

HOLISTIC SCORING AND READER TRAINING

Speakers: Bob Christopher, *Ramapo College, New Jersey*
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Agnes Yamada, *California State University, Dominguez Hills*

Introducer/Recorder: Dick Worthen, *Diablo Valley College*

Bob Christopher opened the session with a description of holistic scoring. Holistic scoring of students' writing forces the evaluator to focus on the rhetorical aspects of the paper and encourages the designing of assignments that set up rhetorical contexts for tasks. It encourages consensus on standards and discourages idiosyncratic evaluations of essays. Papers are compared to each other in terms of the whole rhetorical performance.

The holistic process contrasts with criterion-referenced essay reading. Here papers are evaluated against a scoring guide. This insures somewhat more consistency from test administration to test administration. Theoretically, with criterion-referenced reading, all students could earn the highest score or all could get the lowest score. Actually the two methods are not mutually exclusive and in practice the two often merge.

The training of readers in a department affects more than the scoring procedures. It requires a commitment to achieving agreement. This in turn is a commitment to a means of achieving agreement. It is important that all readers know about and participate generously in preparation for the reading, in effect taking part in the "research" on composition. Reader training, the commitment to subjecting student writing to evaluation, is a precursor to evaluation of the curriculum, raising such questions as "How does the rating process affect course goals, content, and pedagogy?"

While faculties which have adopted holistic scoring as a means of determining successful exit from the basic composition course tend to develop indigenous peripheral practices, most use something like the following as the core procedure. A Leader brings together the Table Leaders, experienced readers who are familiar with the procedure, for an intensive tuneup. Table Leaders will supervise a table of four or five readers. The holistic reading's preliminary activities consist of two stages: 1) the training of Table Leaders and 2) the training of readers.

Carol Sweedler-Brown and Agnes Yamada discussed these two activities in detail. At the first stage, the Leader brings the Table Leaders together and they read a large corpus of papers all written for the same assignment. Assuming the papers are to be graded on a scale of 1-6, all papers are read by each Table Leader and given a ranking number. The reader, of course, does not know the score given by other readers. Those papers that evoked the most consistent scores become candidates for the smaller group of prototype papers for each score. The group then discusses these papers and their characteristics. These six groups of prototype papers become the

(Continued on page 8)

HOLISTIC SCORING (continued)

papers for the second stage, the training of readers.

Each table of four or five readers is given a duplicated set of five papers so that each table does a common reading. Readers are asked to rank them and then the Head Reader announces the scores previously given those papers by the Table Leaders. After time to absorb the implications of the first reading by the readers, they are given another set and the process is repeated. There follows a general discussion of the papers and their grading. Then the process continues. The readers are asked to adapt their reading toward the emerging norms.

All this is preliminary to the actual reading of the exit papers. Each paper is read by two readers and a difference of more than two points calls for a third reader. The Table Leader's job is to check for erratic scoring, call it to the attention of readers, and generally encourage consistency and rigor at his or her table.