

IMPACT OF TESTING ON CURRICULUM AND TEACHING

Speaker: Charles Suhor, *National Council of Teachers of English*
Introducer/Recorder: Cornelia Orr, *Florida Department of Education*

Charles Suhor opened the session by presenting an allegory from *New York Teacher Education*, by Linda Darling Hammond. The implication was that a limited testing instrument, such as a thermometer or an objective writing test, will limit and probably damage the practice of medicine or of writing instruction. The remainder of the session dealt with the impact of testing on the curriculum and teaching in elementary and secondary schools.

Suhor contrasted the effects on instruction of objective tests of writing and test that use writing samples. The information was based on testimony of professionals in the field and some research results, but hard evidence was scarce. He reported that most people believe assessment via writing samples has a salutary effect on curriculum, but some people think that both objective test and writing sample tests are pernicious.

It was clear from Suhor's presentation, and from audience discussion, that testing has produced both positive and negative effects on writing curricula. It was also apparent that a specific impact may elicit both positive and negative reactions. The various impacts of testing on the curricula are as follows:

Positive Impact

1. More writing is required and writing is given more emphasis.
2. Instruction improves because of clearer delineation of teaching practices.
3. Additional classes are added in punctuation, grammar, and spelling, review or remediation.
4. Class size is reduced.
5. More teachers realize the importance of writing and dialogue increases between teachers regarding methods and standards.
6. Grading practices are "tightened-up."
7. Inservice programs on writing are funded.
8. Textbooks are adopted which actually teach, not merely assign, writing.
9. Less able students receive more attention, and all students pay more attention to English.

Negative Impact

1. Emphasis is placed on basic composition skills rather than composition per se.
2. Testing drives instruction. Writing is not taught for a variety of situations. Good writing programs may be narrowed to the tasks that prepare for the test.
3. Curriculum is narrowed with less integration of language, literature, and composition.
4. Greater emphasis on the study of basic skills and on formal grammar instruction on mechanical, routines correctness.
5. Teachers must show evidence of writing activity.
6. Publication of test scores which compare districts and schools creates unhealthy attitudes.
7. Promotion is contingent on test results.
8. Poor writers languish in writing labs.

Suhor ended the session by noting that test makers and state level testing specialists are showing an increased interest in the relationships between testing and curriculum. Thus instruction and curriculum may begin to *affect* testing as well as testing affecting instruction. There is a real need for more research on the effects of testing on curriculum.