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## "A Friendly Challenge to Push the Outcomes Statement Further"

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## A Friendly Challenge to Push the Outcomes Statement Further

Peter Elbow

In *The Outcomes Book: Debate and Consensus after the WPA Outcomes Statement*.  
Eds. Susanmarie Harrington, Keith Rhodes, Ruth Overman Fischer, Rita  
Malenczyk. Logan UT: Utah State UP, 2005. 177-90.

I should "situate myself" and say a word about the history I bring to the outcomes statement. In the 1970s I spent three years in a research project with six others looking closely at seven experiments in outcome based ("competence based") higher education. We each studied our own site for three years--interviewing and observing and eventually writing a case study. But the whole group paid a visit to each site at least once for additional interviewing and observing so that we could provide each other with "triangulation" or additional perspectives. (Sites varied from single courses to programs to entire institutions. Alverno College is perhaps the best known institution we studied and reported on.)

Each of us also wrote a second essay about an issue or dimension of outcomes based education. In my essay, "Trying to Teach While Thinking About the End," I struggled to understand how an outcomes approach affected the teaching process. I say "struggled" because I felt my whole temperament to be at odds with an outcomes approach. Just as I have always valued writing as a voyage of discovery towards an unknown direction rather than toward an outcome or outline specified in advance, so I value teaching as a similar voyage. I don't like destinations specified too much in advance. But in my three years of observing various programs and in my lengthy process of working through to my conclusions about outcomes based teaching, I ended up with high respect for the specification of outcomes. I want to summarize here two of my conclusions.

First, even though my temperament and personal goals in teaching seemed inimical to an outcomes approach (goals like growth, intellectual integrity, curiosity, the ability to question), I finally concluded that in fact there is no conflict here. I concluded that *anything* you are trying for in teaching may be specified as a goal or an outcome or even a competence--as long as you go about specifying it in a sufficiently careful and sophisticated manner. I conceded that the outcomes folks were right: it's all a matter of forcing yourself to figure out and admit what you really want. Second, the issue of whether to specify outcomes turns out to be interestingly tangled up with issues of class. The resistance to outcomes tends to come with elitist attitudes and elitist institutions: ("No one is going to force me to specify my goals. I'm the expert. They wouldn't understand.")

So I arrive at the WPA outcomes statement for first year writing respectful but wary--since of course we also saw how an outcomes approach could be used badly in various ways (sometimes mechanistically, unthoughtfully, unreflectively). And I was suspicious of the WPA outcomes statement because I didn't see any evidence that the authors had consulted or were

even aware of the *extensive* experimentation and literature on outcomes based or competence based education at all levels of curriculum--including higher education.\*

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\*One of the main premises of the competence based movement was that outcomes should be worked out locally: either by individual teachers or by teachers working collaboratively in a program, department or even a whole college. The movement was based on the idea that teaching could be revitalized if teachers themselves figured out what outcomes they are teaching toward--or should be teaching toward. In contrast, the outcomes project, though impressively collaborative, aims to provide outcomes to teachers who had no hand in devising them. For the purposes of my essay, I simply set to one side this important difference.

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I end up admiring the Outcomes Statement. The framers have done something important, useful, and very difficult. They took one of the most chaotic realms in all of higher education--first year composition--and broke it down into clear goals. Perhaps more striking, they managed to attain remarkable agreement among a very disparate but important group of leaders in the field.

Still, I'm not satisfied and I offer this essay as a friendly challenge. I promise to join in on further work if invited. The framers of the WPA Statement have gone a long distance but I want to push further. In this essay I will offer three challenges.

I

Consider this thought experiment. It's one I like to use when I--or new teachers I work with--begin to feel slightly or even very troubled:

Imagine your first year writing course as a ship--as Jonah's ship tossed on hurricane driven waves and in great danger of sinking. Your class is not working well at all. Students are resisting you, they don't seem to be learning, you are suffering. Like the mariners on Jonah's ship, your only hope of making it to port is to jettison cargo. Imagine, then, that you have to jettison *almost everything* on your Good Ship ENG 101. What *few* things would you cling to and not throw overboard? What do you care about most? If you could only accomplish one or two things in your writing course, what would you try for?

I love this question for the way it forces us to figure out our priorities. (I also like the way it invites us to be frank about a feeling many of us more than occasionally have: fear that our class is in trouble.)

This thought experiment gives me a troubling perspective on the outcomes on the WPA list. I'm not troubled that I'll have to throw overboard many of their outcomes; that's how it is with storms. What's troubling is that I can't find on their list any of the outcomes I most want to hang on to. I'm talking about the outcomes that I feel as most central and writerly for a first year writing course: getting students to *experience* themselves as writers and to *function* like writers. The last piece of cargo I would jettison before my ship sank to the bottom of the sea would be a clump of practical and writerly outcomes like these:

- \* The ability to get lots of words and lots of ideas down on paper or on the screen without too much struggle. This general statement implies two very practical corollary outcomes: the ability to get started in writing something without too much harmful delay or procrastination; the ability to keep on writing even when you are tired or discouraged. I like to phrase this in the strongest way as the ability to *enjoy* writing. Face it, the only way that students will get good at writing is to continue writing when no one is holding a gun to their heads.
- \* But I'm not talking about just any words. Rather, my central goal for the course is the ability to put down words and ideas that match one's felt meaning or intention--that produce a click of grateful recognition where you say, "Yes, that's what I mean, that's what I want to say."
- \* Also, the ability write *past* what you "had in mind" when you sat down so that you know how to discover words and thoughts that feel new--that you *didn't* have in mind or at least that you didn't know you had in mind.

Why did the framers so utterly neglect this practical, nitty-gritty, behavioral dimension of writing? Did they assume that our first year students can *already* write without too much struggle and procrastination--and find words that match their existing meanings and intentions as well as new words and thoughts? Yet any teacher of first year writing who knows what's really going on with the students as they write knows that many of them cannot wield words in this way.

Perhaps the framers felt they "covered" the abilities I've just mentioned when they specified the ability to "use writing and reading for inquiry, learning, thinking, and communicating." But this is unhelpfully vague and doesn't get at the nitty gritty abilities I'm talking about. Insofar as the outcomes statement treats invention at all (and mostly it doesn't), it treats it more as a matter of finding and responding to material in readings. I see no awareness of the root ability to find thoughts and topics of your own--to write as an initiator and agent rather than as a responder.

I think the problem is that the framers were too preoccupied with another goal--one that is of course equally important and that Mark Wiley sums up with this phrase: "help them develop into rhetorically savvy, critically aware, versatile writers" (67). The framers seem to

me to stress this goal to the point of redundancy: the ability to suit your words to various audiences, to various purposes, to various genres, and to various situations.

In effect I am calling attention to two very large or general goals: invention (finding lots of words and thoughts and getting them out) and rhetorical savvy (critical awareness of audience, purpose, genre, situation). It is common to feel that these two goals or emphases are in conflict with each other; people tend to assume an either/or attitude toward them: naive vs. sophisticated; being careless vs. exercising care; doing it with pleasure and satisfaction vs. doing it right.

It's this kind of thinking that is the problem: the sense that one has to choose one or the other. That's exactly what the framers seem to have done. In effect, they opted for what felt like "sophistication"--but I would call it an unsophisticated or crude decision. For in truth both these goals can reasonably and effectively be pursued--indeed they must be pursued if we want to help produce well equipped writers. If the only goal is invention and fertility, we lose critical awareness and rhetorical savvy. But--and here is the problem with the WPA list--if teachers emphasize only critical awareness and rhetorical savvy, this functions as an *impediment* for students mastering what I would call the prior or foundational competences of finding lots of words that match their felt intention--and thus getting intrinsic satisfaction from the act of writing. This one sidedness is precisely the conditions that lead to so much wooden, thoughtless, uninvested writing from first year students.

Throughout most of my work on writing, I have emphasized this problem of the seeming conflict between the generative and the critical. I've emphasized that, in practice, *time* is the key: we can do justice to both dimensions if we give dedicated time to each. The framers do allude to this crucial and writerly ability to strategize in the deployment of time: they specify the ability "to save extensive editing for after invention and development work has been done very completely." Yet amazingly, they don't include this central aspect of the writing process as an outcome for the first year writing course itself but rather only in the list of outcomes that teachers in *other* disciplines *might* adopt!

The framer's unconscious preoccupation with rhetorical awareness of audience/genre/purpose led them in fact into an unsophisticated blindness to an audience/genre/purpose that is central for most writers--and one that is a foundational ability that I would also cling to in a terrible storm:

- \* The ability to explore a topic for yourself, on your own, because *you* are interested--even when others are not interested. This is the ability to keep on writing when there's no feedback or when the feedback is negative. Putting it differently, here is the ability to *like* your own writing so you care about it enough to really work further on it when others ignore it or don't like it.

Because the framers were so preoccupied with critical awareness, their only way of imagining peer response, was as "critique." They totally neglect:

- \* The ability to give *supportive* responses to others; to suit your response to the needs of the writer.
- \* Nor do they mention the crucial abilities that *writers* need in soliciting response: figuring out what response *you* need for your draft, and learning to get readers to give it to you--rather than what is inappropriate or unhelpful.

I think their preoccupation with rhetorical theory makes them neglect the central experiences of writers in peer groups. So they leave out one of the hardest but most important skills for freshmen (not to mention full professors):

- \* The ability to listen well to feedback from others--hear it and take it seriously yet not be hamstrung by it.

The WPA unconscious emphasis on "critical" also leads them to neglect a basic skill in good persuasion and argumentation. Though they talk about "critical thinking, reading, and writing," they don't mention:

- \* The ability to understand and write with respect (and even sympathy) for points of view different from your own (the believing game).

Am I just reacting like so many reviewers of anthologies who write, "Those selections you chose are all very well, but you left out some of my old favorites." No, it's more than that. I'm troubled by a serious tilt toward **knowledge about** *the principles of rhetoric*, and a tilt away from **knowing how** *to be a writer*: learning how to function as and experience oneself as a writer.

## II

If I wanted to make fun of the list, I could propose a scary thought experiment. Consider a hard-assed, skeptical, high-level administrator or legislator who thinks that teaching first year writing is too expensive--and who wants more money for large scale assessment. He might take this list and say, "Good work! At last these vague, wishy-washy English teachers have shown a spark of efficiency and spelled out exactly what they are trying to teach. With this list, we can now teach what needs to be taught by means of a large lecture course with a machine-graded exam at the end." I fear that the outcomes list lends itself to this perversion because so much of it is "knowledge" that students could gain by reading and listening to lectures, and that

they could demonstrate on machine-graded exams. To use a distinction from philosophy, there is too much "knowing that" and not enough "knowing how." Let me illustrate.

Consider these the following clump of outcomes--all taken from the first two sections of the outcomes statement (rhetorical knowledge and critical thinking/reading/writing):

- \* Recognize different audiences and their needs;
- \* Recognize differences in communicative situations;
- \* Have a sense of what genres are and how they differ;
- \* Learn the steps necessary to carry out writing;
- \* Investigate, report and document existing knowledge.

We could teach these outcomes with lectures and readings, and attentive students could give correct answers on an exam--even a sophisticated multiple choice exam.

The third section of the outcomes statement is *process*, and here is where we would expect the most emphasis on "knowing how" rather than "knowing that." And yet under processes, we are told that students should *be aware that* it usually takes multiple drafts and *understand* that writing is an on-going process and *understand* the collaborative and social aspects . . . and so on (my emphasis). These too could be taught in lectures and tested on an exam. The fourth section of the outcomes statement comprises knowledge of conventions: this knowledge can obviously be taught *entirely* with workbooks and tested with machine graded exams.

Needless to say, my reading is satirically hostile. No one but a mean spirited, cost cutting administrator would fail to realize that the framers of the outcomes did not intend for them to be used in this way. And half of the outcomes ask for "knowing how" (but half isn't really very many): *use* conventions of format, *adopt* appropriate voice, *write in* several genres, *use* writing and reading for inquiry, *develop* strategies for generating, and even *practice* means of documenting, and so on.

Still, the issue I raise is far from trivial. Not only do we live in a time when institutions are desperate to cut costs and frame learning into outcomes that can be inexpensively assessed; in addition, the whole point of an outcomes statement is to help us be more sophisticated about the nature of knowing--and thus to avoid getting mixed up about the difference between knowing that and knowing how.

My dissatisfaction feels substantial, but in a sense it is a minor one, for it was pretty much cured by a revision of the outcomes statement prepared mostly by Irv Peckham. (Unfortunately, it's no longer available at the Outcomes Statement website.) It did an

admirable job of framing outcomes in terms of knowing how, and this made the outcomes much clearer and crisper than in the main document.

### III

It seems to me that any further discussion of outcomes needs to benefit from the lively experimentation and extensive scholarship on competence based education in the 1970s. The movement was frankly democratic, egalitarian, and liberatory. Let me try to spell out my sense of the central premises that I saw driving it.

(a) Poor teaching in colleges and universities often stems from faculty being characteristically inept at giving clear and concrete answers to their students (and often to themselves and to the public) when asked the direct question, "What are you actually trying to teach?" In a sense the competence-based movement could be summed up as a concerted insistence that we take seriously that pesky question that students like to ask and teachers like to duck: "What are you looking for?" The movement seemed to me driven by an irritation if not downright anger at teachers who answer in effect, "Don't ask. Keep your mind on higher things. Besides, you wouldn't understand. I'm the expert here. Only I understand the criteria; only I can be the judge of what constitutes [say] good writing." People in the movement argued that teachers don't deserve their jobs unless they can answer the question clearly and concretely enough that the student and teachers will agree about whether or not the student has learned that particular skill or ability.

(b) Outcomes should be "validated." That is, faculties and educational institutions have an obligation to consult with people *outside* the academy in deciding what knowledge, skills, and abilities students should achieve. (The WPA framers explicitly declined to open this can of worms--asking various constituencies what they see as good writing or a competent writer. The competence based folk insisted it was a cop out not to open it.)

(c) Colleges typically mystify the relationship between teaching and assessing or certifying. Curricular structures often tacitly legislate that learning doesn't count or deserve credit unless it occurs while enrolled in a course. It was a central premise that structures should be set up so that students could get credit for things they learn without having to undergo instruction. Constantly we felt the theme that students should not have to be so dependent upon teachers for learning. A major goal was to clarify the relationship between the teaching functions and the assessing or certifying functions of education in such a way as to empower students. The competence movement yielded some very sophisticated insights about assessment that are particularly needed today.

(d) Most assessment is problematic because it assumes a "norm-based model" of assessment; we need instead a "criterion-based" model. Norm-based assessment treats *time* as the constant and *learning* as the variable: thus the normal constant is a semester or sixty minutes, and the variable is the degree of learning--and thus the range of scores or grades that

students get. Criterion-based assessment, in contrast, treats *learning* as the constant and *time* as the variable: the constant should be a set of specific abilities or skills that all students must attain, and the variable will then be the amount of time that different students will require. The central pedagogical and ideological point is this: if we articulate outcomes in more concrete detail, we can ask that *all* students master them (the term "mastery learning" was sometimes used). We mustn't write off the ability of certain students to achieve the important outcomes, just because it takes them longer. ("Slow" is a euphemism for stupid.) Thus the norm-based model tends to emphasize difference and competition (the IQ "intelligence" test is the paradigm of norm-based assessment), whereas the criterion-based model emphasizes the expectation that all students can learn--as long as we provide good conditions and flexibility of time. (See McClelland's foundational essay for the movement: "Testing for Competence Rather Than for Intelligence.")

(e) Finally, by insisting on clearer outcomes, we can increase learning in yet another fashion, namely, by helping students themselves understand more concretely the skills and abilities we are attempting to impart--thereby increasing their ability to teach themselves and to assess themselves about whether they learned. In short, for the competence based movement, the key to improved learning and student empowerment is meta-awareness: the ability to notice, monitor, and take control of one's own learning process.

I was troubled when I started observing and writing about outcomes based learning: they are so committed to meta-awareness and self-consciousness whereas I am so committed to intuitive processes like freewriting where you turn off critical awareness and control. But I gradually learned that I didn't need to fear their approach (though too few of them understood the value of the intuitive--sometimes using "intuitive" as a bad word). That is, I figured out that I could do a better job of fostering *my* attempts to make use of intuitive and nonselfconscious processes if I learned from the competence folks to be more critically aware of these as goals--goals that I need to be better at articulating. I learned how to say things like this: "If our ultimate goal is deeper and more connected thinking--and even rhetorical savvy--we can get there better if we consciously set aside periods where we explicitly engage in *non-goal-oriented* writing behavior. There are certain goals that we attain better when we take time to set those goals aside."

If the WPA framers had explored the literature from the competence based movement of the 70s, they would have found it helpful and sympathetic. But they would have learned two important principles that I would argue for strenuously in a revision. Yet I think I'm asking for no more than the next logical steps in a journey on which the framers have already gone the hardest distance.

## **Take Students into our Confidence When We Articulate Outcomes**

Another thought experiment. Imagine we were professional mountain guides leading a party of amateurs climbers, we would do well to get very clear among ourselves about our destinations and goals: Where are we headed and what do we need to do to get there? Clearly the WPA framers took this sensible step goal in formulating outcomes. But we wouldn't stop there if we were thinking hard about outcomes. We'd realize that our mountain expedition would have a much better chance of getting to its destination if the guides took care to ensure that *those we are trying to lead* also know the destinations and goals.

This analogy seems to me particularly apt for teaching. Students will get much more from our teaching if they know where we are trying to lead them and thus can help us get there. Most of us have experienced this truth in an unfortunately negative form: we notice that if students don't understand or share our goals, they can prevent learning no matter what we do.

I think I understand why the WPA framers decided not to talk to students (declaring, "We expect the main audience for this document to be well-prepared college writing teachers and college writing program administrators. We have chosen to write in their professional language"). Sometimes I too can't figure something out about my teaching if I have to talk it out publicly with my students or with parents or the public. Yet given the good work the framers have already done, they are now in a good position to take the second step and articulate these outcomes in such a way as to address students too. This is not just a "rhetorical" choice of audience in the trivial sense of "rhetorical"; it's rhetorical in the deeper sense. That is, decisions about how to frame or articulate knowledge are always deployments of power. The outcomes statement as we now have it constitutes an insistence on retaining power to ourselves as professional experts--and refusing to invite power and participation by the student learner or the outside world. I'd call it professionalism in the bad sense.

Am I too harsh in charging the WPA framers with hiding behind their professional expertise? I'm importing a flavor of harshness that I felt from leading figures in the competence based movement of the 1970s--often aimed at arrogant faculty members and elite institutions that pretended to educate when they were really just rewarding students for the training and talent they already possessed before they came to college or enrolled in the course. (There's no need to be clear and explicit with students if those students are already in good shape to learn what you are teaching.) Of course the community of composition scholars and teachers is anything but an elitist bastion of power and authority (though WPAs do in fact have nontrivial authority). Still I'm troubled when I consult the version of the outcomes that the WPA group *does* provide for students (again on a link from the main statement). I think it's a version that most students would experience as condescending and obfusatory--a piece of rhetoric that says, in effect, "You wouldn't understand us if we really tried to explain these outcomes to you, so we'll just give you vague hip slang." Let me reiterate the premise of the competence based movement: if we want to improve teaching and learning by articulating outcomes, the job is not done till we take the students into our confidence. We need to be smart enough to spell

out what we are looking for so clearly that students can see as well as we can whether they have attained any particular skill or ability.

On one of my visits to a site, I was sitting in on a dreadful lecture--rambling, disorganized, dull. I was starting to tune out in a mood of strong irritation when gradually I noticed how differently all the students were reacting. They didn't look absent or annoyed, and they were busily absorbed in taking notes with great focus. When I talked to some of them afterwards, they told me that of course they knew it was a pretty bad lecture, but they knew what they had to get from it--and they could indeed get it. When we explain outcomes clearly to students, they can get good benefits from bad teaching.

People with portfolio assessment programs are discovering the same thing. When students know ahead of time what skills or abilities they need to display in their portfolios, they can be more active and intellectually aware as they try to *produce in themselves* the learning needed to get those skills and abilities visible in their portfolios. Notice the difference between these two statements to students:

Give me your portfolio and I, in my professional wisdom, will judge it and reveal to you whether you pass or fail.

Here's what your portfolio will have to demonstrate to readers: . . . . I probably can't teach all those things brilliantly in fourteen weeks, but if you will try to *learn* them while I'm trying to teach them, you have a much better chance of success.

And remember: as students try to get their portfolios to demonstrate the required abilities, they will be trying out, testing, and confirming their *conceptual* or *theoretical* knowledge of these sometimes difficult, subtle, or fuzzy rhetorical outcomes. In short, this route addresses both "knowing how" and "knowing that."

### **Make Outcomes as Clear and Down to Earth as Possible**

In a way, this principle follows from deciding to take students as audience. Of course some competence based enthusiasts went much too far toward micro "behavioral objectives," but I came to respect a general push in the movement toward being down to earth. Outcomes folks insisted on a simple but productive two step sequence of thinking. First they ask, "What are you trying to teach?" but then they always go on to ask, "So how will we know this skill or ability or piece of knowledge when we see it? What does it look like in the flesh--on the hoof?"

Thus, I could have framed the whole opening section of this essay in terms of a neglect of the traditional and basic rhetorical skill of *invention*. But this is abstract and it is general. It's

crucial to talk instead about things that every student will recognize and appreciate as a worthwhile goal: "getting lots of words down without too much struggle" or "learning to avoid unproductive procrastination."

It's interesting and perplexing to me that the framers worked so hard to avoid talking in terms of texts. They wrote outcomes like, "focus on a purpose and address audience needs," instead of "produce a *portfolio* that shows you can focus on a purpose and address audience needs." This may sound like semantic quibbling, but my reformulation will be clearer and more productive for students and lead to fewer arguments. (The extensive work on portfolio assessment in the last couple of decades will prove enormously useful here--especially where experimenters and researchers have begun to specify extremely interesting and sometimes subtle writing outcomes.)

But if the framers had opened the door to the concreteness of text, they would surely have made a huge change--and one that strikes me as desirable. That is, even though they were willing to talk about textual features like "control of spelling and grammar" (what does "control" really mean?) and "use of appropriate voice and register," for some reason they ran away from talking about many of the textual features that turn up most prominently in teachers' mouths and written comments: clear sentences, coherent paragraphs, and effective structures. Perhaps the framers felt that these textual features were not sufficiently "rhetorical" and smacked too much of "Platonic-good-writing-in-the-abstract." But these sorts of textual features are just the kind that *must* be specified if we want to give honest answers to that central question that an outcomes approach invites: "*What are you looking for?*"

Furthermore, these textual outcomes do not exclude the rhetorical dimension--indeed, they are very problematic unless formulated in a rhetorical manner:

- \* the ability to create openings that bring readers in satisfactorily, and endings that give a satisfying sense of closure;
- \* the ability to structure essays so that readers have an appropriate sense of where they are being led--so they don't get lost;
- \* the ability to create sentences and paragraphs that are clear for the kind of readers and genre addressed.

Note how this rhetorical formulation avoids the trap of rigid formulas such as insisting that there is only one right way to open or close or structure an essay.

The framers stay at a similar level of generality when they speak merely of "critical thinking." No doubt they didn't want their list too long, but the term strikes me as useless on its own. We need enough concrete clarity that students and teachers could agree about

whether so called "critical thinking"--or certain dimensions of it--has been demonstrated. This means listing outcomes of the following sort:

- \* In writing essays, students should be able to work at both the general and specific level and to move clearly and comfortably between levels;
- \* to create a movement of thinking and not just reiterate a static "position";
- \* to do some justice to points of view other than their own.

Of course the framers wanted to avoid getting into issues of grading--of defining "standards or levels of ability." Rightly so. But the rhetorically formulated textual outcomes I've just named don't fall into that trap. A piece of writing could lack or be significantly weak in some of these outcomes and still manage to be very good indeed. Yet nevertheless, these are textual outcomes that most teachers are indeed looking for--and they are the features most helpful to specify if we want students to *help* us move toward the destination we are trying to reach in our teaching.

For a while now, I've been hearing a voice:

But Peter, you've misunderstood us. We were trying for outcomes to help plan programs and classrooms, not to assess individual students. Your "nitty-gritty" outcomes will just reinforce the push for large scale assessments.

But it strikes me that you miss the benefits of outcomes--and indeed the very meaning of the word--if you run away from saying what your outcomes look like in students and in texts. Large scale assessments are upon us, and I think outcomes of this sort can make them less harmful. Plenty of the process outcomes I suggested earlier (such as the ability to avoid procrastination, to write past what's on your mind, and to balance the use of others and reliance on self) can only be assessed by students themselves--but that doesn't make them less important.

One of the many goals of the competence movement was to create new structures for teaching and learning. They argued that if we specified more clearly and concretely what we are teaching and how we know when students have learned it, we wouldn't be so unthinkingly stuck with the standard structures like the "course" and the collection-of-courses adding up to a degree. Surely, first year writing is unhelpfully stuck in the model of the standard course: 15-30 students and one teacher meeting in one room for 10 to 15 weeks. It was my experience with the competence movement that led me to propose experimenting with what I called the "yogurt model" for first year writing.\*

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\*This is a structure where all students must have at least half a semester's experience in a writing workshop, but where students who make good progress earn the right to leave as early half way through the semester, while others may have to stay longer--maybe even well more than a semester. When a student is judged competent (by means of a portfolio) and exits, a new student enters. In this model, students have more incentive to improve their writing than in the standard semester long, lock step course. And the admittedly startling structure gives relief from what strikes me as the hardest thing about teaching writing: starting off each semester with a brand new class where all are strangers to each other and none has internalized the culture of a writer's workshop. In the yogurt model, half or two-thirds of the class would always be experienced members of the culture--even on the first day of the semester. In effect, the yogurt model simulates the writer's group--where some people leave and others enter. The model also suggests experimenting with smaller "classes" of "group" size. A single teacher would be responsible for multiple groups--and thus they would have to function more autonomously than standard classes. I speak more about this in my essay, "Writing Assessment in the Twenty-first Century: A Utopian View."

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To conclude, let me say again that I'm not so much arguing *against* outcomes in the WPA statement as arguing for others in addition and for some reformulation. I think the framers did a good and a difficult job in bringing the statement as far as they did. If invited, I would be happy to join in a revision process.

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