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## WRITING ASSESSMENT IN PHYSICS, HUMANITIES AND ENGLISH: A FEMINIST APPROACH

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This session was organized by three members of an interdisciplinary research team presently testing feminist pedagogical strategies with the aid of a grant from the Quebec Ministry of Education. Two of the areas under investigation are the importance of writing in the educational experience of women students and the kinds of writing assessment which are most encouraging of these students' development and growth. Since the research was still in progress in April, the team was not able to present a project report: instead, the presentation focused on the assessment strategies that these researchers have defined as feminist.

We briefly outlined the research, which indicates that, both in self-esteem and commitment to continue their education, women are much more easily discouraged than men. We also summarized the research demonstrating that women students talk less in classrooms, fare less well in competitive situations, and are less comfortable in purely intellectual, nonaffective situations. We showed how this research on women's educational experience led the present

research team to formulate its hypothesis that assessment strategies that emphasize a collaborative rather than a hierarchical writer-reader connection. Next, we described the kinds of assessment interactions which may create this constructive learning climate. The teacher/reader is asked to communicate her/his reading process of the student text and how this process leads to the final grade. Simple "I" statements are used throughout the responding process. The strategy is designed to emphasize reading process as learning process on the part of the teacher, rather than prior mastery of material by the teacher against which the students' efforts are measured.

We discussed the ways in which this process has changed the way we assess formal work. Assessing journals and essays in a reactive, non-judgmental way helped us to begin to listen to student beliefs, to identify the world view of each student, and to discover how the teacher can speak to it in an atmosphere of dignity and mutual respect.

We continued with a description of an experiment with formulating a writing assignment in a physics course, showing how we had assessed the work. Since we were teaching in a fairly structured situation with a great deal of material to cover, we were unable to devote a great deal of class time to the writing project. Our major communication with the students was through written response to the developing stages of the project's freewriting, topic definition, drafts, and final copies. We showed the group the kinds of interventions we made, all "I" comments, all reader reactions showing the student how a reader might or might not be able to follow the reasoning or description in various passages. We noted that it was time consuming, but that we felt most students had developed a far deeper understanding of the chosen physics topic than would normally be the case.

There were some questions throughout the presentation, particularly about the research on women's learning experiences. At the end, there was time for discussion of assessment in various disciplines. Some of the participants noted the importance of affective and interactive writing for mature women students. There was also interest in writing assessment in the sciences.