

TRAINING READERS

Facilitator: Robert Christopher, *Ramapo College*

In his presentation, Robert Christopher maintained that the selection, training, and support of the reader are vital to the quality of assessment and to the curriculum. Since the reader acts as a mediator between the institution, the test itself, and the student, only by emphasizing reader training can the integrity of the process and the interests of the student be protected.

Assessment reading is contextual, and there are few absolutes. It is, however, clear that the process will differ somewhat according to the leadership of the institution and the mission of assessment. Nevertheless, there are shared aspects of the experience common, for instance, to the CUNY colleges: the scale employed, the role of the reader, and the training and selection of readers. Although reading can be on a mass scale, an institutional scale, or a departmental scale, the constant throughout is "collaboration to reach a consensus through comparative judgments."

The reader has a dual responsibility: to validate the test and to interpret fairly the student's performance on it. He must assign a score within the limits established by the test, and that decision will determine the student's placement within the curriculum. In consequence, poorly trained readers may misinform students as to their performance, invalidate a test, and undercut the placement process.

It is clear that good readers are necessary if assessment reading is to have any meaning, but what are we to look for in our model of a good reader/evaluator? Reading holistically requires, indeed demands, a combination of skills and attitudes: reading acuity, a willingness to read supportively, the ability to use the entire range of the evaluation scale, skill in the use of available time, and a commitment to working collectively and collaboratively. Furthermore, a reader must be consistent with the institution for which he is doing the assessment reading.

Dr. Christopher suggested that institutions form a "pool" of readers which would work in solitude, sharing judgments and developing mutual trust. Such a pair would constitute a "dyad," and six readers, or three dyads, would form a core. This core of six should undergo intensive training. If necessary, the members of the core group would become "brokers" to bring others into the process. They could be paired off in new dyads so that the circle would be expanded. In order for this training to be effective, the core group would have to be "complete insiders," aware of how the institution functions, why and how topics are chosen, the method of scoring and grading, the way in which the scoring process is conducted, and the consequences of assessment.

Although it is clear that reader training is vital to the assessment process, it is hard to be absolute or specific about the nature of that training. Much depends, for example, on whether the scoring mode is holistic or analytical. However, Dr. Christopher emphasized the importance of a commitment to group work and to the process of trial and error. Naturally, readers who work within an institution that shows its appreciation of their efforts by providing a comfortable working environment and adequate compensation are more likely to maintain high standards of performance. But beyond these purely material considerations, an awareness of the purposes of a particular test, and, indeed, of the purpose of the entire testing process and the vital role of the reader within it, is

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a strong incentive. Both readers and the institutions in which they work should be cognizant of the decisive

influence the outcome of assessment will have on the experience of the student and the development of the curriculum.

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