



Introduction

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Editing a journal, even one focused on a specific subspecialty like writing assessment, often startles me in terms of the range of work people are doing. When we begin to choose articles to comprise a single volume, I am once again surprised as disparate-seeming pieces appear to coalesce into a coherent statement on a particular issue or set of issues. This disparate-coalescing process is once again an appropriate way to describe the experience of constructing *JWA* 3.2. This issue's articles focus on three distinct forms of assessment: classroom assessment and management software; a systemwide high-stakes writing assessment for 4-year postsecondary admission; and a nationally administered, federally financed matrix sample assessment of student progress in writing. The annotated bibliography for this issue is on minority issues in writing assessment, a relevant focus considering the rest of the issue. In an article based on an issues paper commissioned by the National Assessment Governing Board, Arthur Applebee's "Issues in Large-Scale Writing Assessment: Perspectives From the National Assessment of Educational Progress" documents the rationale for and an outline of the new Writing Test framework for the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) writing assessment. The current NAEP framework dates back to 1989-1990, although it was revised 1995-1996. The new framework is designed to make the NAEP writing assessment as relevant, authoritative, and representative as possible. As a component of a large battery of NAEP writing assessment, it must be given in a 25- or 30-minute time slot over three distinct grade levels in a variety of schools serving a diverse and representative sample of students. NAEP, or the Nations Report Card, is not used to make decisions with consequences or instructional benefits for individual students, but it is a valued authoritative indicator of how well schools are doing their jobs and is used to make important policy decisions by school administrators and politicians at the state and federal levels. Success or failure on the NAEP writing test can have profound implications for the ways writing is taught, valued, and assessed in schools across the country.

Bruce Chadwick's "Tilting at Windmills: The City University of New York's ACT Writing Exam" focuses on his and his students' experiences with the writing exam used to make high-stakes admission decisions for students at his and other

community college campuses at City University of New York (CUNY). This article not only considers the experiences of students who have to pass the writing exam to be admitted to 4-year campuses of CUNY, it also explores the political and administrative processes that lead to such an important decision, outlining how the processes ignored important principals and guidelines for acceptable, professional, and ethical uses of educational assessment. From a broad perspective, this article questions the continuing use of this writing exam to make important educational decisions about students at CUNY. Chadwick's article questions a continued focus on the theoretical foundations for writing assessment, when institutions ignore acceptable practice and use tests to make important policy decisions (Shohamy).

Vicki Hester's "When Pragmatics Precede Pedagogy: Post Process Theories of Assessment and Response to Student Writing" focuses on the use of the Interactive Composition Online (ICON) and the Texas Tech Online/Print Integrated Curriculum (TOPIC) to structure the way a required first-year composition course is delivered at Texas Tech University (TTU), a pioneer in the use of technology to deliver writing courses. Although the use of ICON and TOPIC have allowed TTU to increase enrollment to 35 students in a class while at the same time spreading out the paper-load among teaching assistants and other teachers, it does raise questions about the quality of the instruction, especially the quality of the response students receive on their writing from people who do not know them and are not connected to them in any pedagogical or evaluative way. Like Chadwick, Hester fuses her experience with her knowledge of and reading in the relevant literature. Her treatment of ICON and TOPIC questions the consequences of having student writing responded to blindly both from an understanding of what it means to teach real students whose writing you don't grade and from an understanding of theory, practice, and research about responding to student writing.

All three of these articles look at some system of writing assessment used to make assessment decisions about student writing. The annotated bibliography examines the ways in which minority populations have been assessed or the impact of minority cultures and issues on aspects of writing assessment. There is reason to believe that racial identity is an important aspect of what teachers and students value in written texts (Ball, 1996). Although the articles and bibliography focus on different assessments and issues in assessment, each of the articles examine the local, contextual nature of the assessment and its possible consequences. For example, teachers, school districts, and state departments of education who want to "look good" on an NAEP writing test of the future should probably engage students in writing compatible to the three NAEP categories for writing and provide experience in writing 30-minute intervals, whereas students at TTU should learn to write for readers they and their classroom instructors never meet, and CUNY students and their teachers struggle to increase the success rate of the CUNY writing test.

Although Applebee's article does not contain a narrative about having to work within a writing assessment system, he has, nonetheless, been a long-time NAEP writing assessment consultant for several decades and his description and endorsement of the new framework is based on his experience of working with the system itself. Chadwick and Hester's articles are based on their experiences working with students at institutions whose systems of assessment had a strong impact on the

environment for teaching and learning writing. All three of these articles, then, provide a commentary on current systems for structuring the way important evidence is mustered and used for making decisions about students and their education. In this way, all of the articles address policy issues in writing assessment. As I have previously noted (Huot, 1994), earlier scholarship in writing assessment focused on the viability of the procedures themselves, documenting the way(s) in which writing assessment(s) mainly satisfied requirements for reliability and validity, although historically the emphasis has been on reliability (Elliot, 2005; Huot & Neal, 2006). Later work, going back to the early 1990s, switched focus from documenting writing assessment procedures to critiquing them and envisioning practices that were more in line with what we know about literacy and its acquisition (Camp, 1993). The articles in this issue of *JWA* focus on policy issues in writing assessment, or how assessment systems come into being, and why they look the way they do. Although Applebee differs from Chadwick and Hester because he is proposing an assessment rather than examining one in use, he also acknowledges the often tough compromises in building a writing assessment designed to be used in multiple educational contexts and administered with other tests.

The implementation of digital technology for writing instruction and evaluation both inside and outside of a classroom context has been and appears to continue to be increasing in frequency and complexity as a policy issue. In writing assessment, automated scoring has been an important issue off and on for more than 40 years with breakthroughs in the last decade or so, making automated scoring a regular part of the writing assessment industry. TTU's digitally delivered writing program does not utilize automated scoring, highlighting the ways in which computer software can manage and structure writing pedagogy. By outsourcing the labor-intensive practice of reading and responding to student writing, TTU is able to increase course enrollment, while holding down costs and managing graduate student teaching resources for their maximum productivity. This technological answer to economic and political pressures reminds me of Neal Lerner's *College English* essay in which he outlined the birth and resurgence of writing center and tutorial programs to meet the needs of new populations of college students over the last century. We could just as easily see a different kind of reaction to changing student populations, given that the proliferation of intelligence testing around the turn of the 20th century was predicated on recent laws for universal education, bringing into the public schools students whose families and communities had no experience with formal schooling, its culture, values, and expectations for success. The CUNY test, like the ICON and TOPIC, is a response to a changing postsecondary environment. As Chadwick documents, CUNY officials became alarmed by the claims that graduates of the CUNY system could not write up to expectations from the business community. Similarly, The new NAEP framework for 2011 responds to technological developments, recognizing that most students write on a keyboard. At the same time, the NAEP framework keeps many traditional aspects like 25 to 30 minutes for writing an essay and the division of writing tasks into narrative, expository, and argument. Although we can argue that NAEP does not hold specific consequences for individual students, we must also be aware that its results are an important educational marker of achievement and deficit.

The three articles and annotated bibliography presented here make an important point about the necessity of examining writing assessment use to determine and maintain that writing assessment be used to make educationally sound decisions for and about students. The bibliography reminds us that students from racial or ethnic minorities can often face additional issues from assessments that are used to make important decisions about their lives but that often do not recognize the cultural and political issues that define these very people. Whether we consider the NAEP Writing Test Framework for 2011, the CUNY writing exam being used to determine admission into the CUNY 4-year college system, or the TOPIC and ICON course management and evaluation software used at TTU, it is clear that all of the writing assessment systems that are the topics of these articles, and the decisions being made based on these writing examinations, such decisions not always being clear or forthright, especially in the case of NAER, which has no direct relationship to any decisions made about individual students, warrant close and critical examination by the communities that use them. One clear point from the articles and bibliography in this issue is the need for ongoing validation research that includes relevant policy issues and the implementation of all writing assessments. It is no longer viable that we just look at the tests themselves, we must also examine all assessment systems in relationship to the way these systems make decisions about students and impact other larger decisions made about writing curricula, assignments, and other forms of evaluation.

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