



*Reynolds*

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Department of English  
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Mr. John C. Meeker  
Associate  
Formative Evaluation Research Associates  
1130 Hill St.  
Ann Arbor, Mich. 48104

Dear Mr. Meeker:

It is at the behest of the Freshman English Policy Committee, our department's governing board for Freshman English, that I am writing you this letter. Your request that we participate in the FERA study of composition programs has come to us at an opportune time: since November we have been planning to evaluate and compare the relative effectiveness of two of our first semester writing programs. As you know, E306 Regular follows an aims and modes of discourse syllabus developed by James Kinneavy; E306 Individualized, a variant which has been taught here for some time, follows a sentence-combining/structural format developed by Susan Wittig. These two programs have existed side-by-side, with little interaction and without evaluation, for over four years, and, with the support of our Dean of Humanities, we have laid the groundwork for a comparative study to take place in Fall, 1978.

It is therefore with keen interest that we have been discussing your proposal for these last weeks. I speak for the whole committee when I say that we would like to participate in the study. We have not decided yet to do so, however, because we have some substantial questions about it. As I relay these questions to you, I hope that you will understand that they are positive queries, oriented toward clarification. I call our purpose strongly to your attention: we want to be sure that you are willing to address what we see as problematical before we commit ourselves to join you. We feel that if you do so, the study will be the stronger for it, and we will be happy to participate.

Our questions are the following:

- 1) In your preliminary proposal to FIPSE, you say that the programs you plan to survey will be "nationally comprehensive," but you also state that you plan to survey only "four or five different approaches." If you get the FIPSE grant, when you expand the sample to include more schools, how do you propose to expand it so that it becomes comprehensive? We do not understand your use of that descriptive term as it is now used, for it implies to us a meaning that evidently you do not wish it to have.

*(dropped use of term)*

- 2) Could you tell us the theoretical base of your model of sample stratification? We perceive that some of the terms overlap (i.e., we're not sure how rhetorical programs differ from audience-oriented programs, though we do of course perceive a difference between, say, our 306 Regular and the Van Nostrand programs), but we may not understand your principle of classification. *none*
- 3) We would like to know more exactly what you mean by traditional and experimental approaches; as you refer to content or methodology or both. *defined p. 19*
- 4) If you plan to generalize about the effects which "activities in the writing programs have the most effect on students' writing," how will you do so? For instance, how might you evaluate the effect, in Ms. Wittig's E306 Individualized course, of the computer component, the contract grading system, the modular assignments, the content, the proctor-student relationship, and the teacher variable? In each case, will you rely only on what the students say about their experience or will you employ design factors that attempt to isolate these probable effects? *self-taught seals.*
- 5) What do you plan to do to minimize the teacher variable in all of the proposed programs? We know that good teachers can make any program effective. We believe that the design should ensure that each school does not simply put its best teachers into the study, but that perhaps teachers of varying experience and general ability should participate. *no teacher variable in design?*
- 6) Will there be any content-control measures? Will the syllabus of each program be spot-checked so that all can be assured that the programs are being tested and not the students' abilities to improve on the tests? We ask this because historically English teachers have taught for national college entrance tests, and they have a tendency to help their students learn to write for a specific audience, anyway. *no content control beyond selection of sections*
- 7) We understand the general merit of the Primary Traits test, but we would like to know more of the kind of assignment students will be given to do on it. We were told that they would be asked to do a description of a pineapple; could you elaborate upon that assignment and upon how protocols will be established for it? ✓
- 8) Finally, we want to know what you would expect from us during the summer. ✓

We may be addressing some issues prematurely, Mr. Meeker. If such is the case--If we can be assured of having input in the planning of procedures not yet decided upon--please tell us just that. Whatever you feel we should know about at this stage, we would be ahppy to hear. In the meantime, be assured of our interest in participating in the study. We know that participation would

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give more national exposure to our programs than they have already been given, which we would welcome since we think we do some good work here at Texas. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely yours,



Thomas D. Cameron  
Assistant Director of Freshman English  
Secretary to the Freshman English Policy  
Committee

TDC/sw

cc: James L. Kinneavy  
Susan Wittig  
all members of the FEPC