

READER-RESPONSE CRITICISM AS A MODEL FOR HOLISTIC EVALUATION

Speaker: *Karl Schnapp*, Miami University

Introducer/

Recorder: *Ann Hill Duin*, University of Minnesota

Karl Schnapp's session focused on the application of reader-response theory to large and small scale holistic assessment. Schnapp began by citing the work of Stanley Fish, David Bleich, and Norman Holland as working models for the holistic evaluation of student writing. He then said that his own work is also based on Edward White's theories of composition as a socializing and individualizing discipline. From these theorists, Schnapp concluded that the best composition pedagogy views students' writing from both social and individual perspectives. In short, the interpretation and evaluation of writing depends on qualities of the community in which the writing was created and was evaluated.

Schnapp then described his specific project. His model is based on three reading theories that lead to a model for the holistic evaluation of writing. The first theory is the "top-down" model of reading as discussed by Holland and Bleich, the second is the "text-reader interaction" theory (from information-processing theory) as discussed by Rosenblatt, and the third is the "communal association" theory as discussed by Fish. Schnapp described his model in detail. Then he asked conferees to fill out a survey identical to that used in his study. The survey asked us to complete questions regarding our perceptions and understanding of composition/language arts. Next we read an essay written by a freshman student and rated the student essay. Finally, we completed a second survey in which we gave information on the criteria we employ when holistically evaluating student writing. As with Schnapp's results, we had about 75% agreement in terms of the common goals of the composition instructors present. Schnapp stated that his research shows that writing teachers see writing as helping students on more of a practical level than on an aesthetic level.

The remainder of the presentation was a discussion between Schnapp and the conferees. Key points that

emerged included: the need to ask readers about what influences them as they evaluate papers; the need to determine the evaluative standards for one's discourse community; and the extent to which readers are influenced by what they are thinking about while evaluating writing.