

DESIGNING LARGE-SCALE WRITING
ASSESSMENTS THAT MATCH THE GOALS OF
INSTRUCTION: REFLECTIONS FROM THE
NATION'S REPORT CARD

Ina V.S. Mullis and Lynn B. Jenkins, Educational
Testing Service

The presenters described the writing assessments conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Programs (NAEP), in which the writing abilities of American elementary-, middle-, and high-school students are evaluated based on their responses to informative, persuasive, and imaginative tasks. NAEP and other large-scale direct writing assessments have made important methodological advances in recent years, developing better prompts and better procedures for scoring responses. However, large-scale writing assessments as a whole have failed to keep pace with the best of current wisdom in writing research and instruction. The presenters discussed some of the new issues that must be addressed—in particular, the need to develop methods of evaluating students' writing

performance that are congruent with the goals of instruction and providing opportunities for students to use the writing skills and strategies they have learned in the classroom.

Accordingly, ETS/NAEP has proposed an experimental writing portfolio study as part of its 1990 writing assessment, permitting an evaluation of writing that students produce on their own or for school assignments, without the time and resource constraints of the assessment situation. Working with the language arts teachers of fourth- and eighth-grade students, NAEP plans to assemble a national writing portfolio consisting of writing samples gathered from 2,000 students at each grade. Participants in the portfolio study would be selected from those students participating in the main NAEP writing assessment, making it possible to study the relationship between writing produced in and out of the assessment setting. Methods for evaluating the portfolio papers would be developed at Educational Testing Service by NAEP staff and consultants. ETS/NAEP has proposed that the writing portfolio study be refined and continued in 1992, based on findings from the experimental effort in 1990.