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FOREWORD

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Writing assessment is about consequences for individuals. Writing assessment researchers must therefore gather evidence related to fairness, reliability, and validity under frameworks deeply attuned to the consequences of the assessment for individual students. Further, if the individual impact is estimated to be negative, the assessment should not proceed.

I wonder if such assessment principles could have been proposed in the early 1980s when I first began working in writing assessment—a time when Ronald Reagan was president, the US accountability movement continued to gain ground, and large-scale assessments such as the New Jersey College Basic Skills Placement Test were enacting neoliberal commodification on students, teachers, and administrators alike. I wonder if these principles can be proposed now—a time when individual differences exist in a world apart from Florida’s HB 1557 (Florida 2022) and its proposition that school districts may not encourage classroom discussion about sexual orientation or gender identity in primary grades.

Whether allowed or not, many believe individual-consequence principles can and should be proposed for writing assessment. A measurement basis for such principles can be found in the most recent version of the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (American Educational Research Association 2014). There, a single fascinating statement has been given little attention: “Test developers and publishers should document steps taken during the design and development process to provide evidence of fairness, reliability, and validity to intended uses for individuals in the intended examinee population” (85). There are two historically important parts to that sentence. First, the authors of the standards

acknowledge that fairness is a foundational form of evidence in its own right, not a subsidiary to traditional categories of reliability and validity. Second, the authors draw attention to individuals—a unique student seated at a particular desk—a truly radical advancement in educational measurement, in which impact has often been considered in terms of groups. For those in writing assessment interested in theory building and empirical research, the link in the standards between evidence of fairness and consequences for individuals is unprecedented. Surely if test developers and publishers are to follow this overarching principle, those in writing assessment can do the same and, indeed, should take a leadership role in advancing individual-consequence principles.

In the book you are about to read, Stephanie West-Puckett, Nikki Caswell, and Will Banks offer an authentic innovation in writing assessment—queer validity inquiry (QVI)—that places individual students at the center of all we say and do. As an assessment model, QVI invites assessment stakeholders, particularly designers and instructors, to adopt lenses of failure, affect, identity, and materiality. These lenses, the authors hold, can be used to identify missing domains of writing constructs such as the affective competencies—those often-ignored, critically significant personality factors missing from traditional assessments. Absent the intrapersonal domain, the authors imply, we find ourselves with such thin slices of writing constructs that we may wonder what the pie was in the first place. Conversely, once we introduce into our assessments robust writing constructs that reflect the way people really learn, we expose what is hidden, displaced, and negated to focus on individuals and their identities. In our assessments, the authors demonstrate, QVI is a substantiative, principled lens that allows us to think about what the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2018) identify as the complex ecology of context, cultures, neurological processes, and motivation that must be present if deep learning is to occur across the individual life cycles of our students.

QVI is far more than a niche area of assessment; we see important resonances between the lens of QVI and contemporary measurement research. David H. Slomp, Julie A. Corrigan, and Tamiko Sugimoto (2014) use a consequential validity lens—emphasizing the impact of the social and ideological aspects of assessment that often remain hidden—to propose an anticipatory design framework of integrated design to categorically identify and ecologically model consequences at each stage of assessment design. To support highly mobile populations with complex linguistic identities, Mya Poe and Qianqian Zhang-Wu (2020) modify the consequential validity lens to develop a program

assessment method based on multilingualism (attention to proficiency and exposure to multiple languages) and super diversity (acknowledgment of the many ways linguistic identity is deeply shaped by mobility). Continuing the work of writing assessment scholars Slomp, Poe, and their colleagues, educational measurement scholar Jennifer Randall (2021) has advanced a justice-oriented antiracist lens for assessment. Rejecting Cartesian-inspired, cognitively fetishized rhetorics that enact binaries and dualisms at every turn, Randall explicitly asks whether an assessment adequately addresses the diverse ways of knowing that Black stakeholders possess and value. Each of these ways of framing assessment design is profoundly connected to QVI in reminding us writing assessment is never only about textual artifacts. Writing assessment can only be useful to students when the material conditions of their lives—from the killing presence of language dominance to the generative force of individual difference—is acknowledged in each phase of an assessment.

While resonance is important in establishing QVI as an important part of research programs in writing assessment, it is equally important to understand that QVI charts new directions. While the QVI lens is an authentic innovation, it is equally innovative in its affordance. QVI is enacted through a killjoy stance. Informed by scholarship in queer and feminist rhetorics, notably the work of Sara Ahmed (2010a), this standpoint allows designers to recognize the many heteronormative investments within an assessment—the impulse, for example, to create success narratives when evidence reveals individual disenfranchisement—and to replace them with evidence that something went sideways. This sort of (re)visioning, central to the antinormative project of queer theory for over three decades, compels assessment designers to consider how normative rhetorics frame realities in binary ways, such as success/failure, in order to normativize one part of the binary at the expense of the other. As a systematic strategy, the killjoy stance raises the overarching question of plausibility. In the case of multilingual writers, the killjoy would ask, Is it possible to assess writing under a common construct drawn down from a normativized sender-and-receiver communication model? Himself an assessment killjoy when mechanistic models are in play, psychometrician Robert J. Mislevy (2018) simply says that “this is not how human communication works. Even the notion of a situation is deeply embedded in the activities and practices of people as they interact” (237). In place of success, the assessment killjoy calls out those sources of incomparability between the targeted construct and the unique identities of individual students.

While the QVI theoretical lens and the killjoy design strategy are important across assessment genres, West-Puckett, Caswell, and Banks wisely focus on formative assessment. While grassroots, classroom-assessment practices are the daily practice of teachers of writing, the authors attend closely to the impact that queer rhetorics can have on classroom-assessment frameworks and feedback activities. To the question of what is next for formative assessment, Heidi L. Andrade, Randy E. Bennett, and Gregory J. Cizek (2019), editors of a volume on classroom evaluation, identify discipline specificity as the next big thing. As West-Puckett, Caswell, and Banks brilliantly illustrate, attention to the ontology and axiology of QVI productively guides the epistemological design and assessment of a writing-classroom curriculum. Throughout the book, they provide case-based examples of pedagogies and assessments informed by a celebration of contingency and a love of diversity. As readers will see, a sideways vision for teaching and assessing writing helps us see ourselves, and our students, more fully than we have before.