

# INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME 2, EMERGING THEORETICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES

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The two volumes of *Considering Students, Teachers and Writing Assessment* focus on the increasing importance of students' and teachers' lived experiences within the development and use of writing assessments. These two volumes examine key themes from scholarship published in *The Journal of Writing Assessment (JWA)* in the past twenty years. Together, the volumes reflect upon how writing assessment research has contributed to five major themes: (1) technical psychometric issues, particularly reliability and validity; (2) politics and public policies around large scale writing assessments; (3) the evolution of—and debates around—automated scoring of writing; (4) the major theoretical changes elevating fairness within educational measurement and writing assessment; and (5) the importance of considering the lived experiences of the humans involved in the assessment ecology. Each section is introduced by current scholars in writing assessment who reflect upon and frame the issues of the past and comment on the ways in which these issues may unfold in the future. Volume 1 explores dynamic issues connected to reliability and validity and how writing assessment contributed to the evolutions of these concepts, the shifting political context of writing assessment, and the rise of automated scoring of writing. This second volume focuses on the evolution of theoretical and pedagogical considerations in writing assessment scholarship and explores the broader history about the structures and lasting impacts of writing assessment yet to be explored.

Volume 2 of *Considering Students, Teachers and Writing Assessment* captures the interactions between the developments pushed forward by evolving technical, political, and societal contexts. We are poised at a moment in time where

the theoretical developments within writing assessment—particularly the push towards fairness as a major category on par with reliability and validity—coincide with increasing awareness of racism and social inequities. The year 2020 was a watershed, a moment in writing assessment research that represents a shift towards more direct attention to these issues. This awareness has shone a light on scholars and research subjects that have been disregarded or uninvestigated. Awareness is not enough. For this change to have staying power, it must grow from the work that has been done in the field over the last twenty years, and it must also forge new paths. In this volume, *Emerging Theoretical and Pedagogical Practices* traces how writing assessment research and practices have changed as the lived experiences of students and teachers have become a more central concern to the field. The collection charts out the ways in which writing assessment scholarship published in *the Journal of Writing Assessment* accelerated the response to calls for more equitable and socially just educational practices. *Journal of Writing Assessment* scholarship also engaged with calls to increase the fairness of not only writing assessments but also the ways they are used. The increasing emphasis on anti-racist teaching practices in composition studies has seen the development of writing assessment tools such as contract grading become more widespread.

## **ARRIVING AFTER HISTORY: FOSTERING SOCIAL JUSTICE AND FAIRNESS IN WRITING ASSESSMENT PRACTICES**

Drawing on the research published in *the Journal of Writing Assessment* over the last twenty years, this volume explores how writing assessment scholars have incorporated students' and teachers' lived experiences into our understandings of how writing assessment systems work. These chapters challenge writing assessment experts to develop more equitable and socially just educational practices that work across a variety of educational contexts. The intersection of writing assessment, method, and the lived classroom setting has uniquely shaped the larger field of educational measurement and assessment. Most certainly, writing assessment has evolved from portfolio and programmatic assessment to more socially-situated methods: directed self-placement, contract grading, disciplinarily situated outcomes assessment measured through writing, antiracist writing assessments, and responses to the use of automated scoring of writing for large scale testing purposes. The emergence of these areas of writing assessment work points towards a productive new turn in writing assessment: one that considers writing assessment located in relationship to the lived experiences of students and teachers. Rather than seeing assessment primarily as measurement, we can see assessment as an evidentiary argument, situated in social contexts, centered

on students' developing competencies in valued activities, and shaped by purposes and values—chief among them validity, fairness, and equity. The development of these situated writing assessment techniques suggests the potential for more socially attentive forms of educational measurement.

The last twenty years have seen a shift away from a myopic focus on reliability and validity as the gold standard in assessment studies towards the importance of developing broader approaches that document how validity, reliability, and fairness interact with one another. In addition, writing assessment researchers examine how these constructs actually work—or don't work—when put into practice in different secondary and post-secondary contexts. The role that post-secondary writing instructors played in this shift from focusing on reliability and validity to considering multiple, contextualized measures has often received only minor attention in the research literature. However, teachers in the fields of writing studies and composition studies have contributed to the development of writing assessment as a discipline, and they are increasingly helping to shape many aspects of today's large-scale, as well as classroom-based, writing assessment practices. This collection represents a pathway forward that combines writing assessment grounded in social contexts to promote productive societal change. *Emerging Theoretical and Pedagogical Practices* charts out the ways in which scholarship published in *the Journal of Writing Assessment* has assisted the field of writing assessment to further evolve in response to calls for more equitable and socially just educational practices.

## DEVELOPING FAIRNESS IN PSYCHOMETRICS

In 2014, the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* issued another major revision which outlined the importance of considering the consequences of assessments on test takers. The *Standards* defined fairness as

the validity of test score interpretations for intended use(s) for individuals from all relevant subgroups. A test is fair that minimizes the construct-irrelevant variance associated with individual characteristics and testing contexts that otherwise would compromise the validity of scores for some individuals. (AERA, APA, & NCME, 2014, p. 219)

As such, fairness became an essential consideration in writing assessment. The rapidly changing demographic of the US population makes this consideration especially salient. In the last 20 years, college enrollment and degree attainment have skyrocketed, and the demographic profile of the students who attend post-secondary study mirrors the rapidly changing demographic of the rest of the

United States. In 2016, the total enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions was nearly twenty million students (Hussar & Bailey, 2019, p. 59). As composition classrooms attended more to the diverse instructional backgrounds and needs of students and faculty within them, new areas of research emerged. Such writing assessment scholarship continues to evolve to consider the relationship between students, faculty, and assessment processes and how fairness is upheld.

The change in theoretical perspectives resulted in writing assessment scholars considering the contexts in which writing was taught and assessed and the people who occupied them. The work done in response to accountability mandates resulting in large scale writing assessment programs gave rise to a national effort of several programs that commonly articulated of outcomes that could be adjusted to the local student population and their demographics. Behm and his coauthors (2013) document a decade of the ways in which this type of approach played out in first-year writing programs across the US using the WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition. This statement (CWPA, 2019) provided a coherent articulation about the “writing knowledge, practices, and attitudes that undergraduate students develop in first-year composition, which at most schools is a required general education course or sequence of courses.” As such, institutions could work toward a common set of practices while attending to the unique demographic features of their student populations as well as their specific institutional mission. As a result, this angle opened the door to further examine the people involved in the writing assessment ecologies (Inoue, 2015) as well as the institutions and disciplinary situations in which writing is taught (Kelly-Riley and Elliot, 2021).

Scholarship in the *Journal of Writing Assessment* has chronicled this change in focus from technical and political issues to one that more squarely considers the people involved. The two sections in this volume look at the theoretical evolutions and the ways in which consideration of people and institutional type and mission change the writing assessment enterprise.

#### **PART FOUR. THEORETICAL EVOLUTIONS: TOWARDS FAIRNESS AND ASPIRING TO JUSTICE**

Part Four of this second volume examines the theoretical shifts that underscore the importance of teacher expertise and experience in writing assessment. Evolutions in the concepts of validity and fairness meant that writing could be understood as a socially situated construct, rhetorical contexts were important, and the ways in which we communicated with each other must be considered. Mya Poe, Professor of English and Director of the Writing Program at Northeastern

University, documents how the changes in these constructs in educational measurement have opened doors to considerations of fairness and the impacts of assessment on demographic groups. She details how this work on fairness and ethics in writing assessment addresses social justice issues in writing assessment. Further, she sketches out how fairness and antiracist writing assessment practices can lead to new developments in the field.

In 2003, Peggy O'Neill began this conversation in *JWA* in "Moving Beyond Holistic Scoring through Validity Inquiry" emphasizing fairness and bringing local assessment to the forefront of student writing assessment. In this piece, O'Neill responds to the work of William L. Smith from the University of Pittsburgh who experimented on local assessment through both teacher and student perspectives shifting from assigning a numerical value to a piece of student writing to an assessment process that considers students' abilities relative to the instructional classes available. The placement system piloted by Smith and his colleagues asked teachers to directly place students into courses offered by the institution. Thus, Smith established a framework that recognized and valued the expertise of classroom composition teachers. O'Neill connects Smith's work to the evolving educational measurement scholarship related to validity theory.

Next, Bob Broad and Michael Boyd further illustrate the importance of teacher expertise in writing assessment in "Rhetorical Writing Assessment: The Practice and Theory of Complementarity" (2005). They argue for the need to understand writing in all its complexities, including accounting for local, situated elements. For them, communal writing assessment practices engage teachers in longer and more deliberate action and allow for fuller consideration of student performance. They also note that portfolio-based assessment facilitated this complexity and is needed to facilitate the shift away from a reliance on psychometrics which, in their view, had run its course.

In "Articulating Sophistic Rhetoric as a Validity Heuristic for Writing Assessment," Asao B. Inoue (2007) traces validity's genealogy to concepts in ancient rhetoric. Writing assessment's evolution of validity can be traced through the philosophies of the ancient Greeks. Inoue observes "the sophists' positions on *nomos-physis* and Protagoras' human-measure doctrine ask us to reconsider continually our own relationships to the cultural hegemony we often say we resist as intellectuals, but clearly must work within as teachers, assessors, validity researchers, and citizens, which in turn asks us to find ways to open the academy's doors a little wider" (p. 48). Mapping the arguments of ancient Greek philosophers onto current day concepts of validity helps document the consequences of moving validity from an objective construct to one that is socially situated. That move results in the consideration of the effects of assessments on the test takers and the considerations under which these tests are taken.

In “Ethical Considerations and Writing Assessment,” David Slomp (2016) explores the development of the constructs of reliability, validity, and fairness and notes that the exclusion of classroom teachers’ expertise from their modern-day development means that these constructs do not attend to broader social consequences. Our work in assessment must also be guided by ethics. He notes, “[these three concepts] reflect a narrow epistemological, ontological and axiological standpoint; they focus narrowly on intended uses and interpretations of test scores; and they handle key technical issues such as validity, reliability, and fairness as siloed concepts.” As part of a Special Issue on a Theory of Ethics in Writing Assessment, Slomp and his co-authors articulate a theory of ethics for writing assessment that ultimately better serves students because it “assists all stakeholders in the assessment process in more thoroughly addressing questions regarding the moral aspects of assessment use” (p. 102). These moves toward fairness in writing assessment theory and practice enhance the possibilities for increasing equity.

## **PART FIVE. IMPLICATIONS OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS AND TEACHERS IN WRITING ASSESSMENT**

In the final section of the two-volume collection, *Considering Students, Teachers and Writing Assessment*, we extend the conversation about fairness by considering the lived experiences of students and teachers within writing assessment systems. The chapters in this part of the book examine how writing assessments impact students’ and teachers’ lives. In the chapter, “Toward Fairness in Writing Assessment,” we trace how fairness has been developed as a category and how it has increasingly been tied to the impact on students’ lives. This work has led researchers to ask forceful questions about the contexts around writing assessment. Asao Inoue’s (2015) emphasis on approaching writing assessment as a whole ecology rather than the development of an isolated test and Anne Ruggles Gere et al.’s insistence that writing assessment engage in “communal justicing” (2021, p. 384) have helped drive the field towards studying writing assessments *in situ*. That is, rather than only asking questions about validity, reliability, and generalizability, writing assessment scholars have increasingly asked what do these writing assessments look like when seen from students’ and teachers’ perspectives. Disparate impact analysis has become an essential method for operationalizing these approaches. Perhaps, even more importantly, the field has more directly taken up questions about learning differences; mitigating the impacts of racism, sexism, ableism, and poverty; and examining how writing assessments function within educational and social systems.

The first chapter in this closing section, Mya Poe and John Aloysius Cogan Jr.’s “Civil Rights and Writing Assessment,” critiques racist assessment practices

and points the way toward developing antiracist forms of writing assessment. Their work is grounded in the experiences of students and teachers both inside and outside of the classroom. Their work is about how a disparate impact approach could be utilized as a method for evaluating unintended, racialized differences in learning outcomes, particularly the ways in which these may result from educational policies or practices that appear “neutral.” Poe and Cogan argue that disparate impact analysis remains an underutilized conceptual and methodological framework within writing assessment. Disparate impact analysis allows the inclusion of lived experiences when analyzing a writing assessment system in ways that have not always been considered.

Leslie Henson and Katie Hern’s “Let Them In: Increasing Access, Completion, and Equity in English Placement Policies at a Two-Year College in California” builds on this work around disparate impact analysis. They document how refinements to writing placement systems can reduce gaps in course completion outcomes. Their work draws on a disparate impact analysis and continues to ask questions about how students’ lives and time-to-degree are impacted by changes to a community college writing placement system. Their focus on writing assessment and placement at a California community college explores the real-world impacts of changes to writing assessment systems.

In “Neurodivergence and Intersectionality in Labor-Based Grading Contracts,” Kathleen Kryger and Griffin X. Zimmerman also address issues within students’ lives by exploring questions around accessibility. They examine how labor-based grading contracts might be designed to honor neurodivergence and intersectional student identities rather than inscribing ableist, status quo identities. Their chapter shows how student experiences and identities cannot be separated from a writing assessment. In fact, they demonstrate how an assessment defines value (i.e., what is good writing) as well as constructs or limits the complexity of student identities. Grading contracts, like the reflective cover essays for portfolios, produce writing processes that can be framed in numerous ways. Kryger and Zimmerman’s chapter aims to keep open the possibilities of grading contracts rather than having them generate language that confines and normalizes both approaches to writing and, ultimately, the ways in which students may write and think about their identities.

Finally, Shane Wood’s “Engaging in Resistant Genres as Antiracist Teacher Response” grounds his approach to antiracist teacher response by focusing on how teachers respond to students. Wood, like Kryger and Zimmerman, challenges teachers to consider how their response practices reinforce dominant linguistic and social norms. Wood’s work critiques the ways in which teacher response can sustain White language supremacy and bring harm to students. As an intense location for student-teacher interaction, teacher response to student



writing is not only a vital aspect of writing assessment, but also a socialized location that can either replicate or challenge existing social norms. Adding fairness as a vital category within writing assessment has pushed forward theoretical developments in the field. The way these are operationalized and impact students' lives remains an area for further research and engagement. The principle of fairness must be followed up with developing writing assessment practices that attend to students' and teachers' lived experiences and the impacts of writing assessment systems on students' lives.

To close the two-volume collection, Victor Villanueva reflects on ways in which writing assessment scholarship informs the entire field and is, thus, relevant to all. He articulates the importance of engaging in purposeful and intentional scholarship that places the complexity of students' and teachers' lives and identities at the center of our work. His coda reminds us that writing assessment scholarship has implications beyond the silos of research areas in writing studies. In writing assessment scholarship, there have been waves of conversations that overlap and inform directions that need to be pursued; he notes that there are many perspectives and voices that have not been the focus of or included in the past twenty years of scholarship in *the Journal of Writing Assessment*. Villanueva notes the importance of expanding the definitions of fairness beyond teachers' and students' experiences and challenges us to bring a wider array of scholars in to investigate and address these issues.

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