

## TEACHING WRITING AND TESTING WRITING

Facilitator: Barbara Hoetker Ash, *Florida Department of Education*

Barbara Ash began the session by voicing two major concerns: how have tests shaped our teaching, and how can our teaching shape tests? She suggested that these questions could be examined from three perspectives; that of the teacher, that of the administrator, and that of the researcher. Using the participants' experiences in these roles, the group explored the following issues:

- As a teacher, in what ways has testing shaped your teaching?
- If it has shaped your teaching, how do you feel about these changes?
- How do your students respond to testing?
- In what ways can your perceptions as a teacher shape testing?
- As an administrator, what signals are you giving to your teachers and students? What signals do you *intend* to give?

Over the course of the session, the topics came full circle. That is, the participants began by discussing student reactions to testing, then discussed teacher reactions, teaching strategies, testing goals, and finally returned to students.

Clearly, this group was most concerned about the impact of testing on students. Tests make students anx-

ious, and anxiety affects writing performance. In addition, students can demand that courses focus on test preparation. They want to know how each classroom activity relates to the test.

Thus, some participants reported being in a dilemma about whether or not to teach to the test. Most felt that good teaching involved having students think and write clearly and that this would prepare them for competency tests. Some suggested that time could be devoted to test-taking skills either in class, in workshops, or in student handbooks, but all agreed that focusing on the students' writing, not the test, was most important.

If testing raises so many problems, why test? Participants felt that it was important for both placement and competency. Yet, the tests must reflect the teacher's goals. Various testing strategies were shared as alternatives to the timed expository response to the short text. These included tests in which students responded in writing to texts that they had read at home and tests that asked students to write in several different modes. These types of tests might reflect more accurately the kinds of writing required in most college classrooms. Thus, students might be more confident in the testing situation and more likely to write as competently as they can.

Martha J. Bell, *Recorder*  
*Brooklyn College*