

UC Davis

Journal of Writing Assessment

Title

Editor's Introduction: Assessing Writing Programs and Their Impacts on Students

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/01d2s22m>

Journal

Journal of Writing Assessment, 15(1)

ISSN

1543-043X

Author

Whithaus, Carl

Publication Date

2022-12-05

DOI

10.5070/W4jwa.224

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Editor's Introduction

Carl Whithaus, University of California, Davis, US, cwwhithaus@ucdavis.edu

Volume 15.1 of the Journal of Writing Assessment (JWA) examines how diverse learners have been impacted by a range of writing assessment systems. Tamara Tate and Mark Warschauer examine the impact of access to digital writing technologies on students in Grades 4-11 over multiple years. Mary Stewart questions how writing programs and assessment systems that aspire to fairness may actually reproduce inequities. And Analeigh Horton considers how we might better understand directed self-placement (DSP) by looking closely at multilingual, international students' experiences. These three articles share an investment in unpacking how inequities around writing instruction and writing assessment systems have impacted students and teachers. They do not provide simple answers, but rather document the complexities in each of their contexts. From their careful, empirical, and data-driven studies, Tate and Warschauer, Stewart, and Horton each offer insights for researchers interested in writing assessment and how it impacts students' learning.

In "Access, Digital Writing, and Achievement: The Data in Two Diverse School Districts," Tamara Tate and Mark Warschauer focus on the writing done in two school districts by students in Grades 4-11. They analyze time spent writing on Google Docs and access to digital devices in 2014-15, 2015-16, and 2016-17. They describe changes in the amount of time spent writing digitally and how it changed over grade levels. Their systemic assessment adds to our field's knowledge of how access to digital writing technologies impacts students' opportunities to develop as writers. Further, it offers a valuable description of how access to and use of a common writing tool, Google Docs, functioned as school districts integrated it into their classrooms.

Mary Stewart's "Confronting the Ideologies of Assimilation and Colorblindness in Writing Program Assessment through Antiracist Dynamic Criteria Mapping" advances ongoing work

on antiracist writing program assessment. Like Tate and Warschauer's article, Stewart's takes a systemic and programmatic approach to writing assessment. She asks how a modified version of dynamic criteria mapping (DCM) might be used "to describe what was happening in the writing program and then use that information to facilitate critical reflection on the ways in which classroom practices align with or depart from the programmatic goal of delivering socially just writing instruction." Stewart's descriptive work documents how antiracist DCM may help reveal unintended results from writing assessment practices. This process of studying and critiquing writing assessment practices that claim "colorblindness" as a form of fairness opens up questions that may have wider implications in the field.

Finally, Analeigh Horton takes up the valuable conversation that has been developing around directed self-placement (DSP). Her article, "Two Sisters and a Heuristic for Listening to Multilingual, International Students' Directed Self-Placement Stories," zeroes in on students' experiences. By describing these students' DSP stories, Horton provides a glimpse into the complexities that may confront DSP systems. These two sisters had "nearly identical linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds," but they placed themselves in different writing courses. Their stories demonstrate how DSP may impact multilingual, international students. As a focused case study, Horton's work moves away from generalities—either positive or negative—about DSP. Horton's empirical research calls for self-placement systems to more carefully attend to the needs of multilingual writers. Her article ends by sharing a heuristic for analyzing students' placement experiences. Studies like Horton's may help writing assessment researchers better understand how DSP and other self-placement systems work (or do not work) for students.

Upcoming Special Issue on Student Self-Placement

In fact, JWA plans to develop a Special Issue (SI) focused on student self-placement practices. This SI will be edited by Kate Pantelides (Middle Tennessee State University) and Erin Whittig (University of Arizona). Their SI promises to offer researchers and writing program administrators a chance to report on the many ways in which colleges and universities are employing self-placement methods. Referred to at various times as DSP, guided self-placement, or informed self-placement, these placement methods all share the belief that students can and should make decisions about the courses they take. [Pantelides and Whittig's CFP for the SI](#) looks to gather in some of the most promising (and critical!) accounts about self-placement for writing.

Their SI has the potential to chart the ways in which writing assessment and writing programs have evolved and changed self-placement techniques since the publication of Royer and Giles' (1998) landmark "Directed Self-Placement: An Attitude of Orientation" in *College Composition and Communication*. It is high time that the field of writing studies had a journal issue dedicated to looking at advances in—and challenges to—DSP. Pantelides, Stone, and Whittig's SI promises to do that. The CFP was released in late November 2022, and our goal is to have the SI published in April 2024.

JWA RL – Return of Reviews on the JWA Reading List Blog

We're delighted to announce the revival of the [JWA Reading List](#) Blog. Chris Blankenship (Salt Lake Community College), Stacey Wittstock (UNLV), and the JWA RL editorial assistants have been hard at work preparing to relaunch our sister review site. In December 2022, they will release four reviews of recent works in writing assessment:

1. Ellen Carillo's *Hidden Inequities in Labor-based Contract Grading* (2022);
2. Anne Ruggles Gere, Anne Curzan, J. W. Hammond, Sarah Hughes, Ruth Li, Andrew Moos, Kendon Smith, Kathryn Van Zanen, Kelly L. Wheeler, and Crystal J. Zanders's "Communal Justicing: Writing Assessment, Disciplinary Infrastructure, and the Case for Critical Language Awareness" in *CCC* (2021);
3. Deborah Crusan's "Writing Assessment Literacy" in *Research Questions in Language Education and Applied Linguistics* (2021); and
4. Alfie Kohn and Susan D. Blum's *Ungrading: Why Rating Students Undermines Learning (and What to Do Instead)* (2021).

The *JWA RL* editorial assistants are Kathleen Kryger (University of Arizona), Jennifer Reifman (UC Davis), Tiffany Smith (Georgia State), and Sarah Stetson (University of Massachusetts, Amherst). We're excited to see *JWA RL* return after what will have been almost a three-year hiatus during the Covid-19 pandemic. We feel that there is real value to having a space where reviews and responses to major works in writing assessment can be published.

Personnel Changes

2022 has been a busy year full of changes for *JWA*. The biggest change is that our long-term Editor, Diane Kelly-Riley, stepped back from her editorial role and is now a member of the Editorial Board. Diane served as *JWA*'s Editor from issue 5.1 in 2012 through issue 14.1 in 2021. She worked with Peggy O'Neill as co-editor for issues 5.1 through 7.1, and with me as co-editor for issues 8.1 through 14.1. Nine (really ten!) years is a remarkable amount of time for a scholar to devote as Editor of a major journal in the field. I am sure I speak for many when I express my gratitude for her leadership and thoughtful editorial work during that time.

In addition, we have two other members of the Editorial Board who will be rotating off: Dylan Dryer (University of Maine) and Mya Poe (Northeastern). They will begin serving as editors for *Written Communication* in January 2023. We wish them the best and are deeply grateful for the years of service on the *JWA* Editorial Board. We have three new colleagues joining us on the Editorial Board: Joanne Giordano (Salt Lake Community College), David F. Green (Howard University), and Joyce Inman (University of Southern Mississippi). I am delighted that they are willing to contribute their time and expertise to *JWA*, our work on writing assessment, and the ways that it impacts students' and teachers' lives.

JWA relies on a large team to bring you this excellent scholarship. I am indebted to the *JWA* Editorial Team: Mathew Gomes, Christopher Blankenship, and Liz Tinoco have become regulars as we evaluate manuscripts, assign peer reviewers, and ask authors to revise and develop their articles. Madeline Crozier's careful eye for copyediting has shaped the final versions of these articles in immensely valuable ways. I want to extend a special thank you to Stephen McElroy for not only his work on the regular production of the issue but also for his design of the new page layout for *JWA* articles. His work on page design has enabled the new look and feel of the articles we have in 15.1!

JWA continues to rely on legions of reviewers who carefully read and respond to the many manuscripts we receive. As editor, I am grateful for their generosity with their expertise and time. We are thankful for their service contributions to the field. Reviewers this year included:

Tyler Branson, University of Toledo

Deborah Crusan, Wright State University
Norbert Elliot, New Jersey Institute of Technology
James Hammond, University of Michigan
Susan Marie Harrington, University of Vermont
Sandra Jamieson, Drew University
Alexandria Lockett, Spelman College
Jessica Nastal, Prairie State College
Michael Neal, Florida State University
Jeff Pruchnic, Wayne State University
Christie Toth, University of Utah
Shane Wood, University of Southern Mississippi

Finally, I would like to thank the California Digital Library and the University of California for their support of the *Journal of Writing Assessment*. Their support of the eScholarship publishing platform ensures that *JWA* remains an independent journal that publishes scholarship by and for teachers and scholars of writing assessment. I would also like to thank the University Writing Program at the University of California, Davis for support of the *JWA Reading List*.

Carl Whithaus
JWA Editor
University of California, Davis

References

- Carillo, E. C. (2021). *The Hidden Inequities in Labor-Based Contract Grading*. University Press of Colorado.
- Crusan, D. (2021). Writing assessment literacy. In H. Mohebbi & C. Coombe (Eds.), *Research questions in language education and applied linguistics: A reference guide* (pp. 431-435). Springer Texts in Education.
- Gere, A. R., Curzan, A., Hammond, J. W., Hughes, S., Li, R., Moos, A., Smith, K., Van Zanen, K., Wheeler, K. L., & Zanders, C. J. (2021). Communal justicing: Writing assessment, disciplinary infrastructure, and the case for critical language awareness. *College Composition and Communication*, 72(3), 384-412.
- Kohn, A., & Blum, S. D. (2020). *Ungrading: Why Rating Students Undermines Learning (and What to Do Instead)*. West Virginia University Press.
- Royer, D. J., & Gilles, R. (1998). Directed self-placement: An attitude of orientation. *College Composition and Communication*, 50(1), 54-70.