
HOLISTIC EVALUATION AS EMPOWERMENT

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The presenters discussed an adaptation of holistic evaluation that is innovative in several ways. It brings the responsibility for testing back to the teacher by testing in the classroom itself. In addition, it assesses the learning of specific content material across the curriculum rather than general writing ability. Importantly, two of the proposed models of holistic reading allow students to be directly involved in the evaluation process. Over all, this adaptation empowers both teachers and students by suggesting practical means of implementing writing across the curriculum at the same time that it increases collaboration among faculty.

The study that suggested these models was a 1987-88 project under Canada's French Research Category in which 22 participants (representing 11 disciplines) holistically evaluated at least one assignment during a semester. The findings

supported our hypothesis that holistic evaluation can be used to assess learning in content courses. The outcomes demonstrated how the use of such procedures in the classroom can empower both students and teachers. Students received a clearer sense of the purpose of writing, which led to better planning, clearer expression, and a deeper understanding of the topic. They also benefitted from the motivation resulting from more positive feedback and an understanding of the grading system. For teachers, the collaboration led to an articulation and validation of their own pedagogical values and practices, a deepened awareness of the processes of learning and writing, a less tedious marking task, and more congruence between teaching and testing.

We explained three elements of the models in detail: the relationship between the teachers involved, the preparation of the prompt and the scoring guide (concrete examples were distributed for analysis by the audience), and the procedures for reading and scoring the papers. We stressed models in which students were the second readers.