CHAPTER 4.

DIRECTED SELF-PLACEMENT AT "DEMOCRACY'S OPEN DOOR": WRITING PLACEMENT AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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Research Problem: Recent research suggests that the standardized tests used for writing placement at a majority of open admissions community colleges may be systematically under-placing students in ways that undermine their likelihood of persistence and degree completion. These tests may have particularly negative consequences for students from some structurally disadvantaged groups. Directed Self-Placement (DSP) has been touted as a more socially just approach to writing placement, but to date there has been little published research on the consequences of DSP in community college settings.

Research Questions: What are the motivations of community colleges that adopt DSP? What have been the consequences of adopting DSP at these community colleges? What are the consequences of DSP for different groups of students at community colleges?

Literature Review: I ground this study in an examination of the social justice issues surrounding writing placement at open admissions community colleges and the various social justice-related arguments made for and against DSP. I also synthesize the available literature on how DSP affects different groups of students.

Methodology: I reviewed the scholarly literature, searched the archives of professional listservs, and used listservs and professional email lists to identify community colleges that have implemented DSP. I then conducted semi-structured interviews with faculty and administrators at twelve two-year colleges that either have imple-

mented or are piloting some form of DSP. I coded the interview transcripts using a grounded theory approach and reviewed institutional reports provided by interviewees.

Conclusions: Many community colleges implementing DSP are motivated by ethical or social justice concerns. There is promising evidence that DSP can be successfully implemented at community colleges. Interview participants with outcomes data for DSP reported that completion rates in first-year writing courses remained the same or improved after DSP was implemented, and most saw a decline in enrollment in developmental writing courses, suggesting that DSP can reduce under-placement. However, no community colleges disaggregated DSP outcomes data to examine the consequences of DSP for different groups.

Qualifications: This study draws primarily on self-reported interviewee perspectives and pre-assembled institutional reports. I did not have direct access to DSP outcomes data, nor was I able to obtain current writing course completion rates for most of the community colleges.

Directions for Further Study: There is a pressing need for more research in that examines the consequences of various approaches to DSP for different groups of community college students, particularly those from groups that have been systematically disadvantaged by the use of standardized tests for writing placement.

In October 2015, I had the good fortune to attend a workshop for community college faculty in the state of Washington called "Standing in the Gap: COMPASS is Leaving—Now What?" The workshop was sponsored by the state's Board for Technical and Community Colleges and facilitated primarily by two-year college faculty. Its purpose was to discuss options for student placement in the wake of ACT®'s announcement that it would be phasing out COMPASS®, a suite of standardized placement tests for reading, writing, and math used by nearly half of community colleges nationwide (Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011). As reflected in a flurry of inquiries on our professional listservs, versions of this conversation were playing out at community colleges around the country. Reform had been brewing since the early 2010s, when researchers associated with Columbia University's Community College Research Center (CCRC) released a series of papers suggesting that the high-stakes standardized tests used for placement at most community colleges were "under-placing" large numbers of students into developmental courses. Such placement appeared to reduce students'

likelihood of enrollment, persistence, and degree completion, with evidence that students of color experienced particularly negative impacts (Bailey, 2009; Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010; Community College Research Center, Columbia University, 2012a,, 2012b; , 2012c; Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011). These findings raised troubling questions about the gatekeeping function of placement assessment at the institutions Marlene Griffith and Ann Connor call "democracy's open door" (1994). ACT's announcement, a response to reform pressures, created new openings for colleges seeking more socially just placement.

Drawing on emerging research, English faculty at several Washington community colleges had been developing placement processes that used "multiple measures" of readiness for college writing, such as high school GPA, scores on GED or high school proficiency exams, and/or portfolios of student writing. In 2014, Highline College implemented multiple measures placement and saw 20% more students—including 26% more students of color—place directly into first-year composition, with no decline in overall course success rates (Klausman et al., 2016). Faculty at four Washington colleges, including Highline, were also piloting forms of Directed Self-Placement (DSP). The Standing in the Gap workshop was an effort by these "teacher–scholar–activists" (Andelora, 2013; Sullivan, 2015; Toth, Calhoon-Dillahunt, & Sullivan, 2016) to seize the kairotic moment presented by COMPASS's demise and persuade other colleges to adopt multiple measures and consider the possibilities for DSP.

I had been invited to the workshop to share findings from my interviews with faculty and administrators at community colleges that had tried DSP over the last decade and a half. As I listened to the morning's presentations, I was struck by the rhetorical choices the faculty organizers made in their calls for reform. Like many of my interviewees, they discussed community college placement as a matter of social justice. After reviewing the national history of placement policies that had led to high-stakes tests like COMPASS, then laying out the mounting evidence that such practices were not serving students well, the organizers presented a short video (borrowed from the faculty-led California Acceleration Project) in which actual community college students discussed their experiences with placement testing. These testimonies were distressing: students described being unaware of the purpose and stakes of the tests when they took them, dissatisfied with or shamed by the tests' evaluation of their academic preparation, bored and sometimes insulted by developmental classes covering content they had already learned, and frustrated with the time and money they were spending in courses that did not count toward their degrees. The students were linguistically diverse, and most appeared to be people of color and/or from working-class backgrounds. After the video, the workshop facilitators presented multiple measures as a way of reducing such damaging under-placement, and

DSP as an approach that could transform placement from a sorting mechanism into an opportunity to communicate with students about the curriculum, invite reflection on prior learning, and foster a sense of agency in their education.

As someone who has been researching community college writing instruction and working on DSP initiatives for nearly a decade, I believe we are in the midst of a significant shift. Just a few years ago, two-year college faculty with passionate commitments to educational access were often skeptical of DSP (e.g., Sullivan, 2008a; Sullivan & Nielsen, 2009). Even if such processes were beneficial to students in the context of open admissions, which many doubted, DSP seemed politically unfeasible given limited institutional resources and dominant assessment ideologies among administrators and policymakers. However, events like Standing in the Gap, the surge of interest in DSP among community college faculty on our professional listservs, and the publication of the Two-Year College English Association (TYCA) "White Paper on Writing Placement Reform" (Klausman et al., 2016)—as well as growing attention to DSP among higher education researchers (Hodara et al., 2012) and reform-minded philanthropies (Burdman, 2012)—suggest this paradigm is changing. We are at a crucial moment in which we must think carefully about whether and how DSP might offer community colleges a more socially just way to place the diverse student writers they serve. Those are the questions I take up in this chapter.

I begin by framing community college writing placement as a social justice issue, one tied to the distinctive missions and contested functions of these open-admissions institutions. I then turn to the moral and ethical debates surrounding DSP as an approach to writing placement and review the evidence regarding its impact on diverse groups of students across institution types. With this overview in place, I present findings from twelve interviews with faculty and administrators at community colleges that have implemented DSP, discussing their self-described rationale, the outcomes they report, and their (limited) understanding of the consequences of DSP for the diverse groups their colleges enroll. I argue that there is reason for optimism about DSP's potential as a more socially just option for community college writing placement. However, if we are to realize that potential, we must proceed with greater attention to how DSP serves the diverse students entering these "open doors."

WRITING PLACEMENT AT THE OPEN DOOR

Community college writing placement sits at the nexus of several complex and competing social justice discourses. Advocates often refer to these open admissions institutions as "the people's college," committed to educational access and opportunity for students from all backgrounds, particularly groups that have

been underrepresented in postsecondary education. Community colleges operate from the democratic premise that all people should have the lifelong right to learn, develop new capacities, and make positive life changes through low-cost, locally accessible education (Griffith & Connor, 1994; Pickett, 1998; Sullivan, 2008b). These institutions have multiple missions: they typically provide community education classes and vocational programs as well as transfer degrees fulfilling general education requirements for the baccalaureate. Most also offer a range of "developmental" reading, writing, and math courses for students deemed "underprepared" for college-level coursework, and many provide adult basic education and/or GED completion programs (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014).

Two-year colleges are a crucial point of educational access for students of color, who make up 52% of community college attendees nationally (American Association of Community Colleges, 2017). In fact, the percentage of two-year college students who identify as African American, Hispanic, Asian American, Pacific Islander, or Native American/Alaska Native exceeds these groups' proportion of the U.S. population as a whole (Cohen et al., 2014 for more on writing assessment at two-year tribal colleges, see Sassi, Chapter 10, this collection). Likewise, community colleges have long been an important educational pathway for low-income, working-class, and first-generation college students, as well as women, older/returning students, veterans, linguistically diverse students (including immigrants and aspiring citizens), students with disabilities, and students who are place-bound for family, cultural, and/or financial reasons. In response to rising university tuition and the boom in dual/concurrent enrollment programs, more middle-class and academically "high-achieving" students are beginning their postsecondary education at community colleges (see also Moreland, Chapter 5, this collection). On average, however, students at these institutions still tend to be less academically prepared (at least as measured by standardized test scores) and to come from lower-income households than their university peers (Cohen et al., 2014). Community colleges' open admissions policies, comparatively low tuition, flexible scheduling, commuter-friendliness, and amenability to part-time attendance—as well as their small class sizes and minimal risk for students who are unsure what (or whether) they want to study—make these institutions accessible and attractive to a diverse range of learners (Sullivan, 2008b).

Over the decades, however, some have questioned the celebratory rhetoric of community college advocates, asserting that these open admissions institutions offer students "false promises" (Pincus, 1980) that actually sustain structures of inequality. Such critics argue that, although community colleges provide the illusion of egalitarian access to the baccalaureate, and thus the middle class, they

actually function to divert students—particularly students from marginalized racial and socioeconomic backgrounds—into low-status institutions dominated by vocational programs, thereby reducing those students' likelihood of completing a bachelor's degree and their long-term earnings prospects (e.g., Brint & Karabel, 1989; Karabel, 1986; Pincus, 1980). Jerome Karabel's critique is representative:

> Far from embodying the democraticization of higher education and a redistribution of opportunity to the wider society, the expansion of the community college instead heralded the arrival in higher education of a form of class-linked tracking that served to reproduce existing social relations . . .The overall impact of the community college has been to accentuate rather than reduce prevailing patterns of social and class inequality. (1986, p. 18)

In these critical analyses, community colleges serve as a "safety valve," letting off the steam of lower-class ambitions while maintaining the elite status of universities and fulfilling capital's need for semi-skilled labor (Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 208). More recently, some have also questioned the pervasiveness of neoliberal ideologies within community colleges, suggesting that these institutions may contribute to social inequality by facilitating economic globalization, the corporatization and instrumentalization of higher education, and the casualization of postsecondary teaching (e.g., Klausman, 2016; Kroll, 2012; Levin, 2005).

Between these poles are arguments that community colleges struggle to fulfill competing missions that reflect broader tensions in U.S. society. Kevin J. Dougherty describes the community college as a "contradictory" institution whose "antidemocratizing effects are as powerful as its democratizing ones" (1994, p. 8). Likewise, Josh M. Beach argues that community colleges offer "a limited opportunity and a mixed blessing" (2012, p. 128): while they provide access to postsecondary education to many who would otherwise have been locked out, most students who enroll at these "overburdened and underfunded" (2012, p. 69) institutions never earn a degree. Scholars in this vein value the democratic mission of community colleges but see a need for significant reform and public reinvestment before its idealism can be realized.

Central to debates about the structural effects of community colleges has been the notion of "cooling out." In 1960, Burton R. Clark argued that one function of community colleges is to cool out the baccalaureate aspirations of "underprepared" students through a process of "substitute achievement, gradual disengagement, denial, consolation, and avoidance of standards," incrementally

lowering students' sights and tracking them into "terminal" vocational programs (1960, p. 569). The cooling out hypothesis has been the subject of extensive debate (e.g., Bahr, 2008; Deil-Amen, 2006; Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2002; Hassel & Giordano, 2013; Lovas, 2002; Sullivan, 2008b), with evidence that community colleges can and do perform a "warming up" function by elevating some students' aspirations over time (Deil-Amen, 2006). Two-year colleges can have both effects: a key social justice question is *who* gets cooled out versus warmed up, and how.

This question is profoundly linked to placement assessment. As Clark wrote, "the initial move in a cooling-out process is pre-entrance testing: low scores on achievement tests lead poorly qualified students into remedial classes. Assignment to remedial work casts doubt and slows the student's movement into bona fide transfer courses" (1960, p. 572). This "remedial" label goes on to play an important role in how advisors counsel students, including whether they encourage students to pursue transfer courses or shift to vocational programs. While advising at community colleges has changed significantly since the 1950s (Bahr, 2008; Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2002), Clark's observations intersect with a major social justice debate within composition studies: whether "basic" writing courses function to support or subvert the long-term academic success of students deemed underprepared for college writing.

As George Otte and Rebecca Williams Mlynarcyk trace in their history of basic writing (2010), many of the movement's early voices were at open admissions institutions, including community colleges. When they first emerged, basic writing courses often sought to support students' academic success by improving their control over the features of so-called Standard Written English and initiate students into the conventions of "academic discourse." Beginning in the 1990s, however, critics began arguing that such assimilationism served to reinforce rather than challenge inequitable social structures and in the process created the stigmatized category of "basic writer"(Otte & Mlynarczyk, 2010). Ira Shor went so far as to call basic writing "our apartheid," part of "an empire of segregated remediation" that worked against social change (1997, p. 95). From this perspective, basic writing was a racialized cool-out tank.

While such characterizations did not go uncontested, the institutional mechanisms that produced "basic writers" came under greater examination (Otte & Mlynarczyk, 2010). Peter Adams' (1993) study of the long-term success of students placed into basic writing at his community college (findings he affirms and extends in later studies—see Adams, Gearhart, Miller, & Roberts, 2009) made two startling observations. First, many prospective students who placed into basic writing via his college's multiple-choice placement test never went on to enroll, suggesting that such placements discourage some students from pur-

suing postsecondary education. Second, students who placed into basic writing but chose to enroll directly in first-year composition completed that course at higher rates than those who adhered to their basic writing placement. This study eventually led to Adams' Accelerated Learning Program (ALP), developed at the Community College of Baltimore County and taken up widely by other colleges, which enables erstwhile "basic writers" to enroll directly into credit-bearing composition courses with supplemental support (Adams et al., 2009, 2012; Hassel et al., 2015).

While Adams has focused his attention on curricular reform, his 1993 study also raises questions about placement. Adams notes that he and his colleagues tried unsuccessfully to change his college's mandated multiple-choice placement test. Writing assessment theorists have long objected to relying on such tests for course placement, often on the basis of what Lee Cronbach and Paul Meehl (1955) and, later, Samuel Messick (1989) call *construct validity*. These tests are indirect rather than direct measures of writing ability, they focus narrowly on linguistic and mechanical issues rather than broader rhetorical considerations, and they do not align with what most programs value in writing. In short, they do not adequately represent or measure the *local construct* of college writing (Hassel & Giordano, 2015; Huot, 2002; Klausman et al., 2016; White, Elliot, & Peckham, 2015; Williamson, 1994; Yancey, 1999). As Norbert Elliot (2016) argues, this enduring issue of construct representation is central to gauging the fairness of a writing assessment.

The use of these tests for writing placement also lacks *consequential validity*: that is, the consequences of using these tests to make placement decisions may be socially undesirable or unjust (Kane, 2016; Messick, 1980; Poe & Inoue, 2016; Shepard, 1997). Because standardized tests do not adequately represent the local construct of writing, they often do not predict students' success in actual writing courses, and they communicate misleading messages to incoming students about the rhetorical and pedagogical context they are entering, which can undermine teaching and learning. Furthermore, and most importantly for our discussion here, these tests can disproportionately penalize students of color and other historically disadvantaged groups (Klausman et al., 2016; Poe, Elliot, Cogan, & Nurudeen, 2014; Thomas & White, 1981).

Over the last decade, the field of writing assessment has been reexamining its own complicity in reproducing structures of social inequality (Inoue, 2009b, 2015; Inoue & Poe, 2012a; Kelly-Riley & Whithaus, 2016). Informed by Critical Race Theory and other critical traditions, scholars in this "fourth wave" of writing assessment scholarship (Behm & Miller, 2012) have been questioning established practices and advancing a "sociocultural model of validity" (Poe & Inoue, 2016, p. 118). Two concepts emerging from this conversation that are

particularly helpful for examining placement are *racial validity* (Inoue, 2009b, 2015) and *disparate impact analysis* (Inoue & Poe, 2012a, 2012b; Poe et al., 2014). Both concepts advance the argument that we should interrogate how our writing assessment practices interact with and participate in local racial formations; disparate impact analysis focuses specifically on identifying consequences for legally protected groups that could constitute violations of federal and state anti-discrimination laws (see also Casie Moreland, Chapter 5, this collection as well as Gomes, Chapter 6). These kinds of validity inquiry require drawing on multiple assessment measures and disaggregating data to determine how different racial groups are experiencing our curricula and assessments (Inoue, 2009a, 2009b, 2015; Ketai, 2012). The wisdom of disaggregating local data on the consequences of assessment practices extends to additional—often intersecting—social formations such as class, gender, age, disability, and linguistic diversity. For the purposes of this chapter, I will refer to such inquiries as *validation for social justice.*

As the conversations at the Standing in the Gap workshop suggest, it is a particularly opportune moment to undertake validation for social justice in community college writing placement. Despite the concerns of writing assessment experts (and some community college faculty), the perceived efficiency and reliability of standardized tests has long made them irresistible to college administrators (and some other faculty). These assessment practices are now, however, under widespread scrutiny. Currently, more than half of all community college students enroll in at least one developmental course (Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011), and while there is evidence that "misplacement" can go both directions, CCRC researchers argue that many incoming community college students are being *under*-placed into "unnecessary" developmental coursework that actually reduces their likelihood of entering credit-bearing courses and persisting to degree completion (Bailey, 2009; Bailey et al., 2010; Community College Research Center, Columbia University, 2012a, 2012b; Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011;).

The CCRC research also signals the possibility of disparate impact. At least one study showed that the likelihood of persistence through the developmental sequence to credit-bearing courses was lower for men, African Americans, older and part-time students, and those in vocational programs (Bailey et al., 2010). These findings suggest that the negative consequences of under-placement may be greater for some legally protected groups. Those consequences are a function of both the placement instruments themselves and the ways that scores have been used. Several CCRC studies point to the problems with making placement decisions based on a single high-stakes test score rather than multiple measures of "college readiness," such as high school GPA (Community College Research Center, Columbia University, 2012b) and so-called "non-cognitive factors"

like motivation, problem-solving abilities, time management, study skills, and awareness of college norms and expectations (Community College Research Center, Columbia University, 2012a; Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011).

The CCRC research has been critiqued by developmental education researchers on both methodological and ideological grounds (for an illustrative exchange, see Bailey, Jaggars, & Scott-Clayton, 2013; Goudas & Boylan, 2012, 2013), and there are real reasons to be concerned about its impact on education policy, particularly in state legislatures motivated more by budgetary concerns and neoliberal instrumentalism than a commitment to educational access as a public good (Rose, 2012, 2016). However, the CCRC studies have also been rhetorically useful for community college writing faculty seeking to implement placement practices that better align with disciplinary knowledge and values (Klausman et al., 2016). The organizers of the Standing in the Gap workshop believed DSP could offer a more socially just alternative for writing placement, and other community college faculty around the country are following their lead. Such a claim, however, should not be taken on faith. In the next section, I will examine the social justice-related arguments surrounding DSP and the evidence regarding its impact on diverse groups of students.

DSP AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Much of the research on DSP has focused on selective-admissions four-year institutions. However, this literature offers several insights that are salient for considering DSP at open admissions community colleges. DSP is not a singular procedure, but rather a principle: the importance of *informed student choice* (Royer & Gilles, 2003). DSP processes and materials thus vary widely across institutions. Over the years, DSP has been adapted to facilitate student decision making for a variety of curricular options, including stretch courses, honors courses, and supplemental supports like writing studios or accelerated learning courses. Some institutions have opted to vary DSP eligibility and processes for different student populations, such as:

- students conditionally admitted or otherwise considered "at-risk" (Chernekoff, 2003; Cornell & Newton, 2003; Das Bender, 2011; Gere, Aull, Green, & Porter, 2010; Klausman et al., 2016; Pinter & Sims, 2003)
- international or multilingual students (Crusan, 2006; Das Bender, 2011; Gere et al., 2010; Klausman et al., 2016; Pinter & Sims, 2003)
- students deemed to be within a "decision zone" based on standardized test scores (Klausman et al., 2016; Tompkins, 2003).

The nature of the DSP materials and processes, the choices offered, and differential access to that choice all shape the consequences of a DSP process for different student groups in local context.

Advocates have made bold claims for DSP that may be attractive to many community college faculty. Daniel Royer and Roger Gilles' germinal essay on DSP argues for its principles primarily as a matter of "rightness" (1998, p. 62). For them, rightness includes the legitimacy of DSP in comparison to impromptu essay-based procedures, which did not seem "fair to anyone involved" (1998, p. 59). Rightness also encompasses the soundness of students' decisions—that is, their ability to select the "right" course, given their prior academic experiences—as well as the recognition of students' *right* to make an informed choice about their own education. Although they gesture to the importance of reliability and validity, Royer and Gilles are more concerned with shifting the terms of debate to the value of fostering student agency, or "the dignity of making such a [course] choice for themselves" (1998, p. 65). Royer and Gilles (1998, 2003) ground this orientation in the pragmatist philosophy of John Dewey, a theorist of progressive, democratic education. Thus, from its first articulations, advocates have advanced DSP using the language of *rightness*, *fairness*, *agency*, and *choice*.

These discourses have been extended by scholars who have adapted DSP to their own institutional contexts. Robbie Sims and Ellen Pinter (2003) and Janice Chernekoff (2003), for example, invoke critical pedagogues Paulo Freire, Ira Shor, and bell hooks to describe the appeal of decentering institutional authority and foregrounding student agency in the placement process. David Blakesley views DSP as a reminder that placement is a "fundamentally rhetorical and thus social act," one that functions as an "expression of power and a symptom of the institution's normalizing desire" (Blakesley, 2002, p. 12). Recognizing and relinquishing some of this power, Blakesley argues, advances democracy: "The simple act of providing students some stake in exercising personal agency in such an explicit way can begin the process of achieving that more noble goal of higher education: to prepare a citizenry to write its own future by deliberating on its past" (2002, p. 29). Asao B. Inoue (2009a) situates DSP within a "living environment [of programmatic assessment] that (re)produces not just academic dispositions but particular social and racial arrangements in the university and community." To the extent that unjust arrangements can be recognized, challenged, and changed through placement assessment practices, he argues, DSP becomes a form of "social justice work." Echoing Inoue, Rachel Lewis Ketai asserts that "DSP is a major advancement in programmatic writing assessment with unprecedented potential for social justice along racial lines" (2012, p. 143).

However, those who express skepticism or caution about DSP also frame their arguments in moral terms that have serious stakes for community colleges.

Some have turned the rhetoric of DSP on its head, as when Theresa Freda Nicolay asserts, "the process actually disempowers students by asking them to make a judgment without the benefit of the expertise their instructors possess" (2002, p. 43). This issue of "expertise"—whether students understand the writing context they are entering well enough to know what they do not know—is a central concern for DSP doubters (Bedore & Rossen-Knill, 2004; Condon et al., 2001; Neal & Huot, 2003; Nicolay, 2002; Schendel & O'Neill, 1999). Because students' placement decisions have real consequences in terms of time, money, and long-term academic success, critics see self-placement as an ethical quandary rather than self-evidently "right" (Schendel & O'Neill, 1999). Rich Haswell writes, "At issue, then, is who should assume the risk for making such a potentially damaging placement, the teachers or the students. Directed self-placement puts the burden on the student" (Condon et al., 2001, p. 204). In this view, DSP is an evasion of responsibility that leaves students holding the bag.

Ellen Schendel and Peggy O'Neill suggest that such burden-shifting has Foucauldian dimensions. They worry that "self-assessments may require that students participate in their own surveillance and domination" (1999, p. 200), asking whether we are, in effect, having students "do our dirty work for us" (1999, p. 206). They go on to state, "we believe that students come to college experienced with the gaze of educational assessment—both large-scale and classroom-based—and that their self-assessments and self-images may be influenced by the internalization of others' evaluations of them" (1999, p. 218). This concern has important social justice implications. As Schendel and O'Neil observe, "That students may have internalized cultural biases or values so that their self-assessments only reinscribe negative or unproductive stereotypes is very troubling" (1999, pp. 220-221). They wonder

> how race, class, gender, or disabilities might affect students'
> self-assessments—information that we think warrants research
> and discussion because such information is linked both to
> the validity of the assessment and the ethics of the assessment
> practice. Do men and women students assess their abilities
> differently? What about minority students, ESL students, or
> non-traditional students? (1999, p. 219)

Such questions of differential impact are central to understanding the social justice consequences of DSP in its myriad local contexts, and may be particularly relevant at open-admissions community colleges.

Perhaps because Royer and Gilles seem dismissive of validity (1998, 2003), several writing assessment scholars have cited the lack of validity studies as their biggest misgiving about DSP (Harrington, 2005; Neal & Huot, 2003; Schen-

del & O'Neill, 1999). These critics have called for validity inquiries into DSP's consequences for students—particularly students "not traditionally privileged within the university" (Neal & Huot, 2003, p. 251)—as well as for faculty and writing programs in local contexts. In recent years, there have been a number of methodologically innovative efforts to validate DSP (Gere et al., 2010; Gere, Aull, Perales, Escudero, & Vander Lei, 2013; Inoue, 2009a; Toth & Aull, 2014). However, not all local DSP studies have been explicitly framed as validation inquiries, and they vary considerably in the attention they pay to consequences for different groups of students. Most of the published studies encourage optimism about DSP, indicating that, overall, students at four-year institutions fare as well or better in first-year writing courses as they did under mandatory placement and often report high levels of satisfaction with the placement process and their course decisions (Bedore & Rossen-Knill, 2004; Blakesley, 2002; Blakesley, Harvey, & Reynolds, 2003; Chernekoff, 2003; Cornell & Newton, 2003; Crusan, 2006; Inoue, 2009a, 2009b; Jones, 2008; Pinter & Sims, 2003; Royer & Gilles, 1998). Likewise, the two published studies in community college settings found that DSP resulted in high student and/or faculty satisfaction and did not lower students' average final grades or portfolio pass rates in college-level courses (Klausman et al., 2016; Tompkins, 2003) (although Tompkins did report slightly elevated course withdrawal rates among students who participated in his small DSP pilot). In order to evaluate assertions regarding the social justice potential of DSP, however, we must take stock of the evidence regarding its consequences for what Inoue calls "local diversities" (2015, p. 68), particularly in the under-researched context of open admissions community colleges.

A few researchers have investigated the DSP experiences of multilingual students, a group sometimes assumed to be ill-equipped for self-placement (and present in large numbers at community colleges). Deborah Crusan (2006) acknowledges concerns about how cultural differences might shape students' understandings of DSP, particularly the nature of self-assessment and institutional authority, as well as the family and financial interests that might influence international students' course-taking decisions. However, she argues for the importance of including these students in DSP, characterizing "the exclusion of second language writers from any form of self-placement" as "discriminatory" (2006, p. 211). Likewise, in his decolonial thought-experiment regarding writing placement for international students, Gomes (Chapter 6, this collection) suggests that DSP offers possibilities for challenging linguistic imperialism in writing placement. Gita Das Bender (2011) examines how Seton Hall's DSP process initially overlooked so-called Generation 1.5 students—those who have grown up in multilingual households but completed at least some of their K-12 education in the United States. A single self-inventory question about students' language

background, Das Bender found, did not adequately account for these students' diverse identities or literacy experiences. After revising Seton Hall's DSP questionnaire, she found high levels of satisfaction with DSP among Generation 1.5 students, but they sometimes appeared to prioritize their self-identifications as native English speakers (a self-identification that may intersect with other racialized identity markers in a predominantly white institution) over their self-assessed writing abilities when making course decisions. Crusan and Das Bender's work suggests that DSP can support the success of multilingual students, but that these students also present unique considerations for designing and implementing DSP processes in local contexts (see also Gere et al., 2010). Further, students' language considerations may interrelate with local racial formations and other identity categories like class and gender.

While DSP skeptics have expressed concern that women and students of color might reproduce their own subordination through self-placement—a particular concern at community colleges—the available research suggests that these groups appear to benefit from DSP in some settings. Preliminary DSP data from Southern Illinois University showed that women were *more* likely than men to place themselves into challenging writing classes, while both men and women reported high levels of confidence in their course decision making (Blakesley et al., 2003; Reynolds, 2003). Cornell and Newton's (2003) four-year longitudinal study of the impact of DSP on students categorized as "at risk" by DePauw University found little difference in long-term persistence among different groups, but both women and African Americans performed better, on average, than the university would have predicted based on their "readiness" scores, which were determined by ACT/SAT scores and high school centile. Overall, the study findings suggest that DePauw's adoption of DSP benefitted white students and women more than African Americans and first-generation college students. However, DSP still appeared to be more beneficial to "at risk" African Americans and women than mandatory placement based on standardized test scores.

An important model of validation for social justice is Inoue's mixed-method assessment of California State University, Fresno's DSP process (2009a, 2009b, 2012, 2015). Inoue's assessment design included entry and exit course surveys; student portfolio evaluations from independent raters, instructors, and peers; student course progress measures and pass rates; course grades distributions; and supplemental findings from additional short-term studies. These data, Inoue reports, were "analyzed along three lines: race, gender, and generation of student" (2009a). He concludes that, while DSP has been successful in the context of Fresno State first-year writing curricula, "Blacks are most at risk, least satisfied, and fail most often. And yet, it appears that our DSP encourages retention, even when students fail their courses" (2009a). While more than half of failing course

portfolios were from black or Hispanic students, these same groups also reported the highest rates of increased satisfaction in their DSP course selection between midterm and final surveys (Inoue, 2009b). Inoue's research demonstrates that sustained validity inquiry for social justice that draws on multiple methods and data sources can help a program identify how DSP is contributing to more equitable student outcomes and how it might work to improve its placement process in this regard.

Taken together, this literature suggests that, in concept and in practice, DSP can be a promising option for placement that consciously strives to produce more socially just writing programs, institutions, and communities. However, DSP's ability to achieve that promise is contingent on processes designed with a critical awareness of ideologies that reproduce social inequalities. As Ketai (2012) models in her analysis of two DSP self-inventories, writing programs must continuously examine their placement instruments and processes for such ideologies. Furthermore, Inoue (2009a) demonstrates that striving to realize the social justice potential of DSP requires ongoing, multiple-measures validation studies as part of a larger culture of programmatic assessment that explicitly foregrounds social justice goals. This labor must be undertaking carefully, critically, and continuously.

In sum, there is reason for optimism that, if well-implemented and validated, DSP could offer a more socially just approach to writing placement in the nation's diverse community colleges. However, there is much we still need to learn about adopting various forms of DSP in these open admissions contexts. In the final section of this chapter, I present findings from interviews with faculty and administrators at 12 two-year colleges that have attempted DSP. These conversations demonstrate that DSP can be successfully implemented in community college settings, and that faculty and administrators are often drawn to DSP for social justice reasons. To date, however, there has been little effort to examine the consequences of DSP for different groups of students at these institutions. I will argue that validation for social justice should constitute an important part of DSP development and ongoing programmatic assessment as community colleges undertake the much-needed process of writing placement reform.

DSP AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

The goal of this IRB-approved study was to better understand the viability of DSP in community colleges, given these institutions' open admissions policies; I did not initially approach the project as an inquiry into social justice per se. In retrospect, I believe my own subjectivity as a white woman—and as a university-based scholar sensitive to the complex power relations involved in researching

with and writing about two-year college faculty—made me slow to embrace a critical orientation. However, as I conducted and analyzed the interviews, considered the findings in light of this collection's theme, and engaged with emerging writing assessment literature, it became clear that social justice inquiry offered a productive lens through which to examine these data. I am grateful for the feedback on early drafts of this chapter from both the collection editors and faculty participants, a few of whom encouraged me to develop the social justice framework and pushed my thinking further in that direction. They persuaded me that community colleges need such critical work in order to live up to the democratic rhetoric of open admissions.

Methods

This research is an intensive case study of DSP development and implementation in two-year colleges. Because I was interested gaining an in-depth understanding of this phenomenon, I used nonprobabalistic, purposive sampling to identify interview participants who had led DSP implementation at their colleges (Bernard, 2012). I began by reviewing the scholarly literature on DSP, searching the archives of the Writing Program Administrators (WPA) listserv, and recalling my own conversations with two-year college colleagues to compile a preliminary list of thirteen two-year colleges that had attempted DSP. I sent interview invitations by email to individuals at all of these colleges, and seven agreed to participate. From there, I posted calls for participants to the WPA and Council of Basic Writing (CBW) listservs, and, with the help of staff at the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), sent direct email queries to the entire TYCA membership (the TYCA listserv did not exist at this time), and followed up on chain referrals from participants who knew of other two-year colleges that had attempted DSP. Through this recruitment process, I heard from faculty at five additional two-year colleges who agreed to participate in the study.

In total, I conducted twelve interviews: nine with English faculty (eight individuals and one pair) and three with administrators, one of whom had been faculty at the time of his college's DSP pilot. The participants included six men and seven women, all white, ranging in age from early 30s to mid-60s. They were employed at colleges in eight different states (for institutional demographics, see Table 4.1). All of these participants were assured that neither they nor their colleges would be identified in publications resulting from this study, and all were given the opportunity to review and respond to a draft of this chapter. The interviews were conducted through either phone or video conferencing. Ten participants provided copies of DSP materials (questionnaires, course descriptions, and/or writing tasks), and five sent me institutional reports or conference

presentations detailing DSP outcomes at their institutions. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. I analyzed the transcripts using a grounded theoretical approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), iteratively memoing and coding to identify key themes and axial codes. This approach enabled me to understand patterns in perspectives and institutional experiences emerging from participants' own descriptions. A graduate research assistant reviewed 25% of the coded data, randomly selected, and together we negotiated minor revisions to code names and definitions. The findings I present here derive from three broad code categories: *rationale for adopting DSP*, *outcomes of DSP*, and *impact of DSP on student sub-populations*. While the *Rationale for DSP* section below draws on analysis of all twelve interviews, the *Consequences of DSP* section focuses on findings from the five DSP programs that shared data on student outcomes.

Table 4.1. Institutional demographics ("IPEDS," 2016)

Institution	Student Race/Ethnicity	Student Gender	% 25 and older
College 1 Small Suburban West Coast *Active DSP*	51% White 31% Hispanic/Latino 9% Asian 5% Two or more races 2% Black 1% Unknown 1% Non-resident	51% Female 49% Male	22%
College 2 Mid-size Rural Midwest *Active DSP*	82% White 7% Unknown 3% Black 3% Hispanic/Latino 3% Non-resident 2% American Indian/Alaska Native 1% Two or more races	58% Female 42% Male	25%
College 3 Small Suburb Midwest *Active DSP*	87% White 6% Black 4% Unknown 1% Hispanic/Latino 1% American Indian/Alaska Native 1% Two or more races	64% Female 36% Male	34%

Institution	Student Race/Ethnicity	Student Gender	% 25 and older
College 4 Mid-size Large City Midwest *Active DSP*	38% White 29% Black 17% Asian 8% Hispanic/Latino 6% Two or more races 1% American Indian/Alaska Native 1% Unknown	54% Female 46% Male	53%
College 5 Small Small City Northwest *Active DSP*	40% White 26% Unknown 13% Asian 9% Black 7% Hispanic/Latino 3% Two or more races 1% American Indian/Alaska Native 1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	66% Male 34% Female	68%
College 6 Large Suburb Mid-Atlantic *Pilot study only:* *no active DSP*	60% White 23% Black 7% Hispanic/Latino 4% Two or more races 3% Asian 1% American Indian/Alaska Native 1% Unknown	57% Female 43% Male	29%
College 7 Small Online *Institution de-* *funct: no active* *DSP*	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
College 8 Large Suburb West Coast *Piloting stage*	34% White 15% Asian 11% Hispanic/Latino 11% Unknown 10% Black 9% Two or more races 7% Non-resident 1% American Indian/Alaska Native 1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	58% Female 42% Male	34%

Institution	Student Race/Ethnicity	Student Gender	% 25 and older
College 9 Large Small city West Coast *Piloting stage*	46% White 16% Non-resident 9% Unknown 8% Hispanic/Latino 8% Two or more races 7% Asian 4% Black 1% American Indian/Alaska Native 1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	50% Male 50% Female	29%
College 10 Large Rural Intermountain *Piloting stage*	69% White 14% Hispanic/Latino 10% Unknown 2% Asian 2% Black 2% Two or more races 1% American Indian/Alaska Native	58% Female 42% Male	53%
College 11 Large Town Intermountain *Piloting stage*	74% White 17% Hispanic/Latino 3% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander 2% Unknown 1% American Indian/Alaska Native 1% Asian 1% Black 1% Two or more races 1% Non-resident	64% Female 36% Male	43%
College 12 Large Rural Northeast *Piloting stage*	73% White 14% Unknown 6% Black 4% Hispanic/Latino 2% Two or more races 1% Asian	57% Female 43% Male	27%

As with all research, this study has its limitations. First, I rely primarily on participant self-report. While all participants were leaders in campus DSP initiatives, they inevitably had their own perspectives shaped by their disciplinary knowledge, their professional roles, and other aspects of their personal identities and experiences, including race, gender, and age. Likewise, I was reliant on these participants for whatever empirical evidence they had available about DSP outcomes, and what they were able and willing to provide through follow-up correspondence;

most were unable to provide current data on course completion rates. I did not have access to the raw data, and I was privy only to the metrics their colleges used, which limits my ability to compare or generalize across institutions. As I discuss below, none of these colleges had disaggregated data by student demographics. While I cannot make claims about the social justice-related consequences of DSP at these institutions, I can describe the arguments participants made for DSP and the evidence they provided in support of its continued use. I can also suggest the kinds of local inquiries that would enable community colleges to develop more robust validation for social justice of their DSP processes.

DSP IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

The findings of this study demonstrate that, contrary to the portrait in the scholarly literature (Ostman, 2013; Sullivan, 2008a), there *have* been a number of efforts to implement DSP at open admissions community colleges. While there may be additional colleges that have attempted—and, perhaps, rejected—DSP, I was able to identify 17 two-year institutions (roughly 1% of community colleges nationwide) that have tried DSP since the late 1990s. Twelve were actively using DSP in Fall 2015. Of the institutions no longer using DSP, one (an experimental online college) has ceased to exist, one underwent system-wide restructuring that ended its DSP experiment, and one had shifted from DSP to COMPASS. The last college had conducted a promising DSP pilot study, but the faculty member who conducted it was unable to persuade administration take the program to scale. Of the 12 active community college DSP programs, three had been using DSP for more than a decade, two had been using it for five years, and seven were piloting new DSP processes, reflecting the recent surge of interest in alternative approaches to placement in the context of developmental education reform (Burdman, 2012; Hassel et al., 2015; Klausman et al., 2016). (Since closing data collection for this study in January 2016, I have heard from seven additional colleges that have recently launched DSP pilots.) I was able to interview participants at all three long-time DSP programs, one of the five-year-old programs, six of the new pilot programs, and two of the programs that no longer exist.

RATIONALE FOR DSP

Most of the interview participants indicated that their college's interest in DSP emerged from dissatisfaction with their previous placement system, which in all cases was either a standardized test of grammar and usage, a reading comprehension exam, faculty evaluation of an impromptu writing sample, or some combination thereof. Echoing themes in the writing assessment literature, several partic-

ipants stated that standardized tests did not account for the full range of writing abilities expected in first-year writing and were therefore not very predictive of student success. Likewise, participants whose colleges had been evaluating impromptu writing samples found the process burdensome and were not convinced that it yielded useful placement information. Several indicated that prior placement processes did not align well with their department's writing curriculum and, as a result, many students were placing into courses that did not match their abilities.

For some institutions, DSP had a pragmatic appeal: it seemed less logistically and financially taxing than previous placement methods while promising better outcomes for students. On the other hand, multiple interview participants observed that DSP was *more* logistically challenging and no less expensive than using commercial placement tests. Across the interviews, one of the most common reasons for adopting DSP was the desire for a placement process that reflected departments' writing curricula and values. Several participants saw DSP as an opportunity to turn what had been a tedious placement test into a dialogue with students about writing. As one faculty member put it,

> Placement is communication, placement is conversation, and . . . what really should be happening when we're assessing students is that we're communicating to them about what courses they're going into, what the expectations should be. We're also listening to them about their past experience . . . With a static test you don't get that. You don't get that opportunity to have a conversation.

Having read the DSP literature, many participants hoped this "conversation" would encourage students to be more invested in their writing courses. Some also anticipated that DSP would help destigmatize developmental courses, and that students would enter whichever writing course they chose with improved attitudes and motivation.

Many participants also saw DSP as a way to offer students greater control over their own education. One faculty member described enthusiasm across campus for DSP's emphasis on choice: "Student Development got the idea of self-efficacy, and the right message, which was 'student agency,' you know, with the right time, day one, for the right reason, respecting them, and an informed student has the capacity to make a personal placement decision." Participants sometimes linked the importance of agency to a desire to treat students like "adults," perhaps implying that mandatory placement seemed paternalistic. The word "empower" also came up frequently across the interviews, suggesting that the idea of DSP—and the rhetoric with which it is often promoted in the literature—appeals to the critical pedagogical orientations that motivate many community college faculty.

For some participants, DSP was not only about respecting students' agency and empowering them as decision-makers: it also fostered greater writing self-awareness. Several stated that students might benefit from reflecting on their own literacy experiences. As one faculty member said,

> We were giving students the tools to make an informed decision . . . It flipped the premise, that students best know their own academic histories or literacy histories. So, by giving students a method to investigate that history, and to make sense out of it, and to think about how it might map on what we offer, it really seemed to be a better, a more ethical way of placing students than looking at a paragraph or even an essay.

As this quote illustrates, many participants saw an ethical dimension to DSP. One faculty member pointed out that there are inadequacies in any placement system and said, "Okay, so we don't have a good way to do it. So, what's the most ethical way? Well, to allow someone else to choose." In this instructor's view, DSP was more honest than the available alternatives about the limits of institutional knowledge.

Finally, participants were deeply interested in DSP's potential to improve student outcomes. While some noted the value of giving all students the opportunity to choose the additional time and support offered in developmental writing courses, many were committed to reducing perceived patterns of under-placement. Several cited recent CCRC studies regarding the negative consequences of placement into "unnecessary" developmental coursework, which they viewed as an important social justice issue for their predominantly low-income and often racially and linguistically diverse students. As one faculty member described,

> [The impetus] came from not only exposure to the scholarship on [DSP], but me and a few other people getting into our English 100 courses—the course right below 101—and being like, "Why are some of these students in here? What are they doing here?" Not realizing it until later and seeing that misplacement—seeing the way it harmfully affected students. It's really then seeing it as a social justice issue right away. Really not just thinking about it as efficiency for the college— seeing it as what's most just for these students.

Thus, many participants saw DSP as a promising corrective to structural injustices in their placement practices. They believed that DSP's emphasis on self-assessment and student choice offered a more just, pedagogically sound approach, one that reflected the democratic promise of the community college.

Despite the admirable commitments to student empowerment, learning, and success evident in these participants' rationales for DSP, it worth remembering Schendel and O'Neill (1999) and Ketai's (2012) warnings about the ways that student agency might be shaped or constrained by their lived experiences with structural inequalities related to race, class, gender, age, (dis)ability, and standard English ideologies. Students may reproduce the narratives about their own identities, languages, and literacies that they have experienced through prior school-based assessments. Indeed, although DSP purports to offer *all* students choice, its processes and materials may project and reward a white, middle-class *habitus* that results in disparate outcomes for different groups (Behm & Miller, 2012; Inoue, 2015; Ketai, 2012). In short, adopting DSP does not guarantee socially just writing placement in community colleges or any other type of institution. Rather, we must validate for social justice by continuously examining the consequences of specific DSP instruments and processes as they are used in local contexts, particularly for students from structurally disadvantaged groups.

Consequences of DSP

Participants from all seven colleges that collected and shared outcomes data expressed enthusiasm for DSP's impact on their writing programs (see Table 4.2). Five colleges saw a reduction in the number of students who enrolled in developmental writing courses under DSP, and participants from these institutions interpreted this decline as correcting under-placement that occurred in their previous placement processes. One college found that enrollments in developmental writing remained roughly the same after implementing DSP, and one reported an increase in the number of students who enrolled in developmental courses. The faculty participant at that college interpreted the increase positively, viewing it as an indication that students who wanted more time and feedback on their writing were being given that option under DSP. Although the types and specificity of the data that participants provided varied, Table 4.2 suggests that the worst fears of DSP skeptics—increased failure rates in first-year writing caused by students placing themselves into courses for which they are not prepared to succeed—did not come to pass at any of these open admissions institutions. In fact, most colleges saw increased student success as measured by course grades and/or completion of the required first-year writing course. Likewise, those who measured student satisfaction found that students responded positively to having a choice in their writing placement. (Readers seeking DSP outcomes data at colleges similar to their own might cross-reference Table 4.2 with the institutional and demographic information in Table 4.1.)

Table 4.2. DSP outcomes

Institution	Type of Evidence	Outcomes
College 1 Small Suburban West Coast	Faculty poll	Faculty believe DSP as or more effective than previous placement
	Student surveys	Students report high levels of satisfaction with placement process and course decision
	Comparative study with another CC in the state that uses mandatory placement via testing and writing samples	FYC pass rates similar at both institutions
College 2 Mid-size Rural Midwest	Pass rates on FYC exit portfolios before and after implementing DSP	3-year average pass rate for FYC exit portfolio increased 9%
College 3 Small Suburb Midwest	Course grades in basic writing and FYC before and after implementing DSP	Students earning "C" or better in BW increased 30% BW completers earning a "C" or better in FYC increased 21%
College 4 Mid-size Large City Midwest	ACCUPLACER scores and pass rates in FYC	"Decision zone" students who choose FYC do as well or better in FYC than students who either place directly into FYC or pass from BW into FYC
College 5 Small Small City Northwest	Pass rates in basic writing and FYC before and after implementing DSP	Pass rates in basic writing increased 3% Pass rates in FYC increased 4%
College 6 Large Suburb Mid-Atlantic *Pilot study only*	Pilot participants' FYC course grades/pass rates	Students who would have placed into BW but chose FYC earned grades of A or B at 14% higher rate than overall college average
	Pilot participants' FYC course completion rates	11% higher rates of FYC course withdrawal than overall college average
	Student surveys	Students reported high rates of satisfaction with DSP process and materials

Institution	Type of Evidence	Outcomes
College 7 Small Online (defunct)	Pass rates in FYC before and after implementing DSP	Increased student pass rates in FYC
	Student surveys	Students reported high rates of satisfaction with course choice

As Inoue's (2009a) assessment model demonstrates, there are many other metrics that would help build more robust validity arguments for DSP in these local contexts, such as direct assessment of student writing at various stages and data on student persistence, overall GPA, rates of/time to degree completion, and transfer-related outcomes. Nonetheless, the generally positive consequences of adopting DSP at these community colleges suggests that this approach to placement can be successful, at least in broad strokes. The question remains, however, whether DSP offers disparate benefits to different groups of students in these settings.

Of the seven colleges that had outcomes data, only one (College 1) had what its faculty participant characterized as a predominantly middle-class student population. The others served primarily low-income, working-class, and first-generation college students, and each had its own local diversities in terms of race, gender, age, languages, and countries of origin (see Table 4.1). However, none of these institutions had disaggregated their DSP outcomes data for different groups, legally protected or otherwise. Indeed, when I asked in interviews which groups of students benefited most or least from DSP, all of the participants struggled to answer. As one administrator put it, "You know, I didn't run the demographics on it, and I probably should have." At least at the time of these interviews, disparate impact analysis of the kind advocated by Mya Poe and her colleagues (2014) did not appear to be common practice. Like 78% of community college faculty nationwide (Cohen et al., 2014), all of the participants in this study were white. It is tempting to interpret the lack of data disaggregation in institutional validation of DSP as the result of a "color-blind" assessment paradigm that can inadvertently reproduce structures of racism and inequality (Behm & Miller, 2012; Inoue, 2015).

Although they had not examined disaggregated outcomes data, three faculty participants did attempt to answer my question anecdotally based on their classroom experiences. Perhaps in part because of their own white subjectivities, as well as the demographics of their particular institutions, these faculty focused primarily on age and gender rather than race or ethnicity. All three indicated that they thought older students, particularly women, seemed more likely to under-place themselves through DSP. One observed:

> It is harder for us to self-place with them . . . Sometimes
> they're ten or twenty years out from their previous course

> work, they may not remember it much, they may have
> dropped out of school, they may have been terrific students
> until they got pregnant or—who knows what, you know? Of
> course, they learned a lot over previous years by doing things.

These participants did not see older students' selection of a developmental course that "cuts them the anxiety" as necessarily a bad choice.

Conversely, all three faculty suggested that the group most likely to "over-place" themselves were those "who are young and kind of full of their writing abilities." Two indicated that their colleges had recently begun rethinking long-standing DSP processes in light of the rapid growth of dual/concurrent enrollment: placement practices deemed successful with older student populations did not necessarily fit high school students well. One participant saw age-related challenges as a function of gender, as well. The group who benefited least from DSP, in his view, was "confident 18-year-old males . . . That's the group that I see making, most frequently placing themselves up higher than maybe the full picture warranted." He did not comment on the racial identities of those "confident" young men. These patterns of faculty response suggest the need for rigorous and ongoing local validation studies examining whether DSP benefits students differently based on gender and age, perhaps particularly as those identities and experiences intersect with other identity categories like race, language diversity, and (dis)ability.

In sum, we have reason for cautious optimism that DSP can benefit students at open-admissions community colleges. However, there is still a great deal we do not know. We have no information about DSP *failures* at two-year colleges, including what the consequences of those experiments might be for different groups of students. Likewise, we have little understanding of DSP outcomes with recently reformed community college curricula, including various forms of developmental acceleration, modularization, contextualized learning, and dual/concurrent enrollment (Hassel et al., 2015). And, as I have indicated, we need much more research into how various DSP processes serve different student groups in local community college contexts, whether there is evidence of disparate impact, and what approaches to DSP might mitigate disparate impact with different local diversities.

NEXT STEPS

Throughout this chapter, I have been standing in a gap: the dearth of published scholarship on DSP at "democracy's open door." I have sought to establish the stakes of writing placement in community colleges, to trace the debates about

DSP as an approach to placement that advances social justice, to examine how community colleges make the case for DSP, and to identify what they have learned and still need to know about its consequences in their local contexts. I hope this synthesis enables two-year college teacher-scholar-activists to move beyond the roadblock question, "Can DSP work at community colleges?" The answer is *yes*, it can and it has. Indeed, as Siskanna Naynaha observes, skepticism about the viability of DSP at community colleges may reflect a "paternalistic" disregard for the decision making capacities of the racially and socioeconomically diverse students these institutions enroll (2016, p. 199). We can now shift our attention to the as-yet largely unanswered question, "How can DSP contribute to making community colleges more socially just institutions?"

As Anne Gere and her colleagues' (2010) validation study demonstrates, the success of DSP at any institution hinges on its implementation. Allocation of sufficient resources, conceptual understanding and buy-in from campus stakeholders, and continual revision based on ongoing validity inquiry all shape the consequences of DSP in particular contexts. Community colleges planning or piloting DSP should consciously consider the experiences of the different groups that make up their local diversities as they design their processes and build this kind of inquiry into their evaluation of DSP. Likewise, community colleges that have already implemented DSP should undertake ongoing local validation that includes disaggregating student outcomes data and critically reviewing DSP processes and materials as part of their larger programmatic assessments. In short, fulfilling the social justice potential of DSP requires a sustained commitment of intellectual and material resources, including administrative attention and responsiveness to institutional change.

Our field also needs more mechanisms for sharing information about DSP initiatives and findings from local validation studies in two-year college settings. The Washington community college placement consortium that has emerged from the Standing in the Gap workshop offers one promising state-level example. Pooling such knowledge will enable individual colleges and the field as a whole to gain a better understanding of the possibilities for DSP at open admissions institutions. This knowledge will help more faculty step into the temporary gap left by COMPASS to develop placement practices that further social justice goals. If we do not undertake this work within our own institutional, disciplinary, and professional communities, testing companies will likely present us with pre-packaged DSP products that are far less amenable to local validation and control.

Finally, our discipline's emerging "fourth wave" of writing assessment scholarship must explicitly attend to community colleges. William Morris and colleagues observe the near-invisibility of two-year college students in the writing assessment literature over the last three decades:

> Many of these two-year college students suffer the conse-
> quences of socially biased writing assessments designed to
> keep second-language learners, low-income students, and
> others who have traditionally made up the majority of
> community college students off the highway of educational
> privilege . . . [I]t is important to recognize the important in-
> fluence writing assessment can have for students' educational
> opportunities, especially at two-year colleges, which enroll the
> majority of postsecondary under-resourced students. (2015,
> pp. 120-121)

As Inoue (2015) suggests, assessment influences every aspect of our writing ecologies. The ideologies and power dynamics of assessment shape classroom pedagogies and practices, writing curricula and programs, writing centers and other student support services, and the climate for faculty in departments and professional organizations. Thus, given the important role community colleges play in the national postsecondary landscape, particularly for students from historically underrepresented groups, their assessment practices bear directly on our discipline's efforts to promote equity across all dimensions of writing instruction. To date, however, institutional hierarchies have constrained our disciplinary knowledge-making in ways that perpetuate social inequality. If we are committed to reimagining writing assessment as social justice, then community colleges, their students, and their faculty must be at the center rather than the margins of our scholarly conversations.

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