

Teaching Writing in the Age of Accountability: Reflections from the Academy

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Abstract

In this chapter I look at writing instruction in U.S. secondary schools. I focus especially on the ways in which writing instruction is shaped by the policy context and its emphasis on accountability. In order to make students and teachers accountable, mandated tests have been instituted to assess writing proficiency. To understand the effects of these accountability measures on the teaching and learning of writing, I look at three critical settings for writing instruction and students' development as writers. First I review the least visible influences on teachers' conceptions of their instruction: those implicit mediators known as "traditions," the accepted practices and value systems that guide people toward approved actions and endpoints within particular cultures. I next review more explicit mediators, beginning with an analysis of how university-based English education programs instruct preservice teachers in how to teach writing. Finally I turn to a set of nested educational contexts that work in a centripetal manner to influence classroom instruction. Working from the largest setting to the most local, I examine forces at the national, state, and district levels, each of which contributes to pressures for teachers to engage in writing instruction with particular values toward specific ends.

Standardized testing dates at least to the mid-1800s, when Horace Mann began testing students in Boston in order to gain “objective information about the quality of teaching and learning in urban schools, monitor the quality of instruction, and compare schools and teachers within each school” (Gallagher, 2003, p. 85). The accountability movement picked up steam in the 1970s (Nagy, 2000; Savage, 2003), right about when I entered the teaching force in 1977. Thirty years later, the testing environment has grown in scope and influence. Because teachers are held accountable for their students’ success and because administrators’ reputations and careers are often pegged to students’ test scores, teaching and learning are continually interrupted in order to prepare students for what have become critical assessments. Poor performances by students can result in the dissolving of one school into another, wholesale replacement of a school’s administration, teacher reassignment, and other dire consequences.

Standardized tests are perhaps the most obvious of a range of forces that shape writing instruction in U.S. secondary schools. They manifest values that are central to what has become a market-based approach to educational accountability, one in which school districts identify their constituents as “stockholders” and use test scores as the measure of productivity (Smagorinsky, Gibson, Moore, Bickmore, & Cook, 2004). It makes sense, then, to understand how these assessments affect classroom instruction, how they emerge from broader value systems, and how teacher education as presently conducted is insufficient in providing critiques and alternatives to educational practice within what Smagorinsky et al. have called the *corporate climate of schools* and their Fordist production-line mentality (Smagorinsky, Lakly, & Johnson, 2002).

My focus in this essay is on the forces influencing teachers' decision-making about writing instruction and student writing assessment, organized in three major categories. First I will review the least visible influences on teachers' conceptions of their instruction: those implicit mediators known as "traditions," the accepted practices and value systems that guide people toward approved actions and endpoints within particular cultures. I next review more explicit mediators, beginning with an analysis of how university-based English education programs instruct preservice teachers in how to teach writing. Finally I turn to the role of national and state writing tests that hold what I regard to be questionable assumptions about writing. These tests shape writing instruction based on what I view as dubious principles. Working from the largest setting to the most local, I examine forces at the national, state, and district levels, each of which contributes to pressures for teachers to engage in writing instruction with particular values toward specific ends.

Enculturation to Traditions of Schooling

Lortie's (1975) notion of teachers' *apprenticeship of observation* has become widely acknowledged among university education faculty as a deeply entrenched factor in shaping what prospective teachers believe is valid school-based instruction. This construct accounts for how teachers' experiences as students socialize them to view particular educational traditions and practices as normative and important to perpetuate. Lortie refers to those students who believe in the institution of school and its practices as *identifiers*. He argues that members of this group are most likely to enter and remain in the field and sustain the educational practices that contributed to their own positive experiences as students. He contrasts identifiers with *nonidentifiers* who reject normative

schooling practices yet nonetheless choose to become teachers. Some nonidentifiers leave teaching because their lack of fit leaves them frustrated; others remain in the teaching force as reformers. Identifiers are likely to come from the social group that Eckert (1989) calls *jocks*—students who uphold and maintain school values, primarily through their involvement in or support of school activities—who in turn make up the bulk of the teaching profession (Gordon, 2000). Eckert contrasts *jocks* with *burnouts*, those students (typically from working class backgrounds) who affiliate more with the world of work than of school and tend to reject school values and practices as adolescent.

Many English teachers' primary knowledge of how to teach writing comes from their own experiences as students in secondary school (Lortie, 1975). For those who go straight from twelfth grade to college and then back again into the teaching force, this hiatus from life in K-12 schools is a mere 4 years. In their school experiences, students often are taught writing by means of a grammar and composition textbook (Applebee, 1981; Hillocks, 1995). Applebee and Langer (2009) found that, over the past 15 years or so, teachers report giving greater attention to writing process, but that these self-reports have not been sufficiently corroborated by classroom observations; the authors conclude that there is likely wide variation in what teachers mean by this claim. It is thus difficult to say what of substance has changed in the last two decades. In my experiences working with teacher candidates and their field placements since 1990, I would say that form-oriented instruction remains the dominant emphasis in the teaching of writing, even if there might be greater attention to prewriting and revision than there was at the time of Applebee's (1981) first major study of writing in secondary schools.

This emphasis on form is a feature of the textbooks through which writing and grammar are taught. Applebee (1981) and Hillocks (1995) identify Warriner's textbooks (Warriner & Griffith, 1977, and many other versions) as the most widely used vehicle for writing instruction. Hillocks argues that Warriner's competitors try to "out-Warriner Warriner" (p. 113) with writing instruction that, while giving some attention to a general writing process, nonetheless stresses a mimetic, form-driven approach to learning to write. Such approaches tend to be top-down and model-heavy: students are exposed to exemplars of particular, usually truncated forms from the essayist tradition; the teacher explains the features of these essays and where they should appear; and students are then told to imitate the form, with minimal attention to the content that might fit the form or processes through which such forms might be generated.

This approach remains at large in schools even in the midst of imperatives from the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) that writing should begin with ideas and not forms and should involve serious attention to procedures and processes for rendering ideas into appropriate genres (e.g., Writing Study Group of the NCTE Executive Committee, 2004; cf. Hillocks, 2005). NCTE Publications, Heinemann, and other teacher-oriented presses offer alternatives of many kinds to the relatively low percentage of teachers who seek to teach outside the formalist box. What happens by and large, however, is that new teachers are attracted to and are retained by schools because they fit well within its established formalist traditions. In many cases, then, teachers' experiences with emphases such as the five-paragraph theme and formal grammar instruction likely provide the basis for their beliefs about how to teach writing to their own students (Johnson, Smagorinsky, Thompson, & Fry, 2003).

While Dewey's (1916) progressivism has produced streams of inquiry-driven, process-oriented, student-centered, growth-promoting teaching for a good hundred years or more, this tradition has never displaced the inveterate transmission pedagogy that has characterized education since the Greek academies of antiquity (Cohen, 1988). Cole (2005) indeed has published a picture of a Sumerian classroom from 4,000 years ago that depicts, as he describes it, an arrangement "of [stone] desks, facing forward to a single location where a teacher stood, guiding them in repetitive practice of the means of writing and the operations that accompanied it" (pp. 200-201; see Figure 1).

In schooling as a whole, Goodlad (1984), Cuban (1993), and others have documented the preponderance of an objective, transmission-oriented, teacher-and-text-centered tradition in U.S. schools, of which the formalist writing pedagogy tradition is but one example across the curriculum. By and large, then, the culture of school, grounded in a tradition that emphasizes the transmission of unambiguous knowledge reported either in correct-answer tests and formulaic writing in textbook language to a teacher upon whom the class is focused, does not encourage or support teaching that embodies a student-centered approach to teaching—one that is adventuresome, open-ended, inquiry-based, process-oriented, or personal-growth inducing (Cuban, 1993).

Teacher Education Programs

Teachers' apprenticeship of observation is so powerful that it often trumps the effects of teacher education programs. Many researchers have found that, in general, teacher education programs have far less impact on instructional practice than teacher education professors might hope for (Grossman, Valencia, & Hamel, 1997; Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998). Researchers have offered a variety of reasons for this lack

of influence. Some (e.g., Borko & Eisenhart, 1992; Ritchie & Wilson, 1993) have argued that students learn progressive pedagogies in their preservice programs but that the social environment and assessment-driven climate of schools promotes an ethic more geared toward content coverage and control, thus overcoming the value placed on student-centered teaching methods learned in university programs. Others (e.g., Zeichner & Tabachnik, 1981) argue that many preservice teachers never adopt the values and practices promoted in universities to begin with, thus calling into question the assumption that preservice teachers accept the values of teacher education programs only to abandon them in the school culture. Rather, their apprenticeships of observation have instilled “in their bones” a belief in the normative values of conventional teaching practices. They thus reject the progressive alternatives impressed on them by their professors and embrace the formalist values that have drawn them to the teaching profession in the first place.

Many teachers take the traditional route to the classroom, getting certified to teach through an accredited university teacher education program and presumably learning how to teach writing, at least initially, through the courses provided in their English education programs. And yet such programs often fall short in teaching preservice teachers how to teach writing. Tremmel (2001) observes that most teacher education programs emphasize literature instruction at the expense of teaching writing pedagogy. He argues that

Even in what is arguably [teacher education’s] strongest area, field experience, English education programs tend to be decidedly pre-disciplinary and ambivalent with regard to both writing teacher preparation and the teaching of writing. The reasons for this include the lack of [theory in universities] as well as unevenness

in writing instruction in the schools. Bluntly put, there are still teachers out there who are teaching the five paragraph essay, the research paper, handing out worksheets, and not doing too much else with writing. As a result, it is not uncommon for prospective and beginning teachers—despite their best intentions and the best intentions of their professors—to go through an entire field experience sequence without ever becoming fully involved in the teaching of writing and without ever thinking of themselves as writing teachers (p. 17).

This exposure to formalist pedagogies during field experiences is often coupled with a lack of programmatic attention to writing in university coursework, leaving students with some techniques for teaching writing but not an overall conception of writing and writing pedagogy. With their apprenticeships of observation suggesting that formalist instruction is normative, with English education faculty largely dedicated to literary pedagogy, and with field experiences largely reinforcing lessons from teacher candidates' apprenticeships of observation, those going through university-based English education programs learn little of pedagogical substance to counter the prevailing traditions that rule writing instruction in schools.

Smagorinsky and Whiting (1995), in analyzing syllabi from English education teaching methods courses, found that when writing instruction is attended to in university teacher education programs, it most often takes a progressive, often romantic bent. Course syllabi, at least at the time of the study, featured what might be termed “teacher-less” writing instruction, with students learning to write by writing. Such instruction takes place through writing workshops (e.g., Atwell, 1987), freewriting (e.g., Elbow, 1973), and student-generated ideas, topics, and forms (Tchudi & Tchudi, 1991). This approach,

claim its advocates, provides young writers with confidence-building environments in which their writing takes its own form and direction, while teachers make a deliberate effort not to interfere with their emerging natural processes, whatever they might be.

Although many teachers have testified to the effectiveness of such approaches, others find that schools are not hospitable to accommodating students so generously and that the methods cannot be easily employed, particularly when state and district assessments loom. Given that schools hold the ultimate means of determining what constitutes good teaching—the awarding of jobs and continued employment—preservice and beginning teachers tend to gravitate to the norms of the site with the highest personal and professional stakes, the school that employs them, leaving behind the appealing but often impracticable methods emphasized by their university professors.

Meanwhile, back at the universities, professors of English literature, although different from their secondary school counterparts in many ways, tend to assume the same “frontal” (Goodlad, 1984) or “presentational” (Hillocks, 1986a) position for their teaching often found in the high school classroom (Addington, 2001; Marshall & Smith, 1997). They serve as the students’ focal point, typically positioning themselves at the head of the class with all eyes forward, and foreground their own critical frameworks and interpretations of texts in their conduct of discussions and lectures. In departments of English, faculty are relatively unconcerned with the issues that consume faculty in English education: the personal growth of students, a democratic view of language and expertise, attention to learning processes, the personal and idiosyncratic construction of meaning, and so on (see Faust, Cockrill, Hancock, & Isserstadt, 2005).

Rather, English faculty are concerned with their own research, which for the most part centers on literary criticism of some sort, not writing pedagogy. While the New Critical emphasis that dominated departments of English from the 1940s through the late 20th century appears to have ceded ground to more poststructural and critical theoretical perspectives, English faculty still typically teach in ways that center on their interests and the traditions of their critical field rather than on what students might construct idiosyncratically in transaction with their reading or how they might write about it. Successful performance by students is determined by adherence to the professor's beliefs about textuality, and writing is formal according to the traditions of belletristic expression.

While thinking might be more open-ended than in high schools, and writing more expansive and interpretive than what's available in five-paragraph themes, the conventions are nonetheless formal and provide the professor with more abundant and authoritarian floor space than is available to students. At the universities in which I have taught, as well as at others (see Marshall & Smith, 1997), states' requirements for content course work result in students taking far more courses from English faculty than Education faculty, again providing an apprenticeship of observation that reinforces the formalist tradition (Addington, 2001; Bickmore, Smagorinsky, & O'Donnell-Allen, 2005).

But that's not all. Zeichner and Gore (1990) argue that many university education programs are characterized by what they call *structural fragmentation*, i.e., the absence of a sustained, consistent focus on a pedagogical approach or teaching philosophy (cf. Smagorinsky, Cook, & Johnson, 2003). Such fragmented programs, they argue, are

unlikely to have a long-term effect on students' thinking about teaching. If (a) a university English education program does not provide overall coherence, and if (b) it is geared toward literature instruction more than writing instruction, and if (c) field experiences reinforce models of teaching that are prescriptive and mimetic, and if (d) there is little opportunity to practice progressive teaching methods in schools, and if (e) the university curriculum requires a heavy content emphasis with a semester of education courses at the end, and if (f) schools in which students intern are likely to support and reward formalist teaching that is aligned with high-stakes testing, then its students are not likely to enter the field with a clear grasp of the alternatives to the traditions of writing instruction such as the five-paragraph theme to which they were exposed as students.

Hillocks (2006) makes no bones about his view that teacher education programs are insufficient for the task of promoting writing instruction outside the formalist box. In concluding his review of secondary writing research from 1984-2003, he declares:

This review suggests that we have considerable knowledge about approaches to teaching writing and that we have gleaned it in the decades following Applebee's [1981] studies of writing in secondary schools. We find more attention to the specific processes for particular writing tasks and more attention to the need for and effects of focusing on strategies that help students learn to work with the content of their writing. Nearly all studies reviewed make a contribution to this knowledge. But all of that knowledge apparently is not an important part of what beginning English teachers have learned. We are starting to have the knowledge necessary to decide what pedagogical content knowledge teachers of writing should have. The failure to convey the pedagogical content knowledge for

teachers of writing is in no small part responsible for the poor showing of American students on various writing assessments (pp. 74-75).

Hillocks (2006) thus echoes Tremmel's (2001) concern that teacher educators are not sufficiently concerned with the teaching of writing. Writing theory, he argues, has provided a robust conception of what is involved in writing and how teachers can cultivate and advance students' abilities through various process pedagogies. And yet, he argues, a host of writing assessments, from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to state writing assessments, suggest that students in general are not writing as well as they ought.

The assessment context is among the most prominent of Hillocks' (2002) interests in the last ten years, an enterprise of which he has been highly critical, even while finding some assessments more valid and telling than others. The assessment context is the next group of settings that I review. I will start with the largest setting and work my way to the most local—looking at national assessments, state assessments, and district assessments to see how instruction is affected by the mediating contexts of the recent accountability movement.

Standardized Assessment and Writing Instruction

If Bazerman (1994), Madaus (1988), Calfee and Perfumo (1996), and others are right in believing that testing drives school instruction, then it makes sense to study the genre of the writing assessment to understand how it shapes classroom writing instruction (see Olinghouse, Zheng, & Reed, this volume, for recommendations on how to prepare students for large-scale writing assessments). What follows is a consideration of a few of

these assessments and a critique of what they assume to be important for students to produce in their writing.

National Writing Assessments

I will focus on two writing assessments widely employed in U.S. schools for secondary school students: the SAT and ACT. Other tests such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), International Baccalaureate (IB), Education Records Bureau Writing Assessment Program (WrAP), and Advanced Placement (AP) exams are available but are administered either to only a sample of the national student body (NAEP), to students in an elite curriculum (IB), to a relatively small number of schools and districts (WrAP), or to mostly high-achieving students (AP). These exams are less likely to shape writing instruction on the whole, and so I will focus my attention on the most prevalent writing assessments for secondary school students.

Although I will not attend to the NAEP writing assessment, I see Applebee and Langer's (2009) conclusion about its limitations to be appropriate for any consideration of writing assessments produced in a single sitting. While finding NAEP useful in many ways, they also conclude that:

The assessment emphasis in on-demand writing is out of alignment with curriculum and instruction that emphasizes an extended process of writing and revision, taps only a subset of the academic skills and knowledge students need, and leaves no room for the technological tools that students increasing use both in and outside of school" (p. XX).

These limitations apply to both the SAT and ACT writing tests, as I will outline in the next sections.

The SAT. The SAT writing test includes a “focus on writing and knowledge of grammar, sentence structure, word usage,” parsed into one 35-minute section consisting of multiple choice questions and one 25-minute section allocated for a student-written essay (http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/prep_one/writing.html, which is the source for all quotes I include). As with other SAT exams, the scoring range is 200-800.

According to the College Board, in the multiple choice section, “Questions reveal how well students use Standard Written English. The multiple-choice questions test student ability to identify sentence errors, and improve sentences and paragraphs.” This portion of the exam, then, involves no writing, instead employing bubble-filling items that test students’ knowledge of formal, textbook English. Teaching to the test, then, requires teachers to dust up students’ knowledge on the testmakers’ view of what constitutes correct use of English *regardless of context*. Teachers are thus influenced to cater their instruction strictly to issues of language knowledge and usage assessed on this test.

Teaching according to rigid rules produces a number of problems. Rigid rules often impede rather than enable the process of writers who lack confidence or fluency with writing, and, as a result, a rule-bound instructional approach may actually produce writer’s block for them (Rose, 1980, 2006). It further may confuse students with complex knowledge that belies the static view of language usage implied in these assessments. In addition, an emphasis on form overlooks the more protean view of language advocated by the NCTE (Conference on College Composition and Communication, 1974). In this conception, appropriate language use involves code-switching (Hymes, 1974),

knowledge of speech genres (Wertsch, 1991), knowledge of conventions employed by particular cultural groups (Lee, 1993), the generation of new forms for particular media such as text-messaging (Godwin-Jones, 2005), and other dimensions that suggest that language usage is standard only by situational and relational values.

Ideas contesting the validity of a belief in a single standard for language use that have been in currency for over thirty years with the sanction of NCTE, then, appear not to have penetrated the formalist orientation of the SAT. However, even this single standard, is not uniform; see, for examples, the differences in the formalities specified by the Modern Language Association (Gibaldi, 2003) and American Psychological Association (2001) guidelines for manuscript preparation in such areas as comma use (Hunt, 2006). Teachers whose districts emphasize SAT scores when touting school effectiveness are thus under pressure to teach to this view of proper language use, one that overlooks much else about how people effectively communicate with one another through speech and writing for real audiences.

According to the SAT website, the SAT writing component—that is, the part where students actually write—“measures student skill in developing a point of view on an issue. Students must first think critically about the issue presented in the essay assignment, forming their own individual perspective on the topic. Then students must develop that point of view, using reasoning and evidence based on personal experiences, readings, or observations to support the ideas.” Qualified readers, they claim, “take into account such aspects as complexity of thought, substantiality of development, and facility with language. A reader does not judge a work based on its separate traits, but rather on the total impression it creates. *It is also recognized that an essay written in a short*

amount of time is not polished, but represents the initial phase of the writing process: the first draft” (emphasis added).

Perhaps paradoxically, these *unpolished, first draft essays written in 25 minutes under high-stakes conditions* must demonstrate substantially developed, complex thought and a facile command of the language. Prompts for this writing “are carefully selected to enable students to react and respond quickly in a variety of ways. They are written to be easily accessible to the general test-taking population, including students for whom English is a second language (ESL), and will be free of figurative, technical, or specific literary references.” The prompt consists of a paragraph of 80 words or fewer, “adapted from some authentic text,” such as the following sample that they provide:

Directions: Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below.

The principle is this: each failure leads us closer to deeper knowledge, to greater creativity in understanding old data, to new lines of inquiry.

Thomas Edison experienced 10,000 failures before he succeeded in perfecting the lightbulb. When a friend of his remarked that 10,000 failures was a lot, Edison replied, “I didn’t fail 10,000 times, I successfully eliminated 10,000 materials and combinations that didn’t work.”

Myles Brand, “Taking the Measure of Your Success”

Assignment: What is your view on the idea that it takes failure to achieve success? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

According to most style guides with which I'm familiar, an independent clause that follows a colon requires an upper-case letter to start the first word, a convention that has escaped former Indiana University president Myles Brand and the SAT designers. A comma splice connects the independent clauses in Edison's remarks about his 10,000 trials, an infelicity found to be abhorrent to grammarians such as Johnson (2006). I must wonder if students will notice and perhaps even mimic these constructions and thus be marked down because "The essay measures your ability to . . . follow the conventions of standard written English." This statement indeed lacks facility with language because the essay measures nothing; rather, trained raters measure this ability. Apparently the test-makers themselves are not obligated to follow their imperative to students that they must present their "ideas logically and clearly, and use language precisely."

While students must be clear and logical, the testmakers provide a quote in which Edison denies that he has been a failure. They follow this with a prompt for students to write about why failure is a critical stage of achieving success. I imagine that students, especially English language learners who may not be fluent with irony in a second language, might find this prompt to be confusing. As a topper, students must also "Remember that people who are not familiar with your handwriting will read what you write. Try to write or print so that what you are writing is legible to those readers," a stipulation that would compromise the test score of anyone who writes primarily on a computer, such as me and most people I know, including many students who have grown up writing primarily on computers and other electronic devices. The prompt, then, is highly problematic in both what it models and what it solicits. It further disadvantages English language learners, the test authors' protests to the contrary.

The scoring guide provided on the website works on a scale of 0-6, with a six representing the highest score and a zero assigned to those whose essays are judged as not responsive to the prompt. The descriptive names for the six scoring levels include clear and consistent mastery, reasonably consistent mastery, adequate mastery, developing mastery, little mastery, and very little or no mastery. The “first draft essays” composed entirely within a 25-minute block that includes reading and digesting the prompt, which may or may not make sense to the student writers, must then demonstrate some degree of writing mastery.

The score of 6 is awarded to an essay that:

- effectively and insightfully develops a point of view on the issue and demonstrates outstanding critical thinking, using clearly appropriate examples, reasons, and other evidence to support its position
- is well organized and clearly focused, demonstrating clear coherence and smooth progression of ideas
- exhibits skillful use of language, using a varied, accurate, and apt vocabulary
- demonstrates meaningful variety in sentence structure
- is free of most errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

What is prized by the rubric, then, is a traditional “essay” in the formalist tradition. Invention, creativity, storytelling, introspection, exploration, personal feelings, and other dimensions of writing from outside the analytic, argumentative tradition are not rewarded. The writer would likely be penalized for including such elements, given the restricted criteria employed to evaluate the writing. Within this arbitrary time block, students are free to consider their essays to be “not polished, . . . the initial phase of the

writing process.” Yet they must exhibit mastery of traditional analytic writing features, complexity in thought, and precise language that is free of error. These requirements provide no exception, even to English language learners, to whom the prompt is “easily accessible” as part of “the general test-taking population.”

The ACT. Like the SAT, the ACT provides students a brief time period (30 minutes as opposed to 25) in which to produce an essay. The test “tells postsecondary institutions about students’ understanding of the conventions of standard written English and their ability to produce a direct sample of writing,” again positioning writing within the formalist tradition of “standard” English, whatever that might be (see <http://www.act.org/aap/writing/>, which is the source of this quote and all that follow).

The ACT prompts are designed to “describe an issue relevant to high school students” and “ask examinees to write about their perspective on the issue.” The ACT’s method is to provide two competing perspectives on the issue and allow students to support one or develop their own. They provide the following sample prompt:

Educators debate extending high school to five years because of increasing demands on students from employers and colleges to participate in extracurricular activities and community service in addition to having high grades. Some educators support extending high school to five years because they think students need more time to achieve all that is expected of them. Other educators do not support extending high school to five years because they think students would lose interest in school and attendance would drop in the fifth year. In your opinion, should high school be extended to five years?

In your essay, take a position on this question. You may write about either one of the two points of view given, or you may present a different point of view on this question. Use specific reasons and examples to support your position.

To score these essays, ACT uses a rubric that provides gradations in students' ability to:

- express judgments by taking a position on the issue in the writing prompt
- maintain a focus on the topic throughout the essay
- develop a position by using logical reasoning and by supporting their ideas
- organize ideas in a logical way
- use language clearly and effectively according to the rules of standard written English

Like the SAT, the ACT employs a 0-6 range, although it combines the scores of two raters so that the final score ranges from 0-12, with a third rater resolving discrepancies of greater than one point. A score of 6 indicates that an essay demonstrates “effective skill in responding to the task”:

The essay shows a clear understanding of the task. The essay takes a position on the issue and may offer a critical context for discussion. The essay addresses complexity by examining different perspectives on the issue, or by evaluating the implications and/or complications of the issue, or by fully responding to counter-arguments to the writer's position. Development of ideas is ample, specific, and logical. Most ideas are fully elaborated. A clear focus on the specific issue in the prompt is maintained.

The organization of the essay is clear: the organization may be somewhat predictable or it may grow from the writer's purpose. Ideas are logically sequenced. Most transitions reflect the writer's logic and are usually integrated into the essay. The introduction and conclusion are effective, clear, and well developed. The essay shows a good command of language. Sentences are varied and word choice is varied and precise. There are few, if any, errors to distract the reader.

Presumably to provide uniformity within the pool of diverse raters, essay comments, derived from the scoring rubric, are selected by ACT scorers and are provided along with the numerical rating. These comments are intended to help student writers understand the strengths and weaknesses of their essays. Feedback appears in a set of categories that includes Make and Articulate Judgments, Develop Ideas, Sustain Focus, Organize and Present Ideas, and Communicate Clearly, with a range of possibilities from the laudatory ("Your essay effectively supported general statements with specific reasons, examples, and details.") to the corrective ("Your essay provided very little writing about your ideas. Try to write more about the topic.").

Again, the formalist tradition appears to be largely at work in this assessment, although the rubric does reward ideas as well, or at least makes that claim. Teachers whose students take the ACT, like those who gear instruction toward the SAT, must make certain to stress analytic writing in textbook form in order for their school and administrators to look good in this national assessment and to make parents believe that they are teaching effectively. They must also jettison the idea that writing is an extended

process that involves exploratory writing that does not necessarily conform to the textbook standard. Further, they must accept that:

- impeccable writing may be produced within a 30-minute session under highly stressful conditions
- revision is cursory and involves for the most part polishing surface features of writing
- all students have equal access to the material required to substantiate an essay written in response to the prompt without the benefit of having appropriate materials to consult
- that the first idea generated while writing emerges in fully developed form rather than serving as the provisional basis from which more elaborate ideas may be generated
- writing in general is a rapid process that requires little in terms of prolonged consideration, reflection, and development.

Summary. The centripetal pressures placed on secondary school English teachers by the most widely employed writing assessments at the national level—the ACT and SAT—promote a formalist set of values that presumes that “mastery” of composition can be evident in an essay produced within a 25- to 30-minute time frame. While giving a nod to the idea that writing is a process and that a first draft is all that is possible within the parameters of the exam, the SAT in particular expects a final draft (in terms of the rubric), finely tuned analytic essay that conforms to expectations for polished prose in textbook English. It further measures “writing” ability through the indirect assessment of students’ ability to make a correct choice regarding the form of sentences produced solely

for the purpose of assessment. Any attention to the situational, relational nature of human communication must be set aside in order to prepare students for a setting in which writing is presumed to have unitary demands, with a single universal rubric that assessors believe may apply to any writing across the school curriculum.

This idea that writers' declarative, procedural, conditional, and conventional knowledge (see Hillocks, 1995b; Smagorinsky & Smith, 1992, for a review of these knowledge types as they pertain to writing) is general rather than specific has been debunked by teachers, theorists, and researchers from a variety of epistemological perspectives (e.g., Bazerman & Paradis, 1991; Beaufort, 2006; Hillocks, 2006; Nystrand, 1986; Russell, 1997; Schneider, 2003; Smagorinsky, Johannessen, Kahn, & McCann, in press; Witte, 1992), yet remains a driving assumption among testmakers. The assumption of general knowledge simplifies the difficult task of developing a single, one-shot, time-limited assessment with extraordinarily high stakes for those who take it. Ultimately, however, it oversimplifies writing instruction for teachers who find themselves obligated to teach so that their students perform well on these tests.

State Writing Assessments

In addition to these national examinations, many states provide their own writing assessments to measure students' writing proficiency. Illinois simply administers the ACT Writing test as part of their Illinois Prairie State Test, required of all juniors and by the University of Illinois for admissions. Others make great efforts to develop their own writing assessments that are required for graduation or other high-stakes gateways, reserving the ACT or SAT exams for those students who aspire to attend college.

Because virtually all students who are on track for graduation in a given state take a state writing assessment, presumably it has even greater influence on writing instruction than do the national assessments, which are designed to help sort students for the purposes of college admissions. Understanding the developers of state writing assessments' assumptions about writing and what they expect of students is thus critical to grasping the centripetal forces that bear down on classroom teachers.

The most detailed study of state writing assessments was conducted by Hillocks (2002). Hillocks found variation in how states assess writing, with radically different assumptions and practices at work in different states. After reviewing nearly every state writing test available, he and his research team focused on five states that appeared to epitomize the national range: Illinois and Texas (typifying what he found to be the most shallow approach), Oregon and New York (representing an improvement on the approach of Illinois and Texas, but not enough to merit Hillocks' full approval), and Kentucky (representing what Hillocks judged the most promising approach through its employment of portfolio assessment; yet see Callahan, 1997, for a more critical view of the Kentucky portfolio assessment).

Even though Illinois has shifted to the ACT for its writing assessment, the approach they employed at the time of Hillocks' (2002) study is worth reviewing because it appears to be a very common means of assessing writing at the state level. Illinois used rubrics based on the five-paragraph model to assess writing that students produced in a single, 40-minute session. Remarkably, this form was rewarded regardless of the domain—narrative, expository, or persuasive—prompted. The guide that teachers used to prepare students for the assessment never referred specifically to the five-paragraph

theme, yet the rubrics awarded the highest scores to those papers that included an introduction, three paragraphs of support, and a conclusion.

Hillocks (2002) argues that the severely limited time available for scoring the writing leaves little time for considering the content of a paper as an issue in rating its quality. A critical problem that he found was that each body paragraph of the essay was evaluated according to the presence of generalization and support. According to the model essays provided by the accompanying test preparation materials, the support did not need to provide warranted evidence for the claim. Rather, the mere presence of a claim and support, which Hillocks found often involved a simple reiteration or expansion of the claim, was sufficient to produce a high score. Students could be rewarded, then, for producing insipid or specious papers as long as they followed the formula; in Hillocks' (2003) characterization, students "must manufacture blather to fill up the space. The five-paragraph formula provides a way to organize the blather, but it ignores thoughtful development" (p. 69), resulting in "shoddy thinking" that students regard as "the solution to any writing problem" (p. 70).

For teachers, this assessment provided the public forum through which they were held accountable. Even though the Illinois test was "low-stakes," i.e., neither schools nor students would be punished for low scores, the test inevitably drove instruction: "despite the facts that teachers are not in danger of losing their jobs or having their schools disbanded or seeing their students fail to graduate from high school, teachers feel considerable pressure about the tests" (Hillocks, 2002, p. 103). Test scores in some states are, however, used as the basis for putting school districts on watch lists, having them

taken over by the state or other entity, forcing them to consolidate with a neighboring district with higher scores, or precipitating other dire outcomes.

This sort of pressure comes not only from state officials and school administrators, but from colleagues as well who, in accordance with Foucault's (1995) metaphoric interpretation of Bentham's panopticon, police one another. My colleagues and I conducted a study of an Oklahoma middle school teacher's instruction in the five-paragraph theme, which she taught in order to prepare her students for a state writing test much like that of Illinois (Johnson et al., 2003). At the time of the study, Oklahoma, like Illinois, employed a five-paragraph rubric for assessing students' writing. The state curriculum specified that students would write:

Narrative, descriptive, expository, and persuasive paragraphs and longer compositions that establish and support a central idea with a topic sentence; supporting paragraphs with facts, details, explanations or examples; and a concluding paragraph that summarizes the points.

As in Illinois, then, students were taught to produce five-paragraph themes or their facsimiles, even when writing narratives.

This core curriculum objective was aligned with a mandate faced by Leigh Thompson, the focal teacher in this study: the eighth-grade writing test that required students to write an essay on a given topic, which the scoring rubric treated as a five-paragraph theme. This assessment became a central driving consideration in Leigh's writing instruction. She said:

When they [the students] take the eighth grade writing test, that's what they [the assessors] look for is the five-paragraph essay format. And that's something that

I've talked a lot to the other two eighth-grade English teachers about, and so they've helped me on that. But they just said, "Give them lots of practice. Have them practice writing this essay as much as possible" . . . because that's kind of the structure they look for when people grade these writing samples that they have to give (p. 164).

Leigh's conformity to this instructional norm undoubtedly helped relieve the tension of being a first-year teacher entering an environment with established expectations. However, this setting included the pressures produced by expectations accompanying the state writing test and also contributed to her experience of new tensions. Two recurring terms in Leigh's accounts of teaching the five-paragraph theme in preparation for this test were *pressure* exerted on her from without and *stress*, a state she perceived in her colleagues and experienced herself. She was aware of this pressure and experienced this stress very early in her first year of teaching. In the spring as the test approached, she said,

I don't feel like I can spend any other time on any other type of writing right now. I have all these other things I want to do as far as writing, but up until they take this test, I don't feel like I can do anything else. . . . I'm just trying to get them ready for this test. And I've told them a hundred times: That's my goal, and we need to work on this (p. 165).

The pressure to teach to the test confined Leigh's instruction to the five-paragraph theme, a priority of which she made her students well aware. She deferred any other more imaginative writing instruction until after the state writing test:

I feel like I can't do as many fun activities and different activities. And maybe once I've, like I've said before, maybe once I have some more teaching experience and know what to expect with this writing test a little more and know what works and what doesn't as far as helping them write, then I can vary a little bit. But I think definitely because just like I said, I'm going to let them do some more creative projects in writing after this writing assessment test is over. Right now I feel like I'm just pounding it into them. It kind of stresses me out. This whole writing test stuff (p. 165).

Leigh revealed that the stress she experienced came through her interactions with her colleagues much more than from her administrators. She said, for instance, that "I've never heard like if they do awful, that you're going to be fired or anything like that, but I've heard it reflects on you. . . . One teacher commented to me, she said, 'Well, you're lucky you have honors kids because your tests will be higher than mine.'" In contrast to her primary administrator's assurance that her students would pass the test even if she did not dedicate her writing instruction to the five-paragraph theme, Leigh's colleagues impressed upon her the magnitude of the test scores in terms of their reputations as teachers and the importance therefore of teaching to the test. She said,

The pressure of the writing test mainly came from my 8th grade English colleagues. I think they explained to me how important this was, so I naturally assumed the stress. The scores . . . are reflected through the school as the results are published annually through the city newspaper. Our school has a history of doing extremely well in the writing test so that was always a nice reward to see the 98-99% passage rates. . . . My colleagues also taught the same writing

method—there are 3 8th grade English teachers at our school. They all felt the same pressure I’m sure. I didn’t feel much pressure from the administration (p. 166).

Like any other case study participant, Leigh does not represent the whole population of beginning teachers. Her experience does suggest, however, why teachers gravitate to formalist norms: Pressure and stress that follow from mandates are internalized and perpetuated by fellow teachers who create a climate in which adherence to those norms is constructed as good citizenship and a sign of collegiality.

These norms correspond to the values and practices of *current-traditional rhetoric* (Berlin, 1987), which assumes that “truth is objective and may be apprehended directly through observation of the world and our experience in it” (Hillocks, 2002, p. 21). Writing in this tradition is exclusively analytic and argumentative, and tends to promote top-down instructional practices in the form of lectures and recitation, with the teacher front and center and students following the dictates of textbook and teacher. The students’ role is to try to imitate the models that instructors provide for them, with little attention to the processes that generate them or the social conventions involved in participating within the expectations of the genre being produced.

My focus here has been on what Hillocks (2002) found to be the tests likely to encourage the worst writing and least effective writing instruction. Some states provided more than one session, or provided data sets for students to use as the basis for their writing, rather than relying on general recall as the source of evidence for claims. A rare few, such as Kentucky, employed a portfolio approach that, while problematic (see, e.g., Gearhart & Herman, 1998) encouraged greater attention to process, allowed for multiple

genres of writing to be included, and required written work to be assembled over the course of the whole year.

But Hillocks' (2002) most alarming finding is that for the most part, even with some meritorious exceptions, state writing tests reproduce the same problems involved in national writing tests: severely limited time for the writing, prompts that force students to rely on memory or fabrication to support claims, a restrictive emphasis on analytic writing based in current-traditional rhetoric, rubrics that value the presence of features over the development of ideas, and rubrics that emphasize features of expository writing regardless of the genre prompted. The result for classroom teachers is, as in Leigh's case, the reduction of writing instruction that does not feed into the rubrics, and thus the encouragement of writing instruction that produces hollow essay forms whose content is virtually irrelevant.

District Policies, Curricula, and Assessment

National and state writing assessments are not enough; districts have their own accountability measures that are often designed to end *social promotion*, i.e., the advancement from one grade to the next because of age or time spent in school, rather than on a passing grade for a course (Smagorinsky et al., 2004). District assessments are also designed to ensure that students across a large district receive uniform instruction and have a standard for advancement to the next grade level regardless of socioeconomic status, demographic makeup, or other factors that might call for a differentiated curriculum or knowledge base across the district's diverse student body makeup.

While a national assessment might affect a student's prospects for attending particular universities, and a state test might determine whether or not a student receives

a diploma or the status of a school's ranking on its annual report card, a district test can serve to hold students back from moving from one grade level to the next. While the state writing test may be used to evaluate the relative "achievement" and thus the relative quality of instruction at neighboring and competing schools, a district assessment may more easily disaggregate scores not only to contrast schools but teachers within schools, thus ramping up the pressure on teachers to teach to the tests. It makes sense, then, to assume that district-level assessments have a direct impact on how teachers instruct their students, and thus to situate classroom instruction in the context of district assessment practices.

A few of my own studies of teachers transitioning from university teacher education programs to their first jobs have also foregrounded the role of district curriculum and testing mandates in shaping teachers' developing conceptions of their discipline (Smagorinsky et al., 2004; Smagorinsky et al., 2002). In Smagorinsky et al. (2004), focal teacher Natalie Gibson taught middle school English in a district that we characterized as having a corporate identity. For example, in a letter written to district constituents in 2000, a school board member began by saying that "you are stockholders in the [County] Public School System. Your [County] property taxes dedicated to the public school system qualify you for stockholder status." The letter continued: "*Moody's Investor's Service recently upgraded to AAA (Triple A) its bond rating for [County] Public Schools--the highest bond rating available*" (emphasis in original). The county's corporate identity led to a view of accountability that required continual testing of students according to pre-determined skills amenable to measurement through either standardized tests or writing assessments that focused exclusively on issues of form.

In the large school district of which Natalie's school was a part, a skills-oriented curriculum had been institutionalized through district mandates. The district website reported that "The AKS [Academic Knowledge and Skills] are the standards for academic excellence for all students in [County] Public Schools. They are what teachers are to teach and students are to learn. In every [County] classroom, instruction and assessment are tailored so that all students learn the AKS." This curriculum was tied to high-stakes assessments that determined a student's promotion to the next grade, overriding grades achieved in course work and ensuring, in the eyes of the district, that students would not benefit from social promotion. This interdependent relation between curriculum and assessment was developed, according to the district website, in response to the district mission "*to pursue excellence in academic knowledge, skills, and behavior for each student resulting in measured improvement against local, national, and world-class standards*" (emphasis in original).

The district's website claimed that "because the AKS detail exactly what a child is expected to learn, teachers can tailor the classroom experience to meet a child's individual needs." Natalie found this match between meeting the requirements of the AKS and engaging in student-centered instruction to be difficult to achieve in her teaching of 8th graders facing the gateway writing test in the spring, the failure of which would deny their promotion to high school. As a result, her teaching involved conflicted use of progressive methods. When she used a writing workshop, for instance, she evaluated students' work as follows:

I'm going to go over the five areas, the content, organization, and style, and mechanics and usage and sentence formation. And we're going to talk about all

those. And then I might save sentence formation, talk about it last because then I will—after we do the parts of speech I'm going to go into sentences and putting together sentences and subject and predicate and all that. Verbs. [inaudible] verbs and parts of speech. . . . I've tried to set up my scoring scale and the way I've weighted it similar to the writing test. And we've gone over the areas that they look for, that they score under. Content, organization, mechanics, usage, sentence formation, and style (p. 237).

We saw Natalie's implementation of a writing workshop format as the clearest disjunction between her student-oriented values and the pressures of the curriculum mandates and assessment system. Faced with an extensive set of curriculum objectives to cover, she attempted to teach them in the context of methods such as writing workshop that she'd learned at the university that, at least theoretically, would help students make connections with their schooling. The imperative to assess form and mechanics, however, tilted the writing workshop's emphasis away from the student-oriented qualities prized by its advocates and toward the sort of details that she'd dismissed as “nit-picky” during her student teaching. She said,

I was overwhelmed with planning. . . . I had no idea where to begin. [The County] has their own curriculum in addition to the state's Quality Core Curriculum [QCC]. It combines QCC objectives and standardized test objectives. I was supposed to teach the reading *and* language art curriculum in one daily 50-minute class period. It was an insane amount of material to cover. I have learned since coming to [County] that it would actually take something like 25 years to teach [the State's] curriculum! . . .

It was just too much to wade through. Especially considering I was supposed to spend even more time preparing my students' for the high stakes writing test in the spring and a battery of other standardized tests, the [State Criterion-Referenced Competency Test], the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, Stanford Achievement tests, etc. . . .

I entered this profession because I love students. I love their energy and enthusiasm. I usually felt as though I was killing both of these things during my first two years. In the name of learning and discipline I found myself saying crazy, and maybe even ugly things at times. It was almost like an out-of-body experience. I would look down on myself and think, "I can't believe I just did (or said) that! I don't really feel that way, do I?"

(pp. 242-243).

I must wonder how many teachers experience their work as Natalie did hers: finding herself becoming a teacher she never thought she'd be, one so heavily focused on minutiae that she lost sight of the students she'd entered the profession to nurture. Not only did she feel that she was killing her students' energy and enthusiasm, she found that she'd lost her own as well. This dimension of the accountability movement—the deleterious effects of test preparation on teachers' enthusiasm for their work, their love of their students, and their feelings of fulfillment from teaching kids—seems overlooked in the broader outrage over how incessant testing affects students and their school experiences.

Conclusion

In this essay I have looked at writing instruction in relation to the mediating contexts of school traditions, teacher education programs, and assessments at the national, state, and district levels. To conclude, I will try to return to some principles borrowed from Vygotsky (1978, 1987) to try to understand how the cultural history of writing pedagogy and its traditions have served to create a broad motive for secondary school teachers of writing, how universities do and do not support this motive in their teacher preparation programs, and how the particular medium of the assessment movement serves as a dominant tool in shaping teachers' pedagogy and thus their own and their students' experiences in school.

The tradition that I've referred variously to as current-traditional and formalist has influenced education for over two millennia. As Cohen (1988) has argued, this deep entrenchment does matter in how a tradition becomes perpetuated. It's worth noting that the most important challenge to this tradition has come in Dewey's *Democracy and Education*, originally published in 1916. This book has been named the 5th most dangerous book of the last two centuries by the conservative organization Human Events, trailing *The Communist Manifesto*, *Mein Kampf*, *Quotations from Chairman Mao*, and Alfred Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*. Of this staple of teacher education syllabi, they say

(<http://www.humanevents.com/article.php?id=7591>):

John Dewey, who lived from 1859 until 1952, was a "progressive" philosopher and leading advocate for secular humanism in American life, who taught at the University of Chicago and at Columbia. He signed the

Humanist Manifesto and rejected traditional religion and moral absolutes.

In *Democracy and Education*, in pompous and opaque prose, he disparaged schooling that focused on traditional character development and endowing children with hard knowledge, and encouraged the teaching of thinking “skills” instead. His views had great influence on the direction of American education—particularly in public schools—and helped nurture the Clinton generation.

The “hard knowledge” that they value from their conservative perspective would appear to correspond with the current-traditional emphasis that Berlin (1987), Hillocks (2002), and others have found deeply entrenched in American letters and U.S. writing assessment. If Dewey is truly dangerous, it is *not* because he is having much impact on the assessment movement. Rather, these conservative assumptions about the fixed nature of knowledge, the static form of language, and the clear and unambiguous view of morality appear to be thoroughly and with little exception the driving force in assessing young people’s writing and mastery of other aspects of the school curriculum.

University teacher education programs tend to work at cross-purposes with this established formalist tradition, maintaining their emphasis on Deweyan progressivism. However, English educators seem more oriented to how this philosophy can influence literature instruction than shape a pedagogy for writing and language use. Because students are immersed in conservative school cultures throughout their K-12 education, exposed to authoritarian teaching and learning relationships in universities, and offered few concrete alternatives for their instruction in writing at universities, it should come as no surprise that when they return to schools, they most often default to the same form-

oriented approaches to teaching writing to which they were exposed as students and through which they are often apprenticed during their field experiences and student teaching.

My critique has attended both to writing assessments and assessments of other aspects of the curriculum. In my view, both affect writing instruction because both require so much preparation time. When teachers are reviewing for the SAT, the state testing battery, the district testing battery, and more, they are not teaching writing except when preparing students for the writing component, which in most cases promotes what Hillocks (2002) calls “blather” rather than clear thinking.

It seems to be beyond question that the testing environment is successful in making administrators, teachers, and students accountable. What concerns me is for what they’re being held accountable. Hillocks’ (2006) review of writing research (cf. Anagnostopoulos’s [2003a, 2003b, 2006] studies of the Chicago Public Schools) does not let teachers off the hook. The teachers are complicit in going along with the teaching and learning promoted by state and district assessments, which I find to be highly compatible with national writing assessments. What I am beginning to wonder is whether the tests are driving the instruction or whether they’re symptomatic of a belief in the sort of restricted, transmission-oriented, mimetic, linear, authoritarian, fragmented, atomistic instruction that has dominated schools since long before the accountability movement began in the 1970s and proliferated in the 1990s.

If the latter is the case, then the tests are mostly a pesky problem for teachers who must take their routine instruction and parcel it out for alignment with the testing schedule. And if that is the case, then teacher education programs are in big trouble,

because the monolith against which they position themselves is simply too well established to be dislodged. It appears to me that what the accountability movement has accomplished best is to discourage or drive out those teachers for whom the accountability movement is philosophically and dispositionally abhorrent, thus leaving a more receptive teaching force in place to accommodate the accountability movement. Whether or not students are better off is a matter of perspective; but it seems that at the very least, their development as writers is inevitably short-changed as a consequence of the ways in which writing instruction is shaped by the multiple, yet redundant, means of assessment to which they are routinely subjected.

What's a Teacher Educator to Do?

With so many formalist forces bearing down on classroom teachers to crush efforts (though they may be isolated) to teach learning processes and center instruction on students and their growth, teachers have fewer and fewer opportunities to teach outside the dominant tradition. How progressive educators respond to the institutionalization of this tradition will be their greatest challenge in the decades ahead. Although I am not effusively confident that teacher educators can produce substantive changes in the cultures of school and assessment, there are some steps that they can take that might extend whatever small foothold they have in the policy environment that governs writing instruction.

One step would be to include in teacher education programs explicit courses in writing pedagogy that go beyond the courses in writing that they take in English departments. These courses would emphasize how to teach writing in ways that feature the writer's ideas, the relational nature of writing conventions, the various writing

processes that writers employ with different tasks and communities of readers, the presence and problems of mandated standardized writing assessments, and other aspects of writing that distinguish it as a complex, recursive process for communicating ideas that is not easily quantified.

Graduate programs for practicing teachers could also include such features as an affiliate site of the National Writing Project that would draw teachers into a community of writing instructors who appreciate the complexity of writing and writing instruction. I also think that given the paucity of research on NWP site consequences (with some exceptions—see, e.g., Pritchard, 1987; Whitney, 2008), university researchers and classroom-based researchers could develop studies that look at both NWP summer institutes and the influence of the institutes on teachers' subsequent practice and career development.

Teacher education programs could further include greater attention to issues of assessment so that teachers understand the values of the evaluations to which they subject their students. Teachers will be co-opted into the assessment effort whether they like it or not; it makes sense, then, for them to be educated about what motivates, sustains, and drives the specific assessment vehicles toward which they aim their instruction.

A final strategy would be for teacher educators to engage in partnership with school districts to help shape policy and provide research-informed perspectives on the norms that guide educational practice and the sorts of assessments employed to measure effects of instruction. This task, like the others I have proposed, is time-intensive and would require the reallocation of time and resources. Inducing change in educational practice is a long and grudging process, as Cohen (1988) notes in finding remarkable

stability across two millennia of Western education. Any effort to produce change should be undertaken with realistic expectations, given that the machinery of schooling is well-entrenched and established and requires, like the battleship at sea, a wide and gradual turning radius. Working to change the culture of writing instruction so that it matches the field's knowledge about writing process and pedagogy will be most satisfying, then, if it is understood as a long and difficult project that no single effort can reasonably address. Rather, a shift in culture can only follow from the dedicated and aggregated efforts of a field committed to change.

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Figure 1: Sumerian classroom, circa 2000 BCE. Reprinted from Cole, 2005, p.