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Introduction to Volume 8

by Diane Kelly-Riley and Carl Whithaus

Editors' Introduction to Volume 8

The past year has been a dynamic time for writing assessment. The Common Core State Standards assessments were implemented during the 2014-15 academic year through tests developed by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC). They have changed the way we define and measure writing skills by emphasizing the goal of “college-and-career readiness.” These assessment efforts have begun to change K-12 curricula, and invariably these tests will affect post-secondary writing instruction too. The assessment instruments developed by SBAC and PARCC are reshaping the evaluation of—and potentially the teaching and learning of—writing in elementary and secondary education. This enterprise is one of the largest-scale writing assessment projects ever undertaken in the United States.

As we write this column in October 2015, newspapers around the country have covered the mixed reception to, and performance of, the SBAC and PARCC assessments. Around the nation, protesters organized various Opt Out Days when the CCSS tests were administered. In Washington State, Seattle high school teachers went on strike in September 2015 to demand numerous things, one of which was an end to the use of students' standardized test scores as measures of teacher performance (Strauss). Additionally, teachers argued that the administration of the CCSS tests cuts into precious instructional time, and they questioned the SBAC's practice to evaluate student work by automated scoring systems (Todd). As scores were released this fall and were lower than anticipated, states revised the plans they had for score usage. In Idaho, the State Board of Education approved a waiver that rescinds the requirement that students earn a certain score to qualify for graduation (Stone). In Ohio, just more than a third of students met the standards on the PARCC exams (O'Donnell), and in New Jersey, most students performed below grade level in English and math (Clark). In late October, perhaps in response to the uneven rollout of these assessments, President Obama announced an initiative to limit the amount of testing in schools (Zernike).

Even as some parents and students embrace Opt Out Days and as educational researchers question the SBAC and PARCC assessments, the Common Core State Standards are affecting elementary and secondary curricula. It is vital that writing assessment researchers document issues with these tests' fairness, validity, and reliability to understand how these assessments impact students' and teachers' lives. This special issue aims to begin that dialogue in earnest now that researchers have access to educational environments where the SBAC and PARCC assessments have been implemented on a larger scale.

Volume 8 of the *Journal of Writing Assessment (JWA)* opens with Norbert Elliot, Andre A. Rupp, and David Williamson's “Conceptual, Interpretative, and Integrative Frameworks: Assessment of English Language Arts-Writing in the Common Core State Standards Initiatives” and Joanne Addison's “Shifting the Locus of Control: Why the Common Core State Standards and Emerging Standardized Tests May Reshape College Writing Classrooms.” These two pieces take a systems level view of the CCSS assessments. Elliot, Rupp, and Williamson's article examines how the theoretical approaches towards assessing learning in English Language Arts (ELA) have impacted the Common Core State Standards and how stakeholder groups could use frameworks developed in educational measurement and writing assessment communities to “ask principled questions of score interpretation and use.” Addison's article considers how the CCSS and the standardized SBAC and PARCC assessments may reshape college writing classrooms; she worries that the curricula may narrow and that rhetorical contexts may be deemphasized as a result. Her article raises important considerations about the purpose of assessments, and the role and agency of teachers in assessment systems.

The next set of articles on the CCSS assessments consider how they impact teachers and students in secondary schools. Brad Jacobson's “Teaching and Learning in an ‘Audit Culture’: A Critical Genre Analysis of Common Core Implementation” provides a genre-based analysis of a Common Core-aligned senior English Language Arts textbook writing assessment prompts, criteria, and written instructions. He argues that these materials emphasize accountability rather than an enactment or a practicing of the Standards. Todd Ruecker, Bee Chamcharatsri, Jet Saengngoen's article, “Teacher Perceptions of the Impact of the Common Core Assessments on Linguistically Diverse High School Students,” examines how the PARCC assessments impact linguistically diverse schools in the Southwestern U.S. They draw much of their research from the under-utilized perspective of the students' teachers. While the research relies on perceptions, these perceptions are from faculty involved day-in and day-out with English Language Learners; their insights need to contribute to our emerging understanding of how the PARCC-designed tests affect students' lives.

Finally, Angela Clark-Oates, Sherry Rankins-Robertson, Erica Ivy, Nicholas Behm, and Duane Roen's “Moving Beyond the Common Core to Develop Rhetorically Based and Contextually Sensitive Assessment Practices” sketches out how large-scale writing assessments might have been designed to more effectively capture the complexity of writing and learning. Like Jacobson and Ruecker et al., they provide an examination of PARCC-designed tests. They also present an argument in favor of using *The Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* as a heuristic for developing rhetorically based and contextually sensitive assessment practices. These would primarily draw on portfolio assessments which are consistent with recommendations from organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), National Writing Project (NWP), and the Council of

Writing Program Administrators (WPA).

While many of the articles in *JWA* Volume 8 focus on the impact of the Common Core State Standards assessments, we also continue to present new findings related to automated essay scoring software and articles that reflect on the history of writing assessment as a discipline. Scott A. Crossley, Kristopher Kyle, and Danielle S. McNamara's "To aggregate or not?: Linguistic features in Automatic Essay Scoring and feedback systems" examines how AES systems perform when they draw on linguistic micro-features, aggregated features, or a combination of both. They argue that AES and feedback systems should draw on micro-features or a combination of micro-features and aggregated features.

JWA publishes most reviews of assessment-related texts on our refereed blog, the [JWA Reading List](#), but we decided to include Bob Broad's review essay of Norbert Elliot's meticulously crafted biography of Henry Chauncey, the founder of ETS, in this special issue. Elliot's biography provides a window into the lineage of an influential figure whose work continues to affect our contemporary experience of educational measurement, and through this biography we can begin to understand the field's complicated history and influence on standardized testing in new ways. We invited Bob Broad to review Elliot's biography because we think it's important to engage multiple perspectives when considering the origin and influence of ETS. Broad's review acknowledges the research that went into Elliot's biography, but Broad's stance towards Chauncey and ETS is in marked opposition to Elliot's. Broad writes,

In his earlier book, *On a Scale*, Elliot makes this remarkable claim regarding ETS: the College Board and ETS have been two of the great educational institutions of the twentieth century, agencies that will continue to provide informed leadership in the twenty-first century. (p. 354) Almost from the beginning of my career teaching secondary English in the 1980s, I have held the opposite view. To make it perfectly clear: I cannot think of any single organization that I believe has done more than ETS to *harm* U.S. education.

Elliot's book and Broad's review essay reinforce the complex legacy of Henry Chauncey and the continuing influence of ETS. As writing assessment researchers study the impacts of the CCSS assessments, it seems appropriate that *JWA* looks back and analyzes the legacy and influence of Henry Chauncey and ETS.

Next, we want to thank the multitude of supporters of *JWA*. First, we appreciate the continued financial support of the Department of English and the College of Arts, Letters, and Social Sciences at the University of Idaho. This support ensures that *JWA* remains an independent journal that publishes scholarship by and for teachers and scholars of writing assessment. We appreciate the dedication and hard work of our extended editorial team: Jessica Nastal-Dema, Prairie State College, Associate Editor; Tialitha Macklin, Washington State University, Assistant Editor; David Bedsole and Bruce Bowles, Jr., both of Florida State University, co-editors of the *JWA* Reading List.

We greatly appreciate the many reviewers who have generously donated and volunteered their time to carefully peer-review many manuscripts for us this year. These reviewers include:

Charles Bazerman, University of California Santa Barbara

Darsie Bowden, DePaul University

Jill Burstein, ETS

Scott Crossley, Georgia State University

Deborah Crusan, Wright State University

Dylan Dryer, University of Maine

Chris Gallagher, Northeastern University

Carla Hall, University of Ottawa

Susanmarie Harrington, University of Vermont

James Hammond, University of Michigan

William Hart-Davidson, Michigan State University

Asao Inoue, University of Washington Tacoma

Marisa Klages-Bombich, LaGuardia CC-CUNY

Claudia Leacock, CTB McGraw Hill

Cynthia Miecznikowski, University of North Carolina at Pembroke

Pamela Moss, University of Michigan

Michael Neal, Florida State University

Les Perelman, MIT

Kevin Roozen, University of Central Florida

Tricia Serviss, Santa Clara University

David Slomp, University of Lethbridge

Christa Teston, Ohio State University

Stephanie Vie, University of Central Florida

Edward White, University of Arizona

Finally, Volume 8 marks the arrival of Carl Whithaus as co-editor of *JWA*. This CCSS Special Issue is the first of many important undertakings that we will do as a result of his leadership and expertise. Stay tuned for another Special Issue of *JWA* related to a theory of ethics for writing assessment scheduled to be released in March 2016.

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