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Reararticulating Writing Assessment for Teaching and Learning

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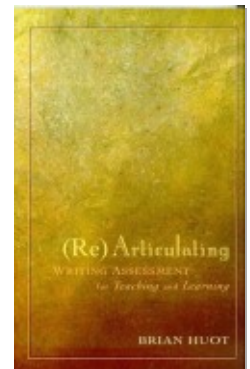
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(RE)ARTICULATING WRITING ASSESSMENT

Naming this book has been quite an adventure. When the idea for its title and shape first came to mind, I originally thought to call it *Reclaiming Assessment for the Teaching of Writing*. Of course, as I thought through the title and reexamined the idea, I realized that to *reclaim* something meant that it had to be claimed in the first place. Unfortunately, writing assessment has never been claimed as a part of the teaching of writing. As far back as 1840, writing assessment was hailed as a better technology (chapter six contains a discussion of writing assessment as technology) for assessing student knowledge (Witte, Trashel, and Walters 1986). The use of essay placement exams at Harvard and other prestigious institutions in the nineteenth century was justified in response to the growing perception that students were under-prepared for the rigors of university study. This notion of assessment as something done because of a deficit in student training or teacher responsibility is still with us in the plethora of accountability programs at the state level for public schools and in the recent national assessment programs advocated by the George W. Bush administration and adopted by Congress. Throughout the twentieth century, writing assessment became the tool of administrators and politicians who wished to maintain an efficient and accountable educational bureaucracy (Williamson 1994). The literature about classroom assessment was limited to an irregular series of volumes on grading student writing (see Judine 1965, for an example). At any rate, it would be inaccurate for me to advocate the re-claiming of writing assessment, when in fact it has yet to be claimed for the teaching of writing.

RE-IMAGINING ASSESSMENT

Although I contend that writing assessment has yet to be claimed for teaching writing, I have also come to challenge the whole notion of claiming assessment at all. Probably my dissatisfaction comes from the association of claiming with the concept of the stakeholder, a concept I discuss in more detail in chapters two and seven. Although I recognize that assessment must be a multi-disciplinary enterprise, something that should never be driven completely by the beliefs and assumptions of any single group, I don't believe that all stakeholders should have equal claim, since those closest to teaching and learning, like students and teachers, need to have the most input about writing assessment and all important teaching decisions. If assessment is to be used as a positive force in the teaching of writing, then it makes sense that those with the most knowledge and training be those who make the most important decisions about student assessment. Using writing assessment to promote teaching is one of the most crucial messages in this book.

Once I rejected the idea of reclaiming assessment, for awhile I renamed the volume *Re-Imagining Assessment for the Teaching of Writing*, because I now realized that the assessment of writing had never been central to its teaching and that claiming was a problematic term for many reasons. Because this volume is an ambitious work that clearly extends beyond simply staking out a claim for teachers to assessment, I thought the idea of re-imagining would work because it seemed grander, bigger, more in keeping with the ambitious nature of my purpose. As I began to work on the volume, however, "re-imagine" seemed too grand, too big, too abstract. And, of course one could argue that we had never imagined assessment for the teaching of writing. In a response to an earlier, shorter version of chapter four published in *College Composition and Communication*, Alan Purves (1996) had objected to my use of the term "theory," as being too big and abstract since he thought what I had constructed was something practical, important and useful, but not theoretical. My concern

with theory is that it can be construed as distinct from practice, and my intent in this book is to blur rather than emphasize any distinctions between theory and practice. As I detail in chapter seven, I was flattered by what he had to say, even if I didn't completely agree with him. On the other hand, I decided "re-imagine" was too big, since what I propose throughout this volume is less grand and more a reasoned response to the pressures, pitfalls and potential benefits from the assessment of student writing. My ideas that writing assessment can become a more unified field with a central focus (chapter two), that grading, testing and assessing student writing are separate acts incorrectly lumped together and that makes us miss the importance of assessment for the teaching of writing (chapter three), that all assessment practice contains theoretical implications (chapter four), that responding to student writing should focus more on the way we read student work and write back to them (chapter five), that assessment has been developed as a technology and can benefit greatly from being revised as research (chapter six), and that writing assessment can never be understood outside of its practical applications (chapter seven) are less a re-imagining than they are a way of seeing something old and familiar as something new and novel. It is in this spirit that I came to call this volume *(Re)Articulating Writing Assessment for Teaching and Learning*. I do think that the individual chapters I mention above and about which I will elaborate more fully can add up to a new understanding of writing assessment. My purpose in writing this volume was to look at the various ways in which assessment is currently constructed and to articulate a new identity for writing assessment scholars and scholarship.

(RE) ARTICULATION

Before I outline the basic tenets that guide this volume, its scope, what the reader can expect throughout and how the various chapters work toward its overall purpose, it is important to talk about what I mean by (re)articulating writing assessment

and even what I mean by the term “assessment”—what it is I hope to explain about assessment’s connection to teaching and learning, why in some ways I think we need to reframe assessment for its pedagogical value, and why I think writing assessment has never been fully connected to teaching. I chose “articulation” as the *what* I wanted to do for assessment in this volume because it describes a kind of attention assessment needs but has never received. We need to talk about assessment in new ways, to recognize how ubiquitous it is within the process of reading and writing. Since we are constantly making judgments about the texts we read, we need to see how our judgments about texts get articulated into specific assessments or evaluations (terms I use interchangeably throughout the volume) and how these articulations affect students and the learning environment. My use of “(re)” illustrates that assessment has been articulated already, and that part of my work is to articulate it in new ways. It is not entirely clear to me that assessment has ever been articulated in ways advocated here—ways that support rather than detract from the teaching and learning of writing. I use the parentheses around “(re)” to indicate this ambiguity.

As is already clear in my discussion of articulation, assessment can be used to mean many things. I wish I had some definitive idea of how we could define assessment. Of course, we could point to some limited notion of the word as being involved with evaluating the performance or value of a particular event, object, or idea. This limited definition, though, it seems to me, misses the larger impact of our judgments and would not necessarily be focused within the context of school, or more specifically, the teaching of writing. It is one thing for me to read a piece of writing and say whether or not I like it. It’s another thing for me to make that statement in the classroom or on a student’s paper. I would contend that the type of classroom, subject, level of instruction, and other contextual factors would further define what impact my statement of value would have on an individual or others interested in that individual. The role I have or my identity in each of these situations also

influences how someone might take or respond to my judgment. I remember my daughter being in third or fourth grade and having me help her with a paper she was writing. It took a little effort for me to actually convince her that she could improve her writing by having someone respond to it and then rewriting. She received an A+ on that particular paper and for awhile would exclaim to everyone how she was going to let me read her writing and revise accordingly (my word not hers) because I had helped her get so high a grade. Although she knew what I did for a living, it really carried no weight with her. It was only after she had actually profited from my judgment and advice that she would actually seek it, something I might add that she no longer does. My role as her father did not automatically identify me as an expert to her. On the other hand, as an instructor in a writing classroom, I am often aware of the great impact my judgment about writing could have on a particular student or the entire class. I also understand that the attention students accord my judgments is not unrelated to my role as the grade-giver in the class.

The idea that we as teachers may often not wish to state a specific judgment leads me to consider that an assessment in the formal sense may be more than just a specific judgment, but rather an articulation of that judgment. The form and the context of the articulation gives us some other ways to think and talk about a new understanding for assessment. Certainly, a statement I might make in class about something I value in writing or in a specific text could impact my students thinking or cause them to take up a specific action. For example, Warren Combs and William L. Smith (1980) found that although students in a course that emphasized sentence combining would write sentences with a greater number of T-units, students without sentence combining instruction would produce similar sentences by just being told that the teacher/examiner liked longer sentences. In other words, our statements as teachers in the context of a class can have a great deal of power or influence over students. Grades are probably the best example of this. Giving students an A or even a

B, even when we suggest revision, probably doesn't encourage them to revise, because the grade itself carries more weight as an evaluation than what we can say about revision. While grades are but one kind of evaluation we can give students, they tend to carry more weight than other assessment articulations because they are more formal and codified. Grades are part of a larger system of values that have been used to identify or label people. In education, grades are a totalizing evaluative mechanism. It is common for people to sum up their experiences as students by saying, "I was an A or C student." In recent years, it has become common to see bumper stickers that proclaim "My son or daughter is an A student at [blank] School," as if this says something inherently good about that child or his or her parents.

It's important to note that while we may give a grade for many different reasons, what ends up getting articulated becomes a part of that larger system of values that has weight and influence far beyond the evaluative judgment we have initially made. Moves, then, to articulate our value judgments about student work in different ways illustrate the separation that exists between the judgment(s) we make and the statement(s) we can make about those judgments. These principles also apply to tests about writing that function outside the classroom. In fact, we might argue that assessment outside the classroom is even more formal and more codified than that within the classroom. For example, in placement testing we actually decide for a student where she will be placed for the next fifteen weeks or, perhaps even more importantly, where she will begin her college or university level writing instruction. Other writing assessments have similar power and can allow or prevent students from entering certain programs or receiving a certain credential. While we can base our judgments of student writing upon many different features, we can also articulate those judgments in different ways, and both the judgments and their articulation can have profound effects upon students and their ability to succeed. Furthermore, the articulation of judgment can easily be codified and assigned cultural value. I am reminded of the story one of my students told

me about his two daughters. In the state of Kentucky, students submit writing portfolios as part of a state assessment program. The portfolios are assigned one of four scale points, but instead of using numbers, the scale is divided into Distinguished, Proficient, Apprentice, and Novice. During an argument the two children were having, one of them replied, “What do you know, you’re only a novice.”

If assessment consists of the judgments we make about student writing ability, the form these judgments can take, and the context within which these judgments are made, then a new articulation for assessment requires that we attend to both the way we make the judgments and the form of our statement(s) about them. Important to this understanding is a consciousness about the level of formality different articulations can take and what influence they can have. In defining assessment as both judgment and the articulation of that judgment, I am specifically interested in neutralizing assessment’s more negative influences and accentuating its more positive effects for teaching and learning. Just as Samuel Messick’s (1989b) theory of validity includes building a rationale for assessing in the first place, I think we need to examine why we might want to communicate a specific judgment to students or others about a student’s writing—what possible educational value would such an articulation serve for this particular student at this pedagogical moment?

Actually, my intention to (re)articulate writing assessment as a positive, important aspect of designing, administrating and theorizing writing instruction has its roots in early conceptions of assessment as progressive social action. The idea of assessment as social action is not new. Since its inception in ancient China, assessment was supposed to disrupt existing social order and class systems (Hanson 1993). However, as we all know, assessment has rarely delivered on this promise. Instead, assessment has been used as an interested social mechanism for reinscribing current power relations and class systems.

This overall negative impression of assessment is exacerbated in composition, since one of the driving impulses in the

formulation of composition as an area of study in the 1970s was against current-traditional rhetorical practices that emphasized correctness and the assessment methods to enforce it. One of the responses from the composition community to the negative effects of assessment has been to avoid assessment altogether. One of the results of composition's avoidance of assessment issues has been that major procedures for assessment like holistic scoring were developed by testing companies based upon theoretical and epistemological positions that do not reflect current knowledge of literacy and its teaching. If we can influence and change the agenda for social action in tests and testing, we can change writing assessment. Constructing an agenda for writing assessment as social action means connecting assessment to teaching, something people like Edward White (1994) and Richard Lloyd-Jones (1977), among others, have been advocating for nearly three decades. Instead of envisioning assessment as a way to enforce certain culturally positioned standards and refuse entrance to certain people and groups of people, we need to use our assessments to aid the learning environment for both teachers and students.

Because assessment is the site where we marshal evidence about what we will value globally as a society and more locally as teachers, researchers and administrators, we can, by changing assessment, change what we will ultimately value. It is no secret that most standardized tests as well as local judgments about academic achievement or aptitude are biased. Women and minorities, for example, score lower on certain tests, even though there may no real reason to question their ability and achievement. We can label such tests biased, and some tests do issue point values in calculating the disadvantage a certain person may have on a particular test. We can even adjust our judgment based upon this form of social action because, like affirmative action, the assumption is that scoring poorly on a certain test doesn't mean a person doesn't deserve a particular opportunity. On the other hand, this kind of affirmative or social action implies deficit. Since affirmative action is increasingly under fire, it is time we

visited fully the impact of assessments upon minorities, so that instead of adjusting test results, we could use tests that are fair to all. What if the tests themselves were changed, so that students of higher income-level parents, for example, wouldn't receive a disproportionate number of the higher scores? This not only eliminates the bias in the current assessment, but it also changes the public evidence about what is valuable—ultimately influencing not only our perception of merit but also our perception of who the bright and capable people are in this country. An agenda for assessment that recognizes it as an important element for social action allows us the ability to guard against over-privileging the values, gestures and customs of certain groups and provides assessment with the potential to become an agent for progressive social change that includes and highlights the improvement of educational environments and opportunities for all students.

Although the potential for assessment is large, its overall track record is dismal. Students and teachers have seldom recognized or been able to harness its potential to improve teaching and learning. In fact, assessment has often been seen as a negative, disruptive feature for the teaching of writing. The quote below from an issue of *English Journal* is typical of this attitude:

This is not a topic the present editors would have chosen to focus on in their last issue of *English Journal*. Nor is its placement immediately after a section on romanticism particularly appropriate. Assessment is not our favorite subject. (*English Journal* 1994, 37)

This stance toward assessment, of course, is understandable given the lack of input from teachers in outside assessment and the punitive and pervasive nature of assessment in current traditional writing classrooms, a point I explore in chapter three where I argue for the use of assessment as a viable classroom strategy for the teaching of writing. One of the overall goals of this book is to create new attitudes toward assessment that can help harness its power for teaching and learning. Much of what is wrong with assessment, both in the way it is conceived within the teaching of writing and in the practices of assessment outside the

classroom for programmatic, institutional, or political purposes, can be traced back to the lack of attention to assessment as a viable and legitimate part of the teaching of writing. As I argue in chapter three, people who write well have the ability to assess their own writing, and if we are to teach students to write successfully, then we have to teach them to assess their own writing.

It may very well be that much of the tumult surrounding the teaching of writing during the twentieth century, and in particular the recent backlash against certain theories and methods, might be related to the neglected status of theory and practice in writing assessment. Foucault (1977) and scholars in composition (Fitzgerald 1996; O'Neill 1998; Traschel 1992) argue that assessment is an essential factor in disciplinary formation. In fact, the argument could be made that composition as a discipline owes its initiation to the written examinations established by postsecondary institutions in the late nineteenth century. The shaping influence of assessment on composition cannot be underestimated. Both Peggy O'Neill (1998) and Mary Traschel (1992) make strong arguments concerning its central role. Our failure to pay enough attention to the role of evaluation has had far ranging implications beyond the development of adequate practices for writing assessment. We have failed not only to address the role of writing assessment in the ways we teach and write, but we have subsequently failed to theorize this influence at all. In a recent discussion of Stephen North's *The Making of Knowledge in Composition*, James Zebroski (1998) notes that North's inquiry into the way knowledge is made starts with the results of a doctoral examination. While Zebroski questions the origins of such an inquiry, it makes perfect sense to begin to look at how and where knowledge gets made based upon a moment of examination in which the values of individuals and the institutions they represent are most visible. Zebroski's problem with North's beginning is but one more example of the way assessment is undervalued. Foucault (1977) asserts that the examination is imbricated in disciplinary formation and identity. This relationship between assessment and identity and value

in education is well articulated in Lauren Resnick and David Resnick's (1992) contention that if we don't test for something it will disappear from the curriculum. We need to articulate a much more conscious, theoretical and practical link between the way we think about assessment and the way we think about the teaching, research and theorizing of writing, recognizing that assessment is a vital component in the act of writing, in the teaching of writing, and in the ways we define our students, courses and programs. Because assessment is a direct representation of what we value and how we assign that value, it says much about our identities as teachers, researchers and theorists. This recognition of the importance and centrality of assessment will require a major rethinking of the role and importance of assessment in our theories, teaching, and research.

Assessment can and should be not only an important component of a healthy research and administrative agenda but also an integral, important and vital part of the effective teaching of writing. One of the main goals of this book is to establish the importance of assessment to the teaching of writing and to connect the teaching of writing to what we now call writing assessment. A common assumption about the teaching of writing and its assessment is that there is a lack of fit between the way we assess and the way we teach. A basic tenet of this volume is that similar assumptions and beliefs about assigning value to student writing permeate both our classroom and programmatic ideas about and procedures for assessing student writing. For this reason, I address assessment in this volume both in and outside the classroom. And, perhaps even more importantly, these beliefs and assumptions remain largely uncritical and unexamined. The act of articulating the many ways assessment permeates practices in and outside the classroom can help make our assumptions more visible, enabling us to revise assessment in the service of teaching and learning.

The relationship of assessing and teaching writing is at once complex and conflicted. While the gaps between theory and practice are a fact of life in most, if not all, applied disciplines

like composition, the split between the two seems especially prominent in writing assessment. For example, at the 1999 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), there were few sessions devoted to writing assessment and even fewer devoted to assessing writing outside of the classroom. However, there were over 150 people who attended a Thursday morning session on assessment as social action and again that many people were present at the last session of the conference, also on assessment—more people, I am told, than attended a featured session that morning with a prominent scholar. It appears that while this historical moment finds few scholars interested in assessment, more and more of us are pressed to find out all we can on short notice to answer a mandate for assessment at our home institutions. At any rate, the need, if not the interest, for (re)articulating assessment is readily apparent. I explore some of the assumptions behind common scenarios for assessment in chapter seven, as I examine what I think is some confusion about exactly what constitutes assessment practice and theory. I contend that critical-reflective examinations and the consciousness they promote can only blur theory-practice boundaries. At a workshop I conducted a year or so ago, a participant who had already begun an assessment project remarked that most literature on writing assessment was theoretical. I responded that I thought the opposite was true, something the literature supports, since it has been common to assume that we have been too busy answering practical concerns to construct a theoretical basis for writing assessment (Cherry and Witte 1998; Faigley, Cherry, Jolliffe and Skinner 1985; Gere 1980). I also remember that this participant resisted any advice I could offer about conceptualizing or theorizing her efforts. She had already begun to collect data about teacher perceptions of student writing and wanted to know what to do with this information—a question that probably should have been worked out conceptually and theoretically in the planning stages. It is often difficult to interest those in throes of assessment with any theoretical considerations, though it is only by emphasizing the link

between theory and practice, and the reflective, critical consciousness it engenders, that any substantive change in writing assessment practice can be accomplished.

In giving workshops, attending sessions at CCCCs and other conferences, and talking with those in attendance, I am struck by the pressure that many in our profession are feeling to implement assessment procedures for a variety of reasons. As Kathleen Yancey (1999) points out in her history of writing assessment and CCCC, program assessment may be the new wave in writing assessment. If, as Yancey (1999) contends, “historicizing” writing assessment is important in helping us avoid the mistakes of the past, then it is imperative that we not only become involved in designing and developing assessment procedures, but that we take the lead in integrating assessment into our profession and our lives as writing teachers and program administrators. Our profession’s abandonment of assessment as a positive practice and its adaptation of negative conceptions of assessment as punitive and counterproductive to fostering literate behavior in our students cannot but continue to put us in a position of powerlessness, while at the same time putting our students and programs in peril. To come to a new understanding of assessment is to not only become conscious of its importance, power, and necessity for literacy and its teaching, but also to understand assessment as one of our ethical and professional responsibilities (Beason 2000).

The scope of this book then, is purposefully ambitious—one of its basic goals is to change the way assessment is thought of by the people who teach writing, administer writing programs, and work in educational measurement. Any complete transformation of writing assessment identity is obviously beyond the scope of an individual volume. However, this book attempts to begin such a transformation and is, therefore, fundamentally different from most recent work devoted to writing assessment. For example, a recent volume in writing assessment (White, Lutz, and Kamuskiri 1996) includes contributors from composition and the measurement community and enters new territory in

addressing the political aspects of writing assessment. However, the overall message of this recent volume is not new. There is a continuing faith in the technology of testing: “The technical apparatus of assessment is important; its quality determines whether the information it yields can be trusted” (Camp 1996, 99). While there is some truth in this statement, I believe it is time to move beyond this complete and largely unwarranted faith in the technology of testing to create site-based and locally controlled assessments of writing, as I explore in chapter four. Only by focusing on the local decision-making process can we heed the call from validity theorists to validate each use of a test (Cronbach 1988; Messick 1989a; 1989b; Moss 1992; Shepard 1993). This volume heeds the call of White, Lutz, and Kamuskiri: “The future of writing assessment requires that we articulate a theoretical basis for our assessment practices” (1996, 105). In chapter four, I begin by articulating the beliefs and assumptions inherent in traditional writing assessment and contrast it with work done at a few schools in which assessment programs have been designed outside the theoretical umbrella normally associated with assessment. The attention to portfolios and the many volumes to come out of this attention (Belanoff and Dickson 1991; Black, Daiker, Sommers, and Stygall 1994; Murphy and Underwood, 2000; Sunstein and Lovell, 2000; Yancey 1992; and others) have all called for looking at assessment in new ways, ways shaped and defined by the portfolio. The portfolio movement remains one of the most important catalysts for real change and growth in writing assessment. However, most attempts to use portfolios outside the classroom have involved their standardization along with other technologies of testing important to a positivist, traditional approach to assessment that consolidates power and control with a central authority and away from teachers and their immediate supervisors (Berlak 1992; Broad 2000; Callahan 1997a; 1997b; 1999; Huot and Williamson 1997; Murphy 1994; 1997). Unless we look beyond specific practices to the theories and histories that drive all assessment practices, we will fail to reap the potential

of portfolios, or any other measures, to substantively change the way writing is assessed.

In chapter two, I attempt to look at the possibility of seeing writing assessment as a unified field. As I outline the ways in which writing assessment has been constructed by various scholars, it becomes apparent that, for the most part, work in writing assessment gets done by college-level writing scholars with connections to the field of composition or by scholars connected to educational measurement who work on issues germane to K–12. I argue that both groups of scholars have much to gain by connecting their work into a more coherent field of study and in using more current conceptions of validity to hold this joint venture together. This chapter begins in earnest an attempt to (re)articulate a field of writing assessment in which those working in isolation can connect with each other and create not only a new, unified field but the possibilities for increased attention to writing assessment and its ability to enhance teaching and learning.

In chapter three, I focus on assessment that occurs within a writing classroom. My main point is that although grading, testing, and assessing writing are quite distinct from one another and have quite different implications, we have often lumped them together. I argue that teaching students how to assess their own writing (as distinct from assessing their progress as students) is an important facet in teaching students how to write. This chapter emphasizes the importance of understanding the different ways we can assess our students and the importance of the implications for each kind of assessment. Distinguishing between the ways we can articulate our judgments about writing, on the one hand, and the impact these articulations can have on students and the writing classroom, on the other, illustrates the important role assessment can have for students learning to write as they struggle to understand the power and potential of their own abilities to articulate judgment about writing.

In chapter four, I explore the beliefs and assumptions behind the practices of writing assessment. I do this historically, looking

back at the ways writing assessment practices have been developed through the years, acknowledging the philosophical and epistemological debts of these practices. This is a longer, revised version of an essay that appeared in the December, 1996 issue of *College Composition and Communication (CCC)*. Joseph Harris, then editor of *CCC*, and at least one of the reviewers wanted a tighter focus in the original essay that looked only at college-level issues and did not focus so much on the history of the practices. I contended then, and I contend now, that we cannot talk about the theoretical implications of writing assessment without a larger focus. I argue in chapter four that it is impossible to effect any substantive changes in writing assessment unless we address underlying theoretical and epistemological issues as well.

In chapter five, I write about the act of responding to student writing. In reviewing most of the literature on response, I come to the conclusion that we have focused, for the most part, on developing different ways to respond to student writing and on detailing advice for teachers to respond better to their students. While these are certainly important and laudatory aims, the response literature seems stunted, since it has neglected to look at the obvious fact that to respond to student writing we must first read it. I argue that the act of reading itself is an important constraint on the kinds of meaning we can make of student texts and the responses we can construct based on our reading. I conclude the chapter by noting that just as our response is affected by our reading, so too it depends upon our ability to craft a rhetorically reasonable and coherent message to our students. As Richard Miller (1994) and Louise Phelps (2000) have both noted, response to student writing is a crucial and neglected topic in composition scholarship. I hope this chapter can encourage an increased attention to response and its importance for the teaching of writing.

Chapter six focuses on the ways in which writing assessment has been developed and constructed as a technology. Drawing upon the work of George Madhaus (1993), who builds a compelling argument for educational assessment as a technological

apparatus, I articulate how writing assessment is a technology and how this technology creates the problems inherent in a technological focus for writing assessment. Contrasting this technological focus, I propose that we come to understand writing assessment as research. Building upon an understanding of writing assessment as research, I argue that there are many benefits in constructing writing assessment in this new way. Seeing assessment as research can create new roles for those of us who work in writing assessment while at the same time creating a new vision for assessment that is focused on answering important questions asked by specific communities of teachers, students and scholars.

Chapter seven focuses on writing assessment practice. I begin with the apparent contradiction of having been distinguished as a theorist on one hand but having my theoretical work labeled as practical. This chapter is a fitting close for the volume in which I explore just how practical, self-conscious, and reflective all writing assessment work should and can be. We must become aware of our beliefs and assumptions while at the same time we attend to the practical pressure of assessment. I argue that all of us who teach writing and administer writing assessment programs need to practice assessment on a conscious, theoretical, and reflective level. Only with a tangible commitment to assessment and a conscious awareness of the beliefs and assumptions inherent in these practices can we avoid theory/practice splits and learn to harness the power of theoretically grounded assessment practices.

Throughout this volume, I hope to build upon emergent and alternative research, theory, and practice to create a methodology for writing teachers, writing program administrators, and assessment professionals to establish practices that recognize and support the importance of contextual, institutional, and local standards. Considering the pressures that writing teachers and writing program administrators face in developing and implementing writing assessment at their respective institutions along with the neglected status of writing assessment both as a

theoretical and practical enterprise, it is crucial that we begin the development of a new methodology. It must be a methodology with which those who teach writing and administer writing programs can learn to appreciate the importance of assessment and to translate their concerns for their students and programs into solid knowledge-producing assessments that meet the needs of outside pressures and enrich teaching and programs from within as well.

The purpose of this book, then, is to change the way writing teachers, writing program administrators, and writing assessment professionals think about teaching and assessing student writing. In the assessment community, it is common to distinguish between summative assessment, which is final and at the end of a project or performance, and formative assessment, which is made while a project or performance is still in progress. The distinction assumes that formative types of assessment are less rigid and punitive and allow for adjustments and improvement based upon the assessment. In writing assessment, it might be wise to include *instructive assessment* (a term I explore more fully in chapter three) because the assessment of student progress is a constant part of the composing process in which writers return to their writing as they attempt to compose new pieces of text, pushing forward while they revise and move ahead. This connection between assessment and instruction as exemplified in the notion of instructive assessment is part of a larger movement in educational assessment that recognizes the importance of holding all educational practices, including assessment, to rigorous standards that include the enhancement of teaching and learning. Validity theorists like Lee Cronbach (1989) and Samuel Messick (1989a; 1989b) stipulated over several decades that in order for a measurement to have some degree of validity, decisions made on its behalf must have a positive effect on the educational environment. For writing assessment, this would mean that all procedures used to assess writing would also contain properties that work toward the improvement of the teaching and learning of writing.

In addition to its ambitious scope, this volume also attempts to reach a far-ranging audience because, while the book works to create the type of theory necessary for transforming writing assessment practice, the message of such a text is that writing assessment must be site-based and locally controlled, and that writing teachers and program administrators must begin to see writing assessment as part of their jobs, a point I make throughout this introduction and the entire volume. Reaching writing program administrators (WPAs) is a vital concern for this book, because in order for assessment to truly change, we must involve those who regularly oversee the day-to-day operations for writing centers; composition, technical, and professional communication programs; and writing across the curriculum programs. This book hopes to help WPAs as a network of writing assessment professionals to see assessment and administration as mutually inclusive and important to the design and maintenance of programs that effectively teach students to write for a wide range of audiences and purposes. Writing teachers and WPAs are often responsible for such common writing assessment practices as first-year college placement, exit or proficiency exams at the first- or third-year level, as well as program assessment for composition and/or writing across the curriculum programs. These practitioners often lack even the most rudimentary preparation. A survey of first-year college placement shows that a large majority of people in charge of such programs have no previous experience or training in writing assessment or composition (Huot 1994a).

While this book should be accessible to practitioners who are interested in writing assessment, especially WPAs, it is also directed at writing assessment researchers and theorists who are interested in pushing the theoretical and practical envelope about writing assessment. The small handful of schools who have experimented with assessment practices have been watched by the rest of the assessing and teaching writing communities. These experimental procedures along with innovations like using portfolios for placement or exemption are important to

this volume and create an extended audience of assessment researchers who read and write for each other.

Lastly, I want to reemphasize the importance of writing teachers and those who educate them as a potential audience for this book. My message to teachers is that the proper and intelligent use of assessment can provide them with an opportunity to learn rich, useful information about their students, pedagogy, and programs. I address such a wide range not just to encourage potential readers but to emphasize that one of the purposes of this volume is to create an interest in and an audience for assessment that has yet to exist. This book attempts to build a *new assessment*, demystifying traditional notions of assessment as a privatized technical apparatus and focusing on the role of writing teachers and administrators and their expertise. This new assessment not only links pedagogy with evaluation practices, it makes the ability to assess one's own writing a primary goal of the teaching and learning of writing. Understanding the power of well-designed, site-based and locally controlled writing assessment procedures guards against the use of any unnecessary, standardized or large-scale current traditional assessments. Ultimately, this volume is about understanding the power of assessment for classroom and programmatic purposes, for harnessing that power to the beliefs and assumptions that drive our pedagogies, and for controlling that power in a productive fashion for the teaching and learning of writing.