
TRAINING OF READERS AS A CURRICULUM AND FACULTY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Speaker: Robert Christopher, Ramapo College, N.J.

Introducer/Recorder: Florence Mooney, Monmouth College, N.J.

Robert Christopher stated that the selection and training of readers for assessing student writing provides many opportunities for curricular and faculty development. He feels that the training procedure parallels larger, significant changes occurring in the institutions that decide to implement holistic scoring. He noted that these changes often have far reaching influences on the institution and the curriculum it offers.

Christopher emphasized that faculty involved in holistic scoring must accept the assessment task as a reasonable and professional one which is intended to work on behalf of the students. He also stressed the need for students to be involved in the research, planning and implementation of test development and scoring.

The second issue that Christopher urged the audience to consider is the development of a consensus for assessment. To insure success in this area, he suggested that those in the campus community who understand and support assessment be recruited first so that they can solicit the knowledge and assistance of the critics. Initially, a review of existing assessment models should be done to determine if any meet the needs of the institution or can be adapted to do so. To further strengthen the program, test administration protocol should be developed carefully and topics should be pilot tested.

A third consideration is the development of a scale for conducting a reading. Christopher recommended the following procedures:

- select a pool of readers who know the needs of the institution, know the students' writing ability, are respected, and can do collaborative work;
- develop a pool of benchmark samples for each area on an evaluative scale through the consensus of these readers;
- train readers with additional samples.

He also recommended that a cadre of good readers be developed and rotated regularly.

The implications for curricular change was the fourth consideration that Christopher discussed. The use of the assessment results for placement or progress evaluation requires an examination of writing curricula and of specific pedagogical approaches. The process should focus on positive self-evaluation, rather than on condemnatory analysis. Christopher noted that most available research data relates to placement, and that the development of accurate instruments to assess programs and progress is the challenge of the next five years.

A fifth consideration is the implication of assessment on faculty development. Since the process of holistic scoring helps to develop a sense of pluralism in teaching and encourages faculty to learn from each other, revised

pedagogy and materials should encourage collaborative instruction. In addition, the assessment process can become a research tool in that it generates an interest in other areas and disciplines.

Finally, Christopher stressed the importance of sustaining momentum and maintaining interest in the assessment process. He recommended the use of awards and recognition for participants and a rotation of leadership and responsibility. He also noted that writing assessment programs should be linked to institutional self studies and should include an investigation of comparative data from similar institutions and the development of longitudinal research. He feels that this research, which requires patience and stamina, is absolutely essential to refining measures and procedures.◇