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**Directed Self-Placement
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Directed Self-Placement (DSP) is described in CompPile's glossary of search terms as “a system of writing placement in which the student makes the final placement decision based upon information or advice from the institution—a name provided by Dan Royer & Roger Gilles (1998), but a practice with some history (e.g., Judith D. Hackman & Paula Johnson, 1981) and considerable variation (e.g., Pamela Bedore & Deborah Rossen-Knill, 2004).” DSP is a writing course placement process that puts the placement decision in the hands of the student. In the introduction to their edited collection, Royer and Gilles explain DSP this way: “DSP can be any placement method that both offers students information and advice about their placement options (that’s the ‘directed’ part) and places the ultimate placement decision in the students’ hands (that’s the ‘self-placement’ part)” (2). According to CompFAQs’ page on DSP, since 1998 at least 35 schools have experimented with some form of DSP. Most who document their efforts at instituting DSP have done so for similar reasons: they were unhappy with their past placement mechanism, usually based on test scores that lacked sufficient validity; teachers reported a high rate of unprepared students in their courses; and DSP would be more cost effective compared to home-grown portfolio or essay placement tests. Often, researchers identify several factors that contributed to switching to a DSP method.

In the research and scholarship annotated in this bibliography, I’ll call your attention to three trends or sets of issues worth noting. First, the question of how to address local needs, students, and contexts in writing course placement processes becomes clear in the way each local version of DSP is developed and tested for adequacy and validity of placements. In other words, DSP makes clear how course placement processes should be “site-based” and “context-sensitive,” to use two attributes of good writing assessment that Brian Huot identifies in *(Re)Articulating Writing Assessment*. In the DSP literature, this often means that “DSP” is not a codified or static set of practices, processes, documents, decisions, or even priorities. It just doesn’t look the same in many schools, despite there being a common urge by all who attempt some form of DSP to allow students to help make their own course placements, to inform them of their choices, and advise or discuss options with students. The variables that make for different versions are complex and multiple: the range of courses offered at a school; the actual judgments made in the system (e.g., by creating scores from students’ responses to questionnaires, or deciding holistically after seeing a range of options); the number of students (and their backgrounds,

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needs, and circumstances); the use of various other tests as filters, or pre-screening devices, before DSP processes occur (e.g., the SAT or ACT); the methods of advising and counseling students on the curricula and course choices. All these elements, and others, change with each site, which make for a different version of DSP at each school.

Second, when folks investigate how well DSP works at their respective schools, or whether its decisions are valid enough or appropriate, they often confront assumptions about what is a “correct” or appropriate course placement. Some do this explicitly (Royer and Gilles, “Directed Self-Placement” and “The Pragmatist Foundation”; Reynolds; Elbow; Tompkins), while many others do not. In one sense, this question of what constitutes appropriate placement is critiqued and tested in all the literature on DSP, otherwise, why would anyone attempt such an alternative placement model, or consider a non-traditional measure of validity as student satisfaction in courses? So we can read much of the DSP literature as literature that helps us understand our assumptions about how we know when a course placement has been successful, appropriate, or adequately valid, questions that Neal and Huot, as well as Schendel and O’Neill ask. In another sense, perhaps out of a local necessity to prove that their DSPs work well to local stakeholders, many in this bibliography do not question their assumptions about what makes for adequately valid placements. These studies often compare external measures, such as SAT and other placement scores, to course grades, portfolio ratings, and the like. Most do acknowledge and incorporate into their arguments student satisfaction rates, usually through surveys, which suggests that the researchers understand successful course placement may be measured differently than conventional validity inquiries offer. This is a direct consequence of one of DSP’s core values: that students can and should have more agency in placement processes, and when they do, they perform better in classes and are happier with those classes.

What is left unaddressed, however, is whether different local social and racial formations perform differently, or are satisfied at different rates, or can be argued to have better placements than other social or racial formations. Schendel and O’Neill urge those validating DSPs to do this kind of work. More significantly, Rachel Lewis argues that the guides offered to help students make decisions about placements may very well cause particular racial formations to choose differently than other formations, but Lewis’ chapter is not a study of a site’s actual placement data, but an investigation of two sites’ DSP guides.

Third, and finally, there are a few questions or issues that I think the literature on DSP helps teachers, administrators, and researchers ask. For example, should student satisfaction or happiness be a criterion for validity of course placements? What are we actually “placing” when we make writing course placements? If we use a writing sample or a portfolio, are we placing the writing when we should be placing the writer? Is it okay to think mostly in terms of placing student-writers, not student writing, or should it be the other way around? What does “failure” mean in any placement system? If a student chooses to take a course, is happy with that course, but fails it, is the course placement, the student choice, the wrong one? Can there be failure in the conventional sense in a DSP system? And if not, then how can one call any decision a bad one? How much agency can, or should, students have in course placements, or in any writing assessment process? Should some students have less choice than others because of writing histories or perceived writing competencies? How is agency distributed differently among students, or student groups, in high-stakes assessments like course placements? These are a few

of the questions that when reading through the literature in this bibliography, my graduate students and I continually asked. There are no easy or set answers, but the literature on DSP offers us ways to consider them, even if by showing us a contrasting placement model to conventional ones.

Asao B. Inoue, California State University, Fresno

Bedore, Pamela; Deborah Rossen-Knill

An informed self-placement: Is a choice offered a choice received?

Writing Program Administration 28.1-2 (2004): 55-78

Concerned that incoming students do not possess enough authority and information to fully understand Royer and Gilles' (DSP) model (2003), Pamela Bedore and Deborah Rossen-Knill argue instead for Informed Self-Placement (ISP). They suggest a dialogic model where faculty, staff, and students share information and responsibility for the final student choice in order to foster a more contextualized decision. Inspired by Cornell's writing program, the University of Rochester (UR) creates a placement process that mirrors aspects of Royer and Gilles' DSP model. UR's writing program thus implements a number of placement processes ranging from a three week summer writing course for students with more need to an on-site writing assessment process. Due to the large size of UR's incoming freshmen class (approximately 950), UR uses standardized testing scores to manage the number of students that take part in the placement processes. According to Bedore and Rossen-Knill, students are advised but ultimately make the final decision to enroll in the regular Reasoning and Writing in College (RWC) course or the extended version RWC-Lab. Bedore and Rossen-Knill analyze the effectiveness of their ISP program and discuss some of the changes they made in light of student feedback, such as providing more information to students during and immediately after the placement process, revising their exception policies (an innovation to apply for exception), and providing instructors with training and information about student's perceptions of their writing abilities. Since Bedore and Rossen-Knill's primary concern is that students understand the choices they are given, communication practices and theories are central to their research.

Keywords: self-placement, directed self-placement, 'informed self-placement,' assessment, WPA, placement, dialogical model, FYC, student-choice, advising

Blakesley, David

Directed self-placement in the university

WPA: Writing Program Administration 25.3 (2002), 9-39

David Blakesley narrates the implementation of a DSP program at SIUC. The impetus for change within the university originated from frustrated faculty members, who felt that juniors and seniors wrote inadequately. DSP was proposed after a series of “town hall” meetings concluded that the writing program needed a basic writing course and that a new placement system was needed. A basic writing course was added to the freshman writing composition program. Blakesley describes the justification for choosing the DSP model as being derived from its success at a comparable university and the concept that students are capable of placing themselves based on self-evaluation. He writes of his trials and tribulations with getting other components and groups to coincide with his goals, such as the administration, advisers, and his struggle with the Center for Basic Skills. He outlines the success of the program and the resulting focus of improving the program rather than grappling with the need to justify its retention at the University. There is an extended section of appendixes which include the contents of the brochure. Of particular interest is Appendix 2, a detailed discussion of the data collected on enrollment and survey results, including students’ opinions of whether they feel they chose correctly or not.

Keywords: Southern Illinois State University, WPA, assessment, directed self-placement, FYC, placement, basic, faculty-resistance, data, student-opinion, program

Blakesley, David; Erin J. Harvey; Erica J. Reynolds

Southern Illinois University Carbondale as an institutional model: The English 100/101 stretch and directed self-placement program

In Royer, Daniel J.; Roger Gilles (Eds.), *Directed self-placement: Principles and practices*; Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press (2003), 31-47

David Blakesley, Eric Harvey, and Erica Reynolds’ stretch program implementation at Southern Illinois University Carbondale is guided by Gregory Glau’s research at Arizona State University (1996; 2007). Their decision to use DSP in the SIUC stretch program was guided by the initial research of Royer and Gilles (2003), and then confirmed as a valid placement procedure after subsequent readings on the topic of self-efficacy, confidence, and choice. The dilemma that the authors faced, and which they share in hopes that other writing program administrators may more easily overcome it, is the means by which a stretch and DSP program can be thoroughly and beneficially implemented within a complex bureaucracy. The authors see four major groups of stakeholders who need to be convinced. First are students who need access to program information. Second are the student advisors who need to disseminate information and choices to students. Third are university administrators who make financial decisions.

And last are the personnel who teach in the classrooms, because they become de facto advisors. Blakesley et al. show brochures, testing procedures, and convincing analytical studies to help others implement a stretch and DSP program. Not content to rely on past research, they also produce research of their own, pointing out the need for future adopters of stretch or DSP programs to continue to collect data as the primary means of justifying adoption. Their stretch program was justified by data that showed a 9% higher pass rate for students who enrolled in the stretch program. Further figures show that while only 48% of students were aware of DSP, of those who were aware, 21% chose to enroll in the stretch program, and 93% valued their right to choose.

Keywords: placement, directed self-placement, self-placement, self-assessment, stretch, self-efficacy, data, stakeholder, student-opinion

Chernekkoff, Janice

Introducing directed self-placement to Kutztown University

In Royer, Daniel J.; Roger Gilles (Eds.), *Directed self-placement: Principles and practices*; Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press (2003), 127-147

Janice Chernekoff describes the implementation and success of a pilot DSP program at Kutztown University, a rural public university in Pennsylvania. Faculty, administration, and students were dissatisfied with the previous placement system, which used SAT scores to place students into either basic writing or the single semester required English course. Students who fell between were required to take a written exam in order to be placed by faculty members. In adopting a DSP program based upon Royer and Gilles' model (2003), the faculty created a brochure that expanded on Royer and Gilles' placement survey for students, which was explained to students during orientation. Students were also asked to fill out an additional anonymous survey, which was more detailed and aimed at getting students to think actively about their reading and writing experiences. With a combination of interviews, surveys, numerical data and lack of student complaints, Chernekoff argues that DSP works better for Kutztown University than the previous placement system. For example, her findings show that 95% of the students surveyed in 1999 believed they had made the right choice of courses. In addition to more appropriately locating students with basic writing needs, the author also points out that DSP is stimulating interest in Honors English as well, with the number of students taking Honors English classes doubling. Further, although there has been a 3.55 percent drop in students taking the basic writing course over three years, Chernekoff argues that DSP has not affected grade distributions but has increased morale within the classes and encouraged needed standardization of composition pedagogy within the English department.

Keywords: placement, directed self-placement, self-placement, self-assessment, basic, FYC, SAT-testing, data, student-opinion, survey, honors

Cornell, Cynthia E.; Robert D. Newton

The case of a small liberal arts university

In Royer, Daniel J.; Roger Gilles (Eds.), *Directed self-placement: Principles and practices*; Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press (2003), 149-179

Cornell and Newton describe DePauw University's transition from a test-based placement system to a Directed Self-Placement model, prompted by budget concerns and past failures at effectively placing students. Administrators first experimented with a combination of mainstreaming and DSP, eliminating the beginning writing course and allowing students who scored high enough on the SAT/ACT to challenge their placement with a writing sample. From this test-run, administrators concluded that students who had been identified as "disadvantaged" were just as able to succeed in the mainstream course. Concluding that their judgments about student placement were unreliable, they attempted to provide students with enough information so that they could make an informed placement decision of whether to take one or two semesters of writing instruction. Guidance included a letter suggesting they speak with high school teachers, a questionnaire similar to that which Royer and Gilles offered, as well as a diagnostic essay administered during the first week of class. The authors present an analysis of readiness, achievement, and persistence data on those students who participated in DSP at DePauw over a three year period. Their analysis compares students with high and low test scores, males and females, African Americans and European Americans, and first generation and second generation students. From this data the authors were able to make a number of observations: first, readiness scores were not reliable in predicting which class students would place themselves in, although women and African Americans did select the preparatory course at a higher rate. Second, "at risk" students who chose to skip the preparatory course achieved at a higher level than those who enrolled in it, suggesting that self-efficacy and disposition may play a larger role in determining student performance and persistence. Finally, African Americans and women achieved higher than their readiness scores suggested. Overall, Cornell and Newton conclude that students were generally happy about their placement decisions with many opting to take the two semester stretch course, and that despite some differences in performance among social groups, as well as the constant need for further adjustment and assessment, DSP works as an effective student-based placement model.

Keywords: placement, directed self-placement, self-assessment, liberal-arts, mainstreaming, basic, FYC, program, SAT-testing, ACT-testing, validity, DePauw University

Das Bender, Gita

Assessing Generation 1.5 learners: The revelations of directed self-placement

In Elliot, Norbert; Les Perelman (Eds.). *Writing assessment in the 21st century: Essays in honor of Edward M. White*; Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press (forthcoming, 2011)

Das Bender categorizes Generation 1.5 students as visa-bearing students, resident ESL, and multilingual students. Generation 1.5 students, who are difficult to identify and define because of their complex cultural and educational experience, lack placement solutions. According to prior research, DSP, with its emphasis on student choice and agency, would seem to address such problems associated with the assessment of multilingual minority students. However, after examining the DSP method instituted at Seton Hall, which relied on a combination of a rated essay and an online survey administered to students with SAT Reading and Writing scores below 550, Das Bender noted gaps in the placement process for ESL students. Generation 1.5 students tended to consider themselves strong readers and writers, and placed themselves in mainstream courses. However, this DSP profile at odds with their self-professed linguistic abilities (which they tend to agree are weak). This discrepancy suggests possible misplacements and complications with DSP. Das Bender calls for us to allocate resources to better understand Generation 1.5's language needs and to develop methods and tools that address those needs. DasBender also includes in the appendices all the materials relevant to her research. This includes questionnaires, statistical charts, curriculum descriptions, and other materials.

Keywords: Directed Self-Placement, Generation 1.5, DSP, Minority, ESL, Multilingual

Elbow, Peter

Directed self-placement in relation to assessment: Shifting the crunch from entrance to exit

In Royer, Daniel J.; Roger Gilles (Eds.), *Directed self-placement: Principles and practices*; Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press (2003), 15-30

Peter Elbow discusses DSP in the larger context of gateway assessments. A gateway assessment, which he calls a "crunch," serves the institution by providing students with two important messages: one of acceptance or denial, and one of the preferred institutional academic values and standards. Elbow asserts that the inception of DSP is an important historical event because it helped create a navigable avenue (i.e. first year writing "stretch" programs) inside of the institution's traditional entry/exit binary. According to Elbow, institutions historically have created three kinds of "crunches": at the end of formal instruction (the exit), at the beginning of instruction (the entrance), or at both the entrance and the exit. To ensure that crunches reward more than good student citizenry, Elbow suggests that universities leverage a larger degree of institutional support into its students, and go out of their way to articulate as much faith in their "remedial" student population as possible. Underwriting this argument is the assertion

that meaningful assessment should identify which writers will or will not succeed in a regular course. Elbow acknowledges that writing programs have become a trusted institutional gateway, so a further transition from norm-based models to criterion-referenced models is necessary to truly take advantage of DSP's potential. In this light, Elbow makes two direct suggestions about how to improve DSP as a protocol: gateway assessments (crunches) must be reconfigured in consideration of time variables; and DSP should offer supplementary, non-segregating help in its course offerings.

Keywords: placement, directed self-placement, self-evaluation, assessment, entrance-exam, exit-exam, basic, history, academy, norm-based, criterion-based, ancillary

Frus, Phyllis

Directed self-placement at a large research university: A writing center perspective

In Royer, Daniel J.; Roger Gilles (Eds.), *Directed self-placement: Principles and practices*; Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press (2003), 179-191

Phyllis Frus describes the implementation of DSP at the University of Michigan in 1999, which had previously used portfolios and test scores to place students. From her perspective as Director of the Sweetland Writing Center, Frus argues that DSP was established to better identify students who may need extra help in meeting the demands of college writing. Students who feel unprepared are given the option of enrolling in the mainstream FYW course or a "Writing Practicum," a FYW course with an added tutorial administered by the writing center. Administrators realized DSP could communicate the same programmatic goals to students that the previous portfolio system had, while reducing appeals. After initial implementation, faculty reported that about 3% of the students were unprepared for the courses they chose. The programmatic information distributed to students was revised to encourage more "underprepared" students to enroll in the Writing Practicum. Following this revision, enrollment in the Writing Practicum nearly doubled. After four years of the Sweetland Writing Center's involvement with DSP, Frus concluded that student grades demonstrated their ability to effectively place themselves. Furthermore, the study showed that Writing Centers can serve an important role in DSP. Gere, et al. continue the discussion of DSP at Michigan University in their article, published almost ten years later, "Assessing the Validity of DSP at a Large Research University."

Keywords: University of Michigan, basic, ancillary, stretch, FYC, placement, directed self-placement, self-placement, self-assessment, wcenter, large-university, data, tutorial

Gere, Anne Ruggles; Laura Aull; Timothy Green; Anne Porter

Assessing the validity of directed self placement at a large university

Assessing Writing 15.3 (2010), 154-176

Close to ten years after Phyllis Frus' initial positive report, "Direct Self-Placement at a Large Research University: A Writing Center Perspective," which examined the University of Michigan's DSP system, Gere et al. assess the validity of UM's DSP system, using Samuel Messick's robust theory of validity. After compiling data on students' academic history, questionnaires, surveys, course materials, and student interviews, numerous weaknesses became apparent in the system. The main curricular goals of the first year writing program were not addressed very well by the DSP; the time gap between survey completion and course selection diminished the DSP's substantive validity; the scoring of the DSP survey that students took to make decisions lacked alignment with the construct of writing in the writing program; DSP scores on the surveys did not generalize across time and various populations; the values implicit in the DSP survey (e.g., a focus on considering past experiences to determine placement) differed from those of the first year writing program curriculum; and while the extra practicum had demonstrable benefits in the view of students who took it, many who might have benefitted from the practicum were not led toward it by their experience with DSP. But since Messick's theory on validity is contextually informed, the results of the study cannot be directly applied to other DSP systems. Instead, the article points out the need for validity testing to be done within other contexts and sites. Finally, based on the lack of validity found within UM's DSP, the authors call for more contextually informed and conceptualized DSP systems that reflect the curriculum in which students are being placed. The authors also include in the appendices all the surveys and questionnaires used.

Keywords: University of Michigan, validity, directed self-placement, data, academic-success, teacher-opinion, student-opinion, needs-analysis, data, student-opinion, interview, contextual

Jones, Ed

Self-placement at a distance: Challenge and opportunities

WPA: Writing Program Administration 32.1 (2008), 57-75

Ed Jones' article outlines the criterion for online DSPs, and discusses the obstacles and advantages of starting this type of placement program at his own university. He outlines the structure of the program, admitting the challenges of accurate placement without face-to-face meetings with students. He discusses certain cases in which his placement of students did not match their own decisions from the online program, which then required an occasional phone conversation. Transcripts of two such conversations are included in Appendix B. Jones stresses the importance of student and faculty feedback and explains

how he disperses surveys among faculty and students, collecting their responses to the questions as one measure of the program's success. Another measure for success is the comparison of data from Accuplacer to that of the online DSP. Twenty five percent fewer students placed themselves in the remedial course via the online assessment program than were placed there by Accuplacer. The data also shows no indication of a higher failing rate for students. Surveys also indicated that the placement's measurements of student ability and self-confidence matched instructors' projection of grades for students at midterm. Jones discusses the survey distribution and identifies the eight characteristics used to place students. Student reaction towards the DSP was highly receptive, with students responding that they were very confident in placing themselves into the program.

Keywords: WPA, directed self-placement, online, basic, data, validity, program, transcript-analysis, administrator-student, data, Accuplacer, machine-scoring, data, basic, teacher-assessment, self-confidence

Lewiecki-Wilson, Cynthia; Jeff Sommers; John Paul Tassoni

Rhetoric and the writer's profile: Problematizing directed self-placement

Assessing Writing 7.2 (2000), 165-183

Beginning with a theoretical framework that assessment is a rhetorical act, the authors argue for opposing computer aided or timed placement tests and suggest possible problems with using only DSP. The authors propose a placement process that they developed, "the writer's profile." The writer's profile is a take-home, writing assignment that incoming students complete, consisting of several documents, "lists, process notes, drafts, and revision," which then are read by two writing teachers in preparation for a dialogue with the student. Students are placed based on what the teachers read on these profiles and through discussion with the readers/teachers. A sample student profile (case study) is presented to illustrate the self-assessing writing questions students are required to answer in their writing profile. While the authors value DSP (for it allows students to self-reflect), they argue that self-reflection can emerge only through writing:

Self reflection alone would not provide all the information necessary for deciding which writing course to choose. Students would have to know thoroughly the curriculum and assumptions informing each course—a clear impossibility for them. The placement process would thus need to include students working with those that know the courses best—the instructors of those courses. (168)

The authors argue that the writing profile is a valid and reliable assessment as it allows students to work off-campus at their own pace with their own choice of technology, and emphasizes a process of student-teacher negotiation in order to place students.

Keywords: directed self-placement, two-year, placement, COMPASS, indirect, testing, extracurricular, self-reflection, rhetorical, computer-rating, Writer's Profile, interrater-reliability, teacher-rater, case-study, curriculum, instructional-validity

Lewis, Rachel

Race, remediation, and readiness for college writing: Reassessing the 'self' in directed self-placement

In Inoue, Asao B.; Mya Poe (Eds.), *Race and writing assessment*; Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University press (forthcoming)

Rachel Lewis argues that an important component of validating any DSP program lies in the degree to which it accounts for historically marginalized students' internalized, discriminatory racialized attitudes, which may render DSP problematic for them. Lewis asserts that racism is a pervasive, permeable construct, often expressed in the ideologies of individualism that DSP tends to work from. Although DSP is a better way to activate student agency than most other placement methods, this very agency is subject to severe contextual limitations, authored and encouraged by the student making a course placement. Lewis argues that DSP administrators should pay particular attention to these consequences of placement in an effort to acknowledge internal biases students may have about themselves that may transform DSP into what Michael Omi and Howard Winant call a harmful "racial project." Furthermore, her essay suggests that the rhetoric of "individual choice" employed by DSP may imply unfairly that students who fail to meet the requirements of a "prepared college writer" do so because of a "failure of individual will"--i.e., a lack of intelligence or skill-- and not as a result of external forces already in play, such as where the student went to high school, or what her family literacy practices were like. Drawing on Inoue's discussion of writing assessment as technology, Lewis illustrates how DSP placement guides reflect or underscore embedded racialized projects in the larger society. Her findings suggest that a dialogic model of self-assessment in DSP placement guides may potentially counteract some of the racial biases potentially inherent in the guides. Finally, among other things, she concludes that the rhetoric of DSP processes would perform better if it were contextualized for students.

Keywords: Directed Self-Placement, DSP, race, technological artifacts, First Year Writing Program, individualism.

Neal, Michael; Brian Huot

Responding to directed self placement

In Royer, Daniel J.; Roger Gilles (Eds.), *Directed self-placement: Principles and practices*; Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press (2003), 243-255

In their reflection on the chapters in Royer and Gilles's DSP collection, Neal and Huot find that, by and large, DSP works; however, portfolio based placements and timed

writing based placements, also tend to do their jobs—they place students. Therefore, it is not their wish to promote one placement procedure over another, rather they call the validity of most placement processes into question. DSP receives their special attention because of a noticeable lack of validity inquiry in the published research. They avoid the question of whether DSP placement processes do what they “purport to do,” because such a question misses the larger political implications of placement. Instead, they ask that future researchers use Samuel Messick's definition of validity. Quoting Messick, they understand validity as “an integrative evaluative judgment of the degree to which empirical evidence and theoretical rationales support the accuracy and appropriateness of inferences and actions based on test scores or other modes of assessment.” In other words, empirical research needs to be understood alongside pedagogical values, social implications, and post-decision consequences. Neal and Huot recognize that some literature validates DSP with student's grades. However, they suggest that validity inquiries should also account for teacher satisfaction, culture, gender, class, and ethnicity.

Keywords: placement, portfolio, time-limit, directed self-placement, self-placement, self-assessment, validity, Messick, research-method, research-agenda, grade, teacher-opinion

Peckham, Irvin

Online placement in first-year writing

College Composition and Communication 60.3 (2009), 517-540

Irvin Peckham describes the online component of student placement into first-year writing classes at Louisiana State University (LSU). This component allows students to challenge their initial placement, which is based on standardized test scores. This component was implemented after LSU faculty and staff expressed dissatisfaction with previous placement procedures, which also required a diagnostic writing sample collected in the first week of class to confirm students had been properly placed. Peckham argues that the revision to the placement procedure at LSU is a more cost-effective solution to placement than the previous placement procedure. This new procedure placed students into courses first according to their test scores. Students wishing to challenge their placement have three opportunities to write an essay with similar criteria as the last assignment from the first semester course. For this writing sample, students received between 8 and 10 articles online, which they had 4 days to read. Then they completed an essay over the course of 3 days. To facilitate the online component, LSU helped pilot the iCampus MIT Online Assessment Tool (iMOAT) program, which stores student data, including student assessments and essays. LSU also used iMOAT to assess writing at the end of the first-semester, which reduced the costs of determining who needed to take the second semester course by \$40,000, according to Peckham (524). As a result of the change, between 4-5 percent of students challenged their placement. Peckham writes that LSU composition faculty expected that students who challenged their placements would be better writers and better students than their peers with comparable test scores (ACT/SAT/AP) (527). The faculty also expected that students whose scores were nearer to the upper edges of a placement would be more likely to challenge their placement.

Peckham concludes that this second expectation held true for students placed into the lowest writing class, but was more erratic for students placed into the other two classes. In terms of reassignments, on average 58.5 percent of students stayed in the same course, 19.7 percent moved to a more advanced course, and 22.1 moved to a less advanced course. Peckham says that LSU is satisfied that this placement procedure represents an improvement over previous procedures, despite some problems he sees with his readers' assessments of students' direct writing samples. He suggests that, in the future, the program may consider expanding this procedure so that multiple genres are represented in students' writing samples.

Keywords: ACT-testing, agency, anchor-paper, AP, assessment, data, diagnosis, directed self-placement, re-placement, cost, data, empirical, e-portfolio, pedagogy, portfolio, online, placement, iMOAT, SAT-testing, self-placement, validity, WPA, Louisiana State University

Pinter, Robbie; Ellen Sims

Directed self-placement at Belmont University: Sharing power, forming relationships, fostering reflection

In Royer, Daniel J.; Roger Gilles (Eds.), *Directed self-placement: Principles and practices*; Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press (2003), 107-125

Robbie Pinter and Ellen Sims explain their transformation of the traditional English placement exam to DSP at Belmont University, a private liberal arts university located in Nashville, Tennessee. The writing faculty was inspired by Royer and Gilles' DSP model, and felt that the traditional placement exam did not reflect their pedagogy, philosophy or classroom practices. In addition, they found the process unwieldy for the needs of the program, as it identified only a very small number of students who needed basic writing. The university went from placing students in a basic writing course prior to a two semester sequence of first year writing to offering students an additional one unit, writing-center based course, taken concurrently with the first semester of the sequence. Most international students at Belmont are required to take a three-semester sequence of writing courses. The placement process they implemented includes a questionnaire based upon Royer and Gilles' model, yet modified to more closely reflect their pedagogy and an additional questionnaire for international students. In addition, during orientation the students are given a sample piece of college level reading and asked to write a response; then after exposure to a typical summary of the piece they are asked to do a guided self-evaluation of their own reading and writing skills to determine if they need the additional one-unit course. Pinter and Sims evaluate their DSP program as successful due to the much higher enrollment rates into the one unit course compared to placements in the previous system. Additionally, instructor satisfaction and anecdotal evidence of student satisfaction were relatively high. For example, an in-class survey showed that all of the students surveyed liked being responsible for their own placement, and many students report that they recommend the one unit course to their friends.

Keywords: placement, directed self-placement, self-placement, self-assessment, Belmont University, power, reflection, sharing, Belmont University, liberal-arts, basic, ancillary, wcenter, questionnaire, student-opinion, data, teacher-opinion, international, FYC

Reynolds, Erica

The role of self-efficacy in writing and directed self-placement

In Royer, Daniel J.; Roger Gilles (Eds.), *Directed self-placement: Principles and practices*; Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press (2003), 73-102

Reynolds reviews studies on self-efficacy in relation to academic reading and writing for students, considering how it affects DSP (75). According to the literature she summarizes, self-efficacy is defined as “people’s judgment of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance” (74). Reynolds’ literature review finds that self-efficacy appears to be directly related to perceptions of writing ability by experienced raters, academic reading and writing achievement, and diminished anxiety over multiple writing assignments over a semester (76-79). Through these studies, Reynolds discovers that self-efficacy, and self-confidence are related to student writing abilities in and outside the classroom. She recommends that universities that implement DSP should be more specific about the types of good writing that they are looking for and that students should pick their class the same day that they receive information about DSP. Reynolds notes that factors such as apprehension and self-efficacy should be taken into account before a student begins to place herself in an English class. In the final section, Reynolds compares how males and females respond to writing feedback. Males have more apprehension about writing; females are more likely to respond to negative feedback on their writing; and females are less confident about their writing. Reynolds argues for more research on confidence, apprehension, self-efficacy, and gender, and how these factors affect a student’s decision in a DSP program.

Keywords: placement, directed self-placement, self-placement, self-assessment, self-efficacy, correlation, data, academic-success, self-confidence, apprehension, gender-difference

Royer, Daniel J.; Gilles, Roger

Directed self-placement: An attitude of orientation

College Composition and Communication 50.1 (1998), 54-70

The article marks the first, two-year, longitudinal pilot study on DSP. Their decision to experiment with DSP originated from their frustration over using traditional placement methods and its known questionable reliability and validity issues. The article explains how and why the department moves from placement testing to Directed Self Placement (DSP), and how this change turns out to be beneficial for teachers, students, and administrators. Through a survey filled by the students at their university, Royer and

Gilles found that 62% of the students who were placed in the remedial classes because of their low scores on the ACT felt they were wrongly placed. They also found that having a high score on the ACT did not correlate to having a better grade in Eng 150 (their first year composition class) and that students with lower scores on the ACT were getting the same grades (C or better)—“Statistically, about 80% of [the students]-regardless of test scores-would get a "C" or better [in the same classes]” (61). Thus, they decided to try a new placement procedure, whereby the students at Grand Valley State University were given the option to self-assess their need for the English preparatory class (Eng 098) or the more advanced, first-year composition class (Eng 150). Their research explains how this change turned out to be constructive for teachers, students, and administrators at GVSU. An orientation speech from the Director of Composition to introduce the concept of DSP to first-year students on the day of their orientation and a self-assessing survey helped the students to understand why and how they needed to decide for themselves. The theoretical framework of DSP is explicitly derived from John Dewey’s democratic and pragmatist philosophy of education. Through student comments, results of the surveys (pre and post), teachers’ perspectives, and administrators’ comments, the article concludes its research by reporting an overall positive effect on all.

Keywords: Grand Valley State University, 'directed self-placement', self-placement, validity, pragmatism, reliability, validation, quantification, self-assessment, summer-seminar, orientation-program, longitudinal, data, academic-success, student-opinion, ACT-testing

Royer, Daniel; Roger Gilles

The pragmatist foundation of directed self-placement

In Royer, Daniel J.; Roger Gilles (Eds.), *Directed self-placement: Principles and practices*; Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press (2003), 49-70

Royer and Gilles argue that DSP is a pragmatic solution to a difficult placement problem. They explain that DSP forms a “design-feedback loop” with the curriculum and students at their university, creating a process that constantly is being assessed by the instructors and through student feedback during the placement process (53). This “design-feedback loop” allows for changes in the process, and perhaps curriculum. The DSP process encourages a “self” that the university promotes, one who makes a conscious decision, a choice, about her education. Ultimately, they explain that students feel more like a part of a community, which can have an impact on their education. Additionally, they suggest that students gain “agency, choice . . . [a] connection and dependence . . . the ideal of a democratic community” (61). This gain in agency further inspires students to get involved in the university and inquire about their own educational goals and needs. Royer and Gilles argue that there were three consequences to individuals and the university in implementing DSP at GSVU. The first major consequence is during their summer orientations, where the students pick their own English class. The second major consequence is that there are fewer placement complaints. The final consequence of DSP is curricular and pedagogical. The first day’s writing sample helps teachers further advice

students on their placements, and lets them give students learning strategies to survive and do well in their class. Finally, Royer and Gilles explain that these consequences “allow students to become authentic inquirers and problem solvers” (69).

Keywords: placement, directed self-placement, self-placement, self-assessment, pragmatism, model, feedback loop, agency, student-choice, problem-solving

Schendel, Ellen; Peggy O’Neill

Exploring the theories and consequences of self-assessment through ethical inquiry

Assessing Writing 6.2 (1999), 199-227

Ellen Schendel and Peggy O’Neill situate a discussion on validity and postmodern ethics surrounding self-assessment practices by noting the ranking and evaluative nature of self-assessment in the classroom. While the authors note that self-assessment is used by writing professionals as a means to deal with the problematic nature of assessments in general, Schendel and O’Neill argue that self-assessment will privilege certain writers and may serve a gatekeeping function for less-experienced writers. According to Schendel and O’Neill, the effects of self-assessment on students have not yet been widely researched. One possible effect of asking students to make a judgment of their writing selves might be that instructors are asking students to participate in their own surveillance and domination. Thus, Schendel and O’Neill advocate for the use of postmodern ethics to inquire about the validity, assumptions, consequences and theories behind large-scale and classroom self-assessments. For Schendel and O’Neill, DSP is a kind of self-assessment because students evaluate their experiences and performances in order to choose the appropriate composition course. In order for DSP to make a claim for validity, however, research needs to address the social, material, and theoretical consequences for the students that participate in a DSP process. According to the authors, more research is needed to understand the effects of a lack of experience in self-evaluation, or the internalization of an educational gaze that focuses on past assessments including test scores. More research is also needed in order to understand how race, class, gender, and (dis)abilities might affect students in DSP processes. Ultimately, Schendel and O’Neill advocate for an ongoing inquiry into the validity and ethics of self-assessment practices that examines theories, assumptions, and implications of such practices.

Keywords: evaluation, self-evaluation, misevaluation, theory, ethical, inquiry, reflective, directed self-placement, validity, data, inquiry, gate-keeping, needs-analysis, research-agenda, race, social-class, gender, reflective cover letter, portfolios, classroom self-assessment, large-scale self-assessment.

Tompkins, Patrick

Directed self-placement in a community college context

In Royer, Daniel J.; Roger Gilles (Eds.), *Directed self-placement: Principles and practices*; Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press (2003), 193-206

Tompkins discusses the development of DSP at John Tyler Community College (JTCC), situated within the Virginia Community College System (VCCS). As a response to a disparate range of tests and test scores which were being used to determine basic “college-level” writing, the VCCS adopted COMPASS as a system-wide placement test. The VCCS also created a task force to implement system-wide standards for interpreting test scores, to develop objectives for developmental reading and writing courses and to make recommendations for assessment techniques in response to these changes. The task force decided on a range of cutoff scores for COMPASS that colleges within the VCCS could use, as well as a “decision zone” for difficult-to-place students. Schools within this system were allowed to experiment with placement procedures on an individual basis after providing justifications of their efficacy, with the option to adopt these placement procedures indefinitely. JTCC thus adopted DSP as a placement procedure for students within this “decision zone,” because of the emphasis Royer and Gilles place on students’ self-efficacy. Tompkins focuses on a cohort of 65 students given DSP options, who also took the placement test for the purposes of comparison. Tompkins notes that no students placed themselves in a course that was “lower” than the one recommended by the placement test. Further, of those students who placed themselves into a more advanced course, 63% earned grades of ‘A’ or ‘B,’ compared to 49% of students who earned this grade overall. However, 27% of students who placed themselves into more advanced courses withdrew from their classes, compared to 16% overall. After the course, about half of the cohort responded to a survey about their DSP experiences. Of these, 35% of students noted that their final decisions were made on the bases of factors outside of the DSP information. One third wrote comments thanking JTCC for the DSP choice, and only two students expressed dissatisfaction with their course decisions. Tompkins suggests that the study suffered from the “Hawthorne effect,” meaning that participating students reacted positively to the special treatment that came along with their participation in the pilot program. While Tompkins says that DSP helped the English department at JTCC rethink their own teaching practices and policies, it was ultimately not used across all writing classes. Tompkins cites issues related to the costs and the difficulties of presenting DSP to students, and suggests that these problems are magnified at the community college level. Tompkins ends by emphasizing the impact DSP has on student placement and all assessment methods at JTCC.

Keywords: two-year, John Tyler Community College, placement, directed self-placement, self-placement, data, student-opinion, academic-success, self-assessment, two-year, community college, COMPASS, cutoff, uneven, Hawthorne effect, FYC