CHAPTER 3

WHAT'S AN ADMINISTRATOR OR TEACHER TO DO?

Repeatedly we have found that students, teachers, parents, and employers all view the ability to write well as a highly valuable skill. For example, Harvard's Professor of Education Richard J. Light, in his study *Making the Most of College*, found: "Of all skills students say they want to strengthen, writing is mentioned three times more than any other" (54). The alumni surveyed as part of Light's study also regard writing as extremely important, as more than 90 percent designated "need to write effectively" an ability "of great importance" in their jobs. And, *Writing: A Ticket to Work . . . or a Ticket Out"* the National Commission on Writing's report, sponsored by College Board, concluded:

> Writing appears to be a "marker" attribute of high-skill, high-wage, professional work. This is particularly true in sectors of the economy that are expanding, such as services, and the finance, insurance, and real estate sectors. Educational institutions interested in preparing students for rewarding and remunerative work should concentrate on developing graduates' writing skills. Colleges and university leaders, as well as school officials, should take that advice to heart. The strength of corporate complaints about the writing skills of college graduates was surprisingly powerful. (19)

Additionally, in a more recent survey conducted in 2011, researchers from Michigan State University in collaboration with the Association of Public Land Grant Universities and the University Industry Consortium identified the important soft skills needed as students transfer from college to employment in agriculture, natural resources, and related careers. The 8,000-plus students, faculty, alumni, and employers who participated in this survey ranked communication skills as the highest priority, with "effective written communication" and the ability to "communicate appropriately and professionally using social media" as among the highest of these skills (Crawford et al. 9).

And yet, as Laura Cutler and Steve Graham remind us when asking why writing has not received the same attention as reading or math:

> One thing is for certain: It is not because students are developing the writing skills they need to be successful. Take for instance the findings of the most recent National Assess-

> ment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (Persky, Daane, and
> Jen, 2003). The writing of two-thirds or more of the students
> tested in Grades 4, 8, and 12 was below grade-level profi-
> ciency. . . . Just as importantly, many youngsters leave high
> school lacking the writing skills needed for success in college
> or the world of work. College instructors estimate that 50%
> of high school graduates are not prepared for college-level
> writing demands (Achieve, Inc., 2005), whereas businesses
> in the United States spend $3.1 billion annually for writing
> remediation (National Commission on Writing, 2004). (907)

Answers to the question of why writing has been largely absent from the school reform movement are varied and complicated. Perhaps most notable at this moment is the elusiveness of large-scale measures of writing achievement that can lead to a recursive process of improvement, and that the high-stakes tests used to determine curricula in school districts everywhere, with their focus primarily on math and reading, have resulted in driving writing out of the class-room (Applebee, "Great Writing"). However, the Common Core State Stan-dards, with an emphasis on literacy across the curriculum, may provide us with an opportunity to dramatically alter the status of writing in U.S. classrooms.

Despite all of this, numerous studies conducted by a variety of stakehold-ers in different contexts reach surprisingly similar conclusions about the path forward, and in this chapter we lay the foundation for that path through a syn-thesis of the recommendations of these stakeholders. In short, results repeatedly show that our efforts should be focused on three related areas: writing across the curriculum, effective and responsive instruction, and professional development. Interwoven throughout discussions of these key areas is assessment. Because the most highly effective forms of assessment stand in a recursive relationship to writing across the curriculum, instruction, and professional development, we don't treat it as a separate area but rather one that must be interwoven within these three.

For example, returning to our touchstone year of 2006, the National Com-mission on Writing's report, *Writing and School Reform* combines the results of five hearings held at different locations throughout the United States (Of-fice of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, Haas Foundation, Alcorn State University, Annual Convention of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), and the University of Texas). Attendees included teachers, principals, superintendents, state department of education officials, curriculum coordinators, two- and four-year college and university fac-ulty, admissions directors, program heads and department chairs, deans, pro-

vosts and presidents, and officers and staff of national education associations. This diverse group reached far-ranging consensus on the path forward. As can be seen in Table 3.1, the points of consensus with a checkmark generally fall into one of the three areas we list above—writing across the curriculum, effective and responsive instruction, and professional development.

Table 3.1 Points of Consensus About Writing Needs. Source: National Commission on Writing, Writing and School Reform.

Recommendations: The Neglected "R"	Consensus Agreement During Hearings
A Writing Agenda that Includes:	
Comprehensive writing policy in state standards	✓
Doubling the amount of time spent writing	✓
Additional state and local financial support	✓
Writing in all subjects and all grade levels	✓
Required writing preservice for teaching license	✓
A white House Conference on Writing	
Improved writing instruction for undergraduates	✓
Time	
Double the amount of time students spend writing	✓
Double resources devoted to writing instruction	
Assign writing across the curriculum	✓
Encourage out-of-school writing	✓
Encourage Parents to review children's writing	
Teachers and Professional Development	
Requirement of writing across subjects and grades	✓
Developmentally appropriate writing for all students, from kindergarten through college	✓
Common expectations for writing across disciplines	
In-service workshops to help teachers understand writing and develop as writers	✓
Professional development for university faculty to improve student writing	
University-school partnerships to improve writing for English-language learners	✓

Table 3.1—*continued*

Recommendations: The Neglected "R"	Consensus Agreement During Hearings
Technology	
Create a National Educational Technology Trust to finance technology and training	
Employ technology to help improve writing	✓
Apply technology to the grading and assessment of writing	
Measuring Results	
Assessment of writing competence must be fair and authentic	✓
Standards, curriculum, and assessment must be aligned in reality as well as in rhetoric	
Assessments of student writing must go beyond multiple-choice, machine-scored items	✓
Assessment should provide students with adequate time to write	✓
Assessment should require students to actually create a piece of prose	
Best writing assessment should be more widely replicated	✓

That such a diverse group could reach this level of consensus in 2006 is an early sounding of the work to follow, reaching similar conclusions. Of note is that "Standards, curriculum, and assessment must be aligned in reality as well as rhetoric" was not a point of consensus during the hearings, and yet now it is exactly the focus of so much time, money, and debate as discussed in Chapters One and Two.

WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM (WAC)

Literacy researchers have long argued that writing is not a single, generalizable skill that can be learned outside a social or disciplinary framework. While there seem to be some skills that we can teach students to transfer across contexts, each new context will present new challenges and ways of seeing and writing that can only be learned when immersed in that context. In short, the central argument for enhanced writing across the curriculum is that "for students to become successful, capable writers . . . requires a protracted period of time during which they encounter many opportunities to write and receive feedback in multiple contexts" (Johnson and Krase 32).

It is not surprising that the history of writing across the curriculum in America parallels that of the history of standardized writing tests. While many point to

the late 1970s/early 1980s as the beginning of WAC as a subfield of composition studies, much like standardized writing tests, its roots go back to the beginning of the modern U.S. university. As previously discussed, early U.S. universities were populated by students who reliably absorbed social, political, and academic values and positions similar enough that their linguistic homogeneity meant there was no need to teach writing out of context. The huge increase, and relative diversity, of students who began to enter the university in the mid-1800s, as well as the new value placed on specialized knowledge and the separation of academic disciplines, changed all of this. In tracing the history of writing across the curriculum, David Russell explains, "almost from the beginning of the modern university, critics from many quarters attacked academic specialization and the relegation of responsibility for writing instruction to the English department" (56). Indeed, Russell points to the work of John Dewey, Fred N. Scott, James Fleming Hosic, Joseph Denney, and others in demonstrating very early efforts to "promote interdepartmental cooperation in teaching language" (60).

While current implementations of writing across the curriculum vary greatly, the central tenets are widely agreed upon:

- Instruction in writing should include the production of a wide array of texts.
- We cannot assume automatic transfer of general writing skills taught in freshman composition courses or the humanities in general.
- The ability to write in discipline-specific genres is central to gaining access to specialized discourse communities.
- Learning how to write in one's discipline shouldn't be a process of trial and error, but rather a structured, guided process that builds on transferable skills and knowledge as well as expands to include discipline-specific literacy skills.
- Writing can be used to promote learning.
- Writing can be used to assess learning.
- Writing can increase student engagement with course material.

For too long these tenets and calls for increased use of writing across the curriculum have required us to act on faith supported by little empirical evidence. For example, in the National Commission on Writing's reports *The Neglected R* and *Writing and School Reform*, the commission found broad support from parents, teachers, and administrators for writing across the curriculum:

> Too frequently, writing is seen as an academic skill that is the responsibility of English or language arts teachers. Insisting on the widespread use of writing across curriculum areas, includ-

> ing mathematics and science, holds the promise of improving students' writing competence, deepening subject-matter knowledge, and expanding the amount of time students spend writing. (*The Neglected R* 25)

The "promise" of improving students' writing through writing across the curriculum programs, even in this report, has not been strongly supported by empirical evidence until very recently. Further, it is likely that this lack of evidence has contributed to the relatively slow growth of strong implementation of writing across the curriculum at all levels and through our national, state, and local assessments of academic achievement.

One important advance in this area is the collaboration between NSSE and WPA. In 2009 the Consortium for the Study of Writing in College (a collaboration between the Writing Program Administrator's Council and the National Survey of Student Engagement) released a report detailing the purpose and results of the WPA/NSSE survey:

> At the inter-institutional and national levels, little data affirm writing specialists' widespread belief that writing-to-learn activities improve learning, engagement, and attainment. Therefore, in 2008, we administered 27 supplemental NSSE questions about writing practices to 23,000 students in 82 randomly selected four-year institutions, providing the broadest snapshot so far of undergraduate writing. . . . [In results from across the curriculum] writing assignments encouraged interactive writing activities (peer response, teacher response, visits to a writing center, etc.), specified "meaning-constructing writing" (synthesizing information, writing to a specific audience), and included clear explanations of the instructor's expectations. Controlling for student characteristics (gender, race, major, and others) and the amount students wrote, results show that more work in these areas are associated with more engagement in deep learning activities and greater self-reported gains in practical competence, personal and social development, and general education. (Anderson, et al. 1)

More recently, individual researchers have begun to publish compelling results on discrete aspects of writing across the curriculum that can help us build more complex levels of evidence on the effectiveness of an approach so many call for as one of the most promising ways to improve student writing. For example, Christopher Wolfe identifies argument as one of the primary genres employed

across the curriculum. After examining 265 undergraduate writing assignments from seventy-one courses across the curriculum at his university, he found that 59 percent of the assignments required argumentation. However, it was very clear that the different academic contexts Wolfe analyzed required different forms of argumentation. Juxtaposing the work of Stephen Toulmin, Aaron A. Larson, and others with the actual assignments given to students, Wolfe identified the seven different kinds of arguments used in different academic situations:

- The explicitly thesis-driven assignment
- Text-centered arguments
- Mixed-genre argument
- Empirical arguments
- Decision-based arguments
- Proposals
- Compound arguments

This type of discrete research is an important step in the development of writing across the curriculum because, as Wolfe notes:

> Students are learning a great deal about how to write in their humanities courses, including argumentative writing—but relatively little about how to make empirical arguments, decision-based arguments, and some other kinds of arguments prized in different disciplines. Understanding both similarities and differences among disciplines is key to developing more effective programs in writing across the curriculum." (208)

This is an extension of ACT's finding in their 2012 report that "in their focus on literary content knowledge, high school literature and reading courses may not be well aligned with college expectations" in terms of the range of the actual types of writing required of students both in college-level writing courses and across the curriculum (9). Further, this points to an emerging area of research that may be key to the interdepartmental work of writing instruction, *transfer*, a topic we will explore more fully in Chapter Four.

Finally, while the participation of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in these debates is relatively new, their broad coalitions, deep pockets, and support for the Common Core State Standards may have the largest effect on writing across the curriculum and a realignment of the reading/writing hierarchy we have ever seen. The foundation's 2010 report *Supporting Instruction: Investing in Teaching* makes their position clear:

> Literacy improves as students read and write about a range of increasingly complex texts. Outside of English language arts (ELA), there are rarely classes in middle or high school that focus just on literacy. Indeed, the Common Core State Standards expect literacy instruction to be included in a number of subjects outside of ELA, including science and social studies/history. The standards focus especially on connecting reading and writing, emphasizing nonfiction reading as well as writing that offers a clear analysis based on evidence—the kind of literacy students need to succeed in college and the workplace.

While a majority of stakeholders are quite vocal about the need to strengthen writing across the curriculum if we are to meet the needs of twenty-first century learners, they are equally silent on how to pay for it. As Les Perelman explains in describing the long-standing and highly successful WAC program at MIT, "the program is valued across MIT because it is funded sufficiently to make a difference to faculty." To show us what this means, he reveals that MIT has thirty-six full and part-time lecturers, at an expense equivalent to the cost of nineteen assistant professors in the humanities, working with an undergraduate population of just over 4,000 students. In short, if the promise of writing across the curriculum is to be realized, it must not come in the form of add-on writing intensive credit hours or the assignment of underpaid and undertrained teaching assistants to courses in the disciplines. For a WAC program to be successful, someone must be willing to pay for it. As shown in previous chapters, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is willing to pay for significant parts of such efforts if they are aligned with CCSS. And while we certainly support the emphasis on writing across the curriculum and the promise CCSS holds in this regard, we have significant concerns about the concentration of power, accountability, and control currently being exercised by advocacy philanthropists in regard to our public school system.

EFFECTIVE AND RESPONSIVE INSTRUCTION

The second of the three widely agreed upon keys to establishing an educational reform focus on writing is not only to call for effective and responsive instruction and assessment, but to begin establishing benchmarks and models for what this looks like. Of course, given the often dramatic diversity of learners we work with every day, it is impossible to declare any one single approach to writing instruction as *the* most effective way to teach writing. However, more and more research shows us that instructional practices, writing genres, and assessments "should be *holis-*

tic, authentic, and *varied"* (NCTE, *Writing Now*). While this advice has, for too long, appeared subjective and unproven, the last several years have witnessed an increase in research that shows us just what this means. For example, when the WPA partnered with NSSE in 2008 to form the Consortium for the Study of Writing, administering the supplemental questions on writing to 23,000 students in eighty-two randomly selected four-year institutions, they were able to identify five activities that highly correlated with NSSE's deep learning scales of higher order thinking, integrative learning, and reflective learning. The five activities include:

1. Pre-Writing Activities: How much feedback students received from faculty and others about their writing ideas and drafts.
2. Clear Expectations: How much instructors provided clear explanations of the goals and criteria of the writing assignments.
3. Higher-Order Writing: How frequently students wrote assignments involving summarization, analysis, and argument.
4. Good Instructor Practices: How much students collaborated with classmates, reviewed sample writing, and engaged in practice-writing tasks.
5. Integrated Media: How much students included numerical data, multimedia, and visual content in their writing. (NSSE)

In their 2009 presentation at the WPA conference, consortium members Paul Anderson, Chris Anson, Bob Gonyea, and Chuck Paine detailed the types of higher order writing activities that are aligned with deep learning across the curriculum:

> ANALYZING the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory, such as examining a particular case or situation in depth and considering its components

> SYNTHESIZING and organizing ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships

> MAKING JUDGMENTS about the value of information, arguments, or methods, such as examining how others gathered and interpreted data and assessing the soundness of their conclusions

> APPLYING theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations

It was during this same time frame that the National Council of Teachers of English published *Writing Now.* After synthesizing the results of numerous

research studies, NCTE offered the following benchmarks independently of the research conducted by the National Commission on Writing and the Consortium for the Study of Writing, again showing a high level of agreement among different stakeholders:

For Teachers:

- Require all students—especially the less experienced ones—to write extensively so that they can be comfortable writing extended prose in elementary school, and a minimum of five-page essays in high school and ten-page essays in college.
- Create writing assignments that ask students to interpret and analyze in a wide variety of genres.
- Employ functional grammar approaches to help students understand how language works in a variety of contexts.
- Foster collaborative writing processes.
- Make new-media writing part of students' regular composing.
- Use strategies of formative assessment to give students feedback on developing drafts.
- Employ multiple measures, including portfolios, to provide summative assessments of students' development as writers.

For Schools

- In hiring instructors, be sure that their professional education has included coursework in writing instruction.
- Develop authentic assessments of writing that bridge the gaps between school and workplace writing, and be sure to include multiple measures of writing proficiency, such as portfolios.
- Create curricula that foster writing in every subject at every grade level.
- Build a technological infrastructure to support new media writing.
- Invest in professional development for writing instructors.

For Policymakers

- Develop programs for professional development in writing instruction for teachers at all levels.
- Encourage and fund studies that bridge the gaps between qualitative and quantitative research on writing; between research in composition studies and in teacher education; between school and workplace writing; and among writers at varying developmental and skill levels.
- Provide funding for both technological and professional development support of new-media writing.

How	Writing is most effectively taught as a process of differentially employed strategies. Multiple points of feedback from teachers and peers both in class and outside of class is a crucial component of the formative assessment that can lead to success. Functional, not prescriptive, grammar, mechanics, and style should be practiced through proven techniques such as sentence combining. Multiple measures of formative and summative assessment should be used. Ample time should be spent reading and analyzing model writing from all disciplines.
What	Students must be given the time to write in the multiple genres they will encounter most frequently in college and in the workplace, with an emphasis on synthesis, analysis, and argument. ELA in high school and college should focus less on literary content knowledge and more on applying literary analytical techniques to a range of texts across disciplines and careers. In high school, students should be required to produce extended writing with a focus on depth. Opportunities to apply theories or strategies to practical problems should be made available. The gap between school, home, and workplace writing must be effectively bridged.
Where	Writing must not be seen as the sole province of literature teachers in English departments. Instead, English departments at all levels should embrace multiple disciplinary orientations to writing instruction. At the same time, writing should be an integrated practice of learning and inquiry within all disciplines. And, it should be practiced in multiple environments (from classrooms to labs to fields to homes) using multiple applications (from pencil to web-based programs).
Why	The study and practice of writing should enable students to compose for different purposes and audiences across a variety of genres and contexts in order to achieve specified goals. It should prepare students for success in school, home, and work. It should increase critical thinking skills and deepen learning of content. And it should provide students with the ability to be active, critical citizens in a changing world.

Figure 3.2. What Really Matters in Teaching Writing

Using a very different research method than those above, researchers commissioned by Carnegie Corporation reached similar conclusions in identifying effective writing instruction for 4th–12th grade students. Through a statistical meta-analysis of 133 experimental or quasi-experimental studies, Steve Graham and Dolores Perin were able to identify the eleven most effective approaches to improving student writing in importance of effect from highest to lowest:

1. Writing Strategies, which involves teaching students strategies for planning, revising, and editing their compositions
2. Summarization, which involves explicitly and systematically teaching students how to summarize texts

3. Collaborative Writing, which uses instructional arrangements in which adolescents work together to plan, draft, revise, and edit their compositions

4. Specific Product Goals, which assigns students specific, reachable goals for the writing they are to complete

5. Word Processing, which uses computers and word processors as instructional supports for writing assignments

6. Sentence Combining, which involves teaching students to construct more complex, sophisticated sentences

7. Prewriting, which engages students in activities designed to help them generate or organize ideas for their composition

8. Inquiry Activities, which engages students in analyzing immediate, concrete data to help them develop ideas and content for a particular writing task

9. Process Writing Approach, which interweaves a number of writing instructional activities in a workshop environment that stresses extended writing opportunities, writing for authentic audiences, personalized instruction, and cycles of writing

10. Study of Models, which provides students with opportunities to read, analyze, and emulate models of good writing

11. Writing for Content Learning, which uses writing as a tool for learning content material ("Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools")

If we turn our attention to research on college readiness, we will again see substantial overlap in research-based best practices. For example, if we incorporate the "Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing," developed by the Council of Writing Program Administrators, National Council of Teachers of English, and National Writing Project, we find that current research on writing and the teaching of writing emphasizes:

- Developing Rhetorical Knowledge—or the ability to adapt to compose for different purposes, audiences, and context across a variety of texts, disciplines, and settings

- Developing Critical Thinking Through Writing, Reading, and Research—or the ability to analyze situations and texts on a variety of levels as well as exhibit multiple ways of understanding situations and texts

- Developing Flexible Writing Processes—or the ability to employ a variety of writing tools and strategies during the development of a

final product such as generating ideas, incorporating evidence from multiple sources, employing effective revision work, and possessing a meta-awareness of their own development as a writer

- Developing Knowledge Conventions—or the ability to correctly use the formal and informal guidelines that govern different types of texts (e.g., knowing how and why texts such as lab reports and autobiographies differ as well as being able to compose these different genres)

- Composing in Multiple Environments—or the ability to write using a variety of technologies (from a pencil to a web-based computer application) and to understand how the use of various technologies affect reading and writing practices (6–10)

A synthesis of these results (Figure 3.2) makes clear what matters in the teaching of writing.

It is vitally important that these best practices not be taught in isolation, but rather as part of a larger vertical effort across disciplines and a horizontal effort through grades. To this end, Chapter Four emphasizes *transfer* as both a method and methodology for supporting best practices in vertical and horizontal curricula that can lead to improved writing instruction. Finally, these widely agreed upon best practices are only as good as the structures we build to enact and energize them. In the next section we touch briefly on matters of professional development, and offer one example of how professional development, standardized tests, effective instruction, and writing across the curriculum come together. In our final chapter we focus in-depth on the role of professional development in positioning teachers as sponsors of literacy, enabled to intervene in meaningful ways in shaping the future.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND ASSESSMENT

To talk about writing across the curriculum and effective and responsive instruction is relatively meaningless without support for the ongoing professional development of our teachers and administrators. As teachers at any level can attest, the often-stated advice to "adopt best practices" is seldom followed by the types of support needed for the sustained adoption of best practices over time. Simply attending a conference or workshop or working on an isolated level to make one's own classroom a site for best practices does not create the kinds of ongoing opportunities for growth and change required. The urgency with which many express the need for sustainable professional development is clear in the summary of the consensus reached among teachers, administrators, researchers,

and other education officials who participated in the National Commission on Writing hearings:

> Scarcely an hour went by at any of the hearings without a strong plea to strengthen programs to help teachers improve writing instruction. Recommendations in this area began with the suggestion that districts transform professional development by turning the responsibility and funding for it over to teachers. The sense was that professional development led by teachers can support and empower them, while grounding professional development in challenges that are immediate and relevant in the classroom. There was also a hope that teacher-led professional development emphasizing teachers as writers could show teachers how to model writing for their students and allow teachers to understand the challenges that students experience learning to write. Encouraging teachers to see themselves as writers and modeling writing for the benefit of their students were recurring themes throughout the hearings. (*Writing and School Reform* 26)

Another strong theme to emerge in relation to professional development was the importance of mentoring. In particular, participants emphasized expanded university-school partnerships that allowed for joint defining and sharing of best practices and reversing teacher turnover rates (26).

Assessment activities, even standardized tests of writing, can be used to support effective writing across the curriculum instruction through professional development. As an example we can look at the work of the Council of Independent Colleges/Collegiate Learning Assessment Consortium, which in 2011 published "Catalyst for Change: CIC/CLA Consortium." From fall 2008 until spring 2011, forty-seven colleges and universities administered the CLA on their campuses, working as a group to determine the most effective ways to improve instruction through assessment. The CLA results were triangulated with other measures, measures differing by campus in order to meet the challenges of each unique context. Interestingly, this report does not focus on gains in student achievement over the research period, likely because it is not a long enough time period to achieve substantial gains. What the report does focus on is the change in instructional activities, including writing across the curriculum and assessment, as well as sustainable professional development opportunities generated through participation in the consortium (itself a long-term opportunity to identify and adopt best practices through professional development). Weaving together excerpts from this report shows

a repetition of some of the main themes we have been highlighting, including the fact that too many of our claims have been based on anecdotal evidence and fuzzy admonitions instead of empirical analysis. Further, this report again shows that the establishment of professional communities of practice, not unfunded mandates for standardized tests of accountability, are essential to any educational reform movement:

> . . . [W]hen the Council for Aid to Education (CAE) first asked the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) to help select a few colleges to participate in a pilot project that would measure the effects of an institution on how much the students had learned during college, CIC jumped at the opportunity. It had been our view that the prevailing and largely anecdotal ways of describing the distinctive educational advantages of smaller, largely residential, liberal arts-based, private colleges and universities had been only modestly persuasive and a more empirical approach was needed. (2)
>
> . . . [T]he CIC/CLA Consortium established a professional community of practice that supports common measures and practices in assessing and improving student learning. For many years, a common phrase and injunction in efforts to improve higher education has been the need to adopt "best practices." However, the movement from going to a conference or workshop in which an interesting "best practice" is discussed to going back to campus and putting it into practice is usually problematic. Getting attention for an idea can be challenging, let alone acquiring the time and efforts of individuals actually needed to experiment with a new initiative. (42)
>
> The CIC/CLA Consortium experience provides two ways to bridge the gap between a best practice, on the one hand, and innovation and campus implementation, on the other. First, providing a common measure across a set of similar institutions gives it some measure of credibility. In the case of the CLA, apart from its intuitive validity, the very fact that a number of institutions were committing to experiment with this instrument gave the work some initial legitimacy and traction. Second, the existence of ongoing meetings of the consortium provided a real opportunity for "best practices"

to be developed and disseminated. Repeatedly, consortium colleges and universities commented on how interactions with other institutions provided advice on everything from logistical challenges of testing students to the broadest ideas about curriculum and program. The work of the CIC/CLA Consortium provides a model of how undergraduate education can become more professionalized through shared understandings, measures, and practices. (42–43)

In describing the increased emphasis on writing across the curriculum, the report focuses on the widespread use of concepts that led to an increased use of engaging performance-based tasks, such as the development of a referendum on cell phone use while driving in a psychology class and a debate team event focusing on molecules of emotion (mind/body connections), and a team-taught interdisciplinary chemistry and psychology course that included a lab on mind/body interconnectedness (29). What is most important here is that these changes were not a result of strictly defined standards and rubrics being imposed on learning communities based on the results of standardized test. Rather, as the authors of this report make clear:

> What is particularly valuable about the consortium in this regard is that it is perfectly consistent with the traditional autonomy and diversity of colleges and universities. The scope and variety of the work of these institutions coupled with the interaction through the consortium offers the possibility for continuing experimentation and imitation. Because these are independent institutions, they can readily adopt best practices as they see them and adapt them to fit their individual circumstances. The community of professional practice represented by the consortium shows how greater consistency, attention to evidence, transparency, and, ultimately, improvement is consistent with institutional autonomy and diversity. (42–43)

We'd like to point out here that the value of "performance tasks" might not be considered revelatory given all of the research cited in the previous sections of this chapter—much of which explicitly supports the use of these types of writing assignments across the curriculum. What is important here is not so much that participants reached this conclusion, but rather that through ongoing professional development informed by assessment, these schools were able to build a sustainable structure for change that is responsive to evolving student needs.

ONE LAST POINT—LET'S NOT FORGET ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

While it is outside the scope of this book to give adequate attention to how we might address the issues raised here from the perspective of English language learners (ELL), it is a topic of too much importance for us not to raise it at all. A number of the studies and research reports we have been synthesizing do make mention of English language learners. English language learners are generally considered the fastest growing population in our public schools, and participants in *Writing Reform Now* hearings "stressed the importance of responding to the special needs of English language learners in assessment. Practically all teachers require support, assistance, and professional development to help these students succeed in both their native language and English (27). However, at the time of this writing, thirty-four states have received waivers from the requirements of NCLB. And, while we are not fans of NCLB, we are concerned that these waivers may lead to a lack of focus and support for English language learners. The American Institutes for Research (AIR) points out that the plans submitted by states are largely lacking in attention to ELLs, despite their ever-increasing numbers in our classrooms and the wide and persistent gap between ELLs and English-proficient students evidenced in the latest results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress. In an effort to provide guidance to states with waivers, the American Institutes for Research has taken up the call to make sure the needs of second language learners are being met. Its guide, "Supporting English Language Learners: A Pocket Guide for State and District Leaders" focuses specifically on ensuring that English language learners have the support needed to become college and/or career ready through effective instruction and leadership.