
EVALUATION OF A PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL: IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

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Evaluation is a major focus of a research project investigating literacy at Ontario Veterinary College. Using ethnographic research methods, I discovered that a set of reductive evaluation practices were at work in the college—an overdependence on in-class exams using short answers to test for information for its own sake rather than information used to solve problems or to argue for a diagnosis. Bloom's taxonomy, James Britton's work on expressive vs. transactional writing, and research into coherence suggested that such practices were leading to students experiencing difficulty when asked to do extended pieces of writing (especially in class) requiring synthesis and evaluation and to a lack of opportunity for students to master the cohesion needed for fully transactional writing.

Further investigation revealed that these evaluation practices have evolved in response to forces outside of the College—both faculty and students believe that they are in the midst of an information explosion and that no time is available for fully transactional writing. Curriculum and pedagogy also reflect and influence the present evaluation system. Despite the college's declared interest in problem-solving and interactive instruction, most of the teaching remains presentational. Thus, the evaluation system and pedagogy work to exclude students from learning how to contribute actively to their discipline.