



## Introduction

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I am pleased to be drafting an introduction to the second issue of *The Journal of Writing Assessment*, marking the completion of our first volume and our first year of publishing this new journal. Certainly, writing assessment continues to be an exciting and contentious venue for scholarship and research. Two of the articles in this issue address pressing concerns for writing assessment, with Michael Williamson writing about the machine-scoring of student writing and Daniel Fraizer writing about the political issues involved in writing assessment at the state level and as part of policymaking in education in general. The landscape for writing assessment literature has evolved over the last 9 or 10 years that I have been editing a journal devoted to writing assessment. I noted in the first introduction to *Assessing Writing* that the literature had moved from focusing on the technical aspects of writing assessment like reliability and task selection and prompt development to more critical stances on current writing assessment theory and practice.

It seems to me that the scholarship presented here including Williamson and Fraizer's articles, as well as the research study by Hauptman, Rosenfield, and Tamir as well as the review of Liz Hamp-Lyons and William Condon's book on portfolios by Terry Underwood, might signal the breaking of some new ground for writing assessment scholarship that combines the focus of earlier scholarship. For example, Williamson looks at machine-scoring of student essays but instead of offering either a defense or critique of automated scoring, he provides us with the opportunity to use extant theories of validity to bring disparate camps in writing assessment together, so that the potential of machine-scoring can be harnessed to not only defend its use but to create an "alliance" of scholars who work in writing assessment on complex and important issues. Fraizer's article and the book review by Underwood also combine theory and practice to look at the ways in which writing assessment can be played out in politically charged arenas. Fraizer's article and Hamp-Lyons and Condon's book address the importance of applying coherent theories of education and assessment in making important and consequential decisions about how assessment will be structured and used. The research presented by Hauptman, Rosenfield, and Tamir also combine these two foci in addressing the often vexing problem of how to best understand how students learn to incor-

porate sources into their writing and then to use this information to help students learn to do this better.

The fact that all of the articles and book reviews in this issue to some degree address important writing assessment issues in complex and sophisticated ways that utilize a theoretical understanding of language and measurement is certainly encouraging. However, we should not forget that a writing assessment literature that is current and relevant to new issues and challenges while at the same time sophisticated in its treatment of theories and principles in both measurement and language education is a future goal and not a current reality as Williamson demonstrates in his review of the literature on machine-scoring of student essays.

Williamson's article, "A Prologue for a Continuing Dialogue on Machine-Scoring of Student Writing," breaks new ground in discussing machine-scoring because it avoids taking one side or another. In fact, Williamson says in the beginning of his article that he intended to write another kind of piece but found that before he could, he need to write a prologue of sorts to outline the various stances of educational measurement and English Studies professionals. Williamson not only outlines the two main positions on this issue, he also explores how and why these two camps came to hold the positions they do. Exploring the history of ideas and epistemologies of these two positions, he goes on to consider them in relationship to current theories in validity and validation research. Williamson sees potential not only in machine-scoring but in a continuing dialogue between English Studies and educational measurement on this and other issues important in writing assessment.

Daniel Fraizer's article, "The Politics of High-Stakes Writing Assessment in Massachusetts: When Inventing a Better Assessment Model is not Enough," explores the pervasive and important influence of politics in writing assessment. Using the current political and assessment environment as a backdrop, Fraizer focuses on the case of the Massachusetts Test for Educator Licensure (MTEL). Fraizer's frustration with the politics of writing assessment is evident as he traces the history of a test that, despite its failure in other places, has continued to be used to make high-stakes decisions about future educators. Fraizer's account of one decision after another being made to rely on such a test in the face of heavy evidence that it is not a reliable or valid measure of teacher expertise is chilling. Fraizer's account of the implementation of the MTEL is also a call to action for all of those with a stake in writing assessment and high-stakes decisions.

Hauptman, Rosenfield, and Tamir address the continuing problem of why students have a difficult time learning to write using source material. One of the things that makes this research so interesting is that it was conducted in Israel using students who wrote in Hebrew, their native language. Interestingly, these researchers found that task representation was one of the biggest problems students faced, a problem that they identify as important in the literature about English-speaking students. This kind of research is important because it indicates that there might be certain principles in the teaching and assessing of writing that carry across languages and cultures, despite earlier studies that demonstrated the problems with cross-cultural writing assessment. This research is also important because it illustrates the ability of writing assessment to be become meaningful for the teaching of

writing because the researchers found that the rubrics used in the assessment had value for teachers and students in an educational setting.

Terry Underwood's review of Liz Hamp-Lyons and William Condon's book, *Assessing the Portfolio*, illustrates some of the themes developed in this issue's three articles. Although Hamp-Lyons and Condon were able to demonstrate the viability and importance of using portfolios to make placement decisions, their program was dismantled for practical and financial reasons. Underwood sees much value in the stories and discussions that these collaborators have over the course of the 10 years or so it took to write the book.

In addition to our customary three articles and a review, I also want to mention the second installment of the annotated bibliography we began in the last issue. This time, the topic is reliability and validity, a wide area of study and concern. We hope that our readers we will help us develop this bibliography further by sending us citations we might have missed or need to include. I also want to take this opportunity to thank Michael Neal, Peggy O'Neill, and Ellen Schendel for all their work on this project, Beginning with the next issue, they will assume responsibility for the bibliography and will be asking others with expertise in certain areas of writing assessment to help them draft future bibliographies.

As is always the case with any publishing venture, I have many people to thank, primarily Michael Neal, my managing editor and without whom this issue and journal would not be a reality. I also want to thank Barbara Bernstein of Hampton Press who has placed a tremendous amount of trust in us and who continues to support us in too many ways to mention. Most importantly, I want to thank our readers—without whom any journal of writing assessment would not be possible. Finally, I want to take this opportunity to thank Kathi Yancey who is moving from the editorial staff to the editorial board of *JWA*. Kathi and I have been working on one or another assessment journal for 10 years now, and there is little doubt that either *Assessing Writing* or *JWA* would be a reality with out her. It's also a no-brainer that I will miss her as my co-editor. I wish her much success (as if she needs it) on her many projects, and I am excited that she will continue to work with us as a member of the editorial board.