that the dissemination aspect of the project was equally, if not more important.

The activities of the first year included identifying a set of institutions that could be included in the research design and whose efforts could later be highlighted through curriculum materials development and dissemination, and the development of the research design that would be put in place at each of the sites during the Fall semester of the following year.

Activities during the second year of the project included the actual research study and analysis of the empirical data generated by the project. Year three’s activities will focus on data interpretation and curriculum materials development and will culminate in a national conference on the uses of computers in teaching college writing which will be held in New York in May of 1990.

The research plan called for each site to identify six sections of Fall 1988 freshman writing classes for inclusion in the project. In theory at least, the six sections were to be comprised of similar students, the major exception being that three of the six sections would be taught using computers and three would be taught using traditional teaching strategies without the use of computers. The sites were urged to use caution in assigning faculty to teach the six sections so as not to introduce additional potential bias (the so-called “teacher effect”) and were asked to be sure that all sections, both computer-based and computer-free, follow as uniform a curriculum as possible.

Multiple outcome measures were used in the study, and project staff chose or constructed a series of questionnaires and examinations designed to measure change in both the attitudinal realm as well as in the realm of performance. A one semester, pretest-posttest design was employed wherein all students would be tested during the first few days of the semester and then again at the end of the semester with the same set of instruments or with equivalent alternate forms of those instruments.

Work has now begun to analyze the accumulated data from the study and to feed the results back to the participating sites. Project staff are also working closely with local site coordinators on their plans for the development of model curriculum materials that each will use to showcase their programs at the 1990 conference. For further information, write to Max Kirsch, CUNY Office of Academic Computing, 555 West 57th Street, 14th floor, New York, NY 10019.

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INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN THE COMPOSING PROCESS: THE CONTEXT

Linda Henson Meeker and Marsha Groff, Ball State University

In the first part of the presentation, Linda Meeker described the profiles of student ability that she had designed. Urged by pedagogical imperatives to implement a new writing course placement formula at Ball State University, Meeker gathered data for five entering classes (1983, 1984-88) on composition course and competency exam grades, withdrawals, repeats, university retention rates, university graduation, high school records, learning styles as measured by the Meyers-Briggs Type indicator (MBTI), and self-assessment indicators of writing or studying difficulties. The resulting profiles highlighted the diversity of the student population rather than the homogeneity that geographical distribution and socioeconomic indicators might suggest. This diversity cannot be ignored; even the most finely tuned placement system must combine groups of students whose profiles differ but which predict success at a particular level of instruction.

Meeker then discussed the problems that writing teachers and program directors face: how do we accommodate diversity in the classroom? Program directors can shape flexible classroom environments two ways: by selecting suitable faculty and providing them orientation and in-service training, and by establishing competency requirements that promote flexibility. Writing teachers can attend to the individual learning styles, composing habits, and needs of students while enabling them to meet requirements for credit in a particular course.

In the second part of the presentation, Marsha Groff discussed her current research on individual differences. College basic writers bring with them differing skills, abilities,
personality types, and learning styles. Frequently the research on basic writers neglects this diversity by focusing on what these writers cannot or do not do when they write instead of emphasizing their strengths or what they do when they write. Inclusion of personality type in the composition classroom offers insight into the strengths each personality type brings to writing.

Groff described research in progress investigating the relationship between personality type as measured by the MBTI and the writing strategies employed by basic writers in two classes at Ball State University. While the MBTI can predict the type of environment and instructional methods which can aid or hinder learning for a particular student, it cannot predict how a student actually reads, writes, or studies. Through process logs, self-evaluation questionnaires, and writing journals, students documented the writing strategies they used throughout the semester. These process instruments will also show if students are employing processes that demonstrate their personality types or learning styles. In addition, this study will indicate if students use preferred processes in writing as predicted by personality type as they write and learn or if a shift toward these preferred processes occurs as students move away from inappropriate writing strategies adopted from previous writing instruction.

TESTING ESL WRITERS: WHAT DO YOU REALLY WANT TO KNOW?

Jane Hughes and Donna Wormuth,
Texas A&M University

Why have we begun to test English as a Second Language (ESL) students' ability to produce, as well as to recognize, standard written English? What exactly do we want to know? To succeed and complete with native-speaking students, ESL students in most North American colleges and universities must be able to communicate clearly and effectively in writing. Thus, we examine what constitutes sufficient writing skills for this purpose. In order to make this determination, examiners must be familiar with the standards of the receiving institution and its writing requirements and expectations for students at the graduate and undergraduate levels as well as with the requirements in specific fields of study.

What we have discovered from surveying a number of colleges and universities is that students must be able to summarize material, analyze and present evidence, and defend a position in writing. Some departments require that students be able to write within the time frame of an essay test, while others require students to write extended pieces over a period of time. Further, since standards, requirements, and expectations vary from one institution to another, no one test or scoring procedure is appropriate for all situations.

Defining what and how much we need to know determines the way we structure, administer, and interpret a production writing test. Major purposes for evaluation or testing ESL writing include entrance to an academic institution, placement into a program of study within the institution, and identification of instructional needs of students within a program.

In light of these considerations, we find that large-scale writing tests, producing first-draft writing in a brief time period, and using scoring scales ranging from 1 to 6 (such as the holistic scale for the ETS-TWE), are adequate for most admissions purposes. However, when an academic institution needs more complete information about students' specific writing abilities in English, such as for placement and instructional purposes, then a test designed to elicit a more specific kind of writing and a scoring scale that provides more detailed information (such as the Composition Profile used by Texas A&M University or the scoring grid used by Michigan University) is preferable.

Ultimately, then, testing purpose, specific institutional requirements, and the intended use of the test results should influence the design, administration, and type of scoring that provide what we really want to know.