WPA SESSION ON THE CONSULTANT/EVALUATOR PROGRAM

Edward M. White, California State University, San Bernardino
Harvey S. Wiener, Office of Academic Affairs, The City University of New York
Michael Flanigan, University of Oklahoma

Harvey Wiener began the session by recounting the founding and development of the National Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA). Supported in part by an Exxon grant, the WPA has developed into an important organization in the field of writing, with its own journal, newsletter, summer conference, and consultant/evaluator (C/E) service. The presenters then distributed a brochure describing the C/E program and the "Guide to Self-Study Preceding a WPA Visit."

Ed White, director of the C/E program for WPA, reviewed the documents and described the way the program works: a campus requests a consultant/evaluation visit, two C/E's are assigned to the campus (in consultation with the campus), the campus contact sends the self-study report to the two C/E's and makes arrangements for the two-day visit, a report is sent to the campus within six weeks of the visit, the campus provides WPA with a follow-up report six months after receiving the report. Cost is minimal: a $1,000 honorarium for each C/E plus expenses. Some support is available from the Exxon grant for campuses that are unable to meet all expenses. The C/E's are well-known faculty and administrators in the field of rhetoric and composition, selected for their ability to bring a national perspective to program evaluation and required to attend a retraining session every other year. They are thus able to combine the advantages of being both "insiders" and "outsiders."

Michael Flanigan described several of his experiences as a consultant/evaluator. He stressed that the visitors are consultants as well as evaluators, ready to assist the campus in meeting its own goals. A visit can serve as an impetus for change, but only if the campus is ready to take action.

The discussion that followed brought out many positive features of this kind of evaluation; with so much emphasis on assessment on so many campuses, it is obviously useful to be able to draw upon highly-qualified national figures in composition, functioning as part of an institution like WPA, for an informed report on a campus writing program.

Information about the WPA Consultant/Evaluator Program may be obtained from Ed White, English Department, California State University, San Bernardino, CA 92407 (714-880-5845).

COMPARING PATTERNS OF WRITING PERFORMANCE ACROSS COUNTRIES

Alan C. Purves, State University of New York, Albany
Pietro Lucisano, University of Rome, Italy
R. Elaine Degenhart, State University of New York, Albany
Ruth Schick, State University of New York, Albany

Discussant: Ulla Conner, Purdue University

This session compared patterns of student performance across twelve countries using the results of the recent IEA Study of Written Composition. The session opened with a brief explanation of the rating system on which student performance measures were based. The International Study Committee attempted to create a reliable scoring scheme that would allow comparisons across countries. Although direct comparability of achievement is not possible, reliabilities within countries were generally high and a series of national profiles can be produced. The profiles look at student performance within a country in relation to reported background variables to provide insights into factors related to writing achievement.

Teachers examined multiple samples of student writing covering different categories in the defined domain of school writing. Both teachers and students completed questionnaires in which they reported (among other things) whether or not the task types had been assigned.
either in the current year or in a previous year's OTL (opportunity to learn). Results show that, generally speaking, the task topics used in the study were assigned at some point in the students' schooling. However, student perceptions in this respect did not correspond completely with those of their teachers. Moreover, when teachers compared student-reported OTL to the mean achievement scores on these tasks the correlation in more than half of the countries was low. Based on the achievement scores, students in most countries found the narrative task the easiest and the reflective task the most difficult, an outcome that had been hypothesized. However, Hungarian and Dutch students found the narrative task to be difficult while the Chilean and Finnish students found the reflective task to be relatively easy.

Another analysis of the IEA writing study data confirmed earlier findings within the U.S. that girls outperform boys in written composition. This paper questioned the sources of girls' superior performance on writing tasks, and the consistency of the relationships between gender and patterns of achievement across countries. Preliminary analysis of the data from Chile, Hungary, Finland, and New Zealand supported the hypothesis that expressive differences between girls and boys are related to the development of different functional communicative competencies which grow out of sex role typing of activities.

The study used two indicators of sex-typed activities: the proportion of male/female teachers and student self-reported preferences and activities. Findings indicated that the size of differences in performance by gender varied across tasks. In these four countries, the smallest differences in performance between girls and boys were found on narrative and persuasive tasks, and the largest differences on reflective and letter writing tasks. Females tended to do better in the countries in which a higher proportion of teachers were female. In general it seems possible to produce a profile of gender activity typing which correlates with performance on the writing tasks.

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF FEATURES FOUND IN ESSAYS WRITTEN BY SELECTED BLACK AND WHITE STUDENTS FOR THE NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS (NAEP) AND THE NEW JERSEY HIGH SCHOOL PROFICIENCY TEST

Miriam T. Chaplin, Rutgers University, Camden

This session began with a summary of the results of a comparative analysis of writing features found in essays written by selected Black and White eighth grade and/or 13 year-old students for the 1983-84 National Assessment of Educational Progress with features found in essays written by 9th grade Black students for the New Jersey High School Proficiency Test.

In phase one of the investigation, four readers read a random sample of 133 essays in an attempt to identify and compare features in the students' writing. In this initial reading, the readers identified fourteen specific features. They classified these features into fourteen categories: grammar and syntax, organization, task perception, and cultural influence. NAEP used this classification scheme in phase two of the investigation to analyze a larger sample (373) of students' essays.

In widely disseminated reports of students' performances in national and state assessments, Black students have consistently scored lower than White students. While this investigation does not evaluate students' writing abilities, it offers a detailed description of observable features in the students' writing. The investigation emanates from the premise that the strategies students use to write essays for assessment purposes can serve as keys to effective instruction and improved performances.

The session included a review of the classification scheme used in the analysis, examples of the features found in four modes of writing (imaginative, informative, persuasive, and narrative), and numerical comparisons of the number of times the features were found in Black and White students' essays.