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BRIDGING THE GAP: WHY MANY HIGH SCHOOL WRITERS ARE NOT
SUCCESSFUL IN COLLEGE COMPOSITION CLASSES

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English: Writing and Rhetoric at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Abstract

BRIDGING THE GAP: WHY MANY HIGH SCHOOL WRITERS ARE NOT SUCCESSFUL IN COLLEGE COMPOSITION CLASSES

By Amy Stutzman Park, Master of Arts in English: Writing and Rhetoric

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Major Director: Dr. Patricia H. Perry
Director of Composition and Rhetoric, The Department
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It may be useful to identify this so-called gap that seems to plague first-year college writers before attempting to discover why it exists. In order to identify the gap, I want to define these writers who are leaving high school and finding difficulty in college composition classes. Patricia Bizzell defines basic writers as “those who are least well prepared for college” (Bizzell “What Happens When Basic Writers Come to College?” 294). I’d like to broaden her definition of basic writers and use the term “inexperienced writers” as the field now defines them.

In order to fully understand why most college freshman writers are not successful, I will outline the type of thinking and reasoning that students are expected to display when they get to college, and thus the new world view Bizzell discusses in her article. Since Piaget's theory takes us only through the formal operational stage that he claims children may reach when they are 11 or 12 years old, I had to turn to two studies that detail the thinking strategies of late adolescents and adults. William Perry conducted a study in the 1950's and 1960's on the intellectual and ethical development of college students through a series of interviews with undergraduate men. He outlines three world views, or cognitive and ethical developmental stages through which undergraduates pass during their post-secondary education: Dualism, Relativism, and Commitment in Relativism. Perry's model details how students, as they move through the levels, make sense of the information, opinions, and theories confronting them in a college classroom (Perry 57-134).

I use William Perry's concept of cultural exploration as Patricia Bizzell interprets it through her article ["What Happens When Basic Writers Come to College?"] to explore the demands of college composition classes. I am using Bizzell's interpretation because she outlines how Perry's model meshes with writing instruction, and writing is the central focus of my thesis. I examine how students are asked to think and relate to their own culture in both two and four-year institutions using Perry's world view stages not so much as a strict guideline, but as a framework for student cognitive development. After determining how the writing curriculum of three different Virginia post-secondary institutions -- Virginia Commonwealth University, University of Richmond, and J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College -- engage with Perry's scheme, I use the model to

interpret how two major writing assessments, the Virginia Standard of Learning (SOL) and the SAT essay, coincide with post-secondary philosophy. Finally, I examine how an international curriculum, the International Baccalaureate (IB), corresponds with Perry's scheme and affects writing instruction at the high school level. By analyzing these secondary assessments and curricular program, I move closer to answering why the gap continues to exist.

Identifying the Gap

As a high school English teacher, I have consistently attempted to prepare my students for the types of writing they can expect in a college or community college setting. I continue to reflect on my own college writing experiences as well as communicate with current post-secondary students about what they are experiencing in a contemporary college setting. As a graduate student, I have studied composition theory that is valued at the university level, and observed how my own instructors present writing assessments. In the process of writing this thesis, I have spoken to many educators and writing teachers about the writing instruction in their institutions. The combination of these experiences have not left me to wonder whether the gap between high school writing expectations and performance and writing at the college level exists; instead they have forced me to investigate *why* such an apparent disparity survives in our current system.

It may be useful to identify this so-called gap that seems to plague first-year college writers before attempting to discover why it exists. In order to identify the gap, I want to define these writers who are leaving high school and finding difficulty in college composition classes. Patricia Bizzell defines basic writers as “those who are least well prepared for college” (Bizzell “What Happens When Basic Writers Come to College?” 294). I’d like to broaden her definition of basic writers and use the term

“inexperienced writers” as the field now defines them. These writers are not necessarily those who need remedial writing classes when they reach the college level. I think inexperienced writers include even those writers who have taken college-preparatory classes in high school. These writers, and their writing teachers, do not view themselves as those in the school who are least prepared. These writers take standard, advanced, and dual enrollment English classes, and are fully expecting admittance to college. They remain inexperienced writers, however, because the high school curriculum they “master” has not challenged them to move past their present cognitive development. They have successfully produced prescriptive, formulaic essays that often lack original thought, argument, and analysis because these assignments are the major expectations of high school writing classes. I find that mainstreamed students are not coming to college prepared to write, and therefore the term “inexperienced writer” can be expanded to include even students succeeding in college-preparatory classes.

Bizzell explains that basic writers enter college with this label for three reasons. The first is that they are asked to change their dialect to conform to Standard English in college. Despite their likely advanced thoughts, writers are forced to express their ideas in a language possibly unfamiliar to them and discard their home dialect. “Defenders of home dialects say that forcing students to abandon dialects, even if only occasionally or temporarily, presents such a barrier that students will learn very little while concentrating on the language problem” (Bizzell “What Happens When Basic Writers Come to College?” 295). In high school, students are certainly shown Standard English -- it appears on all standardized tests. However that basic exposure does not always help them

incorporate this dialect smoothly into their writing while still expressing advanced ideas. Thus students must learn a new way of speaking and writing when they get to college that may inhibit their natural ability to think.

The second reason there are basic writers, Bizzell outlines, is that they are forced not only to change their dialect, but their entire manner of discourse. However, I believe all inexperienced writers must learn to communicate within an academic discourse to suit demands of college teachers, and this discourse may be foreign to anything they have encountered before college. Basic writers will “seek to shape their writing according to discourse conventions more familiar to them from other sources” (295) and will not be able to use their former methods of shaping arguments and convincing audiences. Even though their papers may be grammatically standardized, inexperienced writers may still not be considered “good” or successful writers.

Mike Rose addresses this problem of basic, or as he terms “remedial” writers, and notes that the label is not limited to writers with learning disabilities. He finds that there are “large numbers” of students, both high school and college, who are deemed remedial who have just not learned to read and write in the discourse required by post-secondary institutions. “...students from backgrounds that did not provide optimal environmental and educational opportunities, students who erred as they tried to write the prose they thought the academy required...” (Rose 536). These remedial writers have not received the training they need in high school, not because they are inept, but because that training is unavailable to them. I find that even though many public schools do try to introduce students to academic discourse, they are not able to infuse this discourse into their

writing, and thus remain inexperienced writers when they enter college. They may not need remediation, but they are not prepared for college composition classes.

The third way in which Bizzell shows us a gap between high school and college writers entails a shift in a writer's entire world view. Not only are the language rules and conventions different for these inexperienced writers, but they must use this new way of writing to develop a new way of thinking about the world. "Their difficulties then are best understood as stemming from the initial distance between their world-views and the academic world view, and perhaps also from the resistance to changing their own world-views that is caused by this very distance" (297). This third dilemma for inexperienced writers forces me to ask two questions: What is the world view of an-coming college freshman writer? And subsequently, what world view are we helping students attain in high school?

The second question seems to be one I could answer since I am a high school writing teacher. Not only do I need to discover how high school students are expected to think leaving their secondary education, but also what implications those expectations have for a composition classroom. Constructivist theorist, Jean Piaget, described four stages of cognitive development through which children progress as they develop complex reasoning capabilities. He believed children move through each stage at an average rate based on age and accomplishments of the former stage. This system has been deemed somewhat problematic, as Piaget did not include social factors that may work with or against a child's natural cognitive development. Also, as Lindemann points out in her text *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*, "Piaget also offers little help to college

writing teachers because their students are older than those he studied” (100). However, I believe Piaget paved the way for other developmental psychologists to use his ideas about cognitive developmental stages to help us understand how we think and how and when we progress to higher-order thinking.

Piaget’s theory is also important while looking at assumptions teachers place upon late adolescents and their thinking ability. According to Lindemann, adults become more specialized and experiential in their intellectual skills as they age. They may veer from personal experience as the sole way to view the world and begin to integrate multiple solutions to problems (Lindemann 101). However, high school students still need opportunities to move closer to this more advanced mode of thinking. “High school students, for example, may have difficulty analyzing someone else’s argument, and first-year college students may be frustrated by assignments that require dialectical reasoning...That doesn’t mean that they should avoid challenging work...By posing unfamiliar problems that require students to see, talk, think, and write, we encourage them to modify the cognitive schemes that they have developed and to adopt progressively more complex ways of knowing” (107-108). Knowing the limitations of adolescent thinking is important for teachers, but understanding how to challenge students to develop as more advanced thinkers could help them start to bridge the gap they face in post-secondary institutions. Knowledge is not made through rote writing exercises, but through challenging students to understand their perspectives and therefore validate the perspectives of other people. I deduce that the gap I have identified is made

greater because students are not forced to think beyond their assumed developmental stages in high school writing classrooms.

In order to fully understand why most college freshman writers are not successful, I will outline the type of thinking and reasoning that students are expected to display when they get to college, and thus the new world view Bizzell discusses in her article. Since Piaget's theory takes us only through the formal operational stage that he claims children may reach when they are 11 or 12 years old, I had to turn to two studies that detail the thinking strategies of late adolescents and adults. William Perry conducted a study in the 1950's and 1960's on the intellectual and ethical development of college students through a series of interviews with undergraduate men. He outlines three world views, or cognitive and ethical developmental stages through which undergraduates pass during their post-secondary education: Dualism, Relativism, and Commitment in Relativism. Perry's model details how students, as they move through the levels, make sense of the information, opinions, and theories confronting them in a college classroom (Perry 57-134). Initially, these stages are not directly related to the writing process; they are a map of the moral and intellectual journey all students take and their attitudes toward their school work throughout their college careers.

Marcia B. Baxter Magolda conducted a similar study in the 1980's in which she interviewed both men and women who attended Miami University of Ohio. After studying the subjects' evolving cognitive growth, she developed an Epistemological Reflection Model that outlines four ways of knowing: Absolute, Transitional,

Independent, and Contextual (Magolda 75). I would like to show the blending of the two schemes as both Bizzell and Lindemann outline in their texts.

Dualism, as Perry named the first world view, “is characterized by the belief that everything in the world can be ordered in one of two categories – right or wrong” (Bizzell “William Perry and Liberal Education” 298). Students tend to think that knowledge exists absolutely, and rely on their teachers to disseminate that knowledge, and therefore the “right” answers. They view teachers as ultimate authorities and experts in their field. Similarly, Magolda’s absolute knowers do not see themselves or other students as creators of knowledge, and they also view answers in the context of right or wrong (Magolda 75). “Approaching a writing assignment, an absolute knower is likely to be preeminently concerned with what the teacher wants and may doubt that peers can or should offer advice in planning or revising a draft” (Lindemann 102). Both dualistic and absolute knowers believe that knowledge is fixed and unchanging.

In the second world view of Perry’s conclusions, Relativism, students recognize that there are multiple interpretations in problem-solving. They are not searching for a right answer; instead they embrace different opinions (Perry 100-101). However, students at this stage often cannot communicate the value of each perspective, and instead base their conclusions on their own opinions. “For the student Relativist, education is the process of devising persuasive answers, since right answers no longer exist” (Bizzell “William Perry and Liberal Education” 298). These students expect teachers to evaluate their opinions without absolute standards, but based on particular, possibly individual criteria. They no longer look to teachers as authorities on what is true, but as peers who

relate personally to their view (298). In Magolda's model, transitional knowers also do not view teachers as omniscient. They begin to understand that teachers do not have all the answers. The independent knowers in Magolda's third grouping advance in their thinking from the transitional category in that they also consider their own opinions as valid. "Like Perry's relativists, [independent knowers] emphasized being open-minded, letting everyone believe what they will" (Lindemann 105).

Perry's third category is labeled "Commitment in Relativism," and is similar to Relativism in that there are no authorities or absolutes. Students who are committed to Relativism order their values and choices based upon their social surroundings – family, friends, community traditions. This view is still centralized on the self, but it takes into account the validity of other people's judgments (Bizzell "William Perry and Liberal Education" 298). "For the student Committed Relativist, education is a process of achieving the knowledge necessary for making Commitments... The teacher is neither Authority nor personal friend during this process, but rather a more experienced fellow worker, or mentor" (298). Magolda's subjects who approach the fourth category, contextual knowing, view instructors as those who promote evaluative discussion of perspectives. Both students and teachers critique each other, and writers make choices based upon the criticism of knowledgeable peers and teachers. No one person is an authority on a given subject (Magolda 171).

Magolda's model and conclusions differ from Perry's because she studied both men and women. She discovered differences in the ways in which men and women learn and think even within the same categories of knowing. For example, among absolute

learners, Magolda found that women tend to receive knowledge in a more private fashion; they “do not expect interaction with the instructor, view peers as a support network to help and listen and occasionally ask questions, value evaluation that offers the best opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, and rely on their own interpretations...instead of consulting an authority” (Magolda 38). Men, on the other hand, flourished when they were gaining knowledge through public interaction. They expected to challenge both peers and authority figures in order to master specific knowledge (38). Just as Piaget’s theory is limited to young children, Perry’s model contains both cultural and gender limitations because he studied a homogenous group of white men studying at an elite institution. Although I acknowledge the confines of Perry’s study, I find that the Magolda and Perry models are not dissimilar in the ways in which they describe cognitive development and ways of knowing. I am not studying gender differences, as gender is not a primary factor in how high school students are instructed, so I do not focus my research on the conclusions that Magolda’s model offers about men and women. I plan to use Perry’s theory as a lens through which I can determine how college students are expected to learn and therefore how they are taught that differs from the expectations of adolescent thinking and the way in which they are taught in high school.

Bizzell has challenged Perry’s model as inherently value-laden as Perry asserts that one stage of development is somehow more advanced or better than another. Bizzell also questions where writing fits into his developmental plan. She notes that Perry’s conclusions after his student interviews do define certain types of academic performance.

“...Perry has distinguished between attitudes that produce ‘cow’ writing, or data unorganized by theory, and ‘bull’ writing, or theory unsupported by data” thus in some way linking student writing to their academic ways of thinking (Bizzell “William Perry and Liberal Education” 301).

The danger of this indirect connection, Bizzell warns, is that writing instructors began to match up patterns in papers to each developmental stage, and thus categorize the writing and thinking of their students. She notes the work of Mina Shaughnessy and Andrea Lunsford in classifying the essays “basic” writers – essays that do not offer support for a thesis or an organizing thesis whatsoever (301). These essays seem to fit into a Dualistic student mindset in which students present judgments or inferences as if they were absolute with no need for substantiation. However, Bizzell states “much more research is needed...before we can use Perry’s scheme to classify kinds of student writing” (302). Perry gives no timetable for the rate at which students should move through his three world views, so teachers cannot assume that younger students and/or inexperienced writers can automatically be labeled Dualistic. Perry does not offer any way for us to gauge how quickly or slowly students may achieve one level of development, thus we cannot apply his model to student writing.

However, I find that there *are* aspects of Perry’s model that are useful to college writing instructors. Bizzell mentions that although we cannot use his format to provide definitive categories for student writing, the theory can help us to examine why variations occur. There is another piece to Perry’s method that I find helpful as I examine the gap between high school and college writers. “The great strength of his scheme is its focus on

one important constant in the struggles of all college writers: the intellectual demands of liberal education” (303). Writing professors are asking students to think in a certain way when they reach the university level, and high school teachers must understand this philosophy. Bizzell explains, “We are asking them to accept a certain kind of relation to their culture, from among the range of relations that are possible” (303). Perry is not just outlining a series of stages all writers experience, he is providing us with a picture of a cultural exploration required in a liberal arts institution. He gives teachers a “philosophical map of the changes liberal education seeks to induce in our students” (304). Perry’s theory is useful in that it helps teachers understand the types of problems college writers have in comprehending the “academic community’s preferred world view,” not necessarily problems associated with achieving “normal” cognition (304).

I use Perry’s concept of cultural exploration as Bizzell interprets it through her article to explore the demands of college composition classes. I am using Bizzell’s interpretation because she outlines how Perry’s model meshes with writing instruction, and writing is the central focus of my thesis. I am examining how students are asked to think and relate to their own culture in both two and four-year institutions using Perry’s world view stages not so much as a strict guideline, but as a framework for student cognitive development. After determining how the writing curriculum of three different Virginia post-secondary institutions -- Virginia Commonwealth University, University of Richmond, and J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College -- engage with Perry’s scheme, I use the model to interpret how two major writing assessments, the Virginia Standard of Learning (SOL) and the SAT essay, coincide with post-secondary philosophy. Finally, I

examine how an international curriculum, the International Baccalaureate (IB), corresponds with Perry's scheme and affects writing instruction at the high school level. By analyzing these secondary assessments and curricular program, I move closer to answering why the gap continues to exist.

What Colleges Expect

I have determined that according to William Perry, college students move through cognitive stages in order to grow as writers and thinkers. The question now stands: What type of thinkers and writers do colleges expect first-year students to be? What are the demands placed upon entering freshmen as they attempt to write for college professors? In his article, “Inventing the University,” David Bartholomae outlines what college students can expect from composition classes. He notes that the students must “learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community” (Bartholomae 589). He echoes Bizzell’s ideas that basic writers must not only conform to fit Standard English, but they must also be able to communicate within a new discourse community.

I have examined the first-year writing requirements at three institutions in Virginia. Vast differences exist among the University of Richmond (UR), Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), and J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College (JSRCC). UR is a nationally ranked private university that hosts students in a quiet, residential setting. VCU is a state school with an open, urban campus, and JSRCC is a 2-year community college with two campus locations – one in downtown Richmond, the other in surrounding Henrico County. Below is a table that illustrates the demographics

and requirements for admission of each institution taken from the stated statistics on each school's website:

	# Undergraduate Students	Cost	Average SAT scores	Acceptance Rate
UR	3000	\$40,000	1300-1380	47%
VCU	18,500	\$6,000 – in-state \$12,000 – out	1091	73%
JSRCC	15,000 (credit students)	\$76.00 per credit out (in-state) \$224.00 per credit hour (out)	not required	high school diploma (or GED) needed

Figure 1

UR is highly selective with a smaller population compared to the other two schools. The average class size is 18 students. VCU caters to a large, diverse population with an average class size of 24. JSRCC admits all students who have graduated from high school or received a GED and who are seeking an associate's degree or transfer credit to a four-year institution. The types of students who attend these schools mirror these statistics. Most students at UR are academically driven and have proven themselves in high school: 58% of admitted freshmen are in the top 10% of their high school graduating classes. Many have taken an advanced curriculum in high school and boast high GPA's. Most students who are admitted to VCU are not necessarily in the top ranks

of their high school classes, although many have come from demanding academic programs with advanced placement classes. Students admitted to these two universities as well as those at JSRCC had to receive a high school diploma. In order to receive a public high school diploma in Virginia, students must pass Virginia SOL tests.

Each institution offers a freshman composition program, and many of these introductory writing programs are prerequisites for future English classes. The writing instruction in these classes uniformly calls for a process approach to composition. On the VCU English Department homepage, the writing program is described as emphasizing writing as thinking and placing utmost importance on revision. The stated purpose of ENGL 101 is to teach rhetorical practices in various genres as well as emphasize critical thinking and revision (www.has.vcu.edu/eng/writing). ENGL 101 is a prerequisite for all 200-level English classes. Bartholomae explains as part of a liberal arts education (similar to one a student receives at VCU), “after the first year or two, [the student] must learn to try on a variety of voices and interpretive schemes -- to write, for example, as a literary critic one day and as an experimental psychologist the next;” (590). Therefore, not only must this course prepare students for subsequent composition classes, it must also help students to communicate in any upper division class in any field of study. ENGL 101 helps students understand and practice the types of writing that will be necessary in the academic setting they have entered and to view writing as a mode of thinking. Bartholomae argues that successful writers at the college level are able to “build bridges between their point of view and the reader’s. They have to anticipate and acknowledge the reader’s assumptions and biases” (594). A writer works against a

conventional point of view within an essay and “places himself self-consciously within the context of conventional discourse about the subject, even as he struggles against the language of that conventional discourse” (607). Thus, if the introductory writing classes at VCU are in line with the expectations Bartholomae describes, and I believe they are, this type of writing instruction will help students explore different beliefs possible held by different people – a world view in line with Perry’s third category, Relativism. So, the expectations of early college writers are to push their thinking into a higher-order than they are used to in high school classes.

The writing requirement at JSRCC can also be analyzed using Perry’s model. The community college offers two semesters of writing in ENG 111 and ENG 112. These classes are taught on campus as well as through Dual Enrollment in area high schools. Only seniors who have passed a written competency test may register for Dual Enrollment, which is generally taught at the local high school either by a trained high school English teacher or community college professor. Seniors who achieve at least a B may receive college credit. The course description for ENG 111 states that this class “guides students in learning writing as a process” and “supports writing by integrating experiences in thinking, reading, listening, and speaking” (JSRCC Course Outline). Students in ENG 112 are expected to read, interpret, and synthesize “a variety of texts about the human experience” (Course Outline) which will help them move from a self-interested writer in the Relativism stage to a Committed Relativist who can incorporate other’s experiences into their own perspectives. Some of the course objectives also include “an appreciation of how texts reflect and enrich the lives of readers from diverse

backgrounds” as well as an opportunity to “examine subjects from multiple perspectives and formulate and express their own perspective” (Course Outline).

The UR introductory writing course, ENG 103, is similar in format and content to its counterparts at the other institutions. There exists an emphasis on reflective thinking through the use of writer’s memos, and one of the optional goals on the Syllabus Guidelines is to “encourage students to write for a “real world” audience beyond the classroom.” These requirements also push students beyond a Dualistic mentality of searching for what is right and wrong and extend into a Relativist realm of accepting differing perspectives.

Bartholomae outlines his opinions of what college writing instructors expect from first year college students. I have drawn the conclusion that, although these three Virginia higher education institutions are vastly different demographically, financially, physically, and academically, and although the students who attend them differ just as greatly in other areas, all students are expected to adapt their thinking from a self-centered, absolute approach to a broader world view, and these changes occur within the writing classes. Students who have received varying levels of preparation in their high schools must still eventually be able to accept divergent and possibly opposing view-points, not solely communicate their own. They must move past finding absolute truths in their worlds and embracing other perspectives.

Many high school students are not entering college with the necessary preparation to meet the demands of college writing courses. Andrea Lunsford states that inexperienced writers “have not attained that level of cognitive development which

would allow them to form abstractions or conceptions...they are most often unable to practice analysis and synthesis and to apply successfully the principles thus derived to college tasks” (Lunsford 277). Thus high school teachers face the challenge of preparing all types of students from widely varied backgrounds to attain an understanding of abstract thinking and synthesis. As I stated previously, Erika Lindemann believes that we can encourage higher-order thinking even in adolescents who are not at a Relativist stage in cognitive development.

As I demonstrate in the following chapter, most high school writing curriculum currently does not include such challenges to student thinking. In addition, teachers are forced to work within the confines of mandate state assessments, nationally recognized tests, and international curricula. The Virginia SOLs and the new SAT writing test contribute to the gap in student thinking and writing ability they are expected to bridge when they reach college.

What are we teaching in high school classrooms?

Before I can examine how Perry's model coincides with high school writing instruction, I must first examine what is happening in high school writing classes and the philosophy that dictates that instruction. I have focused my efforts on high schools in Hanover County, Virginia where I am employed. Hanover County caters to a rural/suburban population. There are 19,000 students who attend 100% accredited schools according to the state standards, and 78% of Hanover County graduates go on to two and four-year schools. Thus, teachers are preparing over three-fourths of the student body for college.

What are we teaching in Hanover or any other district's high school classrooms? Ironically, that answer can be found in what exactly we are *testing*. The method in which we test directly affects the method in which we teach. Grant Wiggins, a researcher and consultant on school reform issues, states, "...tests determine what teachers actually teach and what students will study for..." (Wiggins "Teaching to the (Authentic) Test 41). Teachers help students to practice what they need to know now to pass the test they will take later. Students must understand why they are learning the information, and the most immediate answer (although hopefully not the only answer), is that they will be tested on it. Therefore, the assessments teachers design in their classrooms are essentially

the classrooms they are creating. “Teaching to the test” does not harm students or make classrooms meaningless. The test itself is what determines how well teachers teach.

In American public schools, assessments often appear in the form of multiple-choices, short answers, and timed-responses. “The United States is the only major country that relies so heavily on norm-referenced, short-answer tests instead of performance – and/or classroom-based assessment on a national level” (Wiggins “Teaching to the (Authentic) Test” 44). These traditional tests ask students to recall information, memorize, and plug in answers. They teach students that there is a right and wrong to every question. Wiggins explains, “Students come to believe that learning is cramming; teachers come to believe that tests are after-the-fact, imposed nuisances composed of contrived questions – irrelevant to their intent and success” (Wiggins “The Case for Authentic Assessment” 3-4). Thus elements of judgment, argument, and inquiry are not required to be part of a teaching methodology since they do not appear on tests. “The move toward more authentic tasks and outcomes thus improves teaching and learning: students have greater clarity about their obligations (and are asked to master more engaging tasks), and teachers can come to believe that assessment results are both meaningful and useful for improving instruction” (Wiggins “The Case for Authentic Assessment” 4). As teachers we did not envision ourselves as merely monitors of performance.

But what are “authentic” tasks? What types of things should students learn that would engage them and move them toward independent thinking? Individual departments should answer those questions as they develop meaningful objectives for content areas.

One way to develop such objectives is to look at the array of tasks students are asked to complete in colleges and professional settings. If we can begin to mirror the instructional activities of higher-level institutions, we may better equip students to take part in their learning and reduce the one-answer test questions. “In many colleges and all professional settings the essential challenges are known in advance...Traditional tests, by requiring complete secrecy for their validity, make it difficult for teachers and students to rehearse and gain the confidence that come from knowing their performance obligations”

(Wiggins “The Case for Authentic Assessment” 3). Tests should simulate some real-world challenge, whether that challenge involves problem solving, working together with a group, or understanding a formula. Wiggins notes that authentic tests will offer a variety of methods with which students may demonstrate knowledge or mastery. After individual departments determine the challenges they want students to confront, they can work together to find meaningful, performance-based assessment tools.

One assessment tool that demonstrates thinking and learning in all disciplines is writing. A report done by The National Commission on Writing explores the importance of writing instruction in schools. “Writing is how students connect the dots in their knowledge” (“The Neglected ‘R’” 3). George Hillocks claims, “When schools are truly interested in higher level thinking, they demand a good deal of writing on complex topics,” (Hillocks 6). However, The National Commission discovered that the teaching and practice of writing, “...are increasingly shortchanged throughout the school and college years” and thus is the “R” that has been neglected. The report goes on to examine the reasons why writing is not taught in schools. These reasons are the perpetual

complaints of English teachers: lack of time, subjective grading practices, and a dearth in technological resources. As class sizes are not projected to decrease, English teachers have such large numbers of students that they cannot assign and assess the quantity of writing that would be optimal for students. Also, since teachers ultimately teach to the test (often mandated by the state), and the mandated tests are largely traditional in format, there is no emphasis at the state and national levels placed on writing instruction in the classroom. Since writing is thinking, not a black-and-white memorized answer, multiple-choice tests cannot test writing. There is a belief that a correlation exists between teaching grammar and usage in a multiple-choice format and improvement in writing. Teachers who view writing as a skill to be learned do believe that grammar drills improve writing. I find that rote drills help students learn a proper vocabulary for grammatical terms. On the other hand, even though students can label a noun and a pronoun, I do not see improvement in their thinking or confidence in their writing as they learn grammar rules.

Since the advent of the federal program No Child Left Behind, most public schools that strive to receive federal funding are accentuating student improvement on standardized tests. As in most Virginia schools, in Hanover County, a heavy emphasis is placed upon standardized tests and Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) which is a portion of the No Child Left Behind legislation. The Virginia Standard of Learning (SOL) test does include a writing prompt, so writing must be taught in our English classes. Therefore, the question is not whether we are teaching writing in high school, but what *type* of writing we are teaching. Hillocks notes, “the kinds of writing selected [on statewide writing tests]

indicate what the state regards as important and what it sees as the nature of writing” (Hillocks 19). The kinds of writing tested in schools dictates the kinds of writing teachers focus upon in their classrooms, and the methods they use to teach that writing.

A. What is the SOL?

In Virginia, the largest mandated assessment is the Standard Of Learning (SOL) test. All students, whether bound for the University of Richmond, VCU, or J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College, must pass a certain number of SOL tests to graduate from high school. According to Wiggins, Virginia teachers are designing classrooms solely to prepare students to pass this test, although many of us would indignantly deny this claim. The Virginia Department of Education, however, designed these assessments to make schools and thus teachers accountable for what they are teaching. This accountability affects whether or not our school is deemed “accredited” by the federal government. “To ensure that all local education personnel understood that s/he was responsible for doing whatever necessary to ensure that students master the standards, the state designed an accreditation system that required schools to show adequate performance on the standards-related tests to earn state accreditation” (“Study of the Effectiveness of the Virginia Standards of Learning Reforms” 4). Schools must have a 70% pass rate on the SOLs to be deemed accredited. In 2004, students who did not pass six SOL tests were not eligible to receive a Standard Diploma. After that date, schools that have not reached full accreditation must give students the option of going to another, fully accredited school. If these requirements were not stringent enough, the DOE added another piece to make

teachers accountable. “To add teeth to this system of standards-tests-accreditation, the state required the results of all tests and accreditation levels...to be made public annually in the School Performance Report Card (“Study of the Effectiveness of the Virginia Standards of Learning Reforms” 5). Therefore, all educators and parents know that the results of SOL tests will be publicized on the VDOE website, and often in local newspapers. The communities will know which SOLs students are passing. Teachers will feel pressure to make sure their students perform satisfactorily on these publicized tests, and thus the SOLs will affect all classroom instruction.

1. How the SOL Test Affects High School Writing Instruction

Since teachers are so strongly encouraged to focus on teaching to the SOLs, it is important to note what ramifications our students, our methods, and our classroom structure have undergone. I have focused my study on how the presence of the SOLs in secondary classrooms has affected writing instruction, although I know this final assessment has affected instruction in other disciplines as well.

Students in Hanover County take the writing SOL in March of their junior year, and it is split into two parts: multiple-choice and a writing prompt. One day is dedicated to each component. The writing prompt has created a flurry of paperwork in our school system. We have mandatory practice prompts we administer four times a year to all grade levels. The final version of the prompt cannot be graded, though participation grades may be assigned. Ideally, these practice SOL prompts are given to simulate the real SOL experience. So, students receive an unfamiliar question, usually eliciting a personal

response (i.e. If you could tell the next generation something about yours, what would it be? What invention has impacted your life the most?). Teachers must evaluate these prompts using the SOL rubric, give a student a grade out of five possible points, and have the students get the essays signed by parents. We can assign a participation grade to the prompt, but we cannot evaluate the writing itself.

The practice prompts do emulate the ones given on the real SOL test. Since these prompts have no relation to the content studied in English classes, teachers, myself included, usually assign them on the most unproductive days: day before a holiday, day after a holiday, day with a substitute teacher. I rarely use them as part of my writing instruction since responses are often thoughtless due to the generic nature of the question. Students are not excited by the prompts; they would much rather generate their own essay questions and topics. The *Virginia SOL Technical Manual (1998)* details how prompts are written. “Prompts were written in the form of a question, issue, or hypothetical situation” (13). Members on the prompt-writing committee for the original SOL tests never asked students about what interests them, or what they might want to write about. Field studies were completed in 1997 to test the effectiveness of the original prompts: “...scorers and team leaders recorded their observations about student responses to each prompt” (17). Then team leaders compiled a “qualitative report” that answered questions such as “Did students seem engaged by the prompt?” (17) How does one qualify a level of engagement with a prompt? Did these team leaders ask any of the students how they liked the prompt? The report does not give findings of this qualitative report.

Although teachers are heavily focused on teaching students to pass this writing prompt, I do not think they are truly teaching writing. Not only are the prompts generated outside of the classroom, but they are administered as one-shot bursts. True, the tests are un-timed. A student may write his prompt for four hours or more during the actual test. Therefore, students do have a chance to plan what they want to write, compose rough drafts and freewritings, revise and edit in a recursive nature. Students learn that writing may take a bit of time, but at the end (of one class period), it is finished. They do not need to ruminate on what they have written, change any arguments, or discuss their ideas with anyone else. They begin and end the writing process in a finite amount of time and never return to what they have written. There is evidence of planning on their rough paper, but the true nature of process writing, that is using writing as a recursive activity in order to think and reflect on that thinking, is not really learned through practice SOL prompts. Teachers may stop teaching process writing in their classes if this type of writing is not tested. Hillocks cites a study done by Applebee in 1981 in which he claims that the vast majority of teachers, “expected students to write a composition and do well on a single draft. They did not provide preplanning, revising, and other parts of what many teachers now refer to as the composing process” (Hillocks 29). According to Hillocks, most teachers did not teach writing as thinking in 1981. Those of us who are currently teaching are also not required to teach writing as thinking since that type of composition process is not assessed by the SOL writing test.

As teachers have looked back at past prompts, we have found that the quality of writing is still quite low on SOL tests. Students are not using writing as a tool for

thinking, as they need to at the post-secondary level. In this same study, Hillocks found, “only three percent of lesson time was devoted to longer writing requiring the student to produce a paragraph of coherent text” (Hillocks 28). If teachers abandon personal, creative, expressive writing, and are tempted to make an SOL prompt the only major assignment as they prepare students for the test, students will certainly never bridge the gap and prepare for college-level writing. Our county only asks English teachers to confirm we are assigning the practice SOL prompts. Teachers are never asked to attest to any other form of writing instruction happening in the classroom, nor show how we evaluate other types of writing. Thus, teachers could assign four random writing prompts a year and never grade a single piece.

The multiple-choice section of the writing SOL focuses on grammar, spelling, mechanics, and editing. Wiggins and I agree that multiple-choice tests in general do not prepare students to think, but as I teach the SOLs, I find this type of test is actually detrimental to writing instruction. There are some multiple-choice questions that ask students to revise drafts of “student” papers. One question on a 2002 SOL asks, “Which of these should be revised because it is not a complete sentence?” The creator of this question is assuming that a sentence should always be revised if it is not complete. A question like this one limits a writer’s style and choice in his or her writing. Another question on this same SOL test states, “Sentence 3 is not in the correct sequence. Sentence 3 is directly placed after--” Again, I think there is more than one way to place sentences in a paragraph. Sometimes sentences are “mis” placed for emphasis or purpose. Questions like these teach students that there is a right and wrong to writing and that they

must conform to one style. A third question that sparks debate in my classes is: “How is sentence 8 best rewritten?” The revisions of sentence 8 are so interesting that my class humors me as I dissect each possibility, noting the pros and cons of each choice. Why should students choose what is “best” about a sentence? A better test would ask for a choice along with a justification for that sentence. I see the SOL multiple-choice section on the writing test as a step backward in instruction on style, choice, voice, and poetic license -- the techniques that make writing exciting.

Some of the 11th grade English writing SOLs do coincide with Wiggins’ ideas on performance-based assessment. They mandate that students create their knowledge through practice, inquiry, and sometimes collaboration. SOL 11.7 is “The student will write in a variety of forms with the emphasis on persuasion.” Other 11th grade SOLs ask teachers to evaluate oral presentations and help students find connections between a historical and literary perspective. These are excellent objectives for teachers to incorporate into their classrooms. However, these SOLs cannot be assessed through multiple-choice testing. “SOLs that could not appropriately be tested by a multiple-choice item format were identified and excluded from testing” (*Virginia Standards of Learning Technical Manual 5*). Teachers whose goal it is to teach to the test do not have to teach these items as they will not appear on any formal assessment. Subsequently, it would be very easy to skip over these more challenging performance-based items in a curriculum and focus on what will be condensed into multiple-choice.

2. How the SOL Test Affects Cognitive Development

The right-and-wrong nature of multiple choice testing sets students up to rule out the notion that there could be many plausible solutions to certain situations, and perpetuates the Dualistic mode of thinking that Perry describes. Students might never be able to move past this world view because they will always see the person with the answer key as the Authority, and the answers on the key as the Absolutes. “For the dualist, knowing the world means memorizing the Absolutes and applying them to individual instances” (Bizzell “William Perry and Liberal Education” 298). If classrooms are set up as multiple-choice testing grounds, students will forever be hunting for the right and wrong answers, the truth, and will not have an opportunity to embrace another’s perspective, and thus move into the realm of Relativism.

Multiple-choice style tests are not meaningless tools of student achievement. Educators can quickly assess how much information a student has retained on a particular subject, as well as how much information a student still needs to learn. These tests measure one student’s ability against another. “When we construct a norm-referenced test, we do so in order to compare students with one another...” (Ormrod 604). This information is often valuable in helping teachers realize which students need more specialized instruction, but solely utilizing these types of tests is dangerous because “...students are unlikely to be motivated to study much for norm-referenced tests if they believe that, no matter what they do, they are likely to score at the bottom of the class” (609). If students are always measured against their peers, the lowest achieving students will constantly be defeated. Also, most students will study only what they believe will be

on the test. “If they expect to be tested only on their knowledge of specific, isolated bits of information...then many of them will focus on learning at a rote, meaningless level” (604). These tests do not emulate “real life” problem-solving. “When working adults need to recall certain information in order to perform their jobs, they rarely have the assistance of four multiple choice alternatives to help them remember” (605).

Paper and pencil tests are more efficient than performance-based assessments because results can be obtained quickly and data can be produced around how many students have learned a certain percentage of material. But one multiple-choice test cannot and should not measure all the learning a child will do in his secondary education. Students, and some teachers, view the SOL test as the ultimate target of learning and teaching. The atmosphere in many classrooms after the test is one of relief and relaxation; they do not treat the SOL as a standard but a high goal. Teachers are not required to incorporate writing instruction into their classrooms beyond preparing students for this test. Thus this test is potentially detrimental to high school writing instruction. If a significant amount of high school writing instruction consists of random prompts, grammar drills, and multiple-choice editing, our students will hardly be ready to compete in the college classrooms that force them to move away from truth-hunting, past selfish interpretations of the world, and into the realm of embracing their social surroundings and incorporating different values into their perspectives, as Perry and Bizzell argue they must do in order to be successful in higher education. They will not be equipped to think for themselves when they are faced with “real world” problems, and the gap between high school writing classrooms and college composition courses will persist.

B. What is the New SAT Essay?

While all students must take the SOL test in high school, only students who plan to attend four-year institutions must take the SAT test. These students are not necessarily in the most advanced classes, and many of them sit in mainstream classes that are integrated with a large number of special education students. While the SAT is optional, in Hanover County the PSAT is administered to all 10th graders regardless of their post-high school plans. So all students in the school are familiar with the format and content of the SAT. No matter what type of writing instruction students receive, if they plan to go to college, they must all sit for the new SAT essay.

The College Board has developed a new SAT that was first administered in the spring of 2005. There are several new aspects to the revised test, but one major addition is the new essay. Why did the College Board develop this essay? Their answer is to generate awareness of the importance of writing in high school. The essay has been added in order to boost writing instruction at the high school level to help students prepare for the rigorous writing tasks that await them in college. In January 2003, the College Board surveyed 2351 educators including high school teachers, college professors (of various disciplines), and English department heads concerning writing instruction in their classrooms. “The survey focused on how frequently these [writing] skills were covered, the importance of the skills for students entering their first year of college, the kind and frequency of writing and reading done in class and out of class, and the level of proficiency of college freshmen” (www.collegeboard.com). The

“composition skills” that rated “very important” in the survey include: “writing a clear and coherent essay,” “using supporting details and examples,” and “developing a logical argument” (www.collegeboard.com). These skills are thus the main features the new SAT essay plans to examine.

Some competitive colleges also found that the application essays they received were not evidence of a student’s true writing ability. Teachers, parents, and peers could have influenced, and often heavily influence, the content and style of an applicant’s essay. Colleges realized that they needed a more reliable writing sample.

There could be another answer to why the College Board created a third component to their already lengthy, two-part test. A trend had begun to stop using SAT scores as forecasters of anything. John Cloud, a contributor to *Time Magazine*, writes that Richard Atkinson, the president of the University of California, discovered that high school classrooms in his state were streamlining their curriculums solely to prepare students for this one test. He deduced that students were learning how to become test-takers instead of critical readers and writers. He then recommended that his university – the College Board’s biggest client – stop soliciting scores from its 76,000 yearly applicants. “If U.C. had followed through on the recommendation, the board could have lost a huge pool of students, who pay \$28.50 each to take the SAT” (Cloud 53-54). And most students take the SAT more than once. The College Board had to start aligning their test with national concerns in secondary school instruction and curriculum.

Regardless of why this writing portion has been added, teachers are feeling the pressure to prepare their students to succeed on the new essay. “Scorewrite: A Guide to

Preparing for the New SAT Essay” is a guidebook that was distributed to high school counselors and teachers in College Board workshops during the 2004-2005 school year. This book is designed to familiarize educators with the format of the new SAT essay and details strategies teachers might employ in English classrooms to prepare students for the test. It states that the new writing section will measure “a student’s mastery of developing and expressing ideas effectively” (1). The document gives criteria for this “effective writing” including: “sustained focus,” “skillful coherence,” “precise use of language,” and “clear lines of reasoning” (2).

The guidebook explains the format of the essay. Students must answer a given prompt, prefaced with a quote or short passage from an “authentic” (usually historical or literary) text. Students are asked to focus essays on the issues addressed in the prompt, and their responses may be personal and/or persuasive in manner. According to the guidebook, the twenty-five minute time constraint is “...similar to those they will encounter on essay examinations in college courses” (1). Certainly students will write timed responses on exams in college, but in my research of the composition classes at the three Virginia post-secondary institutions, I did not find evidence of emphasis placed on timed-writings.

The College Board offers tips on its website for students who are daunted by this new writing task. They have written a section called “Strategies for Success on the SAT Essay.” In this section they mention that the readers are not simply looking for a strict, five-paragraph essay or a very lengthy criticism. What they really want are “...essays that insightfully develop a point of view with appropriate reasons and examples and use

language skillfully”(www.collegeboard.com). They encourage students not to rush or simplify points but to fully explain each argument. They believe two well-examined arguments are stronger than many examples that are not explained.

There is also a section on the website entitled “The Keys to Effective Writing” to help students who are not strong writers. This section discusses writing as “...not just an end result but also a process that helps you develop your ideas and think logically” (www.collegeboard.com). If a writer is frustrated, the College Board encourages him or her to share ideas with other students or teachers for new perspectives and motivation. This section describes the purpose and importance of a rough draft. “You may find as you write that you end up with a different idea than the one you began with. If your first topic or conclusion doesn’t hold water, be open to changing it.” At the end of a writing session, the College Board advises students to “...take a break so you can come back to your writing with fresh eyes.” Students should proofread and examine arguments for validity and relevance. They also suggest that students “Leave enough time to show your draft to others” (www.collegeboard.com).

All of these tips and notions about writing are very process-oriented. The College Board seems to look at writing as recursive in nature as well as a collaborative effort among peers, teachers and the writer herself. They do not stress a “correct order” necessary to turn out a piece of writing, nor do they prescribe a formulaic approach to getting writing done. However, the actual writing they assign must be completed in twenty-five minutes. The twenty-five minute time allotment includes prewriting, outlining, writing, and revising. There is no time for collaboration, let alone freewriting

or brainstorming. In the 2004-2005 “SAT Preparation Booklet” the advice is: “Spend five minutes on planning. Use your test booklet to create a quick outline... You only have twenty-five minutes to write your essay, so don’t spend too much time outlining” (31). If students have been practicing writing using the tips the College Board offered, they will use writing as thinking; they will take breaks and revise as they write. As the “Scorewrite” guidebook recommends, “Students should take five minutes to plan and organize their response to the assignment, and then write their essay in the remaining 20 minutes” (2). There is not even time to revise at the end of the writing session. They will not be prepared for this rushed period of intense writing about a topic they have never seen, even though they can respond from personal experience.

The guidebook does spell out the accommodations that the College Board allows based on this limited amount of writing time. They acknowledge that “...an essay written in a short amount of time will not be polished but represents the initial phase of the writing process: the first draft” (1). If this first draft is similar to the “rough draft” the College Board mentioned on their website, the product may not be fully coherent or artfully crafted since the College Board encourages students to write a rough draft that starts in one place and ends up in a different one. However, in order to score a 6 on the grading rubric (the highest rating), an essay must “effectively and insightfully develop a point of view on the issue and demonstrate outstanding critical thinking.” A typical essay in this category “is well organized and clearly focused, demonstrating clear coherence and smooth progression of ideas” and should be “free of most errors in grammar, usage and mechanics” (“Scorewrite: A Guide to Preparing for the New SAT Essay” 4). A first

draft that demonstrates all of these qualities is not only polished but quite difficult for high school students to write in twenty-five minutes using the process-approach encouraged by the College Board.

When I attended the College Board workshop for counselors and teachers in Ashland, Virginia, February 24th 2005, and I received these materials, I was frustrated not only by the discrepancies in their views on teaching and assessing writing. When I looked at the wording of the prompts, I thought about my standard level English students. Most of them are not motivated English students, almost all of them have low reading comprehension skills, and many of them are college-bound. The first sentence of the essay prompt in the guidebook reads “Is discontent often the first step to action?” Many of my struggling readers and writers would have difficulty answering this question, not because they do not hold a valid opinion on the subject, but because they would not understand vocabulary such as “discontent.” The word is contextually defined in the quote that precedes the prompt, but there are other words surrounding the definition such as “revolution,” “widespread,” and “untroubled.” I think my students would have difficulty with many of these words, and therefore would not be able to fully comprehend the prompt. The “Scorewrite” says, “Prompts are easily accessible to the general test-taking population, including those for whom English is a second language” (2). I gave this prompt for a practice writing assignment to my standard-level, native-English speakers. Hands shot into the air and foreheads fell into palms before they even picked up their pencils for their five-minute brainstorming session. I could hear bewildered whispers, “What is discontent?” “What action do they mean?” My students psyched

themselves out of answering a fairly simple question before they gave themselves a chance to think. In my experience, I have not found that these prompts are easily accessible.

College admissions programs will have difficulty determining how to use the assessments as predictors of student success in college. In Research Report #99-3 created by the College Board, the near impossibility of assessing writing ability is outlined. The report lists cognitive skills necessary within the theoretical writing domain (interpreting, analyzing, synthesizing, organizing) and types of knowledge, but declares "...no single test could possibly assess the full domain" (Breland 1). Therefore, the report notes, testing programs should carefully design tests with specific skills to be assessed so test users can determine what each test may indicate about a test taker's ability (1).

In another College Board Research Report #2005-1, Milewski captures the purpose of the SAT essay and what specific skills will be tested: "The essay measures the test-taker's ability to develop a point of view on an issue presented in an excerpt; use reasoning and evidence based on his or her reading, studies, experience, and observations to support that point of view;" (Milewski 3). In Breland's research he mentions the Flower and Hayes (1981) recursive model of the writing process. This model includes three basic elements: the task environment, the cognitive writing processes (planning, text generation, and revision), and the writer's long-term memory. The model shows a constant flow among these elements throughout the writing process. Breland notes "Comparing this model of writing to the usual writing assessment situation, with its imposed time constraints, reveals that planning and revision are two aspects of the model

that assessments rarely emphasize” (3). In the SAT grading rubric, there is no way to assess a student’s thinking about his or her writing or his revision process. Thus, the SAT essay can only measure and examine the text generation of a writer. Breland echoes my thoughts when he states, “If planning and revision are important parts of the writing process...then it would seem important to include them in assessments of writing” (3). Yet, if Milewski claims the SAT essay illustrates a student’s ability to develop an idea and use experiences and observation for support, the acts of planning, revising, and using long-term memory must be included in that process. In his statement he assures those colleges and educators who use the SAT essay as a predictor that it actually does measure a student’s ability to write, even though the assessment leaves out many critical pieces of the writing process.

In College Board report #2004-1, Breland discusses factors that could weaken the validity of a test and identifies one factor as *construct underrepresentation*. “Construct underrepresentation occurs when it is not feasible to assess all important aspects of a construct” (Breland 4). Some of Breland’s examples of *construct underrepresentation* include multiple-choice questions that measure something other than what the assessment intends, narrative writing when a test is meant to measure analytical writing skills, and “the use of extremely constrained time limits, allowing no time for planning or revision” (4). The SAT essay is administered for only twenty-five minutes which leaves students hardly enough time to write an entire essay, let alone revise and plan. This very restricted time limit could represent *construct underrepresentation* and therefore weaken the validity of the SAT test results.

In the survey results report written by Milewski, both high school and college teachers were asked to rank the importance of given writing process skills on a scale of one to three. *Understanding writing as a process of invention and rethinking* was ranked among the top 26 skills and received a rating of almost 2.75 (Milewski 10). Although the grading rubric does state that a highly scored paper should be free of most grammar, usage, and mechanics errors, there are no points awarded on the grading rubric for evidence of thoughtful revision. Students must demonstrate their ability to revise in the multiple-choice section. “The improving sentences type of question measures the student’s ability to recognize and correct faults in usage and sentence structure as well as to recognize effective sentences that follow the conventions of standard written English” (3). As an English teacher, I imagine the educators who completed this survey meant that students need to practice revising their *own* writing, not proofreading for mistakes in other writers’ drafts.

In an interview on NPR with Steve Inskeep, Bernard Phalen, a high school English teacher and committee member who helped develop the SAT essay questions, discusses the types of questions students could encounter on the prompt. He says they are argumentative in nature and ask students to “...take a position on that issue and explain and develop it” (NPR Morning Edition 2005). During the interview Inskeep simulates the experience of answering a prompt as Phalen comments throughout the process. At one point, Inskeep tries to start the essay and claims the first sentence is always hardest. After he jots down his first rather general attempt, he asks Phalen how he is doing. Phalen answers, “So far you’re doing what’s called throat clearing. You don’t know what you

want to write about yet, but you're going to put words down on the page until you know." I encourage my students to do this type of "throat clearing" when they begin their writing in order to help them figure out what they think about a subject. However, if they utilized this prewriting technique on the SAT, they would receive a low score, at least from Phalen.

Inskeep continues to try and write his essay, but starts this time from a personal experience. Phalen praises him and says the statement sounds much more authentic. However, if Inskeep had not started the way he did, he may not have gotten around to the good, personal writing that finally materialized. I agree with Phalen that sweeping generalizations at the start of essays are not usually impressive, but students do not have time during the SAT to start one place and finish in another. Phalen says, "It's amazing. People are always writing, but they're not always thinking." Any teacher who promotes writing from a process approach believes just the opposite. We write in order to think. Unfortunately, that type of writing does not score well on the SAT.

1. How the SAT Essay Affects High School Writing Instruction

The repercussions of this new mandated essay will echo in high school writing classrooms. I believe, as does the College Board, that more writing needs to occur in English classrooms, and I also believe that adding this component to the SAT will generate greater awareness of the importance of writing among high school English teachers. I do not believe that this assessment will improve student writing or writing instruction, nor will these timed, first draft attempts lead to the "skill" of writing a clear

and coherent essay that the College Board rated as most important among secondary and post-secondary educators.

In a study done by the National Council of Teachers of English in April 2005, a group of college writing teachers investigated the impacts of the new SAT essay as well as the ACT test (also administered by the College Board) on high school writing instruction. They found that although the SAT now requires students to write, the type of writing preparation that will be emphasized in high school classrooms is not the kind that will encourage a process approach. The group mentioned they have “grave concerns about the potential effects of this kind of large-scale writing test on writing instruction in secondary schools” (“The Impact of the SAT and ACT Timed Writing Tests” 7). One of the concerns mentioned by the committee is that the writing tasks offered by the College Board “are generally decontextualized and artificial, with no reference to the crucial rhetorical matters of audience and purpose” (7). Thus, if teachers want to prepare students for this writing test, they may have to omit lessons on using writing as a process to develop critical thought and focus on writing as a tool to answer an unseen, unstudied prompt. “Important components of effective writing are likely to be implicitly or explicitly discouraged by teachers who will understandably be concerned about helping students manage the required writing tasks in the short allotted time...the kind of instruction likely to be used to prepare students for the new SAT – prepares students poorly for college-level writing tasks and workplace writing tasks” (7). Therefore the new SAT essay may have a detrimental effect on high school writing instruction if that is

the only type of writing that teachers teach, and may perpetuate the influx of inexperienced writers coming into college-level writing classes.

Lack of voice may already be a negative result of the SAT essay felt in high school writing classrooms. John Cloud participated in a simulation of a grading session with members from the College Board in order to understand the process. He experienced difficulty in determining a grade for vague phrases like “insightfully addressed the writing task” and “facility with language.” He noted that the grading done by the committee rewarded the blandest essays. “I gave a 5 to a kid who had written a funny, subtle first-person account of a friend who had slacked off his studies and begun dressing ‘like a pimp’ in order to impress the cool kids. The other graders gave the essay 2’s and 3’s; there was only one 4” (Cloud 55). After they graded all of the essays, “...we 15 readers uniformly agreed on a grade for none. On most of the essays, the lowest score was 3 full points away from the highest” (55). The students are remunerated for rigid, dry essays that do not reflect their personal styles or voices. This type of writing directly opposes the writing I encourage kids to generate in my classes, and does not seem to reflect what college professors are hoping to find in writing portfolios.

As I previously mentioned, Grant Wiggins points out that teachers teach to the test, and certain variables create distinct differences among types of tests. Hillocks discusses important variables such as “length of time that the students have for writing, the amount of or access to information for the writing , scoring procedures, and the stakes involved” (Hillocks 64). We know the limited time allotted to students to write the SAT essay, and we also know that the stakes for these college-bound students are high. The

graders of the SAT essay are taught to grade quickly and “holistically” in which they evaluate not the parts of the essay but how those parts work together to create the entire effect. This type of grading does not consider planning, revision, or progression of thought, so teachers may not emphasize those important aspects of the writing process when helping students prepare for the SAT essay. Students who are taught the prescriptive 5-paragraph essay format are comfortable stating a claim, proving the argument, and concluding what they have proven. Therefore, teachers will be encouraged to continue to teach writing as a product, a tidy package that will leave the right impression on rapid, holistic scoring. This type of teaching could easily perpetuate a formulaic style of writing. Brad MacGowan, president of the New England ACAC, states, “...the effect of this addition [SAT essay] may, in practice, cause the wrong type of teaching at the secondary level...The speeded nature of the test and the ‘holistic’ scoring rubric that will determine a student’s score may corrupt the teaching of good writing” (MacGowan 1). Teachers will be so focused on showing students a reliable form that they may lose sight of the process that is involved in good essay writing. Most writing assigned in high school classrooms has the potential to remain a first draft, 5-paragraph attempt.

Melanie Hammer, co-director of the Long Island Writing Project, shares this concern. As an associate professor at Nassau Community College, she teaches under-prepared students to write successfully in college composition classes, “The pressure of high-stakes testing has continued to ensure a steady stream of students into my classes who have been taught to write by formula to pass a test-” (Hammer 1). She believes

these types of standardized writing tests will cause a decline in the teaching of writing and be detrimental to students when they try to write in college. “That kind of surface attention to form over substance, giving up consideration of complex ideas because they don’t fit neatly into the structure, will not serve them well in college or, I would argue, in their adult lives” (2). Hammer also believes that since there is so much pressure on teachers who are evaluated by test scores, they will begin teaching solely to tests like the SAT, and, “The test writing is, in many ways, much simpler” (2). Students who have been exposed to open-ended, thoughtful prompts will learn critical thinking skills. If they have been shown how to revisit their arguments, write reflectively, and use writing to spark their thinking, even if that thinking sometimes stops in a dead end, they will understand process writing. These students, aided with the proper strategies, will already be prepared to excel on a shorter, timed-essay like the new SAT. They will be prepared to go far beyond that type of writing. If teachers streamline writing instruction so narrowly that they only teach students to be prepared for a twenty-five minute, holistically scored essay test, the process of good writing will vanish altogether from high school classrooms.

One reason the SAT essay was implemented is because parents, educators, and the public in general believe that there exists a dearth of writing instruction in high school English classes. One public supporter of the SAT essay, Patte Barth, writes in an editorial to the *Washington Post*, “Of course the SAT essay could be better. But it is certainly good enough to send a strong signal to high schools that they need to make sure all their students are taught to write. And that means actually doing some writing for class.” If

parents believe their students are receiving no writing instruction in their English classes, the race for tutors in programs like Kaplan and the Princeton Reviews will be on.

Students will find themselves enrolled in “coaching” sessions in order to learn the writing their English teachers are apparently not teaching. Brad MacGowan cautions against this trend. “If good coaching and good teaching were the same thing, that would at least be an advantage for those who can afford it. However, coaching is not good writing instruction, it is teach-to-the-test, format-driven, and rubric-driven instruction drills” (MacGowan 2). Students will be further encouraged to write prescriptively. Yet, only those who can afford such coaching sessions will benefit, thus “...the new section of the test will only exacerbate the inequalities already present in the test.” (2). Students with enough means and supportive parents will try more vigorously to “get ahead” while not really learning good writing, and students who are not able to buy a supplemental education will receive even less, however sub-par, writing instruction.

I have always taught my students that quality, not quantity, counts in good essay writing. I discourage filling pages with babble just to reach the required amount, and I criticize efforts to make papers longer with margins and double-spacing. The SAT essay, however, seems to promote lengthy, repetitive documents that are not necessarily proving a strong point. Dr. Les Perelman, a director of undergraduate writing at MIT, questioned whether high marks were awarded to longer essays. Assured by a panel member from the College Board that he was mistaken, Dr. Perelman took all of the released “anchor” samples from the College Board website, counted the words, and created an Excel spreadsheet. He was shocked with his findings. “I have never found a quantifiable

predictor in 25 years of grading that was anywhere near as strong as this one...If you just graded them based on length without ever reading them, you'd be right over 90 percent of the time” (Winerip 1). He discovered that the shortest essays got the lowest scores and the longest invariably received the highest scores. Thus the College Board is rewarding essays simply on their verbosity; not on the quality of the writing, the level of critical thinking, or the facility with language. They are affirming the old myths that cause students to believe that teachers don't read long papers and give high grades for effort. Dr. Perelman's findings could be detrimental not only to students' views on good writing but to the techniques teachers utilize to prepare students for the SAT essay.

Although Perelman's empirical evidence makes his case seemingly inarguable, there may be a caveat to Perelman's argument that needs to be stated. Generally, students who are more comfortable with writing, who enjoy the process of writing, and who are deemed better writers write longer papers. They write more than necessary for classroom assignments because writing is a strength. These adept writers are likely some of the students who are writing the verbose essays because writing comes more naturally to them. Less confident, possibly weaker writers probably write less even in a 25-minute time span because they consistently write the minimum amount for writing assignments. Although this argument helps to refute Perelman's point, the College Board has not widely printed it as a retort or a possible explanation for the high marks on the longest essays. Whether the best writers are writing the longest essays or not, the emergence of the SAT essay into the lives of high school students and teachers will likely privilege this one form of writing over others that students will need in college and in life.

Despite the possible negative implications of the SAT essay, college admissions will still use the test as a predictor of student post-secondary success, and perhaps use the writing score to determine placement in English classes. Granted, according to the College Board, the most accurate predictor is a combination of high school scores, SAT scores and SAT II scores (Cloud 54). Hopefully high school scores will start to reflect the type of writing instruction that teaches students to think, process, and revise as they wrestle with a piece of writing for appropriate periods of time. Maybe this type of composition pedagogy will help students as they initially bridge the gap from high school to college, and they will begin to be successful in their freshman writing classes without the “deprogramming” that is often necessary by college instructors. If teachers can use the new SAT essay as a springboard for discussions on writing instead of the final goal of the process, maybe this assessment will not weaken the instruction of writing that is taking place at the secondary level.

2. How the SAT Essay Affects Cognitive Development

The new SAT essay will strongly affect high school English classes, and college instructors will feel the impact. Students who have excelled in high school English classes will be specialists in one form of writing. These students who have filled pages with neat paragraphs containing the “correct” number of sentences to prove an overstated argument will be filing into freshman composition classes believing they know how to write. Dr. Perelman writes, “Unfortunately, many students enter college believing that the sloppy writing that got them there is the type of writing that colleges want” (Perelman 2).

College writing instructors will find students unequipped to handle the planning and revising that must accompany a good writing portfolio. “College teachers often spend the first year ‘deprogramming’ students from writing formulaic ‘five-paragraph essays,’ thinking that a first draft is a final draft, believing form is more important than content, and equating quantity with quality. The SAT essay will only encourage that kind of thinking” (2). Dennis Baron, English professor at the University of Illinois, notes that the SAT preparation guides stress the importance of good form in writing, and fears the repercussions. “...formulas like the five-paragraph essay, while common enough ‘in vitro,’ in school and on standardized tests, rarely occur ‘in vivo,’ in the more natural world of personal and on-the-job writing” (Baron 2). Writing these types of essays does not prepare students for college writing, but almost more importantly, does not introduce students to the actual world of writing outside of academic confines.

The SAT essay offers opportunity for one-sided responses from students and guides them to prove the validity of that choice. This type of prompt does not require a student to explore that valuable, “gray” area within which lives tension and meaning. The gray area is the bridge into higher-level thinking, and the springboard from which college composition classes ask students to jump. If they have not become familiar with an argument that could contain more than one right answer, students will not be equipped for college-level thinking. According to college professors and composition theorists, no one is required to write a five-paragraph essay in the “real” world. The problems with these formulaic essays sound similar to the problems of inexperienced writers. Their essays are centered on finding a correct answer to a thesis, or using incorrect information

as substantiation of an argument. “Typically, too, this kind of essay is either hypercorrect or fraught with errors that seem to have kept the student’s attention fixed on the sentence level, so underdeveloped are the ideas in the whole paper” (Bizzell “William Perry and Liberal Education” 301). Though writing should not be categorized as fitting neatly into one of Perry’s three world views, “it seems easy to identify such writing as the work of what Perry calls Dualist students,” (302). If students are only prepared for writing as it is on the new SAT essay, they will achieve only to a level of Absolutes and right or wrong facts.

The reported mission of the College Board’s new essay is to help prepare students to write under time constraints “similar to those they will encounter on essay examinations in college courses” (“Scorewrite: A Guide to Preparing for the New SAT Essay 1). This essay was designed to help students demonstrate their abilities to write “college-style” essays. Unfortunately, the twenty-five minute time limit does not simulate the conditions under which students will write for colleges, nor does a lengthy, prescriptive essay mirror those that college professors give high marks. Dr. Perelman agrees. “Nowhere except on examinations such as the SAT essay does an individual have to write so quickly on an unfamiliar topic. Indeed, aside from in-class college exams, most college writing assignments involve planning, writing and vigorous revising. Moreover, in-class college exams – like most papers produced in the workplace – tend to focus on material the writer knows” (Perelman 1-2). College students will not be asked to write about generalized, personal questions that have no basis on what they are studying. True, they need to be able to connect their worlds to what they are learning, but even in a

critically pedagogical classroom where the student may become the text, the student himself would generate his own questions about his world and his place in it. Melanie Hammer describes her experience writing her article about the new SAT essay. “I’m writing about something that I have experience with, something I’ve been thinking about, something I’ve invested in” (Hammer 1). I do not remember a college class that required me to tune into my world, engage in the discussions around me, connect my thoughts to literary or historical passages, and write a coherent essay in twenty-five minutes. When I did encounter examinations that required me to answer several essay questions in a finite amount of time, I had prepared my thoughts and answers through an entire semester of study.

In Melewski’s survey, College Board Report #2005-1, college and high school teachers outlined the types of writing assignments students could anticipate in their classes. High percentages went to: responses to texts, analyses of texts, and expository essays. College professors ranked argumentative essays highest as the most frequently assigned writing tasks. The College Board notes that a student could choose any rhetorical style in which to write his or her essay, and therefore the SAT essay is possible practice for each type. “Moreover, developing a point of view on an issue encompasses a variety of rhetorical strategies, including those used in writing a persuasive or argumentative essay, and entails some invention and rethinking” (Melewski 19).

Frank Cioffi, director of the writing program at Scripps College, agrees that argumentative writing is key in college classrooms, and does involve creativity and thought. In his article on student writing and the media he writes, “...all academic writing

starts with a problem, a hypothesis, or a question. And the idea is not to solve this problem or answer that question with previously extant notions. This kind of writing should offer something original, imaginative...this kind of writing looks at other answers and engages them, proving them in need of some rethinking, re-contextualizing, or re-imagining. And though its answer might not be perfect, it's closer – it asymptotically approaches a truth” (Cioffi 2). He discusses that writing should be a journey for students; it may take time to approach understanding. “Such discourse requires time and labor. It requires sustained analysis and construction of an intended audience” (3). Argumentative writing, according to Cioffi, is not a tidy process that ends in a conclusion much like where it started. It may take unexpected turns and go backwards before reaching a possible answer. He pans writing instruction that demands neat paragraphs and easy endings. “Consider, for example, the ‘five-paragraph essay’ so often taught in high schools around the country and further abetted by the new SAT exam” (4). He includes the new SAT essay because it does not offer students time to think about an issue that really engages them, wrestle with it, *write about it*, and make an argument.

The SAT essay grading rubric calls for “clear coherence, smooth progression of ideas, outstanding critical thinking.” It does not expressly dictate the 5-paragraph essay format. However, as Dr. Perelman fears, the wording in this rubric may encourage teachers to instruct students to stay within this comfortable prescriptive format as a way to guarantee logical organization. The argumentative writing so often assigned in college composition courses is not completed in twenty-five minutes, nor does it remain in an orderly structure of perfect coherence. This new essay is driving teachers to help students

make a point, prove it, and return to it in a short amount of time, with little of the thinking that Cioffi claims is so vital to students' development as writers. This writing is personal in nature, and may push students to discover there is more than one answer, thus delving into the Relativist stage of development. However, in such a structured time limit, students will not be able to observe their surroundings, make judgments and possibly incorporate the views of others, and therefore become Committed Relativists, as they must learn to do once they reach college.

Although the SAT essay invites students to write an argumentative essay, graders are not actually evaluating the students based upon their abilities to argue. In fact, according to Perelman, they are doing the opposite. He notes, "...students are not penalized for incorrect facts" (Winerip 1). He goes on to report in Winerip's article that the official guide for scorers explains: "Writers may make errors in facts or information that do not affect the quality of their essays... You are scoring the writing and not the correctness of facts." In order to make an argument like Cioffi is describing, not only must there be ample evidence for a case, but that evidence must be correct. A writer could not make a plausible claim if he is misstating the proof. In an interview on NPR in 2005, Perelman remarks, "They're [Students] encouraged to put in lots of details even if the details don't really fit the argument." Research papers require lists of sources in order for a reader to check the validity of a statement. The College Board does not check for validity, nor do they care if data are empirically wrong or statements are actually false. Students may score a 6 on the grading scale for their argumentative essay that is factually inaccurate. These students would not do well in Frank Cioffi's college writing class, in

Patricia Bizzell's composition class, or any class that calls for a Committed Relativist world view.

There is a way for students to discover how to use writing as thinking while still preparing for both the SOL writing prompt and the new SAT essay. Writing must become an integral part of every core subject area, and teachers must guide students to use writing as a way to explore their ideas before they must perform on a test. The curriculum dictated by the International Baccalaureate offers the amount and types of writing in all subject areas that will help students not only do well on state and federally mandated assessments, but will help prepare them for the writing and thinking they will do in college composition classes.

Moving to Close the Gap

The International Baccalaureate (IB) is an alternative to current high school writing instruction that can start to close the apparent writing and thinking gap that exists between high school and college writing classrooms. As the IB Coordinator in my school, I am familiar with this writing intensive curriculum that is compulsory across all subject areas. The writing students are required to complete includes expository, research, personal, exploratory, and analytical. The writing assignments vary in length, time allotment, and purpose, and help students see the relationship between their thinking and their writing.

The IB program moves closely in line with Perry and Bizzell's suggestions. The mission of the IB is to cultivate inquiring, knowledgeable young people through a rigorous academic program. The mission also encourages students "to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right" (IB Mission Statement). Not only is this program interested in educating students, but it emphasizes that they should embrace the differences they find in other people. Bizzell notes that in order to move from a Dualistic manner of thinking to become a Committed Relativist, we must realize that "well-intentioned people may hold beliefs different from our own" (Bizzell "William Perry and Liberal Education" 304). This idea is inherent within the IB program.

This international curriculum requires writing while overtly pushing students to become Committed Relativist thinkers. Every IB class is writing intensive, from visual arts, to math, to psychology. The WAC component of this program encourages students to view writing as part of their thinking and learning process, not just a final product in an English class. Many of the courses require students to research world languages, world literature, and incorporate opinions from other countries in order to discover their own beliefs about a subject. Bizzell encourages Perry's theory that not only widens students' perspectives but "fosters relativism by casting their beliefs into comparative relations with those of others" (Bizzell "William Perry and Liberal Education" 304). The IB program not only recommends such comparison of different cultures, it requires it in order for students to get the IB diploma.

There are drawbacks to any curriculum, and certainly the IB program is not for all students. The workload is demanding, the reading is strenuous, and the topics of study call for maturity and intellectual curiosity. Many have panned the program as elitist as it generally caters to motivated, academically driven students. However, the IB program was designed "to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect" (IB Mission Statement). Piaget believed that "children are not just passive receivers of environmental stimulation, but are naturally curious about their world and actively seek out information to help them understand and make sense out of that world" (Ormond 35). Therefore, the IB is focused on tuning into the natural curiosity that Piaget believed all students possess.

In some school districts, this very expensive program is selective and only available to students who have the grades and the money. In Hanover County, however, the program is available in all four high schools, there is no application process, and the County pays for all exams. Therefore, any student may sign up to take IB classes for free.

People often link the Advanced Placement (AP) program with the IB program, and since the AP has been around in the United States much longer, they are more comfortable with it. The AP program provides a tough, college-preparatory curriculum for academic students. However, there are some differences. First, the AP is not a comprehensive program. Students may pick and chose which AP classes they want to take, and presumably will take courses in which they can excel. Therefore, AP classes are taught for kids who are excellent in Calculus or budding English scholars. Not just any student could walk into an AP class and be successful. Students in the IB program must take all core IB classes, whether they excel in math or biology or not. IB teachers are trained to help even students who do not have a knack for the subject to become independent learners, and to make meaning and connections just like every other student.

Another difference that exists between IB and AP is the type of assessment students are required to perform. AP is designed with one exam at the end of the course that includes both a multiple-choice component and an essay question. A student's grade is determined based on this one assessment. IB classes have several performance-based assessments throughout the course of the program, which include projects, presentations, oral commentaries, interviews, and essays. Science courses have a multiple-choice test as

well as labs and papers. The IB assessments give students a range of ways to display their knowledge and several chances to show what they are learning.

A. What is the International Baccalaureate?

The origins of The International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) date back to post World War I. The tangible hostility between countries during the anxious peace of the 1920's and 1930's led to the establishment of the League of Nations and the awareness of the need for global understanding. In 1924 parents of the League necessitated bringing this awareness into their children's schools. Cooperation from French, German, and British faculty led to the birth of the International School of Geneva. The curriculum at The Ecole Internationale (shortened to Ecolint) became the first integrated, multicultural effort of what would later be recognized as the International Baccalaureate (Matthews and Hill 5).

Although the demographics of Ecolint were decidedly international, the curriculum remained fragmented. French students were siphoned into study groups to prepare for their country's *baccalaureate* exams. British students wishing to university in England had to prepare for their A-level exams. Alec Peterson, director of the Department of Educational Studies at Oxford, visited Ecolint and observed the splintered classes. After much travel, research, collaboration, and diligence, Peterson designed the IB program and included eight schools in a trial implementation. These schools spanned the geography of North America, South America, Europe, Africa, and the Middle East.

The IBO, a non-profit, educational foundation, was established in Geneva, Switzerland in 1968.

“Its original purpose was to facilitate the mobility of students internationally by providing schools with an upper secondary school diploma recognized by universities around the world” (“Overview of the IB in the United States”). Since its groundwork, the IBO has spread throughout the seven continents. There are 1500 schools in 116 countries; the greatest concentration remains in North America. There are approximately 450 Diploma Program in United States’ high schools (“Overview of the IB in the United States”). Virginia ranks third in the nation of states offering the Diploma Program behind California and Florida respectively.

In order to understand the widespread acceptance of the IB throughout the world, there must be an examination of the curriculum. The IBO has developed a hexagonal program model of the IB Diploma Program (DP). See Figure 2 below.

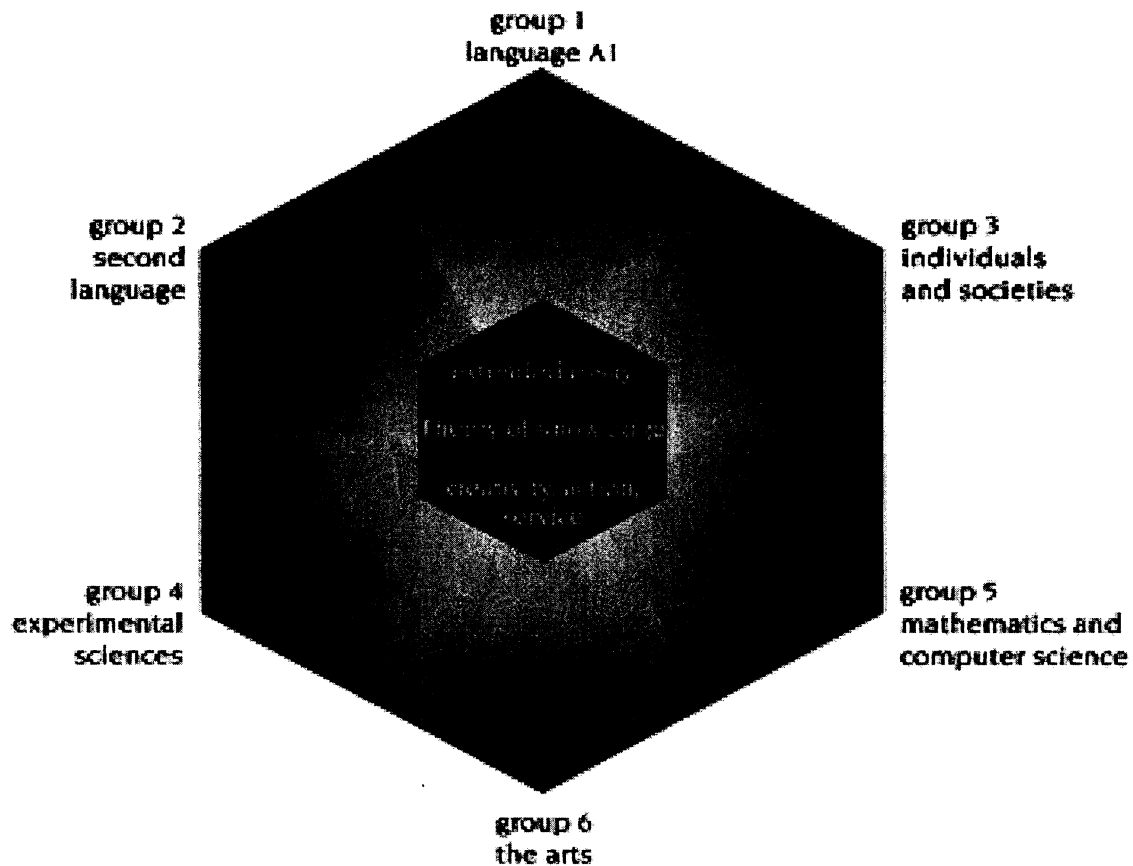


Figure 2

Students must study one subject from each of the six groups concurrently, combining both the humanities and experimental sciences. All coursework is completed within the last two years of the secondary school career. There are higher level (HL) and standard level (SL) offerings in each subject area, and students may choose which courses to study at each level. The HL courses require 240 hours and SL courses 150 hours of study. “Students are thus able to explore some subjects in depth and others more broadly, a deliberate compromise between the early specialization of some national systems and the

breadth found in others. The science-oriented student is challenged to learn a foreign language and the natural linguist becomes familiar with laboratory procedures. Active citizenship and global perspectives are encouraged in each area of the curriculum” (www.ibo.org). In conjunction with the six subject areas, there are three additional components to the DP: Extended Essay, Creativity Action Service (CAS), and Theory of Knowledge (TOK).

Even after students complete these requirements, they are not guaranteed the IB diploma. Each subject is graded out of seven points with three possible bonus points awarded for exceptional work in EE, CAS, and TOK. Students must take at least three HL subjects and receive a total score of 24 points to receive the IB diploma.

Teachers at Ecolint developed the DP in French and English with the assistance of faculty at various other international schools. The curriculum was designed to be a rigorous, demanding course of study while preparing students aged 16-19 for college-level thinking. The program has since developed strong core values that emphasize its mission: international understanding, intellectual rigor and high academic achievement. These values have contributed to a strong reputation as a highly academic organization in international education (“Overview of the IB in the United States”).

In order to offer the DP, schools must complete an extensive application, show thorough understanding of policies and procedures, train all prospective IB teachers, and possess necessary facilities and resources. Once schools receive permission to become IB affiliated, they must demonstrate an awareness of internationalism as the program is

established. Each school has a trained IB Coordinator who oversees all communication among teachers, students, administrators, and the IBO.

Although initiation into the world of IB is stringent, and many of the policies are inflexible, school choice and independence is inherent in the program. No IB school should replicate another in course offerings, texts, or demographics. IB schools are required to develop curricula unique to their population and students' needs. Teachers may choose from a variety of texts, methodology, and assessment tools. Students are also encouraged to be independent thinkers and learners. They have much control over which courses they study, topics they research, and ideas they present, and often enjoy more choice than they do in a traditional, American high school setting. There are specific assessments that must be completed within the two years, but students and teachers frequently have the ability to decide when the assignments will be executed, length of time allotted for completion, and what specific knowledge will be assessed. An IB classroom is meant to be student-centered where the teacher acts as a facilitator and participant in the learning.

B. How the IB Diploma Program Affects High School Writing Instruction

The IB English class is writing and speaking intensive. There are four parts to the Language A1 Higher Level curriculum with one major assessment, either written or oral, tied to each part. Parts 1 and 3 are written; parts 2 and 4 are oral examinations. The World Literature component (Part 1) mandates two essays based on the World Literature texts chosen by the teachers. The first assignment is a comparative essay serving to link

two works by one specific aspect (i.e. symbols, language, style, characters, etc.). The second assignment is an essay based on at least one World Literature text and may be creative or analytical in nature.

The type of writing students generate in IB English depends on who they are as individuals. The study of Group 1 languages is rooted in the Freirian notion of emancipatory literacy. In his book co-authored with Freire, Donaldo Macedo writes, “The notion of emancipatory literacy suggests two dimensions of literacy. On the one hand, students have to become literate about their histories, experiences, and the culture of their immediate environments” (Freire 47). Students must engage in a study of their own cultures in order to expand beyond their worlds and become global citizens. Freire responds to this idea of cultural identity in education, “Literacy and education in general are cultural expressions. You cannot conduct literacy work outside the world of culture because education in itself is a dimension of culture” (Freire 52). The *IB Language A1 Subject Guide* describes literature as an exploration of, “...our conceptions, interpretations and experiences of the world. The study of literature, therefore, can be seen as a study of all the complex pursuits, anxieties, joys and fears that human beings are exposed to in the daily business of living” (4). Students in the IB program will not simply read teacher-dictated texts and take English tests. IB views the Language A1 requirement as a study in humanity and culture, and students are not only encouraged but required to write about their own experiences within their culture. “This policy promotes oral and written communication skills, and respect for the literacy heritage of the students

first language, while providing complementary international perspectives through the study of World Literature” (*Language A1 Subject Guide 3*).

The Language A1 stipulates a World Literature component in which students read texts translated from their author’s original language (which must be different from the Language A1 studied) into the students’ first language. The purpose is not to study the supposed “great works” of another culture, nor is it to study the literary achievements of another people. The World Literature element of the A1 study “...is envisaged as having the potential to enrich the international awareness of IB students and to develop in them the attitudes of tolerance, empathy and a genuine respect for perspectives different from their own” (*Language A1 Subject Guide 4*). Macedo continues to explain the second dimension of emancipatory literacy, “On the other hand, [students] must also appropriate those codes and cultures of the dominant spheres so they can transcend their own environments” (Freire 47). In order to become truly literate, and therefore empowered, students must be responsible for understanding their own heritage and language as well as the views held by other people in the world around them. Whether they are studying a culture of a “dominant sphere,” these students cannot leave the IB program without exposure to the literature and heritage of a culture different from their own. Therefore, they will be more cognizant of where they fit into their own cultures. Students in these courses are required to write from a cultural foundation and use the knowledge of themselves to examine and appreciate people in the world who are different from them.

The assessment for the Genre Study (Part 3) is given at the end of the second year of study as a final examination. There are two parts to this assessment as well. The first is

a commentary written on an unseen piece of prose or poem. The only directions on the examination state: “Write a commentary.” The student may choose either poem or prose, what literary techniques to analyze, and the form his or her writing content will take. The commentary is meant to be reflective in nature, and in fact the individualism of the response is explicitly stated on the grading rubric. One section on the rubric states: “How relevant are the candidate’s ideas about the text? How well has the candidate explored those ideas? To what extent has the candidate expressed a relevant personal response?” (*Language A1 Subject Guide* 44). The rubric does not list specific responses for which a grader should hunt, nor does it qualify the appropriateness of one response over another.

The open-ended, personal nature of the assignment is rooted in an expressivist pedagogical idea. In his article detailing this pedagogy, Burnham writes, “Expressivism places the writer in the center [of Berlin’s triangle], articulates its theory, and develops its pedagogical system by assigning highest value to the writer and her imaginative, psychological, social, and spiritual development...Expressivist pedagogy encourages, even insists upon, a sense of writer presence even in research-based writing” (Burnham 19). The commentary and its link to expressivism have implications for classroom methodology. Teachers can focus on teaching writing as thinking and using writing to help students shape their own ideas and identities. They will directly use this instruction when creating the commentary, even though the assignment deals with a specific piece of literature to be examined.

Students also have the freedom to respond to the text in any form they choose. There is a section on “presentation” in the grading rubric for the commentary, but there

are no guidelines as to what form the essay must take. The question on the rubric states: “How well has the candidate organized the commentary? How effectively have the candidate’s ideas been presented?” (*Language A1 Subject Guide* 46) The highest rating on this portion of the rubric requests: “purposeful and effective structure to the commentary” (46). In his discussion on form in composition pedagogy, Richard Coe writes, “...form grows organically to fit the shape of the subject matter. Thus there is little need to teach form except as an afterthought (along with punctuation) late in both the teaching and writing processes” (Coe 236). He explains that Expressionist process writing does not dictate a form, in fact should not dictate one. A form should develop out of the content. Students writing this commentary have the freedom to create an effective form from their ideas, and teachers have the freedom to stray from formulaic writing assignments in the IB English classroom.

The oral assessment in Part 4 is a presentation and allows for much more creativity than the oral commentary. Although the presentation is centered around the texts studied in class, the subject guide recommends candidates choose their topics to reflect their own personal interests (38) and some examples include structured discussions, much like Socratic seminars, oral exposés, and role playing. Students have the freedom to engage with the texts in any way they imagine. This emphasis on conversations in the classroom, whether planned or spontaneous, coincides with Bruffee’s theories on collaboration in the writing classroom. “...our [writing teachers’] task must involve engaging students in conversation among themselves at as many points in both the writing and the reading process as possible, and that we should contrive to

ensure that students' conversations about what they read and write is similar in as many ways as possible to the way we would like them eventually to read and write" (Bruffee 89). Incorporating conversation and oral assessments into the daily routine of a language class improves students' abilities to write, read, think, and express themselves orally.

The Group 1 curriculum allows students a lens into knowledge that starts with their own experiences. Freire states that cultural literacy depends upon a comprehension of the individual (Freire 47). Students need to understand where they fit into the world before they can begin to comment on it. Freire believes that language is the root of culture as well as the mediating force of knowledge. In fact, he states that knowledge itself is language (53). Although this subject can be taught in over 80 different languages, the functions of those languages do not change. Freire says, "I think all of us ultimately speak the same language (in the abstract sense) and express ourselves in different ways" (53). The IB curriculum harbors the same philosophy.

C. How the IB Diploma Program Affects Cognitive Development

Writing instruction is not limited to the Group 1 of the IB curriculum, and the way in which it is infused in the other subjects helps students find connections between writing and thinking. Writing is the fundamental piece that connects all the separate subjects and components of the IB program. Students are required to write an analytical research paper for the IB Math Studies class. World language classes require an essay written in the language studied. Extensive empirical data must be synthesized and written arguments must be formulated in the experimental science labs. The visual arts students

must report on their processes and progress in journals. Students are forced to use writing not just to regurgitate prescribed information, but to explore their ideas and find out what they believe. Although Writing Across the Curriculum is not expressly stated as part of the IB philosophy, the presence of WAC in all of the other subjects is obvious. Each subject area demands a writing assignment as at least one of the formal assessments, and many smaller, reflective writing assignments that take the form of journals, response logs, and self-study workbooks. I will focus on two specific subjects – Visual Arts and Theory of Knowledge– in order to illustrate the presence of WAC in the IB curriculum, and how writing in all subject areas helps students move into the higher-level thinking that Perry deems essential to successful college writing.

IB Visual Arts is part of Group 6 on the hexagon and is considered an elective. Teachers in this class enjoy a great deal of freedom in designing the specific objectives of the course. In fact the *Visual Arts Subject Guide* states that the IB syllabus “...provides a framework which allows teachers to choose content and activities appropriate to their own and their students’ interests and experiences” (10). The first main area of content to be considered should be the personal backgrounds and needs of the students (10). The course begins with the students, and although it is not solely a writing course, the initial conversations they will have about their own experiences will aid in their understanding of art and the world around them. There are two parts to the Visual Arts assessments: studio work and research workbooks. Studio work is the artistic production of each student. Research workbooks are the independent writings of the students about their art. The workbook is meant to be exploratory. Students enjoy the freedom to inquire,

experiment, and personally reflect on their process of producing artwork. Students are not meant simply to explore their own artistic journeys, but “examine the visual and functional qualities of art from their own and other cultures for meaning and significance” (*Visual Arts Subject Guide* 8).

In the research workbooks, students develop their own themes and directions in an open-ended inquiry. Workbooks should function as “working journals” (*Visual Arts Subject Guide* 13) and the content, although centered around involvement with art, may vary. The WAC program, like most writing programs, focuses on “...helping students to become critical thinkers and problem-solvers as well as developing their communication skills” (McLeod 150) but it also extends beyond just writing classrooms. The WAC pedagogy encourages “...teaching both the content of the discipline and the particular discourse features used in writing about that content” (150). IB Visual Arts students may write and think freely, but their vocabulary should be appropriate to art criticism (*Visual Arts Subject Guide* 13). The research workbooks are a form of the “writing to learn” aspect of the WAC pedagogy, which encourages teachers to use writing as more than a test of learned knowledge but a way to learn that knowledge (McLeod 151). The IB guides teachers to engage in a dialogue with students through their journals as a way to “discuss” privately their processes and offer positive criticism for students’ ideas (*Visual Arts Subject Guide* 13). McLeod outlines many uses for journals within the writing to learn domain including teacher-student dialogues, Ann Berthoff’s double-entry notebook which is essentially a student dialogue with a text or an image, as well as a place for students to “mess up” without feeling the pressure of a grade attached to their work. The

research journals in the IB art class are not graded or edited by teachers, and are only used in the formal interview between the student and the IB examiner.

The Theory of Knowledge (TOK) course has obvious associations to the WAC approach in its inherent interdisciplinary approach. The course demands much writing and speaking throughout the syllabus on the interrelated nature of core disciplines, and the formal assessment is a general synthesis of these discussions in relation to knowledge. However, the course answers many other requirements of students who are preparing for post-secondary work. Ian Hill, deputy director general of the IBO, identifies the educational needs of students in the 21st century and how educational models must reflect those needs. “Students need skills which will enable them to pluck it [knowledge] from the air, sift it, decide quickly what is worth retaining for future reference, what should be discarded, what is of immediate use...The emphasis needs to be on process, finding and using the connections between knowledge from different disciplines, adaptability, avoiding closure without considering all options” (Hill 2). The TOK class directly prepares students to meet these modern challenges. Dr. Braslavsky, former director UNESCO-IBE, details “...at least five trends of the new curricula for achieving relevant education...replacing teaching methods oriented towards transmission, by methods favouring the ‘construction’ of ‘competencies’ and the use of knowledge in context as a way of learning;” (Braslavsky 4-5). Students engaging in this comprehensive, divergent course will not only acquire the writing and analytical skills necessary for higher-level thinking, they will also take part in a global conversation about the essence of knowledge.

TOK, in our school, is often referred to as the “perk” of the IB curriculum. TOK focuses directly on how people learn and process different types of knowledge. Students are asked questions such as “How do you know what you know?” or “What is knowledge?” The *TOK Subject Guide* lists as some of the aims of the course that students should: “make interdisciplinary connections;” “become aware of the interpretive nature of knowledge including personal and ideological biases;” and “understand the strengths and limitations of individual and cultural perspectives” (8). In a discussion-based setting, students make links between the six individual subjects as well as how they personally and culturally learn information. I find TOK has the most direct link with Perry’s model because of its interdisciplinary focus. If we follow Perry’s theory, as Bizzell puts it, “we come to realize that the academic community requires students to know, for example, not only what Genesis says about the creation of the earth but also what geologists, biologists, and other scientists say about it” (Bizzell “William Perry and Liberal Education” 304). In TOK students are forced to study a topic from all sides, including perspectives that are perhaps opposite from their own.

The writing assessments students are required to complete as part of the IB program mesh nicely with Perry’s and Bizzell’s views on what students will be asked to do in college. Bizzell states, “the academic community requires students to know how to evaluate competing ideas according to criteria of logical structure, adequate evidence, and so on;” (Bizzell “William Perry and Liberal Education” 304). Students who are part of the IB program not only learn to substantiate their own views, but they are also forced to incorporate opposing views as part of the grading rubric. These students start to learn

in high school that other people could be correct, even if they differ from their own beliefs, and begin to move past formulaic self-driven essays to make comments on their world and how it relates to the bigger world.

Writing is used in each discipline not only to show mastery on a specific topic, but also to chart understanding and movement through a particular study. Dr. Kathleen Plato, Supervisor of Advanced Placement Programs for the Washington State Office of the Superintendent claims, “The IB programs’ emphases on critical thinking skills, increased content knowledge and an interdisciplinary approach to education not only prepare students for success at the post-secondary level, but also for life and the world of work” (“Overview of IB in the United States”). Dr. James Brown, Director of Admissions at the University of Glasgow, UK writes, “The university seeks students with well-developed study skills based on independent, analytical and critical thinking, which the DP provides” (Jenkins). The DP guides students to become analytical thinkers, and creates an interdisciplinary approach through its emphasis on writing.

In my own experiences as an IB Coordinator as well as an IB English teacher, I have witnessed growth in students’ analytical and critical thinking skills. I teach both the IB preparatory freshman English class and the IB English 12 class, so I am in a position to gauge their progress from their first to their last year in high school. By the end of the freshman year, my students can extract meaning from an author’s style and comment analytically on that style. They write a tremendous amount, both informally and on formal assignments, and they use their writing to further the ideas they already possess. They discuss their journal entries as drafts of thinking, and they use the writing process as

they prepare for class discussions. By the time they become seniors, they are writing in order to analyze what they read instead of writing after they have already determined meaning. These students become sophisticated, reflective writers before they enter college.

Conclusions and Implications

William Perry's model is a lens through which to view current high school standards, curriculum, writing instruction, and national tests and determine why these factors are creating a gap between successful high school writers and successful first-year college writers. Although Perry's model is not perfect, nor is it the only theory that investigates the cognitive developmental stages of late adolescent and adults, it does offer a sound method to examine current college expectations of college writers. Perry, Magolda, Piaget, and prominent psychologists such as Vygotsky, who proposed that children's cognitive development is facilitated and enhanced by interaction with more capable individuals such as teachers and parents (Ormond 58) and Kohlberg who developed theories on the six stages of moral reasoning, all help educators understand that adolescent thinkers have capacities we are not fully helping them attain. If we engage higher-order thinking through challenging writing assignments and create meaningful assessment practices, as Lindemann suggests, our high school classrooms might become more successful preparation for college-level thinking. At least students will be exposed to the types of writing and thinking they will encounter in college so it is not completely foreign to them. Then maybe the majority of our students will not be the inexperienced writers I have defined from Bizzell's article on basic writers.

One frustrating reality facing both high school and college educators is a lack of communication between these two groups. We often blame the teachers who taught our students before us for the students' deficiency in knowledge and skills, yet we rarely have the opportunity to talk to these teachers about what is happening in their classrooms. We do not discuss what types of challenges students face when they enter our English classes, nor do we confer what we could all do to better prepare students for their future academic endeavors. I see my research as a possible catalyst for this type of collaborative discussion. Both high school and college instructors could use the information I have collected as a way to examine what and how each group teaches writing in their respective institutions.

My examination of the IB Diploma Program and my teaching experiences within it have led me to conclude that this type of curriculum might be a realistic blend of progressive composition theory, meaningful assessment, and opportunity for critical thinking that could help students attain a world view closer to Perry's Relativism and Magolda's Contextual Knowing. The program is designed to be inclusive and tap into all students' natural curiosity. While this program that demands intense motivation and academic rigor will not meet all students' needs, teachers can certainly infuse the philosophy of independent thinking into non-IB classes. It does not present material as college-preparatory – instead it takes adolescent thinkers where they are and challenges them to open their minds to consider different perspectives. The writing component allows students to use writing as a way of thinking and exploring their world, not just as an assessment of what they have been told by their teachers. Although our American

culture has deemed multiple-choice tests a financially practical means of assessment as well as a viable benchmark of international competition, IB still allows students time to prepare for that type of test while helping them go beyond just the standard of learning.

In my experience as an IB Coordinator, I have the opportunity and responsibility to train teachers in all disciplines to become writing teachers. I find that when I offer teachers a process approach to teaching writing, they are less intimidated by the task and can apply the approach to their own experiences as writers. These teachers are willing to help students find meaning in their writing, even in subjects that do not necessarily lend themselves to composition assignments. My experiences have shown me that this is the type of preparation that students need in order to be better prepared to write in college. I plan to continue to impact writing classes, even though they are labeled as biology or math classes, by helping teachers use a process approach in their instruction.

All of the IB teachers in my school also teach non-IB classes. Even though these students are not following the IB curriculum, they can still benefit from the IB philosophy that these teachers use. I encourage the IB faculty to assign and teach writing in their non-IB classes in the same way they facilitate the process in their IB classes. The IB students have no problems passing their SOL tests, so even SOL-driven classrooms will find success on the mandated assessments while teaching in the style of IB. Students may even go beyond just a standard of learning. Many more students will gain important preparation and knowledge about writing and profit from the IB philosophy, and hopefully more students will be successful in college composition classes.

I would like to continue my investigation of cognitive development in adolescents and young adults specifically in composition classrooms. I see the Dual Enrollment class as a potential bridge to push high school students into college-level thinking, and I hope to teach this type of class to better understand how it could prepare students for college-level writing. If I leave high school teaching, I plan to enter the realm of community college writing classes and possibly introductory writing classes at a four-year institution because many of these students may fit under the label of inexperienced writers. I would like to use what I've learned in my study to help challenge these students who may be just between high school and college-level thinking to find authority in their ideas as they as open their minds to different perspectives. Since the IB program emphasizes using the background of the students as an integral part of the content of the course, these students may be able to view writing, perhaps for the first time, as part of their thinking and use it to formulate their ideas. Many of these students leave high school believing that writing is the way they show what they have learned instead of using it to explore what they already know. I think these students, who likely have not been exposed to an IB-type curriculum, would benefit from a methodology that includes performance-based assessments and various types of writing assignments.

While high school teachers must challenge students to go beyond their adolescent notions of writing and thinking, college writing instructors must also realize that they cannot expect students to enter college with the capacity to critically analyze the world around them in their writing. I understand that students who enter a four-year institution as well as community college will need help bridging the gap from high school to college

composition classes. I think introducing them to the IB philosophy would help them discover their voices in writing and thinking that they may not have known existed. While we as educators cannot abandon the system in which we teach, we can foster opportunities for students to move from basic levels of thinking into more complex world views that help them create meaning, appreciation of other's differences, and a sense of themselves as individuals.

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