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**INTERNAL ASSESSMENT AND THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH -
A RESPONSE TO THE ARGUMENTS FROM D. GEORGE AND E. VIETH**

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The assessment debate continues. The recent contributions from D. George and E. Vieth were certainly interesting ones, and, as with the previous contribution from R. McGuire, both articles did raise a number of important issues on the nature of internal assessment, especially as relating to the teaching of English. This article attempts to make some formal response to these issues, as well as making an overall response on the current nature of education in Queensland. In the most recent edition of this Journal there was also an article from D. McLucas regarding assessment in English. Generally one can only agree with the sentiments expressed within this article, especially concerning the seriousness of plagiarism, the impracticality of current recommendations concerning assessment and the need for more objective testing in English. However, for the moment it seems appropriate to direct attention to those who would seek to defend the current system of internal assessment, and specifically the arguments from D. George and E. Vieth.

Throughout the first article, by D. George, there are a number of comments in regard to the current assessment system, although possibly the most useful suggestion for assessment procedure is the suggestion that a distinction be made between those students with certain and uncertain achievement results. The work of those students with certain achievement results is then accepted as is and the work of those students with uncertain achievement levels is reviewed by teachers. Certainly this seems a positive suggestion, although, on closer analysis, even with this, problems still remain. Probably the central problem relates to the role of oral expression within the Syllabus. Skills of oracy are usually recognized as being just as important as those of literacy within any English programme. It seems difficult to contemplate just how this aspect of the work of any student could be properly reviewed under this system. The review mechanism thus seems to ignore a substantial component of the Syllabus. The other problem with this limited review of student work is that a Special Subject Assessment is still required for each student of the matriculating population at any institution. It is difficult to see how this could be accomplished in an equitable manner, without reviewing the work of all students. Such a universal reviewing of work is clearly impractical within the present system, especially for the larger high schools and senior colleges.

The article by E. Vieth was also an interesting one. The central argument seems to be that the amount of assessment designated by schools is indeed not required by the Syllabus. The problem is that this judgement itself seems to ignore the Syllabus, especially the situation that assessment is required for skills of oracy and literacy 'over a diverse range of expressive and receptive forms,' and 'over diverse genres, registers, and test-conditions'. There is simply no way these requirements can be fulfilled without extensive assessment. Vieth also seems to be uncertain as to how plagiarism can be [12/13] detected. He is indeed quite correct in intimating that within my own argument the majority of plagiarism remains undetected at school. What does happen, however, is that this information generally comes from outside of the school environment, from former students. This is generally long after graduation, and long after it is possible to take any administrative action on individual cases. The excursus on absolute and relative morality from Vieth was also an interesting one, although it was a little difficult to discern the precise relevance of this to the teaching of English. It seems that Vieth is suggesting that plagiarism should be regarded as somehow an acceptable phenomenon within the secondary school. Again, it is not

quite clear what E. Vieth is attempting to say. Educationally, we do regard plagiarism as unacceptable, and it seems difficult to imagine how this value could change in the future.

Thus, for internal assessment in Queensland, it does seem that the problems of (a) practicality, (b) comparability, and (c) originality do still remain. Both of the above contributions are certainly positive ones in the assessment debate, and there is at least one useful suggestion for improvement to assessment procedures. However, the situation remains that there are still inherent faults within the system of assessment itself. No amount of debate can have any real meaning unless there is a preparedness to address the structural problems of the system itself. Unless and until this is commenced the pervasive disillusionment and discontent amongst both teachers and students in Queensland will inevitably continue.

There are two final comments from the Vieth article which do bear some special response. The initial of these comments is the suggestion from Vieth of the need for more in-service training. Certainly, as a general statement, in-service training must be regarded as a desirably entity. However, it is also desirable for any in-service training to have clear and stated goals and objectives. This does not seem to be the case with the suggestion from Vieth. There is no indication as to what exactly would be included within such in-servicing. If and when there is some clear and logical indication of what should be included, then obviously such in-service training would be justified. Until that time it is difficult to see how such a call can maintain very much credibility. Response needs to be made also regarding the suggestion by Vieth of a supposedly personal statement by myself regarding R. McGuire. Here too it is difficult to understand exactly what Vieth is attempting to suggest. Clearly *ad hominem* statements by any individual are unacceptable in any professional journal. However, it is quite clear from any independent reading of the text that this is not what is intended or accomplished in this individual case. The reference is clearly to educational policies, and not to any individual.

Ultimately, it does seem both logical and inevitable that tertiary institutions in Queensland should take responsibility for the procedures of tertiary admission. This would leave teachers with more scope to be more involved in actual teaching, rather than acting, as at present, as administrators of a complex tertiary selections process. It is noteworthy that the recent Tertiary Entrance Score Working Party in Queensland did receive a number of submissions to this effect, although, for various reasons, the Working Party opted not to consider these at this stage. An alternative logical improvement would involve greater usage of the Australian Scholastic Aptitude Test (ASAT), which does include substantial component to test linguistic competence and sophistication. At the present time ASAT is used to compare groups of students at different institutions, groups which are often quite small in number. Surely it is one further step to utilize ASAT to differentiate between individual students. Such objective-type testing is widely utilized overseas, for the assessment of individual tertiary admission. Surely it is time we set aside our parochialism, and adopted a procedure which has been already accepted elsewhere. [13/14]

Of course, the irony of the current assessment system in Queensland is that it is purportedly a de-centralized one. The reality is that there is a hierarchical and highly centralized bureaucratic apparatus to implement the system, involving District Review Panels, State Review Panels, and Subject Committees. It is noteworthy that all of this apparatus works on a nondemocratic basis. There is no provision for teaching relief for teachers appointed to serve on agencies, and at no stage is there any election of teacher representatives. There seems no real reason why this situation must remain as it is; why there should not be election of teacher representatives and arrangements for proper teacher relief. It is interesting that many commentators have noted the continuing influence of the colonial tradition in Australian education systems. This seems as much the case with the Queensland system as it is with any other system. It is a system dominated

by autocracy, suspicion and mistrust. Clearly there is a strong case to involve teachers more in both the policy and decision-making processes, both to de-colonize and democratize education in Queensland. After all, we are the practitioners, and, more than anybody else, we do know what is happening within our classroom.

Again the articles by D. George and E. Vieth should be commended for contributing to discussion on assessment in Queensland. There can be no doubt that both write from the highest of motives. However, it is still the case that serious problems remain within internal assessment in Queensland, problems which are quite critical in the teaching of humanities, and within the teaching of English. Clearly, what is still needed is more public and professional discussion on such issues, and, hopefully also, some rational and sensible initiatives towards positive and enduring solutions.

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