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Changing the Culture of “Test Prep”: Reclaiming Writing Workshop

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Assessment despair...is a natural response to the calculated assault by the accountability agenda on what should most sacrosanct in education: the relationship between teacher and student. The accountability agenda takes what should be deeply humanizing experiences—teaching and learning—and turns them into bloodless exercises in quality control. (Gallagher 55-56)

To see high-stakes tests as something separate from our teaching is to give those high-stakes tests unwarranted power over our teaching and our curriculum.

(Gere, Christenbury, and Sassi 5)

In this age of Average Yearly Progress (AYP), states and districts have exerted pressure on teachers to improve test scores, and teachers have responded by shifting instructional time to test preparation (sometimes as an individual choice but often at the direction of their district offices). One teacher in New York City described this shift as a cultural one:

Test prep is a culture that a failing (usually synonymous with poor) school is forced to choose. It means that each morning the number of days and hours until the test are ticked off over the school PA system. Test prep means that billboards around the

school are covered with testing tips rather than student work. Test prep is when a school holds prep rallies not for its basketball team but for its test takers. Test prep is when students brag about the label given to them by a testing agency: I’m “Proficient” in multiple meanings. You’re “below Basic” in computation.... I fear that the effects of high stakes testing on a school’s climate are incurably opposed to the best traditions of real teaching and real learning. I can’t wait until April 10th, the first day after testing, when I’ll really become a teacher. (qtd. in Hill 1112)

In this scenario, “test prep” supplements (or replaces, in many cases) instruction—until April! While I could go on about the losses (in time, in subject content, in the professionalism of teachers and the confidence of students), others have written extensively on the effects of high stakes testing (see, in particular Gallagher, 2007; Kohn, 2000; Langer, 2001; McCracken and McCracken, 2001; and Meier and Wood, 2004), so I prefer to focus here on what we can reclaim for our students and for our teachers amid the testing frenzy.

I want to argue for an integrated writing pedagogy, for viewing high stakes writing tests as yet another genre of writing within which students can operate as writers and for integrating “test prep” into a reflective pedagogy that already focuses on best practices for teaching students to write. In this, I am building on the reflection at the center of both writing workshop philosophies (à la Nancie Atwell) and the more recent focus on assessment-driven traits instruction (as demonstrated in the 6-Traits practices of Vicki Spandel). Reflection—or responsive teaching—on the level of classroom workshops can be extended by integrating the dimension of writing on demand outlined by Anne Gere, Leila Christenbury, and Kelly Sassi.

As we saw in the vignette above, separating test prep from a balanced, research-based writing program produces a disconnect for teachers, but also for students; Gere, Christenbury, and Sassi discuss the main problem produced by this lack of integration: “preparation for writing on demand is often largely disconnected from the curriculum and puts teachers in the position of teaching to the test while students develop an impoverished concept of writing” (5). Instead, we should view the skills required for writing on demand—usually some sort of timed, impromptu writing—as being consistent with the skills required of all good writing, and therefore we should recognize that good writing pedagogy prepares students to write in a variety of situations and for a variety of audiences: the state writing proficiency exam is only one of them.

The Theory Behind Integration:

Engagement and Reflective Pedagogy

An integrated view is consistent with school reform models that emphasize what Chris Gallagher calls engagement and a view of assessment as reflective (Serafini). An engaged or reflective pedagogy is one that 1) focuses on student learning rather than on student achievement; 2) is directed by a responsive teacher (classroom-based as opposed to test-driven); and 3) is interpretive (it uses assessment to guide curricular decisions). In short, it mirrors the principles of good writing workshop pedagogy. For example, in her introduction to the second edition of *In the Middle*, Nancie Atwell defines the principles of a writing workshop through the reflective questions she asks as a teacher:

- When do assignments from a teacher who writes help young writers engage and grow?
- What else can happen in minilessons besides me minilecturing?
- How do I talk to--and collaborate with--kids in conferences so that I'm showing them how to act on their intentions, not hoping they can find their way on their own?
- How important are specific expectations for productivity and experimentation?

What should I ask young writers to produce over the course of a year, in terms of quantity and range of genres?

- How do I teach about genre without trotting out tired old English-teacher clichés that don't get to the heart of what makes good fiction or poetry or exposition?
- What behaviors do I want to see in the workshop? How do I encourage them? Which should be mandated?
- How and when do I demonstrate my own knowledge of writing? To what ends? (23)

In this list, Atwell covers those elements of an engaged, reflective writing pedagogy: helping teachers reflect on how to guide students to learn the qualities of good writing and the behaviors of writers through, for example, minilessons, individual conferences, demonstrations, genre study, and self- and teacher assessments.

Like Atwell, Vicki Spandel demonstrates an integrative, reflective pedagogy through her 6-Traits model that blends assessment and writing instruction within a collaborative, process-based curriculum:

[W]e (as teachers) must first teach ourselves what good writing is. We must know how to recognize it—not just the mistakes, but the moments of voice, detail, wonder, and magic—and we must have a language for talking about it.... Then we make students...fully active participants who speak writers' language, have their own rubrics (written in student-friendly terms) and learn alongside us how to think critically about writing. (6)

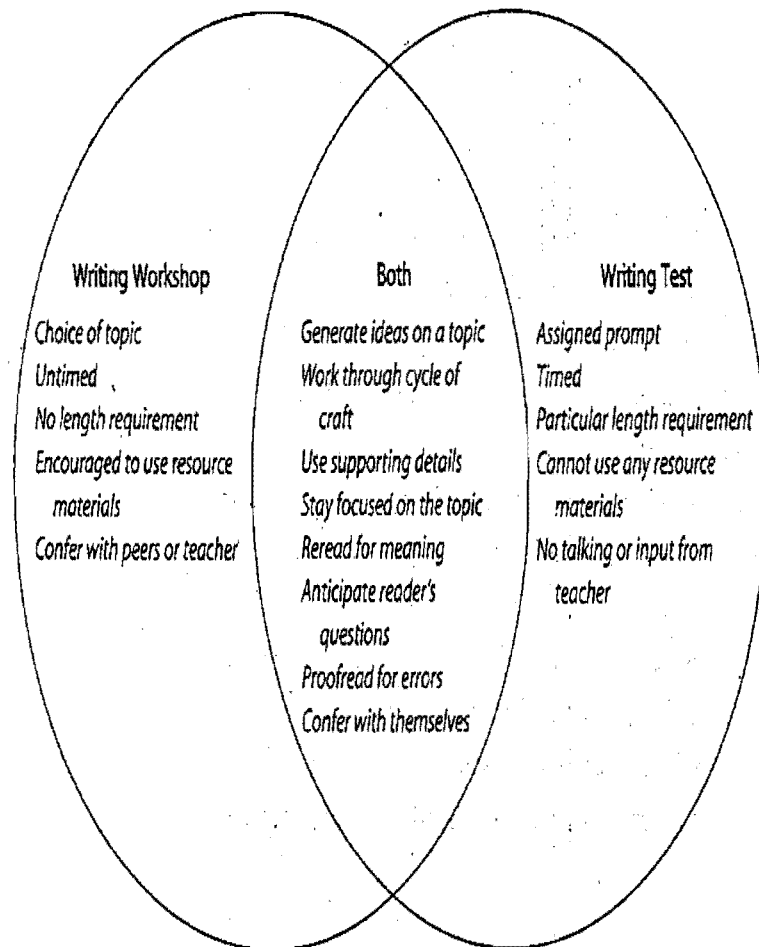
Spandel emphasizes the idea of “having a language for talking about” what good writing is. This really lies at the heart of an integrated writing pedagogy: if students begin

to recognize how writing works—and why it doesn't for certain audiences—they ought to be able to translate that knowledge into new writing situations. In other words, if they can understand the qualities of good writing and the behaviors they can perform to produce it in a workshop environment, why shouldn't they be able to do the same in a testing situation?

Fletcher and Portalupi think students can. They illustrate using a Venn diagram that writing on demand and writing workshop don't have to be seen as mutually exclusive.

Figure 1: Overlap between workshop and test environments (Fletcher and Portalupi 110)

As the diagram highlights, while writing workshop allows for choice and collaboration, the two elements most likely to be missing from standardized writing exams, the overlapping



skills in the middle can be cultivated in a writing workshop for use in unfamiliar writing-on-demand situations like writing tests. For instance, in both situations, students are called upon to consider their readers; generate ideas on a topic (whether assigned or of their choice); to work through a cycle of drafting and revision; to confer with themselves and make decisions about content, style, form, and grammatical correctness. The goals of a reflective pedagogy is to help students make these rhetorical moves within a variety of writing situations

Gere, Christenbury, and Sassi show us how to integrate writing-on-demand into a reflective writing pedagogy, and I rely on their strategies later in this essay to illustrate the concept of incorporating “test prep” into the writing workshop. These authors proceed from what they describe as “several classroom-tested assumptions” (5-6):

Good writing and writing on demand are not contradictory;

- Assessment is an integral part of effective writing instruction;
- Writing prompts can be approached rhetorically;
- Close reading fosters good writing; and
- Criteria for evaluation belongs in the classroom

Like Atwell and Spandel, Gere et al. operate from the important assumption that “the essential skills that student writers need to craft effective prose... are all part of an effective final writing piece that will yield appropriate scores for on-demand writing tests. There can be a real sense of fit between good writing and on-demand writing” (5, emphasis in the original). For example, the skills that Fletcher and Portalupi place in the center of their diagram—considering the reader, generating ideas on a topic, and so on—can be taught both in the context of workshop situations where students can function within a system of choice, time, and feedback and

in a writing-on-demand situations. Let me show you how.

Strategies for Integrating Test Prep: “Thinking Backward,” Analyzing Prompts, and Scoring

Reclaiming the power to teach writing well means focusing on a process-based curriculum that allows students to understand how texts work rhetorically and to implement strategies for generating and polishing text that real writers use—even in on-demand writing situations. Building on Gere et al., I will describe three ways of organizing writing workshop time that “emphasize strategies that are both effective in the testing situation and intellectually defensible in light of what we know about how real writers write” (11).

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Thinking Backward

At base, we want students to be able to think rhetorically about the writing situations they find themselves in. That means, we want to help students to analyze audiences and exigencies in order to produce texts that will have certain effects. In order to do so, Gere et al. suggest having students “think backward”: using literature and student writing as models, students should

- Read and discuss in general terms a range of models;
- Assess in specific terms the qualities of those models; and
- Speculate on the impetus for each model and what it is trying to accomplish. (12)

This kind of analysis is related to literary analysis, so it brings reading and writing together as rhetorical acts; it

also allows a teacher to integrate “test prep” throughout the year as a natural part of a reading and writing workshop. This is “close reading” at its best; as Gere et al. argue, “When students get into the habit of not just consuming prose but actually unpacking its craft—when they read for writing—then they are most able to replicate this in their own work” (113).

I might, for example, introduce students to thinking backward by opening with a student response like Anchor Paper F (see Appendix), written in response to the ACT Writing Test. In a minilesson, I would ask students to read the text and note the strengths and weaknesses of the piece: what does the author do well? Which parts are easy to understand and which are not so easy? Does the author provide details that enliven the text? What about fresh language? After discussing these qualities, I would have the group create a rubric using traits that could potentially apply to this response. For instance, the writer of Anchor Paper F makes an argument that “If you separate ‘academic’ from ‘non-academic’ too strictly, you separate school from the real world its’ [sic] supposed to prepare us for”; therefore, writing persuasively would factor into the scoring rubric. Finally, after creating a workable rubric, I would ask students to speculate about the prompt: what was the student asked to do? Can you tell if the student was writing with a particular audience in mind? Working from student-written models adds an extra layer of understanding for the testing situation, particularly as the class moves from discussing qualities of the writing to creating a rubric to speculating about the prompt.

Prompt Analysis

Thinking backwards prepares students to then move forward into writing situations armed with a sense of the qualities of good writing called for by a particular situation, in this case standardized writing tests. These tests ask for responses that are conventional in many ways (e.g., asking for a persuasive essay on a controversial topic, as we see in the response in Anchor Paper F above) and students can analyze those conventions and hone strategies for responding to them. One way to do so is to move from model texts to close reading

of sample prompts. Gere et al. offer five prompt analysis questions to guide the discussion:

- What is the central claim or topic called for?
- Who is the intended audience?
- What is the purpose or mode for the writing task?
- What strategies will be most effective?
- What is my role as a writer in achieving the purpose? (67)

The kind of analysis called for here is the same kind used to prepare for any type of writing situation, so although you are practicing using test prompts, you are not giving tests undue weight; they become another genre in the repertoire that students are called upon to produce. The Appendix shows the ACT Writing Test prompt to which anchor set responses were written (for all six anchor papers and explanation of scores, go to http://www.act.org/aap/writing/pdf/educator_guide.pdf, pp. 19-35).

One question to ask students is how close this prompt resembles the one they created from thinking backward. Next, break down the prompt using the prompt analysis questions: What kind of essay does this prompt call for? What specific terms tell you that? Who would the audience be? What kind of role are you asked to take as the author? Are there clues as to what criteria will be used to judge the final product? After analyzing a range of prompts (particularly those most likely to appear on your state's standardized writing test or on the ACT/SAT/AP exams), it is natural to move students through the cycles of prewriting, drafting, polishing and evaluating in response to these sample prompts.

Scoring Writing

Using rubrics and other scoring systems as part of an integrated, process-based curriculum makes sense not only in terms of preparing students to understand what is being asked of them in testing situations, but also in terms

of creating a general understanding of what makes writing work. Bringing students into the process of assessing writing lies at the heart of such analytic (or trait-based) strategies as the 6-Traits model. Spandel lists ten reasons to include trait-based writing systems in a writing workshop classroom (6):

1. The model provides consistent language for talking about writing.
2. Using a rubric you believe in keeps your assessment consistent and honest.
3. The six traits can help make both writing and revising manageable for students by breaking it into small steps.
4. The traits support and strengthen writing process.
5. Trait-based instruction makes revision and editing purposeful.
6. Partnership in writing assessment empowers students.
7. Learning to assess with confidence and skill increases student motivation while promoting thinking skills.
8. Six-trait instruction links reading and writing by encouraging students to read like writers—and write like readers.
9. Six-trait writing is real.
10. Working with well-written rubrics can save you time in assessing student work.

Gere et al. echo this confidence in the power of rubrics to help teachers and students articulate the qualities of good writing. They claim that “teachers who have started to use rubrics in the classroom are pleasantly surprised to find an increase in precise vocabulary among students in peer and teacher conferences, decreased student complaints about grades, and better accountability when discussing grading with colleagues, administrators, and parents” (187).

While teachers should develop rubrics that work within their particular classrooms and for particular writing

situations (Gere et al. provide several different kinds of scoring guides and rubrics), it is also useful to bring the scoring of the state writing exam or national standardized test into the classroom. Students can analyze the scoring system and practice applying it to sample texts, including their own. For example, in addition to classroom rubrics—perhaps those based on analytic models like 6-Traits—a teacher could introduce the holistic rubric used for the MEAP or ACT Plus Writing exam. Students could articulate how the two rubrics differ and how they reinforce similar qualities of writing. They could practice applying each to their writing or the writing of their peers. Is one easier to use than the other? How do the values of certain qualities of writing shift depending on which rubric is applied? What do the exam rubrics seem to value that the classroom rubric does not (and vice versa)? This analysis prepares students to better understand what readers are looking for when they evaluate written exams while it also reinforces the learning of writing process, content and style.

With the preservice teachers in my writing methods courses, I often bring in to class not only prompts, a range of sample texts, and the rubric from our state writing proficiency exam (Michigan Educational Assessment Program or the ACT Plus Writing exam) for practice scoring sessions, but also to compare the scores they give to those actually earned by the sample student responses. We discuss how their expectations about what traits would be most valued are sometimes not met by the actual scores (e.g., on the MEAP exam, the section on “Writing from Knowledge and Experience” often will value voice and creative uses of language to a larger degree than organization and grammatical correctness. This surprises the preservice teachers and causes them to rethink how they would approach test prep with their future students). My hope is that when they construct writing workshops with their students, this work with test materials and scoring rubrics will become integrated with other processes of assessment to form the kind of reflective pedagogy that provides their K-12 students with the fullest picture of writing possible.

In the Appendix, I have provided an example ACT

prompt, a rubric, Anchor Paper F, and the explanation for the score. The complete set of “anchor texts” can be found online in the Educator’s Guide to the ACT Writing Test¹. (They include not only a student response to illustrate each score point on the six-point holistic scoring rubric but also an explanation of why the response earned the score it did.) As with the preservice teachers, I would ask students to read the set of responses without knowing what scores were given, compare scores as a class and talk together about why the papers deserved particular scores, and then compare the class scores to those given by ACT readers. Scoring writing in this way—as part of a writing workshop that includes regular peer and teacher feedback and the use of rubrics to assess students’ writing—prepares students to read the testing situation like writers and to respond successfully. Conversely, regular analysis and assessment of writing produced in other situations and for audiences other than test scorers reinforces preparation for testing situations while it keeps that preparation in perspective.

Conclusion: Changing the Culture

It seems obvious that testing in and of itself does not assure excellence. As a matter of fact, an overemphasis on assessment can actually undermine the pursuit of excellence. When teachers break off essential instruction two weeks before a statewide test to drill students on questions that are likely to appear on the test, one wonders whether the true purpose of schools and learning has been polluted or completely lost. (Maehr and Midgley 7)

Under the regime of No Child Left Behind and the standards movement that spawned it, it is no wonder that language arts teachers feel under siege. Much has been written already about the ways that the movement Gallagher refers to as the “accountability agenda” has stripped teachers of autonomy and has “hijacked assessment, reduced staff development to test prep or rendered it irrelevant altogether, and sown the

seeds of distrust for teachers and schools among the public” (122). Even before NCLB, the National Council of Teachers of English passed a resolution “On Urging Reconsideration of High Stakes Testing,” which emphasized that “High stakes testing often harms students’ daily experience of learning, displaces more thoughtful and creative curriculum, diminishes the emotional well-being of educators and children, and unfairly damages the life-chances of members of vulnerable groups” (<http://www.ncte.org/about/over/positions/level/elem/107357.htm>). The siege mentality shows up in the in a recent article on test preparation, where one language arts teacher describes how after winter break, she had to prepare students to write for the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test:

When students returned from winter break, I explained that they would start writing exclusively for the test. They received new writing folders and switched from writing on notebook paper to FCAT writing paper, an important change because the test paper controlled the length of writing. Now my classroom seemed like a boot camp where “the soldiers” were training for real battles. (Shelton and Fu 124)

Does it have to be this way? If we recognize (and help parents, administrators, and other taxpayers to recognize) that “testing in and of itself does not assure excellence,” then we should do everything in our power to insure that we don’t afford statewide tests undue influence within our classrooms. Reclaiming the power to teach means educating others about the dangers of the accountability agenda while protecting our curricula and pedagogies from practices that offer a simplified and limited view of writing and of our students’ abilities. One way to do that is to change the culture of “test prep” by incorporating a flexible, integrated, responsive, and accountable writing pedagogy. High stakes writing tests and other writing-on-demand situations become simply occasions for students independently and confidently to demonstrate their broad

repertoire of skills and understandings about writing.

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Appendix

ACT Writing Test Samples

Anchor Set Example Prompt (*Educator’s Guide* 19)

Many high school libraries use some of their limited funding to subscribe to popular magazines with articles that are interesting to students. Despite limited funding, some educators support this practice because they think having these magazines available encourages students to read. Other educators think school libraries should not use limited funds to subscribe to these magazines because they may not be related to academic subjects. In your opinion, should high school libraries use some of their limited funding to subscribe to popular magazines?

In your essay, take a position on this question. You may write about either one of the two points of view given, or you may present a different point of view on this question. Use specific reasons and examples to support your position.

Six-Point Holistic Rubric for the ACT Writing Test (*Educator’s Guide* 18)

Papers at each level exhibit all or most of the characteristics described at each score point.

Score = 6 Essays within this score range demonstrate effective skill in responding to the task.

The essay shows a clear understanding of the task. The essay takes a position on the issue and may offer a critical context for discussion. The essay addresses complexity by examining different perspectives on the issue, or by evaluating the implications and/or complications of the issue, or by fully responding to counterarguments to the writer’s position. Development of ideas is ample, specific, and logical. Most ideas are fully elaborated. A clear focus on the specific issue in the prompt is maintained. The organization of the essay is clear: the organization may be somewhat predictable or it may grow from the writer’s purpose. Ideas are logically sequenced. Most transitions reflect the writer’s logic and are usually integrated into the essay. The introduction and conclusion are effective, clear, and well developed. The essay shows a good command of language. Sentences are varied and word choice is varied and precise. There are few, if any, errors to distract the reader.

Score = 5 Essays within this score range demonstrate competent skill in responding to the task.

The essay shows a clear understanding of the task. The essay takes a position on the issue and may offer a broad context for discussion. The essay shows recognition of complexity by partially evaluating the implications and/or complications of the issue, or by responding to counterarguments to the writer’s position. Development of ideas is specific and logical. Most ideas are elaborated, with clear movement between general statements and specific reasons, examples, and details. Focus on the specific issue in the prompt is maintained. The organization of the essay is clear, although it may be predictable. Ideas are logically sequenced, although simple and obvious transitions may be used. The introduction and conclusion are clear and generally well developed. Language is competent. Sentences are somewhat varied and word choice is sometimes varied and precise. There may be a few errors, but they are rarely distracting.

Score = 4 Essays within this score range demonstrate adequate skill in responding to the task.

The essay shows an understanding of the task. The essay takes a position on the issue and may offer some

context for discussion. The essay may show some recognition of complexity by providing some response to counterarguments to the writer's position. Development of ideas is adequate, with some movement between general statements and specific reasons, examples, and details. Focus on the specific issue in the prompt is maintained throughout most of the essay. The organization of the essay is apparent but predictable. Some evidence of logical sequencing of ideas is apparent, although most transitions are simple and obvious. The introduction and conclusion are clear and somewhat developed. Language is adequate, with some sentence variety and appropriate word choice. There may be some distracting errors, but they do not impede understanding.

Score = 3 Essays within this score range demonstrate some developing skill in responding to the task.

The essay shows some understanding of the task. The essay takes a position on the issue but does not offer a context for discussion. The essay may acknowledge a counterargument to the writer's position, but its development is brief or unclear. Development of ideas is limited and may be repetitious, with little, if any, movement between general statements and specific reasons, examples, and details. Focus on the general topic is maintained, but focus on the specific issue in the prompt may not be maintained. The organization of the essay is simple. Ideas are logically grouped within parts of the essay, but there is little or no evidence of logical sequencing of ideas. Transitions, if used, are simple and obvious. An introduction and conclusion are clearly discernible but underdeveloped. Language shows a basic control. Sentences show a little variety and word choice is appropriate. Errors may be distracting and may occasionally impede understanding.

Score = 2 Essays within this score range demonstrate inconsistent or weak skill in responding to the task.

The essay shows a weak understanding of the task. The essay may not take a position on the issue, or the essay may take a position but fail to convey reasons to support that position,

or the essay may take a position but fail to maintain a stance. There is little or no recognition of a counterargument to the writer's position. The essay is thinly developed. If examples are given, they are general and may not be clearly relevant. The essay may include extensive repetition of the writer's ideas or of ideas in the prompt. Focus on the general topic is maintained, but focus on the specific issue in the prompt may not be maintained. There is some indication of an organizational structure, and some logical grouping of ideas within parts of the essay is apparent. Transitions, if used, are simple and obvious, and they may be inappropriate or misleading. An introduction and conclusion are discernible but minimal. Sentence structure and word choice are usually simple. Errors may be frequently distracting and may sometimes impede understanding.

Score = 1 Essays within this score range show little or no skill in responding to the task.

The essay shows little or no understanding of the task. If the essay takes a position, it fails to convey reasons to support that position. The essay is minimally developed. The essay may include excessive repetition of the writer's ideas or of ideas in the prompt. Focus on the general topic is usually maintained, but focus on the specific issue in the prompt may not be maintained. There is little or no evidence of an organizational structure or of the logical grouping of ideas. Transitions are rarely used. If present, an introduction and conclusion are minimal. Sentence structure and word choice are simple. Errors may be frequently distracting and may significantly impede understanding.

No Score = 0 Blank, Off-Topic, Illegible, Not In English, or Void.

WRITING TEST

High schools nowadays are struggling to draw the line between what is "educational" and what is not. School programs are cut based on how much educational content they're perceived to have. Now the administration is trying to purge libraries of popular magazines because they contain non-academic subjects. It's important that the library buy dictionaries and encyclopedias, but education purists need to be reminded that if you separate "academic" from "non-academic" too strictly, you separate school from the real world it's supposed to prepare us for.

Educators are the ones who tell us we should spend more time reading. The only way to build the reading-comprehension and vocabulary skills so important for getting into and through college is to practice, and that means reading things other than school assignments. No one ever gained reading proficiency from daily struggles through their Chemistry or History textbooks. We read these because we have to, but we would continue reading — even during precious homework-free moments — if we had something interesting to turn to. The magazines that teenagers enjoy reading are the ones that cover our interests and address our concerns, like "Seventeen" or "Teen People". These are the magazines that some would banish from the library.

It's true that not every page in youth magazines is an intellectual challenge. Many pages show models selling zt enam, or contain "dream date" quizzes. But the critics of popular magazines should take a closer look at them. These same magazines have articles on suicide prevention, the spread of AIDS among teens, and college comparisons — subjects that the adult oriented news media doesn't cover.

Even the frivolous features have something to teach the reader who wants to learn. All those "Great Looks Cheap" may be a first step toward becoming a smarter consumer. The silly quiz may open up questions about the nature of "scientific proof" or lead to more self-knowledge.

Learning is where you find it, and students may find it in places administrators and librarians might not think to look. Learning can be found in popular magazines as well as approved academic texts. There should be ~~more~~ room in the school library for both.

Anchor Paper F

Score Point 6

Scoring Explanation

Essays that earn a score point of 6 demonstrate a clear understanding and effective performance of the persuasive task. The writer takes a clear position, develops it throughout the essay, and states it directly in the conclusion (Learning can be found in popular magazines as well as approved academic texts). The position is placed in a wider context without disrupting the essay's focus (High schools nowadays are struggling to draw the line between what is "educational" and what is not. School programs are cut based on how much educational content they're perceived to have).

The essay addresses complexity by anticipating counterarguments to the writer's position (It's true that not every page in youth magazines is an intellectual challenge...even the frivolous features have something to teach the reader who wants to learn) and fully responding to those counterarguments by showing specifically where they are weak (These same magazines have articles on suicide prevention, the spread of AIDS among teens, and college comparisons—subjects that the adult oriented news media doesn't cover).

The writer's ideas may not be developed evenly over all of the paragraphs, but their development is succinct and logical. The essay elaborates general statements (Even the frivolous features have something to teach the reader who wants to learn) by moving to more specific details and examples (All those "Great Looks Cheap" may be a first step

toward becoming a smarter consumer).

The organization of the essay is clear and the logical sequence of ideas grows out of the writer's intent to persuade. Transitions help the essay flow smoothly from one paragraph to the next (It's true that not every page in youth magazines is an intellectual challenge...even the frivolous features have something to teach the reader who wants to learn). The introduction is clear and especially well developed, connecting the writer's position to a strong critical claim (if you separate "academic" from "non-academic" too strictly, you separate school from the real world it's supposed to prepare us for).

The essay shows a good command of language. Word choice is precise and persuasive (purge the libraries and frivolous features). Facility with words and sentence structure enables the writer to maintain a light, amused tone (The silly quiz may open up questions about the nature of "scientific proof" or lead to more self-knowledge). There are few errors in this essay, and they scarcely distract the reader.

About the Author

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