EVALUATION IN A WRITING PROGRAM: AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

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The presentation described the approach used by a school district, with a student enrollment of 9,000, to assess writing in K-12 within the context of an English Language Arts Program Review.

The program review was conducted in accordance with the district's policy. That policy identifies the purposes of a program review and the principles and guidelines which must be observed in the review. The district conducted the review in a manner that was intended to be supportive of and consistent with an integrated (whole language) English Language Arts program. Consequently, they conducted the assessment of writing in conjunction with assessment of three other strands of language development, namely reading, listening, and speaking. Furthermore, they collected writing assessment data on both the writing process and the writing product. And, in accordance with district policy, they also collected data on classroom instructional practices, including student evaluation and reporting.

Data collection included questionnaires (all English Language Arts teachers, students in selected grades and their parents), classroom observation (over 70 classrooms in K-12), interviews, achievement tests (provincially developed instruments to assess reading and writing) and samples of writing collected in classrooms during the Fall term of 1988.

Assessment materials were distributed to participants and reviewed through presentation and discussion.

SELF AND PEER EVALUATION OF WRITING IN THE INTERACTIVE CLASSROOM

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The evaluation of writing in the ESL classroom has traditionally been the teacher's prerogative and has often remained outside the interactive model of student learning. Our goal is to bring evaluation into the classroom in order to increase learners' awareness of criteria for good writing, promote greater improvement of writing by giving learners a diagnostic tool, promote greater learner independence, and develop positive attitudes toward writing.

Although much research has been done on peer and self-evaluation of L1 writing, and although increasing numbers of L1 teachers at all levels are using these strategies, little work has been done in ESL. The students in our project are high intermediate level adults from diverse backgrounds, who are studying general English language skills part-time at a Canadian community college. The grades the students receive during and at the end of the term are often meaningless to them other than in the pass/fail sense. They are not party to how the marks are obtained or on what they are based, and therefore don't know where they have "gone wrong" or how to improve.

Our project had two parts. Part one involved adapting an appropriate evaluation scale, training students in its use, and having them use the scale throughout the term to evaluate their own and their peers' writing. In part two we studied various end-of-term effects of the scale on students. In a pilot investigation we tested the hypothesis that students trained in the use of the scale (the experimental group) would have a concept of good writing more congruent with that of instructors than would a control group. In addition, we compared the criteria most often cited by both groups as they judged the quality of a set of compositions. Finally we examined the responses of both groups to a survey on their attitudes toward writing.

Results are encouraging, although not conclusive. We find a trend in the predicted direction between the experimental group, and