MODELS FOR THE EVALUATION OF REMEDIAL WRITING PROGRAMS

Speakers: Walter Cmielewski, County College of Morris, N.J.
Anthony Evangelisto, Trenton State College, N.J.

Introducer/Recorder: Robert Cirasa, Kean College of New Jersey

Walter Cmielewski began the session by presenting a theoretical context for program assessment. Quoting a 1978 study done for the National Center for Higher Education Systems by Leonard Romney, he referred to the still primitive state of educational assessment in general, to the important difference between the quality of program activities and the measurement of program outcomes, and to the very real possibility that program impact cannot be meaningfully assessed at all. At the very least, he noted, assessment is a complex, perhaps unmanageable task.

He then pointed out that people involved in writing program assessment should start by distinguishing between a pair of popularly synonymous terms: "remedial" and "developmental". *Remedial* education denotes efforts to correct specific behavioral weaknesses (i.e., writing skills alone). *Developmental* education emphasizes the whole person instead and attempts to develop strengths as well as to address weaknesses. All remedial programs ought to be developmental as well, but all developmental are not necessarily remedial programs. Moreover, Cmielewski urged program evaluators to consider whether they want to conduct summative evaluations or formative evaluations or both types.

A *summative* evaluation involves the measurement of observable outcomes; the emphasis is usually upon identifying any defective results of the program. A *formative* evaluation assesses *what* happened and *how* results were achieved; the emphasis is upon improving the program and keeping it moving effectively and efficiently towards its goals. Cmielewski added that formative evaluation should assess program efficiency as well as effectiveness, and he cautioned that often programs lack clear goals and objectives and data is collected without regard for efficiently managing and reporting that data.

Having established a broad theoretical context for program evaluation, Cmielewski yielded the floor to Anthony Evangelisto, who observed that theoretical models for program evaluation have usually followed--not preceded--actual program development and that there are no generally applicable models for program evaluation. Individual programs usually evolve their own models, and they start by asking themselves some basic questions: "How good is this program? What makes it good? How can we make it better? What's wrong here? So what? Who cares?" Eventually, two basic concerns arise: What was the program supposed to accomplish and how successful was it in achieving its goals? To answer the first question, one must look at the specific goals of the program and at how clearly they are defined. To answer the second, one must

gather data and interpret them.

There are three basic features that can be examined: the program (organization, materials, personnel, curriculum, facilities, etc.); the processes (methods, interactions, interventions, etc.); and the products (cognitive and affective learning, skill development, self-concept, motivation, etc.). Some of these products are very difficult to measure, but complete program evaluation requires that one resist the natural inclination to limit inquiry and answers to only those things that are easily quantifiable. Evangelisto then went on to discuss three models of evaluation and their flaws.

Type I is represented by the noted WPA Model [*WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 4 (Winter, 1980)]. It uses a battery of specific questions for the self-study of curriculum, faculty development, and support services. Resembling the approach of regional accrediting agencies to overall institutional assessment, this approach focuses primarily upon program matters.

Type II is represented by a number of locally developed models that seek only to document gains in student skills. The Individualized Language Arts Program of Weehawken, N.J., for instance, uses holistic scoring of writing samples to study program effect; the New Jersey Writing Project of Monmouth Junction and South Brunswick Township, N.J. do likewise. In the same vein, the Hillsborough County, Developmental Writing Program in Florida assesses improved writing skills in terms of higher achievement scores in reading comprehension, language mechanics, and language expression. And the Elementary Writing Program of Fairfax County, Virginia, bases its evaluations on data from questionnaires, interviews, and a case study of one school. Evangelisto noted that these and other programs of this sort are routinely listed in the latest edition of *Educational Programs That Work*. In general, they all focus upon product, although there is some attention paid to program matters and processes as well.

Type III is represented by the work of the New Jersey Basic Skills Assessment Committee, which has recently begun to ascertain the effectiveness of programs through a combination of data collection and site visitation. Since 1978, a mandatory annual report, designed by the Assessment Committee, has measured data from programs in every public institution in the State on the following indicators of program effectiveness: (1) number of students tested for placement; (2) placement criteria; (3) number of students identified for remediation; (4) levels of remediation; (5) enrollments in remedial courses; (6) passing rates for final level remediation; (7) percent passing class who also perform acceptably on a single standardized post-test (usually a holistic essay); (8) differences in retention among those who needed no remediation, those who did but completed it, and those who have not completed it; (9) differences in GPA's among the same groups; (10) differences in total credits earned among the same groups; (11) differences in percent passing first college-level writing course among the same groups; (12) differences in "successful survival rate" (percent of originally tested students remaining two full years and performing with a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or better). Recently added to these quantifiable measures have been routine site visitations that seek to identify the local features of programs that are responsible for varying degrees

of effectiveness. Specifically, the visitations characterize:
(1) program administration; (2) policies and procedures; (3)
remedial curriculum; (4) remedial pedagogy; (5) faculty
development; (6) instructional support; (7) student support;
and (8) local program evaluations. The overall emphasis of
this approach is equally upon product, process, and program,
and through its multiple perspectives, it comes close to
giving an accurate assessment of writing programs.◊