Writing Assessment

Definition

Writing assessment, which often is used as a synonym for evaluation, can refer to many kinds of activities. Inside the classroom, writing assessment is often *formative*. When teachers respond to student work, their intent is to help students, which is the purpose of formative assessment: to help students while they and their texts are still in *formation*. As many students already know, however, we have many kinds of *summative* writing assessments as well—from the writing essay portion of the SAT to end-of-course Advanced Placement essays—which are thought of as summative because they are final (i.e., they *sum* up) and, typically, are used to rank students. Writing portfolios—which are collections of writing selected from a larger archive and reflected upon by portfolio composers—can be either formative or summative. Because they tend to provide a much fuller and richer picture of a student's writing development, they often lead to better decisions about student development and achievement—and at the center of writing assessment is the ability to make such decisions.

Importance to the Field

Teachers and scholars in composition and rhetoric have been leaders of assessment in U.S. educational contexts. They were among the first to use portfolios; they have helped faculty in many disciplines learn the difference between responding to writing and grading writing; they have helped design many practices to help students reflect on their work; and they are now developing a new language and a new set of practices for the assessment of electronic and networked texts.

Resources

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