given detailed information about the results of their own decisions, a statistical summary of each reading session, and a cumulative summary of all reading sessions. In addition, the readers are rated and their ranking reported to them. They are rated on three bases: experience, reliability, and validity (or the fit between their judgments and other information about students such as GPAs and ACF scores). In short, readers have regular, informed opportunities to reflect upon the relative fit of their judgment with the consensus.

One last piece of information about the consensus reported by Silverthorne and Stephens is that the membership of the transfer-test reading group is stable, the chief movement being the addition each year of two new members from the summer WAC seminar. Once having assumed the role, very few have ever repudiated it. Stephens pointed out that it is in the faculty’s interest to be involved: reading the test essays serves as a useful means by which faculty who teach writing-designated junior and senior courses can gauge students’ readiness to deal with the “writing-to-learn” orientation of their courses.

EVALUATING A LITERACY ACROSS THE CURRICULUM PROGRAM: DESIGNING AN APPROPRIATE INSTRUMENT

Speaker: Linda Shohet, Dawson College, Montreal
Introducer/Recorder: L. Lee Forberg, University of Minnesota

Linda Shohet, director of the Literacy Across the Curriculum Center at Dawson College, has taught Canadian literature and writing at Dawson since 1973. She began developing the Literacy Across the Curriculum program in 1984; the Center now provides instructional and consultation services to English high schools and colleges throughout the province. She began the session by reviewing the language-related political issues in Quebec, and then she sketched the development of the center and discussed the evaluation of the program scheduled this spring at Dawson.

Quebec is a unilingual province in a bilingual country. French (first language) speakers comprise 24.6 percent of the population of Canada and 83.5 percent of the population in Quebec. English (first language) speakers comprise 68.2 percent of the population in Canada and 12.7 percent of the population in Quebec. French speakers see the maintenance of their language politically, as the survival of their culture. Consequently, language awareness is high.

Dawson College is a two-year, English language community college; all students going on for a University degree must first complete community college. The Literacy Across the Curriculum program was initiated by the faculty development committee, not the English Department, and its administration remains in the faculty development office. Keeping it out of the English department gives the program a broader base of support and institutional commitment, Shohet said. The program, originally intended as internal, soon started receiving requests from English-language high schools and other colleges, asking for ideas and resources. As the program expanded to meet those needs, costs rose. The only source of additional funding was the government, which required evidence that the program was relevant to the entire community, including French-language schools and colleges. The Dawson College administration had ordered an evaluation of the program to show its value to its own faculty before supporting expansion.

The bureaucratic demand, Shohet said, is to ask how much student literacy has increased as a result of a program; her response consisted of showing how faculty have responded and how classroom activities have changed. She also commented that the outcomes of a literacy across the curriculum program are not limited to reading and writing instruction. At Dawson, faculty members began attending more faculty development seminars, interacting across departments, and volunteering to develop classroom projects (when previously, they had been embarrassed to be seen at a writing workshop). Faculty publications also increased.

The design of an evaluation instrument began with a model developed at San Diego State College, which helped define an evaluation that would be particular to Dawson. The college also employed an outside consultant, Shohet noted, which gave the evaluation additional objectivity. She cautioned against using generic evaluation instruments; each program develops with its own goals and philosophy, and must be evaluated on that basis.

The Dawson evaluation focused on particular questions about classroom activities before and after workshop attendance: class time spent writing; time spent talking about writing; writing assignments; use of journals; working with drafts; oral communication assignments; use of library resources. In categories covering writing, reading, speaking, and listening skills, the evaluation attempted to determine what changes instructors had made in their classes, what goals they had for center programs, and whether participation in center programs had promoted educational exchange with other faculty members or increased levels of theoretical knowledge. One section defines the program’s objectives and asks faculty to evaluate objectives as appropriate and applicable; this type of inquiry not only helps refine program goals for future planning, but reinforces awareness of program objectives among faculty members who respond, Shohet said.

The center ran a pilot study, distributing evaluation forms to 150 randomly selected faculty members, chosen from those who had attended workshops. About 100 responses were returned; some questions were refined. The
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VALIDITY ISSUES IN DIRECT WRITING ASSESSMENT

Speakers: 
Karen Greenberg, NTNW and Hunter College, CUNY
Stephen Wise, Stanford University

Introducer/ Recorder: 
Joanne Van Oersouw, College of St. Catherine, Minnesota

Karen Greenberg began with what she deemed a radical statement: "I have examined more than 600 writing tests and have yet to see one that I would consider to be a valid one." She went on to state that it seems impossible for writing tests, with their narrow subjects, implausible audiences and severely restricted time frames, to reflect the natural processes of writing in either academic or personal contexts.

Greenberg explained her position by pointing out that writing consists of the ability to discover what one wishes to say and to convey one's message through language, content, syntax and usage that are appropriate for one's audience and purpose. In light of this, she said, it is particularly distressing to note that teachers at many institutions find themselves administering tests that bear little resemblance to this definition or to their curricula and pedagogy. For example, many schools still use multiple-choice tests of writing even though this type of testing does not elicit the cognitive and linguistic skills involved in writing.

She stated that writing sample tests, on the other hand, can assess writing capacities that cannot be measured by existing multiple-choice tests. They, however, also have flaws, and many problems result from our reliance on single-sample writing tests for placement and proficiency decisions. She warned that a single writing sample can never reflect a student's ability to write on another occasion or in a different mode. Yet, according to surveys conducted by NTNW and CCCC, thousands of schools across the country continue to assume that "writing ability" is stable across different writing tasks and contexts and continue to use a single piece of writing as their sole assessment instrument.

Greenberg then went on to suggest what those involved in large-scale direct assessment of writing should do about validity. The first step in establishing a test's validity is to determine its purpose: what information is needed by which people and for what purposes? The next step is developing a clear definition of the writing competence that is being assessed, one that will vary according to the purpose and context of the assessment. Developing this definition is a critical step in creating a valid assessment, but it is easier said than done for there is as yet no adequate model of the various factors that contribute to effective writing in different contexts. Finally, after coming to agreement on their definition of writing competence, faculty need to establish consensus about the writing tasks that are significant in particular functional contexts.

Greenberg noted that she deliberately chose to talk about faculty rather than test developers, for she believes that the people who teach writing should be the ones who develop the assessment instruments. Faculty need to work together to develop tests, to shape an exam they believe in so that they can be sure its principles infuse curriculum and classroom practice. Even when faculty work together, however, Greenberg said that definitions of competent writing may vary dramatically. Locally-developed essay tests show incredible variability in the skills measured, due to difference in the range of skills assessed and the criteria used to judge those skills. For example, faculty often differ about the range of discourse structures that they should teach and that a test should assess. One way to sample students' ability to write different types of discourse is to use the portfolio method, in which writers select three or four different types of drafts and revisions for evaluation. This kind of assessment reflects a pedagogy that emphasizes process over short, unrevised products. Thus, this kind of test stimulates writing teachers and programs to pay more attention to the craft of composing.

Greenberg's final point was phrased as a question: What is the relationship between what we teach and what we test? We cannot, and should not, separate testing from teaching, and we as a profession must be more concerned with the validity of both of these efforts.

Steve Witte summarized a study begun in 1982 which sought to answer two research questions: (1) Do writing prompts that elicit different types of writing and that elicit written texts of the same quality cause writers to orchestrate composing in different ways? and (2) Do comparable prompts that elicit the same type of writing and elicit written texts of the same quality cause writers to orchestrate composing in different ways? Witte stated that although this study did not investigate naturally occurring discourse, this type of experimental study can inform the kinds of conceptualizations we can make beyond the experimental study.

The first step in conducting this research was to create two comparable writing tasks of two types: