

**REVISED REPORT OF THE ASSESSMENT AND TESTING STUDY GROUP  
November, 2004**

**Members:** Millie Davis (Staff Representative), Niki Locklear, Amy Seely Flint, Kathi Yancey, and Kathryn Mitchell Pierce (Chair)

With significant input and support from Patti Stock (President), Randy Bomer (Incoming President), and Kent Williamson (Executive Director)

**Brief Timeline:**

<i>February 2004:</i>	Creation of the Spheres of Influence matrix
<i>Spring 2004:</i>	Gathering and reviewing resources for the Briefing Book
<i>May 2004:</i>	Initial discussions with EC members regarding Spheres of Influence and assessment issues facing teachers today
<i>Summer 2004:</i>	Creation of final Briefing Book for EC
<i>July 2004:</i>	EC small group discussions of our vision: Relative to assessment and testing of ELA, what will be different in 5 years if we have been successful in our work as an EC?
<i>Summer/Fall 2004:</i>	Development of framing statements to guide the work of the Council in the area of assessment and testing
<i>November 2004:</i>	Creation of study group report and draft motions

**Discussion/Summary:**

Our initial work focused on a review of the various Spheres of Influence within which we might focus our work. While work is certainly needed in each of these Spheres, we attempted to identify those arenas in which we could have the greatest leverage. Our small group discussions in EC meetings helped to shape a focus on the K-12 classroom level, on the pre-service context, where students learn to be teachers; and in the postsecondary context, where writing in particular plays a major role in student retention and graduation rates. In addition, these discussions highlighted the different needs of teachers at various levels of schooling. Documents created by the Assessment and Testing Study Group, and the proposed motions, reflect the following:

*Early Childhood (PreK-3):* Our greatest area of leverage for change at this level appears to be in the Federal legislative and policy arena. NCTE should be a strong voice in shaping any future legislation related to assessment of literacy, indeed even in discussions of literacy curriculum for early childhood programs. This work can best be accomplished on concert with such organizations as AEYC.

*K-12:* Our greatest area of service, and potential to affect change, at this level appears to be through a multi-faceted approach to professional development for teachers, assessment directors and curriculum coordinators, school administrators, and, to a lesser extent, parents and board members. We envision this work to be broad enough to incorporate development of professional development workshops and institutes, conference sessions, and consulting support for districts; professional publications including journal articles but also including development of materials for use by individual teachers and school leaders; development of a critical data-base on assessment tools and practices to support those teachers attempting to work "within the cracks" of the mandates associated with NCLB.

*Elementary:* For elementary teachers, the greatest areas of need appear to be focused on reading and writing assessment. While teachers and districts are asking for support from NCTE, many of them are looking at very basic definitions of reading and writing. NCTE is in a position to respond to this need

while also providing leadership in urging teachers and districts to move to more complex definitions of literacy that take into consideration multiple literacies and critical literacy.

*Middle Level:* Depending on the nature of the school context, middle level teachers' needs overlap with aspects of both the *Elementary* and *Secondary* needs outlined above. NCTE's response to the needs of middle level teachers and schools will draw upon both elementary and secondary work and should provide leadership in urging teachers and districts to move to more complex definitions of literacy, and that reflect the unique needs of adolescent literacy learners.

*Secondary:* At the secondary level, teachers and districts are looking for support from NCTE to meet the needs of struggling readers, and to prepare students for the various assessments relating to transition to college – including the writing component of the new SAT. NCTE is in a position to respond to these needs while also providing leadership in urging teachers and districts to move to more complex definitions of literacy that take into consideration multiple literacies and critical literacy

*Post-Secondary:* The assessment needs at the college and university level are broad and complex. They include appropriate use of writing assessment as part of the transition to college (admission essays and placement essays, for example), assessments relating to teacher preparation including admission to teacher education programs and licensure at various stages of a teacher's career, assessments relating to student learning in college classrooms, and assessments relating to college/university program evaluation and accreditation. Many of these assessment issues have been addressed in existing CEE and CCCC documents. The greatest need at this level appears to be a critical look at the work that has been accomplished, with an eye toward making best use of extant documents and research and identifying gaps in that work that need to be addressed.

Through the course of our work, the Assessment and Testing Study Group created several documents we believe to be useful in shaping the work of the Council in the area of Assessment and Testing.

- Matrix of Spheres of Influence within which we might work, contained in the Assessment and Testing Study Group Briefing Book Materials.
- Framing Statements on Assessment, following, which create the context in which our future work should be conducted.
- Ends Statements, following, which synthesize the July EC discussions of our vision for what assessment practices will look like in the near future.
- Proposed Motions, following, which call for action in response to the needs identified through this study group/discussion process.

### **Framing Statements on Assessment**

NCTE holds the following beliefs about assessment:

- Assessment must include multiple measures and must be manageable.
- Consumers of assessment data should be knowledgeable about the things the test data can and cannot say about learning.
- Teachers and school should be permitted to select site-specific assessment tools from a bank of alternatives and/or to create their own.

Based on these beliefs, NCTE upholds the following vision regarding assessment. We want:

- To help teachers develop competence in using various forms of data about how students are doing and what they need in order to continue to grow – assessment for both formative and summative purposes.
- Teachers to be knowledgeable about many forms of assessment and to be able to use these data-collection tools in order to articulate what students have learned and their growth in using strategies for further learning. We also want teachers to be able to provide appropriate parties purposeful accounting for student learning (e.g., descriptive narratives).
- Teachers to use collections of assessment strategies appropriate in their settings. We also want teachers to be knowledgeable about the appropriate uses and limitations of use for each of these assessments.
- Conversations in schools, businesses and communities to be focused on “assessment” as an ongoing part of how educators do our work – taking stock of what students have accomplished and making plans for what needs to come next for continued learning
- Parents to be knowledgeable and involved in the assessment process for their children and their schools. We also want parents to have a voice in establishing the criteria by which their schools will be judged.

To attain our vision, NCTE will act on the following Guiding Principles when taking action regarding Assessment. NCTE:

- Intends to work PreK-University in our efforts to influence assessment practices.
- Will send a consistent message opposing sole reliance on standardized tests.
- Will help teachers cope with the reality they currently have while helping them critique current testing mandates and forms and propose alternatives to the current reality.
- Believes parents should be knowledgeable and involved in the assessment process, including establishing the criteria by which their schools will be judged.
- Wants to influence the way “mid course corrections” are approached, particularly the ways data are used in the process.

Ultimately our goal will be that those involved in and affected by assessment will attain the following ends.

#### In Knowledge and Disposition

- ELA **teachers'** decisions regarding assessment are trusted by parents, administrators, and other interested stakeholders.
- ELA **teachers** are knowledgeable about assessment principles and implement assessment strategies that make sense in light of their daily instructional practice.
- ELA **teachers** help students understand how to become (appropriately) self-critical and reflective so that they can take these "habits of mind" to other disciplines and the workplace.
- ELA **teachers** are confident and skillful in articulating specific details about student growth in areas of reading, writing, literature response, use of oral and written language for learning, etc.
- **Assessment Coordinators** assume primary responsibility for communicating classroom assessment information to groups outside the school building.
- **Teachers, administrators and school communities** work together to change school culture, to shift the assessment paradigm such that learning theory matches assessment theory.
- **Assessment Coordinators** are able to translate and communicate assessment information to school officials, community members and legislators.
- **Teachers** are free to focus on teaching and learning—and assessment is an integral part of the process, not something set aside from the process.

- **Assessment Coordinators** provide regular, cohesive information sessions for parents and other stakeholders, helping them learn how to prepare their children for tests, how to work for their children as learning advocates, and how to be active participants in ongoing assessment conversations about their children's learning.

#### In **Environment and Materials (how/when do assessments take place)**

- **ELA teachers**—in collaboration with students – have primary control over the types of assessment data that are gathered about students, and how these data are analyzed and interpreted and most important, used in any decision-making process.
- **ELA teachers** have time during the school day to develop, interpret and use assessment information to guide their planning.
- **ELA teachers** feel a sense of “spaciousness” with time and creativity to work with students.
- **ELA teachers** select their own assessment programs from various options, and/or create their own.
- **ELA teachers** work with a steady stream of low-stakes assessment of day-to-day learning, rather than decoding high stakes “end point” assessment numbers. This stream of data informs differentiated practice.
- **ELA teacher** study groups have assessment conversations focused on “significant” learning – learning that is significant in both the in-school and out-of-school lives of students, as well as what can be done better.
- **Classroom assessments** developed by teachers feed directly into district assessments – are an integral part of how the district establishes the effectiveness of its programs.
- **Assessment practices** embrace diversity in terms of learning styles, rates and routes of learning, and languages for learning. “One size fits all” **assessments** are not used by schools or imposed by legislators and policy makers.
- **Assessment practices** are well integrated with instruction and produce a stream of feedback that is useful to teachers in planning learning engagements. This integration eliminates a separate time for “test prep.”
- Where **tests** with writing prompts are used, students have an opportunity to identify a range of interests or matters that they consider themselves to have expertise in, and are then be presented with prompts designed to match these interests (so that they can write about what they know, rather than an issue or subject that means nothing to them).
- **All student writing**, including college entrance exams, are evaluated by knowledgeable humans rather than scored by machines.
- **Literacy assessments** are situated in the classroom learning context and will help stakeholders focus on strengths, areas of concern, goals to improve and actions to be taken. Assessments are only valid to the extent that they help students learn.
- **Assessments** include both content-specific goals as well as “habits of mind” and assessment of growth in “learning how to learn.”

#### In **Student Impact**

- **Students** value assessment and have a better sense of why it's important (for learning) and why and how it works.
- **Students** participate in ongoing, multiple, authentic means of assessment of their learning, as they learn to be self-assessors.
- **Students** participate in and/or lead learning conferences about their work.
- **Students** monitor and assess their own learning with guidance.
- **Classroom assessment** data are used to inform others about the learning success of students and schools.
- **All stakeholders** contribute to decisions about how their schools will be judged.

**Assessment and Testing Motions – November 17, 2004**

**Motion 2004:56**

That the Presidential Team take a critical look at the work on college level assessment that has been accomplished by the Council in order to identify gaps in that work that need to be addressed and to propose to the EC an action plan for moving ahead in this sphere.

**Motion 2004:57**

That the Executive Committee accept the revised report of the Assessment and Testing Study Group.

**Motion 2004:58**

That NCTE create professional development materials, experiences and services on literacy assessment aimed at K-12 teachers, assessment coordinators, and administrators; individual schools and school districts.

**Motion 2004:59**

That NCTE, drawing upon the important work of the Commission on Reading, the Task Force on High Stakes Testing, and the Standing Committee on Assessment along with other sources, create and disseminate a collection of information on commonly-used literacy assessment tools that includes such information as:

- Name/publisher of the literacy assessment tool
- Specific literacy assessment questions addressed by assessment tool
- Specific strengths/limitations of the literacy assessment tool
- Reviews/informed critiques of the literacy assessment tool
- Other relevant information to guide a teacher, administrator or school group involved in selection of literacy assessment tools.

Priority to be given to reading and writing assessment tools for use at the building, district or state level.

**Motion 2004:60**

That NCTE collaborate with other organizations to support legislation that makes it possible for teachers of young children (ages birth to eight years) to make teaching and assessment decisions on the basis of systematic observations of learners and the specific needs of those learners. Furthermore, that NCTE collaborate with other organizations to deter future national legislative actions which mandate how literacy is taught and assessed in the crucial early childhood years.