The structure and organization of the folders change over the grades to match the growing insights and experience of students. Each of the four folders is geared to support the understanding of the user while at the same time supporting overall programme consistency and system goals. Each folder is developed to span four years and reflect writing progress over four grades. When students change grades or schools the writing portfolios travel with them. While folders contain the writing that takes place during the course of any one term or semester, they also capture the highlights of the finest writing from previous grades. This repository of excellence reflects the pattern of individual growth over the years. Teachers receiving new students in September have a ready window on individual writers’ capabilities and the kinds of topics, genres, techniques and strategies that students have attempted or mastered in previous grades. Diagnostic evaluation as a fundamental tool of informed teaching is facilitated by this ready reference.

Current research, conducted in various classrooms, is examining revision in greater depth. Teachers have begun to collect drafts that reveal revision at work—thoughts altered, refined, developed as the writer clarifies ideas. Our current research focuses on the difference between surface-structure revision that touches up writing cosmetics and deep-structure revision that improves thought patterns and structure. While the NTNW conference opened the door to this line of thought, the next few years will undoubtedly provide further insights, which may be shared at future conferences.

PORTFOLIOS EVOLVING: BACKGROUND AND VARIATIONS

Roberta Camp, Educational Testing Service
Denise Stavis Levine, Lehman College, CUNY

In the first part of the presentation, we outlined the changes in research and practice that have led to the current interest in portfolio approaches to writing assessment. We identified four kinds of changes: in the prevailing views of writing and writing instruction, in models and goals for assessment, in teachers’ roles in curriculum development and assessment, and in students’ roles as learners.

There is great diversity among models for portfolio assessments designed for different purposes and context, but certain features are common to portfolios responsive to the changes identified earlier: multiple samples of writing, variety in the kinds of writing represented, evidence of processes used to create text, and student reflection on writing. We emphasized reflection as the feature that most distinguishes portfolios from other approaches to writing assessment and affords greatest opportunities for impact on instruction and learning.

Next, we illustrated the kinds of information about learning made available through portfolios and the kinds of difficulties that occur in the development of a portfolio design. We emphasized the exploratory nature of the projects described and the need for other portfolio projects to discover the approaches most appropriate to their situations.

We described the process used in the New York City Junior High School Writing and Learning Project to develop an appropriate and informative approach for portfolios of writing drawn from across the curriculum. First the purpose of the portfolio was established: to encourage students to show and become aware of the ways in which they use writing as a tool for learning and of changes in the ways they use writing strategies. Teachers participating in the project then articulated the underlying principles that characterized their classroom instruction in writing, and these principles became the basis for a series of guideline questions for students to use in selecting pieces of writing for their portfolios.
The students in the project selected from their writing the pieces they believed would illustrate how they used writing as a tool for learning, and they wrote letters explaining to the portfolio reader the reasons for the choices they made.

We presented examples from a student’s portfolio to show the kinds of learning and reflection evident in his work, and also to illustrate a number of questions it raises about portfolio assessment. Many of these questions arise from differences among students, across classrooms, and across subject areas; others involve problems of creating useful vocabulary for communicating about students’ work and the learning demonstrated in portfolios. Portfolios may not easily lend themselves to standardization and their primary value may be in what they reveal about learning to students themselves and to their teachers and parents.

SYSTEM-WIDE EXAMINATIONS: IMPROVING EVALUATION AND PROMOTING PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

Peter Moskos and David Ireland, Carleton Board of Education

Ontario’s Academic Credit English examination is a major component of the Carleton Board’s systemwide program in student and program evaluation of senior English. The aims of the program include a commitment on the part of teachers and students to the evaluation process; a consistency in procedures and marking reached through consensus; an openness whereby students know what they must do to achieve; and an integration of student and program evaluation.

In a demonstration of conference marking, workshop participants used the essay marking guide developed for the examination to mark sample student essays. Reflection upon this activity led to a discussion of key features of the project: The first is teacher involvement in the development and management of the examination by committees. Next is the training of teachers in evaluation techniques. Another key feature is classroom use of exemplar booklets which contain objectives, marking guides, and marked samples of student writing showing how criteria have been applied. Teachers also learn about centrally organized conference marking in which they remark and comment on each other’s evaluations and review all aspects of the examination. Evaluation data and teacher reactions are used as a basis for modifying curriculum and for developing new evaluation instruments and strategies. We then discussed recent findings from analyses of the marking and of student writing and considered ways that teachers can respond to these findings.

The project has had a significant impact. It has profoundly affected the way teachers evaluate in English. It has bolstered the confidence of teachers, students, parents, and trustees in evaluation procedures and, for the first time, brought teachers together to examine their standards and to develop their skills in the evaluation. In addition, the project has had a major impact on the way in which English is taught. There is wide agreement that the project has done as much to improve instruction as it has to improve evaluation.

COMPUTERS IN COLLEGE WRITING: PROGRESS REPORT ON A NATIONAL PROJECT

Michael Ribaudo, The City University of New York

This presentation focused on the status of a three-year grant made to The City University of New York by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (a branch of the United States Department of Education) to investigate the effectiveness of the use of computers in teaching writing at the college level.

The initial goal was to identify a number of representative institutions across the country that had already implemented computer-based writing programs, design a uniform research model for assessing the effectiveness of computers in the writing program, and develop ways of disseminating the results to other institutions seeking to embark on a computer-based instructional approach to the teaching of writing. It was clear from the beginning that although very little has been done to empirically test the outcomes of computers in the English class and that such research very much needed to be done,