

THE WRITING ASSESSMENT PROJECT AT LOUISIANA TECH

Speakers: Michael McCready, *Louisiana Tech*
Virginia Melton, *Louisiana Tech*
Introducer/Recorder: Marian Bashinski, *The Florida State University*

Michael McCready and Virginia Melton stated that the purpose of their research was to determine the extent to which large-scale writing assessment was being used in some school systems. The information that they collected included (1) type(s) of measurement technique(s) used—direct, indirect, or both; (2) type of storing method used for results of direct measurement; (3) method of reporting; (4) uses being made of results; and (5) information as to whether decision makers at state or national level considered writing samples essential to measurement.

They reported that there seems to be little agreement on definitions and descriptions of scoring systems, and schools felt free to use combinations of them. Data revealed that the decision to use a writing sample resulted from policy rather than from mandate. Since very few writing tasks are available in item banks, most had to be developed by teachers and administrators themselves. Most writing samples were

scored holistically. On objective tests, the majority of items related to mechanics. Although there was agreement that certain qualities in writing cannot be measured by objective testing, there was no agreement on identification of those qualities.

A New Orleans conference with leaders in the field actually was more revealing and helpful than were answers to questionnaires. One question which asked, "Why are you doing a large-scale assessment?" brought such answers as (1) so that students will attain a minimum competency in writing; (2) to assure that our students have mastered the basic skills; (3) to determine the state of the art in writing assessment in the schools. Conferees agreed that both a writing sample and an objective test should be used.

A report which followed the Louisiana testing resulted in a handbook for classroom teachers, but since the writing test and the objective test had not been planned together, correlation of results was difficult. One very important finding of the Louisiana study, however, was that for assessment to have an impact, the results must get to the classroom teachers so that English departments can sequence what they are doing.