

Decolonizing the Master's Tool: From Traditional Rubrics to the Competency Wheel

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Abstract

Despite its ubiquitousness in Ethnic Studies classrooms, the rubric, as an artifact of colonial assessment logics, has received little attention from critical pedagogy scholars and educators, including those within the adjacent domains of liberatory and/or competency-based education. Responding to an absence in scholarship amplified by the traditional rubric's silent, steady advancement as an overlooked weapon in the colonial arsenal, this paper builds on preexisting critical pedagogies and praxes to propose the Competency Wheel as an alternative to the traditional rubric. Emerging from the author's teaching experience, the recent corpus of scholarship on equity in assessment and co-created rubrics authored by practitioners writing outside of Western paradigms, the Competency Wheel is a template for a co-created structured assessment that attends to transparency and student agency in assessment practices while giving equal attention to the tenants of Ethnic Studies. An effort to decolonize assessment, the Competency Wheel contests the "temporal colonization" of the traditional rubric. Visibly nonlinear, the Competency Wheel captures the recursive nature of an inquiry cycle and is visually and epistemologically akin to the Four Manifestations, or Movements, of Tezcatlipoca.

Key Words: Ethnic Studies, Critical Pedagogy, Assessment, Education

Introduction

Within the field of ethnic studies praxis and curriculum, assessment tools and practices seem to have escaped the recent push towards pedagogical decolonization unscathed and unchanged. This is despite many scholars and educators calling for action and spotlighting alternative methods for assessing student learning in culturally sustaining classrooms. Absent from their disruption to assessment methodologies, however, is critique of the rubric. The rubric has carried on without equal consideration for the assessment tool's structural and practical participation in the very systems and epistemes from which Ethnic Studies aspires to divest. Essentially, despite its ubiquitousness in Ethnic Studies classrooms, the rubric has received little critical attention from Ethnic Studies practitioners, critical pedagogy scholars and educators in general, including those within the adjacent domains of liberatory and/or competency-based education.

Recent scholarship provide catalysts for critically interrogating and reimagining the rubric that, in many of its common and current iterations, normalizes the "various hegemonic forces" and

“problematic ways of being [that] have become so ubiquitous and embedded in who we are and how we do things that they have become invisible” (Bheda quoted in Henning et al., 2022, p. 22). Frequently created by educators in isolation or in small groups with other educators, rubrics do little to thwart Western settler colonialism’s rugged individualism. Rubrics, according to Bheda, serve to prime learners “to be individual contributors” rather than intentional members of a community (Henning et al., 2022, p. 27). Further, rubrics tend to privilege a predetermined set of skills and/or standards that trickle down to students from a top comprised of people who may or may not share in their lived experiences but who most certainly work within places, spaces, systems, and structures still haunted by specters of coloniality. Even the finer details of rubrics—from word choice to formatting—reify inequities, their esoteric vocabulary, linear presentations, and monochromatic color and font themes creating rather than mitigating inaccessibility.

Responding to an absence in scholarship amplified by the traditional rubric’s silent, steady advance, this article builds on preexisting critical pedagogies and praxes to propose the Competency Wheel as an alternative to the traditional rubric. Emerging from my teaching experience and the recent corpus of scholarship on equity in assessment and co-created rubrics authored by practitioners writing outside of Western paradigms, the Competency Wheel is a template for a co-created rubric that promotes transparency and student agency in assessment practices while giving equal attention to the tenants of Ethnic Studies. An effort to decolonize assessment, the Competency Wheel addresses the linearity of the traditional rubric and what Murrah-Mandril (2020) called “temporal colonization.” Visibly nonlinear, the Competency Wheel captures the recursive nature of an inquiry cycle and is visually and epistemologically akin to the Four Manifestations, or Movements, of Tezcatlipoca. My critique and alternative assessment tool seek to upend a common practice in and beyond Ethnic Studies classrooms that is overlooked as a weapon in the colonial arsenal and normalization of whiteness. For, without alternatives to the traditional rubric, we must, as Pewewardy et al. (2022) insisted, ask ourselves, “Are we doing something different? Or are we perpetuating the same way of ‘doing school’ that has always been in place, rooted in settler-colonial logics that not only has not worked for our people but has caused and continues to cause harm?” (p. 34).

Decolonizing Assessment

What it means, however, to decolonize and liberate facets or the whole of the education system must, according to Shirly (2022), “be accompanied by an examination of settler colonialism characterized by White supremacy, racism, land dispossession, and cultural genocide” (Garcia et al., 2022, p. 9). As a part of modernity, imperialism, and colonialism’s violent pursuit of white supremacy, bodies, particularly bodies of color, underwent an ontological reordering that altered the meaning of the human (Winnubst, 2020; Wynter, 2003). One’s proximity to whiteness became the yardstick for determining one’s humanness, and a construct of the able-bodied white person became the norm (Carter, 2007) that would go on to become the norm references in standardized assessments.

Both ontological *and* epistemological, modernity, imperialism, and colonialism sought to systematically and often violently eradicate Indigenous ways of knowing through a form of cultural genocide driven by white supremacy and racism known as epistemicide. According to Tuhiwai-Smith (2021), imperialism and colonialism’s epistemicide of Indigenous and global south knowledge resulted in the commodification and creation of “systems for organizing, classifying and

storing” knowledge (p. 69). Consequently, and purposefully, hierarchies and taxonomies formed that championed Western knowledge as “legitimate” and “universal knowledge” and devalued Indigenous knowledge as an object to be collected, mined, appropriated, but illegitimate on its own (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2021, p. 72). Schools, including the K-12 and post-secondary institutions of today, were not only informed by the hierarchical structuring of being and knowledge that privileged Eurocentric bodies and epistemologies but reproduced them as well. We see this still in concepts like the canon, and, as we shall see below, in assessment’s taken-for-granted practices such as the rubric.

Efforts to decolonize education, therefore, must start from the premise that the very notions of norms and knowledge that show up in assessment practices are, themselves, colonized. That is, what counts as knowledge, who qualifies as the knowledge keepers and creators, and how metrics are manipulated and function are, like the systems and practices they reify, determined by a hegemony rooted in Eurocentrism. Recent scholarship considers where and how these logics of coloniality might be hiding in assessment practices (Dooley, 2022; Thorius, 2021). Dooley, for example, examines instances of “performances of slow violence” in standardized assessment (2022, p. 63). Slow violences are sneaky, sub-surface, incremental inflictions whose quiet cumulative presence “set up systems of exclusion and inequity” that “circulate through countless colonizing assessment practices” (Dooley, 2022, pp. 66–67). Dooley’s critique of standardized testing’s reliance on “arbitrary norms” (p. 65) echoes Hobbs and Robinson, who describe these norms as derived from the dominant group (Henning et al., 2022, p. 147). Here, as with the colonization of bodies and knowledge, the dominant group reflects the hierarchy created by white imperialists and colonists to maintain epistemic, temporal, and corporal dominance over those apart from the “superior civilization” (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2021, p. 73). Bedfellows, assessment and colonization thus work in tandem to reify white supremacy through the same exclusionary process of othering Tuhiwai-Smith locates in Western knowledge’s violent rise to universal knowledge.

To Dooley’s instances of coloniality’s performances of slow violences in assessments, I insist we must add the concept of time. Hardly benign, its terms defined, normalized, and weaponized by the same colonial projects hijacking bodies and knowledge for personal gain, time was retooled to serve the dominant group. According to Murrah-Mandril (2020), time has been constructed to facilitate “capitalist production and exchange” and “used as a weapon of colonization to exclude people of color from participating in the nation’s past, present, and future” (p. 2). Murrah-Mandril is especially critical of linear time and the metric framing traditional rubrics. An empty construct of temporal colonization rather than relational and discursive, linear time, argues Murrah-Mandril, fails to reflect “the specific places, people, and histories” of colonized peoples and in turn attempts to erase them (p. 6). Of course, how we understand time significantly shapes teaching and learning. From the duration of the typical school day designed to closely parallel the workday to the exact amount of classroom-based instructional minutes school district officials have determined are needed if students are to pass state-mandated standardized tests, the hands of time are far-reaching in education, including through assessment.

In their critique of standardized assessment’s normative bias for Western, white ways of knowing and being, Hobbs and Robinson propose “culturally relevant assessment” as an alternative to assessment practices that enact the aforementioned slow violences (Henning et al., 2022, p. 146). Culturally relevant assessment would, on their view, assess students using methods and procedures that are transparent, fair, relevant, and reflect the student’s individual and communal

learning goals. Instead of enacting colonized performances of slow violences, culturally relevant assessment assignment types center students as experts in their education and work in concert with them to dismantle assignment types rooted in and replicating white ontological and epistemic superiority. Culturally relevant assessment assignment types would constitute high use value and center inclusive content to achieve more equitable academic outcomes for all students. In sum, Hobbs and Robinson emphasize equity in *assignment types* used to assess student learning, leaving the tools used to evaluate these assessments outside their purview.

However, we can no longer ignore the tools, especially when perhaps the most common among them is riddled with colonial performances of slow violences. For all the moves to decolonize education, make culturally relevant assessment, and ensure equity in ethnic studies classrooms, we continue to reach for traditional rubrics, a tool I argue subverts our worthy aims. I join Bheda (2022) in a call to action that necessitates a renewed attention to these tools. Bheda wrote:

As Audre Lorde (1984/2007) put it, it is impossible to dismantle the master's house with the master's tools. In fact, in her work, she makes a couple of statements that readily serve as a great analogy for assessment: "What does it mean when the tools of a racist-patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that only the narrowest parameters of change are possible. (Henning et al., 2022, pp. 110–111)

This means that if our assessment practice in and of itself is framed by and built with parameters that make privilege, bias, and oppression invisible, we will be unable to achieve our goal of equity and social justice. Consequently, our assessment actions will only reify the very systems we are trying to transform, because our impact will be subverted by the inequity of our approach. Unless we overhaul our assessment tools as critical pedagogies overhaul curriculum, they remain cut from the same cloth; they are quite literally the master's tools. My project picks up where other attempts at decolonizing assessment leave off by tinkering with the tool itself.

Master's Tool: The Rubric

Existing scholarship documents the well-crafted rubric's potential to clarify teachers' expectations for students, foster student self-assessment, and contribute to inclusive content (Henning et al., 2022; Yan, 2024). These attributes also constitute the challenges faced by Curriculum Based Education (CBE) models (Bingham et al., 2022). That is, CBE models experience, with varying degrees, difficulties reimagining grading practices using modalities that effectively communicate expectations and student progress to those within and without the school community (Bingham et al., 2022). These challenges are certainly the Achille's heel of CBE and reflect my experiences as a teacher in a CBE model. Novel High's attempts to address these challenges have resulted in the development and piloting of various assessment tools, from traditional rubrics to self-reflections to checklists. Despite our best efforts, the relationship between our school competencies, the Indigenous cosmology and pedagogies framing them, and stated course learning objectives remained fragmented. These various assessment tools did not put all three in conversation with each other and relied on top-down design that made no attempt to critically rethink the formatting and use of the rubric. Put another way, our efforts fell short of capturing and thus overhauling the slow violences at work in this enduring relic of colonial education. To decolonize education, we must also indiscriminately address the multitudinous ways epistemologies and ontologies privileging whiteness show up in assessment practices and

“critically examin[e] the *assessment cycle*” (emphasis added, Henning et al., 2022, p. 147). This requires taking a step back to consider not only the efficacy of the boxy, linear rubric ubiquitous in schools but the creation and function of the tool itself.

In an effort to decolonize assessment practices and contend with the master’s tool, Stitt-Bergh et al. (2021) drew from their experiences as Native Hawaiian educators to contextualize assessment in place-based Indigenous epistemologies. That is, in their critique of Anglo-centric assessment practices and education systems disconnected from place, the authors rethink the rubric. They propose replacing learning outcomes disconnected from place and expansive worldviews with outcomes that reconnect students with sacred places and Indigenous worldviews. In practice, their proposal manifests as a linear rubric with a learning outcome that promotes students’ understanding of Wahi Noho Like o Ka Po’e, a Native Hawaiian concept for community engagement. The rubric moves left to right, each level an additional application of Native linguistic practices: Mu’u (Emerging), Liko (Developing), and Kumu (Implementing). Each level is paired with distinguishing criteria that speaks directly to the learning outcome and, therefore, to place and Indigenous worldviews. To the rubric, Stitt-Bergh et al. introduce language and concepts attuned to Native Hawaiian ways of knowing and being in the world, thereby unsettling the settler’s lexicon. Yet, in the linear form of their rubric lies the temporal colonization of assessment that the Competency Wheel’s marriage of co-creation with *circulos* strives to shed.

Creating and Practicing the Competency Wheel

Context

Developed within the context of the high school at which I currently work, the Competency Wheel reflects the educational model and values of this institution. A small alternative public high school in a politically progressive city and state, Novel High School prides itself on a robust offering of interdisciplinary Ethnic Studies courses and a community and curricular focus on racial and gender equity. Our small but mighty community is disproportionately queer in comparison to other high schools in the District and the school-of-choice for many trans, gender nonconforming, and neurodivergent students. We are the educational home and safe space for many queer students of color, despite being a Predominantly White Institution (PWI).

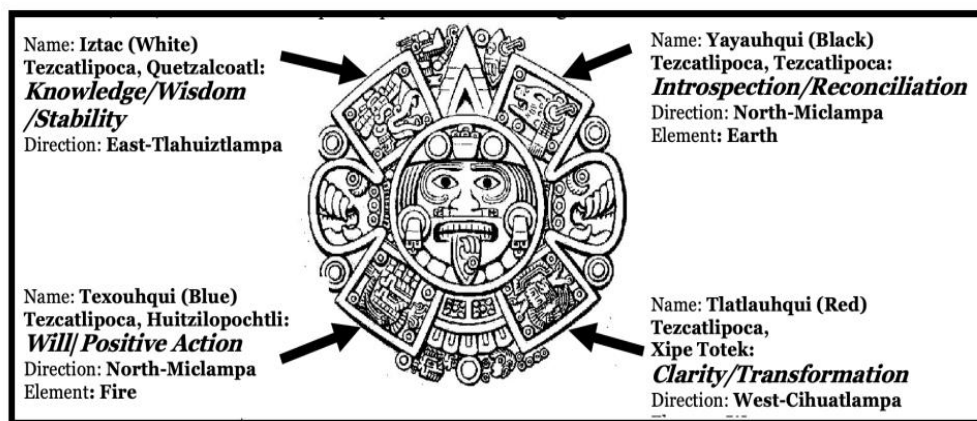
The only nongraded high school in the District, Novel implements a Competency-Based Education (CBE) model that, according to Bingham et al., “is characterized by mastery-based progression; differentiated support based on students’ personalized needs; assessment aligned to measurable, transferable learning objectives; and learning outcomes emphasizing knowledge creation and application, along with developing important skills and dispositions” (2022, p. 676). Pursuant to the CBE model, Novel has developed four school-wide competencies within which content-specific learning objectives influenced by Common Core and Ethnic Studies standards for learning are imbedded. Capturing an inquiry cycle that is also reflective of The Four Movements of Tezcatlipoca, Novel’s four competencies are Embodied Curiosity, Community/Context, Growth/Transformation, Action/Application. A CBE school and regional trailblazer in secondary Ethnic Studies, Novel High School is uniquely equipped to birth and implement the sort of alternative assessment that I propose here.

The Four Movements of Tezcatlipoca as a Cycle of Inquiry

Commonly, rubrics are introduced at the beginning of an assessment cycle but ultimately measure the end product. If, for instance, a unit culminates in a five-paragraph essay, the rubric would speak to the criterion for the essay and not the assessment cycle as a whole. As such, traditional rubrics neither represent nor assess learning as cyclical, recursive and ongoing processes, delineating instead starting, intermediate, and terminal end points that value a very particular product over the personal and communal processes that nurture learning across a space of inquiry. They fail to capture the complexity of the learner and the learning process, employ notions of time, counting, and measuring—slow violence—born from Western ways of knowing and being in the world, and privilege standardized performances of these same epistemologies and ontologies. In contrast to those built from and to maintain the status quo, learning processes that are Indigenous and Indigenized are, according to Craig (Yakima Nation) and Craig (Tulalip Tribes) “much more complex than the ways western schooling has conditioned [them]” (quoted in Pewewardy et al., 2022, p. 29). They are critical of Western schooling’s penchant for standardization that maps learning temporally and with a rigidity that discourages process and reduces it to a regimented series of transactions. Instead, Craig and Craig propose a decolonizing of education that would honor “traditional ways” of learning as a process that “unfolds over time” (2022, p. 29). Along this same vein, the Competency Wheel challenges “temporal colonization” (Murrah-Mandril, 2020) and other colonial performances of slow violences by looking to Chicanx-Indigenous cosmologies and praxis to describe an inquiry process that unfolds over time and non-Western taxonomies to name and organize what the tool aims to capture and communicate.

Recognized by Ethnic Studies educators and scholars (Fernandez et al., 2023; Gonzales, 2021; Villanueva, 2013) as a decolonial pedagogical tool and framework for guiding critical conscious raising, the Four Manifestations, or Movements, of Tezcatlipoca (Figure 1) inspired Novel High School’s description of the inquiry cycle and corresponding competencies. Los Cuatro Tezcatlipoca, the Nahuatl concept Nahui Olin meaning four movements or motions, can be summarized as follows: critical reflection (Tezcatlipoca), gaining perspective (Quetzalcoatl), growing in consciousness (Huitzilopochtli), and renewal and transformation (Xipe Totec) (Villanueva, 2013).

Figure 1: Aztec Sunstone and Four Tezcatlipocas (Gonzales, 2021).



As a teaching and assessment tool in the ethnic studies classroom, Los Cuatro Tezcatlipoca and the Nahui Olin resist a Western construct of learning that adheres to the colonial logics of linear time. For example, the Xicano Institute for Teaching (XITO)'s TIAHUI framework, like Los Cuatro Tezcatlipoca and the Nahui Olin, appears as and moves in interconnected *circulos*, or circles that “embrace collective solidarity, balance, and cycles that overlap and inform each other” (Fernandez et al., 2023, p. 74). This nonlinear, mutually constitutive relationality between and among *circulos* is also true of the Competency Wheel. Students, like Tezcatlipoca, move in and out, back and forth, and between the four manifestations or components of an inquiry cycle and the Nahui Olin.

From Co-Creation to Implementation

Leveraging the Four Movements of Tezcatlipoca, the Competency Wheel honors “the Indigenous, decolonized reality that knowledge is generated, shared, and preserved collectively” (Henning et al., 2022, p. 18). As such, the communal practice of co-creation guided the Competency Wheel's development, revisions, and implementation. Not only, though, does co-creation disrupt the typical top-down formation of the tool thus decentering the proverbial Master. Educators observe that when students participate in the creation of the tool assessing their work, they are more likely to engage in the learning process and take greater pride in their work (Becker, 2016; Chambers & Harkins, 2023; Eppink, 2002; Yan, 2024). Additionally, co-creation improves students' understanding of the teacher's expectations, in the quality of student work, and in student agency, particularly during self- and peer-evaluation (Becker, 2016). Qualities of co-created assessment tools, transparency and student agency are also desired outcomes for the Competency Wheel. For, despite our lofty aspirations to develop school competencies reflective of The Four Movements of Tezcatlipoca, Novel struggled to engage students in a cohesive understanding of and meaningful assessment practices with the competencies.

Each iteration of the Competency Wheel, therefore, was piloted and informed by students, ensuring transparency and entrusting them with the tool's evolution. To do this work, though, we had to start from the beginning and then move from The Four Movements of Tezcatlipoca to Novel High School's competencies. In the early stages of the development of the Competency Wheel, I tried to frontload as much of this history as possible, walking students involved in the co-creation of the assessment tool's earliest iterations through the teacher-led thought process behind the development of the competencies. We looked at the Nahui Olin in Figure 1 and discussed each competency within the context of the corresponding movement: Embodied Curiosity (Quetzalcoatl), Community/Context (Tezcatlipoca), Action/Application (Huitzilopochtli), and Xipe Totec (Growth/Transformation). I distinctly remember the first time having this conversation with students and the audible “Oh!” that arose in my classroom as students heard for the first time explicit mention of the Chicana-Indigenous cosmologies and praxis undergirding our school's competencies. What we like to call an ah-ha moment in education, this reveal of sorts bridged a gap in students' existing understanding of the competencies and one I attribute, in part, to Novel High School being a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in a district cut from the same cloth as the traditional rubric. Shedding a paternalistic approach all-too familiar to systems designed to uphold white supremacy is, as our early misstep shows, an ongoing, imperfect process. By hitting pause on the curricular rollout of the competencies and the assessment tool to revisit the Chicana-Indigenous epistemologies framing them, students began to appreciate the inquiry cycle as student-driven movement through, among, and between its parts and the Competency Wheel as an attempt to assess this movement.

Given the nonlinear nature of the inquiry cycle, the circle made sense to my students, who saw in the Competency Wheel's circulo our competencies and the Four Movements of Tezcatlipoca in motion. They objected, however, to the original language I used to level segments within each competency's wedge. They described the categories I adopted from Native Hawaiian educators Stitt-Bergh et al.—Emerging, Practicing, Implementing—as not kid-friendly. Instead, my students proposed changing the categories to “Starting, Practicing, Doing It!,” a change they claimed increased accessibility and better captured a cycle of inquiry intended to move students from assisted explorations of their passions to autonomous, public-facing expressions of them. Wanting to see themselves instead of a school assignment at the center, students advocated for an additional change to the Competency Wheel that quite literally places them in the center. Open to interpretation and creative license, the innermost circulo invites students to make their identifying mark. Some students simply write their name. Others sketch a caricature of themselves. Occasionally, a student will create a mini montage showcasing hobbies and pets. Around them blooms their cycles of inquiry, their learning goals, all within the context of Novel’s competencies and course learning objectives.

Figure 2. Anchor posters on my classroom wall.



After two school years of co-creating and piloting the Competency Wheel with a small group of juniors and seniors, I launched the assessment tool in a Fall 2025 Freshfolks course, a English/Language Arts class designed for ninth and tenth graders new to Novel High School. As

with the pilot groups, we began at the beginning, starting with Novel High School's competencies and their alignment to the Four Movements. To this launch, I added anchor posters to show rather than just tell alignment (Figure 2) and learning activities aimed at familiarizing our Freshfolks with the school competencies. For example, students engaged in individual and small and whole group activities that, through visuals and prompts, illustrated alignment between the Four Movements and Novel's school competencies (see Appendix 2). Instead of at the end of a learning cycle, students begin interacting with and co-constructing their assessment tools, their Competency Wheels, at the beginning, tapping into their Embodied Curiosities as they relate to their identities, in Quetzalcoatl, to craft goals that personalize for them the course learning objectives (See Appendix 3). They cut out, write in, and glue each wedge to their Competency Wheel, an activity that allows students to view and consider each competency tactically and in isolation, alleviating the visual overwhelm of traditional rubrics that can be challenging for students with visual processing, executive functioning, and specific learning disabilities.

For my timid Freshfolk whose special interest was crows and personal goal to make friends, personalizing the learning objectives, in Quetzalcoatl, involved crafting goals that assessed them on their growth in initiating and collaborating in a range of discussion and knowledge co-creation (Appendix 2, Speaking and Listening 1). As I sat beside them during this activity and first experience with CBE and the Competency Wheel, they quietly voiced to me that they loved crows, wanted to bring them into our nature-based class as a means of completing assignments and connecting with others. Later wedges on the wheel, further into the inquiry cycle, crows remained a persistent theme, if not explicitly in the work they produced and the assessed using their Competency Wheel. They and their personalization of the learning objectives became their yardstick for growth, not their proximity to whiteness. Together, we used their Competency Wheel to assess their progress and engagement in an inquiry process that was uniquely theirs but integral to our learning community and the co-creation of knowledge that took place therein. Their engagement with the Competency Wheel illustrates the general process for all students in the Freshfolks class, although each wheel, each wedge, each personalized learning objective was marked by the nuance of students' individual interests, communities, and identities they brought with them into the learning community.

Given the Competency Wheel's disavowal of linear notions of learning and time, student engagement with the Competency Wheel and teacher data collection happens during formative and summative assessments and occurs at multiple intervals within a given learning cycle. As with the aforementioned student, I co-create and review, with students, their Competency Wheel as they build it during each reflective and goal-setting interval. The intervals take place systematically as we move from one activity to the next and organically as progress in learning goals approaches "Doing It!" and interests shift. Each of these intervals offers moments for assessment and opportunities for both student and teacher to recalibrate, if necessary. For instance, one of my Freshfolk students lost interest in their initial Embodied Curiosity as we moved into Community/Context, into Tezcatlipoca. In community with a friend they made in the class, they discussed their shared Embodied Curiosity, returning to Quetzalcoatl in practice, before co-creating goals and personalizing learning objectives in Tezcatlipoca. In other words, the pair moved backward before going forward, co-creating a goal to assess within Community/Context that was in and of itself evidence of the competency. Together, they wrote a series of silly short stories inspired by a video game they both enjoyed. Their collaboration provided evidence of their ability to draw from a shared community/context (gaming community) to craft creative prose that

deployed rhetorical and literary devices found in the game they played (Appendix 3, Writing 1), and, together, we would assess progress referencing their Competency Wheels. As with their classmate, this student's metric is not their proximity to whiteness and the normative standards derived from the colonial logics underpinning assessment practices designed to uphold whiteness' supremacy. The Competency Wheel invites students to reshape learning objectives through a meaningful process of inquiry that places them at the center whilst never losing sight of their place within a broader learning community engaged in the co-creation of knowledge.

Framed by the Competency Wheel and its co-creation, the discussions I have with students and my assessment of their growth are in direct, *transparent* conversation with Novel High School's competencies. I use the information generated by these conversations and assessments to write monthly status notes reporting on students' progress in my course, make curricular adjustments, conference with students, and ensure that students' Embodied Curiosities and identities are represented in the curriculum. The Competency Wheel and students' engagement with the assessment tool means these notes and subsequent adjustments are, once again, in direct conversation with the competencies and representative of them rather than ideals intended to bolster white supremacy. Experiential, reflective, and reflexive, the Competency Wheel, from start to finish, increases student understanding of and engagement with Novel's school competencies and the inquiry cycle they capture whilst celebrating students' Embodied Curiosities, community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), and role as knowledge keepers and creators.

"Are you looking for something different?"

This year, Novel High School's student-run Recruitment Committee designed and mailed postcards to public and private middle schools as well as every household with a rising ninth grader in the district. The catchphrase—"Are you looking for something different?"—hopes to snag those seeking an educational setting that, as the slogan foretells, offers an alternative to the traditional, comprehensive high school model. A CBE school and Alternative Learning Environment, Novel can and does reimagine teaching and learning, our very existence and commitment to Ethnic Studies acts of resistance, particularly in a climate currently hostile towards such endeavors. Nevertheless, we remain a PWI in school system patterned after colonial models of education framed by and charged with upholding a hierarchical production of knowledge that privileges white Eurocentric epistemologies. Co-creating critical consciousness-raising content, centering the linguistic and cultural practices of our students in teaching and learning, striving for liberatory and decolonized education—these are all necessary and important practices at Novel High School and beyond. We ask our students, our extended community, ourselves to do this difficult, crucial work only to meet it with a metric that, until now, has been mostly absent from conversations about decolonizing assessment. Rather than participating in the slow violences perpetuated by the traditional rubric, the Competency Wheel refuses assimilative assessment practices in a critically conscious return to non-Western ways of knowing and being. Such a turn marks a notable break from a tradition, a master's tool, bound to normative notions of whiteness constructed to uphold their ontological and epistemological supremacy and embodied in conceptual, systemic, and tangible iterations of the master's house (Lorde, 1984). Even if the Competency Wheel in its current iteration feels like a far reach for some educators, especially those outside of CBE schools, the reimagined assessment tool reveals a need for further conversation about how to tinker with the tool its itself.

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