A PEDAGOGY OF RESPECT AND A SEARCH FOR DEMOCRACY:
EQUALIZING CALIFORNIA’S EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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THESIS

Submitted in partial satisfaction of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

ENGLISH
(Composition)

at

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMANTO

FALL
2010
A PEDAGOGY OF RESPECT AND A SEARCH FOR DEMOCRACY: 
EQUALIZING CALIFORNIA’S EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

A Thesis

by

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Abstract

of

A PEDAGOGY OF RESPECT AND A SEARCH FOR DEMOCRACY:
EQUALIZING CALIFORNIA’S EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

by

Rachel M. Walmer Moraes

Statement of Problem:

Standardized testing is at an all time high and continues to grow in California’s elementary and secondary schools and has given rise to a very unhealthy and obsessive outlook on assessment. This paper contextualizes the importance of steering away from standardized testing assessment and advocates for more holistic evaluation in the form of portfolio assessment.

Sources of Data:

Experts in the field of standardized testing and portfolio assessment including Peter Sacks, Debra Meier, Alfie Kohn, Jonathan Kozol, Kathleen Blake Yancey, Liz Hamp-Lyons and William Condon.

Conclusions Reached:

When looking at standardized testing and comparing it to other forms of assessment, portfolio assessment is a much better form of assessing students in California public schools as it allows and promotes a pedagogy of respect and democracy within the classroom by encouraging student individuality and creativity.

_____________________________, Committee Chair
Susan Fanetti, Ph.D.

__________________________
Date

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DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to all my colleagues in the field of education who fight the fight everyday in the trenches of education. Edward J. Maloney says “the road to hell is paved with good intentions” and as educators we know that good intentions are only half the job. We must do more than just pave a road of good intentions for our students. We must set about recognizing what is not working in our classrooms and set about changing it. This paper recognizes the effort every educator puts into his/her classroom everyday and applauds the endless endeavors that we attempt in our classrooms and with our students every day of the school year.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My journey has been a long one. A journey that many would say has been fraught with more valleys than mountaintops. In the midst of those valleys however, is where I learned the most and where I found myself. It is also where I learned to trust in God and put my faith in Him. Without Him I would not be where I am today and I have Him to thank for bringing me along this journey. He has been my rock and my shepherd and has guided me and given me strength throughout the writing of this paper. None of this would be possible without Him.

I am thankful to my parents who instilled in me the knowledge to know the difference between right and wrong and the integrity to follow through. To my mother I owe my gratitude for encouraging me to enroll in classes at the local community college so many years ago and for always being there for me even on my darkest days when I didn’t think I could make it. She has always had a shoulder for me to cry on but also has never been afraid to tell me when it was time to stop crying and change my circumstances. Thank you for all the phone calls, letter, cards and unending belief that I would make it. Thank you for always believing in me even when I didn’t. To my father my hero, I owe much. My father instilled in me a strong work ethic and from his example I have learned the meaning of hard work and the value of a job well done. Thank you dad for all your encouragement and faith in me. Thank you for always encouraging me to keep going and for sharing mom with me. Thank you for all the time we spent on the phone discussing my paper. Thank you both for your prayers, your encouragement and for never giving up on me. Without you this paper would not have been possible.

To my two beautiful daughters I am much indebted for they have endured a lot since I started this paper. To Stephanie, my kind, gentle and soft-hearted daughter who always listened to me and empathized with me during the darkest of times, you are an inspiration to me and I thank God for you. Thank you for all the dishes you washed and for all the times you watched your sister so I could study and write my paper or go for a long run. Thank you for your understanding and companionship. Thank you for for the countless times you fixed mac ‘n cheese so that the three of us could have something to eat for dinner. To you I promise more home-cooked meals and more time to just chill. I love your spirit and your heart. To my feisty and sweet Vanessa I am thankful for her always being so patient with me. Thank you for giving me time to study and for understanding when I wasn’t always able to stop what I was doing to play a game or read a book. Thank you for always helping your big sister and for the many back rubs you have given me. Your high spirits strengthen me and I thank God for you. To you, I promise more game days and more stories.

To the many friends and family members who have encouraged me along the way, I thank you. To my professors, Dr. Fanetti and Dr. Smith who guided me throughout this entire project, I thank you. Even though our acquaintance has not been a long one, I thank Dr. Fanetti for her revisions skills and for helping me turn my vision of this paper into a reality. Thank you for helping me to say what I really wanted to say.
To my students, I thank you for putting up with me especially on my grouchy days when perhaps I didn’t get enough sleep because I was up studying or writing this paper all night. Thank you for your patience and for giving me the incentive to keep going. Thank you for teaching me how to be better teacher.

Lastly I want to thank Frank, my best friend who has been my rock and shoulder these last couple of years. Thank you firstly for your friendship and secondly for your love. Thank you for helping me to believe in myself during those times when I really wanted to give up. Thank you for all the meals you cooked, for all the dishes you washed, the leaky faucets and leaky roofs you fixed and for showing me that I can count on you. Thank you for all the computer glitches you fixed and for having the patience of Job. Thank you for knowing what I needed even when I didn’t. Thank you for helping me to heal and for believing in me. I thank God for you and I look forward to walking with you as you begin your educational journey. I do not know what the rest of the journey will look like or where it will take us, what valleys or mountaintops we will see, but together I know we can conquer them all.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION: DARE WE HOPE FOR CHANGE? – THE EDUCATIONAL PENDULUM AND ITS EFFECT ON CALIFORNIA’S STUDENTS

A teacher serves, for example, as an interpreter, bringing the authoritative words of others into contact with students. These alien words of others, if encountered in another context without the teacher or with a different teacher, might have remained authoritative (or ineffectual) had it not been for this teacher’s mediation. By mediating authoritative discourses and encouraging students to engage alien discourses as internally persuasive, compositionists are enacting a maieutic pedagogy, yet another central feature of a pedagogy of possibility.

- Kay Halasek, A Pedagogy of Possibility

The more we respect our students independently of their color, sex, or social class, the more testimony we will give of respect in our daily lives, in school, in our relationships with other colleagues, with doormen, with cooks, with watchmen, with students’ mothers and fathers, the more we lessen the distance between what we say and what we do, so much more will we be contributing toward the strengthening of democratic experiences.

- Paulo Freire, Teachers as Cultural Workers

I have never had a life changing experience with writing, or any good experience [with writing] worth remembering for that matter.

- Sample student paper, basic writing class SJDC

Programs are not the answer to the learning problems of students but teachers are. Good teachers create good programs [and] the best programs are created in situ, in response to the needs of individual student populations and as reflections of the particular histories and resources of specific colleges.

- Mina Shaughnessy, Errors and Expectations

If the ways of God are inscrutable, the path of man has become incomprehensible to Modern man, despite the wonderful body of knowledge and information he has accumulated and the means to apply it, and appears to be muddling ahead as if he were blind or drugged staggering from one crisis to another.

- Aurelio Peccei and Alexander King, The Club of Rome, 1977
Educators have all seen the proverbial pendulum swing back and forth countless times, and each time, they dare to hope that this time real change will make a difference in the lives of students and schools. The educational pendulum has swung this way for decades, and those that have been in education for at least a decade or two have seen the pendulum swing at least a couple times in each direction. At each end, an extreme. At one end perhaps a more conservative approach to education, and at the other, the opposite of that extreme. Each time the pendulum swings, the extremes are different, depending on who is making the decisions. At one end phonics, at the other, whole language. Open spaced classrooms on one end, learning groups at the other. Traditional testing on one end, holistic assessment at the other.

Time after time, educators are left with empty promises, and classrooms nationwide are left with skeptical teachers and students. Worse yet, with the barrage of broken promises, classrooms are too often left with mediocre teachers, who after being lied to and cajoled into trying new strategies, new curricula, new methodologies and new visions, are left with nothing but students who continue to fail, who graduate with little to no reading comprehension, low math skills, below margin writing abilities and an overall sense of failure.

For the most part, the country is not making great progress, and any progress is slow and arduous. Politicians and policymakers campaign on the idea of making our educational system great once again and ensure us that every student will graduate from high school and our students will be able to compete with other nations in the
international arena. But with every promise comes the reality of just what those promises mean and what they do to our nation’s students. Educators and policymakers theorize about what is best for our schools and our students and in the midst of all that theorizing the pendulum swings again and our students are caught in the middle. When the pendulum stops swinging, schools, teachers, and most importantly students, are usually left with nothing but good intentions staring them in the face. Teachers attempt to make a difference and make progress, but with time, the disillusionment sets in and it is difficult to manipulate around what is legislated.

Teachers, the ones who are in the trenches daily and see what the policies do to our students, are fed up with the swinging of the pendulum and would like to be able to teach students the skills necessary to be good readers, writers, and thinkers, thereby producing students who are ready to enter college and the workforce and be fully participating members of society. But the educational system has become so cloudy that most teachers have somewhat lost track of what the basics are anymore. In a country such as America, the leader in the free world, it should not be that difficult to graduate students from high school who can comprehend what they read and be able to communicate both orally and in written form. But those at the helm seem to be preoccupied more with scores and results than with the process that we take to get there.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 placed in motion mandates that have severely affected our schools and our students. With the NCLB Act, mandated under former President Bush’s presidency, standardized testing has become the answer to the
educational system in America, and the state and federal agencies place great importance on the results gained from these tests. The end result has taken precedence over the path—the process that teachers and students take to get to the desired result. With so much emphasis and demands made on schools, teachers, and students because of standardized testing, it should not come as a surprise to anyone that teachers are rewarded if their students’ test scores go up or that schools brainstorm ideas that will serve as incentives to students to do well on their tests. It should also come as no surprise that teachers have begun teaching to the test and that this strategy has adversely affected students in our country.

With so much emphasis placed on a single test and its results, educators lose sight of the real purpose of education, which is ensuring that we graduate students capable of reading and comprehending what they read but also writing and able to communicate an idea both orally and in written format. These are fundamental in educating the future citizens of our country, and standardized testing does not allow educators to accomplish this.

With the new administration currently in the White House comes a hope that America may have a chance for real dialogue, dialogue that commences with questions about what is working and not working educationally in our country. After all, questions open up the dialogue that will lead to democracy and respect in the classroom and potentially the communities we work in and maybe even the world. Paulo Freire says:
No one receives democracy as a gift. One fights for democracy. The bonds that prohibit us from being democratic are broken not by a well-behaved patience but by the people mobilizing, organizing, being consciously critical (89).

The questions then become the starting point to contributing one’s voice to the discourse that will lead to democracy not only in the classroom but in the world where we all live and work, where we interact with one another attempting to truly communicate—not only to exchange words but to actually understand one another.

With questions, and hopefully an open dialogue, educators and policymakers can begin looking at ways to ensure that students graduate on time, understand the basic skills for reading and writing and enroll in college (community or university) without the need for basic reading/writing classes at the college level. America’s institutions of higher learning should be reserved for precisely that—higher learning. But colleges and institutions now are spending a lot of money, time and effort educating students in the basic skills of reading and writing, which should have been taught at the secondary level.

The questions that we should be asking should lead to changes that will have a positive effect on our schools and our students. It is imperative that we look at what has not worked in the past and make changes for the future that will enable students to be successful. The only danger in making changes, however, is the ever swinging pendulum. If we are careful, though, and do not play the blame game (like so many administrations are apt to do), but instead use the past to make a difference in the future, then the testing, the scores, the graduation rates and most importantly, learning, should fall into place.
Unfortunately, it appears that just this year, President Obama’s administration has decided to take the NCLB Act even further, and the pendulum, instead of swinging in the other direction toward a more holistic type of assessment, has instead swung even further right and taken former President Bush’s 2002 policies and made them even “tougher.” President Obama, according to Nick Anderson from the *Washington Post*, has “proposed overhauling the No Child Left Behind law that was his predecessor’s hallmark education initiative, aiming to eliminate several of the measure’s controversial mandates on public schools but adding new ones” (1). Obama is now proposing that instead of testing students only in math and English language arts, that students also be tested, and “progress” measured, in other subjects as well.

It is disappointing, to say the least, to accept his new ideas, given the fact that when he came into office he was a critic of NCLB. Most of his supporters in fact hoped that he would dump it as soon as he was elected. His new proposals, however, call for more “accountability” within the educational system in the next four years and that by 2020 all students be on a path toward college and career readiness. While these are, on their face, laudable goals, it also means clamping down on the lowest-performing schools in a way that we have never seen before, but without providing the scaffolding for real improvement.

Obama is also proposing rewarding schools and teachers if the schools’ and individual student scores go up. With the increased pressure on standardized testing scores, the pendulum then swings even further right as lawmakers seek to overhaul an
already failing policy. In fact, on March 1\textsuperscript{st} of this year, Obama, in his weekly radio and internet address, stated: “Schools that achieve excellence or show real progress will be rewarded” (Anderson 2). Not only is this a shock but it is a huge disappointment to educators. Study after study has demonstrated that standardized scores are not indicative of actual learning progress, so rewarding schools that excel in such a system only perpetuates the core problems in education.

Students, the ones who should be the most disappointed, are, for the most part, oblivious to these landmark decisions and will only realize the impact of such mandates once confronted with even more of the same. Educators, however, always seem to have hope, hope that faith in the educational system will be restored and the new administration will realize that we do not need more standardized testing, but instead need to move away from a one-size-fits-all educational view and towards a more holistic vision, where students are allowed and encouraged to progress based on individual successes and where educators are valued for the professionals that they are.

As teachers, it is clear that good intentions are only the first step and will get neither us nor our students anywhere, unless coupled with skills and strategies to make learning possible and meaningful for our students. Despite the desire to help students and to find the best possible solutions for them, however, teachers are continually faced with the challenge of sifting through the constantly evolving theories that espouse the philosophy of this theorist or that, as well as the constantly swinging pendulum, which, more often than not, teachers have no control over. Too often, it is easier for teachers to
simply allow the pendulum to do its thing and not get caught in the middle of a swing that could potentially wipe them out. It is easier to simply follow the new rules the pendulum requires than risk being the innovator, much less arguing that the new strategy or the new policy does not work. With so many swings during a teacher’s career, the process can often become daunting, and it is easier to just give in even though that may not be in the students’ best interest.

The field of composition and basic writing, like the field of education in general, seems to fall prey to its own kind of pendulum. At one extreme sits the treatment of error as a way of ensuring progress in writing aptitude, and at the other extreme a more liberal view in which errors are not as important as the big ideas that a writer is trying to get across to the reader. At one end is the teaching of grammar out of context and at the other teaching it within context. The constant swing does not benefit our students, and we are in fact (if we fall prey to the constant swing), as composition teachers, not making as much of a difference as we think we are. Tom Fox, author of *Defending Access* (1999) says:

Composition’s institutional origins in the late nineteenth century are – like it or not – the framework within which issues of access and gatekeeping standards occur. The balance of these two concerns has tipped one way and then the other across the decades, depending on the needs of industry and democratic pressures from students, soldiers, and progressives (40).

Fox is correct in that we acknowledge it has been a struggle all the way, fighting what seems to be an unending battle and one which inevitably only hurts those we are trying to help: the students.
At this point in time, however, we seem to be at a position in composition history where we seem to agree somewhat with one another in theory but not completely in practice. And yet, even that does not seem to be entirely true because it seems the theorists who have the time, the money, and the leisure to sit and write, write for their colleagues – other theorists. Then they pat each other on the back, smile and congratulate one another for yet another book that only seems to defend the ones who cannot defend themselves.

In *Perils of the Pendulum: Resisting Education’s Fads*, John Bruer, president of the St. Louis-based James S. McDonnell Foundation, which supports educational and biomedical research says that in the field of education, “the gap between the research community and the practitioner community is much wider that what you’d find between practicing engineers and physicists” (Chaddock, 3). Granted, engineering and physics are high academic fields that play important roles in society, but one should argue for the simple premise that educating the future citizens in the world in the fundamentals of reading and composition should be paramount in our decision-making process when it comes to education. It is time for the gap to be closed between theory and praxis in the education field.

The argument is that we fight this battle for the defenseless. That is why we do what we do as teachers. Yet little seems to change for the student. The policy makers have very little concept of what the reality is like in the daily trenches (the classroom) where we work with students who come from low-socioeconomic backgrounds and/or
have parents who show no interest and give little incentive to their children to study. We work with students who migrate to our country in their teenage years and have little to no schooling or facility with the English language and yet are placed in age/grade-appropriate classes and expected to somehow make the grade and graduate on time. We work with students who for the most part raise themselves and are accountable to no one. We are faced with parents who have never learned to parent and therefore expect the school system to do it for them.

These may seem like trivial issues that should be discussed outside of an educational arena; nonetheless, these are issues that affect our students in addition to the learning issues that go on in the classroom. The policymakers craft the policies based on ideas they have concerning what schools should look like and mandate that schools and students fall into line, without even the basic realization or understanding that not all schools or students are created equal and that there cannot be a one-size-fits-all education.

It could be argued that all these issues apply directly to what is going on in the classroom, and eventually those issues find their way into the results of the standardized test. But it is not just about what goes on in the classroom. It is also about what goes on outside of the classroom environment. Issues such as poverty, uninterested parents, gangs, and drugs affect these students in ways that in turn affect the classroom environment and academic pursuits. These are the battles that teachers face daily in the classroom. The policymakers nonetheless tell teachers to go and apply the theory they
have learned and to implement whatever new educational fad is currently in place. However much we might like to argue, it remains accurate to state that theory says one thing and practice is something quite different.

Certainly teachers have been plagued over the years with questions regarding the relationship between theory and praxis and somehow on our own have tried to bridge the gap but it is doubtful we ever will, despite our desire to do so. Nonetheless, it would seem reasonable to have at least some type of articulation between the theorists and the different types of educational settings that are enlightening our students. The policymakers must be made to realize that the mandating will change nothing if not coupled with ideas that work for the individual student. For this to happen there must be more meaningful dialogue between the policymakers, the teachers and the students. We cannot ignore the fact that our country still has a large number of students that are not graduating from high school and if they do, are placed in remedial classes upon college entrance. We must look at our teaching practices and our assessment strategies and evaluate whether they do, in fact, benefit our students.

It has been some thirty-five years since Mina Shaughnessy first helped us define the field of basic writing and consequently steered us toward a more democratic classroom--a place where the voices of all students can be heard, regardless of skill. She helped us to begin this dialogue and created a space called basic writing wherein the rules of writing process pedagogy could be broken” (Fox, 46). With her help, we have been
able to set about a transformation in the field of basic writing that some argue was
unprecedented and yet historically necessary for the benefit of the marginalized student.

While some argue that she focuses on errors too much, she has helped us
nonetheless become aware that the problem with the field lies not with the students and
their errors or with the types of programs that we design, for “[the] programs are not the
[answer] to the learning problems of students, but teachers are” (6). Shaughnessy goes on
to say that “good teachers create good programs” (6), and that “the best programs are
developed in situ, in response to the needs of individual student populations and as
reflections of the particular histories and resources of individual colleges” (6). It is with
Shaughnessy’s words in mind that this research project evolved and is an attempt to open
a dialogue that would potentially steer us away from so much standardized testing to a
more holistic type of assessment such as portfolios that would allow for more student
individuality and creativity thus allowing for more democracy in the classroom.

We have reached a point in our educational system where we are no longer
servicing students as we say we are. We are not preparing them for the rigors of the
writing classroom or the rigors that the work world demands. If in fact, as Shaughnessy
asserts, focusing on students’ errors and developing programs and strategies that help fix
those errors are not the solution and that “good teachers and good programs” are, then it
is our responsibility as teachers, educators or politicians to not only define the term “good
teacher” but also “good programs.” We need to look closely at the qualities that comprise
good teachers and good programs and make sincere efforts to ensure that every student receives the quality education that he or she is entitled to.

Ostensibly, a good teacher is only as good as the program or curriculum he or she uses, inasmuch as assessment is only as good as what it is trying to assess. And so we must ask ourselves what should good programs and assessment tools look like? Lastly, and most importantly, how do teachers go about teaching and developing good assessment tools in the midst of so much standardized testing?

This project will look more closely at three standardized tests mandated by the state of California and its impact on California students: The California Standardized testing (CSTs), the California English Language Development Test (CELDT), and the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). All three of these tests demand that students be proficient in reading and writing and are the gatekeepers to a higher level of education which students see as a way to a better life. This project seeks to offer a solution to standardized testing in the form of portfolios, which would not only afford teachers the possibility of teaching real reading and writing skills as opposed to teaching to a test, but also a solution that would promote real incentives in student learning by allowing for more creativity and individuality in the classroom.

We cannot continue to state that there is democracy and respect going on in the classroom if students are failing and not graduating from high school and are not able to have access to the college writing classroom. Respect must be defined clearly and it must be defined according to observations, readings, and experiences and then show the reader
that by creating a climate of respect and democracy within the classroom, composition teachers can, as Shaughnessy defined for us in *Errors and Expectations*, become good teachers. As good teachers, we can in turn empower our students with the ability to write, create and be heard. On the other hand, we cannot ignore the cries of our students who desire the challenge and rigor of higher education or the policymakers who demand evidence that teachers and administrators are doing their jobs. We must find a balance between the two. We must find a way of establishing common ground.

This paper will take a closer look at the large of amount testing that encompasses high school education in California by looking at the assessment moments that comprise standardized testing and its effect on writing standards as well as access to higher education. This paper is also a call for help for the thousands of California students, not to mention the millions of students nationwide, so that educators can get back to teaching the basic core standards of reading and writing with the intent of producing students capable of realizing their full potential as citizens and learners. It will conclude by suggesting a new way to assess students that not only respects them but allows for individual growth based on standards that will lead to academic and personal development. It will show how respect, intertwined with good teaching philosophies, makes for powerful teaching and assessment moments and in turn enables educators to foster students capable of writing not only in the college arena but also in the work setting as well as the world at large. A pedagogy of respect and democracy is what is
needed in the writing classroom if we are to allow students access to the academy and the world.
Chapter 2

THE HIGH PRICE OF STANDARDIZED TESTING

“The more we learn about standardized testing, particularly in its high-stakes incarnation, the more likely we are to be appalled. And the more we are appalled, the more inclined we will be to do what is necessary to protect our children from this monster in the schools.”

- Alfie Kohn, The Case Against Standardized Testing

“Standardized tests can’t measure initiative, creativity, imagination, conceptual thinking, curiosity, effort, irony, judgment, commitment, nuance, good will, ethical reflection, or a host of other valuable dispositions and attributes. What they can measure and count are isolated skills, specific facts and functions, the least interesting and least significant aspects of learning.”

- Bill Ayers – The Case Against Standardized Testing

“It would be naive to underestimate the seemingly magical power that the standardized measurement of minds has on the American psyche.”

- Peter Sacks – Standardized Minds

Standardized testing has become the acceptable norm first because in recent years there has been a call for accountability, and second because it seems to be a way to ensure that students are treated equitably. Standardized testing for many has become a way to measure both the accountability and the equitability of the current educational system and yet, despite the arguments from teachers and school administrators that standardized testing does not work and that the accountability and equitability it is attempting to measure is in fact skewed, the pendulum seems to move even further right with an even greater call for more testing.
Standardized testing has become part of the mindset of this generation of teachers and students and despite growing concern and anxiety about the tests, they have grown to such a degree that those in the educational field (teachers, administrators, policymakers and even students) do not seem to be able to function without them. Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers says:

[No Child Left Behind] has effectively written into law an unbalanced focus on testing rather than teaching. Tests have become more about telling us how much students can remember and less about telling us what they have -or have not- learned. Too often, the tests are not aligned to the curriculum that students are taught all year, and, as a consequence, tests results may not accurately indicate what a student has learned. And teachers caution that the excessive number of tests and the high stakes attached to them consume inordinate amounts of one thing they and their students have too little of: time (36).

Weingarten makes an excellent point. Instructional minutes are mandated by law and every minute must be accounted for. In order to make time for everything, some learning often falls by the wayside simply because teachers are pressured to teach a minimum amount of curriculum in a given subject and still find time to prepare students for the standardized test. Despite this, school districts, school sites, administrators and teachers, although dissatisfied with the results and implications of such tests, continue to push standardized testing, because our very survival depends upon it.

It should be expected that the testing offers results that can be used to help teachers discover better ways to identify curriculum and pedagogy that will ensure success for each student. However, educators often come to view standardized testing as a necessary evil and the school environment becomes a chaotic world in which students
and teachers must learn to navigate in order to survive. While some may view this as a rather extreme and perhaps tragic view of the learning environment, it does reflect nonetheless the attitude of many of the educators and students. The state and federal agencies mandate that schools and teachers must hold students accountable to what they are learning; making sure that they can apply the knowledge learned in the classroom. This way, not only are students held accountable, but schools and districts are as well. The state and federal agencies have found that standardized testing does the job of maintaining the accountability that the state and federal agencies require primarily because the testing produces numbers which seem to imply that schools and students are doing poorly or that they are excelling. However, educators, the ones in the daily trenches, (but also to some extent school administrators and district administrators) see the fallacies of the tests and the discrepancies that lie within the testing culture at the schools. They also see how much damage the tests are doing to students academically and psychologically because of over testing, but feel powerless to do anything about it, however much they may ostensibly disagree with their premise and how much damage they see it is doing to students.

President Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 requires that every school in America make what is called Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) each school year. The AYP score a school receives each year indicates the minimum amount of improvement a school, district or state must make each year. Each state department of education is responsible for deciding what the AYP will be as well as the objectives that will measure
student progress state-wide. The purpose of these measures is to guarantee that within a 12 year period every student in the United States scores “proficient” and graduates from high school. Standardized testing came into play precisely to help states and schools to measure the progress and to guarantee that everyone is doing their job. Those schools that do not meet the AYP are punished by being placed on probation or “in need of improvement” and will go through a variety of options to remove themselves from the “needs improvement list” (United States Department of Education (2002). Each year the school, state or district fails to meet the AYP, stricter penalties are placed on the school, district or state, the strictest of which results in the closing of the school.

Currently in California we begin testing students as young as five years of age on standardized tests and use the results to analyze ability and skill level as well as placement in a variety of different programs. Alfie Kohn, author of *The Case Against Standardized Testing – Raising Scores, Ruining Schools* says “our children are tested to an extent that is unprecedented in our history and unparalleled anywhere else in the world. Rather than seeing this as odd, or something that needs to be defended, many of us have come to take it for granted” (2). Students, parents, teachers and administrators have come to accept standardized testing as something that is beyond their control. It has been imposed upon us and we feel powerless to do anything about it. Peter Sacks, author of *Standardized Minds* states that while “the rhetoric [regarding standardized testing] is highly effective, remarkably little good evidence exists that there’s any educational substance behind the accountability and testing movement” (155). The moment that we
federalized this accountability movement is the precise moment that we lost control over our school and the effects that this testing has on our students.

It is clear that standardized tests have gone from equalizers of opportunity to tools of segregation used to separate not only by intelligence, but by socio-economic status, wealth, and privilege. While opinions vary, it would appear that the ultimate goal of standardized testing is to raise test scores, and the real fundamentals of learning (basic reading and writing skills) fall by the wayside as something that will somehow magically happen on their own despite the call for even more testing. Schools and teachers are mandated to do whatever is necessary to make the test scores go up, and this affects learning and ultimately our society as a whole by making it necessary for teachers to forgo teaching the basics of reading and writing skills and instead focusing on teaching to the test. In fact, Kohn says that “teaching to the test could be described as ‘legal cheating.’” However, unlike the cheating that is widely condemned (giving kids the answers) or the kind that would be condemned if it were publicized (flunking potentially low-scoring students or shuffling them off to special ed.), drilling students so they’ll do well on the test even if they’re not really learning much of value is generally accepted” (32). Daniel Koretz, a testing expert at the RAND Corporation, adds that “teaching to the test is in fact a much larger, vastly more important, and much less tractable problem than frank cheating” (15). We have chosen efficiency over quality and as a result teaching to the test has had a dumbing-down effect on teaching and learning.
A study was performed in 1991 by Lorrie Shepard and Katherine Cutts Dougherty of the University of Colorado that found that teachers surveyed “said they felt ‘substantial’ or ‘great’ pressure from the district administration to raise test scores,” and two-thirds of the teachers “said they felt such pressure from newspapers and the media” (Shepard and Dougherty 28 - 31). The added stress that teachers and students feel due to the inordinate amount of standardized testing that goes on in a given year, does not help to promote real learning and achievement and has the potential of creating devastating impacts on our nation’s schools.

Standardized tests do not take into account gifted learners, English Language Learners, students with special needs, test anxiety, cultural background, outside influences and socio-economic levels, thereby opening the possibility of missing high quality students simply because they could not perform in a snapshot moment in time on a standardized test. Currently we subject students to standardized tests in the name of “objectivity” and somehow expect that students will perform and progress. Kohn says:

Is objectivity really a desirable – or a realistic- goal? Presumably, an “objective” assessment is one that’s not dependant on subjective factors such as the beliefs and values of different individuals; everyone would have to agree that something is good or bad. But disagreement is a part of life, and it isn’t necessarily something to be transcended. You and I will inevitably differ in our judgments about politics and ethics, about the quality of movies we see and the meals we eat. It is odd and troubling that in educating our children “we expect a different standard of assessment than is normal than the rest of our lives” (4).

It is unreasonable to assume that standardized testing can provide the objectivity the state is seeking when the reality is that schools and teachers deal with subjectivity on a daily
basis and that subjectivity makes it difficult to drive instruction in a way that will help to raise the scores.

We should ask ourselves why standardized testing has become so meaningful to everyone involved in education and why it has come with such high stakes. Certainly The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 has much to do with it, as well as a call for more accountability which the NCLB attempted to answer. It is appropriate to show, nevertheless, that prior to 2002, at least in California, students were only required to acquire the required number of credits (220) and pass each class with the determined grade set forth by each school and that student was granted a diploma. Application and acceptance into college then rested on the student’s own abilities and merits by showing that the student possessed the necessary skills to enter the academy. The scenario today is drastically different due to the fact that students now must show competency on exit exams and other standardized tests regardless of that student’s grades and/or merits.

In addition, there is no real uniformity across the country when it comes to standards, and it would seem that standards have a different meaning depending on who you ask. Michael Cohen, a senior education official under President Clinton, is president of Achieve, a nonpartisan education reform organization and he says that:

No Child Left Behind went too far with its highly prescriptive formula for individual school accountability. It requires states to measure how well students perform on standardized tests, with the unrealistic goal of 100 percent scoring “proficient” by 2014 but not accounting for how much students have grown academically. The result is a growing number of schools identified as low performing but few state or local education systems with the ability to adequately respond. We’ve also learned the limits of each state acting independently. While increasing the stakes
attached to test results, the law let each state set its own standards and define “proficient.” Too many set the bar too low. And while “proficient” means dramatically different things from state to state, rarely does it mean that students deemed proficient are academically prepared for anything, much less college and careers (33-37).

Cohen makes it clear that standards mean different things to different people. And yet, the state and federal agencies continue to mandate teachers and schools to perpetuate something that is clearly not working. States and most importantly schools were sold a bill of goods when President Bush was in power and the pendulum swung yet another time with the inception of NCLB. This time the direction made standardized testing mandatory, with severe consequences both for students and for school sites that do not perform according to a predetermined norm.

According to Margaret Spellings, secretary of education under President Bush from 2005-2009 and instrumental in the implementation of the NCLB act of 2002, there are four important lessons to be learned from the inception and implementation of NCLB. First, she says that the primary and most important lesson to be learned is the lesson of accountability, which she says is working and proves accountability works. Second is the lesson that accountability makes people uncomfortable, and, out of that discomfort, educational systems are not able to hide from the fact that students, especially minorities, are not making any progress, and that over half of those minorities will not graduate from high school. Third, she states that NCLB encourages continuous improvement of classrooms and educators and provides parents and students more customized options. Last, she argues that NCLB supports watching out for special interest groups that stall the
focus on closing the achievement gap. The arguments Spellings makes are a call to action to educators, parents and schools and yet the implementation of such actions have proven to be much more difficult to implement than originally thought. Furthermore, the damage that schools and more importantly students have suffered from it should cause us to step back and reevaluate NCLB.

Kohn says the reasons for “implementing something as radical as NCLB are mostly political and financial with no regard to what it is doing to students.” He goes on to say that “some politicians are ready to cast public schools in a bad light as a way of privatizing education” (2). “It would be logical,” he says, “to administer a test that most will fail in order to create the impression that public schools are worthless, if your goal is to serve up schools to the marketplace, where the point of reference is what maximizes profit rather than what benefits children (2). Kohn also says that standardized testing is a money-making business and that “the corporations that manufacture the test have revenues of nearly a quarter of a billion dollars and it continues to grow” (3). On that same note he says that the same corporations that manufacture the tests turn around and sell teaching materials designed to help teachers teach students how to raise their scores. He goes on to say that school systems end up picking the worst kind of test possible precisely because they are the most appealing:

It is fast, and easy and therefore relatively inexpensive to administer a multiple-choice exam that arrives from somewhere else and is then sent back to be graded by a machine at lightning speed. There is little incentive to replace these tests with more meaningful forms of assessment that require human beings to evaluate the quality of students’
accomplishments. Efficient tests tend to drive out less efficient tests, leaving many important abilities untested and untaught (3).

When we allow this type of testing to invade our schools it gives politicians the opportunity to show that they are concerned about education and school achievement and the testing allows them to show that they are getting tough on schools, teachers and students, which in turn shows that they are doing their job and therefore deserve reelection.

The argument is always that the easy-to-read scores allow everyone to see if the student and the school are progressing at the rate they should be thereby giving the taxpayers the impression that the politicians are doing their job. The demand for better schools (something every community wants) feeds the politician’s desire to use highly desirable words such as tougher standards, accountability, raising the bar and better teachers. Not everyone understands the numbers completely and yet it is easy for a teacher or a school to pull up a student’s score sheet or transcripts and show the student and the parent why the student is not making progress or how much progress the student or school is making because the numbers say so. If the numbers get larger, the reasoning is, then we must be making progress. If they get smaller, one is supposed to assume that no progress is taking place.

Numbers can always be used to track supposed failures and successes, whereas intrinsic motivation, intellectual exploration and writing abilities are difficult for some minds to understand and are often even more complicated to prove. Kohn says that “it is easier to measure efficiency than effectiveness, easier to rate how well we’re doing
something than to ask whether what we’re doing makes sense. Not everyone realizes that the process of coming to understand ideas in a classroom is not always linear or quantifiable – or in fact, that measurable outcomes may be the least significant results of learning” (4). Politicians took on the task of measuring that efficiency and passed the NCLB Act because schools, states, and parents were demanding more accountability and standardized testing seemed to be the answer to the problem.

The numbers that are used to keep track of accountability affect every student, teacher, school and district, and one of the groups most affected by the NCLB Act is California’s English language learners. It affects them in ways that are far more detrimental and for which there are few remedies given the current legislation. As mentioned before, they, along with their English Only counterparts (fluent English speakers who only speak one language) will have to score proficient on the state standardized test regardless of English proficiency. The NCLB mandates that all students, regardless of language proficiency, reach high standards by demonstrating proficiency in English language arts and mathematics by 2014. This means that by this date, all students, regardless of status or language proficiency, must reach what the NCLB calls “high standards” (a score of 325 or above on CSTs and 350 or above on CAHSEE). Schools and school districts have no choice but to help English Learners make continuous progress towards this goal, as measured by standardized tests, or they will jeopardize federal funding. Once again, money is valued over education and students will be at the losing end of the mandate.
Given the incredible challenges English Language Learners face in the midst of the standardized testing frenzy, slow progress in English proficiency (usually 3 – 5 years on average), as well as low motivation often due to non-educated parents, and low-socio-economic status, it is often next to impossible for EL students and schools to make anything that would even resemble reasonable progress according to NCLB. Jamal Abedi and Ron Dietel at the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing (CRESST) make it clear that “through these mandates, NCLB establishes high expectation for all students and seeks to reduce the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students” (1). While CRESST believes that these are worthy goals, “they require extraordinary improvement in student learning” (1). The challenges for English Language Learners are especially difficult, involving both technical and educational issues and CRESST states the following:

1. **Historically low ELL performance and slow improvement** – State tests show that ELL students’ school performance is far below that of other students, oftentimes 20 to 30 percentage points, and usually shows little improvement across many years.

2. **Measurement accuracy** – CRESST research shows that the language demands of test negatively influence accurate measurement of ELL performance. For the ELL student, tests measure both achievement and language ability.

3. **Instability of the ELL student subgroup** – The goal of redesignating high-performing ELL students as language proficient students causes ELL high
achievers to exit the ELL subgroup. The consequence is downward pressure on ELL test scores worsened by the addition of new ELL students, who are typically low achieving.

4. **Factors outside of school’s control** – CRESST research shows substantial nonschool effects on student learning even within ELL subgroups. Schools are therefore unable to control all factors related to student achievement.

(https://www.cse.ucla.edu/).

English Language Learners bring the scores down for schools and districts, and the conflicts are many as to how to resolve the issue. Due to the way the state looks at the scores (by ethnicity, by grade and language proficiency), it can often be detrimental to a school to have too many English Learners, as that could and usually does severely impact the scores. Educators agree that the EL population is not diminishing but instead is growing, and that these issues must be addressed or the risk for schools is ever increasing. There is a growing concern as to the best way to do this. In the meantime, ELs continue to be tested along with their English Only counterparts and continue to fail in the eyes of the law.

Despite NCLB’s good intentions to have every student succeed, it will take more than just those *good intentions* to make it possible for English Language Learners to make the grade that NCLB requires. Again, it is important to point out that NCLB functions with a snowball effect. If students do not perform, schools do not make the grade requirement; districts then receive a low Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and lose
their funding. With the loss of funding comes the loss of programs, state and governmental intervention (Program Improvement Status), loss of curriculum and materials essential to good teaching and learning, not to mention the lowering of morale both in students and teachers.

CRESST researchers point out that the problems described above have potential solutions, but those solutions will require more time than the NCLB mandate is allowing for. NCLB mandates that by 2014 every student be proficient (meeting the minimum score requirement) and pass the CAHSEE by the time the student graduates from high school. Anyone involved with the teaching of second language learners knows that this mandate is not only a very challenging task but is one fraught with impossibilities. Without a longer time frame it will be impossible to make the necessary changes that show progress, getting students to meet the minimum requirements, thus placing many schools and school districts in jeopardy of losing funding and sending them into the inevitable snowball effect described above.

One of the major concerns that many opponents of NCLB and its mandatory standardized testing have is that there are so many issues that are out of a school’s control but which inevitably affect the students. Many of these issues are nonschool factors which play an enormous role in a student’s overall achievement. For example, CRESST researchers have shown that parent education level and socioeconomic status play huge roles in the outcomes of a student’s education, particularly within the ELL population. One example they used to show this is the reading level of individual students. CRESST
research shows that the lower the parent educational level and socioeconomic status, the lower a student’s reading scores—which affect the overall testing scores because the student is not able to comprehend what he reads and consequently produces poor responses.

A study performed by Tizard, J.; Schofield, W. N.; & Hewison, J. (1982) entitled *Reading Symposium: "Collaboration Between Teachers and Parents in Assisting Children's Reading"* shows that early reading does affect a student’s level of comprehension and educational future. The study shows that parental involvement based on a model of children reading to parents, found that children who read to their parents on a regular basis made greater gains than children receiving an equivalent amount of extra reading instruction by reading specialists at school (Educational Research Report, 1993). Sticht, T. G., & McDonald, (1990) also found that that more highly educated mothers have greater success in providing their children with the cognitive and language skills that contribute to early success in school (Educational Research Report, 1993). Additionally, Peter Sacks states that income and poverty have a lot to do with how well students do in school. He says that “the effect of social and economic class on how much schooling people get are immense, as most schoolchildren and parents already know” (160).

The idea that testing gives us an accurate picture of a student or a school is a fallacy, and it is imperative that we pay attention to the outside influences because they affect the learning outcomes and overall progress of students. It is imperative the
legislators understand that it is not only classroom issues such as curriculum, the
effectiveness of individual teachers, and assessment moments that affect learning, but
also the outside influences over which schools and teachers have little to no control.
Rewarding teachers for raising test scores or punishing them because scores fall is not
only an insult to the profession of teaching but it is doing a great disservice to students.

Oftentimes, it seems as though the educational system has forgotten its main
purpose: to educate students to become citizens of the world, hence preparing them to
function in society. Linda Darling-Hammond, Professor of Education at Stanford
University of Education, says:

The consequences for individual students who are caught in this no-win situation can be tragic, as most cannot go on to further education or even military service if they fail these tests, drop out, or are pushed out to help their schools scores look better. The consequences are also tragic, as more and more students are leaving school earlier and earlier – some with only a seventh – or – eighth – grade education – without the skills to able to join the economy (Meier, 23).

Standardized testing has promised to give us a clear picture of how students, schools and districts are doing, while at the same time promoting accountability and higher achievement, but in many cases it has not done that and instead has caused schools to fail, increased the dropout rates and lowered morale in both students and teachers. Kohn has researched this idea and says that “the tougher standards movement has actually lowered standards” (27). Those that do stay and fight the battle often become defensive and competitive when forced to prove that the low scores were not their fault. This pits teachers against one another, teachers against administrators, and schools against parents,
and the students are once again caught in the middle of a battle that is about them but over which they have no control. In the midst of such battles, learning takes second place to scoring high on a test. In a fight to keep their jobs teachers teach to the test by making it their primary focus, schools focus on teachers who have not been able to raise their scores, and in the midst of it all learning the basic skills of reading and writing takes a backseat to testing well on multiple-choice tests.

While teachers are attempting to teach to the test to ensure that their class scores go up and remain high, students in the meantime have figured out that these tests often represent high stakes for them as well, and cheating has become a very real problem in schools. Cheating usually implies that it is happening between students, but often it happens between teachers and students. Teachers, feeling the immense pressure that comes from their administrators to have high test scores will find ways to help certain students with the test.

Teachers also have to sign affidavits agreeing to all the policies involving the tests but this still has not prevented teachers from guiding students more than they should on tests. There have also been cases where students have been encouraged to repeat a grade or stay in high school a 5th year to improve and perhaps guarantee a better chance at passing the tests. This not only helps the school in achieving its state-mandated high scores, but it also allows the students more chances at being able to walk across the stage and get that diploma. Many students have also copied the answers off other students, thus completely skewing the testing results. Kohn’s research shows that this is indeed a trend:
High-stakes testing has led to widespread *cheating*. Educators in state after state, pressured to raise their test scores, have been caught coaching students inappropriately during tests or altering answer sheets afterwards. Reports of such behavior always elicit condemnation of the individuals involved but rarely lead people to rethink the pressures attendant on high-stakes testing (28).

Students have to be closely monitored in very constricting and unappealing testing environments, but they are also subjected to testing monitors (usually administrators) pacing the aisles of the testing setting to ensure that no cheating is occurring. This is not a relaxed environment where students feel able to perform their best or where teachers and administrators feel confident about the learning that has occurred in the classroom.

In addition to cheating, there is also a lot of test anxiety that revolves around so much testing. Recently there has been research that shows that the more we force students to take high stakes tests the more anxiety they have and that anxiety skews the test results. Kohn makes this clear when explaining that “test anxiety has grown into a subfield of educational psychology and its prevalence means that the tests producing this reaction are not giving us a good picture of what many students really know and can do” (4). This should be enough to declare the results of such testing skewed at the very least, if not completely invalid. Students producing results under such enormous pressure can hardly guarantee any type of reliable results.

Another issue with the standardized testing is the fact that teachers now view certain students as liabilities. An ELD (English Language Development) classroom, for example, is comprised of nothing but English learners and in some teachers’ minds these students become liabilities because if their whole class is comprised of nothing but
second language learners the probability of their class scores going up is highly unlikely. The same happens with the teachers who are selected to teach the SDAIE (Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English) classes. They feel pressured to perform over and above the norm and when they have an entire class comprised of English learners, the stakes become way too high and they panic. Often it is almost impossible to get a teacher to agree to teach ELD or SDAIE classes for this very reason and often schools end up with the least experienced teachers teaching English learners, because no one else will agree to do it.

Frequently schools place newly credentialed teachers in the ELD and SDAIE classes instead of an experienced tenured teacher simply because the tenured teachers have seniority and refuse to teach second language learners. *Any* teacher, regardless of experience, who agrees to teach second language learners risks putting his or her job on the line. There is no special consideration made for the fact that most of these students do not speak English and teachers are forced to scaffold the entire curriculum and still ensure that students do well on the standardized tests. By agreeing to teach an ELD or SDAIE class teachers are forced to do more than their colleagues and risk their jobs if they are not able to raise the scores.

Time also becomes an issue, because there is simply not enough time to scaffold the amount of information English learners need in order to be prepared for the testing window. Kohn insists that “as long as a school or a teacher has adequate test scores, what happens in the classroom is irrelevant; poor test scores, meanwhile, are viewed as
indicators that change is needed, and no matter what happens in the classroom” (29). Without the adequate time to purposefully and adequately follow through with the curriculum that has been adopted by a school and/or district, teachers are failing at the task they have set out do, which is to provide a fully encompassed education and not one that is based on drills, practice sheets, and rote practices meant to boost test scores.

It is clear then what happens in an ELD or SDAIE classroom, when the focus on the test becomes paramount to learning: real learning (focusing on individual student needs, processed writing, and holistic assessment) takes a backseat to the need to make sure that students understand the importance of the exams and what will be on them. Teaching to the test becomes the new standard, and with this new standard we begin to lose democracy and freedom. Meier and Wood expound on the idea that the consequences of the standardized testing culture is a lost cause for our nation’s students. They say:

the consequences for individual students who are caught in this no-win situation can be tragic, as most cannot go on to further education or even military service if they fail these tests, drop out, or are pushed out to help their schools’ test scores look better. The consequences for society are also tragic, as more and more students are leaving school earlier and earlier – some with only a seventh - or eighth- grade education – without the skills to be able to join the economy” (23).

It is clear that standardized tests, with their multitude of multiple-choice questions and answers, fail to adequately test a student’s knowledge of the full range of academic subjects and literacy that a student should know prior to graduating from high school and potentially moving on to college and/or the workforce. In essence, standardized tests
leave students unprepared to face real life work situations and the rigorous work that college demands due to the inordinate amount of focus on standardized testing in high school instead of the real teaching/learning that focuses on knowledge that prepares students for life and college.

One of the most negative aspects of standardized testing is what it has done to writing skills in the classroom. Standardized testing has changed the way teachers view the importance of teaching writing skills. Educators know that these tests are mostly comprised of multiple choice questions and that this leaves relatively little time to focus on writing skills when one must devote inordinate amounts of time to teaching to the test. While writing has a designated place in standardized testing, it should be argued that it is not a very significant place. The purpose of standardized tests and the manner in which they are scored does not allow for many subjective answers mostly because the whole idea behind the standardized tests is to create an assessment system that is quick and to the point. Kohn says: “The worst tests are often the most appealing to schools systems: It is fast, easy, and therefore relatively inexpensive to administer a multiple-choice exam that arrives from somewhere else and is then sent back to be graded by a machine at lightening speed” (3). The idea of replacing standardized tests with a more holistic and therefore more meaningful type of assessment gets little interest from legislators due to the financial liability and time constraints that would be imposed on school districts. Kohn agrees and says: “There is little incentive to replace these tests with more meaningful forms of assessment that require human beings to evaluate the quality of
students’ accomplishments” (3). It is sad to have to admit that money and time constraints have taken precedence over meaningful learning, individual student growth, and critical thinking.

It should be noted that writing is a process, and it should be taught in such a way that students are able and allowed to work through that process with the intention of producing a document that is worthy of an audience. Students are taught process writing from elementary school and through high school, but as they rise in the ranks of the educational system, less and less process writing is valued and more and more multiple-choice questions and timed-writing is valued, despite the fact that this in no way resembles the kind of work one would expect in a workplace or college writing environment.

The writing that takes place in high schools, especially in California, in no way prepares students either for real world writing situations or a rigorous college writing environment. Donald Murray, in A Writer Teaches Writing, discusses the importance of process writing and the effect it has on students:

Writing is a craft before it is an art; writing may appear magic, but it is our responsibility to take our students backstage to watch the pigeons being tucked back up the magician’s sleeve. The process of writing can be studied and understood. We can re-create most of what a student or professional writer does to produce effective writing. The process is not linear, but recursive. The writer passes through the process once, or many times, emphasizing different stages during each passage. There is not one process, but many. The process varies with the personality or cognitive style of the writer, the experience of the writer, and the nature of the writing task (4).
Murray says that “the process is not linear, but recursive.” Students should be given the opportunity to work through that process and examine and *reexamine* their writing as a means of learning from it by discovering what works and what needs to be worked on. Rarely in the real world are people commanded to write on a given topic without prior knowledge of it and commanded to do it under time constraints.

Real life work situations emulate the writing *process* by allowing the writer the opportunity to revisit his/her work, and work through that process with the intention of producing a document worthy of the reader’s time. Murray emphasizes the fact that there is not a one-size-fits-all educational system that will benefit students, especially when it comes to writing. He says that “we do not teach writing effectively if we try to make all students and writing the same” (5). Politically, the legislators say that schools and the educational system in this country should, by very definition, embrace diversity. Yet the school system does the complete opposite by demanding students participate in standardized testing, which in and of itself espouses conformity and uniformity. Murray cautions that “we must seek, nurture, develop and reward difference” because it is out of that difference that we attain the complex and diverse writing we seek. Standardized testing does not allow for this and subsequently squashes any kind of creativity or individuality that a student may possess. Murray encourages writing teachers to not just accept diversity but to also seek it and make use of it in our writing instruction and our teaching.
The problem writing teachers and schools face today is that writing is no longer central to the idea of the English class. The philosophy is that students must know a definite amount of information by a certain date and that must be accomplished in an assured amount of time. This eliminates the opportunities that writing instructors used to have that allowed for writing to be created and explored, for *process* to be taught.

High schools focus on a set of content standards that have been mandated and imposed by the state and “these content standards were designed to encourage the highest achievement of every student, by defining the knowledge, concepts, and skills that students should acquire at each grade level” (CDE). The content standards adopted by the California State Board of Education seek to give teachers a roadmap that will help to guide them as they teach the mandated and adopted curriculum.

While writing is a part of the California State standards, realistically the time allotted does not allow for writing to be taught--at least not good, *processed* writing. Given the fact that more emphasis is placed on the multiple-choice part of the standardized exam, teachers are forced to spend more time teaching students grammar out of context, reading comprehension and test-taking skills than on the elements that make for a good processed paper. Teachers simply do not have the time in a given year to do it all, so something has to give. Given the fact that the standardized test does not bring into play the need to know or employ processed writing, teachers no longer feel an urgency to teach it, and it is slowly losing its place in the Language Arts classroom.
But writing has an important place within the Language Arts classroom at the secondary level, and a teacher’s primary responsibility according to Murray is to “draw out of the student the knowledge and skills of which the student is unaware. By giving the student that experience of self-exploration and self-discovery, the teacher makes it possible for the student to learn a pattern of self-education and self-expression that will last a lifetime” (129). That is our goal as educators: to teach students to express themselves both orally and on paper and to be able to self-analyze and self-critique with the intention of captivating an audience. Standardized testing and its policies however, do not allow for such a process.

This process, like any other worthwhile process, takes time and effort. It takes a willingness to self-reflect and analyze one’s own direction and intention. Unfortunately the willingness to teach this process has somewhat fallen by the wayside as schools and districts have succumbed to the testing dragon.

In defense of teachers and schools, it should be clarified that this move toward less processed writing was not intentional but rather one of survival. Districts and school sites had to move into survival mode to meet the expectations of the new NCLB requirements, and unfortunately for students that meant sacrificing the time spent teaching processed writing. There simply is no time to teach multiple drafts of an essay, much less time to respond to them, given the time constraints that are imposed on schools and teachers by the unrelenting delegators who demand higher and higher scores from students and schools. Since teachers know that a large amount of the standardized testing
does not involve processed writing, it is easy to simply skip that part of instruction, because teaching students how to take a test comprised of multiple readings and hundreds of multiple-choice questions regarding those readings, is of much more bureaucratic importance. While on one hand NCLB demands that students become proficient writers by 10th grade and prove it on exams such as the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE), on the other hand NCLB requirements force schools and teachers to focus so much on test-taking skills that there simply is not enough time to help students become proficient writers.

To demand that teachers somehow find the time to teach writing and prepare their students for the multiple numbers of standardized tests is an unrealistic endeavor. There is simply no time and no motivation to do so. No motivation for the teacher to teach process and certainly no motivation for the student who knows he will not be tested on it. It is not fair to judge a student in a single moment in time as if the entire high school career does not matter. The standardized test is simply a snapshot of that student--a single moment in time where the rest of the student’s accomplishments seem to wither in comparison to a test that will determine some aspect of that student’s academic and perhaps work career.

We learn to write by writing and it is ridiculous that the educational system in this country expects students to be successful writers when teachers are no longer able or allowed to place enough emphasis on the process. Essentially the system is setting students up for failure by not preparing them for college or the workforce, and yet
teachers’ hands are tied. Despite the fact that teachers know what the ethical thing to do is, the state and federal government demand otherwise. It is a battle that not many are capable of undertaking and is certainly not for the faint of heart.

Peter Sacks, author of *Standardized Minds – The High Price of America’s Testing Culture and What We Can Do to Change It*, says that:

> It seems reasonable to question whether the marginal benefits of standardized tests in terms of their predictive validity are worth the hundreds of million of dollars test takers and taxpayers spend annually on exams. Also, a true economic analysis of the nation’s de facto testing policy would have to estimate the “opportunity cost” of testing: What is forgone when teachers spend inordinate amounts of time teaching to tests that might have minimal connection to what students really need to learn (12)?

Predictive validity is the extent to which a score on a scale or test predicts scores on some criterion measure. To place so much emphasis on a test that only shows a snapshot of the entire student does not make for a valid score when considering everything else that goes in inside a classroom every day, things that are often more difficult to measure on a standardized test, such as critical thinking or writing abilities. Teachers need to be treated as the professionals they are and be allowed to do their job using the set of guidelines that are developed with the help of educators and not just by the hand of legislators who mandate laws without understanding the reality of the classroom. As teachers, parents, administrators and citizens, we must ask ourselves why we allow this to continue to happen.
Sacks goes on to elaborate on the idea that writing has become decentralized and that our society cares more about numbers and IQ testing than whether students are able to express themselves on paper:

Americans are fascinated with mental measurement to a degree that is rare in other countries. In contrast to what Europeans call “American tests,” the examinations for college or university admission in other industrial countries are typically essay tests, in which students demonstrate knowledge of various subjects they’ve learned in the classroom. These tests are not unlike what American educators call performance assessment. Compared to other countries, Americans appear to be far more obsessed with IQ, that notion that intelligence – most often defined narrowly as logical-analytical ability – is both inborn and representable as a single numerical score (14).

Sacks says Americans identify with numbers. Numbers mean something even if the majority of people really don’t know what they mean. Whereas performance assessment requires the student to write and prove his or her knowledge of a particular subject or area, the multiple-choice test spits out a number that is correlated to a scale (predictive validity) that is somehow supposed to prove whether a student or a school is good or bad.

Without question, this type of assessment makes it difficult for the students to make reasonable progress and therefore graduate on time. Take for instance the API (Academic Performance Index) scores by which every school and school district lives and breathes:

A numeric API score ranges from a low of 200 to a high of 1000. The interim statewide API performance target for all schools is 800. A school's growth is measured by how well it is moving toward or past that goal. An API score is calculated for all students in a school as well as
numerous API scores for each subgroup at the school (such as by race, English Learner Status, students with disabilities, and socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils) (CDE).

Schools are given a score based on the progress they have made from one year to the next and will base the following year’s achievement score on the current year’s score. The API Statewide Rank score ranks a school with all schools in California based on API score, while the API Similar Schools score ranks a school with 100 other schools in the state with similar demographic profiles (including parent education level, poverty level, student mobility, student ethnicity). Each rank ranges from 1 to 10, with a score of 10 meaning that the school's API fell into the top 10%. A school's score or placement on the API is designed to be an indicator of a school's performance level and is calculated annually by the California Department of Education primarily based on CST and CAHSEE Tests.

Due to the API's heavy reliance on standardized testing (although some factors such as attendance and graduation rates are considered), many criticisms of standardized testing can also be leveled at the reliability and accuracy of API scores as an indicator of a school's level of "academic achievement." One criticism until recently was that a school's API score took no account of a school's student dropout rate. This created the incentive to let poorly-performing students drop out, since this would increase a school's average test scores. SB 219 (Senator Darrell Steinberg 2007) addressed this concern, however, by requiring schools' API scores to incorporate student dropout rates. These changes are expected to be implemented in 2011 (CDE). By then we will be in President
Obama’s second year of office, and his administration will likely make further changes to education policy. As of March 2010, Obama has already shown the country that he is going to take NCLB even further, with the intent of imposing even more testing.

An example of the wide range of scores from one county is exemplary of how the NCLB has not completely worked out its scoring and merit system:

### San Joaquin County High School API Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stockton Unified</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Edison High</td>
<td>610</td>
<td>589 (growth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Franklin High</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>583 (growth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Cesar Chavez High</td>
<td>603</td>
<td>604 (no growth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Stagg Senior High</td>
<td>592</td>
<td>600 (no growth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Manteca Unified</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Sierra High</td>
<td>744</td>
<td>708 (growth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. East Union High</td>
<td>719</td>
<td>720 (no growth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Weston Ranch High</td>
<td>699</td>
<td>688 (growth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Manteca High</td>
<td>699</td>
<td>685 (growth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. New Vision High</td>
<td>549</td>
<td>685 (no growth)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Escalon Unified**

1. Escalon High 735  744 (no growth)

**Tracy Unified**

1. Tracy High 740 735 (growth)
2. Merril F. West High 713 677 (growth)

**Lodi Unified**

1. Lodi High 753 751 (no growth)
2. Tokay High 716 726 (no growth)
3. Bear Creek High 713 708 (growth)
4. McNair High School 671 650 (growth)

**Linden Unified**

1. Linden High 755 726 (growth)

**Lincoln Unified**

1. Lincoln High 761 727 (growth)

**Ripon Unified**

1. Ripon High 781 763 (growth)
While the intent of this paper is not to enter into a lengthy discussion of the varying degrees of the API scores and the reasoning behind them or how they are calculated, it does merit some discussion as to the degree of importance on these scores, since the community at large (parents, schools and legislators) pays close attention to the ranking that each school receives from year to year. It is also important to mention their significance in that the scores in no way measure or value writing (the CST standardized tests do not even include a writing portion on the test) and, as will be discussed in chapter 3 of this paper, standardized testing is unreliable and unrealistic when it comes to the writing portion of these exams. The API scores also merit attention for what they do not measure and that is the inaccuracy of what they seemingly suggest to tell us.

It is important to note that in the majority of cases, the districts with the highest scores are those with primarily white students, while the schools with the lowest scores from year to year are those with large minority subgroups (large number of Hispanics, African Americans and English Language Learners) as well as high population of English language learners and socially disadvantaged students who for the most part are on free and reduced lunch programs. Typically the minority subgroups have little to no parental education beyond high school and for the most part parental educational background is middle school or less.

Take for instance the three highest scores for the top three schools in San Joaquin County in the above mentioned outline of scores for San Joaquin County in California:
Ripon Unified (781), Lincoln Unified (761) and Linden Unified (755) who respectively have high percentages of white students: 67%, 41% and 46%, which plays a large role in socio-economic status as represented by the CDE. Of the total school population, the amount of English learners in these districts are respectively as follows: 2%, 14% and 46%. It is important to point out that Linden has a high percentage of English learners (46%) in comparison to the other two districts mentioned here; and it is also noteworthy to mention that Linden Unified is a very small district when compared to other districts in the county. Class size in Linden is typically between 1/20 and 1/25 student/teacher ratio compared to 1/35 and 1/40 in other districts (CDE) and percentage of minority groups in Linden is in the bottom 5%. So despite the fact that the number of EL learners is high in comparison to the first two, it is not difficult to understand that the student/teacher ratio plays a huge role in student achievement and overall learning progress.

Minority groups, who across the state have shown to have some of the lowest scores, are not largely represented in this district. Ripon Unified also only has only one high school and total population for 2008 was only 906 (CDE). That number is usually equal to the number of the incoming freshman class in most districts, such as Tracy Unified and Stockton Unified, who have much lower scores as shown on the above chart. Stockton Unified for example only represents a total of 9% of white students in the district, however Hispanics represent 57%, African Americans represented 11% (more than twice the number for Linden) and English Learners a total of 40% for the district. These comparisons are not published in the newspapers every spring when scores come
out; if they were the community would soon realize the fallacy of the scores and would demand explanations and change.

To publish these scores in the newspaper and have some districts hold their heads high with the pride they have in their scores, while other districts cower at the thought of the community seeing their scores published, is reprehensible. Clearly the average person in the community does not have a full understanding of what the scores represent and how the scores are gathered. To demean districts and students with the knowledge that their district has the lowest score in the county only continues to lower morale and expectations in such districts such as Stockton and Manteca Unified who have some of the largest minority groups in the county.

Kohn is adamant that we (teachers, parents and educators in general) need to do whatever is necessary to ensure that we stop standardized testing in its tracks. He voices his concern over a society that resigns itself to the “inevitable.” Standardized testing is not inevitable, he says: “Assume something is inevitable and it becomes so precisely because we’ve decided not to challenge it. The fact of that matter is that stadardized tests are not like the weather, something to which we must resign ourselves” (50). Most importantly, Kohn advocates trying to right the wrong that has been done to our nation’s students thus far:

Equally disturbing is a blasé kind of fatalism that says, in effect, “This too shall pass.” Education has its fads, and standards on steroids may be one of them, but there is no guarantee that it will fade away on its own. Too much is invested by now; too many powerful interest groups are backing high-stakes testing for us to
assume it will simply fall of its own weight. In any case, too many children will be sacrificed in the meantime if we don’t take action to expedite its demise (51).

Most teachers feel powerless when it comes to fighting the system from which they earn their living and to ask them to fight it is asking a lot. Nevertheless, as Kohn says, unless we do something we will continue to fall behind other countries and our students will graduate without the knowledge they need and deserve to survive in society. Kohn offers a first step as a way of opening the door to possible solutions:

Whenever something in our schools is amiss – when children are set against one another in competitions, bribed or threatened into mindless obedience, drilled mercilessly on forgettable facts and isolated skills, and so forth – it makes sense for us to work two tracks at once. We must do our best in the short term to protect students from the worst effects of a given policy, but we must work also to change or eliminate that policy. If we overlook the former – the need to minimize the harm of what is currently taking place, to devise effective coping strategies – then we do a disservice to children in the here and now. But (and this is by far the more common error) if we overlook the latter – the need to change the current reality – then we are condemning our children’s children to having to make the best of the same unacceptable situation because it will still be around (51).

As stated in the first chapter of this paper, it will take real effort to affect the kind of change that teachers and schools want to see and that is needed for student growth and achievement. If we desire to close the achievement gap that seems to widen every year we must, as President Obama has stated, take the first steps to simply start making the changes that will lead to even bigger change in our students, our schools and our communities. As teachers, we should continue to pay attention to real learning and focus on the tests as little as possible. If we are to do what is best for students we must give
them meaningful learning and the tests, the scores and achievements will take care of themselves.
Chapter 3

THE CSTs, CAHSEE AND THE CELDT: LEAVING MANY CHILDREN BEHIND

“Who could object to a law that promises no child left behind when it comes to our schools? After all, isn’t this the great promise of our public school system – that all children, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, gender, creed, color or disability will have equal access to an education that allows them to enjoy the freedoms and exercise the responsibilities of citizenship in our democracy?”

George Wood – Many Children Left Behind

“I would add to this that I am not, by any means, opposed to “standards” – cultural or pedagogic – if, by standards we are speaking of the willingness to state that certain areas of knowledge, certain disciplines of thinking, even certain facts and dates and concepts, even certain literary works, are more important, more worth learning, than some others. To act as if this were not so would be to abdicate our own adulthood.”

Jonathan Kozol – Will Standards Save Public Education?

There are three primary standardized tests that affect students in the state of California, two of which will be discussed at length in this chapter, as they have the most impact on their education. I understand that other states have similar standardized tests, but for the intent of this paper, I chose to focus primarily on the exams in the state of California. This chapter is not meant to offer any solutions that would take the place of these tests, but to simply allow the reader to take a closer look at the exams—as well as to provide data showing the purpose and intent of the exams along with their subsequent effect on students’ academic achievements. The writing portion of the exams will be looked at more closely than the multiple-choice portion of the exam, and this will serve to explain the writer’s rationale in more detail.
The three exams in question are the *California Standards Tests* (CSTs) and the *Aprenda* (equivalent of the CSTs but in Spanish); the *California High School Exit Exam* (CAHSEE), and the *California English Language Development Test* (CELDT). The CST’s and the CAHSEE must be taken by every student in California, while Second Language Learners must take the *Aprenda* (in addition to the CSTs) and the CELDT in addition to the first two. All three tests must be taken by every high school student and each test impacts the student’s educational pathway to some extent, each in its own way. Obviously, the tests also impact school scores and school funding, so state and federal educational agencies pay a lot of attention to the results of each of these exams. Nevertheless, some are more high stakes than others and can impact a student’s future educational endeavors significantly. For informational purposes only and in case the reader desires to do future research, it should be explained that the California Department of Education groups the CST’s, APREnda and the CAHSEE under the umbrella term *STAR*, which refers to *Standardized Testing and Reporting*.

It is important to provide an overview of the CST testing to give the reader a basic understanding of these tests so that the reader is able to understand how these tests impact a typical student. Every student is held accountable, regardless of English proficiency and skill. While a considerable amount of time is devoted to the CST in every school in California every year, considerable time will not be devoted to the CSTs in this paper because it does not contain a writing component, and also because it does not affect graduation or advancement for any student as of yet. It is mentioned here merely because
it is a test that is mandated by the state, takes away much needed time in the classroom, and puts more unnecessary stress on students by making teachers prep them for these tests.

Every spring, California students are subjected to a round of tests (CST’s) in grades 2 – 11 that first became mandated in 1998 (CDE) and are still in use today. The testing consists of standards-based tests designed to show how well California students are mastering the grade-level content standards established by the state Board of Education. In grades 2 through 11, the California State Standards Tests (CST) cover English Language Arts and Mathematics, and in grades 8 through 11 science and social-science are also added, making it a total of four tests. Students in high school take the equivalent test for each course they are enrolled in that school year. Typically a high school student will take an ELA (English Language Arts) test, a math test equivalent to the math course they are taking that year, a science test also equivalent to the class they are enrolled in that year and finally, a social science test of the corresponding class they are enrolled in. Typically this testing occurs during the fourth quarter of the year depending on district calendars and takes about a week to complete. Most districts release students early on those days, while some districts opt to have the testing for four hours in the morning and then commence a regular school schedule with shorter periods for each class for the remainder of the day. Students take one content test each day until completion. Make-up days are available to all students who are unable to complete a test in one sitting, as the tests are untimed.
In addition to taking the CSTs in English, Spanish-speaking students enrolled in California schools for less than 12 months also have to take the *Aprenda*, which is the equivalent to the CSTs but in Spanish. The Aprenda (La prueba de logros en Español) is a nationally norm-referenced achievement test of general academic knowledge in Spanish for Spanish-speaking English learners. This test is also given in grades 8 through 11 and is given during the same window as the CSTs. Typically English language learners will first take the CSTs in English (all subject areas totaling 4 – ELA, math, social-science and science) along with their mainstreamed counterparts and then the following week commence work on the *Aprenda*. This results in two weeks of testing for English language learners.

The expectation is the same for English learners as it is for the mainstreamed student. Students are expected to score above a 350 regardless of language proficiency or skill level. EL’s have a bit of a tougher time because they are tested more than their mainstreamed counterparts are. The amount of testing English learners are put through severely impacts the amount as well as quality of time spent in the classroom. It is obvious that the large amount of testing hinders English learners’ education and prevents them from gaining access to the mainstream classroom, and yet year after year we do more of the same. We should question a system that requires all students to perform in exactly the same time frame when skill level is an obvious deterrent to ensure that happens.
The CSTs is a group of federally mandated tests and districts have no option but to comply or risk being placed on probation. Given the fact that there are many students who simply do not place much value on the test, it should be obvious that the data is skewed. Peter Sacks, in *Standardized Minds*, interviewed Mack McCary, Chief Academic Officer for Guilford County School District in North Carolina, and is quoted as saying:

> One of the biggest problems educators face, [are] the ‘won’t do’ kids, who have the ability but choose not to. The number of kids who just refuse school, who just won’t, who may or may not end up at a community college, that is a significant part of the problem. Also I’ve been amazed at the alienation of the best and brightest kids. They won’t outright fail, but they’ll get through with minimal effort. We’re hearing a giant message from kids: They don’t think most schoolwork is worth doing (258).

In light of the fact that many students place no academic value on the CSTs it should be a huge red flag to policymakers that the data is for the most part meaningless and they should stop demanding that school systems continue the barrage of testing. For teachers, on the other hand, it becomes slightly more complicated due to the fact that many schools are now offering incentives to teachers if their class scores go up. Teachers are encouraged to instruct students on how to prepare for these tests as well as provide them with the skills necessary for doing so. The policymakers have obviously not factored in the time constraints into the formula they have developed that is supposed to help schools perform according to the standards they have set up. There is an established set of instructional minutes that schools comply with that are also state-mandated and there is no extra time to do the extra teaching that is necessary in order to prep students for the tests. Factor in the low motivation that students have concerning the test, and the double-
standards that teachers feel coming from the district administrators and the state and there is a cause for concern as to what education in this state actually exemplifies.

It should surprise no one that there is not much emphasis placed on the writing process on any type of standardized testing. First, the CST’s do not even test writing. Second, even if writing were on the CSTs, there is simply not enough time to encompass it into the already burdensome task of teaching the required minimum state standards so that students can reasonably pass the exams. Again, to repeat an earlier point, there is no motivation for teachers to take on the challenging task of teaching writing when students will not be tested on it anyway. This fact alone has shown a decrease in writing across the state which only leads to future academic issues which often follow a student into the college arena and the workforce. One need only look at the quantity of basic writing classes offered at the local community colleges and state universities to understand that high school students are graduating unprepared amidst all the standardized testing, which according to theory is supposed to improve education. In my experience as an adjunct faculty instructor at the local community college, I see firsthand how packed the basic writing classes are as well as the amount of students on the waiting lists. Students are clamoring to get into these classes as they are a gateway into the more advanced classes. This shows how unprepared our high school students are when entering the college arena.

Most state-approved curriculums and subsequently adopted by the school districts and schools, offer what is called a minimum course of study which encompasses the minimum amount of standards out of hundreds that the state feels are the most
Essential. Most teachers opt to teach the minimum course of study primarily because their plates are already so full they simply do not have time for much else. The state has approved the minimum course of study as being the bare minimum that students need to know in order to pass the CSTs and their respective classes so it should not come as a surprise to anyone that students will simply not care about learning how to write. The minimum course of study does not include much writing, but rather more emphasis is placed on what students need to know on a wide variety of topics in order to pass the multiple-choice test. Successful entrepreneur Jack Kinder says that “high achievement always takes place in the framework of high expectation.” If we only expect the bare minimum, we should not be surprised if we are rewarded with mediocrity. It bears mentioning an earlier point concerning democracy which says that students will work toward freedom and equality if they are treated with the respect they deserve as students.

The second exam in question is the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) which became law in 1999 and demands that students in high school take an exam that determines whether they should be permitted to earn a high school diploma (CDE). The CAHSEE requirement must be satisfied along with other local and state requirements (grades and credits) in order for the high school student to acquire a high school diploma. The California Department of Education (CDE) states that the purpose of the CAHSEE “is to improve student achievement in high school and to help ensure that students who graduate from high school can demonstrate grade-level competency in reading, writing, and mathematics.”
The CAHSEE is broken down into two parts: an English Language Arts (ELA) section and a Mathematics section. Only the ELA portion of the exam will be discussed here, as this is the only section that is pertinent to this discussion because the writer is more interested in how the effects of not teaching processed writing in schools in California is effecting our students, high schools and colleges. Nonetheless, a quick overview is essential so that the reader has a better understanding of its layout and administration.

The CAHSEE is administered over a two-day period, three to six times a year. First it is administered to seniors who have not previously passed; then a month later it is given to juniors who have not previously passed. Some time during the 3rd quarter it is administered to sophomores who take it for the very first time. In the last quarter of school, seniors have two more opportunities to take it. On the first day of the exam, students take the ELA portion and on the second day the math portion. Students are given unlimited time that day to complete the exam but they are not allowed to revisit the exam once the day is over. All questions on both sections of the exam are standards-based and address the curriculum standards set up by the California State Board High School Exit Exam Standards Panel. These are standards that the panel has determined are essential for students to know prior to graduating from high school.

English learners are also required to take the CAHSEE regardless of their level of language acquisition. It does not matter what proficiency level they have in the English language, each EL is required to take the exam and expected to pass or they too will not
receive a high school diploma. English Learners, along with their mainstreamed counterparts, are also required to take the CAHSEE beginning in grade ten and subsequently in each grade if they do not pass it the first time. Once a student passes CAHSEE, he never needs to retake the exam, however if a student does not pass the CAHSEE the first time, he is required to keep taking it until he does pass. In addition, students can keep taking it up to two years after graduation until they pass it. Typically, seniors get at least three opportunities their last year in high school to pass. If they do not pass prior to graduation day they can still walk during graduation ceremony but they will only receive a *certificate of completion* and not a high school diploma. Nonetheless, as mentioned earlier, NCLB demands that districts service students up to two years after graduation or until they pass the CAHSEE, whichever comes first.

Those students who do not pass CAHSEE the first time in tenth grade will have two chances as a junior and three chances as a senior to pass it. In addition, school districts are required to provide additional instruction to assist students who do not pass the exam the first time. Any student, including English learners, who do not pass both parts of the exam the first time in tenth grade, will receive special instruction during eleventh grade and possibly the twelfth grade to equip them with the skills necessary to pass the exam. As stated earlier, the state and federal governments use the CAHSEE as a measure of school and district accountability; this data drives scores and the subsequent school and district funding.
The state accountability program is the Public Schools Accountability Act, and the federal accountability program is the No Child Left Behind Act. Both entities closely monitor all results of the CAHSEE scores, and students and schools are judged accordingly. As mentioned earlier, schools and school districts are closely monitored and the effects of low performance can affect funding and also place the school on a Program Improvement status (PI) which means the state comes into the school and/or district to help the school find ways to improve instruction with the intention of improving the scores. This is a very demeaning status to be in, as it is highly publicized in local newspapers and students quickly become aware of the extra presence of the state monitors which understandably make them and teachers uncomfortable.

The ELA portion of the CAHSEE is divided into three sections: the reading section which consists of Word Analysis, Reading Comprehension and Literary Response and Analysis, the writing section which includes Writing Strategies and Writing Conventions, and finally the writing application is the essay portion of the exam. To reiterate, the ELA portion of the exam, according to the CDE, addresses state ELA content standards through grade ten, and is to ensure that students have mastered basic skills in reading and writing, meaning that when students take CAHSEE for the first time in tenth grade, they are only being tested on standards through grade ten. It is important the reader understand this as many non-educators assume that the CAHSEE tests students on all high school standards and assumes that somehow high schools are not doing their jobs if students do not pass.
The reading section of the exam covers vocabulary, informational reading, and literary reading. This section includes approximately fifty percent literary texts and fifty percent informational texts. The writing section covers writing strategies, applications and conventions. The writing conventions section consists of 79 multiple-choice questions (seven of which are field test questions and are not scored) and in the writing application (the essay), students are asked to respond to a specific topic on a literary or informational passage. The CDE offers an interpretation guide to the exam and can be found on the CDE website and is also attached as an appendix. The purpose of the guide is to help parents and educators make sense of the exam as well as its purpose and assessment method.

The writing portion of the exam presents the most frustrating part of this exam for students and teachers primarily because students know they are unprepared to deal with the rigors of the writing process done in such a short period of time and because the topics are wide-ranging and elusive. Students often come away stumped about the writing prompts because they are unclear and vague. The prompts can often be interpreted in a variety of ways and students, in their attempt to be successful, struggle with the direction to take. Testing monitors cannot offer any help in explaining the prompt in any way. Students either understand the prompt or they don’t; they are completely on their own. Many times, the monitors themselves (who are most often teachers and administrators) are confused by the prompts and struggle with the idea that students do not know what they are supposed to write about. Some students, when faced with such a prospect, often
give up and either do not write the essay or write something completely off topic, which means they fail anyway. ETS develops and scores the exams, and while it is understood that the testing company comes up with the prompts, the process that is used is not clearly defined for the public. It is not being suggested that tests be dumbed-down in order to have students pass, but it is unfair to assess a student on a topic which he has never been taught.

If schools continuously tell students that education is preparing them for the real world, how do we justify a test that does not emulate a real work environment? In a real work situation we most often work collaboratively and can share and brainstorm ideas that will have a general consensus. Even if one is a writer (journalist, columnist, novelist), one usually has an editor that one can go to and solicit advice or an opinion. Very rare are the real work environments that emulate what we are doing to students as they struggle to pass the CAHSEE. If we do not teach process writing in school, the state should be forbidden to ask students to provide an essay on the CAHSEE. Some of the topics that have been on the CAHSEE in the last several years can be viewed as some of the most elusive topics that by far elude even some of the best students on California campuses. James Delisle, author of “How Proficiency Tests Fall Short” reports that:

> There are “countless cases of magnificent student writers whose work was labeled as ‘not proficient’ because it did not follow the step-by-step sequence of what the test scorers (many of whom are not educators, by the way) think good expository writing should look like (41).
Allowing the testing companies to assess our students in such a way eliminates all potential for creativity, which is precisely what we need in our educational system and communities. Creativity should be rewarded and not punished with a failing grade.

Kohn points out that the essay questions leave a lot to be desired. He says the essay prompts often “require students to analyze full chunks of texts, cough up obscure facts, or produce cogent opinions on command about some bland topic – hardly an authentic assessment of meaningful learning” (12). He goes on to question the idea of the five-paragraph essay:

What’s more, these questions are often scored on the basis of imitating a contrived model (such as the cookie-cutter five-paragraph essay) rather than tapping real communication or thinking skills. Preparing kids to turn out high-scoring essays can inhibit the quality of their writing. The way these exams are graded raises even more concerns. For example, the essays written by students in many states are not evaluated by educators; they are shipped off to a company in North Carolina where low-paid temp workers spend no more than two or three minutes reading each one (12).

Schools and school districts blindly trust the results of the exam and students and parents have no right but to accept it. Keep in mind that students take the exam in the tenth grade and are not given any structure or strategies for preparation. It is expected, and at the very least hoped, that every tenth grader passes the first time. Tenth grade students are never given a rubric beforehand to guarantee they follow pre-determined guidelines. Other than “use appropriate spelling, grammar and punctuation,” there are no other guidelines that
students are asked to follow. The prompt usually says: “Write an essay in which you…” and then the student sets out to decipher the meaning of the prompt.

The essay prompt for the 2010 sophomores was the following:

“Write an essay in which you describe something that is obvious, such as the smell of burning popcorn or the tallest building in a city.”

Students were then asked to do what they are normally asked to do on every CAHSEE writing portion and that is use proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling and to use academic vocabulary. Students were stumped. While simplistic enough it proved to frustrate a good majority of the sophomores. Online blogs were filled with comments about the elusiveness of the topic. Students were not really confused what “something obvious” was but were not certain if they could really describe “anything.” Students were unclear if they could just describe anything that came to mind and show how it is “obvious.” In some ways the prompt was too simplistic, almost as if it had been dumbed-down to the point of being confusing.

Typically, English teachers around the state inform students that the writing topics will be biographical, a response to literature, a persuasive essay, a business letter, or something expository or analytical. When they were asked to describe something “obvious” they were not quite sure what to do with it. Some students chose to describe fire hydrants; others chose to describe a car or a school. Some chose to describe the taste of food. Their creative writing abilities were simply not equipped to deal with a topic this simplistic and yet so very vague at the same time. Some had good topics but were unable to expound upon it and offer up substantial support as evidence that something was
“obvious.” Many failed the writing portion of the exam because they failed to meet the guidelines the state has predetermined, which even to teachers were unknown. In this case, they were asked to describe something obvious and show how it is obvious.

Teachers and other educators could only assume that the descriptions were not clear or students simply failed to understand the prompt. The sad aspect of this assessment system is that students will never know why they failed the exam and how they may improve on the next exam. All they will ever know is that they failed and that they get a chance the next year to go back and try again. This defeats the whole purpose of the writing process. If a student of writing is working through the process, he should work with a teacher that can guide him through that process and come out on the other side fully conscious of the why’s and how’s of the process. The student should learn from his mistakes about what works and what doesn’t and be able to move through that process with the ability and realization of where he wants to go with the idea or thought process. By continuing to mandate that students be assessed in timed-writing types of assessment situations, we are not teaching them the value of process, a tool that is in valuable both in college and the work world.

By forcing our students to perform on standardized tests and be compared to other schools in the same area as well as around the state, we are turning out cookie-cutter students who lack creativity and ingenuity. Paulo Freire is in his book Pedagogy of the Oppressed says that “leaders who do not act dialogically, but insist on imposing their decisions, do not organize the people—they manipulate them. They do not liberate, nor
are they liberated: they oppress” (23). It is unreasonable that in a country as developed as ours and in a state as advanced as California that our citizens be subjected to or accept this quality of education, where students are asked to perform and provide only a snapshot of who they are. A better solution would be to eliminate the exam altogether and focus on more holistic/performance assessment.

Herein lies the problem with the CAHSEE: no matter how well or poorly a student does in his or her classes, the privilege of walking across the stage and receiving their high school diploma depends almost entirely on this one exam. A snapshot of the student’s abilities rests on this two-day exam, and until he passes he will be plagued with concern over whether or not he can pass it. One can look at it from a variety of angles and analyze it just as equally and see the fallacies of such an exam and understand why so many are against it. On one hand, one can argue that if a student is well prepared and comes from a family where education is valued, then this student should pass with flying colors and probably go on to have a successful high school career and probably on to college where he may not be required to take remedial writing classes, and then graduate, and eventually go on to make a significant impact in a career. Unfortunately this is not the only typical student who walks the hallways of our public high schools. More often, the typical student comes from a home where parents are either overworked and have no time for their student, at least educationally, or the parent simply has no interest in their student’s education because education is not a priority. In either case, it often rests upon the teachers to attempt to have an impact on the student, with the intention of helping the
student realize the importance of an education. The only reason to even bring this up as part of the discussion is to satisfy the argument of those who might say that it is not our responsibility to bring the below basic and the far below basic student up to par. Some say it is not the schools’ responsibility. While that may be so, it still leaves the state in an ugly position of chaos when students begin to drop out of high school or fail to complete the required number of credits much less complete the state-required exams. This causes problems for the state and for the nation as a whole.

In 2004, WestEd reported that according to the CDE the state of California had about a 68% graduation rate and the state fell 32\textsuperscript{nd} in the ranking of high schools nationwide for graduation rates. Similarly, in 2008, the Los Angeles Times reported 1 in every 4 students was dropping out of school. In July of 2009, The Alliance for Excellent Education reported similar numbers and stated that according to the U.S. Department of Education only 69% of California students are graduating within the allotted four-year period. With such high dropout rates it should be a red flag to our state legislators that what we are doing is not working and that immediate change is needed.

As explained earlier in this chapter the CAHSEE is made up of multiple-choice questions as well as an essay at the end. Students typically have an entire school day in which to complete one portion (ELA or math) and then the following day the next section. A typical school day is seven hours including lunch which typically runs about 35 minutes. High schools, especially the large ones, take an inordinate amount of time to process each student into the examination room (typically the gym and/or cafeteria), and
this takes away from exam time. By the time each student is processed, directions are
given and everyone is settled and ready to begin, the students has about 6 hours to start
and finish the exam. Take away the 30 – 35 minutes the student is allotted for lunch, he
now has 5.5 hours to complete the exam. Given that the multiple choice questions come
first and take up the majority of the exam, students opt to do the multiple-choice first and
leave the essay to the end. Most feel overwhelmed at the prospect of the exam, even those
in the most advanced classes such as pre-AP and AP.

One can only assume how English Learners feel going into this high-stakes test as
they know that the probability of passing is very slim. There is no way to actually prep
for this test. You either know the information or you don’t. The information that is tested
on the CAHSEE is taken from California state standards up to the eighth grade and the
state assumes that all tenth graders should know the information and should pass with
relative ease. Schools attempt to give students as much test preparation as possible with
the intent of lowering the affective filter and possibly helping students reach their full
potential on the day of the exam and possibly score high; nonetheless, students,
especially those whose intent is to pass the first time, tend to stress about the content of
the exam, particularly the essay section, for which they are poorly prepared to pass.

Kohn, in *The Case Against Standardized Testing*, mentions test anxiety in his research
and is quoted as saying:

> The significance of the scores becomes even more dubious once we focus
> on the experience of students. For example, test anxiety has grown into a
> subfield of educational psychology, and its prevalence means that the tests
> producing the reaction are not giving us as good a picture of what
many students really know and can do. The more a test is made to “count” - in terms of being the basis for promoting or retaining students, for funding or closing down schools – the more that anxiety is likely to rise and the less valid the scores become (5).

It is not unreasonable to expect that students at the tenth grade level should have mastered tenth grade standards. It is not unreasonable to expect students to pass the CAHSEE, thereby giving the school and the state the assurance that the schools are doing their jobs. It is also not unreasonable to expect that students at that grade level have mastered writing a five-paragraph essay. What is unreasonable is to expect that everyone pass this test the first time.

In 2001 when the CAHSEE was first administered, it was given in the ninth grade and one year later Assembly Bill 1609 revoked that and it was changed to be administered in the tenth grade. If it is important as a state for us to know that our graduating seniors have mastered a minimum required amount of standards why do we not test them in their senior year? It should be more important that we know that as seniors they are truly capable of either continuing on to college or going into the workforce and contributing to society. If we continue to test in the tenth grade and only test them with tenth grade standards, this is not telling us that we have made the grade. Once a student passes the CAHSEE in the tenth grade the student only needs to pass his classes with a D- or better and he graduates with a diploma.

The last and final standardized test that affects English language learners is the California English Language Development Test (CELDT); it is given to English learners
every year between July 1st and October 31st depending on when the school year starts. This exam is state mandated and school districts and school sites can get into serious trouble with the state if it is discovered that they are not CELDT testing their English learners. By law, and in order to be compliant, every school district is mandated to CELDT test every second language learner at every school. This means that even if the student does not take ELD or SDAIE classes but is classified as a second language learner because he speaks another language other than English, he is CELDT tested every year. Schools and school districts receive large amounts of federal money contingent upon the number of English learners at each school. Needless to say it is in the best interest of each school site to keep a student’s profile listed as EL for as long as is feasible as funding is contingent upon the numbers. The more English learners a school has, the more funding it gets. One could say that this is a high stakes test for the schools and the districts and not so much for the students themselves, as it does not impede graduation even if it does impede suitable progress.

The purpose of the CELDT is to help teachers and administrators identify students who are limited English proficient, and to assess the progress of limited English proficient students in acquiring skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing in English. Every student who speaks a primary language other than English is administered the CELDT once a year until such a time it is determined that the student’s English proficiency level has changed from English Learner (EL) to Fluent English Proficient (FEP). Schools and the state use the test to determine what level of English the student
speaks, understands and writes so that the student may be properly placed and services may be provided for him. Schools typically have English Language Development (ELD) and SDAIE classes which aid in the acquisition of English; the CELDT helps the school and CELDT Coordinator make such a determination. Once a student has been tested, the test is assessed locally by the CELDT Coordinator at the school cite and then sent on to the state where the test will be scored again formally. Once the formal assessment is done, the results are sent back to the school and placed on the student’s transcript and in the student’s file. These results follow a student from Kindergarten until he graduates from high school. The results are used at every school in California and, if a student moves, the CELDT results follow him to establish placement at the new school.

The CELDT is divided into four sections—listening, reading, writing and speaking—and students are tested in each of the four domains. The state has established set criteria that tests students in each of the four domains and subsequently each student receives a separate score for each domain that is then subsequently calculated into an Overall Score. The Overall Score establishes the student’s level as an English Learner: Level 1 – Beginner, Level 2 – Early Intermediate, Level 3 – Intermediate, Level 4 – Early Advanced and Level 5 – Advanced. Every school decides how to place each student depending on the programs and classes available at each site. Schools may have specific ELD classes and full programs or schools may opt to place students in a mainstream class.
Either way, the state mandates that, regardless of the student’s placement (mainstream or ELD), the student receive ELD instruction. Depending on the school and the programs offered this may or may not happen. No close monitoring happens; all schools are required to do is provide evidence that students are receiving ELD services. By definition, “ELD services” simply means that a teacher has received CLAD (Cross-cultural, Language, and Academic Development) certification which has been state mandated for every teacher as of 2008 (CDE). Because a teacher possesses CLAD certification does not necessarily mean that a student sitting in a mainstream class is in fact getting the mandated attention he needs. In a class where the teacher may have upwards of 35 students, it is not impossible to imagine that the English learner might not be getting the specialized attention or services mandated to him and which he deserves.

The CELDT test takes approximately 4-5 hours to administer and there is no mandatory number of days or times to test a student, a school may opt to extend the testing over a period of several days or to perform the testing all in one day. The only time constraint is that the testing must be completed by October 31st of that school year. The listening, reading and writing sections are typically performed in large groups in a gym or cafeteria which can accommodate large number of students. Typically the number of students in these settings is the same as the CAHSEE with the capacity reaching as high as 150 students in one testing environment.

Unlike the CAHSEE however, the CELDT has many directions that must be read aloud, so typically there is one administrator or CELDT Coordinator that performs this
part, usually with a microphone. The first three sections (listening, reading and writing) may be performed individually, but it is more efficient to test in large groups because it takes up less time for the school and the CELDT Coordinator. The CELDT Coordinator is usually a teacher who is assigned this duty in addition to teaching, which means that teacher has to be pulled from his or her classes to manage the testing.

Typically, a school site would never be finished by October 31 if the school site did not test in large group settings. It takes an inordinate amount of time and personnel to ensure that the testing is performed to standard. Time is of the essence when it comes to standardized testing because state guidelines and deadlines must always be reached. If the deadline is not reached, the school site has to request an extension and will be penalized by the state.

CELDT testing, depending on the population of the school site, can take up an inordinate amount of time depending on the population of English Learners and English learners may miss up to three or four days worth of classes due to the testing because it takes place during the school day. There are also no time limits on any of the sections so students may take as long as they need to finish.

The *listening section* of the test involves the student listening to questions and dialogue read by the testing coordinator and attempting to understand what was said and respond accordingly by bubbling in what they heard. This section contains twenty questions with the level of listening ranging from simple one-sentence questions to full lectures about three paragraphs long. This section is not timed but requires that every
student move at the pace that the coordinator has established for reading the questions. Ample time is always given so that the student may reflect on the correct response, but the testing coordinator may not repeat any questions. It is imperative that each student listen attentively the first time and respond by simply bubbling in the correct response on the testing sheet according to what the student has heard. This is a multiple-choice section so the student will have options to choose from that correspond with what he heard.

The *reading section* of the CELDT is also done in a large group setting but each student moves at his own pace depending on the reading level. The directions are read out loud and sample questions are done as a group and then each student moves at his or her own pace. The reading section is comprised of 40 questions broken down into Word Analysis (15), Fluency and Vocabulary (14), and Reading Comprehension (11). Students are allowed as much time as they feel they need, even if it means coming back for several days in a row. This section requires each student to read short and long reading passages and answer multiple-choice questions regarding the readings.

The *Writing section* includes 22 grammar and structure questions and five sentence questions related to photos in which they must identify certain items and write about them; lastly a short composition which entails the student responding to a given topic pre-determined by the testing company. For the short composition, students are encouraged to write *at least three complete sentences* and to use appropriate grammar, spelling and punctuation. No other guidelines are given to the student.
The last section of the CELDT is the speaking section; this is the only section that is performed individually meaning that only the student and the testing coordinator are in the room while this section is being carried out. This section encompasses 20 questions where the testing coordinator asks questions and the student responds or speaks. Thirteen questions involve a mixture of some questions where the student is required to look at photos and respond to questions related to the photos and other questions regarding random vocabulary. The student listens and responds verbally. The answers scored by the testing coordinator are scored as correct, incorrect, or no response. There are an additional 6 questions where the coordinator presents several make-believe situations that could potentially happen to the student and the student must respond in a manner that shows how he would answer if he were in that situation. Using appropriate grammar and vocabulary the student gets a 2 for best possible answer, a 1 for an adequate answer and a 0 for an inadequate answer. Question number 20 involves the student doing the majority of the speaking; he has photos to look at and he must come up with a short story involving the photos. The photos are placed in an organized sequence but the dialogue must be completely the student’s. The possible score for this last item ranges from a 0 to a 4.

The CELDT is much the same as the CAHSEE in that it involves multiple-choice questions for the majority of the exam and only one section involving writing of any substance. Once again, the state has developed a test that is mandated and expected to bring about results that will help the school find the appropriate placement for the student
based on his level of the English language and yet every school is different in that not
every school offers the same classes or programs and this can affect the English learner in
a variety of ways depending if he is getting the instruction he needs or not. If the school
has ELD and/or SDAIE classes then the student may get placed there and may be
serviced appropriately. However, if the school does not have special classes for second
language learners the school’s only choice is to place the student in a mainstream
classroom with a teacher that is CLAD certified and hope that the teacher will be able to
give that student the attention he needs. The state’s expectation is that the school is
providing services that will aid in the progression of the English learner so that eventually
he may become mainstreamed and participate in the full range of courses available and
eventually move on to college.

Of notable interest is that fact the writing required only demands a minimum of
three sentences and at the most three paragraphs. Typically, a student who cannot write
or who writes minimally (less than three sentences) will be classified as a beginner
English Learner and placed accordingly. Of equal interest is the fact that the state accepts
a three-paragraph response (essay) as adequate to mainstream a student and expects the
student to be successful in the mainstream classes. School sites tend to adhere very
closely to the results of the CELDT and place a lot of emphasis on it. It remains part of
the student’s transcript and file until graduation and high value is placed on the results
which are typically used for placement. Every student, regardless of English fluency is
mandated to take the test if they speak a language other than English, even if the student
speaks perfect English. Regardless of proficiency, they must take the exam at least once to prove competency.

Competency means proving they can get a score equivalent to the *Early Advanced* range on the scale score. After proving competency, and receiving a label of FEP (fluent English proficient), the student is allowed access to the mainstream classes. Similar to the CAHSEE, students obsess over the numbers allotted to them by the state with the hope that they will get a high enough score so that they will be given access to the classes that the rest of the population have access to. The higher the score means the more English proficient the student is and with that proficiency the student gains more and more access to mainstream classes.

The following table shows how the final scores are grouped and is meant to provide an understanding to the school, parents, and teachers about the student’s level of English proficiency. The number the student receives in each category (Listening, Speaking Reading and Writing) will determine the student’s overall score, which in turn will determine whether he or she is a beginning learner, an early intermediate learner etc. and placed accordingly should the school site have ELD appropriate classes. Again, the state does not mandate that school districts offer special classes for second language learners. All that is mandated is that students be placed in a classroom with a CLAD certified teacher (by 2008 all teachers were mandated to have a CLAD certificate) with the expectation that ELD services are offered to the English learner within the context of the mainstream class. As mentioned earlier, the likelihood of the student receiving help in
a mainstream classroom is very low due to the large numbers that comprise high school classrooms today. Nonetheless, the following table helps the reader to understand how the scores are broken up and how a school or district might use the scores for placement and instruction. Following the table is an explanation of the proficiency levels showing the reader what a student in that category is capable of:

Table 1
California Department of Education (http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/el/cutpoints.asp)

**CELDT Initial/Annual Scale Score Ranges**

Scale Score Ranges for the California English Language Development Test.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 9</th>
<th>Listening</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Comprehension</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early Intm</td>
<td>436 - 518</td>
<td>423 - 484</td>
<td>509 - 556</td>
<td>467 - 513</td>
<td>472 - 537</td>
<td>458 - 517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>519 - 605</td>
<td>485 - 546</td>
<td>557 - 604</td>
<td>514 - 559</td>
<td>538 - 604</td>
<td>518 - 578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Adv</td>
<td>606 - 690</td>
<td>547 - 609</td>
<td>605 - 647</td>
<td>560 - 605</td>
<td>605 - 668</td>
<td>579 - 637</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>691 - 725</td>
<td>610 - 740</td>
<td>648 - 770</td>
<td>606 - 810</td>
<td>669 - 747</td>
<td>638 - 761</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 10</th>
<th>Listening</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Comprehension</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beginning</td>
<td>230 - 444</td>
<td>235 - 422</td>
<td>320 - 520</td>
<td>220 - 469</td>
<td>275 - 482</td>
<td>251 - 463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Intm</td>
<td>445 - 533</td>
<td>423 - 489</td>
<td>521 - 570</td>
<td>470 - 516</td>
<td>483 - 551</td>
<td>464 - 527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>534 - 622</td>
<td>490 - 556</td>
<td>571 - 620</td>
<td>517 - 562</td>
<td>552 - 621</td>
<td>528 - 590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Adv</td>
<td>623 - 711</td>
<td>557 - 623</td>
<td>621 - 664</td>
<td>563 - 609</td>
<td>622 - 687</td>
<td>591 - 651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>712 - 725</td>
<td>624 - 740</td>
<td>665 - 770</td>
<td>610 - 810</td>
<td>688 - 747</td>
<td>652 - 761</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 11</th>
<th>Listening</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Comprehension</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beginning</td>
<td>230 - 444</td>
<td>235 - 422</td>
<td>320 - 520</td>
<td>220 - 469</td>
<td>275 - 482</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Intm</td>
<td>445 - 533</td>
<td>423 - 489</td>
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<td>688 - 747</td>
<td>652 - 761</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**CELDT Proficiency Level Descriptors (CDE):**

The proficiency level descriptors below are written from the beginning level to the advanced level, and each level builds on the preceding level. An individual student’s English language development may be marked by periods of accelerated or slow growth, reversals of progress, attainment of language plateaus, and unparallel development of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. At each level, the English learner continues to expand his or her social and academic vocabulary and his or her capacity to learn grade-level content delivered in unmodified English. The proficiency level descriptors should only be used with tests administered after July 1, 2006:

**Beginning** – Students performing at this level of English language proficiency may demonstrate little or no receptive or productive English skills. They are beginning to understand a few concrete details during unmodified instruction. They may be able to respond to some communication and learning demands, but with many errors. Oral and written production is usually limited to disconnected words and memorized statements and questions. Frequent errors make communication difficult.

**Early Intermediate** - Students performing at this level of English-language proficiency continue to develop receptive and productive English skills. They are able to identify and understand more concrete details during unmodified instruction. They may be able to respond with increasing ease to more varied communication and learning demands with a reduced number of errors. Oral and written production is usually limited to phrases and memorized statements and questions. Frequent errors still reduce communication.

**Intermediate** - Students performing at this level of English-language proficiency begin to tailor their English-language skills to meet communication and learning demands with increasing accuracy. They are able to identify and understand more concrete details and some major abstract concepts during unmodified instruction. They are able to respond with increasing ease to more varied communication and learning demands with a reduced number of errors. Oral and written production has usually expanded to sentences, paragraphs, and original statements and questions. Errors still complicate communication.
Early Advanced - Students performing at this level of English-language proficiency begin to combine the elements of the English language in complex, cognitively demanding situations and are able to use English as a means for learning in content areas. They are able to identify and summarize most concrete details and abstract concepts during unmodified instruction in most content areas. Oral and written production is characterized by more elaborate discourse and fully-developed paragraphs and compositions. Errors are less frequent and rarely complicate communication.

Advanced - Students performing at this level of English-language communicate effectively with various audiences on a wide range of familiar and new topics to meet social and learning demands. In order for students at this level to attain the English level of their native English-speaking peers, further linguistic enhancement and refinement are still necessary. Students at this level are able to identify and summarize concrete details and abstract concepts during unmodified instruction in all content areas. Oral and written production reflects discourse appropriate for content areas. Errors are infrequent and do not reduce communication.

(Taken from CDE website, California English Language Development Test – March 2007)

The problem with the CELDT is that what is being tested and the results that come from it do not necessarily mean the student is competent or otherwise. The multiple-choice questions, as well as the essay prompts are often biased and about topics that most English learners may not necessarily be familiar with. Kohn says that “for decades, critics have complained that many standardized tests are unfair because the questions require a set of knowledge and skills more likely to be possessed by children from a privileged background” (36), which many of our students in California do not have access to. Kohn further asserts that “it is more that a little ironic to rely on biased tests to address educational inequities” (36). Often, the questions and the vocabulary that accompany the questions are obscure and frustrating much like the questions on the CAHSEE. English learners and their skills (or lack thereof) are constantly being compared to those of native
speakers of the same age and/or grade and yet they are being tested on skills that they may not even have mastered yet or come into contact with because of their lack of time in the country. Dana Ferris, author of *Treatment of Error in Second Language Student Writing*, discusses the issues of second language learners writing under pressure:

> An unfortunate reality for many ESL [English as a Second Language] college students in the United States is that they must pass timed essay examinations in order to pass their English classes and/or to graduate. Though there are many reasons why [second language] writers struggle to succeed in these situations (including difficulties with addressing the writing task adequately, developing a topic and providing effective support, and organizing an essay successfully), the lack of linguistic accuracy that results when students have to produce written texts under stress (because of the high stakes) and under time pressure is clearly a major contributing factor to student failure in many contexts (93 – 94).

Second language learners need extra time to process their thoughts and ideas and put them down on paper. Too often the on-demand writing situations they are subjected to hinder them from performing anywhere close to the desired norm. By demanding that they perform at the same rate as their English only counterparts does a disservice to them and to the school as well as to the community at large. It is only right that the accountability process stay in place for all students, including English Learners. However to demand that they perform at the same rate and in like manner as mainstreamed students, hinders everyone involved in the process, but mostly the students. Like the CAHSEE, the CELDT is a norm-referenced summative test that tests what the student does not know. As suggested earlier, norm-referenced tests are not sensitive to effective instruction. Kohn points out that:
Norm-referenced tests are not about assessing excellence; they are about sorting students (or schools) into winners and losers. The animating spirit is not “How well are they learning?” but “Who’s beating whom?” The latter question doesn’t provide useful information because the only thing that really counts is how many questions on a test were answered correctly (assuming they measured important knowledge). By the same token, the news that your state moved up this year from thirty-seventh in the country to eighteenth doesn’t tell us whether schools are really improving: for all you know, the schools in your state are in worse shape than they were last year, but those in other states slid even further(15).

Kohn’s assertion is yet another example of how these standardized tests are leaving many students behind in California. Standardized testing is not working in our public schools. Our drop out rate continues to rise and students continue to fail and not graduate. If numbers is what we believe in, then let us look at the number of students that continue to drop out of school as well as the numbers of those who fail to graduate because of one test that is no more than a snapshot of that student. We should also pay attention to what is going on at the local community colleges and ask ourselves why basic writing classes are impacted and students have to learn what they should have learned in high school. We need to stop placing students in categories of being a winner or a loser based on a number but instead focus on the student’s individual talents and skills.

Standardized testing is a misguided tool that set out to do something positive but somehow lost its meaningfulness along the way. California students, especially English language learners should not be made to pay the price for the state’s misguided good intentions. Good intentions can only get us so far and after that we must work diligently to enforce accountability that really works, by giving way to a democracy that values
student creativity and individuality over numbers on a scale. All students are not equal
and all schools are not equal. To continue to demand that every school and every student
perform the same based on criteria that do not mirror what is going on in the schools or in
the individual classrooms and communities, only serves to continue to harm our students.
It is time we demand change.
Chapter 4

PORTFOLIOS: A SOLUTION TO STANDARDIZED TESTING
AND A SEARCH FOR DEMOCRACY

“There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest.”

Elie Wiesel, writer, Nobel laureate

“Anyone can confirm how little the grading that results from examinations corresponds to the final useful work of people in life.”

- Jean Piaget – Swiss philosopher and psychologist

“Americans are taking as many as 600 million standardized tests each year in schools, colleges, and universities, and the workplace.”

- Peter Sacks - Standardized Minds

“Every hour spent on such exam preparation is an hour not spent helping students to become critical, creative, curious learners.”

Alfie Kohn – The Case Against Standardized Testing

“Portfolio: A collection of student’s work specifically selected to tell a particular story about the student.”

Jon Mueller – “Authentic Assessment Toolbox”

There is nothing wrong with standards and accountability. In fact, we need standards in order to have balance and to set a guideline by which to improve as a society. Standards also have a way of propelling us forward, compelling us to become better at what we do. Everywhere we look there are standards. The private sector companies have standards which demand certain qualities/skills from their employees
and by which they drive their sales and their business as a whole. Other entities use standards to set guidelines that will drive them in a predetermined direction, and the standards help to set new goals and to reach new heights.

We also need accountability because in the real world where we work, live, learn and survive, we are responsible for our actions and decisions, and we must be prepared to defend them and know that what we do affects our environment, our community and our world. It should be no different in the classroom. We should not demand standards from our students that we are not prepared to uphold and defend. We must first foster individual accountability and then work towards group accountability for our schools, our communities and our state.

If we could simply agree on the outcome and then figure out how to get there in a way that does not discriminate or penalize anyone, we would be doing our students and our country a great service. Obviously getting to a point where that can happen is a difficult task. However, it starts with accountability, which means doing the right thing consistently, day in and day out, in tasks and relationship interactions to fulfill or further the mission of the organization or entity--in this case our schools.

As a state and as a society we must come to a point where we can acknowledge that what we are doing in education is not working and we are failing to properly educate our youth by giving them the tools they need to function as full members of society. Students must be held accountable to their teachers and to their schools, and schools in turn must be held accountable to the state. This ensures everyone that we have come to an
agreement of what that accountability should look like and have agreed to follow a process that will get each student and each school to the desired goal.

This process requires communication between schools, school districts, students, parents and policymakers. Together, we can come up with solutions that will hold us all accountable, while at the same time ensuring that democracy is being upheld and that our youth is being treated with respect. Kohn, in *The Case Against Standardized Testing*, agrees and says:

> Keep in mind that only recently have we heard calls for “holding schools accountable” that are quite this frequent and quite this shrill. We tend to suffer from a kind of collective amnesia, assuming that whatever is happening at the moment is unavoidable. More to the point, endorsing the idea of accountability is quite different from holding students and teachers accountable specifically for raising test scores. We need to help people see that the first doesn’t entail the second – and, indeed, that genuine accountability and authentic standards are undermined by a myopic emphasis on testing (46).

Continuing to test our students to the brink of exhaustion, which is what we are doing now, only serves to widen the gap the state so desperately wants to see closed. It is time we come together as a community and demand the state and federal governments revise the NCLB Act of 2001 and allow teachers, districts and policymakers to come together to suggest and hopefully put together a new plan that will serve our students, our schools and our state in a way that makes sense for all students and not just the simple majority. This paper asks its readers to question standardized testing and to at least consider another method by which to assess students that has real meaning and allows for true democracy in the classroom. The writer suggests a move away from the traditional
standardized testing and to consider portfolio assessment as a means of evaluating students in California.

As mentioned, accountability means opposing the NCLB, which favors standardized testing. But as Linda Darling-Hammond in *Many Children Left Behind* is quick to point out, “opposition to the NCLB doesn’t mean opposing any and all forms of accountability. Rather, the law should be used to advocate for a way to develop genuine accountability that supports improved student learning and schools” (105). It should be expected that we treat education policies in this country no differently than we do other governmental policies that affect citizens and the future of our country.

The problem is finding the best method that will set standards and demand accountability, without harming schools, teachers, and, most importantly, the students. No one wants to have generations of students being turned out into society with no creativity and with no ability to think on their own. Standardized tests stifle creativity and inquiry, and with the loss of these important skills we lose what our country has fought so hard to generate. Some of the greatest minds in this country have been those who were not always deemed the best students or model citizens.

A one-size-fits-all educational system that tests students over and over again without ever allowing the student to be creative or show analytical skills has disaster written all over it. Hannah Arendt, an influential German Jewish political theorist once said:

> Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from
the ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming and the new and
the young, would be inevitable…and where we decide whether we love
our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to
their own devices, nor to strike form their hands their chance of
undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare
them in advance for the task of renewing a common world (Meier, 64).

Testing, and the one-size-fits-all mentality for education, will be the slow demise of our
once great nation if we continue to espouse its ideals. Real change is needed if our
country is to continue to produce critical thinkers, discoverers and innovators--real
change that will bring about the results that are necessary to expect and receive the high
quality standards that we need and deserve. It’s asking a lot, there’s no question. But if
we desire the kind of thinking and creativity Arendt describes, we must strive for it daily,
if indeed our ideal is education in a democracy.

The art of communication, whether written or spoken, and the ability to critically
analyze and act upon it, is something that does not just happen, but rather is taught and
allowed to flourish through a predetermined set of guidelines or standards that follow a
process. Within this process are standards, standards by which the process begins to
make sense and by which the author can allow his or her own creativity to take form. If
we are to spend the next decade teaching to the test and testing our students over and over
again without the results actually meaning anything or the process being worthwhile, we
will surely look back and regret what we have done to society.

The demands for standards should continue; however it should be something we,
as educators, push for every day. What those standards look like should not be a one-size-
fits-all education but one that values the individuality of students and the communities
where they work and reside. Communities should come together and work toward establishing standards that value critical thinking and individual experiences over preset standards that demand every student perform the same. Ayers speaks clearly about his view of democracy:

The purpose of education in a democracy is to break down barriers, to overcome obstacles, to open doors, minds, and possibilities. Education is empowering and enabling, it points to strength, to critical capacity, to thoughtfulness and expanding capabilities; it leads to an ability to work, to contribute, to participate. It aims at something deeper and richer than simply imbibing and accepting existing codes and conventions, acceding to whatever is before us. The larger goal of education is to assist people in seeing the world through their own eyes, interpreting and analyzing though their own experiences ad thinking, feeling themselves capable of representing, manifesting, or eve, if they choose, transforming all that is before them. Education, then, is linked to freedom, to the ability to see and also to alter, to understand and also to reinvent, to know and also to change the world as we find it (Meier, 67–68).

Education is freedom, and with that freedom come the possibilities of a future full of horizons to conquer. It is our responsibility as educators to provide our students with the skills necessary to seek the challenges the world and life may bring them. We must equip them with the tools necessary to not only seek the challenges, but understand them, face them and conquer them.

It is clear that standardized testing equips our modern day students with none of these things. As a state and as a nation, we are placing our future generations in a predicament that they may not be able to undo. It is time that we face the reality that our country has changed significantly over the past several decades and our needs are significantly different than what they used to be.
We are now once again faced with educating many foreign students who have come to our country after wars have torn their countries apart, as well as the reality of educating our own American-born minority youth who have decided that education is not worth the time or the effort. These differences have changed the schools’ environment, culture, and above all the educational needs. All these factors have significantly altered the way we teach and the way we learn. Nevertheless, if numbers are all we continue to care about, numbers may be all we get, and those numbers may mean absolutely nothing as we end up with a nation of citizens who are unable to think on their own, much less critically analyze situations or issues and come up with workable solutions.

We need both accountability and standards. However, agreement on what those standards should look like is a much more difficult task to accomplish given that educators have different opinions about what is important for students to know upon graduation. Nevertheless, each state has been allowed to form what the federal government demanded as far as content standards for each subject; many of which were developed well over a decade ago.

Take, for instance, the English Language Arts Content Standards developed by the California State Board of Education, which covers standards in grades Kindergarten through twelve (CDE). These standards were developed and approved in 1997 (CDE), over 13 years ago, and yet despite the fact that our state has changed in terms of how many new immigrants and how many different ethnicities we service in our schools, as well as new standardized testing that has been developed since then, we continue to
mandate and push standards that may not be working as well as they did in the 1990’s. The standards that were developed in 1997 are the same standards that are now used to incorporate CAHSEE, which did not come into existence until 2001 and not made official as a graduation requirement until 2004. There is a very large gap there and one which educators and the community should question.

We simply cannot continue to do things the same way we always have because our population is different than it used to be. Some would argue and say that our schools are worse today then they were thirty or forty years ago. Schools are not worse; they are just different. The population is different. The methods of thinking and learning are different. Students are no longer satisfied with the same textbook/lecture methodology. We are teaching students who know more about technology than teachers do. Their minds and the way they learn have changed dramatically since the seventies or even the nineties. Debra Meier explains:

Public schools, after a romance with local power, beginning in the late 1960’s and ending in the early 1990’s, are increasingly organized as interchangeable units of a larger state organism, each expected to conform to the intelligence of some central agency or expert authority. The focus of authority in young people’s lives has shifted away from the adults kids know well and who know the kids well – at a cost. Home schooling or private schooling seems more and more the natural next step for those with the means and the desire to remain in authority (15).

We can refuse to accommodate for these differences as we see them now and decide to tackle the issue head on or continue to allow the pendulum to keep swinging, and with every swing it will take a few thousand students with it as it knocks them into a world of potential poverty and ignorance. Kohn says:
to improve-secondary education is to address what is deficient about it (huge schools, short periods, letter and number grades, lecture- and- text-based instruction, and so on) as well as to provide for more meaningful kinds of assessments of what students really understand and can do with what they understand. “Pass this standardized test or you don’t graduate” not only fails to address these problems; it actively discourages people from addressing them because now all eyes are on the test (40).

It is time we understand and accept that the manner in which we have been assessing our students is not working and we should push for change. A change that will in fact make a difference to our students and the type of education they receive. This in turn will influence every community and workforce in our country, because we will be producing students who are capable of thinking and producing.

It is the intention of this paper to suggest portfolios as a solution for the failings of standardized testing--a solution that focuses on individual as well as group and community accountability and which in the long run will graduate students capable of thinking, processing and analyzing, thereby being able to function and perform in society in a way that makes room for progress and advancement. Furthermore, portfolio assessment is a solution that allows for the possibility of going to college or going into the workplace, but in either case, a student who is prepared for a world that encompasses writing in many different forms.

Portfolios are suggested here as a solution that focuses more on authentic assessment (AA) rather than the traditional type of assessment (TA) of pencil-and-paper tests, which lean more towards multiple-choice type responses versus a more subjective type of response. The TA type of assessments have been discussed at length here and are
the typical, multiple-choice, true/false, matching etc. that one normally finds in a
traditional classroom setting and beyond. TA, whether teacher-created or standardized,
whether administered locally or state-wide, simply does not work. In TA, as we have
seen, it is the curriculum which drives the instruction and it is the body of knowledge that
is determined first. That particular body of knowledge is what becomes the curriculum,
which is then delivered to the students via the instructor. Subsequently, students are
assessed with a series of tests to determine whether they have learned the curriculum or
not.

In contrast, AA or holistic assessment, is where the assessment and not
curriculum is what drives the instruction. This is where the actual assessment is derived
prior to the instruction that will drive it, making students aware of and participants in the
instruction and the assessment. John Mueller, Professor of Psychology at North Central
College in Naperville, Illinois, and creator of “The Authentic Toolbox,” an interactive
website designed for teachers to become familiar with the ideas behind authentic
assessment, has developed strategies for encouraging teachers towards a more authentic
type of assessment and contrasts the two types (authentic vs. traditional).

Behind both traditional and authentic assessments is a belief that the primary
mission of schools is to help develop productive citizens. From this common beginning,
however, the two perspectives on assessment diverge. In the TA model, as explained
above, the curriculum is what drives the assessment. The body of knowledge is
determined first. That knowledge then becomes the curriculum that is delivered.
Subsequently, the assessments are developed and administered to determine if acquisition of the curriculum occurred. In contrast, authentic assessment (AA) springs from the belief that in order to be a productive citizen, an individual must be capable of performing meaningful tasks in the real world. Thus, in AA, assessment drives the curriculum. That is, teachers first determine the tasks that students will perform to demonstrate their mastery, and then a curriculum is developed that will enable students to perform those tasks well, which would include the acquisition of essential knowledge and skills.

Mueller explains his rationale for authentic assessment clearly and explains that policymakers and educators lean more toward traditional types of assessment precisely because asking students to memorize reams of information that they will rarely if ever use again is often easier than teaching them the critical skills needed to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Teaching collaboration, metacognition reflection, self-assessment and information literacy are too often not taught precisely because most teachers are unsure of how to assess them.

A lot of research has been done on portfolio-based assessment, and while it has been around in composition studies since the mid 1970’s and widely used over that period of time, it is not the type of assessment that has had a huge buy-in. It is, in fact, a time consuming type of assessment, and it is subjective—as such, it is impossible to standardize; authentic assessment results do not generally fit neatly onto a spreadsheet. When compared to the ease that standardized testing allows for because it is so easy to score, holistic scoring requires significantly more time and the collaboration of all
involved in the portfolio process. The time spent on authentic assessment, though, is time spent teaching. Time spent scoring answer sheets is not. Despite requiring more classroom time and more time for teachers to review portfolios, the overall benefits of portfolios far outweigh the benefits of standardized testing primarily because students’ ideas and creativity are valued allowing for more individualized and authentic assessment.

Charles Cooper, author of “Holistic Evaluation of Writing” (NCTE, 1977), says that “holistic scoring is the most superior method of evaluating in large-scale assessments” (3), and yet, teachers are hesitant to use it primarily because they don’t know how to do so effectively. It requires much more commitment, accountability and preset standards than the type of assessment currently in place, which really only requires a computer to read large amounts of data and spit out a number resulting in an overall score that represents some predetermined level or value. Nonetheless, because of the commitment and the time constraints not everyone is a fan of portfolio assessment.

Portfolio assessment has the potential to bring about results in student writing and achievements that standardized testing never could. Nancy Sommers in “Responding to Student Writing” (CCCC, 1982) says that “the portfolio tends to encourage students to revise because it suggests that writing occurs over time, not in a single sitting, just as the portfolio itself grows over time and cannot be created in a single sitting” (154). Portfolios help students realize and understand their growth over time and come to accept the idea that writing is recursive and involves a process, thereby facilitating their understanding of
the learning objectives and standards while at the same time providing a deep, rich compilation of learning evidence.

Liz Hamp-Lyons and William Condon, authors of Assessing the Portfolio – Principles for Practices, Theory and Research, state:

portfolios answer today’s need for a measurement system that can have a generative, rather than a reductive effect on education, because portfolios reinforce what we know about good teaching practice, because portfolios help teachers help learners assume more responsibility for their own learning, and because portfolios provide a rich source of information to teachers as they continually reconsider their theory and practice and to researchers and administrators as they continue to assess educational progress in our schools and colleges (xv).

Portfolios are one type of assessment that should be considered and reconsidered as a way of not only assessing students, but also as a way of monitoring progress which ultimately should be our main goal as educators. Writing is a process and portfolios are the perfect educational tool to help students become accountable for their own work and ultimately their own progress. As educators, we have had to learn to become reflective practitioners; we must continually look back and reflect on our own teaching practices and assessments and find ways to become ever better at what we do.

Simultaneously we need to be teaching writing students that becoming a better writer and ultimately a better communicator both on paper and orally is about a process. It is not a one-shot deal, where you sit down the night before and write something up and hand it in the next day. It is not the fifty-five minutes a student gets to write an essay on demand in class. It is a reflective process. It is recursive. Portfolios are the ideal tool for
teaching students how to be reflective in their writing, how to understand the process and ultimately be able to make the desired impact as writers. As educators, we should push toward a move for portfolio assessment in the English Language Arts classroom and possibly in other content areas as well such as science and social science, where students can show, on the basis of authentic assessment, what they have learned in a manner which allows for creativity, ingenuity and individual expression.

Kathleen Blake Yancey, author of *Portfolios in the Writing Classroom*, says that portfolios within the classroom are paradoxical:

On one hand, they are quite simple: a mere pedagogical tool with assessment capability. On the other hand, writing portfolios promise to change significantly what goes on in writing classrooms – because of the messages they send, the authority they assign, the ways they motivate students and the insights they challenge students to perceive and articulate. As important, these mere collections, or folders, can emphasize and extend in new ways other processes, particularly when it comes time to respond to and evaluate students’ work (105).

Portfolios have the potential to change the way students view their writing and its assessment because not only does it challenge them but it also forces them to use self-reflection to understand as well as continue producing better writing. With portfolios, teachers have the potential to teach writing by writing and with that process in place, the art of self-reflection becomes much more meaningful and productive.

Kohn is in favor of “performance assessment” and says that the portfolio is “modeled on what adults in some fields, notably the arts, compile to document their professional accomplishments” (42). He goes on to explain how the portfolio, just as in
the arts, can also be used in education not only to assess progress but to establish and
document “professional accomplishments” (42). He also says:

[In the portfolio], students collect what they’ve done over a period of
time, not just because it’s helpful to have all that material in one place but
because the process of choosing what to include – and deciding how to
evaluate it – becomes an opportunity for them to reflect on their past
learning as well as to set new goals. The portfolio’s contents may be
selected to demonstrate improvement over time, or to reflect how many
different kinds of projects have been attempted. Students might share their
portfolios with the rest of the class, or consult with their peers on what
should go into them. Like other forms of performance assessment, they
provide data far more meaningful than what could be learned from a
conventional test, standardized test or otherwise, about what students can
do and where they still need help (42).

Accountability is at the heart of portfolio-based assessment, and it becomes more
meaningful because the student is accountable for what goes into the portfolio once the
standard and/or criteria has been established. Likewise, the student is responsible for not
only choosing the work that goes into the portfolio but justifying the work he has decided
to include. With the justification, comes the process and the knowledge needed to explain
that process.

This is the perfect opportunity for the student to become completely involved in
his own educational pathway. The portfolio becomes the evidence of who he is as a
student and most importantly as a writer and as a critical thinker. In addition, portfolio
assessment is the perfect authentic assessment specifically because it ties into what
Mueller says about asking students to “perform ‘real-world’ tasks that demonstrate
meaningful application of essential knowledge and skills”
(http://jonathan.mueller.faculty.noctrl.edu/toolbox/index.htm). Educators can empower students by inviting them to be active participants of their own educational pathway, and with that newfound power, begin to view education in a completely different light, filled with hopes and goals, but mostly respect and democracy.

Portfolio assessment, unlike standardized testing, provides a structure for long-duration and in-depth, process-oriented assignments. By establishing this type of assessment early on, the use of portfolios transfers much of the responsibility of demonstrating mastery of concepts from the teacher to the student. This automatically increases the rigors of the class, thus making the student reach for new heights. When students are forced to organize, synthesize, and clearly describe their process and achievements and then effectively communicate what they have learned, it opens up a whole new world of critical analysis that standardized testing could never even begin to cover.

One of the distinctive aspects of the portfolio is that the continued use of it calls for self-reflection. This is an opportunity for students to explain and analyze their thought process for each piece included in the portfolio. They can show how they mastered a particular writing concept, why the particular piece represents mastery (proving they know the standards), and also why mastery of such a standard is relevant not only in the classroom but also to the world outside the classroom and beyond. These moments of self-reflection are unique opportunities for the writer to show the reader (and evaluator) the processes of integration that have occurred during the learning process. By doing self-
reflections, the author of the portfolio must know and understand the standards by which the portfolio is being evaluated, thereby ensuring that what is in the portfolio is evidence of having mastered the pre-established standards; this is accomplished by the author’s very own hand and not by some outside third party who has no vested interest in the student’s education or future.

With these opportunities come moments of real creativity and ingenuity that may otherwise have been lost in the countless rows of multiple-choice questions. Secondary education has learning objectives or standards that must be upheld and taught. The state encourages the schools and teachers not to teach from a top-down pedagogy but rather to make the students aware of the standards by allowing them to fully participate in their own education.

This may seem like an obvious statement, but too often educators teach from behind the “big desk” and lecture without really involving the students in their own pathways toward a better future. This leads to passive learning, and when students are passive about their own learning they rely on the instructor to tell them how and what to learn. This is usually why students tend not to buy in as readily to curriculum and content writing and are not as apt to care about what they are learning. This is especially true when it comes to standardized testing, because testing only shows evidence of what a student does not know whereas a portfolio demonstrates and emphasizes what the student does know.
Portfolios are a unique and valuable assessment tool that can become a window into the student’s mind, and it is a way for both teachers and the administration to understand the educational process at the level of the individual learner. These are exceptional opportunities that students can take advantage of to show their expertise in the composition field while at the same time taking control of their own learning. When students are allowed to participate in their own learning by deciding what to include in their portfolio and by being asked to reflect on the pieces they have chosen, it makes learning more authentic and therefore more personal. When a student creates a piece of writing knowing that a self-reflection will follow to accompany the piece, the student will more often than not decide to put more effort into his writing.

What is also positive about the portfolio is that not all the assignments need to look the same. Students’ individuality plays a major role in this type of assessment, thereby making them more accountable for their own work. What is most common, is that students are not in charge of their learning and therefore have a much more passive outlook on education. Students tend to passively sit back and allow the teacher to tell them what to learn and most importantly how to learn. Then they are given standardized tests to prove how much they know. This takes ownership away from the student and places all control in the hands of the instructor and eventually in the hands of the state.

Again, the writer is not suggesting that there be no standards that have been decided upon as a collaborative effort between educators, policymakers and possibly students, but rather to allow the student to take a more active roll in his or her education.
Using portfolios as an assessment tool requires the student to be an active participant in his education because it requires the student to not only collect, but also reflect and analyze his own work, thereby providing both an instructional component to the curriculum as well as offering the opportunity for authentic assessment.

What is most interesting as well as educationally relevant about portfolios is that if the process is carefully executed (standards and rubrics are pre-established), the portfolio can be the perfect instructional tool as well as the perfect assessment instrument, thereby allowing teachers and students to fulfill their roles respectively. This is an assessment tool that engages everyone in the process, and all benefit from it. Lyons and Condon agree with the bottom-up structure and state:

Portfolio-based writing assessment has the potential for employing a bottom-up structure, in which writer, teachers, readers, and system are all involved, not only in producing portfolios, but in negotiating and renegotiating a local definition of the portfolio. Although not all portfolio-based writing assessments work this way, and a range of types of portfolio assessments are possible, at least in theory both the present needs of the writers producing portfolios and the concerns of the teachers teaching the students and evaluating the portfolios can have a major influence on the components of the portfolio and the process of assessing the portfolios. Any carefully designed assessment must take into account the roles of all the major stakeholders. To the extent that the writer or the teacher are left out of full involvement in the portfolio development and evaluation process, some of the potential portfolio-based writing assessment is not being fulfilled. The ethos of portfolio assessment, in many contexts but most especially in composition contexts – which lend themselves to collaboration in all dimensions – is such that it is quite difficult to remain unaffected by its potential for open, shared assessment (5 – 6).

“The major stakeholders,” as mentioned by Lyons and Condon, in this case are of course most importantly the students, then the teachers and lastly the schools themselves. What
we have currently going on in our schools is the exact opposite, with the most important stakeholders being the schools, who care more about the scores than they do students. That is why the idea of the portfolio, although not a new idea by any means, is nonetheless one of the most brilliant types of assessment in today’s educational world.

With portfolio assessment, students and teachers alike have the opportunity to have almost complete control over what the final product will look like and most importantly the process they will take to get there. This involves careful planning, strategizing, communication, and careful execution of a set of predetermined standards. Portfolios provide information about a student that the traditional or current pencil-and-paper test can never give us. They offer the opportunity to present a demonstration of a student’s academic skills and learning dispositions and writing style that help teachers, students, parents and education advocates make informed decisions about education and instruction in general. Not only are they beneficial to the average and above average mainstreamed student, they are especially beneficial to the underrepresented students such as special education students and English language learners because they offer opportunities for one-on-one instruction and individualized attention/assessment which both these groups so desperately need.

Teachers of second language learners complain often about the lack of motivation their students have in and outside the classroom. These same teachers often struggle with the implementation of strategies that will help them reach and engage their EL learners. Often it is not so much that scaffolding and appropriate strategies and structure are not in
place as much as it is the evaluation process that is askew. Frequently, and more often than not, the evaluation process does not truly reflect the students’ capabilities in the application of the English language. As discussed earlier, evaluation of English Learners is mainly performed in the traditional method, which is based on the idea that one test will fit all students despite individual differences. This is why the idea of portfolio assessment, which allows for individual difference, is the perfect assessment tool because it allows students and teachers to set learning goals and standards based upon the individual student, thereby framing and structuring learning so it integrates the collected experiences of that student that will, with time and with a preset process, facilitate further learning and development.

The question regarding evaluation of the portfolio is of course an important one and merits discussion, primarily because educators will be concerned with the time that it will take to grade the various aspects of what could be many pieces within a portfolio during a given time period (quarter, semester, end of year etc…) Mueller suggests that as a start, we shy away from the traditional grading and instead use the portfolio to evaluate a student’s work. He suggests the following:

Evaluation refers to the act of making a judgment about something. Grading takes that process one step further by assigning a grade to that judgment. Evaluation may be sufficient for a portfolio assignment. What is (are) the purpose(s) of the portfolio? If the purpose is to demonstrate growth, the teacher could make judgments about the evidence of progress and provide those judgments as feedback to the student or make note of them for her own records. Similarly, the student could self-assess progress shown or not shown, goals met or not met. No grade needs to be assigned. On a larger scale, an evaluation of the contents within the portfolio or of the entire package may be conducted by external bodies (e.g., community
members, other educators, state boards) for the purpose of judging completion of certain standards or requirements. Although the evaluation is serious, and graduation might even hinge on it, no classroom grade may be assigned. On the other hand, the work within the portfolio and the process of assembling and reflecting upon the portfolio may comprise such a significant portion of a student's work in a grade or class that the teacher deems it appropriate to assign a value to it and incorporate it into the student's final grade. Alternatively, some teachers assign grades because they believe without grades there would not be sufficient incentive for some students to complete the portfolio (htpp://jonathan.mueller.faculty.noctrl.edu/toolbox/index.htm).

Mueller’s suggestions are a way to begin incorporating the idea of the portfolio carefully and strategically within a classroom. Yancey points out that it is understood that “portfolio pedagogy is time intensive” (16). She further states that this type of assessment “does not just happen in one day and it also does not necessarily happen when we anticipate and prepare for it” (16). That is what is so beautiful about the use of portfolios in the classroom, that teachers and students can work on them on an individual basis to fit the needs of the student, teacher and school.

Yancey goes on to state that “time permits the sustained activity characteristic of portfolios, the time to compare composings, to review past goals, to match objectives with performance. Time permits the sustained dialogue within a peer group, the collaboration between student-writer and student-reader over the course of a term or year, the multiple readings that any portfolio might have. Simply put, the gift of time allows students to learn to become writers, rather that to learn to write papers” (17). This is the type of gift that we should be giving our students, the gift that allows for individuality
and democracy within a school environment, where everyone is not expected to perform the same or be placed into a box that allows for no individuality or critical thinking skills.

A classroom and/or school that adopts a portfolio type of assessment can often be somewhat threatening to teachers and students because it is not what everyone is used to. New things are always a bit hard to get used to and often are looked upon with skepticism. This is to be expected. It should also not be expected that everyone rush to try it given the fact that everyone is so accustomed to standardized testing. It is time that we be honest with ourselves and acknowledge that standardized testing has not worked out as well as it was intended. It is the hope of the writer that this paper is a way to open a dialogue and perhaps new possibilities for assessment in California that establishes respect in the classroom and allows students to have a voice when it comes to their work, their passions and their education.

Portfolio assessment demands accountability, which is what everyone involved in education is seeking. The data provided within the confines of a portfolio can hold students, teachers and schools accountable. The portfolios help teachers learn more about their students, and this will help to drive instruction in a much more meaningful way than standardized testing could ever hope to do. With real evidence sitting in front of a teacher, versus a bunch of numbers that have no meaning, the teacher can use that evidence to help that student in the areas where there are weaknesses or deficiencies. This type of assessment is not only the best for EL learners because the teachers can focus on the student as an individual with individual deficiencies in learning and language, but it
can also be the perfect assessment tool for mainstreamed students who, though not having as many deficiencies, can benefit from the individualized nature of authentic assessment.

The difficult task of moving from a traditional type of assessment to an authentic type of assessment is to determine what we want our students to know when they graduate from high school and begin preparation to enter into college. Perhaps the most challenging aspect of this process, the task of devising the end result of portfolio assessment, can also be the most exciting and most rewarding if not outright promising, because it allows the teacher and the student and other stakeholders in the student’s educational achievements, to come up with a pre-determined set of tasks aimed at meeting preset goals and standards that are stipulated by the instructor, by the school or by the state or federal agencies. This process permits the state and federal regulators to be satisfied, while at the same time fostering individual learning and progress.

Portfolios can have many purposes and as such, the rationale needs to be clearly laid out so all intended participants (stakeholders) have a clear idea of what the expectations are prior to commencing or assessing its execution. Mueller says that for any type of assessment, the instructor or administrator first must know where the assessment is intended to end up. What are the goals for the students? What is the portfolio intended to measure? An assessment cannot produce valid inferences unless it measures what it is intended to measure. And it cannot measure what it is intended to measure unless the goal(s) has been clearly identified. This makes the task for the students attainable because they are not left guessing what the standards are, how to access them nor how to provide
tasks that exemplify them. It also makes it accessible for the evaluators (teachers or state/federal agencies) to assess the learning because they too are a part of establishing the guidelines and rubrics that comprise the portfolio.

The principal idea of this paper it to suggest the portfolio as a tool to be used locally (schools and districts), as well as state-wide (taking the place of the CAHSEE, CELDT, and CSTs) by first coming up with manageable tasks that align themselves to the standards that are already currently in use, but hopefully, with time, new standards that reflect this new type of authentic assessment. Likewise, these same portfolios can then be taken to a higher level and used for grade advancement, standards mastery and graduation requirement. This would be a progressive process that would start early in the student’s academic career and would follow him through graduation from high school and potentially onto college, where the portfolio could be a starting point for getting into college.

The suggestion here is that the portfolio be used early on to familiarize students with the process so that they can begin to understand and eventually master the process. However, it would start to become a matter of greater importance (higher stakes) once the student reached high school, where the portfolio would be assessed from year to year (for all four years) on a scale comprised of predetermined standards and goals. Students would not be kept in the dark all throughout high school and then find out the infinite details at the end. Rather, the portfolio would be introduced early in the academic career (elementary school) so that the student becomes familiar with the process and by the time
the student reaches high school he or she is not only familiar with the process and how to manipulate it, but has a vested interest in his or her own work, thereby becoming more engaged and more apt to buy in to the rigorous curriculum.

The goal would be to use the portfolio in conjunction with class grades for advancement but also for graduation, with perhaps more detailed and substantive criteria established by the school, district or state. The idea here is that the portfolio becomes a tool to measure learning, growth, knowledge and skills that will eventually be used for the more rigorous writing environment at the university level and beyond. Standardized testing and teaching to the test have created passive learners who in turn have helped to generate mediocrity in our classrooms and communities. If we want students to care about learning, we have to show them what it means to learn about learning, and portfolios help to do just that. A school is in business to cause and promote learning. It should therefore be a model of learning organization. A solid education that produces good writers, thinkers and innovators is not a school that is a merely a place that expects students to learn, but rather encourages and supports everyone’s learning and not just the simple majority.

In the development of the standards that will guide the implementation of the portfolio, it is important to have a pre-established set of principles by which to inform the practice; otherwise, the process, like standardized testing, becomes meaningless. It is important, as suggested earlier, that each group (policymakers, teachers, school and students) be accountable one to another and that there be an established dialogue between
these groups. The standards should encompass principles that adhere to the most basic fundamentals of good teaching and portfolio assessment. Furthermore, they should be replete with possibilities and implications that can be teased out only through continual analysis of the cases that will come before educators everyday. It is clear that without clear and explicit learning principles – and clear course goals linked to standards – there will be no end to tiresome debates and disingenuous posturing about practice. In other words, no matter how common specific teaching practices have been historically, they are only professional when they are defensible in terms of the school’s mission and its adopted learning principles.

It will always come down to standards and accountability. And it should. Standards and accountability are both needed if we are to foster the kind of student that is ready to participate in a rigorous college environment where writing is a key component to learning and assessment or in the real world where writing takes on an even higher stake of necessity and accountability. It will not be an easy task and it will require work, perhaps more work than what we currently see with standardized testing. That does not mean we should give up the fight for democracy. Meier says:

Schools need to be governed in ways that honor the same intellectual and social skills we expect our children to master, and – ideally – in ways that young can see, hear, and respect. At every point along the way we must connect the dots between our theory and practice and fight for democracy in the classroom. It’s nice when ends and means can come together in this way, and it’s the most powerful form of education when they do. Will it be neat and orderly? Probably not. But democracy is and always was messy and problematic, and it is always a work in progress (78).
It is imperative that we come together as educators, legislators, parents and students to slow down the pendulum and the effects it is having on our nation’s students regardless of race, ethnicity, background or status and fight for a democracy that provides a pedagogy of respect for all learners. It is our responsibility as educators and we should fight not only for democracy, but for the respect that it brings to educators and their students. That is why this paper is pushing for democracy in the classroom. With democracy comes freedom and equality. That is what students deserve in school. Not the freedom to do what they want, but the freedom to learn, to be judged on the basis of individual qualities and attributes and also for personal learning styles. Democracy also brings equality and by demanding equality in the classrooms and schools across California, we can be assured that students are in fact getting the education they deserve which will allow them access to the academy and the world.
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