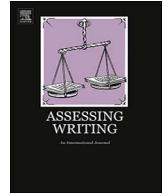


Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](http://www.sciencedirect.com)

Assessing Writing

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/asw

Similarities and differences in constructs represented by U.S. States' middle school writing tests and the 2007 national assessment of educational progress writing assessment[☆]

Ya Mo^{a,*}, Gary A. Troia^b^a National Institute of Statistical Sciences, United States^b Michigan State University, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

NAEP
Writing
Large-scale assessment

ABSTRACT

Little is known regarding the underlying constructs of writing tests used by U.S. state education authorities and national governments to evaluate the writing performance of their students, especially in middle school grades. Through a content analysis of 78 prompts and 35 rubrics from 27 states' middle school writing assessments from 2001 to 2007, and three representative prompts and rubrics from the United States' 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) writing test, this study illuminates the writing constructs underlying large-scale writing assessments through examination of features in prompts and rubrics and investigation of the connections between prompts and rubrics in terms of genre demands. We found the content of state writing assessments and the NAEP align with respect to measurement parameters associated with (a) emphasis on writing process, audience awareness, and topic knowledge, (b) availability of procedural facilitators (e.g., checklists, rubrics, dictionaries) to assist students in their writing, and (c) inclusion of assessment criteria focused on organization, structure, content, details, sentence fluency, semantics, and general conventions. However, the NAEP's writing assessment differs from many state tests of writing by including explicit directions for students to review their writing, giving students two timed writing tasks rather than one, making informational text production one of the three genres assessed, and including genre-specific evaluative components in rubrics. This study contributes to our understanding of the direction and path that large-scale writing assessments in the US are taking and how writing assessments are continually evolving.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the largest nationally representative assessment of student performance in multiple academic subject areas. However, the NAEP is generally not considered a high-stakes consequential test in the U.S. because, due to test design characteristics (i.e., multi-stage stratified random sampling and matrix item sampling), it does not provide scores for individual students (rather, it yields multiple plausible values for sampled participants). Thus, individual states administer academic achievement tests to their student populations to assess learning outcomes for each student. Results from the NAEP often show low proficiency levels across subject areas, yet state-mandated assessments often report relatively high proficiency levels (Lee, Grigg, & Donahue, 2007; Salahu-Din, Persky, & Miller, 2008). For instance, on the 2007 NAEP for writing (the last time representative state-level writing performance data were collected through the NAEP), 29% of Georgia's eighth graders scored at or above the

[☆] This research was supported in part by grant #R305A100040 from the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, to Michigan State University. Statements do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of this agency, and no official endorsement by it should be inferred.

* Corresponding author at: National Institute of Statistical Sciences, 1150 Connecticut Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20037, United States.

E-mail address: yomo@niss.org (Y. Mo).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2017.06.001>

Received 1 August 2016; Received in revised form 5 June 2017; Accepted 10 June 2017

1075-2935/© 2017 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

proficient level. In that same year, the state of Georgia reported that 67% of its 8th-grade students passed their state writing test, meaning that students received a scale score at or above 200 (in the range of 100–350) and that they achieved the Meets (200–249) or Exceeds (250–350) standard for writing. Similarly, on the 2011 NAEP for writing, 27% of eighth graders nationwide scored at or above the proficient level (individual state-level data were not collected in 2011). In that same year, the state of Georgia reported that 83% of its 8th graders passed their state writing test. It may be that variations in how writing is conceived and measured account for such inconsistent results, but little is known about how state writing tests and the NAEP writing assessment differ.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) required states to implement statewide accountability systems that consisted of challenging state standards and annual testing for all grade 3–8 students. At the same time, the NCLB requirements were flexible enough that states were able to adopt dramatically different standards to guide English language arts instruction and assessment, some of which placed little emphasis on writing (Jeffery, 2009); this flexibility also let each state define its own content area proficiency levels and design accountability systems to assess those proficiency levels (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). As a result, “states’ content standards, the rigor of their assessments, and the stringency of their performance standards vary greatly” (Linn et al., 2002; Linn, Baker, & Betebenner, 2002, p.3). Variation in states’ standards, assessments, and performance benchmarks may be associated with differing conceptions of writing (Jeffery, 2009). This variability may have as a direct consequence discrepancies that are consistently observed between state writing assessment outcomes and NAEP writing test results.

This discrepancy suggests that, in order to ensure that the results of state and national assessments are comparable, more uniform academic and aligned assessments may be necessary. As an answer to the call for more uniform standards, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) has already been formally adopted in forty-two states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) schools at the writing of this article (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2017). Two multistate consortia, the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) and the Partnership for Assessment for Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) have worked to develop K-12 assessments aligned with the CCSS. Though the CCSS and new assessments are being implemented in most of the U.S., a retrospective examination of historical writing assessment practices at the middle school level by each state prior to adoption of the CCSS may prove insightful and assist with future assessment development work vis-à-vis highlighting prior discrepancies in how writing was conceptualized (i.e., how the writing construct is defined and measured by testing programs; see Cronbach and Meehl, 1955; Cronbach & Meehl, 1955; Messick, 1995) across states and between states and the NAEP and pressing for more uniformity between state and national writing assessments moving forward so as to provide more useful data for stakeholders. In addition, a retrospective examination of prior writing assessments in the presence of current CCSS-aligned assessments at the middle school level will contribute to our understanding of the direction and path that large-scale writing assessments in the U.S. are taking and how writing assessments are continually evolving.

Little research has been done to examine large-scale writing assessments at the middle school level. A look into what is highlighted in middle school writing assessments as well as the variability of the writing construct used for testing across many states will shed light on the expectations of writing competence for these students. Middle school is an important transition point for students because more abstract thinking and sophisticated ways of using spoken and written language become essential for success (De La Paz and Graham, 2002; De La Paz & Graham, 2002). Middle school introduces expectations for using writing much more independently for developing content knowledge; students who do not learn to write well are less likely to use their writing to reinforce and extend their learning, and thus are more likely to see their grades suffer (NCWAFSC, 2003; National Commission on Writing for America’s Families, Schools, and Colleges [NCWAFSC], 2003). As an important transitional step for students between elementary and high school, middle school education lays a foundation for students’ studies in high school and postsecondary education. Weak writers in middle school not only are at greater risk for grade retention and dropout later in high school, they also are less likely to matriculate at a college or university (Zabala et al., 2008; Zabala, Minnici, McMurrer, & Briggs, 2008).

What constitutes the writing construct is complex. It can be understood through and approached with multiple theoretical frameworks, such as Hayes’ cognitive model of writing (Hayes, 1996), socio-cultural theory (Prior, 2006), genre theories (Dean, 2008), linguistic models of writing development (Faigley and Witte, 1981; Faigley & Witte, 1981), and motivational theories (Author, 2012). Hayes (1996) presented a framework for the study of writing which consisted of two components: the task environment and the individual. The task environment included the social environment and the physical environment. The individual component included individual writer’s working memory, motivation and affect, cognitive processes, and long-term memory. Prior (2006) introduced sociocultural theory for understanding writing. The sociocultural approach argues that writing is a situated and mediated cultural practice shaped by one’s environment. Dean (2008) argued that genre theory can be useful for teaching writing because genre theory sees writing as a social activity that appropriates common communicative forms to respond to particular situational demands. Faigley and Witte (1981) distinguished the two concepts of cohesion and coherence, illustrated how techniques were used to achieve cohesion that differentiated highly-rated and lower-rated essays, and also discussed other text linguistics. Authors (2012) reviewed research on motivation in writing and summarized major findings in four components of motivation: self-efficacy beliefs or perceived competence, mastery and performance goal orientations, task interest and value, and attributions for success and failure.

A multi-theoretical perspective (instead of relying solely on one of the theoretical frameworks discussed above, though not all possible frameworks) ensures a broad representation of current thinking about writing development, instruction, and assessment and such a perspective is more likely to shed light on the underlying writing construct employed in state and national assessments. Author (2010) developed a multi-theoretical coding taxonomy to undertake content analyses of writing standards and assessments. Hayes’ (1996) cognitive model of writing was drawn upon to develop two strands of the multi-theoretical framework—(1) writing process and (2) metacognition and knowledge. Sociocultural theory (Prior, 2006) was used to form (3) the context strand. Genre theory (Dean, 2008) informed the development of two strands—(4) purposes and (5) ideas & elaboration. Linguistics models of writing (Faigley and Witte, 1981; Faigley & Witte, 1981) were used to create the (6) conventions strand. Both cognitive and motivation

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4935780>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4935780>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)