students’ writing development, emphasizing results of the semantic analyses of grade 3, 4, and 5 students’ narratives.

Participants and presenters discussed the implications of these findings for student evaluation, classroom programming, and future research regarding the writing process.

ALIGNMENT OF THE CALIFORNIA DIRECT WRITING ASSESSMENT WITH CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Fran Clagg et al, California Direct Writing Assessment Program

The California Direct Writing Assessment uses matrix sampling to allow the testing of eight types of writing at grades 8 and 12, with 5 types repeated. Now in its third year of operation at grade 8 and first year at grade 12, the test design has from its inception encompassed teacher involvement. The test and all teaching materials are closely aligned with the new California Language Arts Framework, Grades K - 12, and with the accompanying Model Curriculum Standards.

From the outset, the test makers have attempted to design a testing project that would improve the teaching of writing in California. Classroom teachers, chosen primarily from teachers trained by the California Writing Project and the California Literature Project, have been involved in every aspect of the test design and implementation, from serving on the advisory committee to providing inservice workshops throughout the state. The major developmental work was done by a cadre of 24 classroom teachers who designed and field-tested multiple prompts for each type of writing; prepared extensive teaching materials that model the best teaching practice and current thinking about discourse theory, and served as table leaders for scoring sessions at multiple sites around the state.

Results of the test are reported directly to teachers in a special teacher report as well as to districts and state officials in a more comprehensive publication. Sample essays for each score point for all eight types of writing appear with commentary along with the various statistical results. Selected comments from the 450-500 teachers who read each test are included in the reports.

A comprehensive survey of California Junior High and Middle School Teachers on Teaching and Assessing Writing, conducted by the Center for the Study of Writing, along with individual case studies of schools, dramatically shows the results of teacher awareness and teacher involvement. Eighty-one percent, for example, have used at least one of the writing guides developed by the CAP Writing Development Team of teachers for this project while 75% have attended at least one workshop on how to teach specific kinds of writing.

CONTEXTS FOR ARGUMENT

Aviva Freedman, Carleton University, Ottawa

What kind of writing do students produce when given a task that implies—to teachers and assessors—the writing of “argument”? Does this vary by grade and/or ability level? How and why? These are some of the questions that guided our reanalysis of writing produced in several Board-wide research and evaluation projects in Ontario: for each project, the participants included all students in grades 5, 8, and 12 (both 12 General and 12 Advanced). For two of the studies, half the subjects wrote narratives on topics of their own choosing. The task for all other participants was to respond to an argumentative prompt: briefly, students were asked to focus on anything in their school, their home-life, or the world at large that needed changing, and to write a piece arguing for such a change.

Analysis of all scripts showed remarkable development over the years—according to affective, cognitive, and linguistic measures. There was also increasing mastery of the conventional schema for the type of discourse attempted, story or argument, with the following difference: By grade 8, nearly all students could write stories that embodied conventional narrative form; in contrast, while there was significant development from grades 5 to 8 to 12G to 12A, even for the 12As, only 65% of the
arguments looked like traditional arguments. Our reanalysis of the data suggested the following possible interpretations: First, as opposed to their rich experience with narratives, students are exposed to almost no models of argument—even in high school. Consequently, without an organizing schema, many students wrote expressively. At the same time, students are increasingly exposed to potentially distracting models—in the discourse of advertising and propaganda. Hence, we found an increased number of persuasive, rather than argumentative pieces (to use Kennevey’s distinction).

Second, appropriate argumentative form involves a cognitive act on the part of the writer that is much like what Vygotsky describes as central to concept-formation—i.e., the ability to see and name the common, abstract bond underlying a set of data. This kind of abstracting becomes more and more difficult as the nature of the data to be abstracted from becomes more abstract. Third, the task—a typical English composition class assignment—may itself be more difficult than those involved in pedagogy and assessment normally acknowledge. We found far more success among students who chose to write discipline-specific arguments. Perhaps arguments are most fruitfully elicited in discipline-specific classes where concepts are presented within hierarchic systems, and lines of reasoning are modeled throughout the course. Teachers and assessors must consider the possibility that, at least for arguments, children learn to write in the content-area classroom and only later, and as a result, is that learning transferred to the kind of writing typically elicited in the composition class.

ANNOUNCING: New works on writing assessment by NTNW members:

CREATING WRITERS: LINKING ASSESSMENT AND WRITING INSTRUCTION
Vicki Spandel and Richard J. Stiggins
Longman, 1990

WRITING AND RESPONSE: THEORY, PRACTICE, AND RESEARCH
Chris M. Anson, Editor,
National Council of Teachers of English, 1989

WRITING ACROSS LANGUAGES AND CULTURES: ISSUES IN CONTRASTIVE RHETORIC
Alan Purves, Editor
Sage Publication, 1988