

# EXPLORING MODIFICATIONS OF PRIMARY TRAIT SCORING: DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE WRITING OF STUDENTS IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

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The chief objective of this presentation/workshop was to acquaint teachers with a variety of kinds of descriptive analysis of a sample of the writing of Grade 9 students in Canada's Northwest Territories. Our analyses can lead to development of resources of use to teachers in writing programs with attention to all students but with particular focus on the achievements and needs of students of native-language background who make up about half the student population tested annually 1985-1988.

We provided participants with an overview of the scoring procedure (holistic) and the various types of analysis (analytic scoring, error counts, variations on "primary trait") that were applied subsequently to a large random sample stratified by score (the holistic score originally obtained). The general performance comparisons (native and non-native) revealed a number of differences among these writers as to narrative and exposition points of view.

We illustrated the descriptive analysis in greater detail, using graphs to show how particular features related to holistic score: i.e., which seemed to have closest association with over-all achievement, which seemed present or

absent in the writing of most students, and what this information suggested concerning stages of writing development or particular blockages for some students. The results influenced decisions made concerning resource development for the writing program.

Participants applied these variations on primary trait scoring first to Grade 6 writing of fantasy (from another source) and then to three point-of-view essays from the Northwest territories 1987 Assessment.

The variations on primary trait employed here provide more scope for capturing the range of student response than the American NAEP version, and include features that may be simply identified (with their frequency) as well as those that may be scaled.