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Introduction

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Launching a new issue of a journal is always an auspicious occasion, and few scholars get to do it even once, and here we are doing it for a second time in less than 10 years. We would like to tell a little of the story of how we find ourselves in this position once again because many of the people we have talked to recently seem to know little of the story that brings us back to beginning our second writing assessment journal. Several years ago, we teamed up to begin *Assessing Writing (AW)*, and at that time it was the only journal devoted to writing assessment. As we (two untenured assistant professors) shopped around for a publisher, we were fortunate to meet Walter Johnson who owned Ablex Publishing. Mr. Johnson had already made his fortune and although he had sold his larger company, he had retained Ablex because, as he told us, he wanted to make something new. Mr. Johnson took a chance on us and as we chronicled in the introductions to *AW*, he also took us to school, teaching us the kinds of things any editor of a commercial publication should know and what no one teaches in graduate school. Unfortunately, Mr. Johnson passed away in 1996. His company was taken over by his son who also owned a large academic publishing company and whose interests in publishing were the bottom line. Before we had completely adjusted to this new environment, we were sold to Elsevier, the largest academic publisher in the world. Through all of these changes, we continued to publish what we consider a strong publication. Our relationship with Elsevier was checkered to say the least and eventually we were fired as editors. Although *AW* was first our dream and then later our labor of love, we had signed the standard contract with the first Mr. Johnson, which gave Ablex and not us the ownership of the journal, so when Elsevier terminated us, they retained the journal.

At first, we were stunned. We were proud of *AW*, but it didn't seem appropriate that we should just walk away from being its editors and that when we did it

should be our decision and not that of multinational conglomerate. We believe that the academics who see the need for a journal, who write, research, and edit the articles should make the decisions about who should edit and retain control. For that reason, we decided that we would begin again. We went to Barbara Bernstein at Hampton Press because we know and trust her and because she was the first person we had talked to about *AW* almost 10 years ago. Back then Hampton was a brand new press and although Barbara wanted to begin the journal with Hampton it just wasn't possible. She did, however, help us in many ways and helped to make us successful with Ablex. Now that Hampton is an established and thriving press, we are able to begin our new venture where we had first begun. The current contract Barbara drew up allows us to retain ownership of the journal, and we look forward to many years of the *Journal of Writing Assessment (JWA)* being published by Hampton Press.

Now that it's a little clearer how two people who began a journal in writing assessment 9 years ago are now beginning a new writing assessment journal, we would like to talk a little about this new venture. In addition to teaming up with Hampton Press and Barbara Bernstein, we have also teamed up with Michael Neal of Clemson University who will be *JWA*'s managing editor. Michael is a scholar and student of writing assessment and brings several years' worth of writing assessment publishing experience as an assistant editor for *AW*. Michael certainly strengthens our editorial staff and brings new blood to this new journal.

Apart from these rather obvious changes, *JWA* brings the same commitment to publish a wide range of writing assessment scholarship from a wide range of scholars and teachers. We are once again interested in all forms of writing assessment, from the classroom to those assessments used to make decisions about state and federal programs. We also continue our interest in international assessment as well as assessments geared to those whose first language is not English. As you will notice, most of our distinguished editorial board has made the journey with us to this new venture, and we continue to count on them for their excellent advice on what we should publish and value in *JWA*. Much of the success we were able to achieve in the 7 years we published *AW* was due to the efforts of our editorial board, and we would like to thank them for all their help in the past and for their willingness to once again support a new journal in the field. We certainly would not be attempting this formidable task without their continuing support and guidance.

Apart from these many, obvious changes and improvements, a reader of *JWA* can expect the same kinds of relevant, quality scholarship on a range of topics and from a wide variety of scholars in the field that was available in *AW*. We believe that that there is no reason "to fix something that ain't broke." And, apart from our unceremonious departure, *AW* was certainly not broken. We will retain the same format found in this inaugural issue with three articles and a review. One change is a reduction in the individual subscription price. Instead of the $55 charge, *JWA*'s individual subscription price will be lower. We are hoping to send the message that high costs and poor service, problems with *AW* that we dealt with in the years since Mr. Johnson died, are not part of this new venture.

Now that we have told the story of how we came to begin our second writing assessment journal in the last 10 years, we move on to something that's really more

important, the contents of this first issue. One of the high points in beginning again was to put together a special first issue, and we believe we have more than done that. The first article "How State Assessments lead to Vacuous Thinking and Writing" by George Hillocks continues the work he began in *The Testing Trap* and reports on the condition of assessment in state accountability programs. Hillocks outlines the complexities of argument by recounting examples from classical rhetoric. While he problematizes any simple understanding of the rhetorical complexities of argument, he illustrates the ways in which argument and the critical thinking it requires can be taught in a relevant and successful manner to middle and high school students. Using this knowledge about what makes argument successful and how it can be taught, Hillocks examines the ways in which argument is tested in school-accountability programs across the country. The result is both stunning and troubling because it becomes quite apparent that what counts for successful argumentative writing in some testing programs contains little reasoning or evidence. According to Hillocks, the flawed approaches of many large -scale assessment programs prohibit students from demonstrating their argumentative skills and that many students receive inflated scores that only promote shallow reasoning and poor writing.

Sandra Murphy's "That was Then and 'This is Now" reports on the findings of two surveys sent to California teachers 10 years apart. These two surveys chronicle the kinds of influences that state-mandated assessments have had on California teachers' curriculum and instruction. What makes Murphy's work so interesting and important is that in the 10 years since the first survey was sent, state-accountability programs in California have changed drastically. Consequentially, teachers' responses to the survey about their teaching and curriculum paint a picture not only of the ways in which testing impacts curriculum and instruction but the ways in which testing programs have limited and diluted what counts as high school English for millions of students in California. And although Murphy's data speak for only one state, it logically follows that similar accountability programs across the country have had similar effects on curriculum and instruction in other states.

Peggy O'Neill's "Moving Beyond Holistic Scoring with Validity Inquiry" attempts to situate the work of William L. Smith at the University of Pittsburgh within a larger framework of holistic scoring and validity inquiry. Two decades ago, Smith began an inquiry into his writing placement program looking for what he thought was a 40% error rate in placement. Smith conducted several experiments about the way teachers read student writing, the kinds of judgments teachers make about writing and the consequences of these judgments on the educational experiences of these students. O'Neill's article attempts to "situate[e] Smith's work within the larger context of educational measurement theories, placement testing, and holistic scoring and presenting it as a case study of validity inquiry . . . argu[ing] that by approaching local assessment needs as Smith did, researchers can create better assessments while contributing significantly to writing assessment theory." O'Neill's article contributes much to our understanding not only of Smith's work but of the importance of validity inquiry and the limitations of holistic scoring as form of writing assessment.

Although each of the three articles call into question the use of certain kinds of procedures for writing assessment, Hillocks and Murphy target the uses of assessment by state departments of education to advance reform and accountability efforts. On the other hand, O'Neill's work calls into question the ways in which we should assess writing for a variety of purposes, highlighting the possibility of situating writing assessment choices with the local populations that know the most about student ability and the consequences to students and teachers of particular writing assessment procedures. Taken together, these articles provide a unique opportunity to reflect on important issues in writing assessment, to question current practices, and to provide a rich opportunity to think about a productive future for writing assessment theory and practice.

In addition to the three articles, we include the first installment of a selected, annotated bibliography on writing assessment. Our intent is to include one section per issue for the next few issues. As we note in the introducton to the bibliography, we are also hoping that readers will send us additional citations, so that when we can eventually publish the bibliography in its entirety, it will be as complete as possible.

Our final offering in this our first issue of *JWA* is a review of P*ortfolio Practices: Lessons from Schools, Districts and States* by Sandra Murphy and Terry Underwood. Susan Callahan's review provides an interesting perspective on an important resource for those interested in the use of portfolios for assessment beyond the classroom. Callahan focuses on the service provided by this volume because it reviews a variety of portfolio programs that range from the school and district level to those designed to assess student writing at the state level. Clearly, Callahan's review is a relevant reminder of the issues involved in accountability programs highlighted in the articles by Hillocks and Murphy. Like O'Neill's article, Callahan's review furnishes results from the use of the portfolio during the 1990s from a wide range of purposes, providing another lens to view the future of writing.

Taken together, the articles, the bibliography, and the review provide a strong statement about writing assessment practices and theories and the directions that a new approach to writing assessment can provide. It is our hope that this first issue signals to those interested in writing assessment that *JWA* will be an important forum for authoritative and forward-thinking ideas in writing assessment. Of course, providing a forum for people to challenge existing theories and practices and the room to explore new and more productive writing assessment has been our agenda for nearly a decade. We hope that this new journal is even more successful than the last. We also hope that we continue to hear from our readers who make this or any other journal possible.