

IMPACT OF WRITING ASSESSMENT ON MINORITIES

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"The writing problems of minority students are acute," stated Leroy Simmons in his opening remarks. "This finding is not surprising given that so little writing in general is taught in the public schools." Simmons cited two major factors that have impacted on testing: The minimizing of writing skills instruction at the elementary and secondary level, a trend which has carried over into writing assessment, and the tendency to allow colleges and universities to initiate and to take full responsibility for writing assessment. An analysis of the available data on test scores of minority students of the writing sections of the Teacher Certification Examination and of the College-Level Academic Skills Test makes more apparent the impact of writing assessment on minority students. On timed tests, they have more oral language problems and they produce more verb errors. Simmons discussed these problems and went on to criticize several widely held inaccurate assumptions such as the assumptions that non-standard English vernacular lacks grammatical rules and that non-standard English speakers are

incapable of abstract thought.

Simmons concluded with four recommendations:

1. Minority students must understand that if they are to achieve any degree of success they must be able to compete in a pluralistic society.
2. We cannot condone unwarranted assumptions, nor can we allow ourselves to fall victim to the practices of labeling, prejudging or setting limits on the learning capacity of nonstandard English speakers, else we foster apathy and mediocrity.
3. We must engage in the necessary curriculum modifications at the public school and post-secondary levels to meet the writing needs of our students. This revitalized curriculum should have, minimally, the following elements:
 - a. A strong program of diagnoses and prescriptions supported by quality multi-ethnic curriculum materials.
 - b. An increased number of writing assignments integrated with exercises that clarify low context situations.
4. There should be further research focusing on writing skills and assessment of minority elementary and secondary school students.