

## INTRODUCTION.

# THE END OF ISOLATION

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Imagine a college student taking a first-year writing course over the summer. The student is a senior, a single parent, and trying to graduate. It is the student's last required course for graduation. In the reflective letter accompanying the final portfolio, the student writes that she has taken the course four times and that she has had to repeatedly withdrawal because she feared failing. The student describes that fear has accompanied all her college-level writing because of high-stakes assessment practices. The student explains that upon entrance into the college, a timed-writing exam resulted in placement into a developmental writing class, a skills course not offered by the English department but by a remedial division. In that class, failure was commonplace and that sense of failure has followed her throughout her college-writing experiences.

This imagined scenario is not that hard to believe for most writing teachers. But this story is not imagined; it is the story of one of Asao's former students. The student, Cynthia, was a bright and hard-working Asian student, an excellent reader and responder to her peers' drafts. We find it unjust that Cynthia, who described her writing experiences until college as meaningful—a poet, short story writer, and daily journal keeper, whose father was a pastor, a man who worked with words every week—could not find that same passion for language in college.

Cynthia's story could easily be about one student, struggling against institutional writing assessment mandates. But Cynthia's story is not the story of a single student but entire groups of students: non-traditional students, veterans, working-class students, first-generation students, disabled students, multilingual students, and students of color. And that is what makes Cynthia's story one of social injustice, the ways that social systems work against entire groups of people to maintain the unequal distribution of opportunity, wealth, and justice. Social injustice often has no villain, no one person to blame. Instead, social injustice works through seemingly normalized systems—educational systems, health care systems, housing systems, and so on. Because we do not question those systems, social injustice often seems natural. In Cynthia's case, for example, we look to the individual student's writing ability, not the system in which that ability is measured, valued, and distributed. We do not look to the sequence of courses that Cynthia must take, the lack of alignment between course work and assess-

ment, or the ways that the writing program is structured so that teachers do not share information about students who repeat courses; we do not look to institutional markers such as “time to degree” that determine success and failure or institutional economics where students like Cynthia must pay for courses over and over again; and we do not look to gain wisdom from Cynthia herself so that we can make writing instruction and assessment more meaningful. Because we are blind to these considerations, injustice occurs because of the system and its tacit structural injustices. Cynthia’s case is not only typical but is the status quo for many students.

It is for students like Cynthia that we have sought the wisdom of our contributors in *Writing Assessment, Social Justice, and the Advancement of Opportunity* to answer a core question: *How can we ensure that writing assessment leads to the advancement of opportunity?*

As suggested by the title of this collection and our core question, three principles inform this collection. First, we do not limit our understanding of writing assessment to only programmatic or large-scale testing. Writing assessment must also include classroom assessment. Furthermore, we insist that writing assessment must be understood within an ecological framework. Because our metaphors structure our conceptual systems, ecological realities and the rhetorical framework used to describe them are necessary to displace elemental notions of process and product.

Second, we adopt *social justice theory* in order to shift the focus from the potential harm done by writing assessment to a more expansive view of the possibilities of writing assessment. In mapping the history of social justice theory, we find ourselves drawn to the influences of John Rawls’ work in *A Theory of Justice* (1971/1999) and *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (2001) as well as Iris Marion Young’s work in *Responsibility for Justice* (2011).

Third, following legal precedent set through the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (which followed from the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution), we focus on the *advancement of opportunity* in order to identify opportunity structures and actionable outcomes in educational contexts. In our use of the term *opportunity structures*, we follow William A. Gamson and David S. Meyer (1996) in their observation that opportunity balances structure and agency. Opportunity structures, once identified, lead to additional opportunities to learn, a concept demanding articulated connections between writing assessment and the instructional environment. Pamela A. Moss and her colleagues in *Assessment, Equity, and Opportunity to Learn* (2008) have made substantial and enduring contributions in linking assessment, instructional environment, and opportunity to learn—thereby establishing a framework for the creation of opportunity structures in educational contexts. As James Paul

Gee writes in that collection (2008), insistence on opportunity to learn yields the following: universal affordances for action, participation, and learning; assurances to value experiential ranges among students; equal access to relevant technologies that are related to the learning ecology; emphasis on information communication and the communities of practice that manage that information; and emphasis on identity, value, content, and characteristic activities associated with language across academic areas. Emphasis on opportunity to learn, therefore, holds the potential to play an important role in the achievement of social justice in writing assessment.

In connecting writing assessment, social justice theory, and the advancement of opportunity, our collection seeks a restorative milestone in the history of Writing Studies (Phelps & Ackerman, 2010); we reject the historical isolation of assessment scholarship from the social justice orientation of our field (Conference on English Education, 2009; National Council of Teachers of English, 2010). Put as clearly as possible, our vision for the merger of writing assessment, social justice, and the advancement of opportunity is as follows:

As a form of research, writing assessment best serves students when justice is taken as the ultimate aim of assessment; once adopted, that aim advances assessment as a principled way to create individual opportunity through identification of opportunity structures.

In making this three-part connection between practice, theory, and action in the realm of assessment, *Writing Assessment, Social Justice, and the Advancement of Opportunity* complicates received views of U.S. diversity, educational assessment, and educational processes. This particular collection makes interventions in historiographic studies, new applications of fairness and validity, innovative frameworks for outcomes design, and new directions for teacher research and professional development. Collectively, editors and contributors have worked hard to identify bigotry in its intentional and unwitting forms and chart a new future. In that process, as our volume amply demonstrates, we aim to get in the way of injustice.

## **MARILYN STERNGLOSS AND THE REJECTION OF ELEMENTALIST REASONING**

Undertaking this project demanded that we address the elementalist reasoning that often informs the measurement of student learning (Ash, 1998; Boring, 1950). For support in this endeavor, we looked to the literature. The field of Writing Studies is rich with scholarship on the harm perpetuated by unjust as-

essment practices. Researchers such as Marilyn Sternglass (1997), Mike Rose (1989), Ira Shor (1996), Keith Gilyard (2011), and many others all serve as inspirational voices in the need to humanize the role of writing assessment in the lives of our students. Sternglass' study of her writing students at City College, in particular, has been a catalyst for our work because of her attention to the ecological complexity of writing assessment.

In *Time to Know Them: A Longitudinal Study of Writing and Learning at the College Level* (1997), Sternglass followed 53 CUNY undergraduate students in her three first-year writing courses: the lowest level of basic writing; the second level basic writing course; and the single semester first-year writing class. Of those 53 students, 21 were African American, 26 were Latino, four were Asian, and two were white. At the end of six years, Sternglass found that 17 graduated, 10 transferred, 18 dropped out, and eight were still in college. From an assessment point of view, what remains striking about her study is the way that placement and exit tests—whether created by for-profit companies, non-profit organizations, or locally developed academic institutions—have serious detrimental consequences on some students. Those negative consequences of assessment were most likely to be felt on multilingual students whose intersectional identities were also informed by their working-class, immigrant backgrounds as well as their racial identities. Thus, broader social inequalities played out in local assessment practices. Moreover, those assessment practices masked the fact that, according to Sternglass' longitudinal findings, students can and do learn critical literacy over the course of their college years but that development is far from a smooth trajectory.

In reflecting on *Time to Know Them*, Sternglass explained:

Placement and exit exam for composition courses are insidious in providing hazards for students with second-dialect or second-language backgrounds. In the case of the first, the placement exam, the student is confronted with a timed, impromptu test demanding essentially all the components of writing required for entrance into the regular composition course, requirements that are probably not too different from the outcomes required to complete the course. Students who fail to demonstrate such competence are then placed either into basic writing sections or into ESL programs. The instruction in these [basic writing] courses deliberately teaches the students to write drafts and later edit their texts, including the formal conventions of writing. But when these students confront the exit examinations, again timed, impromptu writ-

ing is demanded and no time for editing is available. Thus, the instruction has set the students up for likely failure, when they lack the time to edit their writing. (pp. 206-207)

There are many elementalist rebuttals to Sternglass' claims that assessment practices provide "insidious" "hazards" for students. For example, it could be argued that multilingual students often, in fact, do need additional support for their writing when they enter college. In this case, students are assessed against a linguistic norm of college-level writing. A second argument could be that writing tests are based on cognitive skills that students will need in both the academy and the workplace. Without clear demonstration of competency of these skills—skills that are articulated in academic outcomes—we fail the students. In both of these arguments, assessment practices do not necessarily create inequality; they reflect where students are developmentally.

And yet, these elementalist arguments deserve critique. First, over forty years ago, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976) demonstrated how working-class schools and parents have different values and promote different habits in schools than middle-class, suburban schools and parents—locations where colleges and universities take their cues. This sociocultural perspective means that some students are not born into conditions that easily allow them to acquire linguistic practices that are understood as norms leading to common academic assessment standards—i.e., the construct of writing valued on placement tests, exit tests, and other high-stakes tests. In Marxist terms, Bowles and Gintis explain the way school systems in capitalist societies reproduce the social order.

A deficit approach to understanding such linguistic and cultural difference—rather than a culturally sustaining one (Paris, 2012)—is not only antithetical to democratic ideals, it is based on a factual error that educational processes are based purely on an ahistorical cognitive model of learning. Alas, theories of learning do not sit outside cultural context for there is no universal linguistic norm for students at a particular developmental moment. Rather, theories of learning and linguistic development have arisen at particular historical moments and reflect the social and cultural tensions of that time as well as the understanding of learning and language itself within disciplinary paradigms. When we buy into the fallacy that there is a universal linguistic norm and that the additional support that some students need for their writing means relinquishing their home literacies at the front gates of the university, we are complicit in reproducing social inequality (Brandt, 2001; Carter & Thelin, 2017; Heath, 1983; Matsuda, 2014; Richardson, 2002). As Sternglass demonstrated, such students, unable to draw on those literacies—literacies can act as valuable scaffolds for academic learning—and assessed only through common academic assessment

standards of the white middle class, often find themselves subjected to the institutional penalties of being placed in non-credit bearing basic writing classes with curricula that do not align with first year writing. Thus, the fallacy of a universal linguistic standard results in replicating the existing social hierarchy under the false promise of opportunity.

The second argument above also deserves a critique from a social justice point of view. Even if the writing construct that is valued in higher education is unjust in terms of students' prior learning, that construct could still be considered appropriate, given that higher education's goal is to prepare all students for the English language communication demands that students are likely to have in middle-class professional and civic spaces. This argument too is elemental. If a college or university's goal is to prepare students for such future middle-class professional and civic communication demands, then proficiency in these areas should not be a prerequisite for admission and placement. An admitted student is a qualified student.

Finally, in terms of future workplace success, it is not clear from educational studies that cognitive outcomes alone—such as those identified in a discursive norm or construct such as writing ability defined by Standardized American English—is related to future success for any student. In fact, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (2002) looked at 25 different studies dating from 1960 to 1995 and found that “[t]here is no apparent trend in the estimated importance of cognitive performance as a determinant of earnings” (p. 6). That is, what a student can demonstrate cognitively in a writing assessment episode may not predict how much money that student can earn in the future. While this finding says little about cognitive performance and future success at those jobs, it is quite revealing that one's chances of making more earnings have little to do with the isolated cognitive traits or skills acquired in college. To wit, this lack of relationship between cognitive skills and future earning potential calls into question the very necessity of assessing any student on cognitive language skills for the purposes of future economic gains.

What do researchers find more associated with future economic success? Non-cognitive traits, such as perseverance and the “big five”—openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (pp. 10-11). Closely related to the big five personality factors are the habits of mind (curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility, and metacognition) identified in the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* (Council of Writing Program Administrators, National Council of Teachers of English, and National Writing Project, 2011). In this extension from Cognitive Psychology to Writing Studies, the *Framework* becomes powerful in its potential to contribute to the future success of students through broad representation of the writing construct. In

the end, one message has been consistently clear in the analysis of 40 years of educational attainment data: Constrained construct representation—whether it be a narrow focus on grammatical correctness or a limited measure of cognition—is the enemy of social justice and opportunity advancement.

## **SOCIAL JUSTICE THEORY AND THE ADVANCEMENT OF OPPORTUNITY**

The rejection of elementalist reasoning alone is insufficient for this project; thus we turn to social justice theory for its expansive potential as a means to advance opportunity. Varied over time and circumstance, social justice theory demonstrates the deeply rooted concern for the ways we are bound together, the nature of justified constraint, and the extent of individual freedom.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) identifies 1824 as the first use of the term social justice. In *An Inquiry into the Principles of the Distribution of Wealth Most Conducive to Human Happiness*, William Thompson wrote:

The first principle of social justice, that “the sole object of all institutions and laws ought to be to promote the happiness of the whole of the community, or, where there was any incompatibility, that the happiness of the greater number should be always preferred to that of the lesser.” (pp. 314-315)

Influenced by the utilitarian Jeremy Bentham (Hunt, 1979), Thompson expresses two enduring conceptualizations of social justice: insistence on benefit and identification of solution. Responsive to the rise of industrialism in his native Ireland, Thompson’s expression of the value of community is best understood as set in opposition to the rise of capitalism. The value of utilitarianism is apparent in its opposition to the accumulation of wealth by the few.

In debates over the Italian Risorgimento, or the attempts to unify Italy in the nineteenth century, the conservative Jesuit philosopher, Luigi Taparelli D’Azeglio used the term, “social justice” in 1834 to advance conservative ends (Burke, 2010). He was engaged in debates about the foundations and nature of the state which had arisen at the time. Ironically, Taparelli’s conception of “social justice” was linked to its relationship to inequality: a society with an aristocracy requires that we accept inequality. Social justice, Thomas Patrick Burke (2010) explains of Taparelli’s ideas, is used to justify the belief that all people are “naturally unequal among themselves in everything that pertains to their individuality, just as they are naturally equal in all that pertains to the species” (pp. 101-102). Despite Taparelli’s conservative argument that stemmed from an assumption about that which God had given each person—that is, we should not change that natural

inequality among people—he also identified a key idea in social justice accounts that endures: the paradoxical and the interconnected nature of all people.

Departing from the defense of societal inequality given by Taparelli, contemporary Anglican theologian Nicholas Sagovsky (2008) has identified four key strands of justice: maximization of freedom, rule of law, meeting of need, and responsible action. Each can be found, as he observes, in John Rawls account of social justice.

While the OED does not cite Rawls in identifying the etymological origin of the term social justice, today Rawls' ideas are of great influence on social justice theory. Setting aside the teleological assumptions associated with utilitarianism and Western ethical traditions, the theory of social justice stands in opposition to dominant capitalistic theories of social good. Because he addresses distributive principles based on social advantage, the work of John Rawls is especially important to the scholars in the present volume. For Rawls, justice is defined as fairness—thus eliciting a contractarian theory in which maximum liberty is pursued under realistically constrained conditions necessary to maintain the compact each of us has with society. Whatever the faults of *A Theory of Justice* (1971/1999) and *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (2001)—Sagovsky notes “the absence on the personal nature of doing justice” (p. xvi)—these two volumes provide a moral center under which principled action may be taken in the service of individual liberty.

Also important to the scholars in the present volume is the work of political scientist Iris Marion Young. In *Responsibility for Justice* (2011), Young focused on social structures of economic inequality and the political debates that have shaped our understanding of social mobility from the twentieth century into the twenty-first century. In engaging with the debates in political theory on social structures and individual responsibility, Young argued that social justice is about the relationship of individuals and the dispositions of social structures. Social structures are not inherent in society; rather, they become visible as we investigate the whole society and one comes to distinguish patterns in relationships among people and the positions they occupy relative to one another—i.e., social connection. As Young notes,

People act within institutions where they know the rules, that is, understand that others have certain expectations of how things are done, or that certain patterns of speech and behavior have certain meanings, and that individuals will react with sanction or in other, less predictable ways if the implicitly formulated or formal rules are violated. (2011, p. 61)

For the purposes of social justice, establishing these patterns as they are pro-



cedurally formed is thus as important as categorizing the patterns themselves. Young went on to identify four axes of responsibility for justice: those with greatest power or influence; those with greatest privilege; those with greatest interest; and those with the potential for collective action. Because the pursuit of social justice is about creating equitable relationships, distribution of resources, and decision making among these and other communities, it is the emphasis on decision-making—on action—where we may find purchase for the project of writing assessment as social justice.

Finally, while social action can be used to mobilize individuals, legal precedent is one avenue to realign structural inequalities in order to leverage opportunity. Nowhere is the linking of action and legal precedent more explicit than the work of John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, and Martin Luther King Jr. For example, in reflecting on the admission of black students Vivian Malone and James Hood to the University of Alabama, President John F. Kennedy in his June 11, 1963, Civil Rights Address invoked the ideals of human rights, tolerance, and reciprocity. Kennedy called the issue of equal rights a “moral issue”—an issue that every American should embrace because of its connections to the founding principles of American democracy: “The rights of every man are diminished when the rights of one man are threatened.”

Beyond interlacing notions of morality and democracy, Kennedy established a vision for opportunity to learn: “As I’ve said before, not every child has an equal talent or an equal ability or equal motivation, but they should have the equal right to develop their talent and their ability and their motivation, to make something of themselves.” The legal means to accompany this vision were established under the Civil Rights Act of 1964, signed by Lyndon B. Johnson. For Kennedy, the right to develop one’s talent—was more important than the actual talent that one possessed. Measurement of ability was secondary to opportunity to learn.

Before concluding this section, we note that important for future scholarship on social justice and assessment may be Islamic traditions such as *Zakāt* (alms giving and its association with wealth distribution) and Buddhist traditions such as those found in the teaching of Thich Nhat Hanh. Thich Nhat Hanh’s concept of interbeing, a fundamental pillar in his practice of peace as social justice, asks us to compare our common, received views (such as those of a rose and the contents of a garbage can) and identify resonance (enacted in process). Viewed beyond elemental surface contrasts, we find that “the rose will become part of the garbage” and the garbage “transform[s] into lovely vegetables, and even a rose.” Furthermore, “looking at a rose you can see the garbage, and looking at the garbage you can see a rose. Roses and garbage inter-are” (Hanh, 1991, p. 97). In terms of his emphasis on that which is potentially in harmony, Thich Nhat

Hanh life's work can be viewed as a social justice project. In many ways, he is the embodiment of social justice through his work around peace and suffering with others. When speaking to U.S. Vietnam Veterans about their ongoing pain and suffering, he explains the interbeing of veterans and their larger society. He reminds us that "our individual consciousness is a product of our society, ancestors, education, and many other factors . . . Your personal healing will be the healing of the whole nation, your children, and their children" (2003, p. 125).

## THE END OF ISOLATION

Through our scholarship over the last seven years on writing assessment and race, fairness, and now social justice, we have rejected the disciplinary isolation of assessment from the social justice orientation of Writing Studies. Specifically, Mya, Asao, and Norbert have undertaken a program of research dedicated to exploring theoretical, empirical, and actionable directions for writing assessment framed by evidence of fairness.

- In 2012, Asao and Mya revisited a 1981 study by White and Thomas in their investigation of test results of racially diverse first-year college students in order to understand the "effect of different kinds of testing upon the distribution of scores for racial minorities" (p. 276). Asao and Mya examined the English Placement Test, a writing assessment still in use at the time of the study and discontinued on August 2, 2017, by an executive order from Timothy P. White, Chancellor of the California State University system because of the barriers to student success associated with the test. Anticipating just such an outcome, Asao and Mya compared the White and Thomas findings to their 2008 findings at California State University, Fresno. By looking at racial data from writing assessments, they documented performance differences among student groups and questioned what variables of writing constructs, such as knowledge of conventions, result in student disenfranchisement.
- In 2012, Asao and Mya also published *Race and Writing Assessment*. In the first edited collection of its kind, the author and their colleagues drew on their experiences as instructors, researchers, and writing program administrators to investigate issues of racial identify as it is shaped by teaching and assessing writing. With special focus on validating assessments in terms of response processes and consequences, the volume attempted to identify construction within and across student groups. Chapters were devoted to the absence and presence

of race in writing assessment, technologies of assessing linguistic and racial variation, responding to such variation, placement methodologies, and new directions in placement. In one place, and for the first time, the collection brought assembled a formal discussion of race and identify formation as shaped by writing assessment practices.

- In 2012, Norbert and his colleagues performed the first differential validity study of automated writing assessment used for placement purposes. With emphasis on under-prediction for individuals within sub-groups, the study raised questions regarding the presence of a national culture of remediation and the role that automated writing assessment played in that culture of disenfranchisement; the need for local validation of purchased tests to prevent discriminatory practices; and a call for new frames of reference related to validation that emphasized fairness, especially in terms of performance of specific groups of students. Because the study used general linear modeling techniques to examine scores as they were related to criterion measures such as holistic scores from local measures and course grades, it demonstrated the need to disaggregate scores according to student groups before decisions regarding score use are made.
- In 2014, Mya and Norbert, working with legal scholar, John Aloysius Cogan Jr., and Tito Nurudeen Jr., a law student, continued empirical work with focus on disparate impact analysis. Using a thought experiment to examine the presence of unintended racial differences in outcomes resulting from facially neutral policies or practices, the study demonstrated that basic statistical techniques (four-fifths analysis and chi-square methods) could be used in support of a renewed emphasis on fairness. This newly proposed three-step process includes analyzing placement rates through threshold statistical analysis, contextualized inquiry to determine whether the placement exam meets an important educational objective, and consideration of less discriminatory assessment alternatives. In essence, the study illustrated the value of using empirical techniques having legal force to interrupting received views of placement—algorithmic formulations that question whether an admitted student is worthy of credit-bearing coursework.
- Continuing the emphasis that an admitted student is a qualified student deserving our most informed attention, Asao published *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies: Teaching and Assessing Writing for a Socially Just Future* in 2015, reinforcing a moral basis for the field. With emphasis on the social contraction of race as exemplified in insistence

on standardized edited American English, Asao calls for a new pedagogy based on an ecologically centered understanding of students and their labor. With emphasis on understanding the role of the individual within ecologies of power, parts, purpose, people, processes, products, and places, Asao challenged meritocracy. In place of the promised equal playing field and the lies associated with its constriction, Asao recommends specific practices, from grading contracts to peer review, as part of antiracist assessment ecology.

- Mya guest-edited a special issue of *Research in the Teaching of English* in 2014 that brought together researchers from Australia, Canada, the US as well as *Assessing Writing* editor Liz Hamp-Lyons to address questions of diversity in international writing assessment. The special issue evidenced the various theories and methodologies at play in different national contexts as well as the ways that vulnerable populations are made visible through those methodologies. As well as Inoue's compelling theorization of failure, the special issue introduced David Slomp's framework for making visible and using consequential validity evidence. Moving writing assessment research out of its parochial focus on U.S. contexts, this special issue was also notable for its connection between writing assessment and global language testing.
- In 2016, Mya and Asao edited a special issue of *College English* that further advanced the work they started in *Race and Writing Assessment*. Moving beyond anti-racist approaches to writing assessment to a social justice orientation, the special issue brought attention to the expansive potential of social justice theory applied to writing assessment research: "If social justice is about creating certain kinds of relationships, distribution of resources, and decision making . . . , it is this last point—decision making—where we may find a toehold for . . . writing assessment as social justice. In fact, . . . achieving justice is very much akin to the processes of validation" (p. 117). Contributions from Stephanie West-Puckett on the potential of alternative forms of classroom assessment using digital badging and Jerry Won Lee's call for bringing together writing assessment research with research on translingualism demonstrated the ways that a social justice orientation to writing assessment opens interdisciplinary possibilities. David F. Green Jr.'s essay on writing assessment at a HBCU was revealing in its potential for using race as a formative lens to see institutional assessment practices, such as the push-pull legacies that inform writing assessment in HBCU contexts.

- In 2016, Diane Kelly-Riley and Carl Whithaus edited a special issue of *Journal of Writing Assessment* on a theory of ethics for the field. The time was ideal for such extended deliberation on the role of fairness in educational measurement in general: The 2014 publication of the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* had elevated evidence related to fairness as equal to evidence related to validity and reliability. What would happen, the contributors wondered, if fairness were elevated above validity and reliability in the Trinitarian model of evidence? Extending the social justice scholarship of John Rawls (1999, 2001), Norbert proposed a theory based on identification of fairness and provision of opportunity structures created through maximum construct representation, with special attention paid to the extent which benefits are realized for the least advantaged. Mya and John continued work on disparate impact, this time focusing on the burden-shifting heuristic used by entities such as the Office for Civil Rights to redress disparate impact. Bob Broad defined a new perspective, structured ethical blindness, and applied it to the U.S. testing industry; and Ellen Cushman examined legacies of imperialist thought that permeates our understanding and use of validity. Building on work first published in the special issue of *Research in the Teaching of English* (Slomp, Corrigan, & Sugimoto, 2014), David Slomp presented and applied an integrated design and appraisal framework (IDAF) to the design of classroom-based writing assessments. Especially welcome is David's dedication to ethical design and appraisal in the classroom. David's consistent presence in our program of research illustrates what can be accomplished when colleagues remain focused on exploring theoretical, empirical, and actionable directions writing assessment framed by evidence of fairness.

Together, our overarching goal over the past seven years has been to refute insidious denials of diversity, ignorance of educative processes, and displacement of responsibility. In place of these oppressive practices, we seek to end isolation of writing assessment research and those hindered by unfair practice. Our cause is to connect writing assessment aims to those of social justice; our practice is to advance opportunity for all. To those ends, in answering our core question—*How can we ensure that writing assessment leads to the advancement of opportunity?*—this collection offers us a way to propose a connection between writing assessment, social justice theory, and the advancement of opportunity:

- *To liberate writing assessment from its constrained role as a tool used to support admission, placement, progression, and certification*

In liberating writing assessment from its narrow disciplinary confines, we instantiate writing assessment theories, histories, and practices as central to the field of Writing Studies;

- *To reposition the primary focus of validation studies from score use to justice*

In repositioning the primary aim of writing assessment validation from its often-myopic focus on score use, we broaden the methods available to writing assessment researchers and find a space to position justice, not simply “test use,” as a central aim of writing assessment, and;

- *To reimagine writing assessment as a way to create opportunity structures for all students*

By reimagining writing assessment as a tool of possibility, we can achieve advancement of opportunity through assessment. Summative tests of writing ability used for admission, placement, progression, and certification should be dismantled for their constrained construct representation, diminished understanding of reliability, and failure to produce evidence related to fairness of comparable consequences for all.

As is the case when product and process are inextricably interrelated, our vision is a hermeneutic one. Following Richard E. Palmer (1969), we take the hermeneutic experience to be historical, linguistic, dialectical, and ontological. As the present volume illustrates, research undertaken with this hermeneutic vision is principled, embodying historiographic, access, curricular, and pedagogical frameworks. There need be no division between research and advocacy: Sound assessment practices advance social justice, and social justice requires sound assessment practices. Associated with a such exegetic perspectives, this volume offers a body of knowledge associated with the social justice turn in writing assessment.

## **THE PRESENT VOLUME: A DIACHRONIC PERSPECTIVE**

Each of the chapters in this collection contributes to research in writing assessment regarding the relationship between assessment, social justice, and opportunity. Our authors have sought to identify ways that opportunity can be advanced for all stakeholders of assessment: advisory boards, administration, faculty, par-

ents, professional organizations, students, and the public. Indeed, when the phrase opportunity to learn is used in this volume, it should be extended to relationships among these groups; that is, opportunity to learn is not limited to identification of opportunity structures for students, but, rather, for all involved in education. As our authors demonstrate, opportunity advancement can be achieved through broad attention to meta-paradigms of historiography and specific attention to practices of admission and placement, outcomes design, and teacher research. Through their work, we see the enactment of social justice must result not solely in the identification of injustice but in demonstrable change for educational communities. As this collection demonstrates, change may be brought on through, among other means, the theorization of structures and processes, methodological advances in providing empirical evidence for fairness, and the articulation of values that align with the advancement of opportunity.

In Part 1: Advancing Opportunity Through Historiography, each of the authors expands the disciplinary lens of writing assessment to include historiography. In doing so, they liberate writing assessment from a view of itself as disembodied, technocentric, and ahistorical. J. W. Hammond in “Toward a Social Justice Historiography for Writing Assessment” engages in a social justice historiography of writing assessment by examining the early years of the *English Journal* (1912–1935) for the way articles frame writing assessment. Using a Critical Race Theoretical lens (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005) in Chapter 1, he finds progressive era racism prevalent through nativist and eugenic assumptions and appeals in the journal’s articles. Hammond highlights two characteristic articles, one from H. L. Cohen, “The Foreigner in Our Schools: Some Aspects of the Problem in New York” (1913), and the other from C. E. Brown, “Foreign Language Errors of Chicago Children” (1931). From his discussion, Hammond concludes that social justice historiography of writing assessment can contribute to present day challenges to eugenics, to nativism, and to racial discrimination by continuing to call into question the majoritarian narratives sometimes invoked to shield these injustices from critical scrutiny. Key to his historical account is a non-teleological framework that refuses to support a narrative of triumphalism in which the present is necessarily free from past practices of disenfranchisement.

In Chapter 2, “‘Human Beings Engaging with Ideas’: The 1960s SEEK Program as a Precursor Model of Ecological and Sociocultural Writing Pedagogy and Assessment,” Sean Malloy offers an archival micro-history of the City College SEEK program made famous by Mina Shaughnessy’s work. His historical study of the program during the 1960s reveals the ways its founders, Leslie Berger and Allen B. Ballard, assured that the program was innovative in its various assessments, from entrance and placement to grading. Today, the program—

presently being curated at the CUNY Digital History Archive—offers a useful example of a precursor program that consciously employed elements of presently emerging ecological and sociocultural theories. Far from objectively distanced, its pedagogy and assessment had the express goal of fighting for racial and social justice. As a result, SEEK assumed that each high school graduate, given well-designed opportunity structures, has the potential for learning opportunities in a demanding college curriculum. As such, the SEEK ecology dispelled cruel myths of meritocracy achievement and replaced them with conscious, principled support that is required for the achievement of social justice.

In Chapter 3, “Assessment’s Word Work: Early Twentieth Century American Imperialism and the Colonial Function of the Monolingual Writing Construct,” Keith L. Harms historically contextualizes the relationship between the US and the Philippines. His focus is on the Monroe Report, a 1925 document containing over 200 pages of analysis of large scale educational assessments administered across the colony. As Harms demonstrates, there were moments where the U.S. commission had opportunities to address the educational needs of local students; nevertheless, in each case colonial bureaucrats adopted racist value dualisms endemic to colonial regimes in order to displace indigenous values and solidify foreign power. An 1899 photograph entitled “insurgent dead just as they fell in the trench near Santa Ana, February 5<sup>th</sup>” suggests the multivalent ways that military action is related to subsequent racist pedagogies. This use of evidence greatly expands our understanding of the ways that deeply contextualized research alters our conceptualization of pedagogical legacies.

In Part 2: Advancing Opportunity Through Admission and Placement, the contributors confront issues of transparency in the pursuit of justice. In doing so, they confront the limitations of conventional validation methods that focus on score interpretation to questions of fairness and impact, thus shifting the framework of accountability to institutions and government to collect and release disaggregated data on student assessment results. Christie Toth in Chapter 4, “Directed Self-Placement at ‘Democracy’s Open Door’: Writing Placement and Social Justice in Community Colleges,” examines a problem central to post-secondary education: Evidence that standardized, purchased tests used for writing placement at open admissions community colleges appears to be systematically under-placing students in ways that undermine their likelihood of persistence and degree completion. In her methodological analysis of locally developed practices using Directed Self-Placement (DSP), Toth examines social justice issues surrounding writing placement at open admissions community colleges, as well as social justice-related arguments related to DSP. While she identifies promising validity evidence that DSP can be successfully implemented at community colleges, she also notes the absence of evidence related to fairness



in terms of disaggregated DSP outcomes data to examine the consequences of DSP for different student groups. Toth expertly demonstrates a central dilemma of contemporary writing assessment: standing in gap a where little is known and much is demanded. In this case, the dearth of published scholarship on DSP in community colleges illustrates the high stakes of writing placement in community colleges. As the case study demonstrates, approaches to placement that advance social justice are not immune to the challenges of demonstrating consequences for diverse student groups.

In Chapter 5, “Chasing Transparency: Using Disparate Impact Analysis to Assess the (In)Accessibility of Dual Enrollment Composition,” Casie Moreland uses disparate impact analysis—a transparent, empirical methodology designed to identify unintended racial differences in outcomes resulting from facially neutral policies or practices—resulting from the use of ACCUPLACER WritePlacer® test scores. While she found that test score data was not disaggregated by the institution or publicly available, she also found that extreme and unnecessary complexities in obtaining writing assessment data are common. Such lack of transparency emphasizes the necessity and urgency for validity studies to determine the fairness of testing practices. As Moreland argues, requiring a standard of fairness and transparency has the potential to enable a fluid understanding of assessment genres that determine student placement.

In Chapter 6, “Writing Assessment and Responsibility for Colonialism,” Mathew Gomes demonstrates the value of a social connection model of responsibility to writing assessment methodology. Building on the scholarship of Young (2011), Gomes elaborates the responsibilities of individuals and institutions for redressing structural social injustice in terms of power, privilege, interests, and potential. In presenting an empirical thought experiment, he also uses disparate impact analysis to document the presence of linguistic imperialism—the dominance of English as a vehicle for continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages. Finding application in recent trends demonstrating the internationalization of U.S. postsecondary education, Gomes emphasizes an urgent need to attend to demands for English language proficiency—a flawed opportunity structure characterized by elemental emphasis on correctness and knowledge of conventions—serves to disenfranchise students and subvert opportunity to learn.

In Part 3: Advancing Opportunity Through Outcomes Design, the contributors draw on their frustration with the status quo of writing assessment to open assessment to a variety of critical and methodological approaches. By emphasizing the role of structural violence in traditional assessment methodology as well as the blindness of writing assessment research to institutional critique and student experience, the contributors help us see new ways of understanding how to

create opportunity through writing assessment. In Chapter 7, “The Violence of Assessment: Writing Assessment, Social (In)Justice, and the Role of Validation,” Josh Lederman and Nicole Warwick argue that most writing assessments, both classroom and large scale, do violence to those they measure. The authors begin by focusing on structural violence: that which is unwittingly interwoven into the social fabric. To interrupt these processes, they emphasize the role that validity evidence and validation processes can play in interrupting structural violence. Adopting the pragmatic, argument-based approach of Michael T. Kane (2013, 2015, 2016) to establish validity, Lederman and Warwick emphasize the power of score interpretation and use to identify and disrupt structural violence. Nevertheless, as they acknowledge, structural violence will remain hidden from many empirical methodologies—particularly those that operate within historically dominant paradigms in which score disaggregation, as Moreland establishes, is not present. As such, validation research emphasizing social justice will require inquiry traditions that specifically deal with less visible matters of power and systemic oppression: feminist, queer, postcolonial, anti-racist traditions which actively seek to examine the distribution of power. As Lederman and Warwick conclude, a commitment to writing assessment as social justice demands assessment practices that actively seek to disrupt tacit structural violence.

In Chapter 8, “Fired Up: Institutional Critique, Lesson Study, and the Future of Antiracist Writing Assessment,” Michael Sterling Burns, Randall Cream, and Timothy R. Dougherty employ a lesson study project—derived from research by William Cerbin and Bryan Kopp (2006)—in order to identify methods aimed at structural white *habitus* that make institutions hostile to diverse educational communities. In lesson study projects, groups of teachers engage in a recursive process in which they collaboratively design, teach, observe, and discuss the results of the lessons. Using ethnographic methods, the authors found seemingly contradictory results: statistically significant improvement of outcomes of learning in the lesson accompanied by absence of willingness or interest in challenging institutional racism through activism. Reflectively, the authors identify a potential reason for the contradictory findings: an impetus to develop lessons and programs centered on social justice issues while retaining inflexible and incurious pedagogies. As a way forward, the authors argue for writing program assessment that incorporates students’ agency in a variety of ways to ensure that students are not disempowered by the very programs intended to empower them.

In Chapter 9, “Writing Program Assessment, Attitude, and Construct Representation: A Descriptive Study,” Karen S. Nulton and Irvin Peckham report on a writing program assessment at Drexel University designed to examine the intrapersonal domain of student engagement. Their descriptive, baseline study analyzes student attitude surveys through Likert and free-response items and

uses ATLAS.ti coding tool to create a variable model. The authors find that students enter into the first-year writing program with poor attitudes toward school writing and mixed attitudes toward writing in general. Implementing a curriculum focused on student-centered writing has a strong impact on improving students' attitudes toward school writing. Expanding the writing domain model thus has implications for diverse student groups whose attitudes toward writing are linked to their writing performance.

In Part 4: Advancing Opportunity Through Teacher Research, the contributors leave us with much optimism, providing compelling portraits of how writing assessment research, when conducted with not just a local perspective but a *socially just local perspective* can make real change. Our contributors offer inspiration for the kind of work that writing program administrators, writing teachers, and writing center directors can accomplish in the advancement of justice. In Chapter 10, "Bending the Arc of Writing Assessment Toward Social Justice: Enacting Culturally Responsive Professional Development at Standing Rock," Kelly J. Sassi studies the ways writing teachers talk about writing in writing assessments at Sitting Bull College, a tribal college in North Dakota that serves mostly Dakota and Lakota Indians. To explore the issue of writing assessment at a tribal college, Sassi employs Christine Sleeter's 2014 framework of four dimensions of social justice teaching, as well as indigenous perspectives of Sandy Grande and others. While quantitative data in the form of essay scores during writing assessment were collected, qualitative coding focused on emic coding resulting from labels that emerged from discourse patterns. Under a social justice orientation, teacher discourse demonstrated raised expectations and changes in teaching practice. Modification of testing materials to draw on cultural strengths was observed, as was evidence of professional development when teachers elected not to add another unwarranted basic skills class. An increase of writing scores when more culturally relevant prompts were used was also established. Partnering with K-12 educators also suggests willingness to address structural inequities. As Sassi concludes, roots of settler colonization run deep and future research on writing assessment in tribal settings would do well to emphasize professional development using social justice as a framework for instruction and assessment as a necessary step toward rhetorical sovereignty and decolonization.

In Chapter 11, "Queering Writing Assessment: Fairness, Affect, and the Impact on LGBTQ Writers," Nicole I. Caswell and William P. Banks examine how writing centers, programs, and classrooms engage in assessment projects that attend to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) writers. The authors used focus groups methodology to listen to LGBTQ students explain their lived experiences and narratives about writing assessment in and out of the classroom before the process of designing a writing assessment episode.

A queer turn in writing assessment, Caswell and Banks find, provides a way to advance a socially just writing assessment agenda that privileges the intersections between queer rhetorics and writing assessment methodologies. In establishing the instrumental value of the case, the authors conclude that gender and sexuality represent vexing ontological categories for writing assessment; that assessment data should be gathered in ways that are attentive to participant vulnerability; that administrators can provide leadership on campus by advocating for the collection of aggregate data on LGBTQ students; and that in order for LGBTQ experiences to become a form of validity evidence, researchers must collect and analyze student narratives and attend to local context.

## THE PRESENT VOLUME: A SYNCHRONIC PERSPECTIVE

Complementary to the developmental studies presented in the eleven chapters, we provide two additional features that allow an actionable standpoint for the ideas offered herein—*Eighteen Assertions* drawn from the contributions in this collection and an *Action Canvas for Social Justice*. These features allow a synchronic perspective in which readers may approach social justice at any given point in time through a principled framework.

First, following Chapter 11, we detail the eighteen assertions we present below concerning writing assessment, social justice, and the advancement of opportunity. These assertions are derived from topics shared among our authors: history, theory, methodology, outcomes, classroom research, institutional research, purchased assessments, policies, and next generation research. The assertions are meant to both reflect the contributions in this collection and guide future research. They are, in other words, descriptive and aspirational.

## EIGHTEEN ASSERTIONS ON WRITING ASSESSMENT

### On History

1. Histories of writing assessment are invaluable in the analysis of practices viewed as deterministically objective; therefore, these histories have profound impact on contemporary methods, policies, and consequences.
2. Social justice historiography reveals normative fixations and yields reflexive engagement.

### On Theory

3. Theories of writing assessment are invaluable in the formation of ontological, epistemological, and axiological perspectives that have profound impact on method, policy, and consequences.

4. New theories of writing assessment are needed that hold the achievement of justice and the advancement of opportunity as equal aims of assessment.

### **On Methodology**

5. Analytic techniques are best understood and used when they are linked to clearly articulated, ethical assessment questions.
6. Writing assessment researchers should be able to demonstrate proficiency in a range of methods.

### **On Outcomes**

7. To advance justice and opportunity, the articulation of writing outcomes should be based on robust writing construct models that are informed by current sociocognitive and sociocultural research.
8. Perspectives drawn from a variety of educational community members are required to develop writing outcomes.

### **On Classroom and Writing Center Research**

9. Direct work with students is the first step in writing assessment.
10. Classroom research is best accompanied by inferences that allow others to apply findings across settings.

### **On Institutional Research**

11. When institutional research on student writing is conducted, collection of information related to age, class, disability, ethnicity, gender, linguistic identity, race, veteran status, and sexuality should be justified with an understanding of current ethical standards and institutional contexts for the gathering and securing of such information.
12. Because all inferences about student academic ability can have profound consequences for the purposes of social justice, distinctions between high-stakes and low stakes should not be accompanied by different standards for inferences about writing ability.

### **On Purchased Assessments**

13. Purchased assessments—those assessments developed by testing companies—hold the potential to provide valuable information about students, but their use should never constrain the interrogation of social justice queries in local contexts.
14. Unless the vendor provides evidence of fairness, validity, and reliability, purchased assessments should not be used to make decisions for or draw inferences about students.

### On Policies

15. Institutional policies regarding writing assessment are best developed from clear pedagogical value and include details about their aims, design, proposed uses, and potential consequences.
16. Organizational policies are best developed using professional standards and empirical evidence.

### On Next Generation Research

17. Efforts should be made to eliminate high-stakes tests of writing for purely summative purposes.
18. Efforts should be made to strengthen writing assessment for formative purposes in order to develop innovative approaches to assessment informed by social justice perspectives.

These assertions, along with exposition by the editors and commentary by the authors, are provided in the final chapter of this collection.

Second, our call for action is further articulated in Table 1 through an Action Canvas for Social Justice—a tiered framework that allows (perhaps demands) social justice to be viewed as actionable.

Our tiered action-oriented approach is inspired by two sources. The first source is from the theory of change invented by Carolyn Hirschon Weiss in 1972. As the Beatrice B. Whiting Professor in the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University, Weiss was an advocate with a strong stance for democratic policies. Dissatisfied with the writing of reports as the final step in research to program effectiveness, she advocated for understanding the ways that “the social sciences influence the development of policies in the modern state” (1991, p. 307). In Weiss’ alternative mode of evaluation, known as theory-based evaluation, the evaluation itself (the findings) are based on theories of change (paths for action based on the findings). As Weiss wrote, because all programs, especially educational programs, are based on explicit or implicit theories,

[t]he evaluation should surface those theories and lay them out in as fine detail as possible, identifying all the assumptions and sub-assumptions built into the program. The evaluators then construct methods for data collection and analysis to track the unfolding of the assumptions. The aim is to examine the extent to which program theories hold. The evaluation should show which of the assumptions underlying the program break down, where they break down, and which of the several theories underlying the program are best supported by the evidence.” (Weiss, 1995, p. 67)

Thus, like action research, Weiss' approach to evaluation acknowledges the social matrix in which research is conducted and the way that decisions drawn from research findings work within a constellation of social ideologies. Reflecting in 1998 on the general uses of evaluation, Weiss provocatively wrote the following:

Programs operate within systems of funding, personnel recruitment and promotion, staff in service training, and so on. To think of increasing the use of evaluation without considering the organizational surround is to miss a good part of the story. If results are to be implemented for program improvement, *organizational conditions* may have to be changed—to remove impediments and to supply supportive structures to incorporate and sustain new approaches and activities. Effective use of evaluation often requires institutional changes to undertake and support new activities and to provide incentives and rewards for staff who adopt the new stance. If changes are to be sustained over time, the ways in which institutions function have to be addressed. (p. 28)

“Use,” she continued, “is about change. Any theory of evaluation use has to be a theory of change” (1998, p. 31). “We cannot,” she concluded, “leave the process of evaluation utilization to chance or regard it solely as an in-house conversation among colleagues” (1998, p. 32).

Certainly, Weiss' approach may be critiqued for its narrowness—i.e., research flows from the ideological positions of its authors, funders, or promoters. As such, it encompasses a rather limited sphere of participation. Yet, Weiss' approach is valuable because it lays bare the ways that all research is ideological in nature and the ways that social scientists in the 1970s (and today) were and often continue to be “naïve in failing to understand the tenacity of ideological convictions and organizational self-interest” (Weiss, 1991, p. 311). Simply put, research alone does not change institutions and social policies; research attuned to the rhetorical and ideological positions of its stakeholders is what brings about change. Today, in writing assessment research, the value of localism has made writing assessment researchers attuned to institutional ecologies; yet the ideological orientation of researchers in relation to institutional stakeholders is often presented as a vexing impasse, not as an opportunity to explore theory-based evaluation. Our work in this collection seeks to demand attention to broad conceptual frameworks and daily finances; tacit assumptions are made explicit and, in doing so, can be examined for their usefulness and value. The written report (or, in our case, the published edited collection) is therefore only a step on the road to change.

The second source of inspiration for our action canvas is from the software Launchpad, a tool used in innovation management and entrepreneurship. Adopted by the National Science Foundation in its I-CORPS and Small Business Research Innovation programs, the Launchpad platform emphasizes a structured approach, emphasizing values, activities, stakeholders, and hypothesis testing in order to bring ideas into reality. Although other models of application are available in action research, we were inspired by Launchpad because it is not merely a checklist of obvious steps. Specifically, Launchpad provides a heuristic for entrepreneurs to build theories and examine the assumptions behind them. In our minds, the heuristics in the software facilitate the shift from evaluation to action. As Weiss would put it, we have to understand both *why* we do good and *how* that good must be accomplished.

To express action in terms of the present volume, we therefore offer a procedural plan for the enactment of social justice in writing assessment. In doing so, we now unite the following to propose three paths of actions: (1) the chapters by our authors, (2) the eighteen assertions derived from those cases, and (3) the authors’ commentaries on the eighteen assertions.

Defined as a heuristic device that can be used to identify paths for action in the achievement of social justice, the action canvas shown in Tables 1a and 1b leverages the eighteen assertions on writing assessment by category. These categories are then used to postulate the existence of value, the significance of insight, the challenges of adoption, the usefulness of present applications, and the promise of future directions. As an alternative way to read the edited collection synchronically, the action canvas illustrates the social justice turn and its applications.

To describe the application of each category, we will specifically focus on writing program administrators (WPAs) in their daily work in course design, writing center support, writing across the curriculum, writing in the disciplines, and assessment. Whether the WPA is novice or experienced, the action canvas is useful because of its established stance for social justice.

**Table 1a. Action canvas: Writing assessment, social justice, and the advancement of opportunity**

Assertions					
	History	Theory	Methods	Outcomes	Research
<b>Example in Collection</b>	Chapters 1, 2, and 3	Chapter 7	Chapters 6 and 7	Chapters 7, 8, and 9	Chapter 9
<b>Present Use: Why do we use such a line of inquiry?</b>	Perspective/ memory	Frame- work	Claims	Accreditation/ program im- provement	Pedagogy/ teacher education



Assertions					
	History	Theory	Methods	Outcomes	Research
<b>Value: What perspective is valued in this line of inquiry?</b>	Historiography	Conceptualization	Consequences	Application	Inclusion
<b>Insight: What insights are typically provided through this line of inquiry?</b>	Power distribution and social recovery	Orientation, processes, practice	Empirical evidence	Domain modeling	Student, teacher, and community identity
<b>Challenges; What challenges does this line of inquiry face?</b>	Determinism	Utilitarianism	Reductionism	Standardization	Curriculum design
<b>Future Directions</b>	Justice narratives	Forms of justice	Experimentation ethics	Standpoint	Generalization

**Table 1b. Action canvas: Writing assessment, social justice, and the advancement of opportunity**

Assertions				
	Institutional Research	Purchased Assessments	Policies	Next Generation Research
<b>Example in Collection</b>	Chapters 5, 10 and 11	Chapter 5	Chapters 4 and 5	Forum
<b>Present Use: Why do we use such a line of inquiry?</b>	Outcomes/ accreditation	Meritocracy/ efficiency	Enforcement/ guidance	Knowledge-building
<b>Value: What perspective is valued in this line of inquiry?</b>	Localism	Qualification	Accountability	Epiphany
<b>Insight: What insights are typically provided through this line of inquiry?</b>	Student learning processes	Test-maker transparency	Value articulation and alignment	Programmatic and pedagogical expansion
<b>Challenges; What challenges does this line of inquiry face?</b>	Resource allocation	Public perception	Compliance	Sustainability/ group think
<b>Future Directions</b>	Cross-national research	Resonance	Innovation	Application

**History:** Attention to history allows the identification of multiple perspectives associated with author and subject and forces an articulation of historiographic method. In cases where power has been distributed unequally, attention can then be given to possible paths to social recovery. Explicit and implicit analyses bound to determinism (i.e., the present condition is the logical result of the past) can be exposed and examined. Such exposure and examination allows for analysis and critique of the ways that present conditions are manifold and causation is not solely determined by the historian's logic. Once attention is drawn to social justice, histories of writing assessment can be written in different ways so that stance becomes the driving force for analysis.

*Example:* Every WPA can benefit by attention to the history and development at the specific institutional site of the writing program. Each course—basic skills, credit-bearing first-year courses, advanced courses—have their own unique histories, from when they were initiated to the assumptions driving the curriculum. In turn, these courses are controlled by admission assumptions. If attention to knowledge of conventions is over-emphasized in placement and progression decisions, for example, constructs of writing will be poorly conceptualized and individual students are likely to be disenfranchised. Taken in this way, the long history of purchased writing assessments can be the subject of (re)appraisal and (re)calibration. As large-scale studies associated with the Complete College America (2016) project have revealed, reductionist legacies exist and are instantiated in daily practice; historiography allows for the (re)appraisal and (re)calibration of Complete College America statements that are presented as inevitable fact: “If you’re African American, Hispanic, or a low-income student, you’re more likely to be headed toward the remediation dead end” (p. 6). Each of us can interrupt such information forcefully by social justice perspectives used to write histories of our own writing programs—narratives that are then used to justify needed curriculum reform.

**Theory:** While often taken as abstract, theory is the most practical way to enact stances of social justice in our writing programs. Attention to theory demands that we make explicit our ontological, epistemological, and axiological frameworks—the “as if” series of statements and actions we take as if they reflect objective realities (Morton, 1980). This articulation has great value in helping us express our conceptualizations while offering insight into our own orientation,

processes, and practices. This value is nevertheless challenged by narrow views of utilitarianism in which each idea is tested for its use so that happiness is maximized for the greatest number. Because the best use of theory attends to broad views of use including individual good, we can envision new ways to bring social justice into daily practices of teaching and assessing writing.

*Example:* For every WPA, theorizing social justice leads to identification of forms of justice. Genre theory provides a useful illustration of this claim because of the way it connects form to pedagogical action. In the case of genre, requiring students to produce only final drafts of essays aimed solely at the instructor constrains student understanding of audience, frustrates individual identity, and interrupts professional association. Conversely, broad use of genre, peer review, and collaborative practice introduces students into rich conceptualizations of writing in both academic and workplace settings. As such, genre theory (Bawarshi & Reff, 2010) achieves practical application in ensuring a socially just future for writing assessment.

**Methodology:** While methodologies remain a contested space for Writing Studies in general (Haswell, 2005), attention to the interpretation and use arguments used to establish claims (Kane, 2012) provides a rubber-meets-the-road way of approaching research design. Such argument-based methodologies work in a middle ground between experimental, hypothesis-testing studies and descriptive and observational studies. In addition, attention to consequences of information use allows insight into empirical techniques—disparate impact, differential validity, and differential prediction—associated with social justice enactment. To have access to such tools will require new approaches to doctoral study in Writing Studies in which methodologies are understood in terms of their uses—and in which empirical study becomes a moral obligation attendant to socially just instructional and assessment practices. This is a substantial challenge that, unless met, can potentially deprive students of their education because researchers do not have the ability to pursue data-based legal and policy arguments. Put differently, this challenge can reduce the present volume to a research curiosity (a conversation among specialists) instead of an articulated stance (undertaken on behalf of students). Educated in new ways, future researchers will experiment with innovative methodologies based on many kinds of stances, including social justice.

*Example:* For WPAs, use of assessment methodologies which integrate evidence of validity and reliability under the frame of

fairness provides new ways to help students. Under a fairness-first framework, WPAs can ask evidence-based questions on inter-rater and inter-topic reliability as related to distinct student groups along with questions of construct validity in terms of the assessment tasks. If evidence reveals that the costs of present systems (such as legal challenges based on disparate impact) outweigh the benefits (additional tuition revenue based on policies legally understood as contributing to discrimination), then received views of placement (in which some admitted students are unworthy of credit-bearing instruction) can be permanently kicked to the curb. Only when all writing placement is understood as potentially paternalistic and discriminatory can new methods be developed, such as concurrent enrollment, to structure opportunity for admitted students.

**Outcomes:** In general terms, accountability is often associated with the development of curricular outcomes. When applied wisely, outcomes provide students with demonstrable educational aims and their instructors with useful ways to improve instruction. Recently, domain modeling has become a beneficial way to represent outcomes in terms of cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal domains (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017; National Research Council, 2012). In writing assessment, the addition of a neurological domain (of critical importance to disability research associated with social justice) has resulted in a newly proposed way to model writing constructs within a given curriculum (White, Elliot, & Peckham, 2015). Social justice interventions in outcomes research further extends construct models of writing by considering cultural formations, such as racism and homophobia.

*Example:* For WPAs working in first-year courses, substantial advancement within specific institutions can be made by adoption of the *WPA Outcomes Statement for First Year Composition* (Council of Writing Program Administrators, 2014), and the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* (Council of Writing Program Administrators, National Council of Teachers of English, & National Writing Project, 2011). Specifically, attention to the habits of mind expressed in these documents aligns with recent emphasis on interpersonal and intrapersonal domains—and opens opportunities for new outcomes associated with disability research. Were curriculum designers to pay as much attention to fostering curiosity as to ensuring knowledge of conventions, writing programs would

take new shape in their efforts to create student identity and community, thereby increasing retention and improving graduation. Furthermore, fears over compliance would be replaced with innovation.

**Classroom-based and writing center research:** Since its benefits were revealed by Janet Emig in 1971, classroom-based research has become a mainstay of Writing Studies (Goswami, Lewis, Rutherford, & Waff, 2009). With classroom-specific pedagogy aimed at inclusion, students and teachers form community and construct identity. This view of instruction has been widely adopted by the K-12 community, with efforts through the National Writing Project and the Bread Loaf School of English. Unfortunately, in post-secondary education, curriculum is not often designed and improved through articulated programs of research in which classroom instructors play an active role. Indeed, we may well wonder if the same forces of bureaucratization that drive all education are evidenced in the absence of innovation driven by classroom observation. Once attention is drawn to social justice in classroom-based research, inclusion resonates throughout programs because of its connection to classroom learning. Inclusion is no longer an aspect of the sampling plan; inclusion becomes the key to validity.

*Example:* For WPAs, attention to classroom-based research yields new ways of understanding student writing. Using the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*, research can be undertaken across multiple classes (and, if well planned, across multiple sites). In terms of composing in multiple environments, for example, instructors can learn which genres are most useful to students according to majors and which kinds of digital affordances—blogging and wiki development, for example—are associated with writing improvement. With attention to social justice, teachers can also provide additional evidence that addressing the digital divide is insufficient without attending the material conditions of technology in students' personal lives. By understanding the ways that students live with technology, teachers can be in a position to improve curriculum in their own classes as well as substantially increase the generalization inferences we can make across classrooms and campuses.

**Institutional research.** Institutional research lends value to specific sites in investigations of student learning. With inferences intended for specific curricula, institutional research can, if done well, add to our knowledge about how

students learn. However, resource allocation for such work is often scarce with often poor to no theorization of the writing construct, writing processes, or writing development—and, as a result, often tied to periodic assessment of educational outcomes required for program and institutional accreditation. Hence, we see the well-known lurch for accountability undertaken in cosmetic fashion solely to gain approval of visiting agents who, in turn, sanction institutions and programs for their accreditation masters—and depart following three days of systematized lies on everyone's part. Instead of planned and well-funded review undertaken for the benefit of students, we witness as evidence of institutional research only the mind-numbing reports criticized by Weiss. Under a social justice perspective, institutional assessment is re-imagined as ongoing, recursive, and prioritized as the institutional mission is transformed to emphasize serving diverse student populations—not solely in meeting outcomes needed for accreditation. Emphasis is thus given to using institutional assessment to provide feedback to individual students, especially those most at risk.

*Example:* For WPAs, the advantages of longitudinal institutional research are clear. In terms of student retention and timely graduation, multidisciplinary teams can investigate important aspects of student learning associated with transfer and, based on findings, restructure curricula to be more complementary in terms of across-the-curriculum efforts such as the establishment of learning communities and attention to service learning. It can also keep in focus whether curricular innovations are having disparate impact on various populations—for example, does multi-model writing allow for equal access for students with disabilities? In all such research, the WPA can position the central role of writing for academic and workplace success.

**Purchased assessments:** While they certainly have the limits of locally based research, purchased assessments can be important in gathering evidence of student learning based on categories of fairness, validity, and reliability. As well, these large scale assessments are invaluable in providing large data set comparisons. At the present, many bought assessments have at their basis the false assumptions of meritocracy—that all students have been given equitable educations revealed in the homogenizing presence of bubble-and-booklet tests. Thankfully, increasing attention by many measurement leaders such as Rebecca Zwick (2017) have raised attention to practices that frustrate affirmative action. In calls such as hers that question sole or over-use of text scores, we see the need for increased vendor transparency by test makers in terms of a wide variety of

evidence—from norming procedures to group impact. While public perception remains a substantial barrier—Who among us has not witnessed administrators boasting scores on admission tests or reducing costs through outsourcing placement decisions to machines?—resonance is possible between purchased tests and locally developed tests.

*Example:* For WPAs, leveraging complementarities allows the accumulation of evidence across institutions. New emphasis on assessment portfolios from test-makers—many of whom are developing both surveys as well as performance tests—can allow triangulation of methods and comparison across sites that are difficult with locally based assessment. Imagine a large-scale purchased survey such as the National Survey of Student Engagement designed to yield information about student attitudes toward colleague instruction combined with an across-the-disciplines writing sample taken in classrooms. If well planned, such a study could reveal important information about the teaching of writing and attitudes toward it—information that could be used to identify new opportunities for student learning.

**Policies:** As is the case with the outcomes they produce, policies are often driven by the need for enforcement and the demand for accountability. At their worst, they are mind-numbing statements of the obvious that protect their writers by incorporating vagueness at every turn; at their best, they articulate important cultural and institutional values. While the extrapolation inferences are difficult to gauge—How, exactly, is the U.S. call for equity realized across post-secondary institutions?—there is room for innovation in the development of new policies aimed at social justice. A social justice perspective to policy, in the spirit of Weiss, connects research to the policy orientation of particular organizations and stakeholders. In doing so, policy need not be a vapid exercise in wishful thinking but a roadmap to debate and action.

*Example:* As a model for innovative policy development, WPAs are in unique positions to adapt the *Statement on Antiracist and Social Justice Work in the Writing Center* used at University of Washington at Tacoma (2017). In its commitment to openly discuss social justice issues as they pertain to the writing at hand, such policies instantiate a social justice framework in the contact zone between tutor and student at the point in which writing is shared. Similar models may be found in the *Students' Right to Their Own Language* and the *Statement on Second Lan-*

*guage Writing and Writing*, both issued by the Conference on College Composition and Communication.

**Next-generation writing research:** While it is presumptuous to conclude that the present collection is an example of next-generation writing research, it is equally questionable to conclude that such work is part of an established tradition in Writing Studies. Indeed, no such program of research existed before the 2012 dual publication of *Race and Writing Assessment* (Inoue & Poe) and “Placement of Students into First Year Writing Courses” (Elliot et al.). From these humble beginnings, we see in the present volume the rich conceptualization, innovative methodologies, and daring conclusions signaling an epiphany as direct and sudden as any imagined by James Joyce. As our authors demonstrate, the challenges of research sustainability can be overcome in part with systematic attention to social justice. Along with the challenges of sustainability is the related challenge of groupthink—where next generation research simply becomes the order of the day and any attempt to shift the paradigm becomes heresy. A social justice perspective to next generation research acknowledges that not all perspectives are equally to be valued (e.g. monolingualism) and that any field of inquiry should be subject to regular critical reexamination. Without principled inquiry and rigorous reflection, any discipline falls into a state of torpor.

*Example:* The remaining challenges for next generation research must be identified by our readers, among them our WPA and other colleagues, who must themselves determine the applications afforded by stances of social justice. The applications are many and varied, and they can be used to create a common future in which participatory democracy is realized with each keystroke of our students.

Derived from the chapters and forum discussion, the action canvas therefore demonstrates the power that can be summoned when writing assessment and social justice are envisioned as complementary actions. Approached synchronically, the collection may therefore be considered as aligned with—and inspired by—the fragments of Heraclitus. His disposition toward flux serves as an important foil to the inevitable categorization accompanying modern capitalism. In fragment B31 he writes this of cosmology: “The reversals of fire: first sea; but of the sea half is earth, half lightning storm” (2010, 47). The emphasis on an eternal flame is important to recognize as both an element of origin and of continuation. In writing assessment as in all things, the more flux is recognized, the better the chances at coming to more socially just futures for everyone. Our emphasis on fire is meant to call to mind the spiritual “Mary Don’t You Weep.”



God gave Noah the rainbow sign  
Said “No more water but fire next time.”

As James Baldwin wrote of these lines, “Everything now, we must assume, is in our hands; we have no right to assume otherwise” (1963, p. 120). Taken this way, our assertions may also be understood as provocations to a field of study, to a nation of individuals, concerning their land and their future. Herein we seek a defended way for us all.

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