

CHAPTER 8.

FIRED UP: INSTITUTIONAL  
CRITIQUE, LESSON STUDY, AND  
THE FUTURE OF ANTIRACIST  
WRITING ASSESSMENT

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**Research Problem:** Recent efforts to enact antiracist writing assessment within writing classrooms and writing programs signal a welcome social justice development in Writing Studies. Yet, the white habitus we seek to interrupt and challenge pervades entire institutions, not just writing classrooms.

**Research Questions:** How might we leverage assessment to not simply make our writing assessment ecologies less racist but to also contribute to dismantling the institutional white habitus that makes entire institutions less inhabitable and often outright hostile for students, faculty, and staff of color? How might institutional critique and Lesson Study support antiracist institutional outcomes beyond the individual classroom?

**Literature Review:** We ground our study in the following overlapping scholarly conversations: sociological and rhetorical examinations of the white habitus; institutional critique as a rhetorical methodology for change; Lesson Study, a collaborative and recursive model of teacher research developed in Japan that places focus on learning problems and responsive lesson planning.

**Methodology:** We collaboratively developed a study lesson on social privilege and teacher cohorts delivered that lesson in multiple FYW classrooms. We ethnographically observed the lessons and collected pre- and post-lesson writing artifacts from students. We then applied a four-variable assessment model to those writing artifacts to assess the results. In our report, we contextualize the study through the rhetorical methodology of institutional critique.

**Conclusions:** While our assessment suggests statistically significant outcomes of learning in the lesson, the vast majority of student writing does not indicate a willingness or interest in challenging institutional racism through activism. We suggest pedagogical improvements, including the inclusion of students in the design and implementation of the assessment itself, to more effectively approach institutional change through antiracist pedagogy.

**Qualifications:** Since we operated with the Lesson Study model, which is conducted in one class period, we cannot comment on the ways that a semester-long engagement in the material might have deepened the desired institutional outcomes.

**Directions for Further Study:** We recommend closing the feedback loop by involving students in the design and assessment of future lesson study projects, thereby uniting the collaborative pedagogical innovation potential of Lesson Study with the liberatory potential of constructivist assessment techniques grounded in integrative validity models.

How might assessment technologies drive institutional change and support a vision for racial justice on college campuses and beyond? This is a question that is long overdue, and finally getting sustained attention in Writing Studies (Behm & Miller, 2012; Inoue, 2015; Inoue & Poe, 2012; Poe et al., 2014). In essence, scholars are seeking to inject a critical race-conscious turn into a writing assessment conversation that has long been anchored by the local (Broad et al., 2009; Haswell & Wyche-Smith, 1994; Huot, 2002). This critical race critique of localism is conversant with efforts to more consistently align such localized assessments with global disciplinary best practices (Gallagher, 2010, 2012, 2016; Kelly-Riley & Elliot, 2014; Kelly-Riley, Elliot, & Rudniy, 2016). Recent conversations (Gallagher, 2010, 2016) suggest that local consensus-driven assessment technologies like dynamic criteria mapping can result in outcomes that are quite difficult to contextualize for outside stakeholders, even within the same discipline, without a concurrent process of validation through disciplinary best practices. And scholars like Inoue (2015) remind us that such locally driven assessment technologies can still result in values that are anchored by the color-blind racist assumptions of a white habitus. In a related methodological critique of localism, Poe and her colleagues (2014) argue that programs may find a powerful antidote to the sometimes ineffective frame of localism by importing “disparate impact analysis” from civil rights jurisprudence to help practitioners more effectively measure the effects of writing assessment on students of color,

effects that are often hegemonic in local assessments. This is crucial work, and we applaud it. Like Christie Toth, we see disparate impact analysis as a crucial component of any assessment technology's validation for social justice (Chapter 4, this collection). For an extension of this work in practice, check out Casie Moreland's call for transparency and access to data that will allow disparate impact analyses to proceed (Chapter 5, this collection).

As much as we welcome this critical race turn, though, we worry that focusing on assessment in writing classrooms and programs may limit the more radical potential for assessment to drive the transformation of institutions. A local focus on classroom assessment can obscure the ways that we might unconsciously use assessment to support and extend institutional conditions of white racial habitus—a term which draws on Bourdieu's (1983) notion of habitus as a physical embodiment of the ideology of culture. By restricting our assessment models to the writing classroom or the writing program, we risk leaving intact and undisturbed the institutional ecology of white racial habitus that pervades everywhere else. To riff on Josh Lederman and Nicole Warwick's framing of the issue, what use is a nonviolent classroom assessment when the institution itself is daily engaged in other violent forms of official and unofficial assessment (Chapter 7, this collection)? Recent work by critical race theorists Bonilla-Silva, Goar, and Embrick (2006) informs our use of habitus as a distinctly hegemonic feature of the socialization process that cultivates and sustains whites' perceptions, highlighting the stakes in supporting antiracist pedagogies with antiracist assessment. Making writing assessment ecologies more antiracist is merely a drop—albeit a crucial and important one—in a much larger institutional bucket.

This essay reports a descriptive exploratory study of a first-year writing cohort conducted at West Chester University in January 2015. As we report our use of a methodology much more common in K-12 education, lesson study, we analyze the usefulness of lesson study as a tool for addressing white privilege and implementing antiracist writing pedagogy in the writing program at WCU. Our worry about the resilience of white habitus is based on our own experience trying to pedagogically support the institutional activism of our students in the wake of #BlackLivesMatter in Fall 2014. With the deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown still heavy on our hearts, we watched the non-indictments spark outrage locally and nationally, as media highlighted for many the state's active participation in the machineries of black death. Here at our predominantly white institution (PWI), this outrage led to mass demonstrations, protests, and student organizing on a level that many of us had not thought possible. But it has also led to a profound and painful backlash of both color-blind racism (#AllLivesMatter) and overtly racist vitriol aimed at silencing this groundswell of activism, a backlash most visible in anonymous physical and digital spaces.

How might antiracist writing assessment address the fact that a white habitus pervades entire institutions, not just our classrooms? How might we leverage assessment to not simply make our writing assessment ecologies less racist but to also dismantle the institutional white habitus that makes entire institutions less inhabitable and often outright hostile for students, faculty, and staff of color? Following Barnett (2000), we understand institutional white habitus to include, among other practices, an insistence on: coded racial discourses like color-blindness; the invisibility, objectivity, and neutrality of whiteness; whiteness as “un-raced individuality as opposed to a racialized subjectivity that is communally and politically interested;” on whiteness as privileged arbiter of how difference ought to be celebrated, defined, recognized, denied, or denigrated in a given context (p. 10).

Following the lead of our student activists, we contend that a critical race turn in writing assessment must swell beyond our classrooms and programs to take into consideration entire institutional cultures as it seeks to challenge the pernicious effects of the white habitus. It must thickly describe the institutional conditions these programs inhabit and the consequences of our teaching practices on those conditions. To do so, we employ a mixed methods approach akin to Chen’s (2015) action model/change model as detailed in *Practical Program Evaluation*. Chen’s approach seeks both a more robust, theorized understanding of the problem and the improvements needed—a change model, or descriptive assumptions—as well as an implemented action plan to seek to enact this change—an action model, or prescriptive assumptions. Chen’s action model/change model schema affords a flexibility in evaluation design aimed toward enacting effective changes in programs, informed by the idea that “Research methods should be tailored to meet evaluation needs, *not vice versa*” (2015, p. 86). To deepen the change model our field operates from in antiracist assessment, we first offer institutional critique (Porter, Sullivan, Blythe, Grabill, & Miles, 2000) as a rhetorical methodology suited to tracing, critiquing, and challenging the entrenched white habitus pervading institutions of higher-education, especially at PWIs like ours. Institutional critique is especially important in writing programs like ours whose classrooms are also charged to fulfill general education diversity requirements for the institution. Our students’ activism and the racist backlash against it highlight the toothlessness of our institution’s current diversity requirement and the futility in leveraging its outcome-based assessment for racial justice outcomes.

To support our activist students and help to transform our institution’s diversity requirement, we then worked to develop a *lesson study project* for the First-Year Writing program (FYW) at our institution as a recursive action model to pair

with institutional critique.<sup>1</sup> Joined by fifteen colleagues in the writing program who helped to undertake the lesson study project, we constructed a curricular experience for students in first-year writing classes to increase awareness of white privilege and support a culture of student activism.<sup>2</sup> We posit that lesson study dovetails nicely with institutional critique as a mixed methods approach to evaluating antiracist pedagogy, as it helps us to enact the concrete action for change demanded of both institutional critique and Chen's action model/change model as methodologies. Our group hoped the lesson study project would support the student activists and help us better achieve the long-deferred "diversity" goals of our general education curriculum. Though we will have more to say about lesson study later, we'll briefly offer that it is "a teaching improvement and knowledge building process that has origins in Japanese elementary education" (Cerbin & Kopp, 2006, p. 250; see also Yoshida, 1999). Cerbin and Kopp (2006), who are largely credited with adapting the process to undergraduate education in the US, describe lesson study as a process where "teachers work in small teams to plan, teach, observe, analyze, and refine individual class lessons, called research lessons" (p. 250).

In framing the lesson study, we constructed a four-variable assessment model reflecting the lesson's desired outcomes: activism, awareness, confusion, and rejection. Our assessment of the lesson study, reported below, demonstrates the tangled knot of assessing diversity outcomes, even using an approach that consciously adopts antiracist pedagogical practices. In support of those practices, the present essay outlines our experience as a case study, reports on and assesses its results, and theorizes some appropriate responses to those results by combining the antiracist writing assessment turn with constructivist evaluation innovations such as Guba and Lincoln's Fourth Generation Evaluation (1989, 2001) and Chen's bottom-up approach to integrative validity (2010). Unfortunately, our

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1 Michael conceived of and initiated the lesson study project early in 2014, joined by Randall and Tim as primary researchers in Fall 2014. Each of us is a straight man with relatively high socioeconomic standing in our roles as professors, but our individual subjectivities structure the classroom. Michael is an Arkansas-born black man. Randall is an Alabama-born white man. And Tim is a white man from the Philly suburbs. We acknowledge that our own racial and gender formations condition the ways we are seeing the following data, and we foreground our identities and ideological commitments here to make this inevitability as transparent as possible.

2 This group consisted of Amy Anderson, Mary Buckelew, Kristine Ervin, Margaret Ervin, Stacy Esch, Karen Fitts, Bill Lalicker, Joe Navitsky, Rodney Mader, Cherise Pollard, Justin Rademaekers, and Ilknur Sancak-Marusa alongside the three authors. Anderson, M. Ervin, Esch, Lalicker, and Mader also contributed additionally to the development of the original study lesson and study design. We thank them for their hard work and insight on this project. When this article refers to "our group," the authors are referring to this larger crew of fabulous and dedicated colleagues. When it states "we," the authors are specifically referring to Michael, Randall, and Tim.

initial goal of adopting antiracist pedagogies to help students move from confusion through awareness to activism was not reflected in the data gathered by the lesson study team; our results suggested a much messier dataset and did not support a clear movement from confusion to awareness and activism. Instead, our data suggest students become less aware and more confused by a lesson on privilege. Our interpretation proposes that students' loss of awareness and increase in confusion are, in effect, noise: artifacts of our project's lesson study methodology. We predict that student confusion, given the space to conduct a more controlled longitudinal study, would resolve itself into the other variables of awareness and activism. This resolution, we should note, is not reflected in the data gathered by our project and reported here. The limit of artifact-based writing assessment to note such a resolution, however, is reported and interpreted; this limit is the condition of relating assessment to the writing classroom in support of change.

## **ANTIRACIST ASSESSMENT ECOLOGIES, WHITE HABITUS, & INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE**

As Inoue (2015) reminds us, standardized writing assessment grounds its judgments in the supposed universality of the white racial habitus, a concept emanating from Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1983) which describes habitus as "perceptions, appreciations, and actions" that are socially constructed in order to shape an individual's orientation in the world (83). Bonilla-Silva (2003) extends Bourdieu's notion of habitus to whiteness, arguing that white habitus is a "racialized, uninterrupted socialization process that conditions and creates whites' racial tastes, perceptions, feelings, and emotions" (p. 104). White habitus is, in Bonilla-Silva's definition, a product of "collective experiences" that results from limited contact with others, where interactions are replaced by unverifiable stereotypes that have the appearance of objectivity while "maintaining the existing racial hierarchy" (2006, pp. 233-234).

Bonilla-Silva's invocation of white habitus has been taken up by leaders of the critical race turn in assessment (Inoue, 2015; Behm & Miller, 2012). Inoue (2015) has provided the most robust account of how to conduct antiracist assessment in classrooms, but Behm and Miller (2012) describe the critical race—or antiracist—turn needed in writing assessment as the "fourth wave" of writing assessment. Building off Yancey's (1999) "wave" metaphor for eras of assessment in composition, we applaud Behm and Miller's call for a "fourth-wave" of writing assessment scholarship to challenge color-blind racism in classroom and programmatic assessments (2012, p. 136). For more on this scholarship, see Toth's excellent literature review (Chapter 4, this collection). Yet, we are also

cognizant that doing this well requires new metaphors. We suggest that we get out of the surf, and right into the fire. Our title, “Fired Up” highlights this need for something more urgent than surfing. Echoing James Baldwin, we are calling for the fire. Importantly, though, Behm and Miller note that a critical race-conscious turn requires us to “[analyze] the ways in which assessment practices and interpretations of data constitute and are constitutive of a white habitus” (2012, p. 136).

The centrality of understanding white habitus has also been taken up by compositionists working in critical whiteness studies such as Edward Hahn. In Hahn’s essay “Embodied Censorship” (2014), he both advances a rhetorical critique of Bonilla-Silva’s ontological reification of white habitus and extends the term through a return to Bourdieu (see especially Hahn’s penultimate section, “Towards a Materialist Social Theory”). Hahn argues that antiracist teachers need to understand white habitus not as an embodied fact inhering in white individuals, but as a series of learned practices and values in “fields” of situated “social-historical activity” like school or home (2014, para. 22). In Hahn’s conception, white habitus, rather than ontological, is produced and cemented through repeated practice and performance. Hahn, *contra* Bonilla-Silva’s construction of habitus as a condition of limited exposure, argues that habitus performs a situated tendency by “well-meaning agents’ (mis)readings of texts that challenge the values ‘made body’ through their participation in the everyday practices of an agonistic field” (2014, para. 30). This aligns well with J. W. Hammond’s finding that even progressive pedagogies of inclusion have historically helped to preserve exclusionary nativist assumptions (Chapter 1, this collection). In sort, we become what we practice in institutional settings like classrooms.

Hahn’s insight here can be applied, for instance, to the hidden presence of diversity curricula that have more importance than what institutions, leaders, or teachers *say* in classroom spaces. For example, students who attend most whitemainstream public schools in the United States have learned that diversity functions in specific ways—most often circumscribed in classes or lessons ostensibly *about* diverse perspectives. When white students in our writing classrooms at West Chester University (WCU) question the relevance of a text written about white supremacy or black life, it is not rooted in Bonilla-Silva’s sense of color-blind racism as a white habitus. Rather, it is difficult for these students to confront a practice that transgresses their embodied learning for how one *does* school. When a general education writing class starts from the assumption that rhetorical education must confront white supremacy to enable responsibility, students are confused. Challenges to the white habitus disrupt the hidden curriculum that celebrates diversity in “appropriate” spaces but scrubs the rest of institutional life from the presence of diversity.

By locating white habitus, Hahn recaptures the ability of Bourdieu's concept to not just explain agents' unreflected actions, but also to represent the ways in which structural forces exert their influences in social spaces for even "well-meaning" members of society. Latent in Hahn's redefinition of habitus is its capability for producing social change, as well as its well-acknowledged role in serving as a force for resisting change.

Here at WCU—a mid-sized public university in Pennsylvania—we are cognizant of a need to shift the focus from the hidden curriculum of diversity that produces and sustains the white habitus toward locations where that habitus is made explicit, mitigating its presence in our teaching, classrooms, and students. Our struggle at satisfying our university's diversity outcomes highlights the need for antiracist assessment ecologies that account for institutional contexts that extend beyond our classrooms. We see two ways to activate this shift, one of which we'll enact rhetorically in this piece and the other we offer as a recalibration to this research project: (1) institutional critique and (2) more thoroughly constructivist evaluation concepts.

Institutional critique is a rhetorical methodology for programmatic change based on the work of Porter, Sullivan, Blythe, Grabill, and Miles (2000) that resonates with our own attempts to situate the writing classroom as a site of productive struggle within a larger field of action. In calling on institutional critique, we follow others who have recently applied it to antiracist contexts (Craig, 2014; Diab et al., 2013). Porter et al. point out the toothlessness of criticisms that "exist only in the form of ideal cases or statements, which all too often bracket off discussions of materiality and economic constraints in favor of working out the best case scenario—which, all too often, does not come to pass" (2000, p. 615). Instead, they suggest, we must craft methodologies and enact assessment practices that actually change the institutions within which we are situated. Just as importantly, publications must do "more than *recommend* or *hope for* institutional change;" a project must first "enact the practice(s) it hopes for" as a part of the project itself (2000, p. 628). In this way, institutional critique becomes a process of engaging in *ethical activities central to the inhabited spaces of these institutions*. Their model suggests that writing programs must both *act* to alleviate institutional conditions and *report* on the effects of that intervention. This model is serviceable as both a critique *of* institutional conditions and a critique *for* concrete change to those conditions.<sup>3</sup> Our project, which includes activities in the Fall of 2014 and Spring of 2015 *and* the space of this piece itself, strives to enact institutional critique as

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3 Though space does not allow for it here, this focus on ethical activities connects with important new trends in writing assessment. See, for instance, the *Journal of Writing Assessment's* 2016 special issue on ethics in assessment edited by Diane Kelly-Riley and Carl Whithaus.



a component of antiracist writing assessment that is responsive to conditions beyond the classroom.

This responsiveness, of course, is much more difficult to enact than it is to imagine. To enact that responsiveness, we turn to our second call: constructivist assessment models that serve as both tools of evaluation and look to enact positive change (e.g., Chen, 2015; Guba & Lincoln, 1989, 2001; Yarbrough et al., 2011). Too often, as Guba and Lincoln point out in their influential monograph *Fourth Generation Evaluation* (1989), assessment unconsciously reinforces attitudes that render students passive, inert, and disengaged from the lesson. As learning is constructed by humans and between humans, and for the benefit of improving human relations and conditions, Guba and Lincoln articulate a framework for evaluation that works to empower all individuals—“stakeholders” in their nomenclature. We recommend attempting to develop evaluation schemas that Guba and Lincoln as well as Chen propose to ensure that evaluation consists of a series of negotiations or interactions between individuals representing different perspectives and positions of power—in our case, students, faculty, staff, and members of the community. While there is no requirement that consensus emerge in evaluation, in the interplay of positionality Guba and Lincoln propose “authenticity” as an additional criterion for an evaluand’s success beyond traditional models of validity. For constructivists like Guba and Lincoln, authenticity is context-dependent, multi-perspectival, and empowering to all. We have come to see authenticity as a necessary component in program-level assessment that can help programs like ours achieve institutional critique. A brief examination of the constructivist concept of authenticity will help underscore this potential, as well as point the way forward.

Guba and Lincoln (1989) proposed to add “authenticity” criteria (pp. 245-250) to augment—and perhaps to ultimately replace—traditional notions of validity, transferability, or objectivity in a given evaluand. As detailed in their more recent “Guidelines and Checklist for Constructivist (a.k.a. Fourth Generation) Evaluation” (2001), assessment as a dialectical negotiation recognizes power differentials explicitly and preserves the authenticity of context through a nine-step evaluation process:

1. Identify stakeholders
2. Elicit constructions/viewpoints
3. Provide a method for interaction/dialectic
4. Generate consensus where possible
5. Help negotiation where possible
6. Collect information and document
7. Establish a forum for disagreement

8. Develop a report
9. Recycle and repeat to build upon growing consensus (p. 3).

This approach to evaluation is noticeably social, involving a range of individuals and roles throughout. In fact, only one of the nine stages (step eight) could reasonably be attempted by a sole actor. Authentic evaluation underscores the importance of interaction in assessment, and ensures each of the actors is critically empowered. In addition to the aptly termed “fairness” requirement, authenticity should be “ontological,” or mutually transformative; “educative,” or mutually informative; “catalytic,” or mutually stimulative; and “tactical,” or mutually empowering (Guba & Lincoln, 2001, p. 7). As faculty, we are accustomed to designing *lessons* to accomplish these aims, confident in the knowledge that learning requires openness and mutuality. Assessment and evaluation, though—whether of students or of projects or lessons—often trigger a very different process. Constructivist assessment is tough, because it takes time and space; it is difficult to implement. Indeed, Chen’s (2010, 2015) model of bottom-up integrative validity addresses much of Guba and Lincoln’s critique of traditional notions of validity while still working in these more recognizable frameworks. Rather than rejecting scientific validity outright, Chen offers “viable validity” as a first test of an evaluation’s real-world efficacy and effectiveness. This viable validity concept is very much akin to Guba and Lincoln’s catalytic and tactical authenticity measures, yet it sits more comfortably in traditional evaluation frameworks, thereby appealing to both academic and practical stakeholders. Additionally, the messiness in Guba and Lincoln’s framework can empower students as co-evaluators, encouraging them to use evaluation as a critical tool beyond the class. Indeed, Inoue (2015) applies a version of Guba and Lincoln’s process in the negotiated classroom assessment model he describes in *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies*. While our study did not embrace constructivist assessment in its design, as we discuss in our analysis and conclusion sections below, we plan to anchor our project’s revision in both Guba and Lincoln’s and Chen’s frameworks in order to more fully empower students.

After Ferguson and the on-campus protests, we looked to explore our teaching’s ability to disrupt the habitus of our students, ourselves, and the larger institution. In doing so, we sought to assess institutional climate indirectly through the writing classroom. We think the problems we faced, and continue to face, are shared by many institutions that resemble our public university in the leafy suburbs of Philadelphia. We think that our response to these challenges, while not a rousing success, aligns with the critical race turn by pushing the work of writing assessment to more consciously adopt notions of white habitus put forth by Hahn and constructivist assessment models offered by Guba and Lincoln as well as Chen.

## INSTITUTIONAL CRITIQUE OF WCU'S DIVERSITY ASSESSMENT & CAMPUS "CLIMATE"

Here at our institution, one important place to begin mapping the production of whitely beliefs is with our general education student diversity outcome: students should "be able to respond thoughtfully to diversity" (Curriculum and Academic Policies Council, 2012). Note how the white habitus is centered here in framing diversity as an external thing to ambiguously "respond thoughtfully to." Note too how this goal is rooted in a multicultural paradigm that scrubs diversity of any relationship to power. With such a diffuse goal in a suffix-driven General Education program that prioritizes student choice, it's small wonder that the goal has relatively few advocates within the classroom. Some faculty resent the goal itself as curricular bloat; many others are appalled at the goal's lack of ambition. Students resent any ethical remediation and sense institutional confusion in the curriculum. What's more, it is much easier to require this fuzzy aspirational goal of students than it is to assess any student's—and thereby the institution's—ability to attain this goal.<sup>4</sup> As a result, there is both a high-degree of dissatisfaction with the goal and a persistent impression that the goal is not being adequately met. Rather than challenging the decontextualized multiculturalism or the implicit white habitus of the outcome, though, a recent institution-wide effort to establish methods of assessing courses' ability to meet the diversity outcome resulted in only one clear directive: the need to develop a new rubric for measuring diversity education.

Against this backdrop, the First-Year Writing (FYW) program developed its own stronger goal for addressing diversity in writing courses. In 2012, the FYW committee mandated that upon completing the program, student portfolios should contain writing that "acknowledges structural inequality, either through content or style" and should convey "a perception that ideology influences social structures" (WCU FYW Committee, 2012). Yet our program has found it vexingly difficult to implement this goal in all sections, and even harder to assess. The emergence of #BlackLivesMatter and the student activism on campus opened a kairotic opportunity to enact these goals more deeply in our program.

The white habitus is not only inscribed into our diversity outcomes and curricular structure. It also pervades our location in the suburbs of Philadelphia. Our campus, West Chester University, is a member of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE), a 14-institution system of state colleges and universities that has accessible education for residents of the Commonwealth literally inscribed into its founding mission; no college in the state

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<sup>4</sup> We should note that diversity goals are notoriously tough to assess (Boatright-Horowitz et al., 2012; Case, 2007; Kulik et al., 2008).

offers degrees for lower tuition than these fourteen sister schools. As the largest and best-resourced of these 14—and the only one located within a metropolitan area—WCU enjoys the benefits of what Kynard (2015) might call an “historical accident” that produces apparent diversity as measured by retention and graduation. Students do not ordinarily transfer from a cheaper school to a more expensive institution, as demonstrated by WCU’s retention rates of first-year students currently at 87.9% for all students, according to 2015 data (WCU Office of Institutional Research, 2015). The retention rate for first-semester African American students is similar, at 81.9%. These are enviable numbers for many institutions nationwide, but they may not reveal much locally beyond the relative bargain represented by tuition at WCU. Graduation rates suggest the data mask a larger issue. WCU graduates the majority of white students within four years at a rate of 51.6%; by the fifth year, graduation rates rise to 70.5% for white students. On the other hand, WCU graduates its African American students at much lower rates: 24.6% in four years and 46.8% in five years (WCU Office of Institutional Research, 2015). Using the disparate impact analysis method suggested by Poe and her colleagues (2014), there is powerful evidence of *something* impacting African American students that causes another year of tuition and study. Although more qualitative data is needed to support stronger interpretations, at first pass there is a suggestion that student retention does not readily correlate with equivalent opportunities to succeed.

As the campus response to Ferguson would demonstrate, these data reflect not the typical challenges of recruitment and retention, but rather the more significant (but less visible) issues of campus climate. Overly vague implementation of diversity outcomes are but “a local manifestation of more general social relations” (Porter et al., 2000, p. 621), suggestive of an institutional white habitus. A more robust, activist-oriented diversity outcome—alongside an ethically responsive assessment program—may, as we argue below, begin to address the impact of white habitus on campus climate.

For students, campus climate is neither hegemonic nor unitary; many have not yet internalized the institution’s resistance to change. A student flyer from November 2014 underscores this hope: “from one student to another I believe [we] could help further change the climate” (Anonymous flyer). The flyer projects the belief that students can produce a wholly different *climate for themselves*. As the movement grew beyond an ad-hoc group of protesters, students began to notice “a divide not only within the multicultural community, but also between the students of color and the students not of color” (Anonymous flyer). Students recognized quickly that the struggle to influence campus climate was both *about* race and *beyond* race itself. The move beyond visibility to action and interaction is reflected by the students’ choice in Fall 2014 to declare themselves the Black

Friday Coalition (BFC), “students who care about the well-being of their fellow African American peers [coming] together to help them have a voice and advocate for change in the racial climate at West Chester University” (BFC Facebook Public Group Description). Of note here is the BFC’s use of “climate” in their call for action, which appropriates the institution’s use of the term and reveals the terrain of contest as a semiotic system of material realities and experiences of black students (Porter et al., 2000, p. 625).

The contingency of diversity as a tool to affect or sustain a positive campus environment can be seen in events on our campus, and campuses nationwide, responding to #BlackLivesMatter. At WCU, students worked in what Sibley (1996) refers to as “zones of ambiguity” (p. 33), or under-disciplined spaces on campus, to coordinate public action that included die-ins, rallies, marches, and daily silence on the campus quad. These sustained activities—wherein students and faculty placed their bodies in various locations on campus—forced “a simple spatial reordering” and represented “a micropolitical and rhetorical use of space” that constituted “effective political action” (Porter et al., 2000, p. 630). In altering the physical space of the campus, students effectively disrupted the regularized patterns of white habitus. Since habitus serves as a background support for a host of social knowledges (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Bourdieu, 1986; Hahn, 2014), its disruption can be terrifying. Even as the spaces of the campus were being consciously disrupted by black bodies, a number of anti-black sentiments emerged. In the contested physical space of the campus, signs and posters were defaced, overwritten, or ripped down. Sibley (1996) describes the encounter with spatial disruption as “a source of anxiety. It is a zone of abjection, one which should be eliminated in order to reduce anxiety” (p. 33). White habitus creates, for its bearers, a “need of definition and regulation in order to remove the anxiety of the occupier” (Sibley, 1996, p. 34). We witnessed this anxiety as students lost the pose of neutrality and were forced to traverse zones of ambiguity on campus each day.

The use of space to discipline race and create order is a significant component of white habitus in institutions like WCU. This order can be threatened physically or in virtual space, and the anxiety of disorder can manifest just as easily on campus as on Facebook or anonymous forums (e.g., Yik Yak). In the use of space as a technology to order and rank conflict, Sibley is not alone in finding a preoccupation with exclusionary zones; other researchers have connected these neat architectural spaces to the separation of self from other (Graham & Marvin, 2001; Massey, 2005; Perin, 1977; Sennett, 1992). The spectacle of hundreds of black protesters and allies disrupting the campus’ neat lines and manicured lawns threatened the pretense of “order, conformity, and social homogeneity” (Sibley, 1996, pp. 38-39). The disruption of space is, as we know, the disruption

of habitus and its unconscious and conscious ideologies. If the discursive spaces of hallways witnessed racist graffiti and defacement, the administration's anxiety at this disruption reveals a deeply embedded habitus. Our institution, like many others, struggled to respond to the movement, deferring in hopes of avoiding the conflict. This conflict of space and ideology, of deferral and silence, provides the context for our lesson study.

## **DESCRIPTIVE CASE STUDY: LESSON STUDY AT WCU**

Our group's approach to lesson study aligns with what Hutchings (2011) sees as the method's ability to bring "faculty together to exchange ideas and to collaborate on matters of instructional design and classroom practice in ways that make a difference" (ix). Channeling the moment in December 2014 before winter break and in the midst of campus responses and reactions to #BlackLivesMatter, our group hoped that lesson study could serve "to actually enact the practice[s] it hopes for" (Porter et al., 2000, p. 628) by using the study as a mechanism to achieve the writing program's goals that by itself it has no agency to enact. Our group identified ambitions for the project:

1. to improve teaching effectiveness in the diffuse area of general-education diversity outcomes;
2. to connect with each other and with students, to build a coherent and responsive curriculum;
3. to support and extend the activist moment our campus was experiencing; and
4. to highlight some of the gains being made through institutional critique and make them permanent.

Our group thought that lesson study was the perfect avenue for these ambitions, with its dual focus on revealing pathways of learning and activating mechanisms of reflection.

Lesson study is a recursive process for lesson development that places specific focus on student learning. Cerbin (2011) offers that the goal of "a lesson study is to put a lesson under a microscope, to carefully analyze how students learn from our teaching and then use that knowledge to improve future performance—ours and theirs" (p. 2). Faculty study a lesson in order to assess its effectiveness and improve its ability to achieve its desired outcomes. As a collaborative process, lesson study orients instructors toward students and the practice of teaching.

Lesson study contains both a research lesson—which itself is revised—and a study designed for reflective and systematic analysis of the lesson observations. The lesson study cycle contains eight recursive steps. It begins (Step One) with

participating instructors' development of learning goals and identification of a focus for the lesson. Next, (Step Two) a lesson is developed to address the learning goals, along with (Step Three) a study design to measure the effectiveness of the lesson. Both the lesson and the study design are reviewed and revised, then (Step Four) a team member teaches the lesson while "other group members attend the class to observe and collect evidence of student learning, thinking, and engagement" (Cerbin, 2011, p. 15). The group members focus on collecting observations that document *student* behavior as a response, not instructor behavior. After the lesson is presented, (Step Five) instructors and observers meet to share "their observations, interpretations, and comments on the lesson" (Cerbin, 2011, p. 17). Cerbin notes that the meeting "should focus on the lesson (not the teacher) and analyzing what, how, and why students learned or did not learn from the experience" (2011, p. 17). The group rethinks the lesson and (Step Six) proposes revisions, which are implemented in the next iteration of the lesson. Then, in the second cycle (Step Seven), that revised lesson is offered by a second member of the group while other members again conduct observations according to the study design (Steps Four–Six). This process is repeated until the study is complete; along the way, (Step Eight) the entire process is transparently documented and catalogued.

Lesson study operates in the material and conceptual space located between classrooms and institutional mandates, providing overt mechanisms for evaluating the connections between classroom practices and learning outcomes. Because of its intentionally active, reflective, recursive processes, we view lesson study as a form of institutional critique, well-suited to antiracist writing assessment when it is paired with a lesson focused on social justice. Lesson Study also provided, for our teaching group at the end of 2014, a way to engage more directly in the struggle for a better campus climate, an issue at the heart of our campus student movement.

We also were well aware that the study fundamentally alters the role of the teacher as leader of a class. Quite consciously, the study prioritizes observing the actions of students rather than instructors, asking instructors to alter their strategies based on observed student affective and written responses. As we will offer in more detail below, our study design asked observers to note students' actions, students' interest and engagement, students' interactions with each other, and students' language. Here, the study works to disrupt the material and conceptual space of classroom lessons and classroom observations. Instead of visiting a classroom to assess teaching competence, we visited to measure the responses of students. Observation is a routine part of our department, but ordinarily we are "institutional representatives" (Porter et al., 2000, p. 611) with the administration as audience. Here, lesson study reframes officialdom into a *learning obser-*

*vation*, situating us to “improve the conditions of those affected by and served by institutions” by shifting the focus to student learning (Porter et al., 2000, p. 611). The bodily practice may appear the same, but resetting the rhetorical frame shifts the *activity* toward institutional critique. As the results section below shows, many of our goals were unaddressed. However, despite any failure, lesson study revealed new spaces to integrate more critical assessment practices into our FYW program, especially when more explicitly paired with fourth-generation negotiated evaluation practices that involve students more fully in the lesson’s design and evaluation.

## THE STUDY LESSON ON PRIVILEGE

At the start of our lesson study project, we identified the learning problem as students’ resistance and cynicism to discussions about race and social privilege. Our pilot lesson adopted the following goals: students will be able to recognize the value of an attention to race, will begin to see how race influences the way we think, and can recognize white privilege and their connection to it. Here we were attentive to Cerbin’s (2011) suggestion to use “backward design to plan the lesson” (p. 13). For the study, we worked as a team to plan a single lesson, supported by a prefatory at-home reading assignment and writing assignment. Following Cerbin’s (2011) suggestion that the research lesson plan “should describe fully the sequence of lesson activities, the material the teacher will use in the class, the teacher’s questions, and even possible responses to students’ questions” (p. 13), we developed our privilege lesson in four steps: (1) an initial activity, (2) a homework activity of reading and reflective writing, (3) a group discussion in class, and (4) reflective writing at the end of the lesson. This entire sequence of events transpired across two class sessions. To allow for assessment, we designed steps two and four of these moments to provide collectible data that would facilitate assessment of students’ pre- and post-discussion writing. Within faculty cohorts, we overviewed methods for collecting data to support the lesson study and the research plan: preserving artifacts of student writing, noting formal and informal conversations during the lessons, and recording observable behavior during the lesson observation in step four. Each cohort was charged with adhering to the study design, while also free to revise any and all aspects of the initial lesson in order to achieve the goals of the study.

After asking for and receiving informed consent from all participants, the lesson study commenced with an in-class activity at the end of the class period preceding the observed lesson. We chose a “wastebasket” activity about social privilege that had been making the rounds on the internet. Originally



attributed to an unnamed “high school teacher” (Pyle, 2014), the activity asks students to crumple a piece of paper at their desks. The teacher places a bin at the front of the room and announces that everyone in the class has the opportunity to achieve great wealth and live in the upper class. Students *only* have to shoot their paper ball into the bin, without leaving their desks, to win. We hoped that the inherent unfairness of the activity would expose the various privileges we all experience daily. Our protocols asked instructors to end class with the wastebasket activity and avoid discussion until the following class.

As homework, students were assigned to read Gina Crosley-Corcoran’s “Explaining White Privilege to a Broke White Person” (2013). Originally a blog post on *Feminist Breeder* before going viral and appearing in *Huffington Post* and other content aggregators, the article overviews notions of racial privilege for an imagined white audience that considers itself relatively removed from the taint of racist attitudes. Students were asked to read the article then compose a response structured by questions that asked them to engage with privilege. Following Cerbin’s (2011) suggestion that lessons be designed with “cognitive empathy” and that designers “take on the perspective of the student” (p. 13), we hoped these activities would provide students an opportunity and framework for reflection, extend the insight of the inequitable wastebasket activity, and provide the grist for class discussion during the study lesson in the next class meeting.

On the day of the lesson, students would check-in with informed consent or be excused should they not wish to participate. The initial lesson plan called for instructors to open class by briefly reminding students about the focus for the day and introducing the observers. There were two observers for each delivery of the lesson. At the lesson’s beginning, instructors modeled a recognition of their own privilege, helping students express a detailed recognition of privilege that we’d identified as a learning goal. Next, students were asked to organize into small groups for discussions that paired interpretation of the reading assignment with synthesis of the reading’s goals through their own lives and experiences. Students were asked to document their discussion through a tasked note taker, and the study collected these artifacts of student learning. Moving into a large group report-back, instructors placed different group reports into contact with each other to facilitate exchange and empathy across the class. The lesson moved to an open discussion, allowing consideration of new ideas, before finishing with an in-class reflective writing assignment that asked students to synthesize the lesson and provide feedback on the lesson and its delivery. All written artifacts would be collected at the end of class.

After the lesson, the project asked instructor and observers to meet and analyze the lesson’s effectiveness (Step Five), and (Step Six) share notes and revise

the lesson as needed based on observations and analyses of student writing.<sup>5</sup> The study protocol asked the team to switch roles twice, with each member delivering a lesson and serving as observer twice (Step Seven). Along the way, we asked for cohorts to retain written artifacts from students and observers' notes and documentation. With five groups of three instructor-observers, we hoped that our study would produce five distinct effective lessons on social privilege that could be used within any of our general education writing classrooms at WCU.

## STUDY DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION

The research lesson and plan for the study were developed during December and January 2014–2015. We designed a project that would meet the intellectual aims of lesson study, meet the procedural requirements of the IRB, meet the local exigencies of support for student engagement and activism in #BLM, and meet our disciplinary duties to provide critical assessment data for diversity education across the curriculum. Of course, the study balances these competing needs to varying degrees of success. As a *lesson study* research project, we designed our protocols around the structures of a single class meeting, with a focus on repeatable lesson delivery and observable phenomena to indicate learning in students. This limit allowed our lesson to quickly hone in on unconscious instructor behaviors and hidden student responses, revising the lesson to better meet the needs of the students and faculty. The research study acknowledges, however, that this focus on the lesson as a series of granular acts comes at the expense of longitudinal study of the process of learning; such a longitudinal study is needed, we acknowledge, but remains beyond the purview of this project. Methodologically, we chose early on to avoid tracking individual student artifacts, a decision that made IRB compliance much easier but cost us the ability to measure changes across the pre-lesson and post-lesson artifacts for individual students. The lesson met its initial aim of providing support for student activists and protests in support of BLM; of the nearly 70 English faculty members we solicited to participate in the project, 15 instructors actively joined the lesson study (and upwards of 30 initially voiced their support). Based on teaching schedule and availability to observe other colleagues teach the lesson, the 15

5 Here we diverged from Cerbin's prescription. While he suggests conducting one study lesson in a semester, we attempted to run through three cycles of the lesson study in that time. As we move forward, we—and hopefully others who reflect on the work in this chapter—will especially note Porter and his colleagues' assessment of institutional resistance: "Institutions change slowly, and the results of a given project—and here we mean both the results of a researcher's interactions during a study as well as results seen as publication—may not be visible for some time" (2000, p. 625).

instructors were grouped into five cohorts of three members each. Six faculty collaborated to develop the initial research lesson, while the research study was designed and coordinated by the three of us. We sought and obtained IRB approval for the lesson study under the category of exempt research on educational practice in ordinary educational settings.

The enthusiasm for the project proved difficult to sustain across the multiple revisions, reflections, and observations required of the study. Of the five initial cohorts, only two cohorts completed the full study cycle of one lesson and two revision opportunities per member. While the lesson study generated abundant data reflecting students and faculty responding to race, privilege, and diversity in the writing classroom—reflecting the learning goals “students will be able to recognize the value of an attention to race, will begin to see how race influences the way we think, and can recognize white privilege and their connection to it”—for the research study and publication we agreed to only analyze and report data from cohorts that fully completed the cycle. Our dataset includes materials from six sections for a total of 150 students, five instructors, and four distinct lessons. We received informed consent and writing artifacts from 102 student participants, for a participation rate of 68% (Table 8.1). Due to differences in lesson revision (cohorts were free to alter the lesson) and the parameters of ethical writing research (students were eligible to participate without submitting any artifacts for analysis, or could submit only in-class artifacts), our dataset includes 66 short individual responses from the pre-lesson homework reflection (HW) and 102 post-lesson written reflections (WR).

After the conclusion of the study, we coded artifacts for theme and type, following Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) method of grounded theory and allowing themes to emerge from materials being studied (see also Charmaz, 2006). We built four categories to analyze the artifacts: (1) opposition to or *rejection* of the learning outcomes on concepts of race and privilege; (2) *awareness* of the learning outcomes on concepts of race and privilege; (3) *confusion* regarding the learning outcomes on concepts of race and privilege; and (4) an *activist* orientation toward using the learning outcomes to promote and effect change in the world (see “Categories,” Table 8.3). After discarding artifacts in the dataset from students without informed consent, we removed names and other personal information from the dataset and coded each artifact by two individuals, using a third coder as needed. We analyzed pre- and post-lesson data to assess lesson effectiveness, but the research study’s principled adherence to anonymity and inclusiveness (we allowed passive participation, and so could not assure that each student submitted one and only one artifact) prevents a more granular approach that might allow us to track individual results more effectively.

## RESULTS AND QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF DATA

Results from artifacts written before students attended the lesson on race and privilege suggest that students were widely acculturated to rhetorics of race and privilege, and largely unmotivated to using this habitus as a tool for critical engagement or action (Table 8.1). In the 66 pre-lesson Homework Writing artifacts (HW), 59 artifacts (83.4%) expressed a vague or general awareness of issues of privilege and race. Six artifacts (9.1%) expressed a sense of confusion around issues of race or privilege. One artifact (1.5%) expressed a rejection of issues of race and privilege. No artifact expressed any sense of commitment to action or willingness to explore potential activities to address issues of race or privilege.

**Table 8.1. Variables of student responses from pre- and post-lesson artifacts**

Response Themes	Pre-Lesson		Post-Lesson	
	N	(%)	N	(%)
Awareness	59	89.4	77	75.5
Confusion	6	9.1	13	12.7
Rejection	1	1.5	2	2
Activism	0	0	10	9.8
Total	66	100	102	100

Instructor cohorts read post-lesson artifacts during the lesson revision process, but to avoid confirmation bias the team of researchers waited until the lesson study was complete to code the artifacts. As Table 8.1 above shows, in 102 post-lesson artifacts, 77 artifacts (75.5%) expressed a general awareness of issues of privilege and race. Thirteen artifacts (12.7%) expressed a sense of confusion around issues of race or privilege. Two artifacts (2%) expressed a rejection of issues of race and privilege. Ten artifacts (9.8%) expressed a sense of commitment to action or willingness to explore potential activities to address issues of race or privilege. These results largely confirm our expectations going into the project, which predicted that students would use the lesson to move away from confusion and rejection and toward awareness and activism.

The data suggest a significant discrepancy between the pre-and post-lesson groups on the theme of awareness, but the dataset remains too small for granular inferential analysis. Based on our experiences in delivering the lesson and observing student participation, we created four variables to describe students' artifacts and predicted the following presence of these variables: awareness =

65%; confusion = 20%; rejection = 5%; activism = 10%. As Table 8.1 shows, it appears that our coding experiences approximated what actually occurred in the response theme of awareness; however, our coding experiences in the variables of confusion, rejection, and activism were not aligned with the themes that appeared in student writing artifacts. Our initial response to the data was to suggest some lack of fit necessitating a growth in categories; further statistical analysis demonstrates this more fully. Table 8.2, below, uses a null hypothesis to assess the significance of the lesson as a contributing factor in the occurrence of variables; due to the sample size, *chi square* values are computed for only the variable of awareness.

**Table 8.2. Chi-square analysis of lesson significance by variable**

Response Themes	Pre-Lesson (n=66)		Post-Lesson (n=102)		$\chi^2 / p$
	Expected	Observed	Expected	Observed	
Awareness	44	59	77	91	403.596 $p < .01$
Confusion	13.	6	13	9	
Rejection	3.	1	2	2	
Activism	7	0	10	0	

Our study used pre-lesson student artifact percentages to construct a null hypothesis for the lessons, in this case arguing that the lesson had *no* effect on student behavior and post-lesson data reflects either random clustering or attitudes held prior to the lesson. If the lesson were not impactful, we would expect similar variable numbers post-lesson. The null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) predictions are reported in Table 8.2 above.<sup>6</sup> Using a test of statistically significant difference ( $\chi^2$  (2, n=102) = 103.73,  $p < .01$ ), we can reliably reject the null hypothesis that the lesson delivered had no effect on student responses distributions, and thereby infer a relationship between the lesson and the student artifacts differences. Although the results may not conform exactly to our expectations, especially in the levels of activism we were able to instigate through the readings and discussions, the results nevertheless suggest the potential impact of race-conscious writing pedagogy.

In general, the data reflect students engaging with issues of race and privilege to structure writing artifacts that express an awareness of the issues (75%). While this produces for students a much less desirable outcome than student activism, this development is directly consistent with the study's learning goals—*students will be able to recognize the value of an attention to race, will*

6 Pre-lesson data is analyzed to derive a percentage for each theme, then multiplied by the number of responses in the post-lesson dataset.

*begin to see how race influences the way we think, and can recognize white privilege and their connection to it.* The relative ease with which our study met this desired goal—almost 90% of students expressed this learning outcome *before* the lesson—underscores the frustrating futility of awareness-based diversity learning outcomes. While we felt relieved at the relatively low rate of resistance expressed (1.5% pre-lesson, 2% post-lesson), we were extremely disappointed in low levels of activism throughout the study (0% pre-lesson, 10% post-lesson). With only 10% of students expressing a desire to take action, even when directly prompted by questions in class, we viewed the lesson study as a missed opportunity for supporting and extending the work of the BFC and other student groups. These data reflect an impotency inherent in our classroom-based study: by remaining within the boundaries of the classroom, we were unable to significantly catalyze efforts beyond that space, leaving students with either awareness or confusion.

Frustratingly, the data suggest a marked uptick in the level of confusion in our students: from 9.1% to 12.7%, a nearly 30% growth rate occasioned by the lesson. One interpretation might attribute that growth in confusion to the cognitive dissonance inherent in disruptions of white habitus. As we argue above, the desire for order is a powerful instrument of habitus, and the disruption of that order can be a terrifying process. Even after the lesson, 75% of student artifacts offer awareness as an appropriate response to racism, signaling the work we might have done in connecting thought to action.

Our team's response to the relatively high number of artifacts within the variable "Awareness" (89% pre-lesson, 75% post-lesson) was to subdivide awareness to reflect the potential for widely different attitudes from the student-writers shown in Table 8.3. Our results sub-divide this tricky category to identify these attitudes: (a) awareness as an end; (b) thankfulness; (c) critique of society without any suggested action; (d) charity or a desire to help those less fortunate; (e) an increased sensitivity to others; (f) feelings of *carpe diem*, or an awareness of privilege as a gift that one must take advantage of; (g) guilt about oneself; and (h) resignation that the situation as unchangeable. For both pre-lesson and post-lesson data, we allowed artifacts to have multiple themes present, and used a third coder when necessary.

The data in Table 8.3 indicate one immediate effect of the lesson was to transform expressions of awareness as an end-in-itself (reduced from 71% to 36%) into other more concrete areas: thanksgiving (10%), charity towards others (23%), sensitivity (21%), and *carpe diem* (10%). Without follow-up interviews to confirm the facets, however, we have a relatively low confidence in their ability to accurately reflect underlying student attitudes; this remains an area of future research.

**Table 8.3. Facets of awareness**

Topic	Pre-Lesson		Post-Lesson	
	n	%	n	%
Awareness as end	42	71%	28	36%
Thanksgiving	1	2%	8	10%
Critique w/o action	14	24%	6	8%
Charity	0	0%	18	23%
Sensitivity	4	7%	16	21%
Carpe Diem	0	0%	8	10%
Guilt	0	0%	6	8%
Resignation	1	2%	3	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>100%</b>

If our goal was to produce student activists, then the lesson study is a categorical failure; while 10% of our student artifacts express a desire to work for change, an equal number seem confused *by the lesson itself*. In short, instead of opening a space for critique that uses action to produce change, the lesson study seemed to reify our students' identities as students. However, we are aware that the proposition of institutional critique "also suggest[s] that we be more patient in judging the effects of research practices and publications" (Porter et al., 2000, p. 628). In addressing these misgivings, we have come to realize the importance of constructive methods of assessment as better able to reflect and produce change within all stakeholders (Chen, 2015; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Using more qualitative data, we will document the successes and failures we encountered in order to propose a more detailed way forward.

## QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS: THE PRODUCTIVITY OF UNRESOLVED CONFUSION

Even as we collected the data reflecting students' engagement in meaningful discussions about race and privilege, we recursively revised the lesson to try and light a fire, to get students to move from *thinking* to *doing*. As the data reveals, though, students were far more willing to express *awareness* than *activism*. Our analysis reveals the breadth of attitudes contained within expressions of awareness. For example, one student wrote:

I acknowledge that I have had it much easier than other ethnicities. I have never been objectified because of my race.

I have never really noticed that most people I come into contact with are the same race that I am. (Student SP, pre-lesson)

The artifact hints that this student has already incorporated insights from the Crosley-Corcoran reading into their understanding of privilege. Some students expressed an awareness of intersectional forms of social privilege:

I've also seen that there is privilege along with being straight . . . Being a man has privilege. Lack of fear, higher pay, respect in the workplace, but men don't see it as a privilege it is just who they are. I also see privilege in race. There is still a divide, no matter how much we want to cover it up, between races. (Student DY, pre-lesson)

This student's response reveals an awareness of social privilege evidenced as both absence ("lack of fear") and tangible material advantages ("higher pay"). At the same time, though, some artifacts indicate a diminishing of the importance of race:

[R]ace and color are not always determinates of privilege. Privilege primarily means that some people just work much harder to live through things and that some people may not have the opportunity to get to live those actions because of how they were brought into this world. (Student LS, pre-lesson)

This response troubled us. Even as this student reduces the importance of race in the determination of social advantage, they indicate that circumstance of birth is a factor in determining social privilege. For many of our students, the accident of our reading materials would forever conjoin notions of privilege with the concept of work. The artifact quoted above contains an implicit nod to exceptionalism as a means to counter social privilege, more or less deflecting the trajectory of our lesson. As is clear now, within the over-broad category of awareness is a host of responses to race and privilege. Just as clearly, these responses indicate that awareness is a dangerous learning outcome for race-conscious writing assessment, since awareness can easily serve to reinforce white habitus and reduce students' ability to understand themselves as agents of change.

The post-lesson data suggests expressions of awareness might be even more complex than the pre-lesson data hints. The data are tough to interpret, since it is at least possible that students are seeking to prove their knowledge for the instructor. The statistically significant reduction in the theme of awareness (Table 8.2, above), along with the proliferation of categories of awareness (Table 8.3, above), suggests an engagement with complex theoretical work in student



responses. As we noted above and discuss below, the increase in confusion may reveal a meaningful encounter with disruptions to the habitus, allowing us to correlate increases in confusion with increases in activism. Without more refined data—especially the ability to track an individual student’s progression, or conduct follow-up interviews where students clarify their own words—we are left to conjecture.

## CONFUSION

At first blush, the increase in confusion following the lesson (from 9% pre-lesson to 13% post-lesson) seems to contradict the efficacy of our lesson on race. We interpreted the pre-writing responses of six students (9%) as exhibiting confusion about the concept of social privilege. At times this confusion surfaces as the beginning of opposition; at others, confusion evokes a genuine perplexity. For example, one student offers that, “It’s hard to see how a poor woman can have advantages in life just because she’s a U.S. citizen and she’s white” (Student 11A). Intersectionality challenges this student’s self-conception, and one can imagine the next move being summative: being poor, for this student, outweighs any advantage of citizenship or race. Rather than resist, though, this student continues between accepting and resisting. “I don’t know what to do with these privileges since I’m not fully aware of my advantages” (Student 11A). As we interpreted the results of our study, though, we came to see confusion as a productive space for writing classes and writing students. Like the frustrating torpor of Socrates in Plato’s *Meno*, confusion can become a valuable place for students to work out just *what to do*. In this way, confusion is clearly a much more productive space than an awareness that privilege “is all about hard work, perseverance, and luck” (Student 6B). One entry point to confusion is the material’s challenge to meritocracy. Students struggle to navigate this challenge:

I agree that in some cases being born into a privileged family can help, but at the same time people who work hard can overcome their birthplace. If you are lazy and rich you are much less likely to succeed than someone who is hard working and poor. (Student 11C)

While this student formally acknowledges socioeconomic status as one basis of privilege, they later undercut that with the myth of work, a key component of the meritocratic foundation of white habitus.

After the lesson, 13 artifacts (12.75%) evidenced students’ confusion about social privilege as students struggle to assimilate the lesson in the least disruptive way possible. For example, one student offers, “The idea that is unclear to

me is the fact that we all have the same opportunity. I don't understand what that means if we all come from completely different places" (Student Reflection 28C). This student's response places the concept of privilege, recently acquired, into contact with the myth of equal opportunity, concluding that if privilege holds true, there can't really ever be *equal* opportunity. Another student states, "I don't think I understand my own privilege or privilege in general," then later continues "if I have the power to change something for the better, I would" (Student Reflection 4C). Even more than the pre-lesson reading, the class discussion seems to have asked students to make connections between incompatible perspectives. The growth in confusion underscores the very real cognitive dissonance of reconciling privilege to the white habitus.

### ACTIVISM AND REJECTION

Anecdotally, the data suggest that reading essays on race and privilege alone are insufficient to incite the move to activism in students, but conversations and sustained reflection might be much more effective. In addition to the remarkable growth in confusion discussed above, there was an increase in activist sentiments following the lesson's delivery, from 0% to 10%. Undoubtedly, the ability to opt-out of the lesson study likely reduced the number of students rejecting the premises of study itself. Before the lesson, no student evidenced an activist stance in the pre-writing, and only one student rejected privilege: "If people were truly worried about race and being treated with little to no respect, the president would not be African American" (Student 5A). The post-racial logic of this student's response absences race from the root of worry even as it holds up Barack Obama's presidency as evidence of a resolution of racial problems. After the lesson, two students (2%) expressed sentiments of rejection. One student offers:

The most important thing I learned today is next to nothing. I am told that privilege has everything to do with race, gender, sexual orientation, wealth, and so many other factors, when a simple observation of the world we live [sic] shows that that is not true. Can anyone explain to me how Crosley-Corcoran is privileged despite being raised in a terribly poor family? (Student TJ)

This student's honest assessment of the lesson initially engages race and other socially constructed determinants of privilege before making a "simple observation" that actively challenges the materials and the conversations of the study lesson. The connection with the cognitive dissonance of confusion is evident,

but this student moves a step beyond in their reconciliation of the white habitus to the challenge of privilege. While clearly rejecting, this response also contains a ray of hope: the student makes an effort to demonstrate a degree of engagement with the lesson's materials. And resistance that engages, Plato's *Meno* might teach us, can be quite productive. The other post-lesson artifact manages to reject the issues much more thoroughly:

I know successful people who fall into some of the disadvantage [sic] groups I promise they never talk about their disadvantages. Their to [sic] busy over coming them they waste no time making an issue of them. (Student 13C)

The agonism here is much more total, and much less consequential. Silence becomes a virtue, a testament to the need for order and civility at the heart of habitus. And hard work becomes a surrogate for luck and privilege, returning the student to the Lockean dream of equity.

A qualitative investigation of the activist orientation in post-lesson artifacts underscores the potential of lesson study as an element of institutional critique, even as its relatively small proportion (10 students, 9.8%) suggests a missed opportunity. One student offers,

I can use what I learned in this class to spread this awareness to others that take what they have for granted and help them understand not everybody is born with the same advantages in life. I hope with the help of this lesson people will better understand this subject and create a more inclusive environment for everyone. (Student 7B)

This student connects understanding to action in just the way that we'd hoped. Another student underscores this relationship:

This project made me think about what I can do to make a change. I am not 100% sure what it is yet, but it's always going to be in the back of my mind for the rest of my life. (Student 2C)

The need to connect awareness to action is a clear thread amongst the activist students. Another student immediately makes this connection:

We will never get rid of subconscious prejudices, but if we are aware of them we can keep them in check, and that will reduce the effects of institutional prejudice and privilege on a mass scale. (Student 16C)

Even as this student is doubtful that we can ever be rid of individual forms of prejudice, they recognize the relationship between awareness and change in collective practice. The student's use of "we" is also interesting in that it suggests a collective effort that cuts across lines of social identities.

The consistent use of intersectionality to avoid race in preference of class, combined with a too-eager tendency to affirm one's own sagacity, questions the utility of privilege within the lesson study. As McWhorter (2015) reminds us in his provocative critique of teaching white privilege as an end-in-itself, "It's a safe bet that most black people are more interested in there being adequate public transportation from their neighborhood to where they need to work than that white people attend encounter group sessions where they learn how lucky they are to have cars" (para. 28). In short, if the point of education about privilege is *solely* to raise awareness, what good is it? Only a few students report their commitment to work actively for justice (10%). Achieving 75% awareness as a result of the lesson study may achieve the *learning outcome* of the lesson even as it misses our own goal in framing the study: supporting student activists and facilitating institutional critique. Even as the lesson revealed the suitability of privilege as an entry point to discussing race, it also proved to be a poor avenue to social justice activities, either within the campus or in the larger community.

## WRITING ASSESSMENT AND CRITIQUE BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

For us, these frustrating analyses confirmed events on the ground in Spring 2015, as we witnessed decreasing engagement between white students and activists of color in the BFC. In the second semester of protest, fewer white students joined their black peers around campus. Our classroom-based study indirectly documents this reticence, even as it collects self-reports of awareness of race-based privilege. As a strategy for engaging in institutional critique, then, our lesson study of 2015 proved unsuccessful for the critical moment. But in its failure, it succeeds in demonstrating the contours of a white habitus that must be acknowledged in order to produce effective change. We believe our study points forward in true lesson study fashion. By revising the study itself, we believe that institutional critique remains a possibility within antiracist writing assessment.

To quote McWhorter (2015), our Lesson Study "put the laser focus on the awareness raising" and not "to actually changing society" (para. 14). Our choice of reading material provided an intersectional lens for the privilege discussion that allowed students to decouple race and class. After reading the materials on privilege, economic class was more than twice as frequent a focus for students in the pre-lesson artifacts, versus a rather even distribution of race (18), class

(18), and gender (17) in post-lesson artifacts. As we've argued, the emphasis on economic privilege presents an opportunity for the pervasive white habitus to deflect criticism and resist direct confrontation. Students grasped at privilege as a common phenomenon, reporting that everyone is privileged. Rather than engaging students in dismantling structures of oppression, our analysis suggests that the lesson helped them to use class to inoculate themselves from race. Students used intersectional privilege to find commonality on economic hardship. This echoes Trainor's (2008) finding that students in her high school sample consistently minimized difference and emphasized commonality. While commonality is to be valued, we must move beyond privilege discourses no matter how intersectional.

Interestingly, we as teachers and researchers weren't the only ones searching for something more. When asked directly in the reflection writing, most students articulated confusion about what *to do* with new-found information about privilege. One student exclaimed, "I never/don't really think of myself of privileged because of my skin but now after this I do see it and recognize it and it is sad things have to be that way" (Student Reflection 21C). We think this student's stasis represents a significant failing in our lesson: the lack of a clear path forward out of the cognitive dissonance of white habitus. Without that path, the reflection above simultaneously notes raised consciousness and a sense of white supremacy's inevitability. Indeed, it would seem that one clear consciousness raising that occurred in our lesson study is a heightened sense of color consciousness for students, a growing awareness by white students of their own whiteness. If the essence of white habitus is its own invisibility, then framing white privilege *as white* seems to be a critically important step towards critical color consciousness. Despite this newfound consciousness, our lesson study did not help students develop agency. And herein lies the difficulty of assessment in a writing program built around diffuse questions of "diversity" or "critical thinking," as so many of our programs are.

Our impetus to develop lessons and programs centered around social justice issues often obscures hidden assumptions within our own pedagogies; often, the more committed we are to these real-world social justice issues, the more inflexible and incurious we can become about our own pedagogies. As Fox (2002) offers, "we manifest and reproduce whitely ways of being in the world" (p. 203). Hammond's essay in this volume helps to show that throughout our field's history, even our most pedagogically progressive impulses can be dragged down by nativist—or whitely—assumptions (Chapter 1, this collection). Despite our best intentions, we too often project a passivity onto our students in the very act of construction, pre-imagining relatively complacent students responding in relatively predictable ways to the programs we love so much. In our own lesson

study project, for example, our coding scheme located just four avenues—the very rare “reject” model, held by just 1–2% of students; the unimaginative “confused” model, whose membership grew as we conducted the project; the catch-all “awareness” model, which grew to hold almost all of the students; and the holy grail “activist” model, which never had more than a handful of students from across the six sections. Despite our analysis in the preceding section, we suspect that our study reveals, more than anything else, how little agency was afforded students in our model, and by extension is afforded in most classrooms. Students’ confusion about agency mirrors the too-often unexplored side of the dialectic Diab and her colleagues (2013) name between “critique against” and “critique for” in their own efforts to apply institutional critique as a method of antiracist action. Without coordinating, each lesson was unconsciously pitched as a critique *against*, and students’ anxious paralysis reflects the limits of that model in producing action *for*. We’ve learned that we need to pitch the lesson to a place of “critiquing for” the dismantling of white supremacy. As we revise, we think that such a task demands new ways of imagining solidarity, and new ways of *critiquing for* concrete, embodied action. Awareness on its own simply reinforces the white habitus.

As a conclusion, we propose two strategies for future research in order to reach the goals that our project sought but did not achieve. First of all, we suggest that institutional critique requires a transgression of spatial boundaries in order to activate its potential for real, sustained action. And secondly, we suggest that writing assessment must embrace action-oriented evaluation (Chen, 2010, 2015; Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Huebner & Betts, 1999; Lay & Papadapoulis, 2007) in order to ensure that students are not disempowered by the very programs intended to empower them. If that dynamic of disempowered empowerment sounds familiar, it is because you have seen iterations of it traced throughout this book: Hammond’s essay traces it historically (Chapter 1, this collection); both Harms (Chapter 3, this collection) and Gomes (Chapter 6, this collection) trace it in the linguistic imperialism of U.S. colonialism practiced, respectively, abroad and at home. We argue that lesson study, with its process of recursive revision, is a means to implement both institutional critique and action-oriented evaluation.

If each lesson unconsciously shaped itself towards paralysis by building a strong critique *against* privilege, then our lesson study fell short as a catalyst that produces change demanded by institutional critique. Our design imagined the institution as a mere collection of individuals, where each micropolitical struggle attempts to make real, if infinitesimal, alteration in the institution. We are not alone in that design; Porter and his colleagues (2000) demonstrate this vision of the composition classroom is a common trope. Classrooms are powerful spac-

es, and transformative acts occur within their walls and under their aegis. But we must also acknowledge that when we seek to use classroom space to effect students as agents of institutional change, we risk both effective learning and institutional change. If, as institutional critique describes, the classroom is an effective space for “micropolitical action,” then student learning necessarily becomes a tool of resistance (Porter et al., 2000, p. 616). This dynamic is risky because the rhetoric of institutional critique takes *space* as a foundational concern, and the space of the classroom is not the space of the institution—materially or rhetorically. Without an overt focus on rhetoricizing space and inviting students to interrogate the boundaries of seemingly color-blind institutional structures, the classroom risks making institutions and their white habitus “seem monolithic and beyond an individual’s power for change—except in a kind of liberal, trickle-up theory of change that pins political hopes on the enlightened, active individual” (Porter et al., 2000, p. 617). Without explicitly making the institution itself accessible to students as agents, through an overt and critical attention to space, writing classes will never succeed in engaging the institutional fabric of the white habitus that chokes campus climates with color-blind racism.

We must commit to working beyond the walls of our classroom, and beyond the spaces of our program assessments, if we are serious about lighting a fire for our students. We must design and assess critical race pedagogies that use the space of the institution itself to engage students in embodied and rhetorical practices aimed at weakening the taproot of the white habitus—within the hallways, the quad, the student union. For this to occur, we argue that lesson study projects and institutional critiques such as ours must work to engage students *beyond* the space of the classroom itself. We suggest, and hope to implement in our next iteration of the lesson study at WCU, a critical pedagogy that invites students to physically transgress the boundaries of the classroom in order to more effectively engage with and disrupt the myriad spaces of the institution. If our classes can be disrupted by the relatively simple act of recycling bin basketball, then we can begin to imagine the disruptive effects of lessons that locate privilege directly in the physical spaces of the university. We envision asking students, for instance, to ethnographically document the Student Union, the Quad, the Food Court, and other locations on campus as raced spaces. By disrupting and directly engaging with the spaces of the university that organize and mediate race, we see a very real potential to challenge white habitus—that force of behavior orientation that never quite reveals itself directly. And we’re convinced that taking up this large and pressing task is central work for anyone wishing to work in the long-awaited, badly needed, critically raced space of writing assessment.

Just as significant as the need to traverse space in order to expose the institution and its habitus to effective critique, though, is the need to more thoroughly

integrate students as actors throughout the evaluation process, thereby reimagining the critical act of assessment. We argue that writing classes that undertake race-conscious agenda with students as meaningful actors must also undertake modes of assessment—within and beyond the class—that embrace race-conscious agenda with students as meaningful actors. When we as faculty construct classes *without* students as meaningful actors in the assessment of their own learning, we unintentionally create mechanisms of passivity and disengagement. In retrospect, it is clear that we built our lesson study on a relatively naive model of student learning, on a presumption that learning is externally observable, relatively easily distinguished in silent artifacts after the class. This presumption, as Guba and Lincoln (1989) argue, reinforces positivist passivity in students. An exploration of Guba and Lincoln's constructivist evaluation schema suggests that our lesson study project *may* have succeeded more than we first thought—if our original goal of spurring students to begin to think about race as a complex component of campus and community is to be credited—but that our project also suffers from a noticeable lack of authenticity because it didn't seek to fully involve the stakeholders (students) in their own assessment or in the much more important acts of assessing the lesson study research project itself. Faculty framed the study; faculty devised the lesson; faculty evaluated the results. Without authenticity, evaluation can never produce what Guba and Lincoln (1989) term its proper aim: the mutual education of each of the stakeholding individuals involved in the process. Although the study's data is difficult to parse, our anecdotal experience suggests that writing programs without authentic roles for students to shape assessment and interpretation risk students recognizing their status as objects and embracing the all-too-common model of passive engagement. Our project data reflects, we fear, this trend.

In order to avoid this circumstance, we propose that those who wish to take up writing as a critical space in the interplay of race and economies of becoming deliberately engage students in the act of assessment, both locally (assessment of the students themselves) and globally (evaluating lessons, classes, programs, and institutions). In our students' growing confusion (growth of 30% post-lesson) and shifting realignment (within facets of awareness), we see a lack of tactical authenticity, or a recognition that students were not as empowered to define avenues of action as were the faculty who framed the project. In Chen's (2010) language, our lesson approach did not possess student-defined viable validity, and thus didn't catalyze student-led institutional critique. We propose the next iteration of our lesson study project—and, if we are to adopt a constructivist, fourth-generation approach, there must be a repeat—involve students not just as research subjects, but as researchers and evaluators. Only by involving students as real actors, or stakeholders, in each of the project's stages can we ensure that



they are truly empowered and able to act. In the context of the white habitus at our institution, we are already actively seeking to design assessments that measure the extent to which students complicate their own perspectives and build tolerance through ontological and educative authenticity. But just as importantly, we are looking for actionable change. We want to design lessons, classroom environments, and assessments that stimulate institutional action and open vistas of individual agency for making collective change at West Chester, what Chen might call action models (2015) that are built from bottom-up student input and that privilege viable validity. Indeed, if students are more involved in devising action plans that they see as viably practiced across the student body, we might begin to see results with more educative and ontological authenticity. Indeed, perhaps such attempts at tactical authenticity and viable validity ought to be added to the racial validity and disparate impact analyses that Toth calls validation for social justice (Chapter 4, this collection). While the latter metrics seek actively to understand the harm being done by assessment, the former additions ask that we involve students directly in envisioning and implementing harm-reduction strategies as both pedagogy and assessment technology.

Within this case study, then, we see many productive failures and lessons to be learned. We see the way that our project crystallized the presence of white habitus as a foundational component of campus spaces. We see the dangers of intersectionality as a maneuver to avoid sustained conversations of race, substituting class as a less threatening surrogate for race. And most clearly, we see the dangers of assessment as an under-theorized component of even the most carefully planned race-conscious approaches to writing for social justice. We have already initiated the next instantiation of our lesson study project. If that study, as this one, raises as many questions as it answers, we are nonetheless hopeful that its failures will be as instructive as the ones we report here.

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