NEW PROBLEMS IN HOLISTIC SCORING

Speakers: Suellyn Duffy, Ohio State University
            Nancy Woodson, Otterbein College, Ohio
Introduction/Recorder: Toa Jeffery, Gahanna Community College, Ohio

Nancy Woodson, former Director of the Writing Workshop Program at Ohio State University and currently a teacher of writing at Otterbein College, reported on her research, "Constructing Effective Prompts: Examination of Prompts and Their Responses," which focuses on writers who are suspended between oral and textual cultures. Woodson stated that writers who have oral patterns of composing cannot plan language. Oral-based writers have problems remembering and rereading what they have written, so their writing tends to be repetitive, whereas that of textually-based writers reflects a search for specific words and expressions. In addition, oral-based writers rely on the reader to fill in the meaning; thus, their writing often has the appearance of one-sided dialogues.

To study the influence of dialogic language on basic writers, Woodson conducted a pilot study of fifty students taking the placement test for the 1984 summer session at Ohio State University. She hypothesized that lower-level basic writers would produce written work dependent on oral dialogic composing strategies and that skilled writers would use monologic composing strategies, indicating their awareness of the audience.

Three prompts were created: tell a story (dialogic), persuade (an audience), and monologic analysis (with no audience identified so that the writer must create an audience and interpret the idea from his or her experiences). Students were placed in classes based on the scores of their responses. Testing results showed dramatic improvements in writing strategies when lower-level students selected the dialogic prompt; the reverse was true when they selected the monologic. Even skilled, upper-level writers had more difficulty with the monologic prompt. Thus, Woodson concluded that prompts can affect students' writing skills and that people involved in holistic grading should examine the essay prompts being used.

Suellyn Duffy, the current Director of the Writing Workshop Program at Ohio State University, reinforced Woodson's concern with prompts and their impact on holistic scoring. Her presentation, "What the 'Problem' Paper Can Tell Us About Evaluation," focused on the particular features of writing that are reflected in different scores. Duffy noted that the features that make for complexity include the level of analysis, the source of generalization, the writer's distance from the topic, and the writer's relationship to the text, self, to the reader, and to others. An analysis of these features in "problem" student papers can help in the evaluation of writing as process rather than merely product. The vocabulary that appears in current writing textbooks does not assist us in describing what we see as discourse and does not work well in process-oriented classrooms. Both Duffy and Woodson stressed the need to examine the interaction of writer, prompt, and text in all writing assignments and writing tests.

A MODEL FOR ESTIMATING REVISION SKILLS: POST-DRAFT PLANNING

Speaker: Maurice Scharton, Illinois State University
Introduction/Recorder: Andrew F. Yaranycz, Shaker Heights Middle School and Gahanna Community College, Ohio

Maurice Scharton, Director of Writing at Illinois State University, presented an informative workshop on a model for estimating revision skills through an analysis of post-draft planning. His goal has been the development of methods for assessing and evaluating aspects of the writing process that are usually overlooked in assessment. In Scharton's program, the holistic assessment of students' placement tests is supplemented with an analytic reading of their revision skills, which is carried out by a third or fourth reader.

Scharton handed out a sample of the placement test itself and explained how it takes into account the provisional nature of first drafts. This first handout also contained samples of three student placement essays, and Scharton asked the conference participants to score these three placement papers holistically on a scale of one to five. The results were tabulated and displayed on an overhead.

In the second handout, Scharton provided a sample of the revision prompt given on the placement test. Its instructions and symbols enable students to indicate on the first draft of their placement essays what additional changes and revisions they would make, if time permitted. These changes and revisions indicate writers' post-draft planning. Scharton's second handout also contained the three placement tests from the first handout, which were now clearly marked with the writer's personal changes and/or revision plans. These three sample post-drafts indicated each student's plans for revising and changing his or her original placement essay to make it more appropriate for the intended audience and purpose. Scharton again asked the conference participants to evaluate every plan or change and he again tabulated the consensus on the planned revisions.

Scharton concluded that the data in his research on post-draft planning indicate that the assessment of students' revision skills provides valuable placement and diagnostic information. In addition, Scharton noted that there is a greater need to group students and that there are more grouping options available than placement tests traditionally have suggested or permitted. Finally, he pointed out that there are more planned revisions indicated by writers than actually appear later as carried out revisions. Scharton is continuing to study this problem.