index of "PDQ," Perceived Drafting Quality.
Whether PDQ has any relation to writing performance or ability is unclear, although it is probably a fair index.

5. Given the fact that what is assessed is PDQ, it is little wonder that students see writing performance as comprising adequacy of content, handwriting, spelling, grammar, and neatness. Such is the case of the reports of secondary school students as to the most important features of the textual products of a school culture.

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL WRITING ASSESSMENT: RESEARCH ISSUES

Speakers: Alan C. Purves, State University of New York at Albany
Thomas Gorman, National Foundation for Educational Research, Great Britain
Rainer Lehmann, Institute for Educational Research, Federal Republic of Germany

Introducer/Recorder: Wayne Fenner, University of Minnesota

This session was the first of several sessions on research on international writing assessment. Alan Purves began with an overview of the background of the fourteen-nation Written Composition Study. Begun in 1980, this project is the most recent undertaken by the International Association for Educational Achievement (IEA). Previous studies have examined the teaching and testing of science, math, reading, foreign language, and civic education. Unlike earlier subjects, the domain of written composition is a cloudy one: it is both an act of communication and an act of cognitive processing. Researchers, then, had first to define this domain, both empirically and theoretically. After this phase of domain specification, researchers designed a series of specific writing tasks and writing purposes to be included in the study. Third, a five-point scoring scheme was devised that would be valid and reliable across languages and cultures. Finally, raters were chosen and trained.

Thomas Gorman discussed the results from a recent writing assessment program in England in order to clarify what can be learned from international studies and cannot be learned from separate, national writing assessment projects. The problem of domain specification seems to be culturally relative. The purpose of writing varies in its relation to general educational aims, and specific tasks may or may not reflect the kind of writing that is generally required of students in specific schools in particular cultures. There is, however, remarkable unanimity of assessment criteria and standards of performance across languages and cultures. Content, for example, as well as form, style, and tone appear to be rating factors utilized internationally. As a result of the IEA Study, we have learned more about the relative difficulty of various writing tasks, and we have gathered a great deal of information about background variable relative to writing performance. These variables include students' interest and involvement in life at school, plans for future education, amount of daily and weekly homework, and involvement of parents in the educational process.

Rainer Lehmann discussed the methodology of comparative writing assessment, specifically the application of multitrait-multimethod analysis to the problem of validating the analytical scoring scheme used by all countries in the IEA Study. Although his discussion was limited to results from the Hamburg data, Lehmann provided information from a non-English language context that appeared to confirm the IEA student's methods and findings.

TEACHING STRATEGIES AND RATING CRITERIA: AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Speakers: Sauli Takala, University of Jyvaskyla, Finland
R. Elaine Degenhart, University of Jyvaskyla, Finland

Introducer/Recorder: Robin Marie, University of Minnesota

This session reported on data gathered in the IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement) study of Written Composition. The IEA study, now in its eighth year, is a large-scale examination of student writing in 14 countries (Chile, England, Finland, Hungary, Indonesia, Italy, the Netherlands, Nigeria, New Zealand, Sweden, Thailand, the USA, Wales, Germany). An internationally developed scoring system was used to rate the writing tasks in terms of organization, content, style, tone, mechanics, and handwriting. In addition, students, teachers, and schools filled out questionnaires. These data are now being examined in a number of ways.

Sauli Takala, one of the coordinators of this study, described patterns of agreement and disagreement among raters application of a five-point rating scale (which included the criterion "off the topic"). He found that raters behaved in a uniform manner. Most of the time, two readers were within one point of being in full agreement with each other. Beyond a one-point discrepancy on the rating scale, there was a significant drop in frequency (2 points off: 5-12%; "off the topic": 2.5-7.5%, 3 points off:
2.5-5%). He then discussed where on the scale these discrepancies were occurring. Agreement was greatest at the high end of the scale and least likely in the low-middle range of scores.

Takala then discussed where the rating of "off topic" appeared. In early discussions with colleagues, it was anticipated that this rating would pair up with ratings at the high end of the scale (an essay would be so creative as to elicit either "very good" or "off topic"). In fact, just the opposite was true: "off topic" appeared at the low end of the scale with "poor". Surprisingly, it also occurred in the middle range. Takala noted that perhaps some raters were unsure of how to score such essays and so chose a middle ground. In general, similarities between raters outweighed differences, lending credibility to further comparisons.

Elaine Degenhart, another coordinator of the IEA Study of Written Communication, looked at relationships between writing instruction and student performance, using data from the teacher questionnaires, and questionnaires on the background and curriculum of the schools involved in the IEA study. The purpose of her work was to identify some patterns in instructional approaches and to determine how well the variable that show these approaches discriminate between low, middle, and high achieving classes. The four main approaches that emerged were product, process, reading-literature, and a less well defined skills-oriented approach with emphasis on product. Based on mean scores on the writing tasks, classes were divided into achievement levels: 25% high, 50% middle, 25% low. The top two instructional approaches for each country were then examined in terms of how well they discriminate for the three levels of classes. Degenhart reported on findings from four of the countries: Chile, Finland, New Zealand, and the U.S.

The top two teaching strategies found for Chile were (1) a strongly student-centered approach with a process orientation and (2) a stronger product orientation. Here it appeared that low-achieving students had more process-centered teaching, whereas the product-centered approach distinguished well for the middle group. In Finland, the top two teaching strategies were (1) a reading-literature approach and (2) a process approach. The process approach did not distinguish between the top and bottom groups; the reading-literature approach was positive for low-achieving students. In New Zealand, the top two were (1) a teacher centered reading/literature approach and (2) a less clearly defined approach leaning toward process. Both discriminated between all three levels. In the United States, the top two approaches were (1) a structured reading/literature approach and (2) a strong student-centered product orientation. The product orientation was high for the low-level students.

Questions centered around possible interpretations of these findings. Degenhart was careful not to draw premature conclusions or make quick generalizations. From the discussion it became clear that a greater understanding of the background situation in each country would help with the interpretation of why classes were receiving a particular type of writing instruction.

**EFFECTS OF ESSAY TOPIC VARIATION ON STUDENT WRITING**

**Speaker:** Gorden Brossell, Florida State University  
**Jim Hoekter, Florida State University**

**Introducer/Recorder:** Laura Brady, George Mason University, VA

Gorden Brossell and Jim Hoekter presented the results of a study designed to analyze the ways in which systematic variations in essay topics affected the writing of college students under controlled conditions. To explore the question of whether a change in topic makes a difference in the quality of student response, Brossell and Hoekter chose extremes of topic and student population. The population consisted of remedial students and honors students writing in response to a regular course assignment. The year-long study (May 1987-April 1988) was based on 557 essays collected from four Florida sites: the University of Florida, Miami-Dade Community College, Valencia Community College, and Tallahassee Community College.

The general essay topic for this project, "The most harmful educational experience," was written according to procedures developed by Brossell and Hoekter in their previous research on content-fair essay examination topics for large scale writing assessments (CCCC, October 1986). Brossell and Hoekter then varied this topic in two ways: (1) they controlled the degree of rhetorical specification, and (2) they changed the wording to invite subjective and objective responses. These variations yielded four versions of the topic:

- Minimal rhetorical specification requesting an impersonal discussion
- Minimal rhetorical specification requesting a report of personal experience
- Full rhetorical specification requesting an impersonal account
- Full rhetorical specification requesting a report of personal experience

The essays written in response to these topic variations were scored holistically on a 7-point scale by experienced graders; the scale included operational descriptions for four levels of quality (1,3,5,7) and left the other three variables
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