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INEQUITY IN THE CLASSROOM/EN TOUTE EGALITE.

**Montreal, QC: Concordia University; Office on the Status of Women, 1992.
329 pp. US\$49.95 Cloth; US\$17.95 Paper.**

Developed by the Office on the Status of Women at Concordia University, *Inequity in the Classroom* is a video and training manual which aims at sensitizing university professors and adult educators to the more subtle forms of sexual discrimination in the classroom. The video is 26 minutes in length, and uses examples to illustrate that professors' interaction with female and male students can be quite different, and that the languages used in the teaching process can be very gender-biased, although often in subtle forms. Practical steps are suggested toward creating an equal learning environment for all students.

The materials are helpful for educators to reflect on their classroom teaching and to become sensitive teachers dealing with students of different gender and racial identity. However, some people may feel that the materials fail to present a balanced picture of what transpired in the classroom.

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Christine A. Hult (Ed).

EVALUATING TEACHERS OF WRITING.

**Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1994.
184 pp. \$19.95 (NCTE members \$14.95). ISBN: 0-8141-1621-3.**

Reading Hult's *Evaluating Teachers of Writing* is like panning for gold. When you dip into it, you are left with ordinary gravel in your pan, but buried in the gravel are nuggets of gold.

First, the ordinary gravel. Hult's collection of articles is about the peculiarly American phenomenon: first-year composition. She points out that the evaluation of teachers of first-year comp poses a problem for university administrators who have to mentor and rate professors and instructors. The teaching of writing is not about teaching content, which characterizes university teaching, but about process, which is as confusing for those who rate university instructors as it is for those who deal with teachers in elementary and high schools.

The authors, in this book, conclude that the basic question about evaluation of faculty has changed from "shall we" in the 1980s to "how shall we" in the 90s. One answer to this question involves the exploration of discipline-specific evaluation strategies needed to evaluate writing

teachers. The most promising of these strategies appears to be portfolio evaluation. The authors in Hult's book also stress the significance of differentiating between formative and summative evaluation, just as writing teachers themselves have learned to act both as mentor and judge when working with their students. Specifically, Ellen Strenski provides detailed instructions for the peer review process with such devices as checklists and peer committee reports. Mark Baker and Joyce Kinkead suggest how to use microteaching to work with teaching assistants in first year comp and turn this experience into formative and summative evaluation. David Schwalm outlines the criteria needed in the evaluation of adjunct faculty, including sample policy statements. Irwin Weiser describes a formal mentoring program in which he provides TAs with specific teaching skills and then uses a checklist based on these skills in instructor evaluation. Unlike other authors in Hult's book, Weiser argues that evaluations of instructors by students are "both reliable and valid if the instrument is appropriately designed and appropriately interpreted" (p. 140).

All these suggestions are commonplace for teachers in the school system; these ideas have been around for many years. However, the articles in Hult's book have a nice *how to* ring about them, important no doubt for those working with the many inexperienced TAs who do first-year comp, and would be helpful for those who have to evaluate their work.

Hidden in Hult's book are several interesting ideas, the gold nuggets on the bottom of her pan. Throughout the articles in this book, the authors pop in tough questions about instructor evaluation. Rarely do they answer these questions, perhaps a weakness of this book, but they do raise questions of concern to those involved in the evaluation of professors in general, not just writing instructors. These are questions around the process of evaluation and issues of equity and ideology.

In separate articles, Edward White and Peter Elbow examine the question of student evaluation of professors. White has gone sour on the process; Elbow says we need to do it differently. Abandoning his long-standing faith in student evaluations, White's disillusionment has grown as big universities have reduced student ratings to numbers and used these numbers as the sole measure of teaching. White points out the downright dishonesty and cheating that does occur among instructors who are competing for scarce jobs, instructors who barter high marks for high ratings. He notes, too, that instructors of writing are particularly vulnerable because students usually rate them low as a reaction to the compulsory writing requirement. Peter Elbow, on the other hand, believes that students have much to contribute through their evaluations. For him, student evaluations must be written statements, and not the

number summaries that occur from checking boxes on computer scoring sheets, which he defines as an over simplification of a complex process. Elbow would also make greater use of informal evaluation, asking instructors to provide reflective, self-evaluations based, in part, on informal, formative opinions from students.

Anne Flanagan reports on her study of observers of teaching. Using Mikhail Bakhtin's work, she argues that observations are not independent objective acts, but "microcosms of the academic communities in which they take place (p. 75)." The observers themselves are situated in a context. As a result, we find the dynamics of power, class, gender, and race occurring between observer and observed. Flanagan also concludes that one person cannot play the role of mentor and judge. For formative evaluations, she suggests peer observation and training teachers to be observers of themselves. Those involved in summative evaluation must develop clear objectives for observation as one way to demystify the observation process and counteract the bias of observers.

Looking at evaluation as epistemology, Michael Vivion points out a significant flaw in the peer review process. Drawing upon differences between literature professors and composition professors, Vivion points to differing philosophies of teaching, most easily described as the process/product distinction. Vivion argues that observers make decisions from their own valuable base. Ideological differences in the purpose for teaching often lead to misevaluation. Getting down to problems of English teaching, Vivion poses this question: "How will literature faculty evaluate the next generation of scholars rising out of teaching assistant programs that emphasize reading/writing connections and that teach techniques and approaches which blur disciplinary lines?" (p. 91).

For the past decade, some educators have argued for writing across the curriculum. John Bean points out problems that occur for professors who use writing across the curriculum strategies. For example, students themselves resist the added burden of having to write in a content course, and they often give professors low ratings because of the unexpected writing demand. In addition, professors involved with writing in content areas often are involved in a changing perspective of teaching. Because writing tasks tend to involve students actively in the discipline, these professors are moving from a telling model of teaching to a more engaging model. Such a change can be disturbing for students who want a traditional, content-based, lecture course and object to "the unsettling view of knowledge" used with writing across the curriculum strategies.

For me the largest nugget in Hult's book is David Bleich's comment on evaluation. He challenges the ideology that forms the base of

evaluation practices. In a complex article, Bleich argues that the ideology of competition directs our thinking about teaching. Our need to order, structure, and control. For Bleich, this ideology represents a masculine idea of teaching, which demands that we compete to decide who is best – the rationale for our fetish with evaluation. Bleich writes, “The most palpable obstacle to change is the stubborn presence of the ideology of competitive individualism and its need for ranking and hierarchical structures in the academy” (p. 28). To get to the heart of the issues around the evaluation of teachers and professors, we have to change from a competitive, individualistic ideology to one of nurturing and support. A possible answer to Bleich’s concern is portfolio evaluation of teachers (and students) which, Bleich points out, moves us in the direction of feminizing teaching, of a concern for nurturing, for decency and courtesy, enjoyment, feeling, a “celebration of learning.” If the Americans thought they had trouble with the gun laws, just wait until they grapple with this one.

Bleich is also an advocate of discipline-specific evaluation. He takes on the Boyer report (Ernest L. Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriat*, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990) for its emphasis on generic skills and generic strategies for evaluation, for its basic assumption that teaching and evaluation can be addressed generically. For Bleich teaching is something peculiarly individual and always private. He argues, instead, that teaching, especially in evaluation teachers of writing, needs to be understood “per department, per discipline, per university, per teacher, and even per student” (p. 20). For Bleich, the value of portfolio evaluation lies in the possibility of turning evaluation into “a discourse of particularization”; it allows local knowledge and conditions to be a major focus of any evaluation process, whether looking at faculty teaching or student work.

No doubt, instructors immersed in issues of first-year comp will appreciate the practicality of this book. As for me, I enjoyed the clear, jargon-free writing of *Evaluation Teachers of Writing*. It was an easy read. This book prompted me to think about the times I have evaluated professors in our College, indeed to consider again the whole field of evaluation. It raised issues that educators should address: problems with observation of instructors, with equity, with basic approaches to teaching, with the task of assessing process – issues that occur in an increasingly multicultural, pluralistic society. Perhaps I have to forgive Hult and the other contributors for not providing new answers, for as a profession, we just do not yet have these answers. Maybe the next time I go panning for gold?

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