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THE POLITICS OF THEORIZING

The work described in the last chapter, particularly that of Haswell and Broad, has a lot of potential. Part of that potential lies in the minimal use they each make of conventional educational measurement theory. I would argue, however, that the places where composition assessment theorists rely on or answer to educational measurement are less successful. When we try to think differently, our work has significantly more potential to engender a true paradigm shift.

At the moment, however, our writing assessments, particularly in large-scale and high-stakes situations, do not often show the mark of a contextual paradigm. The tests, for example, we see resulting from the requirements of the “No Child Left Behind” Act certainly do not reach the level of sophistication in assessment that we would hope to see from contextually aware assessment. And the forthcoming additional writing section to the SATs is hardly what most of us in composition would call a valuable writing test. These high stakes assessments are taking these shapes because the dominant paradigm still molds assessments according to objectivist principles that are ultimately incompatible with a contextual paradigm.

But perhaps this is our fault. We have not provided a viable alternative. It is not as if educators are actually satisfied with multiple choice tests and timed high-stakes impromptus that have the power to hold a child back for another year of fourth grade. Governing bodies want evidence that education works, and the tests they are currently using provide information that is persuasive within an objectivist framework. The dominant paradigm thus far has defined what counts as evidence, but my guess is that if someone could provide an alternative kind of evidence—as long as it was persuasive—those bodies would be willing to hear it.

In this chapter, I make an argument that is, at first glance, paradoxical. In order for our theories to be more influential, we need to separate them from educational measurement theory. Considering the influence of educational measurement, this approach would seem counterintuitive. But a primary reason our theories are ineffectual beyond our own borders is that whenever we venture outside, we make the connection to educational measurement, and thus mark those principles as the ones to whom

we must answer. I begin this chapter with a specific example of the paradigm clash I have been describing: the release of NCTE and IRA *Standards for the English Language Arts*. The public reception of the standards shows us why those of us in post-secondary composition studies need to develop independent theoretical principles, and then to develop evidence that supports the use of those principles. Without this work, we run the risk of making our theories perpetually subordinate to conventional educational measurement theory rather than taking the chance that we could make a significant and substantive change to the way we do assessment.

STANDARDS AND VALUES

The development and release of the *Standards for the English Language Arts*, sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association (IRA) (1996) provides us with a clear example of a moment when ideals about literacy instruction and the conventions of educational measurement theory collided. The *Standards* embodies a contextual literacy paradigm as I describe it in chapter two, treating literacy as an integrated and ongoing activity that cannot be dissected into discrete skills and arguing explicitly for the necessary influence of local contexts in determining the specifics of any curriculum. Both before and after its release, critics directly challenged the theoretical ground on which the *Standards* rests, arguing that any “standards” deserving of the name require concrete, observable, and measurable marks of achievement. In their public statements, they argue that these standards are not “standards” because they fail to include benchmarks and thus provide no means for measuring success or failure. Such an objectivist position stands in contrast to the contextually oriented theoretical position of the *Standards*. The release of the *Standards* and the ensuing criticism thus provide an example of the clash of paradigms, of a prolonged and public moment in which the values of contemporary literacy instruction fail to meet the requirements of objectivity exhibited in calls for assessment.

The *Standards* draws on the National Literacy Act of 1991, which calls for students to develop linguistic ability to “compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential” (NCTE and IRA 4). In response, the document presents a definition of literacy that encompasses far more than a technocratic emphasis on the ability to read and write and that relies explicitly on the contextuality of literate abilities and acts: “the capacity to accomplish a wide range of reading, writing, speaking, and other language tasks associated with

everyday life” (73). This definition, “both broader and more demanding than traditional definitions” (73), includes the ability to use language in written, spoken, and visual forms, reflecting a move away from the limited technocratic definition focused on reading and writing and toward the ideal of “educating” students within particular situations—the emphasis of the contextual paradigm.

The twelve content standards reflect this broad definition and emphasize students as active learners in classrooms that implement the given guidelines. Figure 1 presents the standards, numbered as they are in the text, and although they appear lengthy here, they are considerably shorter than the standards produced in the other content areas.

FIGURE 1

NCTE & IRA Standards for the English Language Arts

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.
7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people)

- to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
8. Students use a variety of technological and informational resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
 9. Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.
 10. Students whose first language is not English make use of their first language to develop competency in the English language arts and to develop understanding of content across the curriculum.
 11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
 12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

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Each of the standards tends to link written, spoken, and visual literacies so that the combination encourages ongoing student learning. Most of the standards suggest the integration of these literate abilities, and several incorporate all three explicitly. Even where one aspect of literacy is highlighted, the language of the standards frequently undercuts the boundaries by incorporating all three types of literate activities. For example, Standard 1 foregrounds reading but broadens the definition of “reading” by explicitly incorporating the reading of nonprint texts, drawing visual and even spoken texts into the domain of objects that can be “read.” The emphasis on integrated literate activity suggests that each literacy—spoken, written, and visual—influences the others, and that literacy education is not easily separated from the activities of daily life, certainly not as easily separated from daily life as a specific requirement for the reading of *Hamlet*, for example, would be.

Thus, the *Standards* ground literacy instruction in time and space, and both teachers and students purposefully engage with such locators. The authors of the *Standards* use such contextual terms as they define the intended purpose of the document: “to ensure that all students are knowledgeable and proficient users of language so that they may succeed in school, participate in our democracy as informed citizens, find challenging and rewarding work, appreciate and contribute to our culture, and pursue their own goals and interests as independent learners throughout

their lives” (1996, vii). This purpose or—perhaps more accurately—these purposes claim that literate ability is invaluable to students in their pursuit of goals in specific contexts: in school, in democracy, in employment, in culture. While these goals collectively imply a relatively broad context—perhaps paraphrased as the idealized context of the United States—underlying them is the notion that literacy is meaningful not in some abstract sense, but in the specific situations that individual students encounter.

While the authors do not outline a context more specific than this, they do develop a theoretical position which would require individual teachers and others who develop curricula to engage with their own particular contexts of instruction. The theme of contextuality runs throughout the *Standards*, appearing in two related forms. First, the authors insist that literacy instruction must take place in ways that are meaningful to students’ lives.³⁵ This call for literacy instruction grounded in students’ lives is not particularly radical given even a limited understanding of contemporary literacy scholarship: language instruction is more effective and language ability improves more in contexts where the literate act is purposeful from the perspective of the student.

The second claim follows from the first but is more radical. According to the authors, just as literate acts must be purposeful, literacy instruction must be purposeful, and no national standard can determine specific purposes for all settings. That is, the authors argue that the *Standards* cannot define the literacy benchmarks, curricula, or measures for individual schools, districts, or even states. They point out, for example, that standardized testing tends to divert classroom time away from “actual performance” and that the prescribed use of particular textbooks “discourages teachers from using materials that take advantage of students’ interests and needs and that involve them productively in the curriculum” (1996, 7). Beyond denouncing universalized multiple-choice tests and basal readers, the authors enact their own theory by refusing to provide any prescriptive lists of grade-level skills or texts with which students should be familiar. By contrast, all the other content area standards developed under the same federal impetus provide lists of skills and areas of knowledge that students should possess by particular grade levels, usually 4th, 8th, and 12th. The authors of the language arts standards, however, claim that such benchmarks for language arts education can be determined *only* in the specific context of instruction.

In refusing to develop benchmarks, the authors were explicitly guided, in part, by the National Academy of Education’s principle of the purposes and limitations of content standards: “Content standards should embody

a coherent, professionally defensible conception of how a field can be framed for purposes of instruction. They should not be an exhaustive, incoherent compendium of every group's desired content" (NCTE and IRA viii). This principle specifies the result of a standards project—framework, not inventory—and that the framework should be grounded in principles recognized by the profession. The professional defensibility of the *Standards* stems substantially from the principles of the contextual paradigm that currently dominates literacy scholarship. When the pedagogical emphasis that adheres to the idea of standards is combined with the theoretical emphasis on context, the principles of the contextual paradigm emerge in practice: locally developed curricula and materials; locally determined needs and emphases; locally designed assignments and assessments.

The *Standards* demonstrates an admirable philosophical integrity. Perhaps motivated by the loss of governmental funding³⁶—and its accompanying influence—the theoretical position that the document takes represents the best of contemporary literacy scholarship. Embracing what I have called the contextual paradigm of literacy scholarship, the *Standards* argues that local contextual factors are absolutely crucial to the development of specific language arts curricula and that fluency in a range of integrated rhetorical practices, not familiarity with a particular set of texts and skills, constitutes proficient literate ability. The authors of the *Standards* took this position in spite of the reception that they knew it would receive. Many criticisms appeared relatively early in the drafting phase; a significant contributor to the loss of DOE funding was the charge of “vagueness” exemplified by the lack of specific texts and skills which were provided in other content area standards. In a politically charged atmosphere, amid calls for “back to basics” and skill-and-drill education, the *Standards* embodies a philosophically responsible conception of the field of literacy instruction.

CLASHING PARADIGMS

However philosophically consistent and commendable, the *Standards for the English Language Arts* has been criticized by many people from teachers to the President of the United States.³⁷ Detractors charge the authors with equivocation, political correctness, relativism, and obfuscation. An often-quoted editorial in the *New York Times* entitled “How Not to Write English” claims that the standards are written “in a tongue barely recognizable as English” and asks “Who can differ with them, since nobody can know what they mean?” (How Not to Write English 1996, A22).

Most of the critics take the position that appeared in “Language Arts Standards Flawed, Says AFT”: what the NCTE and IRA have offered is not a set of “standards” but rather “a philosophical discussion” (1996, 2). While the authors of the *Standards* probably would not disagree with this characterization—although they might question the distinction between “standards” and “philosophical discussion”—critics clearly intend “philosophical discussion” to be pejorative. Commentators’ opinions on this “discussion” range from considering it interesting but irrelevant to classroom instruction, to finding it entirely unclear and consequently worthless, to believing it dangerous to the educational health of the nation.³⁸

Not surprisingly, the *Standards* has received the most negative criticism for delegating the development of specific criteria to the local context. Many critics argue that the absence of benchmarks renders the entire document at the very least inconsequential. For example, Albert Shanker, then-President of the American Federation of Teachers, argues that without benchmarks, the standards “provide . . . only the vaguest advice on what [students] should know by the end of high school . . .” (Language Arts Standards Flawed, Says AFT 1996, 2). Without specifics, according to Shanker, the *Standards* fails in its mission to provide national instructional guidance. Michael Cohen, a senior adviser to the Secretary of Education, concurs, contending that the standards “don’t tell parents or students what is important to learn and don’t tell teachers what is important to teach and by when” (Tabor 1996, A12). Shanker and Cohen are most concerned about the absence of benchmarks, which, they claim, would not only provide direction for educators, but which should also be used for judging the progress of individual students and the efforts of teachers and educational institutions. Their claim is that without such benchmarks the *Standards* are not “standards” at all.

Much of the problem seems to be definitional. According to the critics, the *Standards* does not provide actual standards, but rather some sort of spineless, self-serving professional statement. Their objections are based on certain expectations about what constitutes a “standard,” and clearly they are imagining something different. A “standard,” according to these critics, would offer a basis for comparison and measurement, “a measure of qualitative or quantitative value” as Shanker defines it (1996, E7). This denotation differs fundamentally from “a coherent, professionally defensible conception of how a field can be framed for purposes of instruction” (NCTE and IRA viii). Where the critics want concrete marks of achievement, the authors of the *Standards* provide models for instruction. This

definitional problem exemplifies the paradigmatic clash I have been outlining. On the one hand, the definition of “standard” that the critics rely on takes an objectivist—and even positivist—edge in the integration of hierarchy and measurement. On the other hand, the authors of the *Standards* rely on a definition specific to instructional contexts drawn from the National Academy of Education, making no mention of measurement or hierarchy and claiming that standards delineate professional positions. Benchmarks for student performance, they maintain, must be determined in local contexts.

The two primary concerns outlined in the criticisms discussed above—hierarchy and measurement—run throughout most of the negative commentary on the *Standards*. Both point to a desire to differentiate among levels of ability and performance in ways that can be numerically assessed. According to the critics, the *Standards* provides no method for assessment, no mark to measure against. J. Martin Rochester, for example, describes the *Standards* as “long on vague, *semi-assessable* ‘higher-order skills’ (critical thinking, construction of meanings, and so forth)” and short on “basics,” which presumably can be fully measured (1996, 35, my emphasis). Then-President Clinton echoes this position when he claims that “you will never know whether your standards are being met unless you have some sort of measurement and have some sort of accountability” (1996). The implication of these positions is that if some quality or ability cannot be measured, it does not belong in the *Standards*. In addition to the need for measurability, the critics also claim that any standard should be applicable to all students in all locations, and that this is the only way to encourage national excellence in education. Their arguments are based, at least in part, on notions of equality and fairness that would universalize educational goals (within the United States), providing all students, at least ideally, with the same information, abilities, and opportunities by the end of formal schooling (Shanker 1996, E7). These arguments are consistent with an objectivist paradigm.

They are also consistent with the technocratic paradigm. Technocratic literacy argues for universalized instructional goals based on the dissection and sequencing of acts of reading and writing, and such a literacy can be effectively assessed by objectivist measures. Contextual literacy, however, cannot. When the critics apply a definition of “standard” that incorporates measurement of universal benchmarks, they have no means to judge the value of contextual literacy scholarship, much less the instructional products of such a theoretical approach, except by the standards of objectivism—which ultimately do not apply to contextual literacy.

The development and release of the *Standards for the English Language Arts* demonstrate the ways in which the prevailing objectivist paradigm of assessment and the contextual paradigm of contemporary literacy scholarship compete in educational policy. Effectively incompatible, these two paradigms collide in the assessment of literate ability, particularly when such assessment must satisfy public instructional goals. In the case of the *Standards*, the authors applied ideals of the contextual paradigm to a situation that, according to the critics, required an objectivist response.

Both positions are justifiable. From the authors' standpoint, the subtitle of the *Standards*—"For the Profession, By the Profession: A Guide for Discussion"—indicates not only that the document is intended for a particular and knowledgeable audience, but also that the authors never intended the standards to remain immutable. From the critics' perspective, however, the *Standards* by definition should be a statement open to public scrutiny that would catalog the abilities and texts with which all elementary, middle and high school students in the United States should be familiar, just as all the other standards documents do. Both positions are reasonable from within their own perspectives. But to claim that both are justifiable does not mean that both positions are equally legitimate. All "justifiable" means is that someone can provide logical or other reasonable support for a claim. To say that something is "legitimate" is to give it the force of a relevant paradigm. The critics' position is only legitimate within a framework that values quantification and objectivity. While a substantial portion of the public accepts this premise, a tyranny of the majority does not make the position somehow "correct" or "best."

The authors' position is stronger for two reasons. First—and more important from the authors' standpoint—the document is born of disciplinary expertise, of knowledge gained and accepted by scholars in the field. The absence of public acceptance does not signal an equivalent absence of professional acceptance. Second, the authors' position admits the public's wishes. The *Standards*, for example, does not deny schools or districts the right to develop objective requirements or measures; it does, however, make the particular institutions responsible for those local decisions. The authors of the *Standards*, following their disciplinary contextual paradigm, declined to decide for those in contexts who, they would argue, should decide for themselves. The authors perhaps needed a better public relations manager, but they could not and should not have produced booklists and benchmarks. Such a set of standards would have been professionally irresponsible.

To simply claim that one position is superior to the other, however, would miss the point that the distance between them reflects a paradigmatic gap. The *Standards* attempts to put into practice the contextual paradigm of literacy scholarship, the prevailing theoretical position in literacy studies. This attempt fell flat in large part because the practical context in which the *Standards* must operate is currently governed by the objectivist paradigm of assessment, which requires valid and reliable measures of ability. It would be implausible for proponents of either position to move outside of their respective contexts without concrete reasons for doing so. Such a move is unlikely because each paradigm has its own competing understanding of what constitutes acceptable claims and evidence, that is, what constitutes a valid argument.

The release of the NCTE and IRA *Standards* represents a particularly public clash between the competing paradigms of contextuality and objectivism, and the result has been a public denouncement, not a debate. The outcry seems to have resulted in large part because of the indirect confrontation to assessment methods suggested by the *Standards*. Without booklists and benchmarks to test against, the *Standards* challenged the “normal” means for assessing student ability, but without directly addressing why those methods should be altered and without explaining how to do so. Although the authors had little say in the timing—the *Standards* appeared in response to a national project developed on the DOE’s timetable—and although they produced a theoretically and professionally defensible document, their work appeared at the wrong moment. Their challenge to assessment was unheralded and, in the public eye, uncalled for. Before the public will accept the *Standards*—and they have not yet—they will need to understand how and why assessment practices need to change.

OUR FAILURE AND OUR WORK

Developing a convincing explanation for why writing assessment practices need to change and making that explanation public is our job. Part of the tragedy of the *Standards*, I believe, is that we—post-secondary educators, assessment theorists, and compositionists—did not stand up for the educators who developed that document. Here was a moment when we could have thrown our weight behind a gutsy theoretical and political effort and made it clear both to K-12 educators and to political entities that there are principles worth taking seriously in this document. Instead, we were silent.

Yet, to be frank, even if we had spoken out, our influence would not likely have made much difference. Had we said, “These standards are

theoretically sound,” I feel fairly confident that we would have heard dismissive comments about the idealized world of the ivory tower. The timing of the release was off for us, too. Not only was the public not ready to hear what the authors of the *Standards* had to say, but those of us working in post-secondary writing assessment were also not prepared to defend them. At the time the *Standards* were released in 1996, even our cutting-edge assessment efforts, as I discussed in chapter three, were either too impracticable to be taken seriously or still beholden to educational measurement theory in ways that would have undercut our own arguments. Constructivist evaluation was (and is) too complex to explain quickly and clearly to non-experts, and it was not being used in ways that would provide the kind of evidence necessary to support the *Standards*. We might have been able to use the idea of stakeholders to support claims for the need for local curricular decision-making, but when faced with questions of about testing practices, we would not have had strong answers compatible with the theory of the *Standards*. Our expert reader model work at the time could have answered part of the testing question, but only part. Moreover, at the time it was too closely tied theoretically with objectivist principles. While we might have been able to use it to argue that experts could make the decisions about success or failure, the shape of the actual tests would still have been based on the objectivist principles that the expert reader model itself was relying on at the time. Most likely, we would have been accused of simply doing assessment “wrong.” I doubt that either of these could have provided the theoretical support the authors of the *Standards* needed at the time.

The battle over the *Standards* shows us how deeply *normal* the objectivist paradigm has been and still is in assessment situations. Without specifically referring to theory, critics of the *Standards* challenged the principles on which the document was based, demanding objectivist principles in place of the contextual ones offered. Those challenges focused on how the *Standards* deviated from accepted practice. The document was wrong-headed, critics argued, because it did not provide universal benchmarks, because it relied on local contexts for specific decision making, because it refused to privilege one discourse over another. And these failures were seen as failures of the obvious: failures of convention and failures of what everyone knows that standards, as a matter of course, must do.

This is the public’s opinion—and here I am including the government as a representative of the public—but public opinion should not control theory, not even when such assessments are accountable to the public. The public has and should have influence; it is, after all, one of

the stakeholders in education. But the public's opinion in this case—and certainly in a few others—was based on partial or out-dated information. The public claims normalcy for instructional practices like standardized testing and common benchmarks because they know of no reasonable or viable alternative. The *Standards* was premature, sent to a public that was not ready for it. And while the document was elegantly simple and direct, it did not have the weight of evidence behind it. Without the evidence and without the appearance of normalcy, it was doomed from the start—precisely because it was a public document, regardless of its claims to be “For the Profession, By the Profession.”

Such a negative reaction and subsequent relegation to obscurity is the probable fate of any efforts toward significant change in assessment begun at the K-12 level. K-12 public education is, by definition, very public and very much tied to governmental bodies. Those to whom K-12 education is accountable require proof that methods are working, proof that their money is well spent and productive. And they will require proof in forms that are well understood and familiar. Educators at this level will not likely be able to make the kind of significant changes in theory that will support meaningful changes in practice precisely because everything they do is subject to public and governmental scrutiny that bases decisions on accepted practice.

Post-secondary education, on the other hand, has the luxury of theorizing apart from public demands. Not that we never come under the public microscope, but given the structure of higher education and the freedom afforded those of us working in it, we can explore alternative approaches, take the time to theorize the assessments we do, and gather evidence to support those practices we find sound without having to answer to public scrutiny at each step. Public K-12 education has to fight the front line battles with the “No Child Left Behind” Act and similar mandates. We at the post-secondary level do not—at least not to the same degree. We need to use this insulation to our advantage—and ultimately to theirs.

SEPARATISM

One way to press our advantage, the way I am specifically advocating here, is to separate ourselves from objectivist principles and try out alternative models. This means thinking separately. The historical analysis I offered in the first two chapters explains how historically, writing assessment came to be tied to objectivist principles and continues this connection despite changes in literacy theory. As long as our theories remain tied to objectivist principles, our assessments will continue to be dominated by objectivist

thinking whenever we bring them to the public's attention. That is, if we rely on objectivist principles, we open ourselves to the criticism that we are not doing educational measurement "right," even if our methods are deliberately based on a reshaping of those principles. Validity may have value, as may reliability, but because these terms are inseparable at this moment from the objectivist paradigm that has dominated their use for nearly a century, we are unlikely to be able to co-opt them successfully. We need to think about assessment without this baggage.

I know full well I am arguing for separation at a moment when disciplinary boundaries are blurring, but the separation I am arguing for is theoretical, not specifically disciplinary. Educational measurement theory in general may be mired in an objectivist paradigm, but this does not mean that all educational measurement theorists are, as I indicated in the last chapter. There is a lot of promise in the work of Moss and Delandshere and Petrosky, for example, when that work is treated separately from the objectivist leanings of the discipline. To do so from within educational measurement is their job. To do so for writing assessment is ours. And, perhaps, as we go about this work, we can help each other. My own thinking about theories of writing assessment generally and about the principles I develop in the next chapter has been significantly influenced by my reading of educational measurement theorists as well as compositionists.

The first four chapters of this study have been archaeological in the Foucauldian sense of the word. By treating writing assessment as a scene in which struggles are played out, I have been able to explore the incongruities and tensions in this part of our field. What we have is a set of difficult issues, of very real problems that require our attention, but our attention is frequently diverted by the conventional theoretical demands of assessment. Whenever this happens, we traditionally have returned to validity and reliability, putting more radical criteria on hold while we justify our work according to conventional methods. Haswell does this, for example, when he provides reliability data for an assessment process that he justifies in its own right with categorization theory. If categorization theory had sufficient support, would the reliability data be necessary? As a result of this kind of justification, the majority of our theorizing is diluted, if it is not outright undermined by our perceived need to meet the demands of those operating from more traditional assessment theories.

When writing assessment is understood as a Foucauldian scene, we see it a place of paradigmatic struggle. Archaeology exposes the struggle and the knowledges that are subjugated in the process of that struggle.

In the case of writing assessment, our knowledge, for example, of how to value writing with contextual sensitivity has been subjugated in favor of more universal evaluation. Work such as Broad's and Haswell's and much of what has been done at Washington State suggests what our theorizing might look like if we bracket educational measurement theory. I will return to these studies in chapter seven, but for now, it is important to note that these assessments can be understood without relying on educational measurement theory for justification. This is the genealogical part of my study: One way to deploy our understanding of subjugated knowledges tactically, to a different advantage, is to reject the claims of educational measurement theory and to proceed without it. What might writing assessment theory look like if we ignored the principles of educational measurement? What if, instead, we develop models that speculate about the purpose and shape of assessment on our own terms, and then we test those terms out?

This does not mean a total separation; I am not suggesting that we go to our corner and play with our own toys, never to return. That way lies obscurity. Instead, I am advocating a suspension of the connections between our own theories and traditional educational measurement theory, particularly where those connections are of our own making. This will not always be possible; it is not possible at the K-12 level presently, for example. But in places where we study assessment, where we develop pilot programs, and where we think through methods of valuing and evaluating, we should allow ourselves the separation and see what develops.

We need to do this because we have questions that the current dominant paradigm in writing assessment cannot answer. Conventional educational measurement theory cannot satisfactorily answer our questions about context or about the role of expertise in evaluation. When this kind of theoretical gap exists, the possibility of a paradigm shift appears. Paradigm shifts, for Kuhn, are partly political—or, perhaps more accurately, rhetorical. When one set of theoretical approaches becomes more persuasive than another, the paradigm changes. The old is not lost and the new does not completely take over, but the balance of power shifts, and what is accepted as normal changes. Kuhn, however, is primarily talking about paradigm shifts within the same field, and the upheaval is localized. Perhaps because the paradigms I am talking about come from two different fields, the configuration of the shift is somewhat different. In this case, we have a very generalized dominant paradigm, as the public outcry over the *Standards* indicates, and even the President feels justified weighing in on the issue. We have a kind of David and Goliath scenario,

except that instead of picking up the stones we know how to use, we keep trying to use Goliath's own sword against him, sometimes at the same time we are trying to push it aside. This is because we have not yet taken the time to develop our own evidence to support our own theoretical approaches. I believe it makes sense to separate ourselves and gather our evidence so that our challenges to the dominant paradigm are stronger.

However, separatism cannot be a way of life. To adopt it would be to leave those in K-12, for example, as high and dry as we did when the *Standards* were released. Going off in our own corner and developing a paradigm by ourselves will not result in a shift that matters to anyone but us, and in most cases, when we talk about the limitations of educational measurement theory within our own discipline, we are already preaching to the converted. Separation without recombination will merely result in two circles of influence, one of them significantly larger and more influential than the other. The separation I am advocating is and should be temporary. But if we take the time to think through theories on our own—and at the post-secondary level, we have the luxury of doing so—we will come back to the scene with evidence enough to challenge the dominant paradigm and change the larger dialog.