

EVALUATING A LITERACY ACROSS THE CURRICULUM PROGRAM: DESIGNING AN APPROPRIATE INSTRUMENT

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Linda Shohet, director of the Literacy Across the Curriculum Center at Dawson College, has taught Canadian literature and writing at Dawson since 1973. She began developing the Literacy Across the Curriculum program in 1984; the Center now provides instructional and consultation services to English high schools and colleges throughout the province. She began the session by reviewing the language-related political issues in Quebec, and then she sketched the development of the center and discussed the evaluation of the program scheduled this spring at Dawson.

Quebec is a unilingual province in a bilingual country. French (first language) speakers comprise 24.6 percent of the population of Canada and 83.5 percent of the population in Quebec. English (first language) speakers comprise 68.2 percent of the population in Canada and 12.7 percent of the population in Quebec. French speakers see the maintenance of their language politically, as the survival of their culture. Consequently, language awareness is high.

Dawson College is a two-year, English language community college; all students going on for a University degree must first complete community college. The Literacy Across the Curriculum program was initiated by

the faculty development committee, not the English Department, and its administration remains in the faculty development office. Keeping it out of the English department gives the program a broader base of support and institutional commitment, Shohet said. The program, originally intended as internal, soon started receiving requests from English-language high schools and other colleges, asking for ideas and resources. As the program expanded to meet those needs, costs rose. The only source of additional funding was the government, which required evidence that the program was relevant to the entire community, including French-language schools and colleges. The Dawson College administration had ordered an evaluation of the program to show its value to its own faculty before supporting expansion.

The bureaucratic demand, Shohet said, is to ask how much student literacy has increased as a result of a program; her response consisted of showing how faculty have responded and how classroom activities have changed. She also commented that the outcomes of a literacy across the curriculum program are not limited to reading and writing instruction. At Dawson, faculty members began attending more faculty development seminars, interacting across departments, and volunteering to develop classroom projects (when previously, they had been embarrassed to be seen at a writing workshop). Faculty publications also increased.

The design of an evaluation instrument began with a model developed at San Diego State College, which helped define an evaluation that would be particular to Dawson. The college also employed an outside consultant, Shohet noted, which gave the evaluation additional objectivity. She cautioned against using generic evaluation instruments; each program develops with its own goals and philosophy, and must be evaluated on that basis.

The Dawson evaluation focused on particular questions about classroom activities before and after workshop attendance: class time spent writing; time spent talking about writing; writing assignments; use of journals; working with drafts; oral communication assignments; use of library resources. In categories covering writing, reading, speaking, and listening skills, the evaluation attempted to determine what changes instructors had made in their classes, what goals they had for center programs, and whether participation in center programs had promoted educational exchange with other faculty members or increased levels of theoretical knowledge. One section defines the program's objectives and asks faculty to evaluate objectives as appropriate and applicable; this type of inquiry not only helps refine program goals for future planning, but reinforces awareness of program objectives among faculty members who respond, Shohet said.

The center ran a pilot study, distributing evaluation forms to 150 randomly selected faculty members, chosen from those who had attended workshops. About 100 responses were returned; some questions were refined. The

evaluation in its final form will be distributed to faculty members across the curriculum this spring. Shohet will report on the results at next year's NTNW Conference, which will be held at Dawson College. (Shohet is the Conference Co-Coordinator.)