

Honouring the Process:

A Critique of the 'School Wide Write' within Effective Writing Instruction and Assessment

by

Annemarie Mai

Bachelor of Arts, University of Victoria, 1994

Bachelor of Education, University of British Columbia, 1995

A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

In the area of Middle Years' Language and Literacy

in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction

© Annemarie Mai, 2014

University of Victoria

All rights reserved. This project may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy or other means, without the permission of the author.

Abstract

Every September in my school district, the School Wide Write (SWW) – a seemingly innocuous benchmark assessment for writing – has often caused stress, confusion, and even anger for many middle school teachers and students. This project sought better understanding of a test that is shared by approximately 2,700 middle school students in this district, but also around British Columbia, Canada, and the United States. While the rationale behind the SWW purports to accurately determine students' writing abilities so that teachers can better meet their students' writing needs, the literature revealed that impromptu writing tests are often pedagogically and theoretically unsound.

As it stands, the School Wide Write is little more than a bureaucratic responsibility and a clumsy attempt to diagnose writing ability within an English Language Arts 8 to 12 curriculum that clearly encourages insightful and impactful writing. Conversely, the literature supports that on-demand writing tests like the SWW depict writing in a narrow, irrelevant, and obsolete way. The lessons learned from examining quick writes, though, can move teachers toward a pedagogy that incorporates dialogic, instructive, reflective, and transformative instruction and assessment practices. In these practices, educators help foster a student's identity as a writer who shares a vested interest in writing well, starting by honouring the recursive, iterative writing process.

Chapter 1 introduces the project from a personal and local perspective. In Chapter 2, I review the literature on analogous activities to the School Wide Write, then critique the process, rationale, and conclusions drawn from students' single-draft constructed responses that are used to determine writing proficiency. In Chapter 3, I elaborate on the Prezi presentation I

created that is aimed at teachers and administrators in my district (see Appendix C). In addition to highlighting significant limitations of the SWW within today's sociocultural milieu, I impress upon the need for change within writing instruction and assessment practices – changes that are further supported by British Columbia's revised draft curricula which encourage students to think creatively, reflectively, and critically. Finally, the reflection in Chapter 4 discusses what inspired me to translate frustration with the School Wide Write into action on a personal and professional level.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Tables	vii
List of Figures.....	viii
Acknowledgments	ix
Dedication	x
Chapter 1	1
INTRODUCTION	1
Definition of the School Wide Write	3
Assessment of the School Wide Write	9
Project Significance	10
Statement of Purpose.....	12
Overview of Project.....	14
Chapter 2	17
A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	17
Definition of the School Wide Write within the Testing Literature.....	20
Other Related Definitions: Assessment, Evaluation, and Testing.....	21
The Current State of Writing Instruction and Assessment.....	24
Assessing Writing: From Theory to Practice.....	26
The Challenge: Bridging 21 st Century Principles of Writing Instruction and Assessment.....	28
Theoretical Frameworks	30
Social Constructivism.....	30
Multiliteracies.....	34
The Writing Process: Genius, Perseverance, or Luck?.....	38
The Writing Process and Writing Tests.....	40
Teaching to the Writing Test	44
Validity and Reliability	49
Rubrics: Strengths and Limitations.....	52
Assessment Subjectivity and Rater Bias	54
Feedback	56
Informing Instruction.....	60
Common Formative Assessment: Side-stepping the ‘1000 Mini-lessons Problem’	61
‘Crystal clear’ goals	64
Where to Next?	66
Assessment for Learning	66
Professional development: Doing things differently	69
Conclusion: Looking Forward	71

Chapter 3	75
PREZI PRESENTATION TO TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS.....	75
Where to Next... with the School Wide Write?	75
The Presentation: What, To Whom, When, Why...?	77
Title Page	78
Personal and Professional Introduction	79
Activity #1: Writing Strengths and Goals using the Writing to Learn Strategy.....	80
Middle School Beliefs and Values in the New Curriculum.....	80
Activity #2: Brainstorm Aspects of 21 st Century Learning	81
The Importance of Writing in the Current Sociocultural Milieu.....	82
Introduction to the School Wide Write: Frequency of Use	83
A Working Definition of the School Wide Write.....	84
The Writing Process.....	85
Activity #3: A Metaphor for Writing	87
Getting Started: Examining our Practice	88
Activity #4: Examining Assessment Practices	90
Informing Instruction.....	91
Where am I Going?, How am I Going?, and Where to Next?	93
Where am I Going?	94
Explicitly Sharing Learning Goals and Criteria	94
Activity #5: Considering Revising.....	96
How am I Going?	97
Common Formative Assessments	97
Scaffolding Learning	98
Feedback	99
Where to Next?	100
(Student) Self-assessment	100
(Teacher) Self-assessment.....	101
Activity #6: Workshop Wrap-up: 5 Minute Write.....	103
Conclusion: Revisiting the Rationale	103
Chapter 4	104
REFLECTIONS	104
Writing: Its Promising Future	104
Begging to Differ.....	107
Getting Started: No Tidy Little Boxes	108
The Writing Process: A Personal Take	111
Conclusion	113
References.....	115
APPENDICES	143
Appendix A	144
Quick Scale: Grade 8 Writing Personal Views or Response.....	144
Appendix B: Assessment Terminology	145

Classroom Assessment Literacy.....	145
Constructed-response, Essay Test, Impromptu Write, On-demand Writing Test	145
Benchmark Assessments	146
Benchmark.....	146
Interim Assessments	147
Standardized testing.....	147
Common Formative Assessments	147
Appendix C: Prezi Presentation	149
Appendix D: G•O•S•S•I•P with R•A•S•A	161

List of Tables

Table 1: 'Barebones' School Wide Write.....	5
Table 2: Three-step School Wide Write.....	5
Table 3: Four-step School Wide Write.....	6
Table 4: G•O•S•S•I•P with R•A•S•A.....	162

List of Figures

Figure 1. Comprehensive Writing Instruction8

Figure 2. The Teacher Inquiry and Knowledge Building System Cycle70

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the “team” of people who made this MEd possible. First, I want to acknowledge my students who have shared their ideas, anecdotes, and gems of wisdom with me over the years. The inspiration for this project originated from their determination, conviction, and never-ending thirst for originality and self-expression. I also wish to thank Dr. Deborah Begoray, who enthusiastically and fearlessly guided me to where ‘my book’ begins. During the last two years, à la Natasha Bedingfield, she seemed to will the rain so I could feel it on my skin, transforming ideals into practice. I am grateful for the warm mist, steady showers, and occasional hail that needed to fall before the sun illuminated the words on the page. I am also grateful to Dr. Sylvia Pantaleo, who helped me change the “culture” in my classroom by introducing me to Gee, Friere, Reznitskaya, and Smagorinsky. A heartfelt thanks goes out to those in my supportive and inspiring cohort.

I would also like to thank my family. I come from generations of teachers and professors; their endless curiosity, energy, and love of knowledge also fueled my long-time desire to complete graduate work. Thanks for waving pompoms during my learning journeys! My own two children have not only doubled up on their chores these past two years, but because they were just a bit older than the students I was writing about, I could often ask them if something they had learned in middle school (writing class) had “stuck” in high school (and get a candid answer). My partner, Nicolas, has been endlessly patient and selfless with his own time. Any moment spent with him during the last two years has represented time away from the computer, time to play, rest, and find balance and calm. I am looking forward to many hours hanging out in countless non-goal-oriented ways.

Dedication

I wish to dedicate this project to my family. You give me stories to tell and inspire me daily. I feel grateful and lucky to have your support.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Every September in my school district the School Wide Write – a seemingly innocuous benchmark assessment for writing – can cause stress, confusion, and even anger for many middle school teachers and students. This apprehension is not surprising given that assessment itself often remains “mysterious to both teacher and student” (Spandel, 1997, p. 30; Frey & Fisher, 2013; Gardner, 2012). Certainly, “the pursuit of reliable and valid means of assessing people’s learning generates ... discourse and ... dissent [that] could conceivably fill whole libraries” (Gardner, 2012, p. 2). Implementation is also controversial. Critics are blunt when they say that students are merely “bludgeoned by topics that feel restrictive ... [or] held to deadlines no writer (even a professional) could hope to meet” (Spandel, 1997, p. 30).

Remarkably, regardless of its shortcomings or definitive effect on writing ability, the School Wide Write (also referred to as the SWW) is common practice in numerous school districts in British Columbia such as 20, 22, 23, 27, 38, 41, 58, 61, 74, and 85 (Google search: “school wide write” AND “BC AND 2013”), as well as across Canada and the United States (Shepard, 2005).

School boards and educators hope that on-demand, sometimes-timed writing tests, can “determine achievement levels, writing concerns, writing strengths, [then] develop strategies to address concerns and celebrate strengths” (Vancouver School: Board Plan, 2013-2014, p. 5).

But can the SWW truly deliver?

As in many districts, implementation of the SWW has just become part of the demanding and often overwhelming ritual of the fall start-up. Throughout my nearly 20 years of teaching I have administered the SWW at least five times. While I have taught Kindergarten to Grade 8,

my career has also included temporary contracts at four elementary and five middle schools from Shanghai, China to Salt Spring Island, BC, my experience with the SWW is restricted to the urban, semi-urban, and suburban school district. Here, I have taught at 4 out of the 10 middle schools before attaining my first continuing contract (teaching Grade 8) in 2013. And it is from this district where I draw my conclusions about the SWW based upon experience, observations, and conversations with administrators, school literacy coordinators, Learning Assistance specialists, and English teachers. In interviews, for example, these educators confirmed that 7 of the 10 middle schools in this school district, which services almost 4,000 middle school students (from Grades 6 to 8), wrote the SWW in 2013 (A. Maxwell, personal communication, Jan. 29, 2014; D. Christy, personal communication, Jan. 22, 2014; G. Khosla, personal communication, Jan. 29, 2014; I. Fawcett, personal communication, Feb. 3, 2014; J. Reeson, personal communication, Feb. 21, 2014; K. Andrews, personal communication, Jan. 21, 2014; L. Moreau, personal communication, Jan. 29, 2014; L. Rud, personal communication, Jan. 24, 2014; N. Naughton, personal communication, Feb. 21, 2014).

Incidentally, teaching is my second career. I published my first piece as a freelance writer in 1991 about renowned statesman, Stephen Lewis, where I chronicled his experiences as Canada's ambassador to the United Nations. I also worked as a reporter and columnist for a start-up newspaper on Salt Spring Island called, *The Barnacle* in 1999 and 2000. From there, I have focused mainly on parenting and education, as I have always been keen to better understand the human condition. For instance, I have written about unrelated single parents who co-habitate, divorced parents who "upstairs/downstairs" parent, and intact couples who differ in their child-rearing philosophies. When writing profiles and features on a range of

topics, I interviewed internationally-renowned parent-educator, Barbara Coloroso, acclaimed scientist, David Suzuki, and American child psychologist, Anthony Wolf. I have also written one pseudo-academic article about my experience teaching English immersion Kindergarten at an international school in Shanghai, China in 1996. A search in Summons, the University of Victoria library's online catalogue under "Amei Parkes" (my nickname and maiden name, respectively), lists two pages, highlighting some of my articles from *Today's Parent*, *The Globe and Mail*, *The Vancouver Sun*, and the *Times Colonist*. My true passion, however, is writing humour and slice-of-life articles; undoubtedly teaching has provided with me a few profound and humorous anecdotes.

Thus, my unofficial, and sometimes unplanned 'sampling' of different schools throughout my career (starting in 1995), coupled with my passion for writing inspired this project: to examine and critique the SWW, a biannual on-demand, oft-timed writing test. A critique of this writing test, however, first requires a more precise definition of the SWW.

Definition of the School Wide Write

Despite their ubiquity, diagnostic writing benchmarks are not required by the school district where I teach; individual schools decide whether they will conduct the SWW. Many educators are drawn to its potential to provide a baseline indication of student writing ability with the goal of informing a teacher's English Language Arts (E.L.A.) curriculum for the upcoming year, and ultimately improving student writing (Crawford & Smolkowski, 2008; Frey & Fisher, 2012; K. Andrews, personal communication, Jan. 21, 2014).

Because no formal district policy or standards define the goals, implementation or assessment processes of the SWW, these facets are literally as varied as the number of teachers

administering this assessment; it is often easier to define the SWW by what it is *not*. Most importantly, it is not a province-wide standardized assessment; the writing prompt, however, is standardized for each school. Students are not necessarily given advanced warning and cannot choose to opt out with parental permission, unlike the annual Grade 4 and 7 Foundation Skills Assessment, for example, where students can be excused because of: “family emergency, lengthy illness, [and] other extenuating circumstances” (British Columbia Teachers’ Federation, n.d.). Students generally respond to a writing prompt, such as: describe your ideal school, yourself, or what it means to ‘make a difference’ (McEwen, 2011; V. Roberts, personal communication, Jan. 20, 2014). The writing samples are then assessed, but the process for grading and extent of feedback also varies greatly. Usually, the process of administering the SWW then repeats itself six to eight months later during the last term.

Amongst the seven schools that administer the SWW in my district, implementation varies from school-to-school and teacher-to-teacher. Some teachers prepare their students for days or even weeks for the SWW and some “just do it cold” (K. Andrews, personal communication, Jan. 21, 2014). One administrator cautioned against this method because “then kids will just sit and stare at a page” (M. Trofimuk, personal communication, Feb. 24, 2014). At its most basic level, a teacher gives the test in one sitting, and assesses it soon thereafter. He or she may or may not return the marked SWWs.

Below are four different ways that the SWW can be implemented, starting with the most ‘barebones’ method (Table 1) (A. Maxwell, personal communication, Jan. 29, 2014; D. Christy, personal communication, Jan. 22, 2014; G. Khosla, personal communication, Jan. 29, 2014; I. Fawcett, personal communication, Feb. 3, 2014; J. Reeson, personal communication, Feb. 21,

2014; K. Andrews, personal communication, Jan. 21, 2014; L. Moreau, personal communication, Jan. 29, 2014; L. Rud, personal communication, Jan. 24, 2014):

Table 1: 'Barebones' School Wide Write

Completed during 1 class		
Students read writing prompt individually, then draft a response.		Teacher evaluates SWW.

Other educators try to scaffold the writing process by introducing the topic, then inviting discussion and brainstorming before giving students the rest of the class to write. Additionally, Trofimuk (personal communication, Feb. 24, 2014) also tweaked the one-day experience by hiring a teacher-on-call for two days to administer the SWW to *all* classes at the school. That way, she believed that consistent explanation of the writing prompt better ensured continuity when the same teacher, equipped with resources and exemplars, “shared the same message [with students] using the same parameters” (M. Trofimuk, personal communication, Feb. 24, 2014). Note that in the following two examples (Table 2 and Table 3, the writing process is still viewed linearly and sequentially.

Table 2: Three-step School Wide Write

Completed during 1 class		
Class discusses writing prompt.	Students draft a response individually.	Teacher evaluates SWW.

Table 3: Four-step School Wide Write

Completed during 1 – 3 classes			Completed during 1 class
Class discusses writing prompt.	Students draft a response individually.	Teacher evaluates SWW.	Teacher gives feedback (and scores)

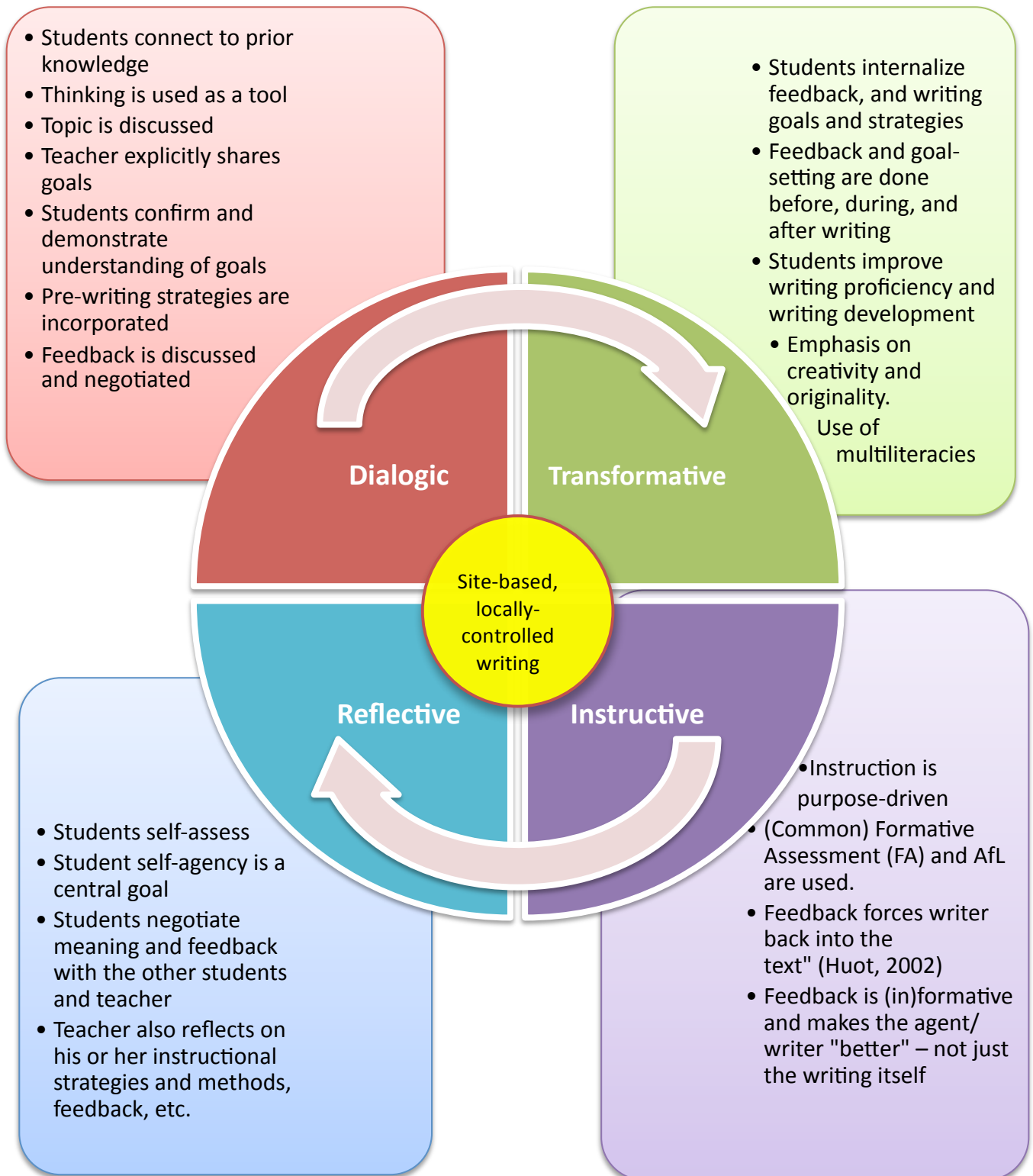
Yet, for some individual teachers, or teams, or entire staffs the one-day SWW is still too short to be considered an authentic writing process (Ryan & Barton, 2014; Spandel, 2013). These educators in my school district promote prewriting, planning, drafting, and editing before marking the final draft (e.g., D. Christy, personal communication, Jan. 22, 2014; I. Fawcett, personal communication, Feb. 3, 2014; K. Jones, personal communication, Jan. 22, 2014; and L. Rud, personal communication, Jan. 24, 2014). Notably, at the middle school where the teachers could choose whether or not they wanted to do the SWW, for example, the administration believed the activity was most meaningful when it incorporated dialogic instruction, planning, and editing (I. Fawcett, personal communication, Feb. 3, 2014). Here, “the assessment process inextricably embedded within the educational process” was then continued throughout the school year (Schuwirth & Van Der Vleuten, 2011, p. 478).

Feedback and assessment can also vary from teacher to teacher. A vice-principal indicated that when she administered the SWW as a classroom teacher, goal-setting was a primary way to inform instruction (L. Moreau, personal communication, Jan. 29, 2014). Not only did she help students make goals, she then met with parents to discuss “what the key features of a quality

performance are, and what is needed to bridge the gap between current and desired performance” (Parr & Timperley, 2013, p. 70).

Figure 1 below shows a comprehensive writing activity (that could include the SWW) that was inspired by both Close and Nottingham’s (in press) lesson plan sequence where students “flow through the Connect \leftrightarrow Process \leftrightarrow Transform \leftrightarrow Reflect learning cycle” and Huot’s (2002) graphic representation of a dialogic, instructive, reflective, and transformative process of responding to students’ writing in an effort to promote teaching and learning (p. 132). It represents a writing assignment (that *could* be the SWW or one within a unit of study) that is not standardized, and one that *is* site-based and locally controlled. The SWW would not be an in-class, impromptu, or quick write, as planning and organizing would be integral to the process and it would span over many classes. Notably, in my own experience and from conversations with administrators and teachers, I have never known the SWW to be administered in such a comprehensive way.

Figure 1. Comprehensive Writing Instruction



Below, I explain the range of assessment procedures associated with the SWW.

Assessment of the School Wide Write

The administrators and literacy coordinators from my district also confirmed that generally teachers use the four-trait rubric from the British Columbia Performance Standards for Writing (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2009) to assess the writing sample for meaning, style, form, and conventions (see Appendix A). At the middle school where I presently work, teachers disaggregated these categories, but in the past, they just assigned a cumulative mark out of four (ranging from “Not yet within expectations” to the “Exceeding expectations” (BC Ministry of Education, 2009) (K. Andrews, personal communication, Jan. 21, 2014) thought it was important to share the performance standards with students after they wrote the SWW to help them make writing goals, followed by sharing the results and goals with parents in an effort to show them “where they are [in their writing abilities and] where they are aiming to get” (L. Moreau, personal communication, Jan. 29, 2014).

Some administrators also indicated that it was important to discuss assessments with other teachers (K. Andrews, personal communication, Jan. 21, 2014; M. Trofimuk, personal communication, Feb. 24, 2014). During the 2013-2014 school year, for example, same-grade-level teachers at the school where I work marked their own students’ writes, but at the same time and place. This approach allowed for lively sharing and provided a respectful professional forum to: ask questions of colleagues and the school literacy coordinator regarding content, assessment methods and criteria, and so on; discuss philosophical or procedural differences in interpreting assessment criteria; share powerful or remarkable examples of student writing; and discuss the exemplars in the Performance Standards. Here, the team of Grade 8 teachers at

my school, like many experienced teachers before us, was discussing what Spandel (2013) calls “rater bias” (p. 18). Scores, she said are neither right nor wrong, but merely “defensible” (Spandel, 2013, p. 17). Whether students write a paragraph or an essay, a variety of assumptions and suggestions will always surface (Graham, Gillespie, & McKeown, 2013; Spandel, 2013). Following the assessment, teachers then decide how (or whether) they will share the results with their students.

Project Significance

A certain amount of discrepancy in implementation and assessment methods of the SWW are, in reality, to be expected, especially given the adaptable middle school mandate which strives for “personalized and coherent learning, instead of the hurried anonymity of ‘pre-high school’” (Frey & Fisher, 2007b, p. 204). Daily, middle school teachers address the complex and varied needs of their students. In the district where I teach, for example, many groups are represented, including First Nations, international, and special needs students. In addition, nearly 20% of the students in the district come from impoverished backgrounds and many come from non-nuclear families (Dupuis, 2012, p. 3). The noted diversity is not emblematic of negative influences, but rather is recognition of the need for flexibility in how teachers use instructional time and strategies (Dreher, 2012; Frey & Fisher, 2007). Acknowledging, “the contextual nature of learning, language, and literacy, and the need to access a mixture of literacy ‘tools’ that are responsive to learners needs” helps contribute to effective literacy instruction (Dreher, 2012, pp. 341-342; Englert, Mariage, & Dunsmore, 2006; Graham & Gillespie, 2010; Graham, Gillespie, & McKeown, 2013; Kiili, Mäkinen, & Coiro, 2013; Snow & Moje, 2010; Smagorinsky, 2009; Willis, Adie & Klenowski, 2013).

The SWW, therefore, is woven into a multilayered sociocultural tapestry, one where teachers can and do *also* influence the quality of writing instruction and assessment (Ecclestone, 2012; Schultz & Fecho, 2000). Understandably, they are sometimes hampered by chronic resource inadequacies or systemic policy (Hillocks, 2002), but many are, as discussed in the literature review, ill-prepared to teach writing after graduating from teacher education programs (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Graham & Gillespie, 2010; Graham, Gillespie, & McKeown, 2013). This lack of understanding compounds their ability to adapt to students' needs, or diagnose then teach specific writing skills explicitly – both necessities for a successful benchmark writing test (Hawe & Parr, 2013; Parr & Limbrick, 2010; Shepard, 2005; 2009). Too often educators, like those with whom I implemented the SWW in 2013, also find themselves “drowning” in data (Frey & Fisher, 2013, p 68), but rarely do they follow up with an “instructional prescription” (Shepard, 2009, p. 34), thus compromising the effectiveness of their writing instruction (Frey & Fisher, 2013; Graham & Gillespie, 2010). Frey and Fisher (2013) likened assessment without appropriate, specific feedback to “taking your temperature but doing nothing even if the thermometer indicates you have a fever” (p. 67).

If, as administrators had hoped, “assessment is our focus but learning is the goal” (Gardner, 2012, p. 2), could such an open-ended quick-write ultimately “pay off in terms of improved student understanding of writing” in today’s literacy context (Frey & Fisher, 2013, p. 66)? A review of the literature reveals that educators cannot simply assume, as they have done in the past, that “an on-demand format can mimic the processes undertaken during more authentic writing” (Crawford & Smolkowski, 2008, p. 62). Granted this diagnostic test is just one assignment out of many, but as noted by Shepard (2005), many middle school teachers state

that every curricular moment is precious. While numerous “exploratory experiences” complement academics – a tenet that successful middle schools embrace, rather than eschew – they cannot help but interrupt them in the process (Meyer, 2011, p. 42). As one charter school administrator, Mike Feinberg, bluntly stated about the running of middle schools: “Every second counts, and there’s no margin for error” (as cited in Meyer, 2011, p. 46).

So, then, where do the thousands of educators – and more importantly, their students – go from here? While the “Holy Grail of transparent assessment” (Ecclestone, 2013, p. 141) may not exist, educators certainly need to go beyond merely grading papers (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Dreher, 2012; Fisher & Frey, 2007b; Graham & Gillespie, 2010; Graham, Gillespie, & McKeown, 2013; Hillocks, 2003; Lacina & Block, 2012; Marshall, 2009; Smagorinsky, 2009; Shepard, 2009; Stiggins, 1991). The challenge lies in striking a balance between determining students’ writing abilities, helping students find meaning in “their increasingly complex literate worlds” (Marshall, 2009, p. 114), and supporting them in “closing the gap” in their zone of proximal development (Shepard, 2009, p. 33; see also Black & Wiliam, 1998a) – all within “rich and engaging programs” (Applebee & Langer, 2011, p. 26). In this “age of accountability,” teachers like me need both practical ways and theoretical reasons to turn interim assessments like the SWW into more useful, relevant, and valid writing activities (Newell, VanDerHeide, & Wilson, 2012).

Statement of Purpose

My initial reasons for studying the SWW were born out of a frustration with its ambiguous goals, implementation and assessment processes. If the SWW was a high-stakes test, for example, my research might expound on how teachers adjust their curricular and instructional

practices to influence test scores (Anagnostopoulos, 2003, 2005; Hillocks, 2003; Klenowski, 2012; Marshall; 2009). If this writing benchmark assessment had clearer parameters, again, I could judge how the latter affect writing skills, instruction, and assessment. But the SWW is neither high- nor low-pressure – it's *no* pressure. This writing activity is as formal or informal, broad or deep as a teacher wants to make it. As a middle school teacher with perpetual demands and responsibilities, I craved direction or at least better understanding of the task.

My worst fear was that the SWW harkens back to writing instruction 30 years ago when it was “a relatively simple affair” (Applebee & Langer, 2011, p. 14) where teachers did not *teach* writing, *per se*, they “assigned it” (Spandel, 2013, p. 31). Certainly, early in my middle school teaching career, administering the SWW felt like ‘doing mindless paperwork’ and ‘collecting data in a hurry’ for administrators. Implementing the SWW drew distressingly close parallels with literacy instruction in the 1980s, where teachers regularly dispensed, collected, and then corrected quick writes in English class (Spandel, 2013). In addition, I worried that the SWW aligned itself with a more myopic view of literacy where purely “school-based reading, writing, and technical skills” ignored the current “application of these skills in relevant ways that vary by social and cultural context” (Kiili, Mäkinen, & Coiro, 2013, p. 223). While daunting and overwhelming at times, the innovative and uncharted possibilities for writing in the 21st century require a more “complex, nuanced, and dialogic approaches” to writing instruction (Marshall, 2009, p. 122).

My goal in this project is to present a holistic picture, with the goal of providing constructive criticism of and recommendations, rather than waging unfounded judgment based on isolated cases. Much like the teachers with whom I graded the last SWW samples, other researchers

investigating the quality of literacy instruction assumed a perspective of professional respect, curiosity, and open-mindedness (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Dreher, 2012; Fisher & Frey, 2007b; Hillocks, 2003, 2005, 2010; Lacina & Block, 2012; Marshall, 2009; Smagorinsky, 2009; Snow & Moje, 2010). They did not, however, profess a “‘hygienic’ approach... whereby the researcher and researched are mystified as objective instruments” (Dreher, 2012, p. 337). This ‘in-the-trenches’ perspective, together with professional reflection, therefore, guided this critique of an assessment tool that has often raised more questions than answers.

Overview of Project

This project sought better understanding of a usually timed, but low-stakes assessment that is shared by approximately 2,700 middle school students in my district, as well as other students in British Columbia, Canada, and the United States. It contains four chapters. The first chapter has summarized how the oft-used SWW is implemented and assessed. It has also highlighted the need to examine the SWW within its “complex weave of ... pedagogic style, student-teacher interaction, self-reflection ..., motivation, and a variety of assessment processes” (Gardner, 2013, p. 3). The second chapter outlines the theoretical frameworks, situated in social constructivism and multiliteracies. I examine the strengths and limitations of the SWW through a discussion of the literature on the relationship between pedagogical goals, effective writing instruction, and assessment, and summarize how formatively assessing young writers can assist in both improving proficiency and deepening the learning experience.

In the third chapter, I present the structure of a professional development workshop directed at teachers’ professional development and administrators (e.g., at their monthly principal’s and vice principal’s meeting), indicating best practice for powerful, insightful writing

and representing. Firstly, I wish to stress the idea that writing is a complex process that warrants numerous opportunities to formally and informally assess students. When assessing, teachers of writing are often faced with the paradox that they are still assessing products, namely “the plan, the draft, the revision, or the edited copy” (Purves, 1992, p. 113). Thus, I also offer ways to provide informative and transformative instruction, interventions, and follow-up.

The fourth chapter is my personal reflection on the process of completing this project. It details the process I went through when researching and writing this project, highlighting both the personal and professional lessons learned.

ENDNOTE

¹ Out of these seven, the SWW was not mandatory at two of the middle schools. At one, the administration gave staff the choice of whether or not to implement the SWW. At the other school, only those teachers involved in a literacy project partook.

Chapter 2

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

As educators, we know that “the most important factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows, that teachers should ascertain this, and teach accordingly” (Ausubel, 1968, as cited in Wiliam, 2011, p. 3). While not a new idea, a review of the literature reveals that determining a student’s writing ability, then implementing subsequent intervention strategies and giving feedback that fosters autonomy and responsibility for learning have proven challenging (Calfee & Miller, 2013; Gregg, Coleman, Davis, & Chalk, 2007; Dutro et al., 2013; Frey & Fisher, 2012; Parr, 2012; Shepard, 2008; Sullivan & Nielsen, 2009). Furthermore, as a writer and educator for more than 20 years, the studies I read confirmed my own experience whereby “many professionals consider timed impromptu essays formulaic and unresponsive to the process of writing” (Gregg et al., 2007, p. 306; see also Andrade et al., 2009; Baldwin, 2012; Condon, 2012; Frey & Fisher, 2009; Knoch, 2011).

Too often, tests like the School Wide Write usurp the writing process and teach students to write hastily and formulaically, instead thoughtfully and insightfully. Further, it has been demonstrated that the snapshot of writing resulting from a single sitting is fraught with numerous inescapable external or superficial shortcomings (Parr, 2013; Spandel, 2013). Throughout the critique in this chapter I discuss other valuable, relevant ways to determine writing ability that have been documented by many scholars (Huot & Perry, 2009; Peterson & McClay, 2010; Shepard 2009). At the same time, however, teachers have expressed an “urgent need” for assessment that clearly identifies their students’ strengths and weaknesses and helps them adapt instruction accordingly (Llosa et al., 2011, p. 258; see also Frey & Fisher, 2013; Huot

& Perry, 2009; Parr & Timperley, 2010; Shepard, 2008; Tillema, 2014; Wiliam, 2011). Scholars, however, lament that test results rarely translate into targeted interventions or “powerful” teaching tools (Huot & Perry, 2009, p. 424; see also Engelsen & Smith, 2014; Frey & Fisher, 2013; Huot, 2002; Shepard, 2008; Timperley & Parr, 2009).

Concomitantly, Canadian teachers work in the shadow of their American counterparts, who operate within a system known for its “mania for testing” (Hillocks, 2003, p. 63). Detractors maintain, however, that standardized literacy tests give only the “illusion of scientific rigor” and represent an “infuriating numbers game” (Williams, 2005, p. 154) “whose scores can only be narrowly descriptive of students’ literacy abilities” (Avila, 2012, p. 101). However, not only is standardized assessment on the rise in Canada (Slomp, Corrigan, & Sugimoto, 2014), more significantly, even though the SWW demands final-draft writing done under first-draft conditions, it is erroneously presented as a valid, reliable measure of writing proficiency (Slomp, 2008, 2012; Spandel, 2013; Williams, 2005). Numerous studies have demonstrated that teaching and assessing writing can and *should* be dialogic, instructive, reflective, and transformative (Calfée & Miller 2012; Huot, 2002). As it stands, however, the SWW is little more than a bureaucratic responsibility and a clumsy attempt to determine writing ability with the goal of informing instruction.

Nowhere is its obsolescence and irrelevance more evident, perhaps, than in the newly revised 2013 curriculum documents. Here, principles such as flexibility, innovation, personalizing and inquiry-based learning, and higher order thinking are found throughout the English Language Arts curriculum and “redesigned” assessment literature (BC Ministry of Education, 2013a, para. 1). Thus, if the SWW continues to be routinely scheduled with little

thought to its import or “learning potential” (Kennedy et al., 2008, p. 198), it will perpetuate an outdated and more importantly, ineffective way to assess writing both pedagogically and theoretically within the current sociocultural milieu of today’s schools (Huot & Perry, 2009; Shepard, 2008). I maintain that the lessons learned from implementing on-demand writing tests can move us toward “a better pedagogy” of writing instruction that incorporates formative assessment (FA) and assessment for learning (AfL) principles (Huot & Perry, 2009, p. 432).

In this review, I unpack existing beliefs and assumptions about writing pedagogy and the theories used to support or challenge the implementation of impromptu writing tests. The socio-constructivist and multiliteracies principles form the foundation from which I examine a selection of scholars who have reviewed the effectiveness of tests like the SWW. I begin by describing the current state of writing instruction and assessment, and the ways teachers instruct and assess writing. I also explore studies that demonstrate that writing tests compromise the recursive, sometimes time-consuming writing process where, instead, students learn to adapt their writing to score a higher grade rather than write more insightful prose. Next, the discussion on validity and reliability elucidates the challenges associated with creating a fair test that can accurately measure writing proficiency. While rubrics have helped teachers clearly share goals and criteria, researchers indicate that they are not without drawbacks. Furthermore, teacher-evaluators are often complicit in swaying results due to a multitude of reasons that are unrelated to the actual writing. Lastly, I return to the SWW’s *raison d’être* – to inform instruction – and examine the literature that identifies what truly promotes writing development, but more importantly, deep learning.

Admittedly, in years past, I am also guilty of assigning, marking, then submitting the SWW to administrators without questioning whether it is a viable way to test writing proficiency within a process-oriented curriculum. Thus, after evaluating the literature, I feel the 'urgency' to find a baseline writing ability for my students has been replaced with an urgency to provide quality writing instruction and assessment starting during the first week of the school year. I begin the critique by defining the SWW vis à vis the academic literature.

Definition of the School Wide Write within the Testing Literature

Arguably, with its broad variation in implementation and assessment, the School Wide Write is "difficult to pin down" (Slomp, 2012, p. 82). A common understanding will therefore contribute to the analysis of the SWW, a writing activity that is already plagued by ambiguity. Given its widely interpretive nature, for the purposes of this critique, parallels have been drawn from analogous and similar activities, including timed, impromptu writing assessments (Albertson & Marwitz, 2001; Baldwin, 2012; Bromley, 2011; Condon, 2012; Crawford & Smolkowski, 2008; Gregg et al., 2007; Peterson, 2009; Slomp, 2008), large-scale writing assessments (Slomp, 2008, 2012; Slomp, Corrigan, & Sugimoto, 2014), standardized writing assessment (Brimi, 2013; Hillocks, 2002, 2003); common formative assessment (Frey & Fisher, 2013; Shepard, 2005, 2009); high-stakes testing (Dutro et al., 2013), advanced placement based upon "one-shot" writing samples (Albertson & Marwitz, 2001, p. 144), and other writing or testing activities. (See Appendix B for more definitions of various types of assessments.)

Based upon a wide canvassing of the literature, therefore, the SWW can be described as: a low-stakes writing test that is structured as a constructed response from a standardized, higher-order question with the intention of being formatively assessed (based upon ideas

drawn from Arter, 2010; Baldwin, 2012; Butt, 2010; Frey & Fisher, 2013; Hillocks, 2003; Li, Perie, Marion, & Gong, 2010; Shepard, 2005, 2009; Stiggins & DuFour, 2009; Sullivan & Nielsen, 2009). 'Constructed response' is used synonymously with essay test, impromptu write, and on-demand writing test in the literature. These terms denote an unplanned, not rehearsed writing test where students respond to a prompt using 'first draft writing' that are typically completed during a block in the timetable (Spandel, 2013). As was previously mentioned, though, some teachers prepare students through classroom discussion (i.e., brainstorming, partner talk, cooperative group work, or reciprocal questioning) or teacher-aided outlining strategies, such as using a graphic organizer or web (K. Andrews, personal communication, Jan. 21, 2014; L. Rud, personal communication, Jan. 24, 2014). These tests differ from *selected*-response tests (Almond, 2014). Relative to multiple choice tests, constructed responses typically take students "so long to complete," so students are given only one or two questions (Almond, 2014, p. 74). The SWW is considered to be a constructed-response, essay test, impromptu write, or on-demand writing test. Within this definition, however, further clarification is needed, as there is certainly "widespread confusion in terminology" in the testing literature itself (Shepard, 2005, p. 3).

Other Related Definitions: Assessment, Evaluation, and Testing

Numerous key assessment concepts have taken on different meanings according to different researchers and in different contexts (e.g., Arter, 2010; Butt, 2010; Frey & Fisher, 2009, 2013; Li et al., 2010; Popham, 2008; Shepard, 2005, 2009; Stiggins, 2001). 'Assessment,' 'evaluation,' and 'testing,' are, in fact, often used interchangeably or synonymously throughout the literature (Davies, 2007; OECD, 2005, p. 25; Robertson, 2005; Shepard, 2005;). Furthermore,

'writing assessment' as a separate discipline (and one that is distinguished from measurement theory) is a relatively new area (Behizadeh & Engelhard, 2011). Additionally, assessment is separate from related, but generic terms such as evaluation and testing. Notably, "confusion reigns over these... terms, and their usage wanders, depending on context" (Robertson, 2005, p. 1). Certainly, assessment, evaluation, and testing require further explanation.

Assessment commonly refers to understanding and analyzing student artifacts or information intended to demonstrate knowledge, comprehension, or skill of prescribed learning outcomes (Davies, 2007; OECD, 2005; Shepard, 2005). Assessors, usually teachers, measure the evidence's effectiveness in formal and informal ways, whereas evaluators observe and measure for the purpose of determining its value. Evaluation is more of a process of reviewing "whether or not students have learned what they needed to learn and how well they have learned it" (Davies, 2007, p. 1). Originally, Scriven (1967) introduced "formative evaluation" as a way to describe the quality of educational programs, such as their curricula, strategies and methods, and instructional material. Moreover, testing is "a small part of assessment.... It's an audit... a snapshot" (Wiggins, 2008, para. 2). Using this analogy, assessment can be considered a photo album (Wiggins, 2008, para. 2), whereas evaluation represents the conclusions drawn about a collection of albums.

Assessment can be both formative and summative. Formative assessment is gathered and used in an ongoing fashion during and after the learning process. Here, teachers use classroom "evidence to focus on improving and developing student learning" (Carless & Lam, 2014, p. 167; see also Hibbert, Van Deven, & Ros, 2012). Both student and teacher can use the evidence (specifically from writing samples) to identify strengths and weaknesses for future

improvement and refinement. Integral to student success is quality feedback, which I discuss in greater detail following the discussion of assessment subjectivity and rater bias. Wiggins (1993), an advocate for authentic and informative assessment for the last 25 years, considers formative assessment “unobtrusive” and “seamless with teaching and learning,” as well as flexible and diverse (p. 3), but Shepard (2009) cautions that it needs to be done concomitantly within a “rich curriculum... to foster instructional practices consistent with learning research” (p, 32).

Summative assessment has also been referred to as assessment *of* learning; it takes place after learning has taken place and it is not “primarily focused on redirecting further learning progress” (Tillema, 2014, p. 40). That said, information gained from summative assessment can inform teaching, but does not usually give specific information to students on how they can improve their skills (Huot & Perry, 2009). While the SWW is intended to be assessed formatively, not all teachers have used it for this purpose (I. Fawcett, personal communication, Feb. 3, 2014; J. Reeson, personal communication, Feb. 21, 2014; K. Andrews, personal communication, Jan. 21, 2014; L. Moreau, personal communication, Jan. 29, 2014).

Testing writing can be additionally problematic because the focus often remains steadfastly on grades, rather than engaging, insightful writing (Behizadeh & Engelhard, 2011; Huot & Perry, 2009). Perhaps nowhere is this more evident than when students take large-scale, high-stakes tests such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT), International Baccalaureate (IB), or Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) (Peterson & McClay, 2010). Unlike the SWW, these highly contested exams act as a gateway to future educational opportunities (including acceptance into kindergarten or graduate school, or identification for special-education) or employment opportunities. Thus, a

student's future can depend upon a piece of writing, usually a traditional essay, that needs to be written 'impeccably' in "a 30-minute session under highly stressful conditions" (Smagorinsky, 2010, p. 289). Moreover, even though they usually do not have time to research the topic or revise their work, the on-demand writing test "taps only a subset of the academic skills and knowledge students need, and leaves no room for the technological tools that students increasingly use both in and outside of school" (Applebee & Langer, 2009, p. 26).

Without scrutiny, however, the SWW may continue to be routinely scheduled with little thought to its import or "learning potential" (Kennedy et al., 2008, p. 198) – especially worrisome, given the current state of writing and teaching.≈

The Current State of Writing Instruction and Assessment

Strong writing skills are vital for our students "living and learning at the nexus of the local and the global" (Bean & O'Brien, 2012, p. 276). Unfortunately, many students who are learning in less-than-optimal environments continue to show "persistent academic underperformance" (Fang & Coatoam, 2013, p. 627). Many scholars have also identified the need for improved writing instruction for students to succeed in their future workplace or academic environments (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Brimi, 2012; Gilbert & Graham, 2010; Graham, Gillespie, & McKeown, 2013; Lacina & Block, 2012). Additionally, the literature often describes the importance of preparing students to write for different purposes, audiences, and modalities while simultaneously maintaining that teachers are under prepared to teach writing (Brimi, 2012; Gilbert & Graham, 2010; Juzwik, 2010; McQuitty, 2012; Rowsell & Lapp, 2011; Smagorinsky, 2011). Sixty percent of Grades 4 to 6 teachers, for example, indicated feeling ill-prepared to teach writing (Gilbert & Graham, 2010) and 61% of their high-school counterparts

echoed these sentiments (Kihara, Graham, & Hawken, 2009). In addition, high school teacher candidates have almost no writing education. Instead, their time is usually centered on learning how to teach literature (Smagorinsky, 2011; Tremmel, 2001). These shortcomings also affect learning in the classroom.

Even though the English Language Arts 8 to 12 curriculum clearly encourages students “to experience the power of language by dealing with a range of texts and with the full range of contexts and purposes” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2007a, p. 3), writing practices do not always match such high expectations (Applebee & Langer, 2011). Currently, in the United States, for example, “little time is spent teaching writing to students beyond grade three, and students do little writing in or out of school for academic purposes” (Graham, Gillespie, & McKeown, 2013, p. 2). Furthermore, school writing assignments are generally short, averaging about a paragraph to a page each day (Lenhart, Arafeh, Smith, & Macgill, 2008). According to Applebee and Langer (2011), who studied 20 middle and high schools known for their superior writing programs across five states, interviewed 220 educators and 138 students, and surveyed 1,520 randomly selected teachers in the United States, the teacher, curiously, does the majority of the composing in today’s classrooms, where students are generally “left only to fill in missing information” (p. 26). In this detailed, comparative study of how writing instruction has changed since their last national study 30 years ago, Applebee and Langer (2011) determined that while educators now recognize writing’s importance in learning, unfortunately, students still spend most of a “typical” (p. 26) English class copying notes, summarizing chapters, or writing highly formulaic essays, instead of doing the hard work of composing; that is “analyzing text, using academic language, formulating and critiquing arguments, and trying on perspectives” (Snow &

Moje, 2010, p. 67). Moreover, because “[t]eenagers’ lives are filled with writing” (Lenhart et al., 2008, p. i), such critical literacy skills can help give them “agency, [and] the power to take action” (Janks, 2014, p. 1). Lamentably, as they eagerly embrace technology which incorporates or relies on print text, such as texting on Smartphones or playing certain video games, bringing 21st century writing tools into the classroom still presents a considerable challenge for schools; critiquing and diverse usages of technology are still uncommon (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Gouthro & Holloway, 2013; Graham et al., 2013).

Thus, in the span of an hour and throughout a term, English teachers – many of whom who are under the “regulative gaze of highly visible test results” (Ryan & Barton, 2014, p. 312) – busily have to marry pedagogically sound learning strategies with developmentally appropriate activities and resources (Calfee & Miller, 2012; Gardner, 2014; Parr & Timperley, 2010). Furthermore, their choices are influenced by teaching experience, prior knowledge, the sociocultural context, and conflicting ideas about how to teach writing (McQuitty, 2012; Peterson & McClay, 2011; Slomp, 2008; Smagorinsky, Cook, & Johnson, 2003) – all before wading into the “imperfect world” of assessing student work (White, 1995, p. 43).

Assessing Writing: From Theory to Practice

Teachers generally spend approximately 30% of their preparation and instruction time on assessment-related functions which may involve planning, assessing formatively and summatively, familiarizing themselves with rubrics or scoring keys, offering feedback to students, tracking student achievement, and helping them set goals (Chappuis, Stiggins, Chappuis, & Arter, 2012). Even though assessment can help teachers scaffold learning, communicate learning goals to students, and improve their abilities, for example, it is still often

associated with “onerous, dreadful tasks, providing little opportunity for teaching and learning” (Huot & Perry, 2009, p. 423). English teachers especially are said to be “relegated to the drudgery of reading and ‘correcting’ stacks and stacks of papers, semester after semester” rather than teaching writing (Huot & Perry, 2009, p. 429).

Huot and Perry (2009) also state that marking is perceived as a chore for other reasons as well. Not only do many teachers struggle with how best to assess written work, they may not know how to follow up (Bruno & Santos, 2010; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). On one level, teachers may be unsure of how to change student performance or apply student errors to subsequent lessons. Yet on a deeper level, teachers question how “to inspire students to think of themselves of writers... and to engage in writing with [a] sense of ownership or passion” (Williams, 2005, p. 155). Curiously, while writing instruction has evolved “as a coaching and enabling process,” assessment is still often seen as a technocratic, bureaucratic necessity, rather than a transformative tool (Huot, 2002, p. 164).

Unfortunately, the chronic disconnect between theoretically-based best practices in writing instruction and assessment for more than a century, continues to result in unsound practices (Behizadeh & Engelhard, 2011; Dutro et al., 2013; Huot, 2002; Juzwik, 2009; Parr, 2013). While writing tests are seemingly ubiquitous, “classroom-writing assessment remains under-researched, under-theorized, and underutilized as a legitimate and important part of teaching students how to write” (Huot & Perry, 2009, p. 423). For instance, Calfee and Miller (2012) suggest that within a process-oriented writing curriculum where formative assessment should elucidate how to build upon students’ strengths and goals, rather than their failures, tests should be “rare events” (p. 355; see also Inoue, 2014). Yet more than half of the middle schools

in my district, and many in British Columbia, Canada, and the United States have chosen to begin the school year with a “pseudoscientific, ... one-size-fits-all a-contextual test” (Williams, 2005, p. 156). Moreover, success during this potentially anxiety-ridden experience is often hinged more on the individual teachers’ choices and experience, rather than a collective goal and understanding of formative assessment (Calfee & Miller, 2013; Frey & Fisher, 2013; Timperley & Parr, 2009). Unfortunately, the writing/assessment divide will maintain its status quo unless educators first address the juxtaposition between their teaching practices against their stated beliefs and ideals (Brindley & Schneider, 2002).

The Challenge: Bridging 21st Century Principles of Writing Instruction and Assessment

A substantial amount of research identifies best practices in writing instruction and assessment (Calfee & Miller; Huot, 2002; Huot & Perry, 2009; Parr & Timperley, 2010; Peterson & McClay, 2010; Ryan & Barton, 2014; Smagorinsky, 2010a). Scholars emphasize critical and creative thinking within a process-based model of writing instruction (Smagorinsky, 2010b). These 21st century writing instruction and assessment principles are also echoed in British Columbia’s new English Language Arts curriculum (2013a, 2013b, 2013c). Filtered through the four “Big Ideas,” students are clearly directed to experience “meaning and joy..., rich diversity..., artistry,” and deepened understanding in language – a tall, if not impossible, order for the SWW (BC Ministry of Education, 2013c, para. 1, 2, & 4). Further, in the British Columbia Ministry of Education document, “Exploring Curriculum Design: Transforming Curriculum and Assessment” (2013a, 2013b, 2013c), personalizing learning and informing instruction are integral to the new goals. And even though these goals have been written about more than 20 years ago (e.g., Wiggins, 1993a, 1993b), *enactment* of process-oriented, open-ended, progressive assessment,

however, still depends largely upon educators' "deeply rooted" ideas about schooling and pedagogy (Smagorinsky, 2010b). Significantly, these tacit ideas often "[prevent] us from teaching students how to write" (Huot & Perry, 2009, p. 426).

Unfortunately, the SWW serves as an anachronistic reminder that schools are often "impervious to real, systemic change" (Smagorinsky, 2010a, p. 22). It has been documented that rather than implementing a "learner-centred, activity-oriented, inquiry-driven, and socially-mediated methods" that John Dewey also espoused as early as 1900, teachers often default to the more passive and rote approaches of a "transmission-oriented, mimetic, linear, authoritarian, fragmented" system that they themselves experienced as a child (Smagorinsky, 2010a, p. 300). Educators, who 'apprenticed' in a very authoritarian education system, often maintain an equally traditional, teacher-centered practice (Smagorinsky, 2010b). Their own values and beliefs often inhibit them from actualizing change even if the efforts "have a lasting impact on the practice of education" (Smagorinsky, 2010b, p. 29). Moreover, many educators are often "conflicted as they are caught among competing traditions" (Smagorinsky, 2010b, p. 28). It has been documented that "the culture of schools tends to 'wash out' what teachers learn in their university programs" (McQuitty, 2012, p. 259). New teachers, in fact, often feel pressured to "abandon the models of writing instruction they learned in teacher education and teach the prescriptive genres found on the test" (McQuitty, 2012, p. 359).

Various scholars do not believe that teachers are *unaware* of more progressive teaching and assessment methods, but that they are unwilling to let the power structure within the class be "legitimated, contested, and negotiated" (Willis et al., 2013). First and foremost, educators need to question their disjunctive beliefs and understanding in order to make a "culture

change” in the classroom (Parr & Timperley, 2010, p. 71). Not only will these changes open up the creative possibilities for writing, more importantly “valid, equitable assessment is a child’s right” (Willis et al., 2013, p. 252). Undoubtedly, it is an exciting and potentially innovative, yet challenging time to be an English teacher. Next I describe a theoretical framework through which I seek to understand, predict, and critique the values and beliefs surrounding how educators teach and assess the complex, recursive process of writing.

Theoretical Frameworks

Justifiably, many teachers sometimes have “little patience” with theory (Shepard, 2005, p. 10) within a busy, sometimes overburdened educational system (Hamp-Lyons, 2014; Shepard, 2008; Williams, 2005). According to Huot (2002), theory should have a practical element that enhances teaching and learning. It is hoped, however, that “big-picture understandings” (Shepard, 2005, p. 10) will lead to much-needed changes and innovation (Baker, Pearson, & Rozendal, 2010; Dreher, 2013; Huot, 2002; McQuitty, 2012; Shepard, 2005; Smagorinsky, 2011; Willis et al., 2013). Thus, I situate the SWW – an activity that incorporates writing development and instruction, and assessment – in the interrelated theoretical principles of social constructivism and multiliteracies.

Social Constructivism.

Leading social-constructivist Lev Vygotsky (1978) recognized that conceptual understanding is filtered through an “intersection of individuals, culture, and activity” (Englert et al., 2006, p. 208). Unlike its behaviourist predecessors who postulated that students accumulate information sequentially (Skinner, 1954), social constructivists view meaning making and learning as active and adaptive social experiences (Albert, Corea, & Macadino, 2012; Shepard, 2008). Because the

writing process cannot be reduced to a systematic teaching program, teachers must provide multiple ways for students to internalize, and then apply understanding (Marshall, 2004; Parr & Timperley, 2010). ‘Tools’ in the form of “instructions, explanations, modeling, and think-alouds” (Englert et al., 2006, p. 209) help students develop expertise “as a principled and coherent way of thinking and representing problems” (Shepard, 2008, pp. 6-7).

Vygotsky (e.g., 1978) and his contemporary, Bakhtin (e.g., 1981, 1986), also promoted writing as a way to “celebrate language through which human beings understand the world and themselves” (Schuster, 1997, p. 472). When students negotiate oral and written texts, for example, they develop a critical, recursive “inner speech” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57) that lays the “foundations of learning itself” (Halliday, 1993, p. 93). In this sense, writing is synonymous with thinking (Hillocks, 2002; Shepard, 2008; Spandel, 2013). A teacher’s central task, in fact, “is to set up situations and challenges that will encourage their pupils to relate new ideas and ways of thinking with existing understandings and expectations in order to modify them” (Barnes, 2008, p. 3). When teachers design curriculum that incorporates higher order cognitive skills such as composition, students and teachers can collaboratively construct meaning before, during, and after words are written on a page (Gipps, 2004; Parr & Timperley, 2010; Smagorinsky, 2007). When students interact and talk, for example, they consider other perspectives and collaboratively construct meaning (Bakhtin, 1986; Barnes, 2008; Smagorinsky, 2009). In this way, feedback does not “stand alone,” but can “trigger cognitive processing such as searching for relationships or developing knowledge to elaborate information” (Parr & Timperley, 2010, p. 69). Certainly, the people in the learning environment can influence the quality of instruction (Smagorinsky, 2009).

As “more knowledgeable others” (Gipps, 2004, p. 27), teachers also support students in the often “complicated, interesting, tantalizing, and difficult” process (Schultz & Fecho, 2000, p. 57) by scaffolding learning tasks within their zone of proximal development, or ZPD (Gipps, 2004; Hillocks, 2002; Powell & Kalina, 2009; Schultz & Fecho, 2000; Timperley & Parr, 2009). Here, in Vygotsky’s oft-referenced construct, teachers gauge a student’s learning and intended growth (Albert et al., 2012; Gipps, 2004) by comparing actual development level to a student’s potential (Gipps, 2004). With assistance from an expert, and sometimes through the use of technological or psychological tools that give direction on how to think, plan, and discuss, the ZPD shrinks, then changes as writing matures (Albert et al., 2012; Powell & Kalina, 2009). Students may use tangible graphic organizers to process their thoughts, or may engage in partner or small-group discussion, for example, to further understanding (Powell & Kalina, 2009). “[G]etting it” (Powell & Kalina, 2009, p. 244) means internalizing how to do a certain task, with or without assistance, then ultimately being able to transfer this knowledge to new contexts (Slomp, 2012). These scaffolds guide students toward mastery by shifting responsibility to the students and gradually decreasing the amount of assistance needed “to reshape knowledge to suit our evolving purposes” (Slomp, 2012, p. 82).

Social constructivism distinguishes itself from cognitive constructivism whereby understanding is not only an individual pursuit, but one that is mediated within meaningful social interactions (Powell & Kalina, 2009). When students write, they do so “to and through varied audiences and multiple contexts” that do not necessarily stem from their own primary Discourse (Dutro et al., 2013, p. 101). This “initial taken-for-granted understandings of who we are and who people ‘like us’ are” (Gee, 2012, p. 165) and “culturally distinctive way of being an

‘everyday’ person” is usually shaped early in life by their family of origin (p. 151). Then, as people grow up, they broaden and “hybridize” their initial identity kit (Gee, 2012, p. 151). Through enculturation, changing social roles, or finding a sense of belonging, individuals get themselves “in sync with various [and sometimes new] objects, tools, places, technologies and other people” (Gee, 2012, p. 152). Certainly, educators note the wide range of diversity of “words, deeds, attitudes, props ... and values” (Gee, 2011, p. 123) within any given classroom as they teach countless unique individuals, including (but not limited to) video gamers, gifted students, struggling writers, skateboarders, or international students. Because students communicate who they are through “ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing” (Gee, 2011, p. 3), Discourse is “always more than just language” (Gee, 2012, p. 151). People also use “behaviour, values, and beliefs to give a different shape to their experience” (Gee, 2012, p. 170). In addition, they perceive and identify with subtle or overt power and social relationships (Janks, 2014).

The role of context cannot be understated. First and foremost, within the recursive writing process, students have to negotiate their particular “discourse community,” while they also contend with genre, subject matter, and the effective use of language (Slomp, 2012, p. 87). Thus, the participants, curriculum, institution, issues, and audiences ultimately drive a student’s definition of “good writing” (Slomp, 2012, p. 87; see also Calfee & Miller, 2012; Huot, 2002). Over time, “[g]ood writers learn to analyze and respond in their writing to the expectations of the particular communities that form their audience” (Slomp, 2012, p. 87). For some, however, being able to “reshape” their experience is very challenging, especially when writing formal essays (Gee, 2012). Success often hinges upon tailoring assessment to “individual classroom

situations” (Calfee & Miller, 2012, p. 368) and bridging in and out of school literacies (Haddix, 2012).

Frequently, though, academic (or “reportive, linear, ‘the facts’”) discourse is privileged over other linguistic styles, leaving students to fail at school (Gee, 2012, p. 145). Too often, students, especially those in marginalized ethnic groups or lower classes, are “oppressed through literacy” (Gee, 2012, p. 77; see also Haddix, 2012; Inoue, 2014; Slomp et al., 2014; Williams, 2005).

Solutions are complex, but begin with teachers illuminating student strengths, such as their “ready access to a personal repository of ideas, examples, perspectives, and other needed information for writing” (Peterson, 2014, p. 502). They also need to incorporate socially- and culturally-empowering curriculum so that creative ideas can emerge and transform from social interactions using language and other semiotic systems (Peterson, 2012). Lastly, effective writing instruction and assessment requires time (Williams, 2005).

Thus, I now explore how our increasing cultural and communicational connectivity confirms that writing is “broad, multifaceted, situated, contextual, and resistant to a monolithic, stable definition” (Slomp, 2012, p. 81; see also Lotherington & Jenson, 2011; Rowsell & Lapp, 2011).

Multiliteracies.

In 1994, a group of 10 eminent scholars met in New London, New Hampshire to discuss how literacy education could be reimagined in the context of globalization (New London Group, 1996). Two years later, they published results that described how writing was changing; as we now know, it happens all day, and in multiple contexts and modes (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; New London Group, 1996; Schultz & Fecho, 2000). Not only are digital technologies seamlessly integrated into much of daily life in Canada (and elsewhere), their importance constantly gains

momentum as they evolve and continue to connect us globally and locally. The “alphabetic world” (Lotherington & Jenson, 2011, p. 226) is now being subsumed by a more contemporary definition of ‘text’ that encompasses “books, films, music, art, clothing, spoken language, architectural designs, landscapes, and other human products” (Burroughs & Smagorinsky, 2009, p. 171) – a reality that adolescents readily and fluidly accept in their composing practices (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Kiili et al., 2013; Rowsell & Lapp, 2011). ‘Authors,’ furthermore, also include those who create video game narratives (Gee, 2003, 2005), or message and text in a discourse unique to adolescents (Turner, 2012). Certainly, when identity is seen as “[enacting] in and through language,” then multiliteracies are not separate from what contemporary adolescents see, do, are, and believe (Gee, 2011, p. 30).

Yet, while digital technologies are part of most adolescents’ day-to-day existence, they still generally take “a back seat in the classroom” (Lotherington & Jenson, 2011, p. 227). Here, students are usually restricted to a “static, linear, paper-based” form of communication that, more accurately, may be referred to as ‘composition’ (Lotherington & Jenson, 2011, p. 227). It is no exaggeration to say that education is experiencing “a profound shift” in how we view writing and assessment (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 172). Given the ubiquity and instantaneity of images and information, students need to be multiliterate and develop “the capacity to speak up, to negotiate, and to be able to engage critically” in their present environment where they readily make meaning from visual, audio, spatial, behavioural, and gestural modes with little prompting from teachers (New London Group, 1996, p. 67; see also Lotherington & Jenson, 2011).

In this digital age, defined by new and powerful ways to view texts and “seemingly limitless volumes of information” (Gainer, 2012, p. 15), more than ever perhaps, students need to learn

how to arrive at the 'correct' "version of 'the truth'" (Janks, Dixon, Ferreira, Granville, & Newfield, 2014, p. 1). As Bakhtin (1984) and Freire (1985, 2012) both postulated, the notion of 'truth' is highly politicized and context-dependent. And even though schools provide a natural venue where students can simultaneously develop technical and critical thinking skills, they are rarely afforded the latter opportunity in school. Not only do print literacies continue to dominate, but also the majority of technology use is focused around technical, rather than critical digital literacy (Lotherington & Jenson, 2011, p. 228). In aforementioned study of writing instruction in the United States, for example, Applebee and Langer (2011) reported finding only "isolated" use of the computer beyond its ability to function as a "powerful typewriter" for word processing (p. 22). Furthermore, their data revealed that computers were rarely used in conjunction with audio, visual, or graphics for such activities as social networking, animating, or video production, unless the teacher used them in his or her "presentation" (Applebee & Langer, 2011, p. 26).

Scholars lament that there is an apparent "confusion over goals" (Warschauer, 2008, p. 1) whereby literacy education over-emphasizes high test scores over civic engagement and future success in higher education or employment possibilities (Gainer, 2012; Warschauer, 2008). Curiously, in a time when scholars suggest that contemporary teaching and learning should "reflect [a] culture of flexibility, creativity, innovation and initiative" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 170), a review of the literature reveals that tests like the SWW ignore emergent forms of digital writing and multiliteracies (Burroughs & Smagorinsky, 2009; McClay & Peterson, 2013; Slomp et al., 2014; Smagorinsky, 2010; Turner & Hicks, 2012). Indeed, my school district's practices illustrate this shortcoming. While educators have not expressly disallowed students from using

computers for the SWW, none of the administrators or English Language Arts teachers who were interviewed for this project reported utilizing this resource. And even though most teachers regularly incorporate word processing when students draft or publish writing (Gainer, 2012), the SWWs that I have administered in the past were strictly “graphite-based” (Newkirk, 2009, p. 4). But the limitations do not stop there.

In the (recent) past, timed writing tests have usually been limited to expository or persuasive essays, over other genres such as fiction, poetry, drama, and visual media (Brimi, 2012; Hillocks, 2003; Slomp et al., 2014; Smagorinsky, 2010), thus restricting ways for students to express themselves as a writer and privileging more academic forms of writing (Gee, 2011). Moreover, if students are viewed as “designers of meaning,” then “[m]eaning-making is about choosing and assembling resources in relation to individual desire as well as perceptions of audience and context” (Stein & Newfield, 2009, p. 8). Curiously, even though curricula in Canada and the United States expressly indicate that students write for many purposes, such as “to inform, persuade, entertain, respond, instruct, describe or explain and to relate to, move, inspire, motivate, up-skill or gain support from a range of audiences” (Ryan & Barton, 2014, pp. 311-312), writing tests usually necessitate “fitting ideas into rigid forms such as the five-paragraph theme” (Smagorinsky, 2010, p. 28).

Additionally, even when students are asked to write personal narratives, they are often evaluated based upon the criteria for highly structured essays (Hillocks, 2002). Students quickly learn that higher marks stem from “post-enlightenment rationality, objectivity and scientific thinking, [and] alphabetic forms and writing” (Stein & Newfield, 2009, p. 6). As was previously indicated, such writing represents only a small part of the English Language Arts draft curriculum

that aims to offer “a broad definition of text in different forms, including oral, visual, written, and digital” (BC Ministry of Education, 2013c, “English Language Arts Overview,” para. 3).

Unfortunately, starting the school year with the SWW conveys to students that quality writing has a very narrow focus – and one that does not necessarily engage a student’s interest or strengths.

In conclusion, theory helps make sense of the conflicting demands put on teachers. By examining the SWW through sociocultural and multiliterate frameworks, we can better understand the integral role that process and context play for students in the 21st century. Without them, the relevancy and learning potential of the SWW are theoretically and – as the literature further demonstrates – pedagogically unfounded.

The Writing Process: Genius, Perseverance, or Luck?

Fundamentally, attempting to measure writing ability during a one-hour test does little to honour the complex writing process or instill a passion for writing (Behizadeh & Engelhard, 2011; Calfee & Miller, 2012; Peterson, 2014; Williams, 2005). Consider the analogy in *The Writing Life* by Pulitzer Prize winning author, Annie Dillard (1989), where she describes writing process as an active, systematic, yet spirited process where authors “keep cranking the flywheel that turns the gears that spin the belt in the engine of belief that keeps you and your desk in midair” (p. 11). To say that writing development is complex is indeed an understatement (Gilbert & Graham, 2010; Graham et al., 2013; Hillocks, 2003; Parr & Timperley, 2010; Schultz & Fecho, 2000). Quite colourfully, it has been referred to an “eelish notion” (Haswell, 1991, p. 18) that is “nettlesome” to teach, especially for beginning teachers (Smagorinsky, 2011, p. 262). Additionally, Spandel and Stiggins (1997) muse about whether writing requires “genius,

perseverance, [or] luck” (p. 100). Researchers generally agree that writing is no longer presented as a “sequence of skills, [but] a cognitive activity that involve[s] poetic and transactional language and the interaction of social conditions and the individual minds” (Schultz & Fecho, 2000, p. 54; see also Albertson & Marwitz, 2001; Gilbert & Graham, 2010; Graham, Gillespie, & McKeown, 2013; Huot, 2002; Parr & Timperley, 2010; Peterson, McClay, & Main, 2012; Smagorinsky, 2005, 2011).

Perhaps the most well-known process-oriented approach to teaching writing is the ‘writers’ workshop’ (Atwell, 1998; Calkins, 1983; Graves, 1983), whereby teachers offer personalized and individualized writing instruction through minilessons, conferences, and “teachable moments” (Graham & Sandmel, 2011, p. 397). A “sizeable minority” of elementary and secondary teachers use this approach, and more than 100,000 teachers worldwide are given professional development through the National Writing Project (NWP) each year on how to use it (Graham & Sandmel, 2011, p. 396). Proponents strive to facilitate students in writing on self-selected topics for authentic audiences. Writing is seen as a recursive process of prewriting, drafting, feedback, revising, editing, and publishing (Atwell, 1998; Calkins, 1983; Graves, 1983; Hillocks, 2002). In a recent analysis of the writing curricula of all Canadian provinces, Peterson (2012) found that this approach is the most dominant in Canada.

Some researchers have challenged some of the individualistic, “natural” (Hillocks, 1986, p. 123) assumptions and practices of the writers’ workshop approach (Englert et al., 2006; Hillocks, 1984; 1986; Peterson & McClay, 2012; Smagorinsky, 2009; Smagorinsky, Johannessen, Kahn, & McCann, 2010). While they generally concur that it is a recursive process from planning to publishing, these authors also advocate for more explicit instruction of writing strategies.

Furthermore, Peterson and McClay (2012) critique the writers' workshop for having overly "Romantic views" of the individual writer at work that does not take into account the multiple and diverse needs of today's students (p. 87; see also Smagorinsky, 2009). Teachers using the 'structured process' (Hillocks, 1984; 1986; Smagorinsky et al., 2010) design activities around "understanding the purpose, content, and form of written discourse" (Englert et al., 2006, p. 209). They plan and lead inquiry units, then explicitly teach specific writing strategies, incorporate dialogic teaching, and review the criteria from which students will be assessed (Graham & Perrin, 2007; Smagorinsky et al., 2010).

Even though there are "fissures and differences within the research on writing" (Juzwik, 2009, p. 272), proponents of the process-oriented approaches recognize that students need to set goals, work together with peers and experts (Englert et al., 2006), emulate powerful writing, and represent ideas using multiliteracies (Alvermann, 2009; Graham & Perrin, 2007).

The Writing Process and Writing Tests

Decidedly, teaching writing demands a high level of expertise and decision-making. In fact, using the 'process discourse' (Ivanič, 2004) requires that effective teachers "need more knowledge than an average, competent adult writer" (Parr & Timperley, 2010, p. 71). Firstly, they need to have a comprehensive understanding of language, and also be able to impart to students "how texts work to achieve their communicative, rhetorical purposes," processes that are often implicit and "below conscious thought" (Parr & Timperley, 2009, p. 71). Unfortunately, in many classrooms, instruction remains dominated by studying and practicing a highly formulaic structure, such as the five-paragraph essay (and related subtopics, such as paragraphing, elements of style, and grammar) (Brimi, 2012; Frey & Fisher, 2013; Graham &

Harris, 2013; Graham et al., 2013; Hillocks, 2002, 2005; Lacina & Block, 2012; Parr & Timperley, 2010; Slomp et al., 2014; Smagorinsky, 2011). This highly structured 'genre' approach "often assumes a mechanical texture" and step-by-step progression where writers do not necessarily engage in metacognitive strategies or attune themselves with the audience (Ryan & Barton, 2014, p. 305).

Given the complexity of writing, scholars have documented that impromptu writing tests, such as the SWW, often result in "predictable and dull [writing] with few students taking risks" (Petersen, 2009, p. 179). With the goal of examining writing "within the competing and often contradictory spaces of high-stakes testing," (p. 302), Ryan and Barton (2014) suggest that students exhibit "limited dramatic or resonant voice" because they have little invested in quick writes (p. 313). In interviews with the 12 students in the multiple, parallel case study conducted by Ryan and Barton (2014), students reported that they rarely had enough time to "write creatively" (p. 313). Furthermore, the authors estimated that when students construct a response for the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), a standardized test given to students in years 3, 5, 7, and 9 in Australia, they spend approximately 5 minutes planning, 30 minutes writing, and 5 minutes editing. This process "does not allow time for deep reflection on one's relationship with the topic, or interrogation and research of the subject matter" (Ryan & Barton, 2014, p. 306). Likewise, in British Columbia, while the E.L.A. curriculum encourages students to be "linguistically, rhetorically, and aesthetically sophisticated," a writing test does not usually afford students enough time to create a piece with such complexity (Ryan & Barton, 2014, p. 321).

Interestingly, complexity is also lacking in *how* educators ask students to compose during the SWW. Traditionally, writing compositions has meant putting pen to paper, or lately, word processing, also described as “the complex task of taking raw ideas and representing them on screen as a string of words with syntax” (Stapleton, 2010, p. 295). The latter case, as I previously indicated, is rarely used for quick writes, and is typically reserved for producing research papers or narratives over several weeks (Stapleton, 2010). The SWW, therefore, continues to hinder students from embracing not only “emerging technologies [that] create new, compelling possibilities for textual production,” but also word processing, that has been used in English classes for decades (Fulwiler & Middleton, 2012, p. 39). Emblematically, today’s students are caught in a ‘convergence culture’ (Jenkins, 2006), where society is “caught up in a whirlwind of change as old and new media renegotiate their functions” (Fulwiler & Middleton, 2012, p. 39). Instead of opening up new ways to write and represent, however, the SWW anachronistically (and needlessly) maintains rigid ways to compose. If students adhere to Flower and Hayes’ (1981) three main phases of composing, namely “planning, translating, and reviewing” (p.369), it readily adapts and applies to other modalities, such as video and digital writing.

Furthermore, in the current “new media era” (Fulwiler & Middleton, 2012, p. 40), teachers should also employ a more comprehensive and rigorous way to assess writing proficiency (Ryan & Barton, 2014). They recommend that, “a thirdspace of writing pedagogy and assessment is needed to capture the complexities of writing development” (Ryan & Barton, 2014, p. 325). While the scope of this project does not encompass a thorough study of thirdspace, it will suffice to say that it urges educators and students “to resist, subvert, and reimagine the real- and imagined spaces... [found in] everyday realities and hegemonic ideologies” (Soja, 1996, as

cited in Ryan & Barton, 2014, p. 309). Here, educators not only move away from focusing on stylistic conventions, but also recognize their students' diverse linguistic backgrounds and help them build a writerly identity and voice (Ryan & Barton, 2014). Other scholars (e.g., Huot & Perry, 2009; Slomp, 2012; Wardle & Roozen, 2012) also promote collecting a breadth of ethnographic information from portfolios and revised work, conducting conferences, and facilitating reflections to get a more "fuller, richer" understanding of writing development (Wardle & Roozen, 2012, p. 106). Certainly Hillocks (2002, 2003), a vocal critic of standardized testing, has long maintained that responding to a prompt under test conditions inhibits not only determining what students know and are capable of doing, but also critical, creative thinking.

Furthermore, within a Vygotskian framework, when students have to quickly produce an organized, succinct first draft, the resulting product usually represents less inventive, artistic, and creative *thinking* (Brimi, 2012; Nielsen, 2002; Slomp et al, 2014; Smagorinsky, 2010; Weigle, 2007). If teachers use the process approach in their classrooms, where they teach students to "[w]rite a first draft as though you were thinking aloud, not carving a monument" (O'Conner, 1999, p. 38), then the writing produced during a SWW would be more similar to Barnes' (1976/1992, 2008) notion of 'exploratory talk' than organized, lucid prose ready "to meet an assessor's approval" (Smagorinsky, 2013, p. 194). The literature supports giving students additional opportunities, such as dialogic instruction (through partner-talk or peer assessment, for example), to move "inchoate thinking into a public, articulated form, [so] the thinking itself may undergo change" (Smagorinsky, 2013, p. 194; see also Peterson & McClay, 2010). Even writers' workshop founder, Nancie Atwell (1998) admits she is "not a good first-draft writer" (Atwell, 1998, p. 92). But with enough "time to think, rethink, wander around my garden, make

a cup of tea, talk with others, reread, revise, and polish, and chances are I can produce something halfway coherent” (Atwell, 1998, p. 92).

Thus, writing presented as “a more mature thinking process” (Brimi, 2012, p. 54) rather than a mimetic, prescriptive product-centered approach, becomes a cognitive tool (Behizadeh & Engelhard, 2011; Smagorinsky, 2013) rather than a potentially stressful and meaningless (and hence, invalid) exam that is not used to improve instruction (Camp, 2012; Frey & Fisher, 2013; Huot, 2002; Shepard, 2008; Spandel, 2013). As theorists have postulated, if writing development is viewed as cognition, “isolating students from the world, having them effectively quarantined while they write” ignores what gains scholars have made with reference to increasing learning opportunities within a sociocultural context (Spandel, 2013, p. 389; see also Camp, 2012; Parr, 2013; Slomp et al., 2014).

Various scholars recommend a movement away from this “obsession” with teaching the form of writing (Hillocks, 2005, p. 238; see also Albertson & Marwitz, 2001; Petersen, 2009; Peterson & McClay, 2010; Smagorinsky, 2011). Proponents, however, justify this rigid practice as a way to prepare students to write impromptu essays for such gateway experiences as high school graduation or college entrance (Gregg et al., 2007; Weigle, 2002). In the next section I discuss why ‘teaching to the test’ serves to appropriate, rather than support, the writing process.

Teaching to the Writing Test

Behizadeh and Engelhard’s (2011) retrospective of writing and assessment in the 20th century clearly illustrated that the weak link between writing instruction and assessment hinders effective writing development. When viewed more as a skill than a complex process done within an authentic social context, writing results in “hollow essay forms whose content is

virtually irrelevant” (Smagorinsky, 2010a, p. 295). Furthermore, writing subskills (such as lexical complexity, verbosity, and even proper spelling and handwriting) have been shown to “contribute to students’ performance on impromptu essay writing” (Gregg et al., 2007, p. 306). Often, the students lacking these skills have writing disorders or are English Language Learners (ELLs). Other scholars argue that instead of teaching students “to succeed in constrained writing situations” by improving their test-writing skills, educators should re-examine their assessment practices (Worden, 2009, p. 176), especially since many educators “lack expertise and experience in evaluating writing samples” (Gregg et al., 2007, p. 315).

In a two-part experiment whose key objective was to determine the reliability and validity of rubrics, Rezaei and Lovorn (2010) asked 108 education students, and 72 business and marketing graduates to use a rubric to mark an essay written by a hypothetical student in an advanced social studies class. This writing sample contained 20 mechanical, structural, spelling, and grammar errors, but addressed all parts of the prompt when compared against the rubric. As the authors anticipated, the participants were swayed by the writer’s spelling errors and grammar mistakes, and routinely assigned a low overall score. Surprisingly, however, the raters also awarded the essay on globalization a low score on “understanding and synthesis of argument” and “understanding the goals and implications of globalization” (Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010, p. 27). One explanation offered by the researchers for these consistent results was that, alas, “[r]aters often sacrifice validity for reliability, insight for efficiency, and authenticity for easier scoring” (Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010, p. 28). They cautioned that teachers should first receive training on how to use rubrics so that it is not reduced to “little more than a checklist” (Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010, p. 21; see also Huot, 2002). In addition, they suggested gathering

various samples of writing in a portfolio “instead of a one-day or one-time (snapshot) writing sample” (Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010, p. 29). Ultimately, superficial and trivial errors made on essay tests decrease test scores, and unfortunately, further obstruct accurate, complete answers from getting the high marks they deserved.

Notably, when students learn that critical thinking, creativity, and autonomy is less important than mechanical correctness, they strategically “play it safe and attempt, like an obstacle course, to ‘get through’ the [writing] test relatively unscathed” (Petersen, 2009, p. 192; see also Ryan & Barton, 2014; Williams, 2005). Better would be to offer them more opportunities to authentically practice the craft of writing, which is usually a “messy and time-consuming process” (Worden, 2009, p. 165). Most educators, therefore “feel that it is counterproductive to assess students on a single draft of a paper, especially on an impromptu topic that students may not have had time to think about” (Weigle, 2007, pp. 199 & 201).

To further examine the writing process during timed writing tests, Worden (2009) coded 890 college-level essays and learned that even though students were not prompted to revise (just pre-write), 85% of them engaged in at least low-level prewriting *and* revision. She also found other “interesting and surprising trends” (Worden, 2009, p. 164) such as the correlation of substantial prewriting with higher scores. Those students who heavily revised their work, however, received lower scores, and conversely, those who did not revise at all received a higher score. The presence of prewriting, but more specifically “the absence of revision” was the key predictor of success (Worden, 2009, p. 164). Thus, she determined that students learn “that revision is a good thing,” *except* during timed writes (p. 175). Because this message contradicts the idea that revising (or making changes to the main text of the essay) usually contributes to

more developed and polished essays, Worden (2009) concluded that these tests are “so restricted as to be rendered impossible” (p. 161) and hence “out of sync” (p. 175) with the process-paradigm of teaching writing. Teaching to the test, therefore, continues to be a much-debated issue especially when large-scale testing is the preferred indication of writing proficiency.

Fortunately, unlike their American counterparts, Canadian teachers do not generally function within a reward-based system where assessment has become “a key policy lever for improving education” (Koh, 2011, p. 255). In British Columbia, for example, teachers are required to administer two provincial tests each year: the Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) in Grades 4 and 7, and the Graduation Program Provincial Examinations (GPPE) in Grades 10, 11, and 12 (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2007a), but schools are not penalized for low scores, as they were under the *No Child Left Behind* policy in the United States (Rush & Scherff, 2012). Now, US teachers are held accountable through a competitive grant program called *Race to the Top* (Weiss, 2014). The process, however, has also been seen to be “deeply flawed” because those schools having difficulty meeting basic educational needs are not even eligible to apply for the much-needed monetary rewards (for such categories, curiously, as improving low-achieving schools or teaching excellence) (Weiss, 2014, p. 65). Furthermore, numerous educators (e.g., Bromley, 2011; Hillocks, 2002, 2003, 2005; Koh, 2011; Marshall, 2009; Newkirk, 2009; Rush & Scherff, 2012; Slomp, 2012) have reported how teachers in the US “spend hours teaching students only those things they know will be tested, having students memorize facts, drilling students on test-taking strategies, and rehearsing test protocols” (Ryan & Barton, 2014, p. 306). In older grades, teaching to year-end standardized tests, for example, continues to

prevent educators from fully adopting and implementing sociocultural practices (Klenowski, 2011; Hillocks, 2002; Slomp, 2008; Smagorinsky, 2009).

While the SWW is not a summative, high-stakes test, lessons can be learned from Slomp's (2008) work with three Canadian Grade 12 English teachers. He demonstrated how closed-book, no-discussion-allowed writing tests negatively (and routinely) affected the socially-mediated learning process (see also Barton & Ryan, 2014; Hillocks, 2002; Marshall, 2009; Parr, 2013; Rush & Scherff, 2012). Slomp (2008) concluded that when instruction culminates with standardized testing, teachers feel pressured to use product-oriented methods – at the expense of their pedagogical principles. Over a period of time, conflicted teachers are often forced to choose between teaching to the test, delivering a process-oriented approach, or trying to do a combination of both. Slomp's (2008) study demonstrated that writing instruction and assessment practices are still in conflict and thus, often result in a “narrowing of curriculum, over reliance on test preparation materials, unethical test preparation practice, unfair use of test results, unintended bias against population subgroups, increased tension and frustration in schools, increased grade retention, and regression in pedagogical practice” (p. 181).

Weigle (2007), however, views large-scale writing assessments as “a fact of life,” especially in many high schools and colleges (p. 201). Certainly, successful “essay-text literacy” can lead to “social mobility and success in society” (Gee, 2012, p. 76). Weigle (2007) also cites being able to assess students' abilities without outside influence or help by others as a more reliable way to gauge ability. Detractors, however, worry that essay tests penalize “slow thinkers” – an injustice, considering that some of the most brilliant scholars, such as Albert Einstein and Charles Darwin, needed extra time to process their ideas (Graves, 2002, p. 34). Furthermore,

Sullivan and Nielsen (2009) questioned one-shot writing samples as an accurate or fair method for determining placement into college. After these researchers studied the data from “a robust sample” of student college assessment essays (Sullivan & Nielsen, 2009, p. 2), they concluded that more fair determinants of ability could be derived from a longitudinal assessment process “over the course of several months” where students can demonstrate ability in a variety of ways based upon their preferred learning styles and choices they are given” (p. 7).

The question of how best to evaluate writing assessments has been disputed for more than a century (Behizadeh & Engelhard, 2011; Condon, 2012; Huot & Perry, 2009; Knoch, 2011; Llosa et al., 2011). Since composition tests based on prompts became widely used as part of the Harvard entrance exams in the mid-1870s, “even experienced teachers of writing will disagree strongly over whether a given piece of writing is good or not, or which of two writing samples is better” (Charney, 1984, p. 67; see also Behizadeh & Engelhard, 2011; Brereton, 2011; Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010; White, 1995). The next section examines another “divide” within the testing literature, namely the divide between reliable and valid assessment theories and practices (Behizadeh & Engelhard, 2011, p. 206).

Validity and Reliability

When teachers grade tests such as the SWW, their assessment procedures can affect reliability and validity, two much-contested terms that first need defining (Baldwin, 2012; Slomp, 2012). Reliability examines “the consistency of the measurement” (Baldwin, 2012, p. 328), namely whether it can be depended on to measure writing proficiency in the same way. It has been associated with fairness (Condon, 2012) and ethics (White, 2012). Validity refers to whether “the assessment measures what it is intended to measure” (Baldwin, 2012, p. 328). It

has been associated with honesty (Condon, 2012) and meaningfulness (White, 2012). Validity is also “based on the purpose(s) of an assessment and how effectively the interpretation and use of the results serve each purpose” (Stobart, 2012, p. 234).

On-demand writes have been found to be problematic because they are essentially a “one-question test” (White, 1995, p. 141), where students’ answers may not accurately reflect their skills or ability (Coates & Siefert, 2011). When the prompts are too hard or outside of students’ schema, they may complain that it “wasn’t fair” (Baldwin, 2012, p. 329), but often it is a question of reliability. If students were given an easier prompt, for example, it is assumed that they would have received a better score and that all students would find it to be easier to score more highly (Baldwin, 2012). The assessment of a student's ability, especially during an on-demand write, however, should not depend on the writer’s familiarity with the selected topic (Charney, 1984; Hillocks, 2003). When the student has little background knowledge, tests like the SWW do not accurately measure writing proficiency, and the test’s validity is very low (Baldwin, 2012).

Furthermore, the quality of the writing prompts can affect the quality of the response (He & Shi, 2012). Hillocks (2003) illustrates how unwittingly complex they can be. If students need to explain where the best place to live is, for example, they first need to generate the important qualities of excellent living, then weigh and justify them. Students then have to further consider the philosophical dimensions of said qualities and place them on a quantitative or qualitative scale. From there, they have to demonstrate how each city will be judged against criteria of excellence (Hillocks, 2003). Apropos, Hillocks (2003) then challenges educators: “given that complexity, would it be possible for you to write a carefully considered response in forty

minutes?” (p. 67). Furthermore, He and Shi (2012) caution that if writing prompts are not general enough, students may require “particular cultural or subject-specific knowledge” (p. 444) and deem the test ‘unfair,’ especially for English Language Learners (Inoue, 2014). Writing assignments that are integrated into units of study, conversely, provide a context and time for students to brainstorm, problem-solve, and share ideas with peers and educators (He & Shi, 2012). During a quick-write, students have only enough time to edit their work superficially, thus further compromising the validity of the test (Slomp, 2011).

Certainly this creative process of negotiating and synthesizing ideas into original, thoughtful prose is made easier when a writer enjoys their topic (Peterson, 2014). After interviewing nine Canadian and American award-winning authors and illustrators about what “views of writing underpin the curriculum objectives” (p. 499), Peterson (2014) noted that they “can be best met when students feel the sense of commitment to writing that comes when following their passions, feeding their curiosity, and sharing their writing with others” (p. 496). When students write about what interests them, they more readily “identify and lay claim to their own interests, concerns, and areas of expertise” (Atwell, 1998, p. 120). Not only are students intrinsically motivated to write creative, detailed prose, but also they are inspired to challenge themselves to write about topics that may be new to them (Peterson, 2014). Furthermore, “identity and literacy come together” (Williams, 2005, p. 154) when students start to realize that writing can be used in many powerful ways, including inspiring social change (Graham & Harris, 2012).

Often under a “pretense of objectivity” (Williams, 2005, p. 156), however, assessing the SWW is not truly able to capture the “satisfaction and joy” of writing, and may once again,

inaccurately reflect a student's true ability (Peterson, 2014, p. 500). The SWW is marked either holistically or analytically, much like the classic college entrance essay, where it is based upon a rater's interpretation of the work (Kelly-Riley, 2012). When scoring analytically, teachers usually use a multiple-trait rubric to break down assessment according to the BC Writing Performance Standards (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2009) categories: Meaning, Style, Form, and Conventions (p. 311; K. Andrews, personal communication, Jan. 21, 2014). Over the years, I have also worked at schools where SWWs were marked holistically; that is "scorers do not quantify strengths and weaknesses but rather give a score based on their first impression of the overall quality of the writing" (Baldwin, 2004, p. 73). Holistic scoring is said to generate a less reliable (i.e., more subjective) score and be less valid because teachers cannot accurately judge the quality or content of the writing with only a single score (Behizadeh & Engelhard, 2011; Calfee & Miller, 2012). In addition, in terms of the writing process, holistic scoring is product- rather than process-oriented because teachers examine the total performance, rather than separate criteria (such as meaning, style, form, and conventions). Interestingly, when teachers use rubrics with multiple traits (to mark analytically), these tools can also be imprecise, causing teachers to formulate an overall impression by the first trait (Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010). Even though rubrics are used "regularly and confidently" and have not been shown to decrease reliability, they do have limitations (Rezaei & Lovorn, 2011, p. 19).

Rubrics: Strengths and Limitations

Rubrics were initially adopted in an effort to 'level the playing field' and increase the chances that students' writing would be awarded similar scores if graded by different markers. Indeed, in a comprehensive review of the literature on the use of rubrics, Panadero and Jonsson (2013)

noted that these tools have the potential to mediate improved writing abilities since they clearly outline the expectations and criteria of a writing assignment, which, incidentally, also helps lower student anxiety (Panadero & Jonsson, 2013). Rubrics do not, however, guarantee reliability, and in fact, may again lay “false claims to objectivity” especially when they are inadequate or used by teachers who have never used them before (Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010, p. 19; see also Peterson & McClay, 2010). Furthermore, because writing is a socially- and culturally-negotiated practice, “a one-size-fits-all rubric arguably has limited utility for classroom use” (Parr, 2013, p. 495).

In the aforementioned study conducted by Rezaei and Lovorn (2010) to determine whether marking matrices improved reliability of the assessment of students’ written responses to a prompt, the authors also asked 71 education graduates, and 85 business and marketing graduates (from a total sample of 326 participants) to assess a writing sample that contained certain types of errors. As described previously, the essay written by the same fictional essay writer in an advanced social studies class (and prepared by the researchers) contained 20 mechanical, grammar, spelling, and structural errors, but it fully and “eloquently” answered the given question (Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010, p. 23). Without any other information, the graduates marked the essay first without, then with the help of a rubric. Surprisingly, Rezaei and Lovorn (2010) found that the raters (especially those from the college of education) consistently awarded this essay, with poor ‘C.O.P.S.’ (i.e., capitalization, organization, punctuation, and spelling), but accurate details and ideas, a low overall score.

The age-old question of how to define ‘good writing’ also came up during the last co-marking session of the SWW at my school. Regardless of the educators’ breadth and depth of

experience, we also debated whether quality derived more from the meaning (i.e., insight and complex analysis) and style (i.e., the impact of the language), or rather, conventions (i.e., the mechanics) and organization (i.e., form) (V. Roberts, personal communication, Feb. 15, 2014). We still remain divided on the issue, and may continue to be without any more explicit training on how best to use rubrics for marking writing tests. Problems with valid and reliable assessment, however, are further compounded by numerous, often-external judgments.

Assessment Subjectivity and Rater Bias

Clearly, assessment is not a neutral process (Peterson & McClay, 2010); numerous immaterial aspects have been shown to influence evaluators (Spandel, 2013). Students with better handwriting or writing mechanics, for example, routinely outperform other students who may display similar content (Lovett, Lewandowski, Berger, & Gathje, 2010; Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010; Spandel, 2013). Interestingly, teachers tend to focus on marking surface conventions, rather than meaning or ideas for first draft writing, such as the SWW (Huot & Perry, 2009; Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010). Frequently longer writing samples are mistakenly deemed to be higher quality even though the “ability to condense is often a virtue” (Spandel, 2013, p. 18). Other teachers make a judgment about the writing after skimming only the first few lines. Some evaluators who enjoy the topic they are reading about will inflate the final mark (Spandel, 2013).

Additionally, the challenges with reliability and validity are not limited to the writing itself, but interpersonal relationships. Sometimes teachers judge the student, not the work and “[f]ailure becomes messily intertwined with students’ and teachers’ conflicting ideological stances as much as with teachers’ phenomenological reading practices that may presuppose error” (Inoue, 2014, p. 333). Unjustifiably, even the physical attractiveness of a student has

affected scoring. Furthermore, sometimes teachers penalize those students who do not use academic discourse to write, especially students of colour, working-class students, and multilingual students (Inoue, 2014). Additionally, some teachers may have a long list of pet peeves, such as clichés or abbreviated text-speak (Spandel, 2013; Turner, 2012), and some may respond negatively to profanity or violence. Moreover, when the evaluators themselves are consistently strict or lenient, or outright inconsistent, they sway results (Baldwin, 2012).

Fortunately, the revised 2013 BC curriculum has made important changes to try to address the interrelationships between stakeholders and educators. While these innovations lead, ideally, to insightful writing, where students have helped to set criteria and design inquiries, as well as assess their own and peers' work, there are no guarantees that their writing will improve or, more importantly, students will take responsibility for making changes. How the new curriculum is enacted is also dependent upon a teacher's prior knowledge and education, teaching experience, the sociocultural context, and conflicting ideas about how to teach writing (McQuitty, 2012; Peterson & McClay, 2011; Slomp, 2008; Smagorinsky, Cook, & Johnson, 2003). A score cannot, therefore, be solely attributed to "bad or lazy students or bad or lazy teachers" or even poor "student texts, students themselves, teachers' judgments, or the processes, codes, artifacts, or products that circulate in writing assessments (e.g., rubrics, feedback, and grades)" (Inoue, 2014, p. 337). Usually, a final score is "the interaction of all these elements in a writing assessment system" (Inoue, 2014, p. 337).

Due to so many factors and 'personalities' involved, however, it needs to be acknowledged that writing assignments never garner one "right score" (Greenberg, 1992, p. 18). Nonetheless, as I discuss later in further detail, teachers should be "crystal clear" (Spandel, 2013, p. 388)

about why they are assessing their students and what they want them to learn (see also Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Calfee & Miller, 2012; Frey & Fisher, 2013; Panadero & Jonsson, 2013; Timperley & Parr, 2009). Too often, when teachers assess first-draft, impromptu writing, they assign scores “as if students had carefully planned, drafted, revised, and edited” their work (Spandel, 2013, p. 388). Unfortunately “[t]his happens more frequently than we might like to think, and it is a major flaw in our large-scale assessment approach” (Spandel, 2013, p. 388). In an effort to contemporize assessment practices, the revised BC curriculum stresses that they should “[happen] in an ongoing fashion and should be seamlessly intertwined with instruction” (BC Ministry of Education, 2013a, para. 22; see also Black & Wiliam, 1998a). In the next section I highlight how feedback can help actualize this symbiotic relationship.

Feedback

According to Perrenoud (1998), giving vague advice to students is like throwing bottles into the ocean in the hopes that the messages will one day find their way back to the recipients. To help the writer improve, conversely, feedback needs to be “task specific, problem specific, and learner-specific” (Haswell, 2006, p. 16). When viewed through a sociocultural lens, however, feedback is first “influenced by teachers’ views of what constitutes good writing and good teaching practice” (Peterson & McClay, 2010, p. 87). These authors recognize that the process is never neutral, but subject to teachers’ values and perceptions of effective writing assessment. Evidently, “feedback is a process of communication” (Bruno & Santos, 2010, p. 112). To reify improvement, teachers should strive for a balance of comments that are legible (so not to frustrate students), unambiguous, positive, and clear (without abbreviations or symbols that students may not understand) (Bruno & Santos, 2010). Hattie and Timperley (2007) also suggest

including comments that build on students' schema. To help alleviate bias, well-known writing theorist, Peter Elbow (1973, 1997, 2000) also recognized that, due to its highly-subjective nature, feedback should be timely and frequent, and come from many sources, such as peers, other educators, and oneself (Peterson & McClay, 2010, p. 87).

When the SWW is implemented as a one-shot test with little or no dialogic instruction (and hence, feedback, editing, reflection, or goal-setting), it is devoid of the true diagnostic significance it claims to achieve. Furthermore, when teachers circumvent the writing process and fail to engage students in it along the way, assessments like the SWW function more like "early-warning summative" assessments rather than true formative assessments" (Wiliam, personal communication, 2005, as cited in Shepard, 2005, p. 2). Thus, students miss out on key "teachable moments" when they are not involved in determining the assessment criteria, setting goals, and monitoring their learning (Peterson & McClay, 2010). Within an English Language Arts curriculum that strives to honour the complexities of the writing process, a 'barebones' SWW (i.e., where students are given a prompt and instructed to write about it without any discussion or follow-up) serves to perpetuate ineffective ways to practice, teach, and assess writing (Deane, 2012; Frey & Fisher, 2013; Timperley, 2014).

In an effort to learn how to give students better (and authentic) feedback, Peterson and McClay (2010) drew upon grounded theory and "constant-comparison analysis" (p. 90) to examine "the values, perceptions, and the socio-cultural understandings of effective writing assessment and good writing in ... day-to-day interactions with students" (p. 87). These researchers conducted phone interviews with 216 Grades 4 to 8 writing teachers across Canada. Subsequent to coding the first 70 interviews, they refined the codes to determine emergent

issues and recurrent events. They offered six recommendations about feedback within the writing process. Below I highlight five of the conclusions that point to further inadequacies of the SWW, but first I need to acknowledge how crucial these conclusions are in light of my own experience administering this test. By not giving my students feedback on their writes, as Peterson and McClay (2010) indicate, I short-changed the recursive and iterative writing process. If, conversely, feedback is dialogic and reflective, where students are agents and voices of change, and both students and teachers reflect on their practice, the advice and comments can be both instructive and transformative (Huot, 2002).

Firstly, Peterson and McClay (2010) reported that teachers found it very important that feedback be encouraging, so to develop a sense of identity as a writer and to motivate them to continue writing. Secondly, they noted that feedback should have a direct effect on writing, and that it is most effective when done by the teacher, peers, or the student themselves. Furthermore, it should be transformative and “open-ended, forcing students back into the text” (Huot, 2002, p. 132). A powerful way to involve students is through self-assessment, however, the data gathered by Peterson and McClay (2010) revealed that it rarely occurred because the teachers either did not see the worth of self-assessment or “have difficulty in supporting students to assess their own writing effectively” (pp. 96-97). But when feedback becomes a sociocognitive tool, it can act as a catalyst for improvement (Parr & Timperley, 2010, p. 70).

Thirdly, Peterson and McClay (2010) conveyed that oral feedback, in the form of conferences or informal conversations, allowed teachers to “check and clarify students’ misunderstandings in progress” (p. 89). It frequently contributed to nurturing strong self-esteem and motivation to write. Fourthly, they underscored the importance of peer feedback, as long as the teacher

supports it. Lastly, teachers raised questions about the subjective nature of assessing writing. Interestingly, the teachers interviewed for the study resoundingly made the “mistaken assumption” that using rubrics and performance indicators would make their marking “objective” (Peterson & McClay, 2010, p. 96). The findings from the study by Peterson and McClay emphasized how best practices in writing instruction involve complex processes that must also work interchangeably with sound assessment (see also Behizadeh & Engelhard, 2011; Frey & Fisher, 2013; Hawe & Parr, 2013; Parr, 2013; Shepard, 2008).

While this complementary relationship seems natural, even intuitive, traditionally, teachers mostly only evaluated students summatively, at the end of a unit or after a test (Huot, 2002; Panadero & Jonsson, 2013; Timperley, 2014; Wiliam, 2011). Granted, this kind of assessment also provides valuable information, contemporary research often recommends allotting more time to analyzing a student’s emerging competence through formative assessment of drafts, rather than final products (Frey & Fisher, 2013; Hawe & Parr, 2013; Parr & Timperley, 2010; Peterson & McClay, 2010; Timperley, 2014; Wiliam, 2011). Further, Huot (2002) cautions, that when teachers consider “a student text finished and its value finished” (Huot, 2002, p. 65), they are limited to making only “generalized, rigid” (p. 64) conclusions about their abilities and subsequent interventions. Additionally, when teachers evaluate writing samples “at too gross a level of generality and feedback,” the results cannot guide instruction (Shepard, 2005, p. 5). At best, these writing samples can indicate which students are at risk – information that is usually readily available in the student’s previous report cards or Individual Education Plan (or I.E.P.) (Shepard, 2009).

While teachers play a key role in providing targeted interventions (through feedback and other means), fostering success also hinges upon students gaining agency and self-regulative habits. Next, I examine the literature on formative assessment (FA) and Assessment for Learning (AfL) to determine how these fundamental and philosophical changes can be made (Hawe & Parr, 2014; Timperley, 2014).

Informing Instruction

As a way to connect teaching and learning, two related, but distinct, paradigms have emerged in the literature: formative assessment and assessment for learning. Consistent with sociocultural principles, both approaches shift the focus from test-taking to mastery learning where the goal for assessment is instructive (Huot & Perry, 2009; Shepard, 2008; Willis & Cowie, 2014). Formative assessment tends to place more emphasis on improving teacher-driven activities, and assessment for learning is said to have a more “ambitious agenda” to promote student learning, whereby students, teachers and peers collaboratively articulate and re-evaluate goals, assess work, and make decisions “through a criss-cross of ideas, thoughts, feelings and opinions” (Hawe & Parr, 2013, p. 2). AfL also incorporates dialogic instruction, which ideally gives students voice in the planning, writing, and assessment of their work. During the recursive, iterative process, students can negotiate and discuss ways to improve writing (Hawe & Parr, 2013; Klenowski, 2009). Ultimately, AfL strives for learners to regulate their own progress and improve self-efficacy by taking responsibility for their own learning (Engelsen & Smith, 2014; Timperley & Parr, 2009).

Fostering change and deep understanding, however, starts with students and teachers being able to judiciously answer the following three seemingly basic questions: ‘Where am I going?’

‘How am I going?’, and ‘Where to next?’ (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 86). The importance of these questions should not be underestimated. Results from one-shot tests like the SWW do not address these key questions; as revealed by the literature, they oversimplify and underestimate the complex, dynamic, and continuous writing process (Earl & Timperley, 2014). Furthermore, researchers have shown that some writing assignments – even those that purport to incorporate drafting and editing – actually glaringly neglect the writing process (Frey & Fisher, 2013). These educators learned, in fact, that many school districts treat writing assignments like interim benchmark assessments. For starters, essays or research papers were assigned only a few times a year, and those were used “only minimally for making instructional decisions” – as is the case with the ‘barebones’ SWW (Frey & Fisher, 2013, p. 67). Because I maintain that the SWW should be used to foster improvement and writing *development*, I turn to Frey and Fisher’s (2013) study where they scrutinized, then improved their own methods for assessment.

Common Formative Assessment: Side-stepping the ‘1000 Mini-lessons Problem’

Like many an English teacher before them, Frey and Fisher’s (2013) colleagues had routinely complained that assessment does not always “pay off in terms of improved student understanding of writing” (p. 66; see also Huot & Perry, 2009). They noticed that even with edits and feedback, students would frequently re-submit essays or research papers containing identical errors. Thus, in order to learn how to “to set specific and challenging goals with learners, foster partnerships focused on learning and provide constructive feedback to learners” (Dixon, Hawe, & Parr, 2011, p. 365), Frey and Fisher (2013) first surveyed almost 550 high school students at Health Science High and Middle College in San Diego, California, where they worked as administrators. They asked the students (consisting of 298 Hispanic or Latinos, 106 African-

Americans, 85 whites, and 64 Asian/Pacific Islanders) what kind of feedback would be the most helpful on the first draft. Resoundingly, the students communicated that they valued the writing process as 92% chose “Edits to improve my writing,” followed by 83% choosing “Specific and detailed information about my performance” (Frey & Fisher, 2013, p. 66). Only 12% indicated that just knowing the grade that they would receive on the draft would help future edits. These results then spurred changes in how their teachers graded and gave feedback.

To “gain a greater understanding of students’ thinking,” and then apply that information to their instruction, the researchers decided to increase and intensify their methods for analyzing writing development (Fisher & Frey, 2007a, p. 132). They also communicated this change in the process of formative assessment to students and parents. Next, the educators formed “course-alike groups or grade level teams” to jointly examine student work and devise a “system wide process” (Fisher & Frey, 2007a, p. 120). To be able to intervene with “actionable” suggestions, they developed a system to track student writing errors and misconceptions” (Frey & Fisher, 2013, p. 67). They found that simply responding to all the unique difficulties demonstrated on writing tests resulted in “incoherent and decontextualized” instruction, also called the “1000 mini-lessons problem” (Shepard, 2005, p. 6). If more than 75% of students made the same error, for example, it was red-flagged and re-taught to the whole class or a small group. By spending more time cataloguing errors (as factual or procedural, for example), and spending less time marking final papers, solutions were two-fold.

On one level, teachers used the error analysis tool to gauge which students required any adaptations or “additional instruction” (Frey & Fisher, 2013, p. 68). This team at Health Science High and Middle College also tried to link assessment with instruction by helping students find

the “path through the problem-solving space” (Nichols, Meyers, & Burling, 2009, p. 16). They realized that students did not “need another version of the same lesson that had been taught previously,” they often just needed time to apply the newly-learned lessons from individual, specific feedback (Frey & Fisher, 2013, p. 70). Additionally, when the educators engaged in conferences and coached the students, they found the following three scaffolds to be the most effective: questions that verified understanding, prompts to trigger the correction of errors or more abstract metacognitive thinking, and cues to shift a student’s focus back “to something he or she has overlooked” (Frey & Fisher, 2013, p. 71). Ultimately, these scholars concur that timely feedback that is supported by a team of educators, or ‘common formative assessment,’ can translate into “whopping gains” for students (Popham, 2011, p. 25). In this case, 98% of the students at their school passed English in 2012 with a C or better (Frey & Fisher, 2013).

Scholars stress, however, that formative assessment practices (which encompass both FA and AfL) are not programmatic, but unitary, long-term, and philosophical (Hawe & Parr, 2013; Limbrick & Parr, 2010; Ryan & Barton, 2013; Shepard, 2008; Timperley, 2010; Wiliam, 2010). In this “rich,” supportive classroom environment, educators, peers, and students reciprocally and fluidly set goals, motivate themselves to write more challenging texts, self-monitor progress, respond to feedback, and ultimately take action in their situated and dynamic learning contexts (Parr & Limbrick 2010, p. 589).

Next, I explore the ways both teachers and students are directly involved in improving writing, beginning with the need for teachers to be “an adaptive expert,” who regularly reflects upon “whether [their] current practice is effective in that it is supporting all students in the class to learn” (Parr, 2014, p. 491).

'Crystal clear' goals

Using student writing to inform instruction requires careful planning, collaboration, and time (Frey & Fisher, 2013; Parr & Limbrick, 2010; Spandel, 2013). In their examination of six highly effective Grades 4 to 8 writing teachers, Parr and Limbrick (2010) confirmed that, "teaching quality is central to student achievement" (p. 586). These 'best,' but heterogeneous cases were selected for study because past students (of these teachers) had achieved significantly better results on national writing tests (in New Zealand) than other schools in the region. Using multiple data methods (including lesson observation, analysis of classroom environment, and student and teacher interviews and teacher documentation), Parr and Limbrick (2010) distilled the successful teaching habits held in common by these individuals.

Firstly, these model teachers routinely and explicitly shared learning goals, such as writing to entertain an audience or identifying the purpose of a limerick, with their students. The strategies and methods they used consistently yielded "a sense of purpose and meaningfulness; of coherence or connectedness and of being consistent, systematic and specific" (Parr & Limbrick, 2010, p. 589). Additionally, like the educators in Frey and Fisher's study (2013), these teachers shifted the focus from test-taking to mastery learning, and their goal for assessment was instructive, rather than purely summative. Parr and Limbrick (2010) also recognized that in order to specify goals and to follow-up with clear, targeted advice, however, required an extensive and specialized knowledge about how language works – a specialized skill that varied amongst the E.L.A. teachers (Limbrick, Buchanan, Goodwin & Schwarcz, 2010; Parr & Timperley, 2010). Two of the six teachers, for example, stood out because not only did they explicitly share learning goals and provide precise feedback, but they also provided systematic scaffolding of

students' learning clearly and iteratively throughout their lessons. The scholars indicated that teaching to learning goals, scaffolding, and checking for understanding may seem like general hallmarks of quality literacy instruction, but acknowledged that they are "not simple to achieve" (Willis et al., 2013, p. 245).

The current dearth of "(in)formative" guidance, in fact, is seen as "as an urgent instructional problem" in writing (Tillema, 2014, p. 46). Timperley and Parr (2009), for example, observed whether (and how) 15 Grades 4 to 8 writing teachers shared learning goals (i.e., addressing the question: 'where am I going?') with their students. In this empirical study, observations of the 15 teachers were followed by interviews of a selection of their students. In addition, two of the teachers who struggled the most with sharing learning goals were also given feedback by an educational consultant on how to improve their practice. Generally, the two teachers learned that when mastery goals are not explicitly shared with students, they tend to focus on surface features (i.e., length, punctuation, and spelling), rather than deep features (i.e., argument construction or awareness of the audience) in their writing. Instead of asking 'where to next?', both teachers and students perseverated on 'how am I going' – but only superficially (Timperley & Parr, 2009; see also Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Huot & Perry, 2009). Additionally, some teachers fail to share goals because of "their limited pedagogical content knowledge related to writing" (Timperley & Parr, 2009, p. 56). Assessment then becomes "more about the teacher's judgment" than determining pedagogically-sound ways to become a better writer (Huot & Perry, 2009, p. 426).

Therefore, during the SWW, where sharing any goals – performance or mastery – is optional or too decontextualized to be useful (as in the 'barebones' case), then students may be missing

out on valuable, relevant learning opportunities where they can learn “to guide, plan, and monitor their own activities” (Timperley & Parr, 2009, p. 44). Furthermore, without this crucial component of writing instruction that can result in “an additional one to two years’ progress in comparison to their peers” (Timperley & Parr, 2009, p. 45), students cannot successfully gauge their progress or generate the ever-important “internal feedback” in the Vygotskian sense (p. 57). If students clearly understand (and the teacher clearly articulates) performance and learning goals throughout writing assignments, they can offer “valid insights” into their learning process (Hawe & Parr, 2013, p. 21). With input from their teacher and peers, students can collectively and fluidly set goals, motivate themselves to write more challenging texts, self-monitor progress, respond to feedback, and ultimately take action in their situated and dynamic learning contexts. However, as is evident in the discussion below, Hawe and Parr (2013) learned that readily accepting assessment for learning (AfL) principles does not necessarily translate into quality, insightful instruction.

Where to Next?

Assessment for Learning

AfL represents a different paradigmatic lens, rather than “a minor shift” in traditional assessment practices (Earl & Timperley, 2014, p. 325). But because AfL is sometimes misunderstood as a teaching tool or the need for increased testing, Hawe and Parr (2013) sought to learn which AfL strategies teachers were using, how they were implemented, and ultimately what ways teachers’ instructional AfL practices could be improved. They guided 18 New Zealand middle school teachers in six reciprocal peer observations of writing lessons. This study was the second phase of a major initiative on literacy education that involved 615

students and 31 educators. The first phase aimed to further teachers' content and pedagogical content knowledge in the teaching of writing. During the second phase, the 18 Grades 6 to 8 teachers used an Observation Guide, which was designed by the scholars and grounded in research of effective literacy practice, to critique their colleagues' AfL practices, with the goal of identifying both areas of strength and weakness.

During observations of 35 to 45 minute classes, the 18 educators recorded opinions and judgments of their colleague's AfL practices on the Observation Guide using continuous descriptive rating scales (of usually up to four points). The teachers then reversed observer-teacher roles, and followed up with a discussion about their experiences and offered suggestions for improvements. After analyzing the results, Hawe and Parr identified various challenges with AfL. Primarily, some teachers struggled with articulating goals and sharing criteria with students. When they were presented as "a list of items," for example, rather than "broad, cognitive" goals, both students and teachers applied a "fix-it approach" (Hawe & Parr, 2013, p. 228). According to Hawe and Parr (2013, if writing was not "recognised as a complex activity and ... crafted act" (p. 229), students tended to over-emphasize 'performance' goals (e.g., writing conventions) rather than more open-ended 'learning' goals (such as using "language to explore and express ideas, communicate clearly, and evoke emotion... [or] refine meaning, create voice, develop style, and create artistry" (BC Ministry of Education, 2013c, para. 88). Hawe and Parr (2013) concluded that "[d]ialogic exchanges where students and teachers jointly construct achievement and the way forward can promote skills and understandings critical to developing students' writing" (p. 230). Conversely, they concluded that students who

write without learning goals or specific criteria have further difficulty self-monitoring or self-regulating their progress.

On-demand tests, like the 'barebones' SWW, offers few, if any, socioculturally-mediated opportunities to cue learning. Self-regulation represents the causal link between feedback, instruction, and opportunities to learn. Identifying a student's writing weaknesses (and strengths) is just one part of the complex puzzle within a sociocultural and multiliterate context. But "for self-improvement to occur, students must have *motivation and an intention to engage actively with their learning and the information available*" (Colbert & Cumming, 2014, p. 215). This engagement extends beyond curricula and school itself and involves "a deliberate, judgmental, adaptive process" (Timperley & Parr, 2009, p. 44) where learners proactively regulate their own learning and work with 'expert others' to set goals, and ultimately generate internal feedback that fosters change (Andrade, 2010; Colbert & Cumming, 2014).

Hawe and Parr (2013) recognize that teachers, especially those who teach primarily within a "quantitative [and] mechanistic" (Birenbaum, 2014, p. 285) testing culture, may have difficulty shifting to this fundamentally different way of viewing assessment. However, even though the implementation of AfL is sometimes "scripted and ritualistic" (Hawe & Parr, 2013, p. 22), with guidance and professional development, it has great potential to deepen learning. For some teachers, it is first important to move away from the idea that AfL is "a set of practical strategies that teachers can pick and choose from and implement with little adjustment made to the existing classroom programme" (Dixon, Hawe, & Parr, 2011, p. 376). Teachers have been shown to be more effective in instilling self-regulation and quality learning when they followed the 'spirit' of AfL which is "based on a deep understanding of the principles underlying the practice,"

rather than the 'letter,' which focuses on surface techniques (Earl & Timperley, 2014, p. 325; see also Dixon et al., 2011; Hawe & Parr, 2013). Finally, while AfL is not a panacea for developing writing proficiency, when students are given the opportunity to "mess with texts" in collaboration with classmates and mentors, they can lead the way on the journey toward mastery and quality learning, both integral for lifelong learning (Hawe & Parr, 2013, p. 215).

Students, however, are not the only ones who need to be involved in the learning process. Lastly, I demonstrate how a group of teachers faced the challenge of improving their knowledge about writing (Limbrick et al., 2010).

Professional development: Doing things differently

While teachers can be applauded for making philosophical and practical changes to their writing curriculum, they also need to address the sensitive issue of improving their own pedagogical and content knowledge of writing – for their students' sake. While improved writing ability has, in part, been attributed to teachers' knowledge about the content, pedagogy, and students, nonetheless teachers are sometimes "frightened of writing and unsure, themselves, about the process of writing, or how to integrate new knowledge about writing into their classroom practice" (Limbrick et al., 2010, p. 900). In Limbrick et al.'s (2010) study, they described the changes that happened when teachers took "a research lens to their own practice" (p. 897). The scholars reasoned that much could be learned "by identifying and responding to dissonances within their practice" (p. 899). More importantly, because writing is "a communicative process" (Limbrick et al., 2010, p. 299) where meaning-making is socially-mediated, addressing strengths and weaknesses collaboratively was thusly seen as an opportunity for supportive, collective improvement.

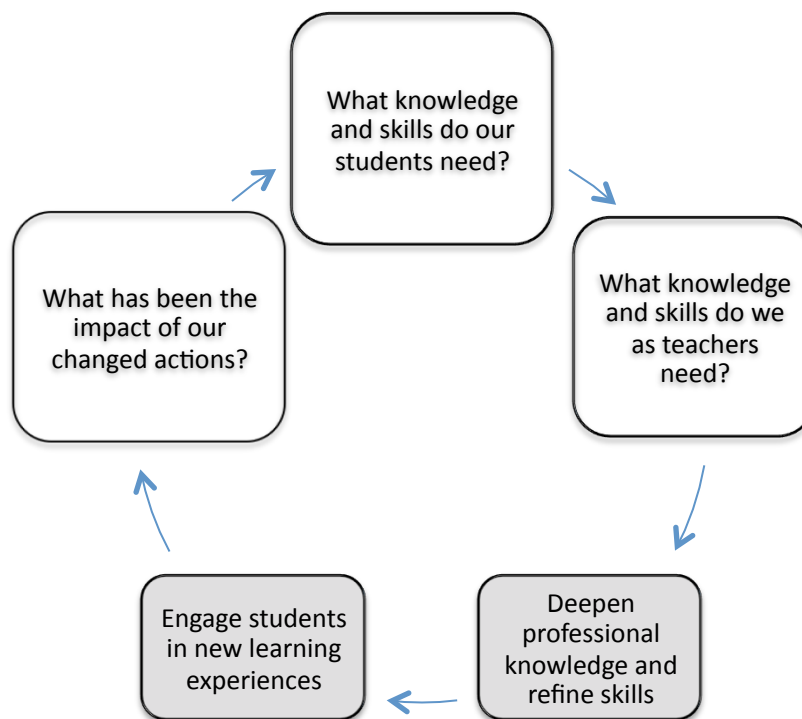


Figure 2. The Teacher Inquiry and Knowledge Building System Cycle (Timperley, 2010). Permission granted to use this figure.

Over a two-year period, more than 20 teachers who taught Grades 4 to 8 at six low socio-economic urban schools in Auckland, New Zealand, volunteered to research their own teaching practices. They partook in comprehensive professional development, using the above inquiry model for the process. (See Figure 2.) With guidance from the four researchers and literacy coaches at each of the six schools, teachers had numerous opportunities to pose and discuss the above (and other) questions. Additionally, at school-based meetings, they set goals for their students' learning, and grappled with how writing samples could reveal strengths or weaknesses when compared to exemplars. Additionally, the teachers participated in professional learning circles where they considered and reflected upon student data, teaching practices, research literature, and challenges and successes.

The researchers then used a constant comparative analysis which involves a “process of taking information from data collection and comparing it to emerging categories” (Creswell, 2013, p. 86). Three themes (and improvements, in many cases) emerged: using writing to inform teaching, developing a meta-language for writing, and acquiring additional resources to support writing (Limbrick et al., 2010). Not only did the teachers demonstrate more confidence teaching and assessing writing, but they also developed a language to discuss it with both students and colleagues alike. To students, their teachers were better able to provide specific feedback, and purposeful modelling and conferencing for improving writing skills. With other educators, they “developed a shared understanding” of what quality work entailed (Limbrick et al., 2010, p 910). The teachers also utilized and deconstructed “carefully chosen, relevant, research-based, and manageable articles” and ministry documents (Limbrick et al., 2010, p. 914). And, ultimately, student achievement showed “greater than expected” gains (Limbrick et al., 2010, p. 915). Finally, developing an inquiry stance as a practitioner researcher was inspiring, challenging, and helpful for their classroom practice. Like the writing process, creative and professional transformation requires time, commitment, and the willingness to re-examine teacher beliefs about what effective writing instruction truly means.

Conclusion: Looking Forward

As it stands, impromptu writing tests prevent students from achieving writing’s most exciting promise: representing the “comprehensive psychology of the human mind” (Smagorinsky, 2009, p. 18). Unfortunately, the SWW cannot possibly encapsulate most students’ strengths and talents, especially for those who are not adept at using print-centric literacies (O’Brien, 2012). Additionally, when a quick-write erroneously highlights a student’s ignorance, failure

may trigger or reinforce the unfortunate cycle where students “attribute success to stable factors outside of their control (e.g., the texts are too hard, effort doesn’t yield results, the teacher is hard, they just don’t have the ability, [and] success is perceived as unattainable, universal, permanent” (O’Brien, 2012, p. 72).

Students tersely labelled ‘un-academic’ may hover on the outskirts of what some educators narrowly define as success or intelligence throughout their 13-year career, justifiably concluding that schooling is often a “hierarchical, authoritarian, fact-orientated” place (Smagorinsky, 2010a, p. 27). Imagine, instead, if they had been placed in O’Brien’s (2012) inquiry-based class where at-risk high school students “engage in a range of literacy practices including reading, writing (print and media authoring), web browsing, and playing video games, to attain personally relevant goals through the use of tools they control and connect to outcomes” (p. 73). Imagine if *all* teachers could actualize such personalized and relevant learning that draws on students’ strengths and is now written into the revised BC curriculum. Certainly, the SWW pales in comparison to such active, motivating, and important learning.

Thus, this test serves to demonstrate how, within the current “grading-oriented, testing culture,” writing instruction and assessment continue to be at odds (Birenbaum, 2014, p. 286). Fortunately, a review of the literature demonstrates that the tide is shifting again – albeit slowly (Behizadeh & Engelhard, 2011; Huot & Perry, 2009; Parr, 2013). More and more “imaginative new forms of assessment” (Shepard, 2008, p. 8) are challenging currently held beliefs and values about how best to analyze student writing (Hawe & Parr, 2013; Shepard, 2008; Timperley, 2014). If we move writing away from “traditional measurement conceptions of assessment” and emphasize instead its connection to curriculum and learning theory, I believe it has the potential

to engage students and enhance learning (Willis et al., 2013, p. 244). But as the pioneers of FA and AfL, Black and Wiliam (2006) contend: “this is [still] a task of immense difficulty” (p. 90). Granted, “[p]olicy change requires teachers to develop new repertoires which significantly impacts on the work of teachers and the assessment, curriculum, and pedagogic discourses of the classroom” (Willis et al., 2013, p. 246).

If educators do not take the risk, however, we unjustly mislead our students into believing that a quick-write is both a reliable and valid judge of writing ability. In reality, it determines only how well students can speedily formulate organized, original prose – something most professional writers cannot do (Spandel, 2013). Furthermore, during the SWW, proficiency, or even intelligence, is often perversely measured in how well students can compose on paper, the degree to which they are familiar with or passionate about the given topic, and whether their marker agrees with or even likes them. Simply put: when handed the SWW, few, if any, students can deliver, regardless of their level of intelligence.

As educators, it is not our goal, then, “to find, standardize, and implement the *one true method*, but for teachers to develop flexible repertoires of field-, discourse-, and text-specific pedagogies, suited to particular textual artifacts, technologies, social and linguistic/interactional outcome” (Luke, 2004, p. 90, emphasis added). Through “deep professional discussion” (Birenbaum, 2014, p. 289) though, educators can begin to shift their focus from a one-off writing event as the SWW to engaging students in one of the many meaningful, relevant, multiliterate, contextualized writing opportunities where teachers commit to using formative assessment practices. When writing is viewed as thinking, and we, as educators, learn to trust that students – no, *writers* – will create original ideas when they are not pressed for time,

obligated to use a narrow structure or medium, or left in the dark to figure everything out themselves, the possibilities are truly limitless (Huot, 2002).

In Chapter 3, I present both philosophical and concrete ways scholars have found to incorporate dialogic, instructive, reflective, and transformative ways to teach and assess writing (Huot, 2002). In this way, the SWW serves as a baseline, not for student writing ability, but as a means for historical comparison. As educators move away from single-draft, timed writing tests, they open the door to student-centered, inspiring, and enjoyable writing instruction that happens *every day*. Before this potential is realized, though, educators first need to critically examine their own teaching practices and beliefs.

Chapter 3

PREZI PRESENTATION TO TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

Where to Next... with the School Wide Write?

In 1989, when I studied anthropology at the University of Victoria, I was introduced to Margaret Mead's oft-quoted maxim: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has" (as cited in Fitzhenry, 2006, p. 362). With this inspiring thought in mind, I wish to present practical, yet theoretically-sound ways to reconceptualize responding to a prompt – one that is integrated into a unit of study, rather than rushed and tested. This goal is especially timely since the revised 2013 British Columbia curriculum strives to "transform and modernize the British Columbia education system" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2013b, para. 1). Furthermore, because the stand-alone, 'barebones' School Wide Write is a "contextless activity emphasizing standardization and an ideal version of writing quality," it prevents educators from adopting emerging and dynamic ways to teach and assess writing (Huot, 2002, p. 104). Arguably, Deweyian ideals of a "learner-centred, activity-oriented, inquiry-driven, and socially-mediated" learning culture are juxtaposed with the often-prevalent conservative, reductionist, authoritarian teaching methods when the SWW 'parachutes' into the classroom during the first week of school, never to be re-visited again (through feedback, subsequent lessons, or revision, for example) (Smagorinsky, 2010a, p. 300; see also Dewey, 1900). Its use and import is further questioned when teachers then resume process-oriented writing instruction.

Additionally, when educators start the year by handing students a test during an already fast-paced, and sometimes overwhelming, school start-up, negative messages are

communicated to our students. Most importantly, the SWW implicitly teaches them that deep, insightful ideas developed through a dialogic, socially-mediated writing process that requires time and feedback are optional or unnecessary. Instead, I want to dedicate the hours now used for the SWW to offering meaningful, multi-draft writing activities, where students develop skills to use across the curriculum and throughout their lives.

The Prezi presentation that follows is relevant to English Language Arts teachers wanting to join effective writing instruction to 21st century assessment practices, as well as to all those who want to become more familiar with the revised E.L.A. goals (BC Ministry of Education, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c). While the curriculum states the need to help students find meaning and joy in language, better understand ourselves, and celebrate diversity, deep and reflective understanding, and inquiry-based learning, teachers may not know where to begin to teach such writing (BC Ministry of Education, 2013c; Willis & Cowie, 2014). Thus, my goal is to provide teachers with effective, pedagogically- and theoretically-sound ways for students to respond to a prompt that is integrated in their current unit of study with the goal of deepening and enriching the E.L.A. curriculum.

Many principles and ideas that I discuss may seem “generic to good teaching” (Parr & Limbrick, 2010, p. 589). When applied to the context of teaching writing, though, carefully planning lessons with clearly articulated goals, connecting learning to prior experience, or systematically monitoring their students’ progress, for example, are effective teaching practices that can always be “improved and honed” (Parr & Limbrick, 2010, p. 589). I want to move beyond critiquing the divide that has existed for more than 100 years between teaching and assessment, and concentrate on “actionable” changes to how we teach and test writing (Frey &

Fisher, 2013, p. 67; see also Behizadeh & Engelhard, 2011). Fundamentally, the reductive, minimalistic SWW serves as a stark contrast to contemporary goals for good writing instruction, but educators wanting to reconceptualize adolescent literacies are now faced with the ultimate question: where to next?

The Presentation: What, To Whom, When, Why...?

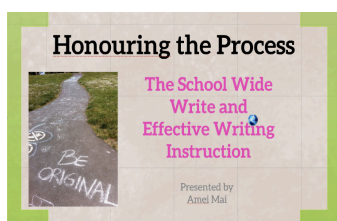
I have created a two-hour interactive professional development workshop (i.e., Prezi presentation) for educators centering on ways to deepen writing instruction. Notably, this project (and presentation) is not going to culminate with ‘a new and improved’ SWW. Before broaching why I believe educators should facilitate and implement ways to respond to a prompt that is integrated into a contextualized unit of study, chosen by the teachers and/or students, I stress that the solutions I put forward are not activity-based or ‘silver bullets’ (i.e., “teaching [methods] that work best regardless of setting” (Smagorinsky 2009, p. 20). Instead, I offer philosophical, concrete, and research-based suggestions to improve writing instruction and assessment, but fully acknowledge that teachers will integrate these ideas with their own teaching style, repertoire, strengths, and philosophy.

My intention is to lead the workshop early in the school year, such as the first professional development day in September. For administrators, I would present the information at one of their regular monthly principals’ meeting. (This presentation would be a condensed version of this more comprehensive talk.) Every effort has been made to minimize the amount of print within each Prezi frame. The visual images illustrate or reinforce the concepts covered, described, and discussed in my presentation. The two-hour workshop includes the following sections:

1. Personal and professional introduction
2. Middle School beliefs and values in the new curriculum
3. The importance of writing in the current sociocultural milieu
4. Introduction to the School Wide Write: Frequency of use
5. A working definition of the School Wide Write
6. The writing process
7. Uniting writing instruction and assessment
8. Enriching writing instruction and assessment
9. Where am I going? Informing instruction, explicit sharing learning goals and criteria
10. How am I going? Common formative assessments, using rubrics, scaffolding learning, feedback
11. Where to next? Student self-assessment, teacher reflection
12. Conclusion: Looking forward

The following explanations provide both the rationale and ‘speaking notes’ of my presentation, which are often one in the same.

Title Page



Objective: To introduce the MEd project in context. When

informally discussing my project with colleagues, I have received support, genuine curiosity, or criticism. Some teachers are blunt in their dissatisfaction with the SWW. They argue against

administering on-demand, timed writing tests to middle school students, citing them as stressful for students and meaningless in terms of what information can be learned. Others

weigh the pros and cons, and have found ways to make the process more relevant and integrated into their curriculum. They have shared with me how they discuss the prompt before writing takes place, for example, give feedback, change their lessons based upon what they learned from the write, and help students set goals. Still other teachers have been offended by my critique of the SWW, citing the need to determine a baseline at all costs, as well as collect data on student writing proficiency.

Because opinions are so varied and, at times, polarized, I do not want to begin my presentation alienating certain teachers, and, at the same time, I welcome any dissenting voice “that counters, challenges, or even offends my own” (Fecho, 2011, p. 24). Undoubtedly, a multiplicity of ideas will further the conversations we ‘urgently’ need to have about writing and assessment (Birenbaum, 2014). All involved will be able to “garner a range of response, to posit questions, to propose alternatives, to... engage in dialogue” (Fecho, 2011, pp. 24-25). My title page, therefore, begins with our common ground: underscoring the importance that writing is taught as a process and the importance of incorporating best practices (Peterson, 2012).

Personal and Professional Introduction



Objective: To establish credibility. By sharing my credentials, I wish to illustrate that my ‘in-the-trenches’ perspective is two-fold: I am both an experienced teacher (having taught for nearly 20 years) and a freelance writer and journalist (since 1991). Not only am I

passionate about teaching writing, I also practice the craft – an asset for writing teachers (Graves, 1983). I also wish to highlight my international experience as an educator as well as my experience (since 2009) administering the SWW in various middle schools. While the literature

has undoubtedly rounded out and deepened my understanding of impromptu writes, my personal and professional dissatisfaction with the SWW is what initially inspired me to question why we administer this test in the first place.

Activity #1: Writing Strengths and Goals using the Writing to Learn Strategy

On the screen, I will project these questions for teachers to respond to:

What are my strengths as a writing teacher?

What do I want to accomplish as a writing teacher and/or a writer?

I will remind participants that they will not be evaluated and there is no 'right' answer.

Educators may choose to relate responses to their personal lives and history, or to their classroom experience. Some educators may choose to share out.

Middle School Beliefs and Values in the New Curriculum



Objective: To activate prior knowledge and establish core middle school English Language Arts curricular goals. Again, I wish to set a positive, inclusive tone, and highlight our common ground as educators who value active, age-appropriate, multicultural

education that challenges students and incorporates technology. This frame with the multiple images, illustrating some of the many positive and productive activities that students participate in from Grades 6 to 8, will serve as an image set to activate prior knowledge.

Activity #2: Brainstorm Aspects of 21st Century Learning

Brainstorm: How do the seven images in the frame connect with the revised curriculum and 21st century learning? Specifically, what are students doing here that could relate (but are not limited) to the English Language Arts curriculum?

I would anticipate the following input from educators:

Students:

- engage in deep learning,
- effectively engage in the use of digital media,
- impart and exchange information, experiences, and ideas,
- celebrate students' cultural heritage and/or rich diversity,
- participate in community events,
- participate in social change,
- challenge themselves,
- think critically and problem solve,



- collaborate,
- inquire and show curiosity,
- learn kinesthetically, and
- express individuality.

Next, I will demonstrate how the revised 2013 English Language Arts curriculum supports these values (namely, in the four 'Big Ideas' of the revised 2013 curriculum) (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2013c).

The Importance of Writing in the Current Sociocultural Milieu



Objective: To highlight the importance of composing in a contemporary context. In this multi-frame 'slide,' I stress the importance of writing *across* the curriculum, valuing writing beyond school hours, viewing multiliteracies as integral to

students' lives, and using writing to inspire change. In the first frame, I demonstrate how writing is used for learning and communicating. I direct educators to notice that the boys on the left who were responding to First Nations' art at the Victoria Art Gallery. I will also discuss how writing is used *across* the curriculum. Here, the boys integrated writing and art, but acknowledge that writing is also important in other content areas, including math, social studies, and science. Additionally, both pictures (in frame #1) demonstrate how "[t]eenagers' lives are filled with writing" (Lenhart et al., 2008, p. i). The girl on the right is writing and using her Smartphone, a common combination for today's multi-tasking teens (Adams, 2012).

The reference to technology also segues to the current state of writing instruction. Admittedly, even though educators eagerly embrace technology, many of them struggle with bringing 21st century writing tools into the classroom (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Gouthro & Holloway, 2013; Graham et al., 2013). Unfortunately, the teacher still does the majority of the composing in today's classrooms; students are generally "left only to fill in missing information" (Applebee & Langer, 2011, p. 26). Students spend most of English class time copying notes, summarizing chapters, or writing highly formulaic essays (Albertson & Marwitz, 2001; Applebee & Langer, 2011; Hillocks, 2002; Scherff & Piazza, 2005; Smagorinsky, 2011), instead of doing the

hard work of composing; that is “analyzing text, using academic language, formulating and critiquing arguments, and trying on perspectives” (Snow & Moje, 2010, p. 67).

In frame #2, I reinforce how ‘writing’ is not limited to the “alphabetic world” (Lotherington & Jenson, 2011, p. 226). A more contemporary definition of ‘text’ goes beyond “graphite based” (Newkirk, 2009, p. 4) compositions, even encompassing this impressive cake symbolizing the plot, themes, and characters in the novel, *The Hunger Games*. Because writers and authors are now synonymous with “designers of meaning” (Stein & Newfield, 2009, p. 8), we encourage students “to engage in playful language activities... and think creatively, reflectively, and critically” (BC Ministry of Education, 2013, para. 2).

The people in frame #3 (e.g., Anne Frank, Stephen Lewis, Martin Luther King, and the Kielburgers, the two young Canadian activists who are fighting for the rights of children and co-founders of Me to We and the Free the Children charity) illustrate the importance of critical thinking and how language has been used to create positive social change.

Because the SWW represents a narrower, formal, essay style of writing that is, usually printed on paper (Gee, 2011; Newkirk, 2009), it limits the ways students can express themselves – especially ELLs and students with special needs (Gregg, 2007; Petersen, 2009). So, who writes the SWW in this district?

Introduction to the School Wide Write: Frequency of Use

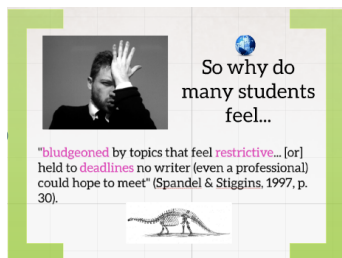
Who writes the School Wide Write?

- approx. 2,700 out of 4,000 middle school students
- 7 out of 10 middle schools
- the SWW is *not required* by the district

A Google search for "school wide write AND BC and 2013" got 5,230 hits.

Objective: To demonstrate the SWW’s widespread use. Using statistics (i.e., 2,700/4,000 middle school students in 7 out of 10 middle schools in this district write the SWW, and a Google search about the SWW garners 5,230 hits, etc.), I intend to demonstrate its

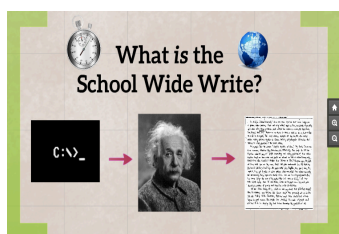
widespread use in the district and beyond (in Canada and the United States). I counter these ‘hard numbers’ with the fact that it is not a required test (unlike a yearly reading assessment, such as the Oral Reading Comprehension Assessment (ORCA) or Nelson’s PM Benchmark Assessment, the Grades 4 and 7 Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA), and the Graduation Program Provincial Examinations (GPPE) in Grades 10, 11, and 12) (BC Ministry of Education, 2007a). Many teachers with whom I spoke over the last six months were not aware that the SWW is optional, and decided upon at the school level (usually in June of the previous school year). Another interesting, and somewhat controversial fact is that French Immersion students at my school write the SWW in English (M. Challies, personal communication, June 5, 2014). (The scope of this project, however, does not examine whether this practice is the exception or the norm, or whether French immersion students should write it in English or French.)



Next I examine whether, given the revised goals and the current research, the SWW is truly needed. What is the rush, for example, to find a baseline writing ability? Arguably, any glaring difficulties have usually been documented in a student’s previous report cards

or Individual Education Plan (I.E.P.) (Shepard, 2009). Additionally, using the more time-consuming, but effective writing process, teachers can determine a student’s writing ability in more meaningful and accurate ways. Before examining more effective ways, it is important establish a shared definition of the SWW.

A Working Definition of the School Wide Write

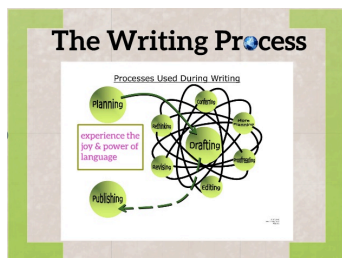


Objective: To clarify its meaning. Because the literature on testing is rife with a “widespread confusion in terminology” (Shepard,

2005, p. 3), I first share a definition that is based upon both the literature and my experience. In its most basic form, we begin by giving students a prompt (e.g., describe the best place to live (Hillocks, 2003); describe your ideal school or yourself (V. Roberts, personal communication, Jan. 20, 2014), or describe what it means to ‘make a difference’ (McEwen, 2011). Then students tap into their ‘inner Einstein’ and come up with thought-provoking, original ideas. Lastly, they structure these ideas into lucid prose before handing it in.

This frame illustrates how unrealistic (and even comical) it is to expect students to construct a response from a standardized, higher-order question in such an abbreviated, sequential way. It is also ironic and sad, given that Einstein, who is associated with brilliance, probably would have had difficulty completing the SWW since he was considered a ‘slow thinker’ and required extra time to process ideas (Graves, 2002). Evidently, the writing process is not a formulaic set of steps: plan/pre-write, draft, edit and revise, then publish, but a far more complex cognitive activity, even an “eekish notion” (Haswell, 1991, p. 18). As writers gain experience, they constantly make decisions (related to ideas, voice, style, audience, and so on) and adjust their texts accordingly. Next, I describe the writing process in comparison to the SWW.

The Writing Process



Objective: To convey that writing is a sociocultural experience, not a sequence of skills. Viewing writing as a series of steps harkens back to behaviourists who said students accumulate information sequentially (Skinner, 1954). Writing is now seen as an active and adaptive social experience, where students make meaning. We know that students develop a recursive “inner speech” when they write (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57). According to the Writing

Study Group of the NCTE Executive Committee (2004), students ‘get it’ when they internalize “a repertory of routines, skills, strategies, and practices, for generating, revising, and editing different kinds of texts” (para. 8). Our job as teachers, therefore, is to provide both tangible and intangible ‘tools’ to apply their understanding and further learning (Marshall, 2004; Parr & Timperley, 2010). Graphic organizers, for example, can become ways for students to expand their ideas (Englert et al., 2006). When they engage in A-B partner talk, students can consider other perspectives and collaboratively generate meaning (Bakhtin, 1986; Barnes, 2008; Smagorinsky, 2009).

But the process does not end there; we also want students to reflect on their writing. Granted, we want them to reflect on the particular piece they are working on, but ultimately we want them to develop a “meta-awareness” about writing in general, to be able to transfer their skills to different contexts (Writing Study Group of the NCTE Executive Committee, 2004, para. 8; see also Slomp, 2012). Writing ‘in isolation’ removes such an important aspect of learning process: the context. Like professional writers, students strengthen and deepen their ideas when they can discuss the topic, problem-solve writing or content issues, negotiate meaning or feedback, and find support within their class and beyond. While writing is often a solitary act, it is not done in a vacuum (Spandel, 2013).

Conversely, teachers’ use of the on-demand test “genre” (Spandel, 2013, p. 396) underestimates and cuts the dynamic, and continuous writing process short (Earl & Timperley, 2014). Within the SWW’s rigid ‘closed-book, no-discussion-allowed’ rules, we are asking students to ‘take a test’ instead of write authentically. In very few ‘real-world’ situations, however, do writers produce quick-writes (Gregg et al., 2007; Petersen, 2009; Sullivan &

Nielsen, 2009). The only two examples in the literature that I found included writing press releases and timed writing tests, such as the provincial Social Studies or college entrance exams. Incidentally, my daughter asked me to get her a watch for her upcoming English 12 provincial exam, where successful completion, she assured me, depended upon strict pacing.

Researchers have also examined such strategic writing, as my daughter intended to do. Earl and Timperley (2014) found that when students constructed a response for the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), a standardized test given to students in years 3, 5, 7, and 9 in Australia, for example, they typically planned for 5 minutes, wrote for 30, and revised and edited for the last 5 minutes. As is expected, the writing produced for quick-writes is often “predictable and dull with few students taking risks” (Petersen, 2009, p. 179). Conversely, writing proficiency is more likely to improve as students learn to “revise: rethink the message, reorganize, [and] release the voice” (Spandel, 2013, p. 420). Equipped with a new curriculum that promotes engaging strategies for our multiliterate youths, educators can reconsider implementation of one-shot tests that circumvent the writing process, only to give them a very narrow indication of writing abilities (Avila, 2012; Spandel, 2012).

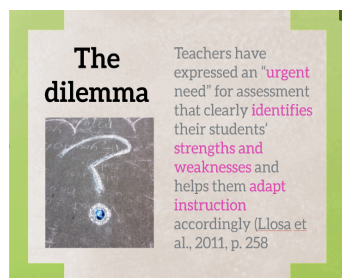
Activity #3: A Metaphor for Writing

Individually, create a metaphor for writing. (‘Writing is (a)...’) Be creative and original. Then, using the SMART Learning tool, “G.O.S.S.I.P. with R.A.S.A.” (which stands for **Go Out** and **Selectively Search for Important Points** ↔ **Receive** • **Appreciate** • **Summarize** • **Ask ?**), find a partner and ‘offer’ the metaphor to someone else, hear theirs, and discuss your findings. When

the whole group convenes, select people can share out (Close & Nottingham, in press). (See Appendix D.)

Next, I demonstrate that when writing instruction and assessment are linked, student writing improves – but first educators need to unpack their beliefs and assumptions they make about writing pedagogy and the theories used to support or challenge the implementation of impromptu writing tests.

Getting Started: Examining our Practice



Objective: To determine how educators should implement 21st

century principles of writing instruction and assessment. Because

teaching English does not have “a body of scholarship that defines

the content of the subject of writing” (Parr, 2013, p. 489), what we

teach students varies widely, including how to respond to a prompt. Do you start by teaching students how to write a topic sentence, for example, or do you explain how to formulate an argument? Do you instruct ways for students to find their voice, or how to structure concrete and persuasive ideas? E.L.A. instruction, in general, is influenced by a teacher’s prior knowledge and education, teaching experience, the sociocultural context, and conflicting ideas about how to teach writing (McQuitty, 2012; Peterson & McClay, 2011; Slomp, 2008; Smagorinsky, Cook, & Johnson, 2003). At the same time, the new curriculum includes exciting innovations; how they are enacted, though, is literally as varied as the number of teachers. Up until now, many of us, myself included, have just thrown students in the water and shouted, “Swim!” during the SWW (Read, 2010, p. 48). But research tells us that doing it “cold” (K. Andrews, personal

communication, Jan. 21, 2014) grossly misrepresents the writing process, where, unfortunately, the resultant texts are often left with “a mechanical texture” (Ryan & Barton, 2014, p. 305).

I also acknowledge that even though educators are busy and often overburdened, many persevere in seeking ways to innovate (Hamp-Lyons, 2014; Shepard, 2008; Williams, 2005). Personally, I am constantly looking for “actionable” ways to improve my instruction and assessment methods (Frey & Fisher, 2013, p. 67). Teachers also worry about “drowning” in data or are sometimes unsure of how to change their teaching or help students (Frey & Fisher, 2013, p. 68). Thus, it behooves us as educators to be “realistic, not romantic” when embarking on new teaching practices, or changing existing ones (Wiggins, 1998b, p. xvi).

How the SWW fits into an E.L.A. curriculum, therefore, is both a professional and personal decision. Before coming to a definitive answer, though, I believe educators need to re-examine and re-evaluate the current culture in their classroom, as well as their personal teaching philosophy. For instance, ask yourself: Do you truly agree with the “Big Ideas” in the new curriculum? Do some of them present logistical or philosophical challenges? (I could certainly name a few.) Do you believe that assessment can further learning, but do not really know where to start? Do you possess (or lack) some writing or pedagogical skills to help students write better (Timperley & Parr, 2009)? Even if you are open to the possibilities of enacting the principles in the new curriculum and improving your skills, do you worry about what to do on Monday morning? Before educators ‘talk strategy,’ however, we need to have a “deep professional discussion” about how we approach instruction and assessment in our classrooms (Birenbaum, 2014, p. 289).

Activity #4: Examining Assessment Practices

Which of the following is part of your staff's current classroom assessment? Discuss responses with your group. Try to order them from "do most often" to "do least often." Why do you (or don't you) use or promote the use of these activities? (adapted from Spandel, 2013, p. 416).

- Assessing multiple samples (a body of work)
- Observing students as they engage in the writing process
- Conferencing with students during the writing process
- Doing in-depth analysis of selected writings to discover strengths (or weaknesses) that go beyond the rubric
- Asking students to evaluate themselves as writers (self-assessment)
- Asking students to evaluate or comment upon their peers' writing
- Having students keep portfolios
- Writing impromptu paragraphs

While debriefing some of the responses, I anticipate that educators indicate that they usually assess a body of work, often observe, and assist students throughout the writing process. I would also hope (but not anticipate it to be the norm) that they delve into comprehensive studies of writing, which would include teacher and peer feedback, observations and conferencing. Based upon the research, I also assume that self-assessment and portfolios are done less frequently (Huot & Perry, 2009; Johnson & Gelfand, 2013). Many teachers do not understand how to use portfolios or use the information from self-assessments as formative

assessment tools (Huot & Perry, 2009). Sometimes portfolios, for example, are reduced to “papers in a folder, a sort of fancy checklist used to document students’ tests” (Huot & Perry, 2009, p. 428). Additionally, teachers often do not know what form self-assessment takes. Assigning one’s own final grade is discouraged, for example, because ‘at-risk’ and male students tend to overestimate their grade, and furthermore ‘blame’ a poor grade on external factors or luck (Buckelew, Byrd, Key, Thornton, & Merwin, 2013). That said, self-assessment has many pedagogical, metacognitive, affective, and logistical benefits that I further discuss later. While many teachers assess differently, however, the point is that educators are moving toward using writing samples more for “guiding and directing teaching practice,” than “labeling and categorizing students” (Timperley, 2010, p. 5).

Because of this shift from diagnosis to accountability (Johnson & Gelfand, 2013, p. 571) educators now need different skills to assess (Timperley, 2010). While the possibilities to deepen understanding are exciting, teachers need to learn how to redefine and reshape their roles and responsibilities where they involve and empower students in the learning and assessment processes – only then can they use student writing to inform instruction.

Informing Instruction



Objective: To explain formative assessment and ‘Assessment for Learning.’ In the past, it has seemed like “a radical idea” or even “cheating” to help students mid-stream (Wiggins, 1993b, p. 43).

Some teachers, however, still view formative assessment as inferior to summative (or end-of-the-unit testing) assessment. Some teachers – even those who do not lack the writing and pedagogical skills, and are aware of progressive teaching and assessment

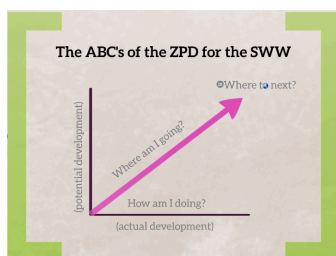
methods – are just unwilling to change the power structure in the classroom (Smagorinsky, 2010a, 2010b; Willis et al., 2013). As a way to connect teaching and learning, two related, but distinct, paradigms have emerged in the literature: formative assessment (FA) and assessment for learning (AfL).

FA places greater emphasis on how the *teacher* change his or her practices. AfL encourages all stakeholders (students, teachers and peers) to collaboratively articulate and re-evaluate goals, assess work, and make decisions “through a criss-cross of ideas, thoughts, feelings and opinions” (Hawe & Parr, 2013, p. 2). AfL also incorporates dialogic instruction, which ideally gives students a voice in the planning, writing, and assessment of their work. During the recursive, iterative process, students can negotiate and discuss ways to improve writing (Hawe & Parr, 2013; Klenowski, 2009). Ideally, learners take responsibility and regulate their own progress and improve self-efficacy by being “deliberate, judgmental, [and] adaptive” (Timperley & Parr, 2009, p. 44; see also Engelsen & Smith, 2014). AfL does not advocate that educators relinquish their authority or expertise, but promote ways for students to become “successful and autonomous” (Panadero & Romero, 2014, p. 133). Currently, many teachers “dominate through lecture or teacher-centered discussions” (Smagorinsky, 2010a, p. 25). Furthermore, students “typically stay fixed in one location, facing forward so that students may concentrate on the teacher undistracted by the chatter and shenanigans of their classmates” (Smagorinsky, 2010a, p. 20).

Ideally, when students regulate their own learning, with coaching, they develop an “inner speech” about how to reach their goals (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57). While self-regulation ‘converges’ quite naturally with AfL, both are not seen as a temporary “initiative” (Clarke et al.,

2006, p. 43), but a unitary, long-term, and philosophical shift (Hawe & Parr, 2013; Limbrick & Parr, 2010; Ryan & Barton, 2013; Shepard, 2008; Wiliam, 2010). Ideally, in a “rich,” supportive classroom environment, educators, peers, and students reciprocally and fluidly set goals, motivate themselves to write more challenging texts, self-monitor progress, respond to feedback, and ultimately take action in their situated and dynamic learning contexts (Parr & Limbrick 2010, p. 589). From there, educators can begin to foster change and deep understanding by answering these three seemingly basic questions: ‘Where am I going?’ ‘How am I going?,’ and ‘Where to next?’ (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 86).

Where am I Going?, How am I Going?, and Where to Next?



Objective: To share the benefits of formative (mid-stream)

assessment. Originally, Hattie and Timperley (2007) applied these three important questions to giving effective, “instructional” feedback (p. 82). They advocated for offering students “targeted

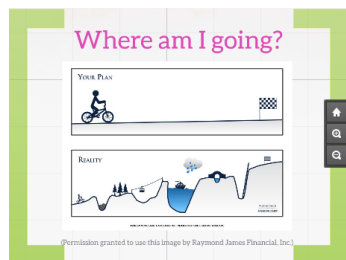
interventions” during the writing process to help students improve a body of work or develop better habits of mind that impact future writing (Clarke, Owens, & Sutton, 2006). I have plotted these three questions on a graph to illustrate how they connect with Vygotsky’s oft-referenced zone of proximal development (ZPD). The shrinking (then reconfiguring) of the ZPD mimics the learning process of mastering and coaching (or enabling) – processes that occur when students have systematic and precise tools to improve learning.

The question ‘**Where am I going?**,’ for example, addresses the need for teachers to share learning goals and discuss criteria with students. Secondly, ‘**How am I going?**,’ refers to helping a student become increasingly independence, where the teacher or group of teachers scaffold

learning and give feedback that helps the student gradually assume more and more of the responsibility for his or her learning. Students should be able to recognize “their next steps and how to take them” (Broadfoot, Daugherty, Gardner, Gipps, Harlen, James, & Stobart, 1999, p. 7; see also Hattie & Timperley, 2007). **‘How students go’** is also a team effort, and requires planning coordinating with other educators to give students extra support or differentiate learning. Lastly, answering the question **‘Where to next’** is different for every student. Based on their abilities, students and teachers reflect on their learning and set goals. Inherent in FA and AfL principles is that these approaches are dialogic, instructive, reflective, or transformative ways educators can instruct or assess writing (Huot, 2002). We begin by giving students clear expectations.

Where am I Going?

Explicitly Sharing Learning Goals and Criteria



Objective: To demonstrate the importance of sharing goals before and during writing instruction. Explicitly sharing learning goals

helps students in numerous ways. First, by understanding what is expected of them, students are able master certain skills. Second,

once students can regulate their own learning, they learn how to coach themselves about how to reach their goals and, hence, improve their writing (Englert et al., 2006; Timperley & Parr, 2009).

Parr and Limbrick (2010), two educators in New Zealand, realized how important it is to give students “a sense of purpose and meaningfulness” where instruction is connected and consistent, yet “systematic and specific” (p. 589). They confirmed that, “explicit, targeted

teaching can raise achievement of the lowest 20 percent” (Parr & Limbrick, 2010, p. 584). Just sharing goals before and during a lesson, however, does not guarantee success. Thus, in order to help students achieve optimal success (and improve their writing skills), Parr and Limbrick (2010), observed and interviewed six teachers whose students achieved significantly better results on national writing tests (in New Zealand) than other schools in the region.

Not only did the teachers start their lessons by explicitly naming, and then re-visiting the learning goal throughout the lesson (such as writing to entertain an audience or identifying the purpose of a limerick) with their students, they followed up with clear, succinct advice. These six teachers also spent “an ample amount of time working on what constitutes good writing” (Johnson & Gelfand, 2013, p. 577). They formulated criteria (and re-visited it throughout the lesson). Johnson and Gelfand (2013) also suggest students further analyze, evaluate, and discuss exemplary writing to gain a deeper understanding of the writing process.

In another study, aptly named “What is this lesson about?,” Timperley and Parr (2009) looked at how educators can shift a student’s focus from improving only the mechanics or surface conventions of writing to those deeper features that instill internal feedback, goal-setting, and mastery in the long run. Timperley and Parr (2009) suggest a two-step process that merges the integration and alignment of goals with tasks. First, teachers and students co-create the mastery or learning goal, such as: write effective imaginative texts to explore ideas and information to make connections and develop insights. They *co-create* because students are not usually able to making learning goals by themselves, and need guidance from a writing expert, their teacher. Secondly, teachers provide feedback and evaluate the writing sample based upon the said goal.

If, conversely, teachers stray from the goal or give students “mixed messages” (Timperley & Parr, 2009, p. 58), students tend to focus on surface features of the writing task, or devise a different, more general learning aim, such as becoming a better writer (p. 57). While honourable, students may not know specifically how to go about achieving it, and thus default to concentrating on “getting the punctuation and spelling right” (Timperley & Parr, 2009, p. 58). Furthermore, self-regulation does not happen unless students first understand exactly what they are supposed to learn (and do).

The downside is that not every teacher has the skills to accurately align and integrate goals and tasks (Timperley & Parr, 2009). Thus, teaching English is demanding because in the span of an hour and throughout a term, teachers are required to make numerous choices based upon their prior knowledge, teaching experience, the sociocultural context, and conflicting ideas about how to teach writing (Gardner, 2014; McQuitty, 2012; Peterson & McClay, 2011; Slomp, 2008; Smagorinsky, Cook, & Johnson, 2003). These choices often influence what strategies teachers advocate or methods we use to improve writing skills and instill student agency. If, for example, teachers do not have extensive and specialized knowledge about how language works, it may be an area of improvement for the teacher him or herself.

Next, I examine other “deliberate acts of teaching” that improve writing, including collaboration, scaffolding, and feedback (Parr & Limbrick, 2010, p. 587).

Activity #5: Considering Revising

Consider... How many times have you collected first or even second drafts where students have repeated identical errors, sometimes word-for-word? What teaching strategies have you used to prevent errors from simply being re-written the second or third time around?

How am I Going?

Common Formative Assessments



Objective: To underscore the importance of collaborating with colleagues to effectively teach writing. Frey and Fisher (2013), along with their colleagues at Health Science High and Middle College, were very frustrated with marking student work because, even after editing and revision, they rarely saw improvements, or they edited second or third drafts containing the same errors from draft number one. So, Fisher and Frey (2013), who are also professors at San Diego State University and the authors of *Checking for Understanding* (2007), a useful resource about formative assessment, surveyed about 550 of the students at their school to see what kind of feedback students wanted. They learned that mostly students wanted edits and ways to improve their writing. These educators decided to cut back on marking. Instead, they decided to analyze the *types* of errors being made. After they devised a system to code the mistakes in grade-level teams, they learned a few important lessons.

First, different groups of students (in different) classes made different errors. They could not just generalize (e.g., all students in Grade 8 need to write stronger topic sentences), but had to look at individual classes, and teach accordingly. Fisher and Frey (2013) concluded that if 75% of the students in a class made the same error, they would re-teach the concept (e.g., citing sources). By carefully analyzing the errors, they sidestepped the “1000 mini-lessons problem” (Shepard, 2005, p. 6), where teachers just run around ‘putting out fires,’ instead of offering systematic editing and revising suggestions in context.

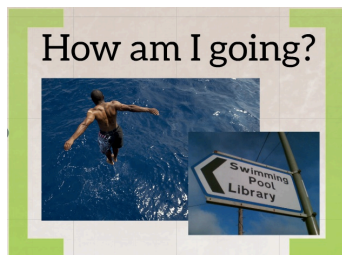
They also learned that re-teaching was not the ‘obvious’ or only solution. Students often



needed more *time* to apply their learning – a ‘luxury’ that is not afforded during quick writes. Students need to “mess with texts” in collaboration with classmates and educators (Hawe & Parr, 2013, p. 215). During this ‘slower,’ but more authentic and effective

method of teaching writing, Fisher and Frey (2013) also had time to scaffold learning and give comprehensive feedback.

Scaffolding Learning



Objective: To offer ways to support learners during the writing

process. Imagine if you were asked to write in a genre you were not familiar with or on a topic you knew nothing about. It is generally not good practice to “merely assign writing topics without engaging

students in dialogue, accessing prior knowledge, or acknowledging the specific context and its particular needs” (Read, 2010, p. 48). Ideally, during E.L.A. classes, educators ‘chunk’ the learning process, with the goal of gradually releasing responsibility to the student. Here, teachers fluidly ‘step in and step out’ of the learning process. Students are encouraged and guided to make key decisions about the ideas, organization, voice, language, and conventions, yet at the same time, they harness teachers’ expertise and take a critical and honest look at their writing – processes that simply cannot be rushed (Englert et al., 2006; Spandel, 2013).

Again, the goal is for students to internalize how to do a certain task, with or without assistance, and ultimately be able to transfer this knowledge to new contexts (Slomp, 2012).

Here, scaffolds such as graphic organizers, mind maps, or collaborative writing help connect a

student's prior knowledge with the task at hand. From there, Fisher and Frey (2013) suggest teachers cue, prompt, and question students about their writing, thus "forcing students back into the text" (Huot, 2002, p. 132). In order to be effective, however, feedback needs to be "task specific, problem specific, and learner-specific" (Haswell, 2006, p. 16).

Feedback



Objective: To demonstrate the importance of offering targeted feedback and to offer effective ways to give feedback. Perrenoud (1998) compares giving vague feedback to students to throwing bottles into the ocean in the hopes that the messages one day finds

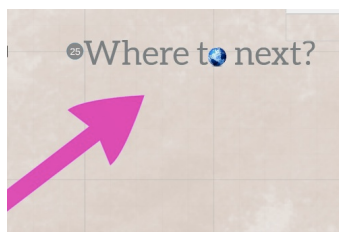
their way back to the recipient. Conversely, if the feedback tells students how to correct mistakes with some explanation and specific ways to improve, the effects on learning can be profound (William, 2011, p. 7). Feedback should not only focus on what is 'right or wrong,' but it should also be positive and supportive because it affects a student's self-esteem and motivation (Peterson & McClay, 2010; William, 2011). It should

It is no secret that 'marking papers' is often called one of those "onerous, dreadful tasks, providing little opportunity for teaching and learning" (Huot & Perry, 2009, p. 423). English teachers especially are said to be "relegated to the drudgery of reading and 'correcting' stacks and stacks of papers, semester after semester" (Huot & Perry, 2009, p. 429) rather than teaching writing. Conversely, Huot and Perry (2009) invite teachers to sit down with the intent to "enjoy or learn something from your students' writing" (p. 431), instead of trying to report back where students went right or wrong (Shepard, 2008). These small, but significant shifts illustrate how feedback is indeed "a process of communication" (Bruno & Santos, 2010, p. 112).

I would briefly like to offer some concrete ways to give effective feedback. First, teachers should give a balance of comments; over-zealous ‘red-penning’ is not recommended (Bruno & Santos, 2010). Quality feedback, in fact, matters more than giving a large amount of feedback (Bruno & Santos, 2010). Firstly, comments should be encouraging and positive. They should also be legible, unambiguous, and clear (without abbreviations or symbols that students may not understand) (Bruno & Santos, 2010; Peterson & McClay, 2010). In addition, to avoid the problem where students just repeat previous mistakes, feedback should suggest, “only what is necessary for students to answer by themselves” or prompt them to resolve their revisions by themselves (Bruno & Santos, 2010, p. 112). Furthermore, an effective way for students to “recognize their strengths, gauge their progress, and take more ownership of their learning,” is through self-assessment (Johnson & Gelfand, 2013, p. 571).

Where to Next?

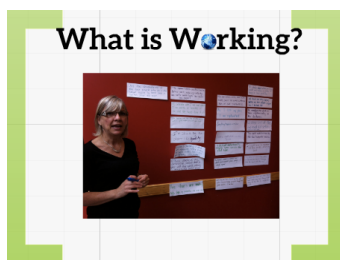
(Student) Self-assessment



Objective: To highlight the importance for students to evaluate their own writing. A powerful way to promote student agency is through self-assessment, however, Peterson and McClay (2010) revealed that it rarely occurs because teachers either do not see the value in self-assessment or “have difficulty in supporting students to assess their own writing effectively” (pp. 96-97). Two possible benefits include improving writing ability and transferring new skills to future writing (Nielsen, 2012). Nielsen (2012) recommends that self-assessment, or prompting students to “think about, evaluate and/or respond to their own writing” can be done *during* the writing process (p. 1).

In my own experience, I use formal and informal, written and verbal forms of self-assessment. For example, after drafting and revising thesis statements during a writing block, I asked students to reflect on the experience. I got the usual responses: challenging, hard, tricky, but then one (female) student said, quite colourfully, that it was like falling down a narrow hole, hoping that someone is down below, ready to catch you. In subsequent lessons, the class and I recalled her vivid description. As students wrote their final drafts (and the process got easier), the girl concluded: “Luckily, someone *is* there to catch you.” Making judgments about one’s performance builds learner autonomy and writing expertise through metacognition. It also creates a “type of internal dialogue” that helps build ownership and acts a cognitive tool (Nielsen, 2012, p. 4; see also Englert et al., 2006). Johnson and Gelfand (2013) suggest that co-constructing the rubric against which they judge their own work is a precursor to setting personal goals. This process has also been shown to increase motivation and give students a greater sense of responsibility in “the entire learning and assessment process” (Johnson & Gelfand, 2013, p. 573). Students, however, are not the only ones in the class who should evaluate their work.

(Teacher) Self-assessment



What is Working?

Objective: To highlight the importance for teachers to evaluate their own teaching and writing practices. In the most general

sense, educators can agree how important it is to candidly reflect upon one’s instructional practices. What is working? What can I

change? Am I clearly identifying students’ strengths and weaknesses? Am I offering reasonable and effective strategies? Can I illicit my colleagues’ help, guidance, or constructive criticism if

needed? Am I fair, yet direct? When honestly answered and followed up with an action plan, these questions benefit both teacher and students (Birenbaum, 2014). I encourage educators to continue discussing how we teach and assess at staff meetings, school-based team meetings, and professional learning circles (Limbrick et al., 2010). Granted, it is ‘frightening’ to admit one does not have all the answers, but by acknowledging that we have gaps in our own learning, or questions about pedagogy or writing, we put our students first (Limbrick et al., 2010). When the teachers in Limbrick et al.’s (2010) study developed an inquiry stance as a practitioner researcher, for example, students made significant gains.

With the support of colleagues, educators can address the challenging questions about pedagogy and writing skills: Am I really qualified to teach writing? What aspects am I doing well and what can I improve? Then more specifically: do I possess “‘insider’ knowledge of the writing process” (Sarmiento & Vasquez, 2010, p. 276)? Do I consider myself a writer (Gardner, 2014)? Some teachers consider themselves to be readers, involved in book clubs or perpetually reading for pleasure, but do they write for enjoyment? Why or why not? If not, what would it take for me to develop a love of writing? Research has also shown that, not only do teachers have to understand mechanics and skills, but must they also teach *creativity* – an abstraction made more understandable when teachers experience “the emotional capacity to tolerate uncertainty, take risks, and engage artistically” first-hand (Cremin, 2006, p. 415). By “making sense of their [own] artistic potential,” research suggests that they grow to appreciate how “resilience, reflection, and relationships” affect the writerly arts (Cremin, 2006, p. 430), thus producing more intuitive, efficacious, and confident writing teachers (Gardner, 2014).

Activity #6: Workshop Wrap-up: 5 Minute Write

To conclude, teachers revisit their initial writes where they responded to the questions:

What are my strengths as a writing teacher?

What do I want to accomplish as a writing teacher and/or a writer?

They now add to their responses and include any key learnings from the workshop, or new realizations or reflections. Some educators may choose to share out.

I encourage them to review their responses or to share them with a colleague in a few days' time.

Conclusion: Revisiting the Rationale



I recently asked my 99-year-old grandmother, who holds a PhD in conservation education: how do you change someone's mind when that person disagrees with you? She quickly replied: make it worth their while. Initially, I had educators, specifically educators who ardently support the implementation of the SWW in mind, and worried about fielding complaints from angry workshop participants. In retrospect, I now see that perhaps, in her near-century wisdom, my grandmother's words could better pertain to the true stakeholders: the students. I truly believe it is "worth their while" to implement formative assessment practices throughout the writing process. Furthermore, writing when they are intrinsically invested and interested certainly commences an exciting and deeper shared journey.

Chapter 4

REFLECTIONS

Writing: Its Promising Future

In 2010, I taught a forthright boy with permanently tousled hair named Jason¹. Any time I had a problem with my projector or software, all I had to do was grimace or sigh, and Jason would bounce to the front and, with a few clicks of the mouse, usually had my presentation up and running faster than it took for me to phone (or find) the tech-teacher. Jason also had a vivid imagination, partially from playing role-play games (RPGs) on his X-Box and also from interactions with his dad, a computer programmer (whom he spoke of fondly and often). At the time, I taught English and Social Studies, and frequently integrated the two subjects, where my Grade 7 students engaged in lively discussions around higher order thinking questions, such as: how have the ancient Greeks affected our society, or how is power gained, used, and justified? Frequently, Jason provided more worldly insight and connections than you would expect from a 13-year-old. Yet, he experienced significant difficulties in transferring his ideas onto paper. Throughout his schooling, Jason had consistently been assigned a C- in English.

I also taught Max, a Grade 8 student with bangs down to his nose. He also came to me with a history of C- marks on previous report cards. Max went to the Resource Room daily to get help with his 'written output.' Even though he received three-on-one help for our in-class English assignments, when given a new topic to write about (and left to his own devices), he drew pictures in the margins or played with fonts on the computer screen – for *hours*. No prompting or cajoling sparked any need to put 'pen to paper.' The Learning Assistance teacher would often

¹ Names have been changed.

visit me after school, brace herself on my desk, sigh heavily, and describe the process of writing – which she compared to pulling teeth – with Max. Sure, he had creative, thoughtful ideas. His mother treated him as an equal at home, and it was apparent that their candid conversations and his genuine curiosity for counter-culture inspired divergent, quirky ideas. During class discussions, Max dropped thought-provoking ideas like a millionaire casually spilling a bag of diamonds. We all scrambled to pick them up, then became quiet in confused admiration. While Max was not ready to ‘move’ the classic fountain pen into masterful prose, he was effortlessly fluent in other “mainstream status-giving Discourses” (Gee, 1989, p. 11). He might be ‘mushfaking’ his composition skills, and probably had many hard years ahead at school, but Max knew that drawing mainly from his strengths in oral and digital literacies, afforded him a certain amount of “power and prestige” (Gee, 1989, p. 11).

After attending a workshop for English teachers this spring, I co-taught a lesson using the iPad app, Explain Everything. In pairs and triads, students had to use words and image to represent ‘dystopia,’ a society that is “characterized by human misery, as squalor, oppression, disease, and overcrowding” (The American Heritage® Stedman's Medical Dictionary, 2004). They also had to show how aspects of present-day society are often dystopian. Max took command of the device and created a colourful, content-rich six-slide presentation before the block was over. Additionally, at the beginning of the lesson, we identified ‘experts,’ or those who could trouble-shoot any problems that arose when using the app. Max’s hand shot up every time; his skills were invaluable.

After completing this critique of the School Wide Write within the context of effective writing instruction, I would be exaggerating if I said I know precisely how to instruct and assess

the 'Jason' and 'Max' students who populate my classes year after year. If anything, the gaps in my understanding now more resemble Grand Canyon-sized crevasses, than the shallow cracks I would like them to be. Undoubtedly, humility has a way of changing perspective (Friere, 2012). My tool belt has changed, though. It holds more sophisticated, refined tools to help me support students who do not fit into tidy categories or who are multiliterate, but rarely get the opportunity to demonstrate their skills (O'Brien, 2012). I also try to start a lesson, for example, with an explicit goal to accompany a task, then revisit the goal often and check for understanding throughout the block (Fisher & Frey, 2007a; Parr & Limbrick, 2010). Daily, I get more adept at scaffolding learning by making "tacit knowledge perceptible through think-alouds that make visible the discourse, thoughts, actions, decisions, struggles, and deliberations that are part of the writing process" (Englert et al., 2006, p. 209). Additionally, I try to give feedback by drawing the student back to his or her work via cueing and questioning, rather than just marking for correctness (Frey & Fisher, 2013). More often now, I also try to 'borrow' tools and expertise and insight from students, such as Jason and Max's proclivity for all things digital.

The operative word with all these strategies is *try*. Only one thing is certain: many powerful writing opportunities abound. After that, context, experiences, strengths and talents can influence the quality of instruction and the process itself. But to stop the classroom flow, even during the first week of classes, and ignore or discount all forms of expertise, even if they are not academic, seems not only counterintuitive, but wrong. Friere (2012) speaks of hope "rooted in men's (sic) incompleteness, from which they move out in constant search" (p. 91). In this way,

writing is both the journey and the destination. Curiously, my own professional transformation also began during a writing class two years ago.

Begging to Differ

In retrospect, I see that Dr. Begoray tried to ‘warn’ our eager, but green cohort during first week of classes back in July 2012 when she told us that formal, formulaic writing often privileges few and isolates many. When she indicated there were numerous alternatives to the five-paragraph essay, for example, my jaw dropped and my hand shot up, ready to differ. (Now I cannot educate myself fast enough to try and find those many and varied alternatives.) Over these past two years especially, the ‘Jason’ and the ‘Max’ students have driven home Dr. Begoray’s message that, in my case, needed to be witnessed before it was truly believed: writing is far more multifaceted than pen-meets-paper and far more complex than draft-edit-publish.

In Dr. Begoray’s class, there was no mention of writing tests, though. I see now that they drive students even farther away from this helical process – even though they are sometimes presented as an acceptable, even preferred, way to judge writing and thinking (Hillocks, 2002). Somewhat tongue-in-cheek, Smagorinsky (2009) calls it “*instructus interruptus*” when top-heavy administration demands that educators teach to a standardized test (over offering more open-ended, Atwellian or inquiry-based Hillocksian approaches) (p. 19). Shepard (2005) further describes how an emphasis on test-taking and summative assessment may, in fact, backfire on teachers (and students). Because tests often provide only unreliable information, teachers are often left scrambling to present ‘1000 (unrelated) mini-lessons’ in an effort to address all the different learning needs in the classroom. Thus, this project grew from a critique of a writing

test to a study in differentiation in the writing class vis à vis tangible strategies such as scaffolding, feedback, and goal-setting, but also a re-examination of my long-held philosophical beliefs about assessing writing and teaching in general. When it came to the writing process, for example, I had to only look as far as this project to appreciate the proverbial ‘blood, sweat, and tears’ involved in presenting information in a clear, concise, and readable format. My other source of inspiration came, unexpectedly, from the people who are affected the most by the SWW: my students.

Getting Started: No Tidy Little Boxes

Unlike the two boys I mentioned above, I have an ardent, even “obsessive” (according to my partner, Nicolas) passion for the written word – in the old fashioned sense. Over these last six months, nothing excited me more than “sitting in a small room for the duration, in the company of pieces of paper” (Dillard, 1989, p. 44). That said, throughout the process, more often than not, “the manuscript revealed the usual signs of struggle – bloodstains, teethmarks, gashes, and burns” (Dillard, 1989, p. 29). At the beginning, I wrote paragraphs only to discover the next morning that they made very little sense! I agonized, then realized that I needed a system for collating so much information (before I attempted to understand it). The connections and overlapping data reminded me of the airplane routes criss-crossing a map of the world in arching hairlines on the back page of an in-flight magazine. Not only did I have to keep the facts straight, but somehow, I was also supposed to knit them into lucid, intelligent prose. During our first semester back in 2012, Dr. Begoray also warned us about ‘chewy’ articles – those laden with arcane, theoretical concepts, where words like *semiotic*, *epistemology*, and *metadiscursivity* marched across the pages. Some days I just read, highlighting and writing

notes in the margin, to avoid the daunting task of meaning-making. If anyone asked, it would *look* like I was working.

The more I read, though, the more the concepts started to link and relate – their worth sometimes evidenced by which authors seemed to linger in a horseshoe around my laptop longer than others. Firstly, using statistics, anecdotes, humour, or historical examples, Hillocks (2002, 2003, 2010) and Smagorinsky (2009, 2010a, 2010b) revealed how testing often maligns the writing (and learning) process. Similarly, Huot (2002), Huot and Perry (2009), Shepard (2005, 2008, 2009), and Smagorinsky (2009, 2010a, 2010b) were vocal critics of how writing was typically assessed, and equally vocal champions for bridging writing and assessment to support instruction and “enhance learning” (Shepard, 2008, p. 4). Additionally, Smagorinsky (2009, 2010a, 2010b) demonstrated that changing the system was no easy feat, and furthermore, that the most difficult group to change was possibly the educators themselves due to their long “apprenticeship of observation” and close affinity with the status quo (2010a, p. 24).

From there, Hawe and Parr (2013), Parr (2010, 2011, 2013), Parr and Limbrick (2010), Parr and Timperley (2008, 2010a, 2010b), and Timperley and Parr (2009) provided concrete ways and theoretical reasons to enact formative assessment and assessment for learning. I ‘followed’ them into many classrooms and interviews, ‘observing’ ways to improve one’s writing instruction, replete with the realistic challenges associated with enacting such dialogic, reflective and transformative goals. They, along with Fisher and Frey (2013), Rezaei and Lovorn, (2010), and Barton and Ryan (2013) supplied the nuts and bolts of how to inform instruction. I also spent a few afternoons in the quietest, farthest corner of the downtown public library

combing through Behizadeh and Engelhard's (2011) comprehensive retrospective on writing instruction and assessment; they gave my project its historical context. In addition, Peterson and McClay (2012) and Slomp (2008, 2012) became relevant and valuable Canadian resources. And finally, it was Nancie Atwell (1998) who first whetted my curiosity to further examine how writing is taught. Even though Dr. Begoray suggested *In the Middle* as supplementary reading for EDCI 556 (Language Processes in the School Curriculum: Writing and Representing) in 2012, I read it cover-to-cover in August, after finishing the course. While I was often inspired by these and other authors, I was equally confronted by references that were remote as Antarctica, as chewy as toffee. There were many times I had to make choices: persevere or walk the dog? Drink more tea and re-read, or check Facebook? Study a related article or wash the dishes?

I usually decided to plod on or "just keep swimming," à la Dorie from *Finding Nemo*. In a cubicle on the third floor of the McPherson library or in my makeshift living room office, I decoded articles out loud like a beginning reader, "chewed on" abstractions, and then scoffed at the person who let me tackle this Master's degree in the first place. Then it dawned on me: the joke was on me. Not only did I choose a topic that seemed defined and tidy at the onset – to critically examine a certain writing test – the more I read, the more I opened a Pandora's box of extensive and interwoven literature about writing instruction and assessment. It sprawled and overlapped across all curricular areas, and never spoke directly to my specific focus: the School Wide Write. It just continued to bulge and widen exponentially whenever I read another article. In fact, the night I finished my literature review, I did another Boolean search on Summons, the University of Victoria library's online catalogue (e.g., "writing instruction" and assessment") and learned of a 400-page book on assessing writing, published in 2014 and

loaded with many prominent voices I had come to admire, including: Klenowski, Parr, Timperley, and Willis. I did the only thing I could do: I “acknowledged [my] bewilderment” and persisted (Dillard, 1989, p. 78). I performed research triage, draining highlighters, prioritizing the two-foot high stack of reference books, and shelving articles that were only peripherally related. Eventually, I learned to trust the process: that ignorance would lead to recognition would lead to understanding. Themes began to appear: the importance of process and context, formative assessment, innovation, the challenges associated with systemic change. They began to stand out like the bigger, bold words in a Wordle. Eventually, paragraphs started to take real shape.

The Writing Process: A Personal Take

Joke number two: writing about writing. Certainly, this major project has been testament to the curvy, winding, interconnected, complex nature of writing. Not only did it take me a very long time to produce the first draft of my literature review, during the process, I made a grave error. I assumed that I was not in control. I assumed that it was my job to compare, not canvass the scholars’ ideas, to summarize, not scrutinize. I rationalized that I was trying to save ‘the good stuff’ for Chapter 3. But ‘hoarding’ ideas is never good writing practice according to acclaimed essayist, Annie Dillard (1989): “spend it all, shoot it, play it, lose it, all, right away, every time... give it, give it all, give it now” (p. 78). When my advisors instructed me to formulate an argument, I felt liberated, yet intimidated. Sorting information, after all, was easier than taking a stand.

Re-writing the literature review was like taking a sweater that had unravelled from the middle and attempting to re-knit it, by starting from the rupture and simultaneously repairing it

in all directions. In a word: *complicated*! Including critical analysis – an “edge” – was even more daunting than collating (D. Begoray, personal communication, May 17, 2014). At first, I did not feel up to the challenge, knowing I had to digest the material on a different, higher plane. I also knew I had little choice but to continue to trust (and hope) that I would encounter more ‘a-ha’ moments. And so it transformed: “cell to cell, bole to bough to twig to leaf,” confirming indeed that “writing from the first word toward the last, displays ... courage and fear” (Dillard, 1989, p. 15).

Initially, I perceived the editing process as a major thorn in my progress, an inconvenience. I see now that my professors, conversely, knew that any systemic or personal change could not “be carried out in isolation” (Friere, 2012, p. 85). After all, when “dialoguers expect nothing to come of their efforts, their encounter will be empty, sterile, bureaucratic, and tedious” (Friere, 2012, p. 92). Thankfully, being critical (of the SWW) did not come down to being a “well-behaved” educator or a rebel, as I had initially thought (Friere, 2012, p. 92). I joined Freire, a Brazilian scholar and philosopher, in lumping together “the truly humanist educator and the authentic revolutionary” as one and the same (p. 94). But according to Friere (2012), risking disagreement is a small price to pay for seeking truth and transformation. According to Friere (2012), we must consider the context, then proceed by showing “a profound love for the word and for people” (p. 89). So, I put my students in the forefront of my thoughts when writing. By exposing my own “anxieties, doubts, hopes, or hopelessness” about writing instruction in general and the SWW, specifically, I slowly started to ‘move over’ and make room for the ‘Jason’ and ‘Max’ students in my writing class (Friere, 2012, p. 93). I have known for many years that the writing process is messy, non-linear, fierce, and powerful. I soon began to view

teaching and learning as similarly layered, complex, and dynamic processes. When I stopped trying to fit students like Jason and Max, and Rachel and Britney, into impossibly small boxes, I stopped silencing those who truly have so much to give.

Conclusion

Over pizza and beer, I told my dear and long-time friend, Kathleen, that what began as study of a writing test had concluded with 'change the world.' We laughed at my hyperbole, but I secretly agonized how I would instill the same longing for embedded, integrated, contextualized writing activities that honour the writing process to dubious teachers who resisted change. By simply saying: 'Just do it my way,' I had learned nothing. I did not need Friere (2012) to convince me that dialogue is "an act of creation" (p. 89); I saw it in my classroom daily. I did need Friere (2012), though, to remind me that change "requires an intense faith in humankind, faith in their power to make and remake, create and re-create" (p. 90).

Ultimately, my goal as an English Language Arts teacher is to foster a student's identity as a writer who shares a vested interest in writing well. I have also added a professional and pedagogical goal since completing my Master's degree in Language and Literacy, namely to continue this process of "teachers teaching teachers" (Borko, 2004, p. 10). Rather than developing formal mentorships with superiors, I am keen to continue collaborating and co-reflecting with colleagues who are willing to honestly "question their beliefs and practices" and "[look] below the surface of their teaching" (Limbrick et al., 2010, p. 901). And since many unknowns still lie ahead within writing instruction/assessment theory (Huot, 2002), and in my own "unfinished" learning process, I conclude by drawing parallels between crafting a first draft

and embracing change (Friere, 2012, p. 84). When writers put fresh words on a page, an act that requires a certain amount of risk, passion, and hope, they sometimes have to yield to the process itself: “Right now, you are flying. Right now, your job is to hold your breath” (Dillard, 1989, p. 21). Thus, our work begins.

References

- Adams, J. (2012). Make learning matter for the multitasking generation. *Middle School Journal*, 43, (3), 6-12.
- Albert, L. R., Corea, D., & Macadino, V. (2012). *Rhetorical ways of thinking: Vygotskian theory and mathematical learning*. New York, NY: Springer. doi:10.1007/978-94-007-4065-5_2
- Albertson, K., & Marwitz, M. (2001). The silent scream: Students negotiating timed writing assessments. *Teaching English in the Two Year College*, 29(2), 144-153.
- Ali, S. (2014). The role of assessment in pedagogic context: A descriptive study of classroom assessment practices of junior school teachers. *Language in India*, 14(1), 886-896.
- Allal, L., & Lopez, L. M. (2005). Formative assessment of learning: A review of publications in French. In *Office of Economic Co-operation and Development, Formative assessment: Improving learning in secondary classrooms*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Allen, L. A. (2010). Benchmark assessment. In C. A. Kridel (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of curriculum studies* (pp. 76-77). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.4135/9781412958806>
- Almond, R. G. (2014). Using automated essay scores as an anchor when equating constructed response writing tests. *International Journal of Testing*, 14(1), 73-91.
- Alvermann, D. E. (2009). Sociocultural constructions of adolescence and young people's literacies. In L. Christenbury, R. Bomer, & P. Smagorinsky, (Eds.), *Handbook of adolescent literacy research* (pp. 14-28). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Alvermann, D. E., & Hinchman, K. A. (Eds.) (2012). *Reconceptualizing the literacies in adolescents' lives*. (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

- Anagnostopoulos, D. (2003). The new accountability, student failure, and teachers' work in urban high schools. *Educational Policy*, 17(3), 291-316.
- Andrade, H., Buff, C., Terry, J., Erano, M., & Paolino, S. (2009). Assessment-driven improvements in middle school students' writing. *Middle School Journal*, 40(4), 4-12.
- Andrade, H., & Cizek, G. J. (2010). *Handbook of formative assessment*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Applebee, A. (2000). Alternative models of writing development. In R. Indrisano & J. R. Squire (Eds.), *Perspectives on writing: Research, theory, and practice* (pp. 90–110). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Applebee, A. N., & Langer, J.A. (2009). What is happening in the teaching of writing? *English Journal*, 98(5), 18-28.
- Applebee, A. N., & Langer, J.A. (2011). A snapshot of writing instruction in middle schools and high schools. *English Journal*, 100(6), 14-27. Retrieved from <http://www.editlib.org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/p/53571>
- Arter, J. A. (2010). Proceedings from NCME conference: *Interim benchmark assessments: Are we getting our eggs in the right basket?* Denver, CO: Pearson Assessment Training Institute. Retrieved from <http://ati.pearson.com/downloads/Interim-Benchmark-Assessments-Paper.pdf>
- Atkinson, B. M. (2012). Rethinking reflection: Teachers' critiques. *The Teacher Educator*, 47(3), 175-194.
- Atwell, N. (1998). *In the middle: Reading, writing, and learning from adolescents*. (2nd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Avila, J. (2012). The fight's not always fixed: Using literary response to transcend standardized

- test scores. *English Journal*, 102(2), 101-107.
- Baker, E. (2010). *The new literacies: Multiple perspectives on research and practice*. New York, NY: Guildford Press.
- Bakhtin, M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination*. M. Holquist (Ed.). (C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Trans.). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1984). *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics* (Vol. 8). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bakhtin, M. (1986). *Speech genres and other late essays* (V. McGee, Trans.). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Baldwin, D. (2012). Fundamental challenges in developing and scoring constructed-response assessment. In N. Elliot & L. Perelman (Eds.), *Writing assessment in the 21st century: Essays in honor of Edward M. White* (pp. 327-342). New York, NY: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Barnes, D. (1976/1992). *From communication to curriculum*. (2nd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Barnes, D. (2008). Exploratory talk for learning. In N. Mercer & S. Hodgkinson (Eds.), *Exploratory talk in school* (pp. 1-15). London, UK: SAGE Publications, Ltd.
- Bean, T., & O'Brien, D. (2012). Past and future directions in content area literacies. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 56(4), 275-278.
- Behizadeh, N., & Engelhard, G. (2011). Historical view of the influences of measurement and writing theories on the practice of writing assessment in the United States. *Assessing Writing*, 16(3), 189-211.
- Birenbaum, M. (2014). Conceptualizing assessment culture in school. In C. Wyatt-Smith, V.

- Klenowski, & P. Colbert, (Eds.), *Designing assessment for quality learning* (pp. 285-302).
New York, NY: Springer.
- Black, P. J., & Wiliam, D. (1998a). Assessment and classroom learning. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 5(1), 7-74.
- Black, P. J., & Wiliam, D. (1998b). *Inside the black box: Raising standards through classroom assessment*. London: GL Assessment.
- Black, P. J., & Wiliam, D. (2009). Developing the theory of formative assessment. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, 21(1), 5-31.
- Borko, H. (2004). Professional development and teacher learning: Mapping the terrain. *Educational Researcher*, 33(8), 3-15. Retrieved from http://www.aera.net/uploadedFiles/Journals_and_Publications/Journals/Educational_Researcher/Volume_33_No_8/02_ERv33n8_Borko.pdf
- Brimi, H. (2012). Teaching writing in the shadow of standardized writing assessment: An exploratory study. *American Secondary Education*, 41(1), 52-77.
- Brindley, R., & Schneider, J. J., (2002). Writing instruction or destruction: Lessons to be learned from fourth-grade teachers' perspective on teaching writing. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(4), 328-341.
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2007a). *Foundation skills assessment (FSA)*. Retrieved from <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/assessment/fsa/>
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2007b). *Provincial examinations*. Retrieved from <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/exams/>
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2009). *British Columbia performance standards:*

Writing grade 8 (Rev. Ed.), 309-357. Victoria, BC: British Columbia Ministry of Education.

Retrieved from http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/perf_stands/writing_g8.pdf

British Columbia Ministry of Education (2012). *Enabling innovation: Transforming curriculum and assessment*. Retrieved from

http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/docs/ca_transformation.pdf

C: British Columbia Ministry of Education (2013a). Assessment: Transforming assessment.

Transforming Curriculum & Assessment. Retrieved from

<https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/assessment>

British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2013b). Home: Rethinking curriculum, draft curriculum, redesigning assessment, the feedback process, next steps. *Transforming Curriculum & Assessment*. Retrieved from <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/>

A: British Columbia Ministry of Education (2013c). Curriculum drafts: English language arts 8.

Transforming Curriculum & Assessment. Retrieved from

<https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum/English%20Language%20Arts/8>

British Columbia Teachers' Federation v. British Columbia, (2014) BCSC 121 (Jan. 27, 2014)

<http://www.courts.gov.bc.ca/jdb-txt/SC/14/01/2014BCSC0121cor1.htm>.

British Columbia Teachers' Federation (n.d.). *What parents need to know*.

<http://www.bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Parents/HotTopics/FSA-withdrawal-English.pdf>.

Broadfoot, P. M., Daugherty, R., Gardner, J., Gipps, C. V., Harlen, W., & James, M., & Stobart, G. (1999). *Assessment for learning: Beyond the black box*. Cambridge, UK: University of Cambridge, School of Education.

Bruno, I., & Santos, L. (2010). Written comments as a form of feedback. *Studies in Educational*

Evaluation, 36(3), 111–120.

Buckelew, S. P., Byrd, N., Key, C. W., Thornton, J., & Merwin, M. M. (2013). Illusions of a good grade: Effort or luck? *Teaching of Psychology*, 40(2) 134-138.

Calfee, R. C., & Miller, R. G. (2012). Best practices in writing instruction. In S. Graham, C. A. MacArthur, & J. Fitzgerald (Eds.), *Best practices in writing instruction* (2nd ed.). (pp. 351-377). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Calkins, L. M. (1994). *The art of teaching writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Camp, H. (2012). The psychology of writing development – and its implications for assessment. *Assessing Writing*, 17(2), 92–105.

Carless, D., & Lam, R. (2014). Developing assessment for productive learning in confucian-influenced settings. In . In C. Wyatt-Smith, V. Klenowski, & P. Colbert, (Eds.), *Designing assessment for quality learning* (pp. 167-182). New York, NY: Springer.

Charney, D. (1984). The validity of using holistic scoring to evaluate writing: A critical overview. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 18(1), 65-81.

Clarke, P., Owens, T., & Sutton, R. (2006). *Creating independent student learners: A practical guide to assessment for learning*. Winnipeg, MB: Portage & Main Press.

Close, S., & Nottingham, A. (in press). *SmartLearning: A blueprint for empowering learners*. Victoria, BC: Friesen Press.

Coates, H., & Seifert, T. (2011). Linking assessment for learning, improvement and accountability. *Quality in Higher Education*, 17(2), 179-194.

doi:10.1080/13538322.2011.554308

Colbert, P, & Cumming, J. J. (2014). Enabling all students to learn through assessment: A Case

- study of equitable outcomes achieved through the use of criteria and standards. In C. Wyatt-Smith, V. Klenowski, & P. Colbert, (Eds.), *Designing assessment for quality learning* (pp. 211-231). New York, NY: Springer.
- Condon, W. (2012). The future of portfolio-based writing assessment: A cautionary tale. In N. Elliot & L. Perelman (Eds.), *Writing assessment in the 21st century: Essays in honor of Edward M. White* (pp. 233-246). New York, NY: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (2009). "Multiliteracies": New literacies, new learning. *Pedagogies: An International Journal*, 4(3), 164-195.
- Cremin, T. (2006). Creativity, uncertainty, and discomfort: Teachers as writers. *Cambridge Journal of Education* 36(3), 415-433.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Crooks, T. J. (1988). The impact of classroom evaluation practices on students. *Review of Educational Research*, 58(4), 438-481.
- Crawford, L., & Smolkowski, K. (2008). When a "sloppy copy" is good enough: Results of a state writing assessment. *Assessing Writing*, 13(1), 61-77.
- Cuban, L. (2009). *Hugging the middle: How teachers teach in an era of testing and accountability*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Davies, A. (2007). *Making classroom assessment work*, (2nd ed.). Courtenay, BC: Connections Publishing, Inc.
- De La Paz, S. (2009). Rubrics: Heuristics for developing writing strategies. *Assessment for Effective Intervention*, 34(3), 134-146.

- Dillard, A. (1989). *The writing life*. New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc.
- Dirksen, D. J. (2011). Hitting the reset button: Using formative assessment to guide instruction. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 92(7), 26-31.
- Dixon, H. R., Hawe, E., & Parr, J. (2011). Enacting assessment for learning: The beliefs practice nexus. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 18(4), 365-379.
- Dreher, K. (2012). Tests, testing times and literacy teaching. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 35(3), 334-352.
- DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & Many, T. (2010). *Learning by doing: A handbook for professional learning communities at work*. (2nd edition). Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.
- Dupuis, J. (Victoria Literacy Outreach Coordinator). (2012). 2011-2012 District/Community Literacy Plan: Implementation Report. Greater Victoria School District No. 61. Victoria Literacy Task Group.
- Dutro, E., Selland, M. K., & Bien, A. C. (2013). Revealing writing, concealing writers: High-stakes assessment in an urban elementary classroom. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 45(2), 99-141.
- dystopia. (n.d.). *The American Heritage® Stedman's Medical Dictionary*. Retrieved June 4, 2014, from dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/dystopia>
- Engelsen, K. S., & Smith, K. (2014). Assessment literacy. In C. Wyatt-Smith, V. Klenowski, & P. Colbert, (Eds.), *Designing assessment for quality learning* (pp. 91-107). New York, NY: Springer.
- Englert, C. S. (1994). Writing instruction from a sociocultural perspective: The holistic, dialogic, and social enterprise of writing. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 25(3), 153-172.

- Englert, C. S., Mariage, T. V., & Dunsmore, K. (2006). Tenets of sociocultural theory in writing instruction research. In C. A. MacArthur, S. Graham, & J. Fitzgerald. (Eds.), *Handbook of writing research* (pp. 208-221). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Fecho, B. (2011). *Teaching for the students: Habits of heart, mind, and practice in the engaged classroom*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2003). Writing instruction for struggling adolescent readers: A gradual release model. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 46(5), 396-405.
- Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2004). *Improving adolescent literacy: Strategies at work*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.
- Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2007a). *Checking for understanding: Formative assessment techniques for your classroom*. Alexandria, VA: Association for the Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).
- Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2007b). A tale of two middle schools: The difference in structure and instruction. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 51(3), 204-211.
- Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2008). Student and teacher perspectives on the usefulness of content literacy strategies. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 47, 246–263.
- Fitzhenry, R. I. (Ed.). (2006). *The Fitzhenry & Whiteside book of quotations*. Markham, ON: Fitzhenry & Whiteside.
- Flower, L., & Hayes, J. R. (1981). A cognitive process theory of writing. *College Composition and Communication*, 32(4), 365-387.
- Freire, P. (1985). Reading the world and reading the word: An interview with Paulo Freire. *Language Arts*, 62(1), 15-21.

- Freire, P. (2012). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing Inc.
- Frey, N., & Fisher, D. (2013). A formative assessment system for writing improvement. *English Journal*, 103(1), 66-71.
- Fulcher, G. (2012) Assessment literacy for the language classroom. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 9(2), 113-132, doi:10.1080/15434303.2011.642041
- Fulwiler, M., & Middleton, K. (2012). After digital storytelling: Video composing in the new media age. *Computers and Composition* 29(1), 39-50.
- Gallagher, C. W. (2014). All writing assessment is local. *College Composition and Communication*, 65(3), 486-505.
- Gardner, J. (2012). (Ed.). *Assessment and learning*. London, UK: SAGE.
- Gardner, P. (2014). Becoming a teacher of writing: Primary student teachers reviewing their relationship with writing. *English in Education*, 48(2), 128-145.
- Gee, J. P. (1989). Literacy, Discourse, and linguistics: Introduction. *Journal of Education*, 171(1), 5-17.
- Gee, J. P. (1999). *Social linguistics and literacies: ideology in discourse* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Falmer.
- Gee, J. P. (2003). *What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gee, J. P., (2006). Self-fashioning and shape-shifting: Language, identity, and social class. In D.E. Alvermann, K.A. Hinchman, D.W. Moore, S.F. Phelps, & D.E. Waff (Eds.), *Reconceptualizing the literacies in adolescents' Lives* (2nd ed.) (pp. 165-185). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers.

- Gee, J. (2008). A sociocultural perspective on opportunity to learn. In P. Moss, D. Pullin, J. Gee, E. Haertel & L. Jones Young (Eds.), *Assessment, equity and opportunity to learn* (pp. 76-108). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Gee, J. (2009). Reflections on reading Cope and Kalantzis' "'Multiliteracies': New literacies, new learning." *Pedagogies: An International Journal*, 4(3), 196-204.
- Gee, J. P. (2011). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method*. (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Gee, J. P. (2012). *Social linguistics and literacies* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Gilbert, J., & Graham, S. (2010). Teaching writing to elementary students in grades 4-6: A national survey. *Elementary School Journal*, 110, 494-518.
- Gipps, C. V. (2004). *Beyond testing [electronic resource]: towards a theory of educational assessment*. Philadelphia, PA: The Falmer Press. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/login?url=http://www.mylibrary.com?id=31652>
- Gipps, C. V. (2008). Socio-cultural aspects of assessment. In H. Wynne (Ed.), *Student assessment and testing* (Vol. 1, pp. 252-291). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Goodman, A. (2005). The middle school high five: Strategies can triumph. *Voices from the Middle*, 13(2), 12-19.
- Graham, S., (2011). It is more than just the message: Presentation effects in scoring writing. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 44(4), 1-12.
- Graham, S., & Gillespie, A., McKeown, D., (2013). Writing: Importance, development, and instruction. *Reading and Writing*, 26(1), 1-15.
- Graham, S., & Herbert, M. (2011). Writing to read: A meta-Analysis of the impact of writing and

- writing instruction on reading. *Harvard Educational Review*, 81(4), 710-744.
- Graham, S., & Herbert, M., & Harris, K. R. (2011). Throw 'em out or make 'em better? State and district high-stakes writing assessments. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 44(1), 1-12.
- Graham, S., & Perrin, D. (2007). *Writing next: Effective strategies to improve writing of adolescent middle and high school*. New York, NY: Carnegie Corporation of New York.
- Graham, S., & Sandmel, K. (2011). The process writing approach: A meta-analysis. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 104(6), 396-407.
- Graue, M. E. (1993). Integrating theory and practice through instructional assessment. *Educational Assessment*, 1, 293-309.
- Graves, D. H. (1983). *Writing: Teachers and children at work*. Exeter, NH: Heinemann.
- Graves, D. H. (2002). *Testing is not teaching*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Great Schools Partnership (2013). Standardized test. *The Glossary of Education Reform*. Retrieved from <http://edglossary.org/standardized-test>.
- Greenberg, K. (1992). Validity and reliability issues in the direct assessment of writing. *Writing Program Administration*, 16, 7-22.
- Gregg, N., Coleman, C., Davis, M., & Chalk, J. C. (2007). Timed essay writing: Implications for high-stakes tests. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 40(4), 306-318.
- Haddix, M. M. (2012). Reclaiming and rebuilding the writer identities of black adolescent males. In D. E. Alvermann & K. A. Hinchman, (Eds.), *Reconceptualizing the literacies in adolescents' lives* (3rd ed.) (pp. 112-131). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1993). Towards a language-based theory of learning. *Linguistics and Education*, 5(2), 93-116. doi:10.1016/0898-5898(93)90026-7

- Hamp-Lyons, L. (2014). Writing assessment in global context. *Research in the Teaching of English, 48*(3), 353-362.
- Hargreaves, E. (2013). Assessment for learning and teacher learning communities: UK teachers' experiences. *Teaching Education, 24*(3), 327-344.
- Harvey, S. (1998). *Nonfiction matters: Reading, writing, and research in grades 3-8*. York, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.
- Haswell, R. (1991). *Gaining ground in college writing: Tales of development and interpretation*. Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist UP.
- Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. (2007). The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research, 77*(1), 81-112.
- Hawe, E., & Parr, J. (2013). Assessment for Learning in the writing classroom: An incomplete realisation. *Curriculum Journal 25*(2), 1-28. doi:0.1080/09585176.2013.862172\
- Heritage, M. (2014). The place of assessment to improve learning in a context of high accountability. In C. Wyatt-Smith, V. Klenowski, & P. Colbert, (Eds.), *Designing assessment for quality learning* (pp. 337-356). New York, NY: Springer.
- Hibbert, K. M. (2012). Fundamentals of assessment and evaluation: Clarifying terminology. *Radiology Education: The Evaluation and Assessment of Clinical Competence*, pp. 11-19. Berlin, Germany: Springer Berlin Heidelberg.
- Hillocks, G. (1986). *Research on written composition: new directions for teaching*. New York, NY: National Conference on Research in English.
- Hillocks, G. (2002). *The testing trap: How state writing assessments control learning*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Hillocks, G. (2003). Fighting back: Assessing the assessments. *The English Journal*, 92(4), 63-70.

Hillocks, G. (2005). At last: The focus on form vs. content in teaching writing. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 40(2), 238-248.

Hillocks, G. (2010). Teaching argument for critical thinking and writing: An introduction. *The English Journal*, 99(6), 24-32.

Hillocks, G. (2011). *Teaching argument writing, grades 6–12*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Retrieved from

<http://www.heinemann.com/shared/onlineresources/e01396/introandchapter1.pdf>

Huot, B. (2002). *(Re) articulating writing assessment for teaching and learning*. Logan, UT: Utah State Press.

Huot, B., & Perry, J. (2009). Toward a new understanding for classroom writing assessment. In R. Beard, D. Myhill, M. Nystrand, & J. Riley (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of writing development* (pp. 423-436). London: SAGE Publications Ltd. doi:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9780857021069.n30>

<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.4135/9780857021069>

Inoue, A. B. (2014). Theorizing failure in US writing assessments. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 48(3), 320-352.

Ivanič, R. (2004). Discourses of writing and learning to write. *Language and Education*, 18(3), 220-245.

Ivanič, R., Edwards, R., Satchwell, C., & Smith, J. (2007). Possibilities for pedagogy in further education: Harnessing the abundance of literacy. *British Educational Research Journal*, 33(5), 703-721.

Johnson, C. S., & Gelfand, S. (2013). Self-assessment and writing quality. *Academic Research International, 4*(4), 571-580.

Juzwik, M. M. (2010). Challenges and possibilities for professional development in writing instruction: Connecting contemporary writing teachers with insights from diverse research on writing. In G. A. Troira, R. K. Shankland, & A. Heintz (Eds.), *Putting writing research into practice: Applications for teacher professional development* (pp. 276-305). New York, NY: Guilford.

Kennedy, J. K., Chan, K. K. S., Fok, P. K., & Yu, W. M. (2008). Forms of assessment and their potential for enhancing learning: Conceptual and cultural issues. *Educational Research for Policy and Practice, 7*(3), 197-207. doi 10.1007/s10671-008-9052-3

Kiuhara, S. A., Graham, S., & Hawken, L. S. (2009). Teaching writing to high school students: A national survey. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 101*(1), 136-160.

Kelly-Riley, D. (2012). Setting sail with Ed White: The possibilities of assessment and instruction within college writing assessment. In N. Elliot & L. Perelman (Eds.), *Writing assessment in the 21st century: Essays in honor of Edward M. White* (pp. 157-168). New York, NY: Hampton Press, Inc.

Kines, L. (2014, January 28). Teachers win \$2M victory over B.C. government. *Times-Colonist, A1*.

Kiili, C., Mäkinen, M., & Coiro, J. (2013). Rethinking academic literacies: Designing multifaceted academic literacy experiences for preservice teachers. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 57*(3), 223-232.

Koh, K. H. (2011). Improving teachers' assessment literacy through professional development.

- Teaching Education (Columbia, S.C.)*, 22(3), 255-276.
- Klenowski, V. (2011). Assessment for learning in the accountability era: Queensland, Australia. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 37(1), 78-83.
- Klenowski, V. (2012). The impact of high stakes testing: The Australian story. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 19(1), 65-79.
- Knoch, U. (2011). Rating scales for diagnostic assessment of writing: What should they look like and where should the criteria come from? *Assessing Writing*, 16(2), 81-96.
- Lacina, J., & Block, C. C. (2012). Progressive writing instruction: Empowering school leaders and teachers. *Voices from the Middle*, 19(3), 10-17.
- Lacina, J., & Watson, P. (Eds.). (2008). Focus on literacy: Effective content teachers for the middle grades. *Childhood Education*, 84(3), 159-162. doi: 10.1080/00094056.2008.10522998
- Lassonde, C., & Richards, J. C. (2013). Best practices in teaching planning for writing. In S. Graham, C. A. MacArthur, & J. Fitzgerald (Eds.), *Best practices in writing instruction* (2nd ed.) (pp. 193-214). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Laveault, D. (2014). The power of learning-centered task design: An exercise in the application of the variation principle. In C. Wyatt-Smith, V. Klenowski, & P. Colbert (Eds.), *Designing assessment for quality learning* (pp. 109-121). New York, NY: Springer.
- Lenhart, A., Arafeh, S., Smith, A., & Macgill, A. R. (2008). *Writing, technology and teens*. Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2008/04/24/writing-technology-and-teens/>
- Li, Y., Perie, M., Marion, S., & Gong, B. (2010). An approach for evaluating the technical quality

- of interim assessment. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 85, 163-185.
- Limbrick, L., Buchanan, P., Goodwin, M., & Schwarcz, H. (2010). Doing things differently: The outcomes of teachers researching their own practice in teaching writing. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 33(4), 897-924.
- Llosa, L., Becka, S. W., & Zhao, C. G. (2011) An investigation of academic writing in secondary schools to inform the development of diagnostic classroom assessments. *Assessing Writing*, 16(4), 256-273.
- Lotherington, H., & Jenson, J. (2011). Teaching multimodal and digital literacy in L2 settings: New literacies, new basics, new pedagogies. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 31, 226-246. doi: 10.1017/S0267190511000110
- Lovett, B. J., Lewandowski, L. J., Berger, C., & Gathje, R. A. (2010). Effects of response mode and time allotment on college students' writing. *Journal of College Reading and Learning*, 40(2), 64-79.
- Luke, A. (2004). At last: The trouble with English. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 39(1), 85-95.
- Marshall, B. (2004). Goals or horizons – the conundrum of progression in English: Or a possible way of understanding formative assessment in English. *The Curriculum Journal*, 15(2), 101-113. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0958517042000226784>
- Marshall, J. (2009). Divided against ourselves: Standards, assessments, and adolescent literacy. In L. Christenbury, R. Bomer, & P. Smagorinsky, (Eds.), *Handbook of adolescent literacy research* (pp. 113-125). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Matsumura, L., Patthey-Chavez, G., Valdes, R., & Garnier, H. (2002). Teacher feedback, writing

- assignment quality, and third-grade students' revision in lower- and higher-achieving urban schools. *The Elementary School Journal*, 103(1), 3-25.
- McCarthy, S. J., Woodard, R., & Kang, G. (2014). Elementary teachers negotiating discourses in writing instruction. *Written Communication* 31(1), 58-90.
- McClay, J., & Peterson, S. S. (2013). Teaching composition with new literacies perspectives: "We'll test it out and then let the kids run with it." *Language and Literacy*, 15(1), 39-57.
- McEwen, B. (2011). *May 24-27 is School-Wide Write Week for RVE*. Retrieved from www.rve.sd23.bc.ca.
- McQuitty, V. (2012). Emerging possibilities: A complex account of learning to teach writing. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 46(4), 358-389.
- McVee, M. B., Dunsmore, K., & Gavelek, J. R. (2005) Schema theory revisited. *Review of Educational Research*, 75(4), 531-566.
- Meyer, P. (2011). The middle school mess. *Education Next*, 11(1), 40-47.
- Milwaukee Public Schools. (2000). *Narrative writing guide*. Retrieved from http://www2.milwaukee.k12.wi.us/portal/Elemen_Narrative_Writing_Guide1of4.pdf
- Moss, B., & Lapp, D. (Eds.). (2010). *Teaching new literacies in grades 4-6*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Musoleno, R. R., & White, G. P. (2010). Influences of high-stakes testing on middle school mission and practice. *Research in Middle Level Education Online*, 34(3), 1-10.
- New London Group. (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66(1), 60-92.
- Newell, G. E., VanDerHeide, J., & Wilson, M. (2012). Best practices in teaching informative

- writing from sources. In S. Graham, C. A. MacArthur, & J. Fitzgerald (Eds.), *Best practices in writing instruction* (2nd ed.). (pp. 141-165). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Newkirk, T. (2009). *Holding on to good ideas in a time of bad ones*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Nichols, P. D., Meyers, J. L., & K. S. Burling (2009). A framework for evaluating and planning assessments intended to improve student achievement. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*, (28)3, 14-23.
- Nielsen, K. (2014). Self-assessment methods in writing instruction: a conceptual framework, successful practices and essential strategies. *Journal of Research in Reading*, 37(1), 1-16.
doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9817.2012.01533
- Nielsen, S. M. (2002). *The will to write: Students' and teachers' perceptions of writing*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Florida International University, Miami, FL. Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/dissertations/AAI3076652>. (Paper AAI3076652.)
- O'Brien, D. (2012). "Struggling" adolescents' engagement in multimediated: Countering the institutional construction of incompetence. In D. E. Alvermann, & K. A. Hinchman, (Eds.), *Reconceptualizing the literacies in adolescents' lives* (3rd ed.) (pp. 71-91). New York, NY: Routledge.
- O'Conner, P. T. (1999). *Words fail me*. New York, NY: Harcourt Brace.
- Office of Economic Co-operation and Development. (2005). *Formative assessment: Improving learning in secondary classrooms*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Panadero, E., & Jonsson, A. (2013). The use of scoring rubrics for formative assessment purposes revisited: A review. *Educational Research Review*, 9, 129-144.

- Panadero, E., & Romero, M. (2014). To rubric or not to rubric? The effects of self-assessment on self-regulation, performance and self-efficacy. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 21(2), 133-148.
- Pardo, L. S. (2006). The role of context in learning to teach writing: What teacher educators need to know to support. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 57(4), 378-394.
- Parr, J. M. (2010). A dual purpose data base for research and diagnostic assessment of student writing. *Journal of Writing Research*, 2(2), 129-150.
- Parr, J. M. (2011). Repertoires to scaffold teacher learning and practice in assessment of writing. *Assessing Writing*, 16(1), 32-48.
- Parr, J. M. (2013). Classroom assessment in writing. In J. McMillan (Ed.), *SAGE handbook of writing development* (pp. 423-435). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.4135/9781452218649>
- Parr, J. M., Glasswell, K., & Aikman, M. (2007). Supporting teacher learning and informed practice in writing through assessment tools for teaching and learning. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 35(1), 69-87.
- Parr, J. M., & Limbrick, E. (2010). Contextualising practice: Hallmarks of effective teachers of writing. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26(3), 583-590.
- Parr, J. M., & Timperley, H. S. (2008). Teachers, schools and using evidence: Considerations of preparedness. *Assessment in Education*, 15(1), 57-71.
- Parr, J. M., & Timperley, H. S. (2010). Feedback to writing, assessment for teaching and learning and student progress. *Assessing Writing*, 15(2), 68-85.
- Perie, M., Marion, S., & Gong, B. (2009). Moving toward a comprehensive assessment system: A

- framework for considering interim assessments. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*, 28(3), 5-13.
- Perrenoud, P. (1998). From formative evaluation to a controlled regulation of learning: Towards a wider conceptual field. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy, and Practice*, 5(1), 85-102.
- Petersen, J. (2009). "This test makes no freaking sense": Criticism, confusion, and frustration in timed writing. *Assessing Writing*, 14(3), 178-193.
- Peterson, S. S. (2012). An analysis of discourses of writing and writing instruction in curricula across Canada. *Curriculum Perspectives* 42(2), 260-284.
- Peterson, S. S. (2014). Award-winning authors and illustrators talk about writing and teaching writing. *The Reading Teacher*, 67(7), 498-506.
- Peterson, S. S., & McClay, J. (2010). Assessing and providing feedback for student writing in Canadian classrooms. *Assessing Writing*, 15(2), 86-99.
- Peterson, S. S., McClay, J., & Main, K. (2011). An analysis of large-scale writing assessments in Canada (grades 5-8). *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 57(4), 424-445.
- Popham, J. W. (2011). Assessment literacy overlooked: A teacher educator's confession. *The Teacher Educator*, 46(4), 265-273.
- Purves, A. C. (1992). Reflections on research and assessment in written composition. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 26(1), 108-122.
- Osborn Popp, S. E, Ryan, J. M., & Thompson, M. S. (2009). The critical role of anchor paper selection in writing assessment. *Applied Measurement in Education*, 22(3), 1-31.
- doi:10.1080/08957340902984026

Powell, K. C., & Kalina, C. J. (2009). Cognitive and social constructivism: Developing tools for an effective classroom. *Education, 130*(2), 241-250.

Pressley, M., Gaskins, I. W., Solic, K., & Collins, S. (2007). A portrait of benchmark school: How a school produces high achievement in students who previously failed. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 98*(20), 282-306.

Read, S. (2010). A model for scaffolding writing instruction: IMSCI. *The Reading Teacher, 64*(1), 47-52.

Regina Public Schools (n.d). Assessment and Evaluation Regina Public Schools: Writing Benchmark Help Page. Retrieved from <http://assessment.rbe.sk.ca/node/111>

Rezaei, A. R., & Lovorn, M. (2010). Reliability and validity of rubrics for assessment through writing. *Assessing Writing, 15*(1), 18-39.

Robertson, B. (Ed.). (2005). *Peer observation and assessment of teaching: A resource book for university faculty, administrators, and students who teach*. El Paso, TX: UTEP Center for Effective Teaching and Learning / Instructional Support Services.

Rowell, J., & Lapp, D. (2011). New literacies in literacy instruction. In L. M. Morrow, & L. B. Gambrell, (Eds.), *Best practices in literacy instruction* (4th ed.) (pp. 395-411). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Rush, L. S., & Scherff, L., (2012). NCLB 10 years later. *English Education, 44*(2), 91-101.

Ryan, M., & Barton, G. (2014). The spatialized practices of teaching writing in Australian elementary schools: Diverse students shaping discourses. *Research in the Teaching of English, 48*(3), 303-329.

Salcedo, J. B. (2009). Inviting students and teachers to connect. *Language Arts, 86*(6), 440-448.

- Scherff, L., & Piazza, C. (2005). The more things change, the more they stay the same: A survey of high school students' writing experiences. *Research in the Teaching of English, 39*(3), 271-305.
- Scriven, M. (1967). The Methodology of Evaluation. *AERA Monograph Series on Evaluation, 1*, pp. 39-83.
- Schuwirth, L. W. T., & Van Der Vleuten, C. P. M. (2011). Programmatic assessment: From assessment of learning to assessment for learning. *Medical Teacher, 33*(6), 478-485.
- Schultz, K., & Fecho, B. (2000). Society's child: Social context and writing development. *Educational Psychologist, 35*(1), 51-62.
- Schuster, C. (1997). Mikhail Bakhtin as rhetorical theorist. In V. Villanueva, Jr. (Ed.), *Cross talk in composition theory* (pp. 457-473). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Shepard, L. A. (2005). Formative assessment: Caveat emptor. Proceedings from ETS Invitational Conference 2005: *The Future of Assessment: Shaping Teaching and Learning*. New York, NY.
- Shepard, L. A. (2009). Commentary: Evaluating the validity of formative and interim assessment. *Educational Measurement, Issues and Practice, 28*(3), 32-37.
- Skinner, B. F. (1954). The science of learning and the art of teaching. *Harvard Educational Review, 24*, 86-97.
- Slomp, D. H. (2008). Harming not helping: The impact of a Canadian standardized writing assessment on curriculum and pedagogy. *Assessing Writing 13*(3), 180-200
- Slomp, D. H. (2012). Challenges in assessing the development of writing ability: Theories, constructs and methods. *Assessing Writing, 17*(2), 81-91.
- Slomp, D. H. (2014). A framework for using consequential validity evidence in evaluating large-

- scale writing assessments: A Canadian study. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 48(3), 276-302.
- Smagorinsky, P. (2009). Is it time to abandon the idea of "best practices" in the teaching of English? *The English Journal*, 98(6), 15-22.
- Smagorinsky, P. (2010a). The culture of learning to teach: The self-perpetuating cycle of conservative schooling. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 37(2), 19-32.
- Smagorinsky, P. (2010b). Teaching writing in the age of accountability: Reflections from the academy. In G. A. Troira, R. K. Shankland, & A. Heintz (Eds.), *Putting writing research into practice: Applications for teacher professional development* (pp. 276-305). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Smagorinsky, P. (2013). What does Vygotsky provide for the 21st century language arts teacher? *Language Arts*, 90(3), 192-204.
- Smagorinsky, P., Cook, L. S., & Johnson, T. S. (2003). The twisting path of concept development in learning to teach. *Teachers College Record*, 105, 1399-1436.
- Smagorinsky, P., Wilson, A. A., & Moore, C. (2011). Teaching grammar and writing: A beginning teacher's dilemma. *English Education*, 43(3), 262-292.
- Snow, C., & Moje, E. (2010). Why is everyone talking about adolescent literacy? *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 91(6), 66-69.
- Soja, E. (1996). *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and other real-and-imagined places*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Spandel, V. (2013). *Creating writers: 6-traits, process, workshop, and literature* (6th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

- Spandel, V., & Stiggins, R. J. (1997). *Creating writers: Linking writing assessment and instruction* (2nd ed.). White Plains, NY: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc.
- Stapleton, P. (2010). Writing in an electronic age: A case study of L2 composing processes. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 9*(4), 295-307.
- Stein, P., & Newfield, D. (2009). Multiliteracies and multimodality in English in education in Africa: Mapping the terrain. *English Studies in Africa, 49*(1), 1-21.
doi.org/10.1080/00138390608691341.
- Stiggins, R. J. (2001). The unfulfilled promise of classroom assessment. *Educational Measurement, Issues and Practice, 20*(3), 5-15. doi:10.1111/j.1745-3992.2001.tb00065.x
- Stiggins, R. J., & DuFour, R. (2009). Maximizing the power of formative assessments. *The Phi Delta Kappan, 90*(9), 640-644.
- Stobart, G. (2012). Validity in formative assessment. In J. Gardner, (Ed.), *Assessment and learning* (pp. 233-). London, UK: SAGE.
- Sullivan, P. (2011). "A lifelong aversion to writing": What if writing courses emphasized motivation? *Teaching English in the Two-Year College, 39*(2), 118-140.
- Sullivan, P., & Nielsen D. (2009). Is a writing sample necessary for "accurate placement"? *Journal of Developmental Education, 33*(2), 4-13.
- Tillema, H. (2014). Student involvement in assessment of their learning. In C. Wyatt-Smith, V. Klenowski, & P. Colbert (Eds.), *Designing assessment for quality learning* (pp. 39-53). New York, NY: Springer.
- Timperley, H. (2010). *Using evidence in the classroom for professional learning*. Paper presented to the Ontario Research Symposium, Toronto, ON. Retrieved from

<https://cdn.auckland.ac.nz/assets/education/about/schools/tchldv/docs/Using%20Evidence%20in%20the%20Classroom%20for%20Professional%20Learning.pdf>

Timperley, H. S. (2014). Using assessment information for professional learning. In C. Wyatt-Smith, V. Klenowski, & P. Colbert (Eds.), *Designing assessment for quality learning* (pp. 137-149). New York, NY: Springer.

Timperley, H. S., & Parr, J. M. (2009). What is this lesson about? Instructional process and student understandings in writing classrooms. *The Curriculum Journal*, 20(10), 43-60.

Timperley, H. S., Wilson, A., Barrar, H., & Fung, I. (2007). *Teacher professional learning and development: Best evidence synthesis iteration [BES]*, (p. xiii). Wellington, NZ: Ministry of education. Retrieved from http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0017/16901/TPLandDBESentireWeb.pdf

Tremmel, R. (2001). Seeking a balanced discipline: Writing teacher education in first-year composition and English education. *English Education*, 34(1), 6-30.

Turner, K. H. (2012). Digitalk as community. *English Journal*, 101 (4), 37-42.

Turner, K. H., & Hicks, T. (2012). "That's not writing": Exploring the intersection of digital writing, community literacy, and social justice. *Community Literacy Journal* 6(1), 1-36.

Vancouver School Board: School Plan. (2013-2014). Dr. R. E. McKechnie Elementary School: School Goals. Retrieved from <https://www.vsb.bc.ca/sites/default/files/school-files/03939097.pdf>

Volante, L., & Fazio, X. (2007). Exploring teacher candidates' assessment literacy: Implications for teacher education reform and professional development. *Canadian Journal of*

Education, 30(3), 749-770.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1962). *Thought and language*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wardle, E., & Roozen, K. (2012). Addressing the complexity of writing development: Toward an ecological model of assessment. *Assessing Writing*, 17(2), 106-119.

Weigle, S. C. (2007). Teaching writing teachers about assessment. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 16, 194-209.

Weiss, E. (2014). Mismatches in *Race to the Top* limit education improvement. *The Education Digest*, 79(5), 60-65.

White, E. M. (1994). Issues and problems in writing assessment. *Assessing Writing*, 1(1), 11-27.

White, E. M. (1995). An apologia for the timed impromptu essay test. *College Composition and Communication*, 46(1), 30-45.

Wiggins, G. (1993a). Assessment: Authenticity, context, and validity. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 75(3), 200-214.

Wiggins, G. (1993b). *Educative assessment: Designing assessments to inform and improve student performance*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Wiggins, G. (2008). *Why is assessment important?* Retrieved from <http://www.edutopia.org/assessment-guide-importance>

William, D. (2011). What is assessment for learning? *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 37(1), 3-14.

Williams, B. (2005). Standardized students: The problems with writing for tests instead of people. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 49(2), 152-158.

- Willis, J., Adie, L., & Klenowski, V. (2013). Conceptualising teachers' assessment literacies in an era of curriculum and assessment reform. *Australian Educational Researcher*, 40(2), 241-256.
- Willis, J., & Cowie, B. (2014). Assessment as a generative dance: Connecting teaching, learning and curriculum. In C. Wyatt-Smith, V. Klenowski, & P. Colbert (Eds.), *Designing assessment for quality learning* (pp. 23-37). New York, NY: Springer.
- Wolsey, T. D. (2010). Complexity in student writing: The relationship between the task and vocabulary uptake. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 49(2), 194-208.
- Worden, D. L. (2009). Finding process in product: Prewriting and revision in timed essay responses. *Assessing Writing* 14(1), 157-177.
- Writing Study Group of the NCTE Executive Committee (2004). NCTE beliefs about the teaching of writing. Retrieved from <http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/writingbeliefs>
- Wyatt-Smith, C., Klenowski, V., & Colbert, P. (Eds.). (2014). *Designing assessment for quality learning*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Yancey, K. B. (1999). Looking back as we look forward: Historicizing writing assessment. *College Composition and Communication*, 50(3), 483-503. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/docview/62503269?accountid=>
- Ying, L., Marion, S., Perie, M., & Gong, B. (2010). An approach for evaluating the technical quality of interim assessments. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 85(2), 163-185.
doi:10.1080/01619561003685304
- Ziegler, W. T. (2013). Taking a risk: Sharing leadership and power. *The Education Digest*, 78(5), 45-49.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Quick Scale: Grade 8 Writing Personal Views or Response.

The Quick Scale is a summary of the Rating Scale that follows. Both describe student achievement in March-April of the school year. Personal views or response is usually expected to be checked for errors but not revised or edited.

Aspect	Not Yet Within Expectations	Meets Expectations (Minimal Level)	Fully Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
SNAPSHOT	The writing addresses the topic but is seriously flawed by problems in logic, style, and mechanics. May be very short.	The writing presents relevant ideas about the topic but does not develop the topic to any extent. Often vague; parts may be flawed by errors.	The writing is clear and logical, with some analysis and development of a central idea. Provides sufficient material to meet requirements	The writing is clear, analytic, and shows some insight. It features some engaging ideas or language.
MEANING • ideas and information • use of detail • generalizations or connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • presents some ideas' may be illogical or inappropriate • inaccurate, illogical, or insufficient details • connections may be omitted or confusing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • presents a series of related ideas • generally accurate details, examples, and explanations; may not link to central idea • some difficulty making connections beyond the immediate and concrete 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sense of purpose; tries to deal with complexities • relevant and accurate details, examples, and explanations; includes some analysis • makes connections or generalizations beyond the immediate topic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • purposeful; with some individuality, insight; deals with complexities • some engaging details, examples, explanations; includes analysis, reflection, speculation • puts topic in a broader context; logical generalizations
STYLE • clarity, variety, and impact of language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no sense of fluency or flow; sentences are often short and choppy or long and awkward • limited, simple language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some sentence variety; uses complex sentences • conversational language; generally appropriate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses a variety of sentences types and lengths • language is clear, appropriate, and varied 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • flow smoothly; uses a variety of sentence types and lengths effectively • varied and effective language
FORM • beginning, middle, end • organization and sequence • transitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • often begins with introduction, assuming that the reader knows the topic and content • ending is ineffective • lapses in sequence • may shift abruptly from one idea to another 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • beginning introduces the topic • ending is often weak, formulaic • related ideas are together; may be listed rather than developed • simple transitions; sometimes ineffective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • introduces topics and purpose • explicit conclusion (often formulaic) • logical sequence; related ideas are together • transitions connect ideas clearly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establishes purpose and context in clear and often interesting introduction • logical conclusion • smooth and logical sequence; explicit paragraphing • variety of natural and smooth transitions
CONVENTIONS • complete sentences • spelling • punctuation • grammar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • frequent errors in simple words and structures often interfere with meaning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • errors in basic words and structures are noticeable but do not obscure meaning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • errors in more complex language are sometimes noticeable, but meaning is clear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • may include occasional errors where the writer is taking risks with language; these do not interfere with meaning

Appendix B: Assessment Terminology

Classroom Assessment Literacy

Being assessment literate means understanding “the *fundamental assessment concepts and procedures deemed likely to influence educational decisions*” (Popham, 2011, p. 267). It involves collecting accurate information about student progress before using that information to improve their achievement (Chappuis et al., 2012). Furthermore, Webb (2002) defines assessment literacy as “the knowledge or means for assessing what students know and can do, how to interpret the results from these assessments, and how to apply these results to improve student learning and program effectiveness” (p. 4).

Constructed-response, Essay Test, Impromptu Write, On-demand Writing Test

These terms are used synonymously and denote an unplanned, not rehearsed writing test where students respond to a prompt using “first draft writing” (Spandel, 2013). They are typically completed in the span of a block in the timetable, but some teachers prepare students through classroom discussion (i.e., brainstorming, partner talk, cooperative group work, or reciprocal questioning) or teacher-aided outlining strategies, such as using a graphic organizer or web (K. Andrews, personal communication, Jan. 21, 2014; L. Rud, personal communication, Jan. 24, 2014). These tests differ from selected-response tests (Almond, 2014). Additionally, because they usually take students “so long to complete” relative to multiple choice tests, they are given only one or two questions (Almost, 2014, p. 74). The School Wide Write can be considered to be a constructed-response, essay test, impromptu write, or on-demand writing test.

Benchmark Assessments

Benchmark assessments are usually administered during or at the end of a term, and sometimes as often as once per month to judge “students' overall performance and knowledge base for the entire school year as well as their likely performance on accountability assessments” (Allen, 2010, p. 76). Additionally, benchmark assessments are often used as remedial placement tests. They identify students who are at-risk but fail to delineate specific intervention strategies (Shepard, 2005). Throughout much of the literature (Arter, 2010; Perie et al., 2009; Popham, 2008; Shepard, 2005; 2009; Stiggins & DuFour, 2009), benchmarks are considered to be “formal, machine-scored” tests made from commercial item banks (Shepard, 2005, p. 5). Policymakers often use them to evaluate the program of instruction, rather than student achievement (Arter, 2010; Perie et al., 2009; Stiggins & DuFour, 2009). The School Wide Write is not a benchmark assessment.

Benchmark

‘Benchmark’ differs from ‘benchmark assessment’ in some of the literature (Graham & Harris, 2013; Graham et al., 2013; Hillocks, 2003; Osborn Popp, Ryan, & Thompson, 2009). Its usage is especially noteworthy because the term is frequently used by George Hillocks Jr. (2002; 2003), a prominent researcher and critic in the area of assessment. In “Fighting back: Assessing the assessments” (Hillocks, 2003), for example, he refers to “benchmark papers” as exemplars chosen by teachers to evaluate the quality of writing samples produced for writing performance assessments (Osborn Popp, Ryan, & Thompson, 2009). In this way, benchmarks are also referred to as “anchor papers” (Osborn Popp, et al., 2009, p. 255) or “range finders” (p. 256).

Interim Assessments

When Li (2010) evaluated interim assessments, he addressed the numerous, and sometimes confusing, names that commercial mid- or end-of-term assessments go by, including: ““benchmark,” “diagnostic,” “formative,” and/or “predictive” assessments” (p. 163). Interim assessments are administered mid-term and are used to help students prepare for summative assessments. They have the additional goal “to improve teaching and learning” (Li, 2010, p. 163).

Standardized testing

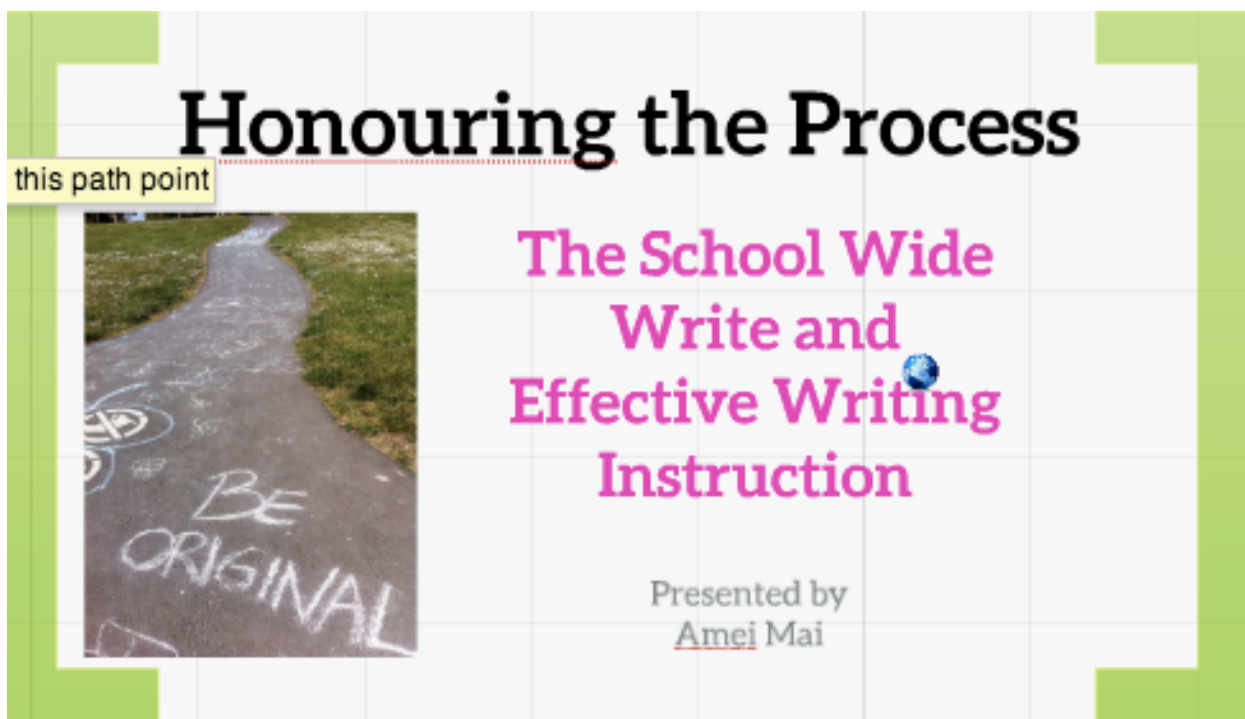
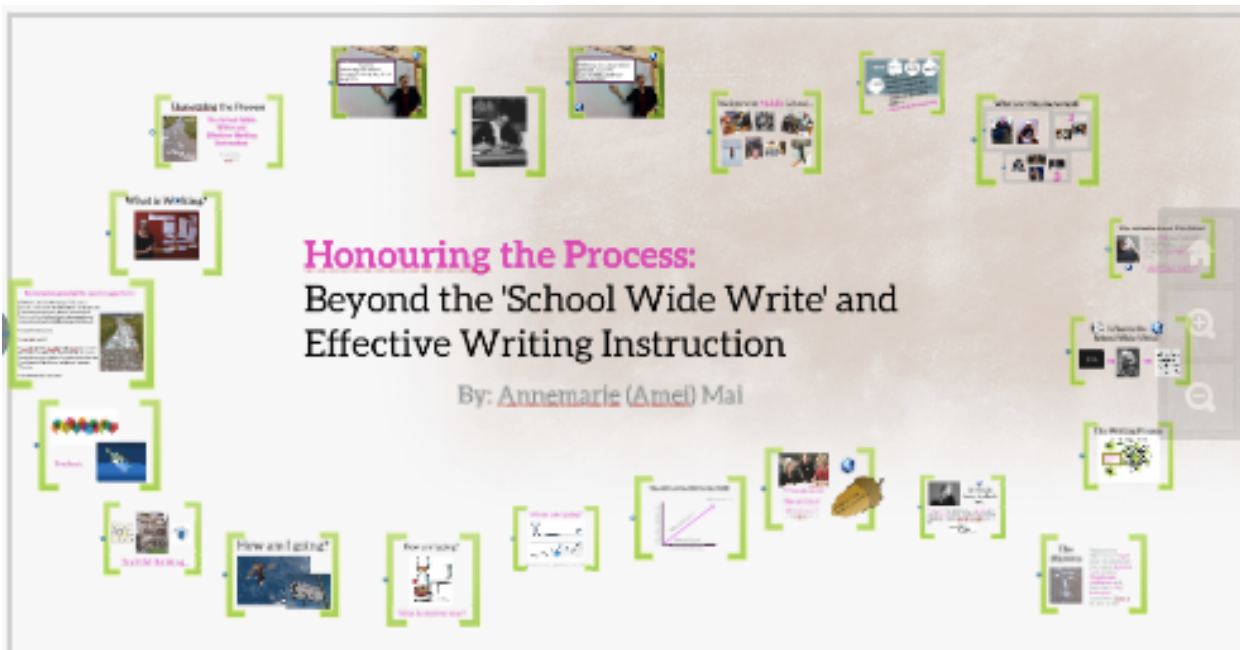
The School Wide Write has some characteristics of a standardized test. Firstly, test takers are expected to answer the same writing prompt in essay-format. In addition, standardized tests are scored in a similar way. Unlike well known large-scale and high-stakes standardized tests such as SAT, GMAT, IB, and TOEFL, however, the SWW is not used by educators to “compare the relative performance of individual students or groups of students” (Great Schools Partnership, 2013, para. 1). Standardized tests are more prevalent in the United States than in Canada (Peterson & McClay, 2010). These highly debated exams are frequently ‘high-stakes,’ in that they act as a gateway to future educational opportunities (including acceptance into kindergarten, identification for special-education, or acceptance into graduate school), or employment opportunities.

Common Formative Assessments

Common formative assessments are also sometimes referred to as ‘common assessments’ or sometimes ‘interim assessments’ (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010). Their overarching goal is to improve student achievement by identifying students who need extra support and

time for learning (DuFour et al., 2005; Frey & Fisher, 2009). Teams of teachers who usually teach the same grade level or subject matter collaboratively suggest and discuss strategies that will help students acquire the intended knowledge and skills. On a macro-level, common formative assessments can also reveal program concerns and improvements goals for educators (DuFour et al., 2010). In my school district, we refer to this team-approach as student services meetings.

Appendix C: Prezi Presentation







Big Ideas

Language and literature help us find meaning and joy

Exploring a rich diversity of texts deepens our understanding and develops our ability to make connections, express ideas, and think critically.

Inquiry, curiosity, and thoughtful reflection in story and text deepen our understanding of self, identity, and humanity.

Using artistry and precision in language are powerful tools in writing for specific audiences and purposes.

this path point

- inquire
- make connections
- find meaning & joy
- understand ourselves
- celebrate diversity
- reflect
- deepen understanding

Why is writing important?

9

1



10

2



11

3



Who writes the School Wide Write?



- approx. **2,700** out of 4,000 middle school students
- **7** out of 10 middle schools
- the SWW is **not required** by the district

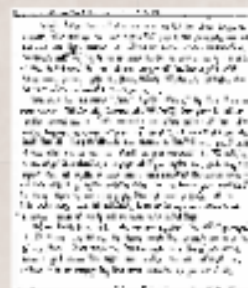
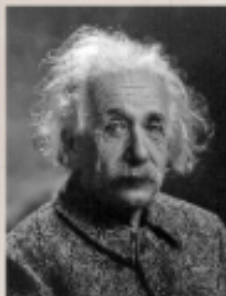


A Google search for "'school wide write AND BC and 2013' got 5,230 hits.

this path point



What is the School Wide Write?



The Writing Process

Processes Used During Writing




The dilemma



Teachers have expressed an “**urgent** need” for assessment that clearly **identifies** their students’ **strengths and weaknesses** and helps them **adapt instruction** accordingly (Llosa et al., 2011, p. 258).




So why do
many students
feel...

"bludgeoned by topics that feel restrictive... [or] held to deadlines no writer (even a professional) could hope to meet" (Spandel & Stiggins, 1997, p. 30).

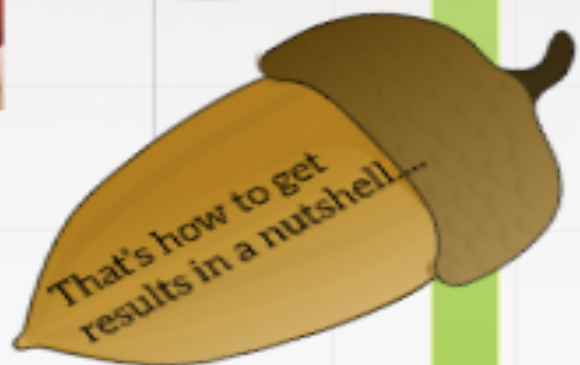


Where am I going?

How am I doing?

Where to next?

(Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 86).



The ABC's of the ZPD for the SWW



Where am I going?

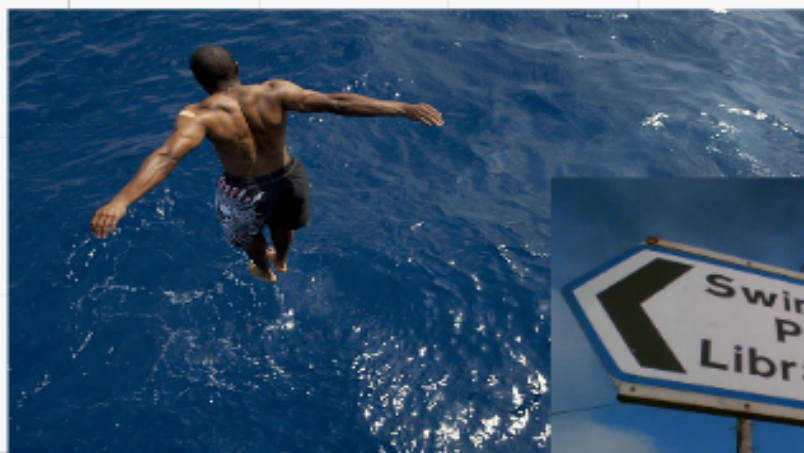
The image is divided into two horizontal panels. The top panel is titled 'YOUR PLAN' and shows a simple path leading to a checkered flag. A person is riding a bicycle on this path. The bottom panel is titled 'REALITY' and shows a complex, hilly landscape with various obstacles: a person on a bicycle, trees, a body of water, a cloud with rain, a building, and a checkered flag. The text 'this path point' is written in a yellow box on the left side of the 'REALITY' panel. At the bottom of the image, there is a small text line: '(Permission granted to use this image by Raymond James Financial, Inc.)'

How am I going?



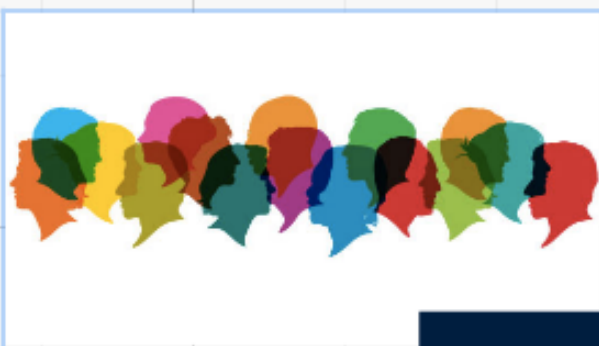
What do students want?

How am I going?



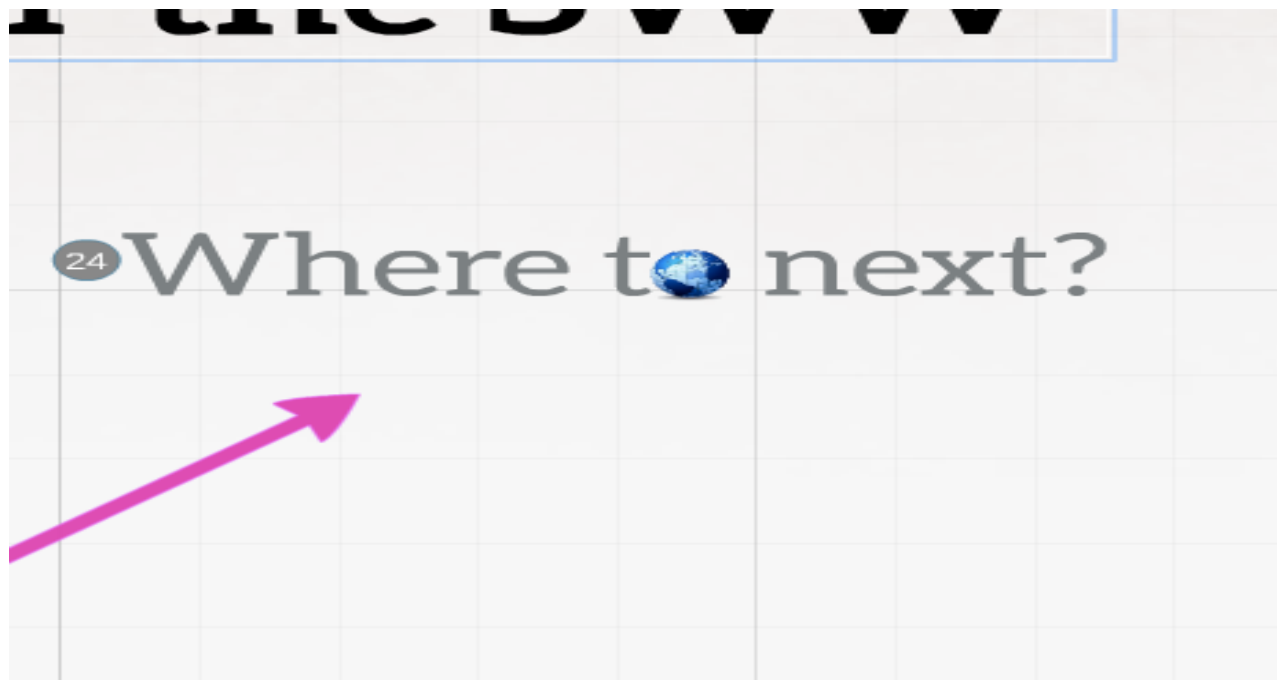


Scaffold thinking...



Feedback





What is Working?



Permission granted to use images from:

- British Columbia Ministry of Education (2013a). Curriculum drafts: English language arts 8. Transforming Curriculum & Assessment. Retrieved from <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum/English%20Language%20Arts/8>
- Creative Commons
- Fawcett, Ingrid
- LessLIE. (2013). wHOLE w((h))orl(((d))). acrylic on canvas, 183x183 cm, Courtesy of the Artist, Installation view, Urban Thunderbirds/Ravens in a Material World, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria.
- My wonderful students!



Appendix D: G•O•S•S•I•P with R•A•S•A

Permission granted to use the description of G•O•S•S•I•P with R•A•S•A and the table below (Close & Nottingham, in press).

G•O•S•S•I•P with R•A•S•A: receive... appreciate... summarize... ask questions




This tool is great for activating and developing background knowledge, and for analyzing, summarizing, synthesizing, and clarifying information. Learners go out and selectively or systematically search for important points. Learners first generate their own ideas, and then start the process by going to a first person asking, “What’s important?” They receive the information... appreciate what they are hearing by showing appropriate body language... summarize what they heard... and ask questions to clarify and extend meaning... They write information in one of the boxes. They thank the person and move to another person, repeating the process. This time they pass the gossip, ...the ideas they just heard. RASA is repeated and the person hearing the information jots it down, then shares his or her gossip. Following the gathering of ideas, each person returns to their A/B partnership or team to share the GOSSIP they gathered.

The team or partner interaction can be deepened through Lettered Heads. Learners are lettered off, A↔B↔C↔D... In order, learners explain and summarize their personal understandings. The group works to summarize all of the understandings in the group. One person’s letter is drawn (role of the die, from sticks of courage, from a selection of cards, or...) and the person chosen is then rehearsed by his or her teammates, before presenting the findings using a reporting-frame:

My partners ____. ____, ____, and ____ learned _____. The next team reports only new findings...

Table 4: G•O•S•S•I•P with R•A•S•A

	<h2 style="margin: 0;">G•O•S•S•I•P with R•A•S•A</h2> <p style="margin: 0;">Go Out and Selectively or systematically Search for Important Points</p>
---	--

Name: _____ Date: _____

R•A•S•A: Receive ↔ Appreciate ↔ Summarize ↔ Ask ?

<p>My ideas</p>	<p>New ideas from: _____</p>
<p>New ideas from: _____</p>	<p>New ideas from: _____</p>
<p>Reflections on learning: ✓ on evidence of meeting your goal Strengths in your learning:</p>	<p>S-t-r-e-t-c-h goal:</p>