

COMPUTERS AND THE TEACHING OF WRITING

Speakers: *Michael Ribaudo*, The City University of New York,
Linda Meeker, Ball State University

Introducer/

Recorder: *Donald Ross*, University of Minneapolis

Both speakers discussed the National Project on Computers and College Writing, a three-year project supported by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education and The City University of New York. This project is coordinated by three of the NTNW directors: Michael Ribaudo, Harvey Wiener, and Karen Greenberg.

Michael Ribaudo explained the goals of the project: it will (1) identify outstanding college programs that have incorporated computers in freshman-level composition courses, (2) conduct research on the impact of computers on students' writing abilities, (3) develop and disseminate reports on this research and on instructional philosophy and methodology, and (4) host a national conference showcasing the programs and the research.

Ribaudo noted that, at this point in time, fifteen colleges and universities from across the country are involved in the project. They are developing research designs that will pair three "computer" sections and three traditional sections and three traditional sections at each site. Some of the research instruments to assess students include essay tests (scored holistically and analytically), multiple-choice tests, and questionnaires on writing anxiety and writing attitudes.

Linda Meeker discussed her university's participation in the project, and summarized the efforts that Ball State

has already made in evaluating the effects of computers on the teaching and learning of writing.

She described three of her recent studies. The first study assessed student attitudes toward using computer-assisted instruction (CAI) in basic writing classes. She found that CAI proved effective in terms of students' time management and that basic writing students developed positive attitude toward CAI. Her second study focused on using "invention" software to assist the composing processes of basic writing students. Results indicated highly positive student attitudes and a noticeable improvement in students' ability to focus on their topics. Meeker's third study examined the revising strategies of basic writing students. This study revealed that students spent significant amounts of time in a variety of prewriting and revising activities, but it was unclear whether the text manipulations were clearly related to a greater flexibility provided by CAI. However, Meeker did find that the computer enabled students to do more frequent --and more productive--pre-editing.

Next, Meeker described some of the studies that will be conducted by the National Project on Computers and College Writing. She noted that data collected from these large scale assessments will either confirm or call into question the results of her studies. Students attitudes toward CAI and the effectiveness of word-processing as a tool for inventing, composing, revising and editing will be evaluated. Moreover, each of the project sites will examine the comparative effectiveness of different hardware and software configurations available at their institutions.

For further information on this project, or the conference which is scheduled for Spring 1990, write to Dean Ribaudo at CUNY, 535 East 80th Street, New York, NY 10021.