities for social action and change" (p. 358). Within a crip assessment ecology, disclosure manifests in discussions about the ways that the university constructs disability, personal experiences and embodiments of disability, and the ways that engagement manifests within the assessment ecology. By being proactive and responsive towards these discussions, I allow space for the many cripistemologies that arrive at my classroom, create opportunities for openly discussing access needs, and encourage students to think about how their own ways of learning and engaging shape their academic experiences.

Crip Engagement

One of the conversations engendered by strategic disclosures in my assessment ecology pertains to students' engagement practices and preferences. Within the problematic design of both traditional and alternative assessment models, engagement is often predetermined and delimiting for disabled and neurodivergent students. In order to avoid the issues created in my original EBA system, I have begun to conceptualize student learning through the lens of "crip engagement." I define crip engagement as the various experiences and embodiments of time, labor, effort, energy, interaction, and performance that contribute to a student's learning. Because engagement practices emerge from the assessment ecology in a dynamic, ongoing, and iterative way, I make no pretense of pre-determining the engagement options or preferences that students might decide to perform in my class. Instead, my EBGC serves as an entry-point for students to begin thinking about (dis)ability and the forms of engagement that are most meaningful and accessible to them. Negotiations of how engagement manifests for students are as dynamic, ongoing, and iterative as the engagement practices that students bring to each class.

Radical Flexibility

Enacting crip engagement is facilitated through radical flexibility, a term coined by Veletsianos and Houlden (2020) to describe their "invitation to imagine and turn to the tools, mechanisms, and systems needed in order to create life-sustaining education, not just for some, but all, and not just for now, but far into the future" (p. 852). In terms of engagement, radical flexibility requires me to "begin by interrogating assumptions about who the learner is and what tools and capacities they have at their disposal" (p. 852). Radical flexibility requires that academic spaces, structures, and practices be both relational and responsive. Therefore, radically flexible praxis which enacts more equitable assessment outcomes for disabled students must value relationality and responsiveness.

Practically, this will look different across our classrooms and institutions as we negotiate our various situated, localized contexts. For me, radical flexibility occurs when I negotiate attendance policies with my classes, experiment with different modes of communicating with students, make

adjustments to the course schedule, and solicit feedback about the ways that my assessment practices do or don't create access points for different types of learners. It's a deep and sustained willingness to relinquish my own normative assumptions about what academic performance and assessment might look like, control over the temporal processes of learning, and the limitations of institutional logics. Through radical flexibility, I am able to transform and re-imagine not just alternative assessment models, but the very values and hierarchies upon which the university is constructed. In accepting Veletsianos and Houlden's (2020) invitation, I ask "what kind of university do we want—which is in turn to ask, what kind of life, what kind of future do we want" (p. 852)?

Conclusion: CCCC 2026 and Beyond

As I was revising my initial manuscript for this special issue, CCCC released its call for proposals (CFP) for the 2026 conference. That CFP shares the themes that the upcoming conference will be organized around, conversation and community, but it also reveals how the flagship organization of our field defines each of these values. In particular, the CFP articulates a conceptualization of these terms that places asynchronous modes of participation, which often offer increased accessibility for disabled scholars, at the bottom of a constructed hierarchy of collegial interactions. As I was reading the call, I recalled an assumption that has long circulated in academic spaces and characterized my own experiences within them: that a body's ability to occupy a particular community in sanctioned ways directly correlates with that body's ability to contribute to the conversations which take place there, an assumption I encountered during my first experience at CCCC 2024 now codified by the new CFP. This latest iteration of academic ableism indicates our field's distance from futures which meaningfully legitimize and honor the onto-cripistemological orientations of its disabled members. I don't share my experiences at CCCC 2024 or refer to 2026's CFP to criticize the specific facilitators or dole out blame to individual actors. Rather, I introduce them here as representative of a larger system of ableist and disableist logics that continue to constrain the possibilities that might otherwise proliferate in our field, at our conferences, and in our classrooms. And while I'm troubled by the CFP, I'm energized by the reactions of my disabled colleagues, they ways that they've leveraged this kairotic moment to reaffirm the ways of knowing and communing and conversing that emerge from disabled subjectivities. I hope that we might continue to find opportunities for proliferating and networking cripistemological orientations as we stretch towards more accessible and inclusive futures.

Similarly, I hope that writing instructors continue to imagine and enact assessment practices that respond to the embodied positionalities and cripistemologies that emerge in their classrooms. As I conclude this piece, I think it's important to acknowledge that the answers for how writing instructors might begin designing radically transformative alternatives to traditional assessment cannot be located in a single article or theory of accessible pedagogical praxis. The boundaries of my own cripistemology give way to the knowledges of other disabled scholars, students, and faculty who will continue to shape the ways that disability emerges within our assessment ecologies, within the university. I invite others to continue Inoue's (2022) legacy of problem-posing writing assessment, drawing from their unique cripistemological perspectives to examine assessment practices as both vehicles for the ableism and disableism that delimit the possibilities for our writing classrooms and as sites for imagining radical futures for all of the bodies and minds that converge there.

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