

testing will, predictably, do best.

## CLASSROOM RESEARCH AND WRITING ASSESSMENT

**Speaker:** *Myles Meyers*, California Federation of Teachers

**Introducer/**

**Recorder:** *Deborah Appleman*, Carleton College, Minnesota

Myles Meyers addressed the issue of large scale assessment from the perspectives of the K-12 administrator and classroom teacher. From these perspectives he finds large scale assessment to be problematic and often ill-advised. The enormous diversity of schools makes it difficult to capture the current "state of the art." Myers also contended that state assessments such as California's CTBS work against teaching as well as against the professionalization of teachers.

Meyers discussed at length the seemingly reductionist quality of large scale assessment. Although recent research on writing maintains that writing is a multiple construct, time and financial constraints limit the constructs that can be examined. The construct that is employed to define writing thus becomes the primary focus for a particular grade (for example, autobiography in grade 10). In our effort to handle the assessment task by limiting constructs, our definition of writing, as well as its instruction, therefore becomes uni-dimensional. Moreover, because of the inevitable prescriptive quality of

the interpretation of assessment results as well as teachers' lack of involvement and consequently lack of ownership in the entire assessment process, Meyers claimed that statewide assessments can destroy teaching-as-inquiry and harm student learning.

Meyers then presented several suggestions for involving teachers in the assessment process. He emphasized the importance of having teachers participate significantly through summer institutes at university settings. He also underscored the importance of viewing assessment as a process of inquiry, one in which disagreement is as important as agreement. To illustrate the value of assessment as inquiry, Meyers handed out three sample student papers and asked the audience to rank them as high, middle, and low. The resulting scoring was quite discrepant, as were the reasons offered for the rankings. Meyers then discussed the value of discrepancy in our aim to improve literacy for all children. Rather than considering agreement as the ultimate goal in assessment, discrepancy can lead to a fruitful dialogue about our underlying assumptions about teaching good writing as well as about its evaluation.

Meyers pointed out that dialogues or debates such as those generated by the conferees when they were asked to rank the papers were a critical aspect of the assessment process. He stressed the importance of having classroom teachers as active participants in an on-going debate on assessment, rather than as recipients of an administrative decision to employ a particular large scale assessment instrument. He then handed out six additional student papers, and asked conferees to rank them and then to discuss the rankings in pairs. As with the first exercise, the rankings were widely discrepant. Meyers illustrated how this kind of exercise can be used to encourage teachers to think explicitly about their pedagogy and also described several ways in which the ranking of student writing can be employed to generate discussion among teachers. For example, he has asked teachers to devise sample lessons for students whose papers they have ranked.

Meyers ended his provocative discussion by suggesting several ways in which writing can be viewed as a speech act and as a collaborative social event. He discussed the differences and similarities between conversation and written presentation. Meyers concluded his talk with the following thought: "When you teach people how to write, you teach them a new definition of themselves."