

EXPLORING WHITE PRIVILEGE IN TUTOR EDUCATION

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Abstract

In this article I report the results of action research focused on white writing center tutors' attitudes toward white privilege. I studied four semesters of my tutoring internship course at a linguistically and ethnically diverse university, analyzing white tutors' written responses and classroom discussions connected to a survey and assigned article focused on white privilege and tutoring. The themes that emerged in tutors' "white talk" (McIntyre) regarding initiating/assimilating students to academic discourse caused me to rethink my curriculum and make white privilege a more central part of discussions about tutoring throughout the course.

Introduction

As a new writing center coordinator at a linguistically and ethnically diverse state college in Northern California, I was troubled by the perspectives white students in my semester-long tutoring internship courses expressed about initiating tutees to academic discourse. During the one day I had squeezed into the busy course schedule for the topic of language diversity, white tutors often argued that academic discourse was more sophisticated and intellectual than students' home discourses, and many were reluctant to accept that initiation to academic writing is not neutral but ideological. Semester after semester, it became apparent to me that the view of tutoring as a neutral, apolitical act of initiating students to academic writing conventions was a deeply held belief that many white tutors were reluctant to critically examine.

The missing element of critical literacy in the tutoring internship course was my fault—I devoted just a single class session to language diversity, and I had no readings focused explicitly on the concept of white privilege. I lacked awareness of the complexities of issues surrounding white privilege, and I was nervous about tensions that might flare if I challenged white tutors' biases. I decided I needed to study the literature on white privilege, try to overcome my discomfort, and make the subject of white privilege a more integral part of the tutoring internship course. I decided I also needed to more closely examine white tutors' attitudes about the concept of white privilege with an action research project. As a white educator at one of the most diverse state universities in the country, my history of avoiding the topic of white privilege was especially problematic.

In this essay I discuss the themes that emerged in four semesters of discussions of white privilege in my tutoring internship courses, and I discuss changes I made to my pedagogy based on my research—changes that I hope will be relevant for other writing center directors interested in exploring white privilege in their tutor education courses.

Scholarship on White Privilege and Teaching and Tutoring Writing

Writing Center directors who are interested in learning more about theory and research connected to white privilege might begin, as I did, with the writing studies scholarship on linguistic and racial justice, cultural bias, and anti-racism work. Scholars such as Victor Villanueva, Keith Gilyard, Suresh Canagarajah, Geneva Smitherman, and Elaine Richardson have focused on cultural and linguistic bias in the teaching of writing and the gatekeeping role of academic literacy in the U.S. These scholars have argued for students' right to their own languages, to use the title of the Conference on College Composition and Communication's position statement demanding respect for linguistic pluralism and challenging the myth of a single, standard dialect. Writing Studies scholars focused on anti-racism work, such as Vershawn Ashanti Young, Frankie Condon, and Rasha Diab, encourage writing teachers to critique and expose institutionalized, systemic racism. These scholars argue that anti-racism work requires political activism and the courage not to avoid (as I was avoiding) uncomfortable discussions about the racial politics that shape instruction in academic literacies.

Critiques of white privilege are an important aspect of anti-racism scholarship and pedagogy, and seminal works by scholars in education such as Henry Giroux, Alice McIntyre, and Maureen Reddy and Bonnie TuSmith and sociologists such as Theodore W. Allen, George Lipsitz, Peggy McIntosh, and Tim Wise are important reading for writing center directors who desire to study more widely in white privilege theory and research. Although white privilege has long been an area of interest for education and writing studies scholars, it is only in the last decade that white privilege has emerged as a focus in writing center scholarship (Barron and Grimm; Condon; Denny;

Geller et al.; Greenfield and Rowan; Villanueva). The literature in education, writing studies, and writing centers related to the white privilege themes I found in my study are the focus of the rest of this brief literature review. These themes include tutors' white talk, color blindness, white tutor resistance, and tutors' perception of academic discourse as unraced.

A seminal study in education by Alice McIntyre focuses on the language white teachers use to either avoid or resist instruction in anti-racism pedagogy; a language she refers to as "white talk." White talk involves whites "talking uncritically with/to other whites, all the while resisting critique and massaging each other's racist attitudes, beliefs, and actions" (McIntyre 45-46). Gaining a better understanding of the nuances of white talk was a primary goal of my research. McIntyre found that one predominant aspect of white talk is the belief in the importance of being color-blind—a belief that race needn't be taken into account since we're capable of getting beyond issues of race. This belief disregards systemic racism and unconscious biases and allows white people to "ignore the benefits of whiteness and dismiss the experiences of people of color" (McIntyre 126). Anne Ellen Geller et al. connect this disregard of the benefits of whiteness to the kinds of lived experience of white tutors I encountered in my tutoring education courses, arguing that "...the benefits and advantages that accrue to white people as a result of racism are an everyday experience for white students, tutors, and directors" (91). Condon and Villanueva discuss the ways color-blindness in the writing center can lead to tutors viewing white academic discourse traditions as ideologically neutral. In her seminal article "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," Peggy McIntosh also comments on this idea of whiteness as neutral, saying that "whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average."

It's a challenge for writing center directors to get white tutors to critically examine white privilege and white talk in tutor education and in the writing center. Henry Giroux comments on the pervasiveness of white student resistance to value systems that question white privilege, and both McIntyre and Nancy Barron and Nancy Grimm describe this resistance in their experience introducing anti-racism pedagogy in their courses. Many of the white tutors in my courses believe academic discourse conventions and the "rules" of Standardized English are a neutral or even superior form of literacy. As Ellen Geller et al. contend in *The Everyday Writing Center*, "structural inequalities are perceived as so normal, so natural, that they are invisible to most white people" (91). Echoing Ellen Geller et al., Timothy Barnett reminds us that

"whiteness only seems invisible, objective, and neutral," and it maintains this appearance by presenting itself as unraced as opposed to politically interested (10). If academic discourse conventions are seen as neutral and not ideological, then initiating/assimilating students of color is perceived as less problematic for white tutors. But as McIntyre argues, "Whites talk assimilation, when what we really mean is dominance and control" (62). Students' desire to gain access to academic discourse complicates issues of assimilation and control, but at a minimum I wanted to make white tutors more aware of how white privilege operated in the writing center, however that would wind up affecting their tutoring approach.

Research Methods

The goal of action research is to solve a specific classroom problem through research, reflection, and action (Ray). My goal in conducting this research project was to become a more reflective teacher regarding educating tutors in issues of racial and linguistic diversity, and for my tutors—and especially white tutors—to become more critically self-aware of white privilege in the context of tutoring a linguistically diverse student population. In order to triangulate data regarding the ways tutors thought about white privilege, I assigned Barron and Grimm's essay "Addressing Racial Diversity in a Writing Center" and received IRB approval from my institution to record and analyze "white talk" in conversations about the article, in tutors' electronic discussion board posts in response to the article, and in articles about academic discourse and language diversity that tutors wrote for our course's student-authored tutoring book. My choice of Barron and Grimm's essay was partially a pragmatic one—it was included in the main text for the class, *The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors*. But I made Barron and Grimm's essay the focus of my intervention for more than just pragmatic reasons. Because the essay explicitly discusses white privilege and tutoring, I felt assigning it would force both me and the tutors to have frank discussions about white privilege—it was an essay I'd avoided assigning prior to undertaking this research project for this very reason. I collected data on white talk from four course semesters: Fall 2012, Spring 2013, Fall 2013, and Fall 2014.

In addition to gathering this data, I drew on questions from an inventory of white privilege in Ellen Geller et al.'s *The Everyday Writing Center* that is based on McIntosh's "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" to create a brief class survey focused on tutors' literacy histories in school. Geller et

al. emphasize that their inventory is not meant as a tool for discussing tutoring practices, but rather as a way for tutors to confront white privilege. I had tutors fill out the survey before we read Barron and Grimm's essay and reflect on the ways the survey complicated their thinking about their literacy histories and the concept of white privilege. I modified Ellen Geller et al.'s inventory to make it into a briefer survey, since my internship classes were fifty minutes once a week and I wanted to have plenty of time to discuss Barron and Grimm's essay. Following is the survey I distributed and the quantitative results from four semesters of the course (N=58):

1. The way I typically communicate in writing for school is considered the standard and correct way of communicating in writing in the United States. a) true b) false
All students answered "true."
2. I have never chosen to be absent or not to participate in class discussion on a day the class was reading a text from an author of my race because of concerns I will be asked to represent my race in the class discussion. a) true b) false
72% of white students answered "true" and 43% of students of color answered "true."
3. Most of the texts in my courses are written by people of the same race as me. a) true b) false
79% of white students answered "true" and none of the students of color answered "true."
4. When I was in K-12 most teachers assumed I could be a successful writer. a) true b) false
73% of white students answered "true" and 56% of students of color answered "true."
5. If I perform outstandingly in a writing course there is no chance I will be thought of by the teacher as a credit to my race. a) true b) false
85% of white students answered "true" and 65% of students of color answered "true."
6. I can remain oblivious to rhetorical traditions not associated with my race without suffering any penalty for such obliviousness. a) true b) false
54% of white students answered "true" and 49% of students of color answered "true."
7. I have been/can expect to be awarded in school rather than penalized for speaking/if I can speak more than one language. a) true b) false
92% of white students answered "true" and 75% of students of color answered "true."
8. In most of my writing classes the teacher was a person of my race. a) true b) false
95% of white students answered "true" and none of the students of color answered "true."
9. If a writing teacher is especially critical of my work, I do not need to ask myself if race is an issue. a) true b) false
91% of white students answered "true" and 70% of the students of color answered "true."
10. I identify primarily as Caucasian. a) true b) false
67% of students identified as primarily Caucasian.

The focus of my research is on the attitudes of white tutors toward the concept of white privilege, and the quotes presented in this essay are from tutors who self-identified as Caucasian on the survey (over two-thirds of the tutors identified as primarily Caucasian, but the semester I completed the research 35% of the students at this institution were Caucasian). I share quotes that are representative of the white talk I heard from tutors each semester, but it's important to note that each semester there were some white tutors who acknowledged white privilege and defended Barron and Grimm's positions. I didn't include quotes from these students since the focus of my action research is exploring the problem of the white talk that predominated and often drowned out alternative perspectives.

Peggy McIntosh asserts, "it is hard to disentangle aspects of unearned advantage which rest more on social class, economic class, race, religion, sex and ethnic identity than on other factors." It was beyond the scope of my research to parse out other variables such as class and gender, or the differences across ethnic groups that identify as Caucasian, and I acknowledge that these variables are an important component of discussions of white privilege—but perhaps not nearly as critical a factor as being identified as Caucasian, as Tim Wise argues in *White Like Me*. White tutors rarely had to consider the issues of race mentioned in each survey question, and the unraced literacy experiences of white students is reflected in the themes that emerged in my research.

White Privilege and Tutoring Themes

My analysis reveals four themes regarding white tutors' attitudes toward academic discourse and language diversity. In the following section of this essay I discuss each theme and present evidence from

tutors' classroom conversations and written work.

Theme #1: Students should be able to move easily between discourse communities and should be able to learn academic discourse without feeling that they are giving up their cultural traditions.

Many white tutors resisted the ways Barron and Grimm complicate the initiation/assimilation model of tutoring. These tutors felt that students should be able to make a smooth transition from one discourse community to another without a sense of loss or alienation, as these quotes from a classroom conversation and a tutoring book article illustrate:

It's not so much taking a voice away
It's not with a sense that you're taking away a voice or taking away that person's identity or the type of language they use but that they convey their ideas clearly.

By showing students that they can inhabit two discourse communities, diversity is actually promoted. This allows people to move between discourses more easily and comfortably.

I do disagree with Grimm's statements that students who learn to write within the confines of academic discourse are relinquishing their cultural distinctiveness, so the writing center needs to be the place where these changes are prevented. I believe the job of the writing center is to help students move efficiently from one discourse to another.

White tutors who may not have experienced cultural loss in their own initiation to academic discourse conventions had difficulty imagining that students would experience conflict as they "faced pressure to accommodate to naturalized white codes of rhetorical expression" (Denny 38).

Some tutors felt that before students could consider the relationship between academic discourse and their home discourses, they first needed to learn "the rules" of academic writing. In an article for the tutoring book one tutor wrote:

The rules are always there to use as tools with which a writer can better express themselves in a more commonly accepted way. As writers, we have to fit our writing to a specific discourse so that it *is* recognizable to a reader.

The "rules" of academic writing are perceived as a neutral set of tools or a "commonly accepted way" for

students to "better express themselves." It is assumed that the generic academic reader is someone expecting white discourse—other discourse may not be "recognizable" (and probably will not be recognized). Learning academic discourse while retaining home discourses was often perceived by white tutors as simple, apolitical, and unquestioningly beneficial. Unfortunately the neutral way I had been presenting academic discourse to students—whether it was by providing them example disciplinary genres or guides to citation style conventions or strategies for helping multilingual students become better editors of their own writing—was reinforcing this belief in academic discourse as neutral and unquestionably beneficial.

Theme #2: Academic discourse is more sophisticated, articulate, and intellectual than other kinds of discourses.

One reason white tutors felt that moving among discourse communities should be relatively easy for students of color is the belief that academic discourse is superior to students' home discourses, and thus something students would surely strive to assimilate into. Sometimes this justification was overtly based on a traditional canon of Western, white male thought, as in this quote from a tutor during a classroom conversation:

We have this way of conveying ideas, and there's an entire way to express ideas accurately. We have Bertrand Russell, Gottlob Frege, John Locke, these individuals are trying to . . . convey ideas clearly and articulately.

Few tutors were so explicit about citing a white male tradition, but this notion that academic discourse is more clear and articulate than students' home discourses was a claim made by other tutors in articles for the class tutoring book. Consider, for example, these excerpts from tutoring book articles about the advantage of learning academic discourse:

Academic discourse is the 'language of the university.' It is typically straightforward, clear, concise and 'elevated.' By elevated, we are referring to using more complex ideas and higher levels of articulation.

Another reason why students should use academic discourse is because it advocates the thoughtful use of language. This discourse is highlighted by intellectual speech and the ability to use it.

Modernism also tends to uphold the current academic system, favoring a clean, concise essay that has a focused argument and relevant supporting citations. Since we are all members of an academic community that favors such standards, a tutoring session that helps the student acquire these skills is very useful.

Tutors associated academic discourse with elevation, clarity, complexity, thoughtfulness, and intellect. Many white tutors were unwilling to consider Frankie Condon's argument that "definitions of excellence in writing within the American academy are circumscribed by the particularities of white Western values" (24). By failing to push tutors to identify these values as white and Western in class discussions, I had been complicit in this perspective of academic discourse as more sophisticated and intellectual.

Theme #3: Academic discourse is an unchanging tradition and tutors can't or shouldn't try to affect change.

In his examination of white privilege in literary studies, Barnett emphasizes that Whiteness relies on institutional structures. Tutors often took it for granted that these are permanent structures, not subject to interrogation and change. As one tutor put it in her tutoring book article:

I do not believe that the academic standards should be changed or altered based on the various cultures that are currently present on our campus. If we reduce the tutoring center to a place where cultural differences are the focus, rather than the goal to improve the writing of our students, then we are doing our students a disservice.

Questioning academic discourse is associated with lowering standards, and focusing on language pluralism is placed in contrast to improving student writing—echoing Condon's observation that in white talk "excellence and academic rigor are juxtaposed against diversity" (25).

Some white tutors acknowledged that the initiation/assimilation model of tutoring was problematic, but they often felt that they were powerless to effect change due to the structure of the institution, and therefore had no choice but to help students assimilate, as two different tutors expressed in classroom conversations:

Change has to be at the teacher level . . . I would feel I didn't service my tutees well if I said oh yeah write it this way, they turn it in, and their audience says, no, this is not academic discourse, you know, you don't get a good grade.

I write the way academia—which is white, of course, but—I write the way my audience, which is usually my teacher, wants me to write. So when I'm teaching somebody to write, it never comes up that they might want to write a different way.

It's understandable that tutors would feel helpless to effect change in a system where teachers and grades hold sway, but this fatalism about white privilege could prevent even the most reflective tutors from "confronting structural racism by creating spaces and occasions to self-reflect and question assumptions about race and its consequences for interaction," as Denny argues for in *Facing the Center* (24). The fact that as the Writing Center coordinator I was not fully engaged in confronting structural racism meant that I was serving as a poor role model for this type of critical self-reflection.

Theme #4: In tutoring sessions race isn't taken into account or shouldn't be taken into account.

White tutors expressed a variety of perspectives on the concept of color-blindness. After reading Barron and Grimm, many tutors admitted they had never considered a student's race when tutoring. As one tutor wrote in a discussion board post, "I have to admit that so far, I have been pretty color blind when it comes to my tutees. I have never even really taken race into account." This tutor went on to critically reflect on her approach to tutoring, but some tutors never develop a critical stance and simply see color-blindness as unquestionably positive. A tutor who associated color-blindness with openness said in a classroom conversation, "Colorblindness created some openness that wasn't there before. It's difficult for me to think of a person as being of a specific race or a specific viewpoint." In a classroom discussion another tutor associated color-blindness with universalizing experiences, saying, "You need to be able to treat a person as an individual as if you can universalize their action."

Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg argue in "Addressing the Crisis of Whiteness," "Whites alone have the privilege of opting out of their racial identity, of proclaiming themselves as non-raced" (22). Many of the white tutors in my courses simply opted out of considerations of racial identity in tutoring academic writing, as I opted out of building these kinds of discussion into my syllabus. In a classroom conversation about whether or not academic discourse is politically and racially neutral, one tutor said, "They come with a specific assignment which they're trying to fulfill, and of course the assignment doesn't say

write white.” The white tutor can simply ignore the possibility that assignments might be implicitly asking students to “write white,” and the white tutor can also ignore the possibility that there is an imbalance of linguistic power in academic assignments.

The themes that emerged in my study connect to prior research on white teachers and white privilege, but I can’t generalize from my study of four courses to my future courses or to tutors at other institutions. However, my research led me to make a number of changes in my pedagogy that other writing center directors may find informative.

Taking Action

The most significant result of my action research was that I realized I needed to go beyond simply devoting one day and one article to white privilege as I had done in my intervention—what Laura Greenfield and Karen Rowan refer to as the “week twelve approach,” discussing race “at an isolated moment, often late in the semester, rather than foregrounding such issues or accounting for their relevance in our everyday theories and practices consistently throughout the course” (132). After examining the persistence of white talk in my courses and the lack of willingness of many white tutors to critically self-reflect on their white privilege, I made a concerted effort to integrate discussions of race and tutoring throughout the tutoring internship course, from the first day to the final reading. There were a number of ways I reformed my pedagogy to address issues of white privilege throughout the course.

Connecting issues of language, power, and race to each aspect of the course and not isolating these issues in a single day devoted to language diversity.

I made a conscious effort to foreground race and white privilege in all of the topics of the course, from avoiding presenting the teaching of citation styles and American academic writing conventions as neutral and unraced to complicating the white tutor’s role in acting as a “cultural informant” for international students. In the role-playing scripts and videos I used for example tutoring sessions early in the course I added scenarios that brought issues of white privilege to the forefront. And I made room for a substantial additional reading, Nancy Grimm’s *Good Intentions*, which highlights race, tutoring, and white privilege.

Integrating issues of language, power, and race throughout the class put less pressure on me to try to push white tutors to dramatically change their perspectives in a single class period. It also put less pressure on tutors of color, who were often feeling the

burden of making white tutors try to understand and acknowledge their experiences in just a forty-five minute discussion of a single reading. I found that I was able to be more artful and less blunt about issues of white privilege knowing that I could revisit in a later class a perspective or argument that had bogged down or become too heated for productive conversation.

Scaffolding discussions of white privilege from the first day of class.

Tutors who sign up for a tutoring education course are typically expecting to learn the “nuts and bolts” of tutoring, and are not expecting class topics that challenge their belief systems and may lead to emotional, often heated arguments. I revised my syllabus to ensure that I scaffolded the often-difficult discussions of white privilege and tutoring from the first day of class. I created a statement on my syllabus regarding expectations and ground rules for productive and respectful classroom discussion, and we discussed this statement on the first day. As one part of our conversation about tutoring international students, I added the video *Writing Across Borders* to my curriculum to get tutors to reflect on the biases we have toward American academic discourse conventions. This video—which is available on YouTube—includes interviews with international students about their struggles with American academic English and the contrasts between American writing conventions and the conventions of their first languages. I also integrated questions about language, race, power, and privilege into weekly journal reading responses. Finally, I chose tutor-authored readings from the course tutoring book that would introduce us to issues of white privilege from the perspective of tutors.

After I began scaffolding these discussions, I found that tutors were far more prepared to focus explicitly on white privilege in discussions of Barron and Grimm’s article and in the final reading for class, Grimm’s *Good Intentions*. Discussions were less superficial, and tutors of color felt more empowered to talk and less likely to skip class on any one day because of a concern about having to represent their race.

Integrating more diverse perspectives in class readings.

After completing this action research project I became conscious of the fact that all of my class readings—including readings on language and cultural diversity—were from white authors. I added the perspectives of authors of color by integrating readings from Villanueva, Canagarajah, and Smitherman and including the perspectives of students

of color through the video *Writing Across Borders*. I also made a more conscious effort to assign readings from tutors of color from the course tutoring book.

Adding these readings helped to work against the white noise that had been drowning out alternative voices in classroom conversations, since the readings demanded that white tutors engage with the arguments and the lived experiences of authors of color. Prior to diversifying the voices of class readings I had put myself in the absurd position of trying to represent the perspectives of people of color as a white person—albeit a white person who was trying to be an ally. The tutors were especially persuaded by the perspectives of the students in *Writing Across Borders*. These were tutors who genuinely wanted to help their student writers, but were failing to fully investigate those students' literacy histories or listen closely enough to their linguistic concerns and challenges. For many tutors, hearing the student voices in the video was like finally hearing about their own student writers' struggles.

Forcing tutors to confront white privilege in direct ways.

As I learned more about anti-racism work and reflected on the results of my research, I became less afraid of frank and open discussions of white privilege in tutoring. I found that rather than trying to avoid difficult discussions, I became interested in forcing tutors to directly confront white privilege. I changed from being afraid of difficult conversations to being disappointed if conversations were so safe and superficial that the difficult work of exposing and confronting white privilege never materialized. One way I forced white tutors to confront white privilege was to change my course readings, as I mentioned earlier. Readings explicitly focused on white privilege forced tutors to begin to examine white privilege, as did the survey about prior educational experiences. The survey is meant to force white tutors to reflect on the many invisible privileges they have taken advantage of in their academic careers, and even white tutors who are defensive about the concept of white privilege often acknowledge that they had not thought of these invisible privileges before.

I also asked tutors to complete and discuss the online test of implicit racial bias at <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>. This test is focused on exposing deep-seated, systemic racism that has become so naturalized that even tutors who feel they are enlightened about racism and white privilege find that the activities they are asked to complete on the site reveal their unconscious biases. It upset me deeply that even after I had been conducting this research and trying to be especially cognizant of structural racism, when I took the test my scores

revealed racial bias. It typically bothers white tutors that they do poorly on tests of racial bias despite their best intentions, and discussions of this test of bias are often tense. But they are also productive in part because the test exposes implicit bias in ways that are measurable and are hard for white tutors to deny.

Making space for both intellectual and emotional discussions of white privilege.

The survey of educational experiences and the test of implicit bias are primarily intellectual experiences, but the intellectual discussions that the data informs can quickly become emotional, both for tutors of color whose experiences and perspectives are often denied or dismissed by white tutors, and for white tutors who feel they are being attacked. Barron and Grimm and Seibel Trainor emphasize that discussions about white privilege are not just intellectual but also emotional, and even with my revised curriculum sometimes classroom conversations about white privilege were heated and became personal. But as Diab et al. point out, “anti-racism work is messy and ongoing” (“Making Commitments” par. 7). Denying the emotional components of discussions of white privilege leads to discussions that are less messy but also less productive. Ground rules and framing questions are important, but so is allowing space for expressing feelings and lived experiences and not just abstract concepts and positions.

As a result of the revisions to the tutoring education course curriculum, I found that tutors became more reflective about their biases and more critically aware of issues diverse student writers encounter in their initiation to academic discourse. This increased awareness came out in ongoing classroom discussions, in tutors' responses to readings, and in their tutoring book articles. To move beyond this anecdotal evidence of the positive effect of my revised curriculum, it would be useful in future research to compare the response of students to the old curriculum with the response to the new curriculum as it pertains to their awareness of issues of white privilege, to interview or survey students about the ways the course has affected their perspectives on white privilege, or to do a pre- and post-course assessment of their beliefs about white privilege. Although I am no longer at the institution that served as the research site, I hope to undertake this type of research at my current institution.

Helping tutors become more critically self-aware of their biases is an important project, but it is just as critical to change institutional structures that support white privilege. Catherine Prendergast encourages composition teachers to focus their advocacy and

scholarship beyond racism in the classroom to “racism as institutionalized, normal and pervasive” (36). McIntyre and Seibel Trainer also call for a focus on larger contexts beyond the classroom, and Ellen Geller et al. encourage writing center directors to “broker considerations of race and racism across institutional boundaries” and to think of themselves not only as writing center leaders but as anti-racism leaders in their institutions (103). Perhaps the next phase in research on writing centers and white privilege is moving beyond the tutoring session, the writing center, and the tutor education course and considering ways that writing centers can facilitate institutional interventions that work against white privilege. At my former institution, this could have meant taking a number of steps: working through the Writing Across the Curriculum program to offer faculty development events explicitly focused on race and writing; speaking out to make sure that language pluralism is considered in our university writing rubrics and writing intensive course guidelines; forming long-term relationships with potential allies such as the Student Multicultural Center and the EOP program; using these alliances to recruit for a more diverse tutoring staff; inviting guest speakers whose scholarship focuses on issues of race and writing; and working to challenge institutional timed writing assessments that disproportionately place students of color into non-credit bearing “remedial” courses. Further research into what types of interventions are most effective for combating white privilege at the institutional level is needed.

Since conducting this research and composing this article, I have changed institutions, and I no longer direct a writing center. I now direct a first-year composition program, and teach first-year writing and graduate courses in composition theory and practice for new graduate teachers who will teach in the composition program at my new institution under my supervision. I have taken the lessons I have learned from my research project and my reading of the literature on white privilege to my new institution. For example, the FYC course readings bank that we collaboratively developed has literacy narratives from Sherman Alexie, Jay-Z, Amy Tan, and Gloria Anzaldúa, among other diverse voices. The academic articles about language and literacy that are also included in the course readings bank include Geneva Smitherman, Victor Villanueva, Suresh Cangarajah, and Jacqueline Jones Royster. The FYC learning outcomes we developed focus not just on asking students to practice academic writing conventions but to “explore the connections and conflicts between their home discourse communities and academic discourse communities.” Composing projects included

in the teacher’s guide encourage instructors to treat students’ literacy backgrounds and traditions as coequal to academic literacies through assignments like literacy narratives and autoethnographies, literacy inventories and self-studies, rhetorical analyses of multiple genres, and comparisons and analyses of school, home, and public discourse communities.

My deeper awareness of the responsibility WPAs have to do anti-racism work beyond just their own programs has also carried over to my approach at my new institution. For example, when I was asked to facilitate a speakers series at my new institution, a colleague of color let me know that she was concerned about the lack of diverse voices among the speakers that had been invited in the past. I worked with her to invite to campus Frank Waln, a Lakota Sioux hip hop artist and music producer, and I reached out to our Native American Student Academic Center and our Cross Cultural Center to collaborate on the event. I’ve also collaborated with WPAs in our University Writing Program to work against a structure of timed testing and remedial course work that disproportionately places students of color into non-credit bearing course work. I have also tried to be more conscious in my day-to-day administrative work with teachers and students: for example, by trying to be more supportive of teachers of color who face attitudes and biases from white students and peers that white teachers do not face.

It is understandable that the instinct of many WPAs is to avoid the uncomfortable, often emotional work required to confront white privilege. My earlier, superficial efforts to “cover” diversity in my tutoring education course only led me to further dread discussions of race and writing. However, my research has persuaded me that it is critical for writing center directors and WPAs in any type of program to confront white talk in a thoughtful, substantial, and theoretically informed way. White writing center directors who are failing to directly confront white privilege in their tutor education and their centers are unintentionally reinforcing structural racism, as I was before I undertook this project and changed my pedagogy. As McIntyre argues, white educators need to address “our own complicity around issues of educational racism” (148). It’s the responsibility WPAs to confront white privilege in their courses, their programs, and their institutions, rather than “turning a blind eye, safe in the silence” (Villanueva 18).

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