Coralie Bryant, Winnipeg School Division #1

The staff at Aberdeen Junior High School in Winnipeg began, almost inadvertently, a Writing Across the Curriculum program by requesting a session on holistic marking. While already committed through the Aberdeen Project to improving literacy instruction, we focused increasingly on the writing abilities of our students and on methods to encourage the growth of those abilities. Inservices, the institution of writing folders, brown bag lunches to share progress, a professional Writer-in-Residence, visits with the division consultant all became part of this teacher-owned process.

Both for the purpose of providing data for the project’s evaluation and for their own curriculum planning, the teachers have conducted a schoolwide assessment of writing every six months since the project began three years ago. Scoring sessions continue to provide the most important inservice for teachers in writing instruction.

The Aberdeen Project illustrates four principles important to effective staff development. The vehicle for change—in this case writing—must be sufficiently focused, yet central to all student learning. Frequent and institutionally sanctioned collaboration among teachers provide the pressure and support needed for meaningful change to occur. Administrative presence is another important feature; without taking over decisions he believed his staff should make, the Principal continually made clear his commitment to language development and to the process. Both he and the project’s coordinator worked hard to maintain staff ownership of the project, recognizing the necessity for the staff to articulate its own needs, goals, and solutions. Outside “experts” served only to facilitate that articulation.

Aberdeen teachers have a powerful sense of directing the course of their school’s program, of having put their students increasingly on track academically, and of having established patterns of genuine collaboration, all of which will continue to contribute to their success in facing the many problems—including teaching writing—of an inner city school.

COMPARING RHETORICAL COMMUNITIES

Alan C. Purves and R. Elaine Degenhart, State University of New York, Albany
Elena Chacon, University of Chile, Santiago, Chile
Horst Lofgren, Lund University of Malmo, Sweden

The session began with a definition of a rhetorical community as a group that shares assumptions about what information texts should contain, how texts should be organized, and how texts should be presented in terms of tone and style. Such communities are often coterminous with academic disciplines or businesses. At times, however, they share broader cultural constituencies. The International Education Association (IEA) Written Composition Study sought to determine what were the characteristics of national or subnational communities by examining the shared assumptions of teachers and of students as to what constituted good writing, particularly good school writing. This was done through questionnaires and through a content and stylistic analysis of actual writing samples.

As a background for understanding these assumptions, we described the classroom in terms of its environment for literacy. Using data from Chile, Finland, Hungary, New Zealand, and the United States, we showed that most students do not spend much time reading for pleasure (except in Finland) but that in all countries most families have at least one newspaper in the home. School libraries were universally available in these countries and most (except Chile and New Zealand) reported having a school newspaper. Only in Finland was there a reported school policy of discouraging the use of multiple choice exams rather than essay exams. In Hungary and Finland, students tended to rate themselves as poor writers although this perception was not supported by their scores on these tasks. To determine if achievement in writing is related to the type of task assigned, a correlation of

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