

What Do WPAs Need to Know about Writing Assessment? An Immodest Proposal

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ABSTRACT

This article offers an answer to the increasingly pressing question, “What do WPAs need to know and be able to do vis-à-vis writing assessment?” Contending that WPAs must become assessment leaders in this accountability-driven moment, I offer a set of propositions designed to elaborate the expertise necessary to exert that leadership. I suggest that by virtue of the work we do, WPAs already possess much of this expertise, even as we must continue to educate ourselves and our colleagues. I end with an examination of the benefits and dangers of making this intellectual work visible, concluding that in our current regressive policy context WPAs should take seriously the political and rhetorical potential of publicly claiming our considerable scholarly and experiential assessment expertise.

Scenario 1: Your university’s Assessment Coordinator wants your program’s outcomes assessment report because accreditation is fast approaching. Your department chair hands you this year’s fully developed strategic plan and asks you to “connect it somehow” to last year’s assessment in order to show you’re using assessment results. The General Education Task Force chair wants your opinion on the new report by a testing company on assessing college learning. Your university president is talking up the Spellings Commission report at every opportunity and convening meetings to determine whether to join an accountability consortium and to pilot a standardized test. A Vice Provost of Something wants to use the SAT writing exam to make placement decisions because your portfolio placement system is too “cumbersome”—and expensive. A Vice Provost of Something Else won-

ders why you cannot use the state's 12th-grade writing assessment results instead. And all the while, testing and test preparation company representatives and their textbook company cohorts line up at your door, becoming permanent fixtures in your hallway.

Scenario 2: After a meeting with you, your dean begins a campus campaign to stop using results of standardized writing tests for placement and even admissions decisions because “the tests don't measure what we value.” You and your Director of Institutional Assessment team up to promote faculty-led assessment across campus. A colleague in statistics writes to tell you that the general education assessment meeting, at which you had faculty from multiple disciplines reading student e-portfolios, was the best professional development experience he's had in years. A normally grumpy business professor calls to gush about how the student self-assessment strategies you helped him develop are making a big difference in his business writing course. A teacher in your program stops by to tell you about the great multi-genre projects she just received and how the class-generated assessment criteria guided students' work while giving them lots of room for creativity. Right behind her is a student from last semester, thanking you for helping him learn to assess his own work more critically in order to revise it more effectively.

For WPAs, assessment is all these things: politics and pedagogy, burden and opportunity, threat and promise, weapon and tool. Assessment is a figure in upper administrators' language of institutional excellence and in teachers' language of learning. It is accountability's Trojan horse and teaching's instructional vehicle. It is a fetish of technical rationality and the stock-in-trade of reflective teaching. It is a means of re-inscribing class-, race-, and gender-based privilege and a means of redressing social injustice. It is how we measure return on investment and how we value what we share.

A robust body of work is emerging to help WPAs make sense of this complex social, institutional, and pedagogical activity. The growing literature of higher education assessment helps us better understand assessment theory and practice in general, and much of it underscores the importance of writing as an assessment instrument—a way for teachers and administrators to “make visible” teaching and learning across disciplines. This literature includes theoretical scholarship (e.g., the journal *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*; Banta and Associates; Bernstein, Burnett, Goodburn, and Savory; Huber and Hutchings; *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*), practical guides (e.g. Diamond; Huba and Freed; Maki; Palomba and Banta; Walvoord), and a plethora of models and examples (e.g.,

see the Association of American Colleges and Universities' VALUE project and the Peer Review of Teaching Project). Within Rhetoric and Composition, we have important books on a range of assessment topics, including writing assessment theory (Broad; Hillocks; Huot; Lynne), portfolio assessment (Black, Daiker, Sommers, and Stygall; Hamp-Lyons and Condon), and writing assessment and technology (Ericsson and Haswell; Penrod). We also have two journals devoted to writing assessment (*Assessing Writing* and *Journal of Writing Assessment*), a critical sourcebook (Huot and O'Neill), a comprehensive history (Elliot), statements from our professional organizations (CCCC and NCTE-WPA), online resources (including a gallery) on the WPA website, and a guide designed for WPAs (O'Neill, Moore, and Huot).¹ For the first time, a wealth of theoretical and practical information on writing assessment is easily accessible to WPAs.

At the same time, few WPAs are trained in assessment; most of us continue to learn how to “do” assessment on the job—and on the fly. Graduate students in Rhetoric and Composition *might* enroll in an isolated course in writing assessment; more commonly, they may be introduced to it in a unit within a pedagogy course. (It's worth remembering, too, that many WPAs still are not formally trained in Rhetoric and Composition.) But most of what WPAs know about writing assessment we learn as a result of institutional necessity—through the sort of “opportunities” dramatized in the equally likely and possibly simultaneous scenarios at the beginning of this article.

While institutional exigencies can make us quick learners, their sheer volume can create a triage mentality that does not necessarily result in deep and meaningful knowledge of what we are doing. More likely, we move into damage control mode, warily and wearily trying to avoid the landmines others have set in our way. Like the new teacher who fixates on the countless things that might go wrong in her classroom—unruly (or all-too-ruly) students, activities that fall flat, technological glitches, etc.—we allow our task to be defined by worst-case scenarios. And like that teacher, when we act from fear, we seek to control: we think small, avoid risks, tighten the reins, guard the process, and above all protect our fragile senses of self.

This response is understandable. WPAs have too much to do. We are already embattled on our campuses. We are worried about the ways that others might use our assessments and assessment data. Especially for the majority of us not trained in psychometrics—who don't know benchmarking from standard-setting, factor analysis from regression analysis, CRTs from NRTs from CBTs from RCTs²—we are not at all sure we have the expertise (or the right kind of expertise) to do assessment well. The problem, though, is that the modest, play-it-safe approach may be the riskiest

move we could possibly make. It risks ceding exigencies to institutions and expertise to technical measurement specialists. Though of course WPAs must respond to institutional demands, we should not allow those demands to define our assessment work. Nor should we mistake technical expertise in educational measurement—useful as it can be at times—with the much broader activity of writing assessment. Writing assessment is our purview; we have substantial expertise in it by virtue of our scholarship *and* by virtue of the work we do every day with teachers and students. We need to recognize, claim, and celebrate the expertise we already have, even as we acknowledge the need to acquire, or to call on partners to provide, further expertise. In other words, WPAs ought to embrace *writing assessment leadership*.

Clearly, given the material and intellectual landscape I have described, this is easier said than done. WPAs rarely *choose* a “triage” mentality; we are forced into it by the material conditions of our work. As a profession, then, we need to keep pushing our institutions for improved working conditions for WPAs. We also need to continue designing and making available easy-to-use web-based and print resources to help WPAs learn about assessment quickly and well. In addition, we need to provide more opportunities for graduate students—the next generation of WPAs—to learn about assessment, both in their seminar rooms and in their writing program work, whether as assessment committee members or administrators.

But here I want to pause to ask a fundamental assessment question: Do we know what we need to know? In other words, do we know what “assessment leadership” would look like if our working conditions allowed us to provide it? Do we know what WPAs need to learn about assessment from those accessible resources? Do we know what graduate students need to learn about assessment?

My short answer to these questions is that we do not—or at least, we have yet to mount a collective articulation of what WPAs need to know and be able to do in order to exert assessment leadership. I suggest that such an articulation would allow us to *realize* our expertise and leadership in both senses of that term. That is, by naming the components of assessment leadership, we recognize it: we realize what it is. And because WPAs already possess much of what is required to exert assessment leadership, this naming becomes a *claiming*: an achievement—a realization—of leadership.

To this end, this article offers a set of propositions that sketch the components of leadership for writing assessment. These propositions are not intended to nail down leadership for writing assessment once and for all, but rather to prompt reflection and discussion among WPAs. The sketch is, after all, necessarily partial in both senses of that word: incomplete

and biased. I write from the point of view of someone who never meant to grow up to be “the assessment guy,” but who, through the vagaries of institutional (mis)fortune, has done just that. Over the past several years, I have found myself leading a writing program’s programmatic assessment, chairing a department assessment committee, facilitating a teacher inquiry group focused in part on assessment, leading a faculty-driven pilot of a general education assessment process, and evaluating and consulting on a state’s K-12 assessment system.

Other than the first, which I agreed to take on when I agreed to administer the writing program, these projects have chosen me rather than the reverse. Or so I tell myself. At any rate, all this assessment work has led to numerous presentations, articles in various journals and education magazines, national presentations, and a book with “assessment” in the title. And *still*, I confess, I find it difficult—as many WPAs do—to claim my expertise in assessment. Instead of writing about what I (think I) know about assessment, I’m tempted to emphasize how often I have been flummoxed and foiled trying to work with teachers and students to design meaningful, manageable assessments that serve our needs while meeting institutional demands. But I also recognize in this temptation the workings of a technocratic logic that assigns the title of “expert” only to those who have mastered technical intricacies and not to those who live and breathe hard, messy work in classrooms and programs. And I hear in it the marginalization of writing teachers and program administrators—as mere “content” people who don’t *really* understand assessment—that I hope to challenge in this article. And so, in the spirit of immodest proposals—or, more properly, proposals for immodesty—on with my admittedly singular, decidedly partial, undoubtedly immodest sketch.

GENERAL PROPOSITIONS³ REGARDING WRITING ASSESSMENT

Any articulation of what we should know about writing assessment depends on a construction of writing assessment. (In turn, any construction of writing assessment depends on a theory of writing, as scholars such as George Hillocks and Brian Huot have argued.) So I begin with a set of propositions distilled from several professional statements, including CCC’s *Writing Assessment: A Position Statement* and the NCTE-WPA *White Paper on Writing Assessment in Colleges and Universities*, as well as what I perceive to be points of consensus in Rhetoric and Composition’s scholarship on assessment. Because I take these general statements to reflect “the state of the art” of our profession and therefore likely to be widely accepted among readers of this journal, I make no argument for them. It should be noted, though,

that “the state of the art” is far more dynamic than that phrase suggests; our ideas about writing and writing assessment are shifting constantly and never enjoy complete consensus. Any articulation of “what we need to know” must be a perpetual work-in-progress as well.

Writing assessment is the gathering of information about students’ written literacy for a variety of formative and summative purposes, but primarily to support effective teaching and learning. It is broader than *evaluation* (which always involves attaching a judgment) and it is different from *accountability* (which is one purpose for conducting assessment). Writing assessment is a vehicle for teaching and learning and is a crucial part of writing, rather than something teachers and writers do once these activities have ended. As a result, writing assessment must be informed by research on and theories of writing and writing instruction. And because it is a highly contextual activity, writing assessment must serve the needs and reflect the values of participating teachers and students, including consideration of their linguistic and cultural differences. It must be sensitive to and useful for instruction, whatever its secondary purposes and audiences might be. Writing assessment does have technical dimensions, but it is first and foremost an educational activity.

The following propositions are hardly comprehensive; indeed, they purposely elide areas of controversy in our literature on writing assessment. (Our proper relationship to the educational measurement community, for instance; see Huot and Lynne for two very different treatments of this topic.) Additionally, some readers might quibble with the form and/or content of some of the propositions. But I hope these statements are at least uncontroversial and sturdy enough to create a foundation on which to build a consideration of what WPAs need to know and be able to do vis-à-vis writing assessment in order to function effectively as assessment leaders.

PROPOSITIONS REGARDING WPAs’ ASSESSMENT LEADERSHIP

Some of the components of assessment leadership proposed in this section are loosely adapted from the state of Nebraska’s approach to K-12 assessment under its School-based, Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System (STARS) (discussed at length in my book, *Reclaiming Assessment*) and from *Competency Standards in Student Assessment for Educational Administrators*, a document developed by the American Association of School Administrators, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and the National Council on Measurement in Education. In drawing on these sources, I do not mean to suggest that administering a college writing program is *equiva-*

lent to administering a K-12 school or district. On the other hand, for better and for worse, we and our K-12 administrator colleagues are similarly positioned on the “front lines” of the now K-16 accountability movement. As my opening vignettes suggest, and as most WPAs can attest, college writing programs are often targeted by accountability-minded reformers. We have much to learn from our K-12 colleagues, who have long faced the assessment pressures and opportunities whose full force and scope we in higher education are only now confronting.

As we navigate this often perilous social and institutional landscape, we will need to attend not only to assessment theory and practice but also to assessment politics and policy. The propositions weave together these four aspects of assessment.

WPAs understand major trends in the history of writing assessment in U.S. K-12 and higher education, including various political, economic, institutional, and educational agendas assessment has been made to serve as well as how assessment helped give rise to the contemporary field of Rhetoric and Composition (on the latter, see O’Neill). WPAs’ assessment work is well served by acquaintance with events and movements such as the Harvard literacy tests, early twentieth century uses of testing in eugenics and social engineering, and the more recent teacher movement for direct assessment of writing. But though WPAs do not need to devote their scholarly lives to the history of writing assessment, they should be aware of the ways in which assessment politics and policies have played out between and among writing teachers and program administrators, upper administrators, and various external “stakeholders” such as journalists, the educational measurement community, and policymakers. (O’Neill, Moore, and Huot provide a helpful chapter historicizing assessment as well as a timeline; see also Elliot.)

WPAs are aware of the latest research on and theories of writing and writing assessment. Again, we cannot expect every WPA to be a writing assessment scholar. But WPAs understand how major conversations and controversies in the field of Rhetoric and Composition—over the ontological status of “the writing subject,” for instance, or how new media are changing the means of writing production—impact their writing assessment work. Moreover, they understand the assumptions, perceptions, beliefs, and values (epistemological, ontological, and ideological) that inform major approaches to and debates within writing assessment, including distinctions between objectivism/positivism and constructivism/contextualism (see Huot; Lynne; Wilson; Huot and O’Neill).

WPAs understand basic concepts in the field of writing assessment. This proposition means that WPAs have a general working knowledge of important, evolving concepts in educational measurement and in Rhetoric and Composition, though not necessarily an exhaustive knowledge of the technical intricacies of psychometric theory and practice. At present, these concepts include validity, reliability, appropriateness, fairness, context-sensitivity, accessibility, meaningfulness, and ethics.⁴ These concepts are best understood as sites of contention rather than settled terms; consider, for instance, the ongoing struggle over definitions of validity (e.g., Broad; Cronbach; Huot; Messick; Moss). Also note that these value-laden concepts name criteria by which assessments are to be evaluated. Though I don't have space to elaborate this point here, "What is effective assessment?" may be the policy question on which the future of writing assessment hinges. If "effective" assessment is understood within the contextualist, rhetorical framework emerging in Rhetoric and Composition, then the kinds of standardized tests currently being touted and widely adopted cannot be the future of assessment. Instead, if we publish both our assessment results and information on the quality of the assessments we use to generate those results (according to those rhetorical criteria), there will be no need for inter-institutional standardized tests in the first place; this information will satisfy accountability demands while allowing us to keep using our local assessments. (See Gallagher, *Reclaiming*, for an elaborated version of this model at the K-12 level.)

WPAs use their leadership capacity to promote teacher leadership for assessment within (and perhaps beyond) their programs. They understand that assessment at the program and institutional levels is best practiced as a form of collective inquiry. They strive to use assessment as an opportunity to involve teachers in professional conversation around teaching and learning writing. They encourage collaboration in a spirit of risk-taking and experimentation such that teachers are encouraged to innovate, study their innovations, and then, depending on results, repeat them or try something else. While taking ultimate responsibility for the assessment process, WPAs build assessment processes with teachers in the programs, not for them. (On collaborative WPA leadership, see Mirtz and Cullen; Phelps; Goodburn and Leverenz; Popham, Neal, Schendel, and Huot).

WPAs are well versed in classroom assessment theory and practice. They understand a range of methods by which effective teachers assign, respond to, and grade/evaluate student writing; how they use information gathered through assessment to inform their teaching and student learning; and how

they involve students in the assessment process. WPAs know enough about teacher assessment of student writing to be effective collaborators with and evaluators of the teachers in their programs. (On classroom assessment and evaluation, see Anson; Cooper and Odell; Straub; White, *Assigning*).

WPAs understand a wide range of purposes for assessment, are aware of a wide range of forms of assessment, and facilitate the development of appropriate assessments for intended purposes. With teachers and students, WPAs carefully identify purposes for each assessment activity—instructional change, student self-assessment, grading, placement, proficiency, curriculum review, course review, teacher evaluation, etc.—and develop or choose appropriate assessment methods (observation narratives, essay-grading, self-evaluation/self-placement, teacher observations, portfolio reviews, rubric-based scoring, Dynamic Criteria Mapping [Broad], etc.) to match that purpose. They are cognizant of the dangers of confusing or conflating assessment purposes/practices, such as when programmatic assessments designed to evaluate student work on a narrow outcome are used to “norm” grading practices that are based on a broader constellation of outcomes. (On the importance of identifying purposes of assessments, see Hughes; O’Neill, Moore, and Huot; Turley and Gallagher.)

WPAs formulate assessment policies that support effective teaching and learning. Working closely with teachers and students in their programs, they develop assessment policies that are clear, public, consistent, and fair. They offer appropriate compensation to teachers who take on the labor of writing assessment. WPAs respect the limitations on instructors’ time and energy imposed by their personal and professional lives, including their working conditions. Indeed, whenever possible, they use assessment as an opportunity to address and improve the material conditions of teachers’ labor, recognizing that in order to be effective, writing programs must provide teachers with decent working conditions. Once assessments and assessment policies are in place, they should be evaluated continuously for their effects on teaching and learning. Only those assessments and policies that are shown to have a salutary effect on teaching and learning should be continued; all others, no matter how well-intentioned, should be revised or abandoned. Each program determines what would constitute a “salutary effect” based on its local values and needs. (For discussions of programmatic assessment policy, see Broad; Gleason; Haswell; Haswell and Wyche-Smith; Royer and Gilles; Smith; also the program narratives in the WPA assessment gallery at <http://wpacouncil.org/assessment-models>).

WPAs use their leadership to encourage ethical and appropriate assessment methods/uses and to discourage unethical and inappropriate assessment methods/uses. What constitutes “ethical” and “appropriate” writing assessment practice is a matter of ongoing debate and is shaped at least in part by local circumstances. However, WPAs are aware of national/international professional standards of ethical practice in writing assessment as articulated in professional documents published by WPA, CCCC, and NCTE as well as general ethical guidelines for testing as articulated in documents such as *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (American Psychological Association, American Educational Research Association, and National Council on Measurement in Education) and *Code of Fair Testing Practices in Education* (Joint Committee on Testing Practice). WPAs also understand relevant governing guidelines provided by Institutional Review Boards as well as the salient ethical and legal intellectual property issues for teachers and students. With these considerations in mind, WPAs sponsor conversations within their programs aimed at producing agreed-upon guidelines for ethical and appropriate assessments and uses of assessment results.

WPAs account for and affirm cultural and linguistic differences in teaching and assessing writing. With teachers and students in their programs, WPAs design assessment processes that accommodate individual differences, including learning and physical disabilities, to ensure, in the words of the NCTE-WPA White Paper, “an equal opportunity for students to understand the expectations, roles, and purposes of the assessment” (par. 16). But WPAs go further than that: they use assessment as a vehicle for giving voice to, valuing, and assisting students to develop their multiple literacies, languages, and ways of knowing. They build participatory assessment processes that seriously and respectfully engage differences and that support the teaching and writing of members of marginalized groups. (See, for example, Ball; Cai; Hamp-Lyons; Holdstein; Kamusikiri; Mountford.)

WPAs ensure that technology is used appropriately to conduct assessment. They understand the ways in which technology “converges” with assessment in classrooms, in assessment situations, and in storing, interpreting, and reporting data. They do not allow the tail of technology to wag the dog of curriculum/instruction/assessment and they are mindful of access issues for students and teachers. But where appropriate and feasible, they work with teachers and students to procure and use technology, as well as any necessary training and technical support, to conduct assessments. WPAs understand the benefits and drawbacks of various course management software

systems, online assessment platforms and programs, and machine scoring. (See, for instance, Penrod; Ericsson and Haswell; Herrington and Moran.)

WPAs orchestrate meaningful, manageable assessment processes, identifying and using external partners and reaching external audiences in strategic ways. WPAs collaborate with teachers and students to develop assessment processes that serve the needs and values of program participants first. (This principle is an article of faith in Rhetoric and Composition's writing assessment scholarship; see Broad; Huot; Lynne. Equally important, the Higher Education Act and regional accrediting agencies also recognize institutions' and programs' responsibility to identify and measure their own learning outcomes, rather than having them mandated by outside powers; see Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions.) They meet institutional policy demands whenever doing so does not violate that primary responsibility. Grounding assessment work in the questions that program participants wish to ask goes a long way toward making it less onerous and more manageable. Assessment programs cannot be everything to everyone, and they cannot answer all questions at once. WPAs are responsible for shaping assessment goals that are attainable and communicating those goals and progress toward them both within and beyond their programs.⁵ As they design and implement their programs, WPAs may choose to involve external partners—measurement specialists, data management software providers, colleagues, administrators, community members—depending on the purposes of the assessment. For example, a colleague with training in educational measurement might be brought in to help work out some technical aspects of the reliability model and data display; a software provider might be contracted to ease the paper load and provide a secure, easy-to-use platform for data management and storage; or community members might be asked to help evaluate writing portfolios.⁶ The WPA and participating teachers design, implement, use, and communicate their assessments, soliciting others' assistance when appropriate and necessary. The WPA carefully orchestrates this process.

CONCLUSION

One response I can imagine to the foregoing set of propositions is this: "There is no way WPAs can or should be held responsible for all *that*, especially when we consider that assessment is only one of the many things WPAs do. We're already busy enough, just barely keeping our heads above water." I offer several replies to this reasonable concern.

First, it is striking how many of these propositions are rooted in activities that WPAs *already* undertake and about which we have a quickly evolving literature. To be sure, we need to deepen our collective understanding of assessment theory and practice, especially work in educational measurement (Huot). As well, assessment could be more carefully woven into various aspects of our work—leadership, program policy, teacher development, instructional technology, and so on. The problem is not so much that WPAs don't know about assessment, but rather that we tend (perhaps as a result of our perfectly understandable triage mentality) to hold it apart from our other activities.

This point leads to my second response to my imagined skeptic: assessment need not be just “one more thing” for WPAs to confront. As Brian Huot suggests, in order to write well, we must assess well (68). The same is true of teachers and administrators of writing: assessment is integral to what we do. Done well, it helps us improve all areas of our programs. By helping us see how those parts of our programs work together (or don't), assessment can even help us keep our heads above water.

Third, and finally, this sketch depends on the premise that WPAs, as a network and organization of professionals, should hold ourselves responsible to our own professional expectations. If we are to control the writing assessment agenda, as we should, then we will need to claim our expertise and then help each other, and those who follow us into the profession, to achieve it. No WPA working alone could ever hope to have all the expertise outlined in this article; only a strong professional network and organization can support its development.

Though I think the Council of Writing Program Administrators has an important role to play in making this expertise visible and helping its members develop it, I am mindful of Bruce Horner's warnings about such efforts. In his critique of the WPA's 1998 *Evaluating the Intellectual Work of Writing Program Administration*, Horner suggests that we risk “contribut[ing] to the debasement of both WPA work and the work of composition generally” (163) by confusing exchange value with use value (i.e. expecting that if we make ourselves useful, we will be better remunerated); by commodifying WPAs' labor into a set of “products” (typically separated from lowly “service”); by insisting that only “intellectual work,” as defined in institutional terms, is to be valued; by eliding the concrete labor of program participants other than the WPA; and by holding WPAs responsible for things not entirely (or at all) within their control. These are important admonitions, and any attempt to “make visible” the “intellectual work” of writing program administration should heed them. For example, we should be sure to operate from a facilitative, collaborative, and participatory model

of leadership, rather than relying on a traditional, managerial approach. The propositions above depend on the notion that effective assessment leadership hinges on the sponsorship of other's—especially teachers'—leadership. It is not the product of a WPA working alone.

And this is largely the point: We need to make visible the range and amount of labor required from various people to run an effective and responsible writing program. As Horner points out, the debasement of WPA and composition work is a function of impoverished understandings within and beyond our institutions about the nature and function of our work. In order to change those understandings, we need to articulate just what that work is and what it takes to do it well.

Formalizing such an articulation into evaluative mechanisms may be counterproductive; it might play into the hands of the ledger-wielding, bean-counting accountability hawks who increasingly run our institutions from their upper administration perches. However, we should not underestimate the subversive potential of alternative professional statements of expectations (that is, alternative to what passes as educational commonsense in the rarefied air of those perches). For example, the work of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards—an organization founded by and for teachers—is worth consideration as a model for similar WPA and CCCC activities. The Teaching Standards were formulated in response to a regressive policy context that was (and is) deskilling teachers through watered-down “alternative certification” (really a ploy to allow businesspeople and other practicing professionals to replace teachers without having to undergo teacher training), scripted instruction, prepackaged curriculum, and constant teacher and student testing.

Progressive educator Linda Darling-Hammond and her colleagues designed a powerful professional statement that makes visible the range of expertise that teachers must command in order to do their jobs well. This statement of standards is used to certify teachers, but equally important, it serves as a foil to narrow, commonsense constructions of teachers as mere “content experts” or functionaries of their school systems. We may not agree with every proposition of the Professional Standards, but we should recognize the political and intellectual power it wields on behalf of a teaching profession that is under siege.

In the end, whether or not we formalize our assessment work for the purposes of evaluation, the important point is to ask ourselves what it takes to function effectively as assessment leaders and then—modesty be damned—claim the expertise we already have and acquire the expertise we need. This will allow us to assert ourselves with more confidence and

competence as writing assessment experts and leaders. This we should do, because it's our job—and our prerogative.

NOTES

1. An excellent bibliography may be found in Huot and O'Neill (457–72).
2. CRT=criterion-referenced test; NRT=norm-referenced test; CBT=criterion-referenced test; RCT=randomized controlled trials.
3. I borrow the term “proposition” from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards; see <http://www.nbpts.org>.
4. I've drawn these terms from a wide range of sources, but particularly from the NCTE-WPA *White Paper*, Huot, and Lynne.
5. The assessment gallery on the WPA website is intended to house discussion and examples of communication strategies, though it does not yet.
6. Brain Huot and Edward White (“Power”) argue for involving testing experts in program assessments as a matter of course (i.e., as part of assessment validation). While I would not rule out this choice, nor am I convinced it is always necessary. Moreover, like Patricia Lynne, I worry about the extent to which we allow our assessments to be shaped by terms and values other than our own. My larger point here is that part of a WPA's charge is to determine whether, when, and how to involve programmatic outsiders in assessment activities.

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