

**Teachers' and Students' Roles in Large-Scale
Portfolio Assessment: Providing Evidence of
Competency With the Purposes and
Processes of Writing**

CSE Technical Report 406

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CONTENTS

THE CLAS/ETS PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT PROGRAM	2
OUR STUDY.....	9
Focus on Writing	12
Purposes of Writing	13
Processes of Writing.....	14
METHODS.....	15
OUR FINDINGS.....	18
Writing for Multiple Purposes, Genres, and Audiences.....	18
Opportunities to Learn.....	18
Purpose	19
Genre.....	23
Audience.....	25
Students' Understandings and Portfolio Choices.....	27
Purpose and genre.....	28
Audience.....	32
Portfolios and interviews as assessment contexts.....	37
Summary.....	40
Writing With Resources, Processes, and Reflection.....	41
Opportunities to Learn.....	41
Using resources.....	41
Demonstrating a range of processes.....	44
Reflecting on and/or using standards for work.....	47
Summary.....	55
Students' Choices for Resources, Processes, and Reflection.....	56
Little analysis of revision	58
Either generic or vague and inexplicit analyses.....	61
Explications of revision processes.....	65
Summary.....	67
SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS.....	68
Opportunity: The Implementation of the "Dimensions of Learning"	69
Variation in Approaches to Alignment.....	69
Variation in Documentation.....	71
Students' Choices: Students' Understandings of the Dimensions.....	73
Conclusion	76
REFERENCES	79

**TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' ROLES IN LARGE-SCALE PORTFOLIO
ASSESSMENT: PROVIDING EVIDENCE OF COMPETENCY WITH THE
PURPOSES AND PROCESSES OF WRITING^{1,2}**

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To Whom It May Concern:

Welcome to my literary domain. If you are curious about my identity, let me introduce myself. At the up-most peak of middle school, I am an eighth grader and my “moniker” is officially Alinda Alvarez³, and yes your guess is correct, I am a girl, though I do not quite bear the lush beauty and curves of preferable “chicks.”

Getting to the point, let me introduce my portfolio by asking a question and I want you to think this out. *What abilities and weaknesses can be found in a reader, writer and student?* That is the basis of my portfolio. (CAA, January 28, 1994)

In the introductory piece to her portfolio, Alinda asks her audience for reflection and critique. Her challenge is addressed to raters who will score her portfolio according to the Language Arts “Dimensions of Learning” established by the California Learning Assessment System/Educational Testing Service Research and Development Portfolio Assessment Project. It is also a gauntlet thrown to a far wider audience—teachers, researchers, measurement experts, and policy makers who believe that reading and writing competence can be captured with portfolio assessment.

¹ Our warm thanks to the teachers and students who consented to our visits and our interviews; to the staff of the ETS/CLAS Portfolio Assessment Program who supported our work and provided critical input—Karen Sheingold (Director), Joan I. Heller, Barbara Storms, Bill Thomas, Athena Nuñez, and Jean Wing; and to Joan Herman for helpful comments on a prior draft.

² A companion report will address the character of writing as the author’s personal craft: the perspectives or points of view (personal, cultural, historical, imaginary) considered in the writing, the ways that student writers take risks in both self-expression and the expression of others’ ideas, and the careful crafting of language to create particular effects.

³ The names of all teachers and students are pseudonyms. Please note that the first letter of each student’s “initials” (A, B, C, or D) corresponds to the first letter of that student’s teacher (Aimes, Bentley, Cris, or Donner). The next two letters are codes assigned to particular students.

Across the nation, teachers and researchers are working with each other to piece together the puzzle of portfolio assessment (e.g., Bratcher, 1994; Calfee & Perfumo, 1993; Camp, 1993; Camp & Levine, 1991; Condon & Hamp-Lyons, 1991; Cooper & Brown, 1992; Freedman, S., 1993; Gearhart & Herman, 1995; Gitomer, 1993; Graves, 1992; Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 1993; Hewitt, 1993; Hill, 1992; Howard, 1990; Le Mahieu, Gitomer, & Eresh, in press; Mills, 1989; Moss, 1992; Murphy & Smith, 1992; Reidy, 1992; Sheingold, Heller, & Paulukonis, 1995; Simmons, 1992; Stecher & Hamilton, 1994; Tierney, 1992; Valencia & Calfee, 1991; Voss, 1992; Wolf, D., 1989, 1993; Yancey, 1992). Together we are challenged by questions of design and purpose: What kinds of work should be included? Who should select the work? How can students' reflections on their work add important evidence of competency? How should the portfolio be evaluated?

Alinda has offered us her own version of these questions: *What abilities and weaknesses can be found in a reader, writer and student?* In this report, we reply to Alinda by formulating our own questions for exploration:

- How does a student like Alinda learn to reflect on her writing and construct a portfolio that will display her “abilities and weaknesses” as a writer?
- How does a teacher learn to guide a student like Alinda in selecting evidence of her writing competencies?

Answers to both of these questions are essential to the development of large-scale programs of portfolio assessment. The CLAS Portfolio Assessment Program was ideal for our research, for it was designed to support the growth of student competency in the reflective construction of portfolios.

THE CLAS PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT PROGRAM⁴

In collaboration with the California Department of Education, the Center for Performance Assessment of the Educational Testing Service (ETS) was engaged from 1992 to 1994 in the development of a new standards-based, classroom-performance-based portfolio component for the California Learning Assessment

⁴ Our description of the CLAS Portfolio Assessment Program is edited from documents provided us by the ETS/CLAS staff. For more information contact Dr. Karen Sheingold, Director of Research, Center for Performance Assessment, Educational Testing Service, Rosedale Road, Mail Stop 11-R, Princeton, NJ 08541-0001.

System (CLAS).⁵ The aim was to supplement on-demand test scores with evidence drawn from classrooms. In collaboration with educators across the state, ETS was developing a portfolio assessment system that could build on and support improved classroom practice, while also providing trustworthy information about student performance. The approach that evolved focused on students demonstrating performance with respect to dimensions of learning, rather than required kinds of work or standardized entries. The dimensions in a subject area were to be aligned with the instructional goals of the California state frameworks and provide a vision of what students can achieve. Figures 1 through 3 contain the Dimensions of Learning for Language Arts (the revision at the project's end), and Figures 4 and 5 contain scoring guidelines for the trial scoring session held in May of 1994.⁶

⁵ In September, 1994, Governor Pete Wilson vetoed a bill reauthorizing all components of the California Learning Assessment System.

⁶ Barbara Storms and Joan Heller of ETS have provided additional background:

The CLAS/ETS Portfolio assessment research and development project began with work by the Portfolio Task Force to identify the skills, abilities and habits of mind that students should be able to demonstrate through portfolio assessment. In the spring of 1993 the Task Force worked to define initial dimensions. They worked within an assessment framework that, at that time, included both on-demand and curriculum embedded assessments as part of CLAS. Within that assessment framework, they focused on identifying the types of evidence and skills for which portfolios were suited. When curriculum embedded assessment was folded into portfolio assessment rather than being a separately scored element of the system, during the summer of 1993, the dimensions changed to be more content specific. Educators from around the state helped draft initial dimensions of learning for mathematics and language arts in the fall of 1993. During that same time, 15 schools were identified as Phase I development sites.

In December 1993, teachers from the 15 Phase I schools as well as district and reform network representatives met and were introduced to the concept of CLAS portfolio assessment and the dimensions of learning. During January, teachers tried out the initial dimensions with their students and brought portfolios to the next meeting in February of 1994. At that time, teachers looked at the portfolios for evidence of performance related to the dimensions. They revised the dimensions and began to develop assessment guides to determine the level of student performance in each dimension. After that meeting, teachers were sent a new version of the dimensions to use with their students. At meetings in March and April, teachers again brought student portfolios and again reviewed them as a way to further define the dimensions and assessment guides. Once more revisions were made to the dimensions and the assessment guides. These revised materials were sent to fourth- and eighth-grade teachers to help them and their students in their selection of evidence for the CLAS assessment portfolios which they sent in for the scoring in early May. In the middle of May, a scoring was held for fourth- and eighth-grade portfolios.

Throughout Phase I, teachers were developing and trying out materials. The materials, including the dimensions themselves, evolved and became further refined throughout the five months that teachers had to work with them. Because this was the initial phase of research and development, guidelines for building assessment portfolios were not available. Teachers relied on discussions at the large group meetings and at their school sites to help them figure out how to build assessment portfolios.

California Learning Assessment System Organic Portfolio Assessment

DIMENSIONS OF LEARNING IN LANGUAGE ARTS

The CLAS organic portfolio assessment in language arts is designed to give students opportunities to demonstrate the breadth and depth of their abilities to read, write, listen and speak, as they construct meaning about their lives and the world in which they live. With their teachers' assistance, they select work and other evidence that shows their accomplishment in the following dimensions of learning. The accompanying questions may help teachers and students determine whether the assessment portfolio provides evidence of the dimensions.

CONSTRUCTING MEANING: Students respond to, interpret, analyze, and make connections within and among works of literature and other texts, oral communication, and personal experiences. Students consider multiple perspectives about issues, customs, values, ethics, and beliefs, which they encounter in a variety of texts and personal experiences. They take risks by questioning and evaluating text and oral communication, by making and supporting predictions and inferences, and by developing and defending positions and interpretations. They consider the effect of language, including literal and figurative meaning, connotation and denotation. They reflect on and refine responses, interpretations and analyses by careful revisiting of text and by listening to others.

What in the assessment portfolio shows whether and how well the student:

- responds to what was read or heard with own ideas, interpretations, analyses?
- connects ideas from readings, oral communication, and experiences?
- considers various personal and cultural perspectives?
- takes risks by questioning, by going beyond literal meaning and by developing and defending or explaining a position or point of view?
- considers the effect of language?
- reflects on and refines responses, interpretations and analyses?

COMPOSING AND EXPRESSING IDEAS: Students communicate for a variety of purposes, with a variety of audiences, and in a variety of forms. Their written and oral communication is clearly focused; ideas are coherent, and effectively organized and developed. They use language effectively to compose and express thoughts. They draw on various resources including people, print and non-print materials, technology and self evaluation to help them develop, revise and present written and oral communication. They engage in processes, from planning to publishing and presenting; when appropriate, they do substantial and thoughtful revision leading to polished products. Through editing, they show command of sentence structure and conventions appropriate to audience and purpose.

What in the assessment portfolio shows whether and how well the student:

- communicates for a variety of purposes and audiences and in different genres, both orally and in writing?
- establishes clear focus, coherence, organization and development in communications?
- uses effective language that is appropriate to audience and purpose?
- uses resources to develop, revise and present written and oral communication?
- uses a range of processes from planning to revising, editing and presenting?

Figure 1. Draft CLAS Organic Portfolio Assessment in Language Arts: Dimensions of Learning.

Dimension: Constructing Meaning

CONSTRUCTING MEANING: Students *respond to, interpret, analyze, and make connections* within and among works of literature and other texts, oral communication, and personal experiences. Students *consider multiple perspectives* about issues, customs, values, ethics, and beliefs, which they encounter in a variety of texts and personal experiences. They *take risks* by questioning and evaluating text and oral communication, by making and supporting predictions and inferences, and by developing and defending positions and interpretations. They *consider the effect of language*, including literal and figurative meaning, connotation and denotation. They *reflect on and refine responses, interpretations, and analyses* by careful revisiting of text, by listening to others, and by using a range of resources.

EXEMPLARY	ACCOMPLISHED	DEVELOPING	BEGINNING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RESPONSE, INTERPRETATION, ANALYSIS: explores ideas, issues, relationships and themes by using details from sources to test theories and interpretations • CONNECTIONS: uses personal and analytic connections to explore and reflect on ideas and interpretations • PERSPECTIVES: compares and contrasts multiple perspectives in discussing literature, experiences and points of view of others • RISKS: questions and evaluates sources, develops and supports student's own interpretations and predictions • EFFECT OF LANGUAGE: explores effects of literal and figurative language on meaning and presentation, often using specific examples • REFLECTION AND REFINEMENT OF IDEAS: synthesizes information to reflect on and refine responses, interpretations, and analyses; considers several viewpoints and revisits the source 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • responds, interprets and analyzes by explaining ideas, relationships and themes using references to sources • explains personal connections to sources or analytic connections between and within sources • demonstrates awareness of multiple perspectives in discussing literature, experiences and points of view of others • takes risks by questioning sources and presenting innovative interpretations and predictions • discusses language effects on meaning and presentation, sometimes using specific examples • reflects on and refines responses, interpretations, and analyses by revisiting the text or listening to others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describes events, people and places with some supporting details from the source • makes connections to sources, either personal or analytic • states or briefly includes more than one perspective in discussing literature, experiences and points of view of others • takes some risks by occasionally questioning sources, or stating interpretations and predictions • identifies the effect of language with some use of examples • makes superficial changes in responses with little evidence of rethinking or refinement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • responds by retelling or graphically showing events or facts • makes personal connections or identifies connections within or between sources in a limited way • discusses literature, experiences and points of view of others in terms of own experience • responds to sources at factual or literal level • focuses on simple aspects of language effect • includes little or no evidence of refinement of initial response

Figure 2. DRAFT CLAS Dimensions of Learning for Language Arts: Constructing Meaning.

Dimension: Composing and Expressing Ideas

COMPOSING AND EXPRESSING IDEAS: Students communicate for a *variety of purposes*, with a *variety of audiences*, and in a *variety of forms*. Their written and oral communication is clearly *focused*; ideas are *coherent*, and effectively *organized and developed*. They *use language effectively* to compose and express thoughts. They *draw on various resources* including people, print and non-print materials, technology and self-evaluation to help them develop, revise and present written and oral communication. They *engage in processes*, from planning to publishing and presenting; when appropriate, they *do substantial and thoughtful revision* leading to polished products. Through *editing*, they show command of sentence structure and conventions appropriate to audience and purpose.

EXEMPLARY	ACCOMPLISHED	DEVELOPING	BEGINNING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AUDIENCES, PURPOSES, GENRES AND STYLES: communicates effectively in an appropriate and personal style to diverse audiences, for varied purposes, using various genres • ORGANIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT: demonstrates coherent organization and strong development to communicate ideas clearly and convincingly • LANGUAGE USE: effectively uses persuasive and figurative language and lively description • RESOURCES: uses multiple resources to build and present strong written and oral communication; credits sources appropriately • REVISING AND EDITING: presents well crafted products that demonstrate clear command of sentence structure and conventions and show evidence of perseverance in revising and editing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communicates with an appropriate style to a variety of audiences, for a variety of purposes, using a variety of genres • demonstrates clear organization; uses details effectively to clarify ideas and arguments • uses some persuasive, figurative or descriptive language • uses resources to develop, clarify and revise ideas and edit work; attempts to credit sources • presents polished products that demonstrate command of sentence structure and conventions, and reflect revision of ideas and editing of work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communicates some awareness of various audiences and purposes; sometimes uses variety in genres • demonstrates organization that is sketchy and sometimes difficult to follow; expresses ideas and arguments using limited details • uses language in a literal way with little creativity • uses resources in a limited way to develop ideas and revise or edit work • presents products that show some command of sentence structure and conventions and some attempts to revise ideas and edit work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communicates almost exclusively to one audience, usually in the same style and genre • demonstrates confusing organization or limited development; expresses ideas and arguments with few if any details • uses language that is sometimes vague, limited, imprecise or repetitive • uses resources sparingly, if at all • presents products with little if any command of sentence structure and conventions; demonstrates few attempts to revise ideas or edit work

Figure 3. DRAFT CLAS Dimensions of Learning for Language Arts: Composing and Expressing Ideas.

Check Most Appropriate Score for **CONSTRUCTING MEANING**

NOT ENOUGH EVIDENCE to score this dimension

<p>EXEMPLARY <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>ACCOMPLISHED <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>DEVELOPING <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>BEGINNING <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RESPONSE, INTERPRETATION, ANALYSIS: explores ideas, issues, relationships and themes by using details from sources to test theories and interpretations • CONNECTIONS: uses personal and analytic connections to explore and reflect on ideas and interpretations • PERSPECTIVES: compares and contrasts multiple perspectives in discussing literature, experiences and points of view of others • RISKS: questions and evaluates sources, develops and supports student's own interpretations and predictions • EFFECT OF LANGUAGE: explores effects of literal and figurative language on meaning and presentation, often using specific examples • REFLECTION AND REFINEMENT OF IDEAS: synthesizes information to reflect on and refine responses, interpretations, and analyses; considers several viewpoints and revisits the source 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • responds, interprets and analyzes by explaining ideas, relationships and themes using references to sources • explains personal connections to sources or analytic connections between and within sources • demonstrates awareness of multiple perspectives in discussing literature, experiences and points of view of others • takes risks by questioning sources and presenting innovative interpretations and predictions • discusses language effects on meaning and presentation, sometimes using specific examples • reflects on and refines responses, interpretations, and analyses by revisiting the text or listening to others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describes events, people and places with some supporting details from the source • makes connections to sources, either personal or analytic • states or briefly includes more than one perspective in discussing literature, experiences and points of view of others • takes some risks by occasionally questioning sources, or stating interpretations and predictions • identifies the effect of language with some use of examples • makes superficial changes in responses with little evidence of rethinking or refinement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • responds by retelling or graphically showing events or facts • makes personal connections or identifies connections within or between sources in a limited way • discusses literature, experiences and points of view of others in terms of own experience • responds to sources at factual or literal level • focuses on simple aspects of language effect • includes little or no evidence of refinement of initial response

Very Clear, Possible Benchmark

Day 1 Day 2 early am late am early pm late pm

Table Leader Initials _____

Figure 4. CLAS Dimensions of Learning for Language Arts: Scoring Guidelines – Constructing Meaning.

Check Most Appropriate Score for **COMPOSING AND EXPRESSING**

NOT ENOUGH EVIDENCE to score this dimension

EXEMPLARY <input type="checkbox"/>	ACCOMPLISHED <input type="checkbox"/>	DEVELOPING <input type="checkbox"/>	BEGINNING <input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AUDIENCES, PURPOSES, GENRES AND STYLES: communicates effectively in an appropriate and personal style to diverse audiences, for varied purposes, using various genres • ORGANIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT: demonstrates coherent organization and strong development to communicate ideas clearly and convincingly • LANGUAGE USE: effectively uses persuasive and figurative language and lively description • RESOURCES: uses multiple resources to build and present strong written and oral communication; credits sources appropriately • REVISING AND EDITING: presents well crafted products that demonstrate clear command of sentence structure and conventions and show evidence of perseverance in revising and editing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communicates with an appropriate style to a variety of audiences, for a variety of purposes, using a variety of genres • demonstrates clear organization; uses details effectively to clarify ideas and arguments • uses some persuasive, figurative or descriptive language • uses resources to develop, clarify and revise ideas and edit work; attempts to credit sources • presents polished products that demonstrate command of sentence structure and conventions, and reflect revision of ideas and editing of work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communicates some awareness of various audiences and purposes; sometimes uses variety in genres • demonstrates organization that is sketchy and sometimes difficult to follow; expresses ideas and arguments using limited details • uses language in a literal way with little creativity • uses resources in a limited way to develop ideas and revise or edit work • presents products that show some command of sentence structure and conventions and some attempts to revise ideas and edit work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communicates almost exclusively to one audience, usually in the same style and genre • demonstrates confusing organization or limited development; expresses ideas and arguments with few if any details • uses language that is sometimes vague, limited, imprecise or repetitive • uses resources sparingly, if at all • presents products with little if any command of sentence structure and conventions; demonstrates few attempts to revise ideas or edit work

Very Clear, Possible Benchmark

Day 1 Day 2 early am late am early pm late pm Table Leader Initials _____

Figure 5. CLAS Dimensions of Learning for Language Arts: Scoring Guidelines – Composing and Expressing Ideas.

The construction of the dimensions and scoring guides involved the input of large numbers of educators and students, and, accordingly, the ETS staff was engaged in research on the impact of teachers' participation in the formative design of the portfolio assessment program (Sheingold et al., 1995) and technical issues regarding trial portfolio scoring.

**OUR STUDY: TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' ROLES IN
CONSTRUCTING
CLAS LANGUAGE ARTS PORTFOLIOS**

Our CRESST-funded project supplements ETS research with a study of students' and teachers' roles in construction of CLAS portfolios. We visited a classroom at each of four school sites just after or just before students made their choices for their CLAS portfolios; we talked extensively with teachers and with students; and we collected copies of the students' portfolios. To give us an understanding of students' opportunities to develop competencies and understandings aligned with the CLAS dimensions, teachers discussed their writing curriculum with us. To provide us with insights regarding the student's role in portfolio construction, students shared their portfolios with us as they responded to a series of questions about the ways that their portfolios revealed their competencies with the CLAS dimensions of learning.

Because our study was set in a context of formative project development, our findings cannot be interpreted as evidence of the "implementation" or "impact" of a large-scale portfolio assessment program. Teachers had been engaged in the CLAS/ETS development effort for no more than five months; only some of the materials necessary for a full system of large-scale portfolio assessment were yet available (i.e., there were no guidelines as to how to build portfolios); and the dimensions of learning had been changing rapidly, with new versions sent out monthly. Thus our work was designed as an opportunity to develop better questions about issues in the implementation of a portfolio assessment program.

We began with three study questions (see Figure 6). The first and second addressed the perspectives and practices of students and teachers from within their classrooms.

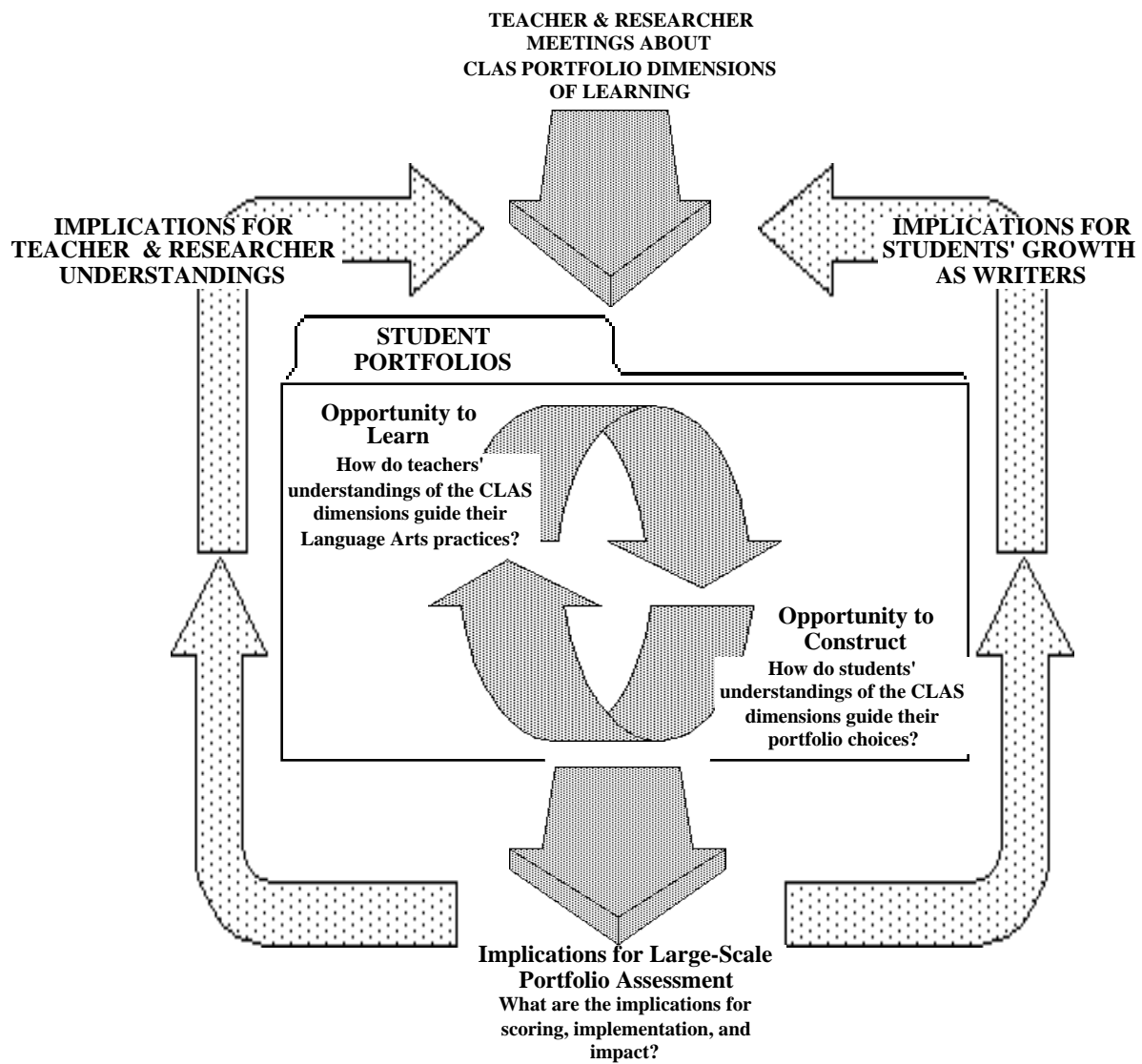


Figure 6. Three study questions.

Opportunity to learn: How do teachers understand the CLAS Portfolio Assessment Program, and how do they use the dimensions of learning to guide their language arts curriculum and assessment practices? Understanding students' portfolio choices requires understanding the possible choices available to students, and those possibilities emerged in particular classroom contexts. Therefore, we interviewed teachers in an attempt to understand the classroom context that supported students' work, students' understandings of the CLAS dimensions, and students' ultimate portfolio choices. Thus this component of our project was an examination of curriculum, an essential enterprise in that the lens for examining any assessment practice—portfolio or otherwise—must be the same for both curriculum and assessment. What a teacher chooses to teach is often inextricably tied to what she chooses to assess, or to what others, like CLAS, have chosen to assess.

Opportunity to construct a dimensions-based portfolio: How do students understand the dimensions of learning, and how do they use the dimensions to guide their portfolio choices? Our interviews engaged students in analyses of the ways that their portfolios revealed competencies important in the dimensions. From the interview responses, we have built frameworks for classifying students' explanations of their portfolio choices—the ways that their chosen pieces revealed their understandings of and competencies with the dimensions of learning in language arts. In addition, through contrasts of students' interview responses and the contents of portfolios, we consider contextual issues in portfolio assessment: How consistent was the evidence of students' understandings of the CLAS dimensions across both the interviews and their portfolios?

The third question addressed the implications of our findings for the design of a large-scale program of portfolio assessment.

What implications do our findings have for large-scale portfolio assessment? Here we raise a set of issues regarding the interplay of classroom and large-scale contexts for portfolio assessment (Figure 6):

Scoring issues. We consider the perspective of the rater charged with scoring the portfolio in the large-scale context, and we highlight the ways that variations in teachers' and students' understandings and uses of the CLAS portfolio assessment program may impact raters' judgments.

Implementation issues. We consider what kinds of support teachers, students, and raters may need to construct a common framework for guiding and assessing student work: What kind of text is needed in the teacher and student materials (dimensions of learning, rubrics, scoring guides, teacher manuals)? What kinds of interactions and dialogue are needed around student work—in the classroom and in rating sessions?

Impact issues. Since the goal of the CLAS program (and any program of large-scale portfolio assessment) is to enhance students' growth as readers, speakers, and writers, we consider the ways that our findings reveal how students may, or may not, benefit from different approaches to CLAS implementation.

Focus on Writing

This report is designed to provide insight into students' choices for their portfolios, the ways that these choices were supported or constrained by curriculum and instruction, and the implications of these findings both for raters' judgments in a large-scale context and for the benefit of large-scale portfolio assessment for students. Although the CLAS/ETS language arts dimensions address reading, writing, speaking, and listening, our study concentrates on students' writing for two reasons. First, portfolio assessment in writing is well researched and thus offers us possibilities for comparisons with other studies. Second, writing provides us more easily accessible documentation of students' learning—a paper trail as opposed to audiotapes or videotapes of students' readings, discussions, and/or performances.

We refined our focus by addressing aspects of writing competence that are central to many current models of portfolio assessment—the purposes for writing

and the processes of writing.⁷ Thus we centered our interviews on those aspects of the CLAS dimensions that were specifically linked to students' purposes and processes for written expression.

Purposes of Writing

In the CLAS dimensions, students are asked to demonstrate “[w]hat in the portfolio shows whether and how well the student . . . communicates for a variety of purposes and audiences and in different genres, both orally and in writing” (CLAS Dimensions of Learning in Language Arts, April 1994). This aspect calls for range and flexibility on the part of the writer, and it is a common request in the construction of writing portfolios (Camp, 1990; Cooper & Brown, 1992; Murphy & Smith, 1992). The emphasis on variety is intended to encourage students to show their competencies with particular genres and their understandings of the links between genres and social purposes.

Genre-based writing approaches are advocated by a number of scholars (Callaghan, Knapp, & Noble, 1993; Murphy, 1989; Wolf & Gearhart, 1994) who worry that the current emphasis on freedom of student choice may leave our students ill prepared. If students are asked to write only to “discover themselves and to make sense out of their world” (Hairston, 1986, p. 449), they may be caught short when faced with genres (e.g., letters, reports) that specific audiences (e.g., colleagues, employers) demand—genres that leave little room for the writer’s personal life experiences. On the other hand, if students are asked to practice specific genres without writing for personal purpose, there is little chance for ownership of the writing. Texts may be reduced to assignments that students complete to satisfy imposed requirements rather than to create personal meaning. Thus, the CLAS dimensions reflect a concern for balance, blending range and flexibility of writing with personal style and purpose. Note in Table 1 how these are integrated within the rubric that raters use to score portfolios: What marks “exemplary” work is the integration of “personal style” with purpose and genre.

⁷ A companion report will address the character of writing as the author’s personal craft: the perspectives or points of view (personal, cultural, historical, imaginary) considered in the writing, the ways that student writers take risks in both self-expression and the expression of others’ ideas, and the careful crafting of language to create particular effects.

Table 1

CLAS/ETS Portfolio Scoring Rubric: Excerpts Concerned With Audience, Purpose, and Genre

EXEMPLARY <input type="checkbox"/>	ACCOMPLISHED <input type="checkbox"/>	DEVELOPING <input type="checkbox"/>	BEGINNING <input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicates effectively in an appropriate and personal style to diverse audiences, for varied purposes, using various genres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicates with an appropriate style to a variety of audiences, for a variety of purposes, using a variety of genres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicates some awareness of various audiences and purposes; sometimes uses variety in genres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicates almost exclusively to one audience, usually in the same style and genre

To address the CLAS dimension on purpose, we asked teachers to explain the ways that their curriculum spanned a variety of genres, and we asked students to pick two very different pieces to compare and contrast in terms of purpose, genre, and audience.

Processes of Writing

The CLAS guidelines ask students to demonstrate “[w]hat in the portfolio shows whether and how well the student . . . uses resources to develop, refine and present ideas; uses a range of processes from planning to revising, editing and presenting; uses reflection and applies standards” (CLAS Dimensions of Learning in Language Arts, April 1994). This characterization fits well with general consensus in the literacy community about the writing process as an iterative, complex experience, rather than a linear sequence of steps that writers must follow to achieve a product (Atwell, 1987; Dyson & Freedman, 1991). There is less agreement, however, about methods for *assessing* students’ competencies with writing process. As Purves (1992) questions:

[W]hat is it that is assessed? How can we talk about students being better or worse planners, drafters, revisers, or editors? In each case, it seems we have to look beyond the act to the result of the act: the plan, the draft, the revision, or the edited copy. (p. 113)

Purves reminds us that our evidence for process is by necessity the results of process—the portfolio artifacts themselves. Fortunately, in our interviews, we were able to use the “results of the act”—the plan, the draft, the revision—in the students’ CLAS portfolios as contexts for engaging students in *discussions* of process. In addition, matches and mismatches between what students explained

to us and what their portfolio contained as evidence highlighted the challenges of using portfolio artifacts as evidence of processes that are inherently emergent, cognitive, and interactive.

METHODS

We interviewed the teacher and six students in each of four classrooms (Grades 2, 4, 7, and 8). Spanning urban, rural, and suburban settings, the target students in each classroom were selected by each teacher to represent the diversity of ethnicities, gender, and language arts competencies (2 “high,” 2 “medium,” 2 “low”) at each school site (Table 2). All four teachers were deeply engaged in the formative design of the CLAS/ETS portfolio assessment system: They had attended from one to three portfolio meetings over a span of five months, contributed to the development of the dimensions of learning and the assessment guides, offered recommendations for building assessment portfolios in the classroom, and participated in the trial portfolio scoring session. All four teachers were selected by the ETS staff as “front runners” in their efforts to implement the emerging CLAS portfolio assessment program: Two teachers had sent their students’ completed CLAS language arts portfolios to the trial scoring session prior to our visit, and the remaining two teachers were engaged with their students in preparing portfolios consistent with the CLAS model at the time of our visit.

Our interviews addressed both general issues regarding teachers’ and students’ views of portfolio assessment, and specific content derived from the version of the CLAS dimensions of learning in use at that time.⁸ Table 3 contains questions that are relevant to the current report. Our questions were constructed following piloting with two elementary teachers and six students: For the student interview, in particular, we revised some of the language of the dimensions of learning and crafted an interview focused on students’ writing. In addition, at each site, each of the four teachers interviewed for this report read through the student interview with us and suggested occasional revisions of language appropriate for her students.

⁸ There are slight differences in content between the dimensions of learning in Figure 1 and the version we used to guide our study. The most substantial difference was the inclusion of issues regarding “standards”—no longer present in the final version.

Table 2
Teachers and Students at the Four Study Sites

Teacher	Setting	Students			Note
		Grade level	SES ^a	Ethnicity ^a	
Aimes	Rural/suburban	2	Working class	Predominantly Anglo	
Bentley	Suburban	4	Middle class	Predominantly Anglo	
Cris	Urban, inner-city	7-8	High poverty to middle class	Ethnically mixed	Participant in pilot of New Standards portfolio assessment
Donner	Rural	8	Working class	Predominantly Anglo	

^a Our descriptors capture the predominant SES and ethnicity in each classroom, although there was diversity in every setting. Ms. Cris’s classroom contained the greatest range.

All interviews were transcribed from audiotape, and copies were made of each student’s portfolio. Because the CLAS portfolio program was in its earliest formative phase and the four classrooms varied markedly in grade level, student characteristics, and practice, we analyzed our data to produce preliminary frameworks for exploring what teachers and students understood of the CLAS dimensions of learning, and the ways that their understandings mediated choices of writing for portfolio assessment. Guided by our study questions, our analyses of the data represent our search for patterns as well as discrepant cases (Krathwohl, 1993), both within and across classrooms. We supported our method by engaging in debate on every claim as we built our frameworks. We divided responsibilities for the data—MG had greater responsibility for analyses of the student interviews, and SW had greater responsibility for the teacher interviews and the portfolio contents. However, each of us had great familiarity with all of the data, and we challenged one another’s assertions in ways that required many revisits to the data and revisions of our claims.

Table 3
Interview Questions

Teacher interview questions	Student interview questions
Views of portfolio assessment	
<p>In what ways is your writing program aligned with the CLAS Dimensions of Learning in Language Arts?</p> <p>In what ways have you transformed the guidelines to meet your own classroom needs?</p>	<p>Tell me about your writing portfolio. What do you use it for? How do you or your teacher decide what to put in a portfolio?</p> <p>Are there special guidelines in your classroom for how you pick pieces of writing for your portfolio? Are there any other ways that you choose pieces that are different from the classroom guidelines?</p> <p>What are your special strengths as a writer? Show me some pieces of your writing that show this.</p> <p>Every writer has special challenges. What are some things about your writing that you need to work on? Show me some pieces of writing that show this.</p>
Writing for multiple purposes and audiences	
<p>How are students “learning to communicate for a variety of purposes and audiences and in different genres?” How do they show this growth in their portfolios?</p>	<p>Can you show me two pieces which are really different, two pieces that you wrote for very different reasons, or for very different audiences. Tell me about how different they are. Where did you get your ideas for each of these pieces? from your own experience? from your teacher? other students? other books?</p>
Processes of writing	
<p>What resources do the children draw from to inform ____ (each of the genres, purposes mentioned)? How do they learn to take the things they know and read and connect these with their own writing? How are students learning to use resources to develop, refine, and present ideas? How do they show this growth in their portfolios?</p>	<p>Where did you get the ideas for this—from your teacher, from other students, or other books?</p>
<p>How are students learning to “use a range of processes from planning to revising, editing, and presenting?” Tell me about the ways you implement a writing process approach.</p>	<p>Is there a piece where you did a lot of revision or really worked hard to change it? For this piece, once you had an idea, what did you do? Once you’d written something, did you revise? How?</p>
<p>How are students learning to “. . . [apply] explicit standards for judging the quality of their own and others’ work?” How do they show this growth in their portfolios?</p> <p>What are the sources for children’s assessments of their writing? from classroom standards? How are children informed of these standards? Are some required and others negotiated? Do students gain understandings of their writing from peers? How? From parents? How?</p>	<p>When you revise, do you use classroom guidelines or the responses of your teacher or fellow students to help you? How?</p> <p>Do you ever help other students revise—read or listen to their work and give them ideas? What kind of advice do you give? Can you give me an example?</p>

OUR FINDINGS

We have organized our findings in two sections that address purpose and process, respectively. In each of these sections we examine, first, students' *opportunities to learn* a dimensions-based approach to writing and, second, *students' understandings* of the CLAS dimensions and the ways that these understandings guided their portfolio choices. Evidence of opportunity to learn is based on the teacher interviews and the portfolio materials, and evidence of students' understandings and their role in portfolio choice is based on analyses of the student interviews and the portfolios. Thus our goal is to interweave an analysis of instructional practices with an analysis of students' ultimate choices for their portfolios among the products of their instructional opportunities. Questions regarding assessment are thus set squarely within the instructional context.

Writing for Multiple Purposes, Genres, and Audiences

In this section, we discuss aspects of the CLAS dimensions concerning “how well the student . . . communicates for a variety of purposes and audiences and in different genres, both orally and in writing.”

Opportunities to Learn: Purpose, Genre, and Audience

Depending on their interpretation of CLAS language and concepts, each of the four teachers in our study created a unique classroom context to provide varied opportunities to learn. Based on both the contents of the portfolios and the interviews, we constructed a framework for analyzing the ways that teachers' language arts assignments engaged students in writing for a variety of purposes, genres, and audiences.

We interpreted patterns in the teachers' assignments in the context of current tensions between two interpretations of “purpose”: One aligns in many ways with the “romantic” school of composition theorists, and the other with the “classical” (or “cognitive”) school (Hairston, 1986). In the romantic view, students must write from their own questions and emotions in order to make their own meaning in the world. The “purpose” of writing in this school is thus the individual writer's, and highly personal. In the classical view, students are taught to analyze many kinds of writing as a grounding for their efforts to extend their range and flexibility as writers. Writing in this school is more pragmatic and the range of

“purposes” is far reaching. Between the black/white poles of the romantic and classical schools, however, there exists a more balanced vision—an integration of ideas that reflects aspects of both schools (Figure 7). Indeed, the CLAS dimensions exist in this gray area, for they encourage personal expression supported and enhanced by a careful study of established genres, purposes, and audiences.

Figure 7 captures the questions we brought to our findings. To what extent did individual teachers’ interpretations of purpose, genre, or audience reflect a relatively balanced perspective between the romantic and classical schools, or, lean more heavily toward either pole? Table 4 summarizes our analyses of teachers’ reported curriculum and practice. We examine the purposes and genres of writing in each classroom as well as the audiences the students addressed. We then consider the implications of these findings for the materials available to students at the moment of portfolio choice.

Purpose. All four teachers in our study reflected some of the balanced vision inherent in the CLAS dimensions. Nevertheless, there was a tendency for individual teachers to emphasize one perspective over another. We found that teachers working with students at a grade level targeted for trial scorings by CLAS raters (4th or 8th) were more likely to lean toward the classical end.

Ms. Bentley, Ms. Cris, and Ms. Donner were likely to discuss assignments that represented a range of teacher-directed writing that fit closely with specific CLAS constructs. As Ms. Bentley explained, “I was assigning projects and stories and activities for them to do which are aligned with a lot of these [CLAS]

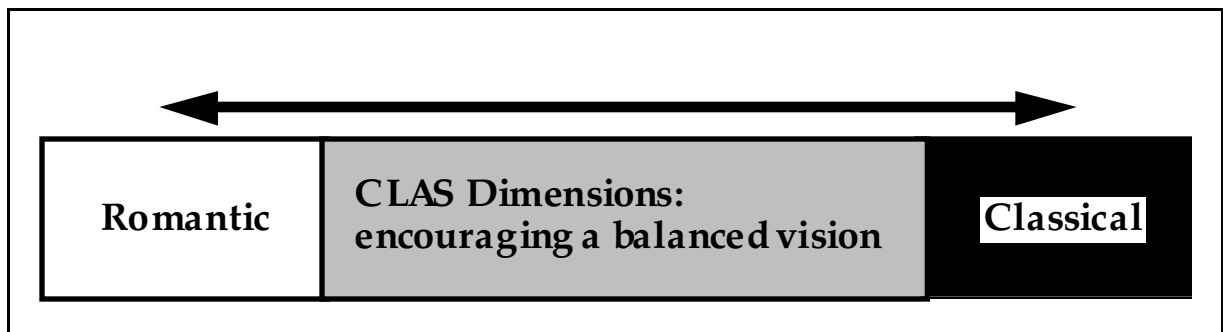


Figure 7. The need for a balanced vision.

Table 4
Evidence of Purpose

Teacher (Grade)	Purpose	Genre	Audience
Ms. Aimes (2nd)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imitate specific models for writing • Write stories for wordless picture books • Express yourself personally • Respond to literature • Reflect on portfolio work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal narratives • Fantasy narratives • Poetry • Letters to family members • Journal entries • Language experience stories (e.g., descriptions of field trips) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self • Peers • Teacher • Family^a • 5th-grade buddies^a
Ms. Bentley (4th)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate many “kinds” of writing • Demonstrate “best work” through “Showcase” pieces • Express opinions supported by research • Integrate specific content and form • Take on another person’s perspective • Summarize reading • Personally respond to literature or history • Reflect on portfolio work • Practice specific elements of writing (e.g., description) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendly letter • Concrete poetry • Expressive writing • Essay • Persuasive writing • Telegram • Stamp album • Dual entry journal • Sympathy letter • Explanation of a sketch • Venn diagram • Descriptive writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self • Peers • Teacher • Principal • Parents • Imaginary characters and hypothetical audiences • Authentic audiences outside of school (e.g., writing to the Belize Government)
Ms. Cris (7th & 8th)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate many “kinds” of writing • Write to “show, not tell” • Express opinions supported by research • Integrate specific content and form • Take on another person’s perspective • Reflect on portfolio work • Write literary criticism • Personally respond to literature or history 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reader response journal • Persuasive letter • Realistic fiction • Science fiction • Fantasy • Historical fiction • Short stories • Autobiography • Biography • Mystery • Response to standard prompt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self • Peers • Teacher • Hypothetical audience (e.g., letter about LA riots) • Authentic audiences outside of school (e.g., letter to portfolio reader)
Ms. Donner (8th)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate many “kinds” of writing • Write to “show, not tell” • Express opinions supported by research • Integrate specific content and form • Take on another person’s perspective • Reflect on portfolio work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialectic journal • Mongol newspaper • Pop-up book • Perspective cube • Poetry • Letters • Imaginary diary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authentic audiences outside of school (e.g., letter to 6th graders)^a • Self • Peers • Teacher • Authentic evaluators (e.g., portfolio presentations)

^a The evidence is in the interviews only, not in the portfolios.

dimensions.” The importance the teachers placed on representing that range in the students’ CLAS portfolios was reflected in their assigned “Table of Contents.” Most of the contents listed specific titles of teacher-directed assignments, though there was usually some room for variation among these assignments with writing chosen for “Showcase Pieces” or “Wildcard Entries.”

When we asked whether the students in their classes ever had opportunities to craft a purpose for a piece of writing on their own, Ms. Bentley, Ms. Cris, and Ms. Donner suggested that this was rare: When they attempted to offer their students a more balanced perspective, the students seemed confused and uncertain, which ultimately caused the teachers to revert to more teacher-directed assignments. Ms. Bentley explained, “If I just would give them a—just an assignment—please write whatever you want for a journal today, they just would sit there and not know what to write about. . . . They want a topic. They actually want them.” Ms. Donner reported that when given a teacher-designed topic vs. free choice, “most of them do write to the topic.” And Ms. Cris said:

Last year I tried this experiment . . . For one whole quarter . . . I turned it into what I would say, the best of my ability, was a writer’s workshop, embracing, you know, “where are you today, and when do you plan to finish,” and all that stuff. Dismal failure. Dismal. They need highly structured deadlines. I’m not kidding. They just had a horrible time with having the world open to them about when they could compose and not compose. . . . I would like to see more of the students deciding what it was that they’d like to write. But I haven’t thoroughly thought about how long it would take to get them to the point where they’d be able to say that. Is that like a second semester thing? I’m thinking it would be.

These teachers felt that “personally purposeful” writing was important, but they implied that the way to reach such a point was, as we shall see in the next section, through the teaching of specific genres.

Somewhat more “romantic” in her view of children’s writing, Ms. Aimes emphasized the need for students to create their own purposes for writing. While one might assume that Ms. Aimes held such views because she taught at primary grade levels, often romantic in philosophy of development as well as in orientation towards instruction (McGill-Franzen, 1993), her emphasis on personal purposefulness is not limited only to teachers in the early elementary grades. Upper grade teachers can just as easily view writing as a forum for personal

purposes and worry that explicit genre instruction might dampen the spirits of student writers.⁹

Ms. Aimes created a “Writer’s Workshop” in her classroom, and her students were “about half of the time . . . in their own spot . . . doing whatever they want to write about.” The other half of the time the children responded to teacher-directed assignments in which they imitated specific prose or poetry models (e.g., read and discussed Margaret Wise Brown’s [1949] *The Important Book*, and then wrote their own “important” stories) or wrote their own words to wordless picture books. The children looked upon these books as “real comfortable support” for their own writing. However, if students ever found themselves without ideas for their writing, Ms. Aimes encouraged them to find their own experience important.

A lot of them, I think, are still trying to figure out how to get new ideas for stories. They get really stuck. And that’s something that they really need help with still. Although we’ve talked a lot about that they should write about things that they know, they don’t think the things they know about are that exciting or important yet.

Thus the concept of “purpose” that motivated some of Ms. Aimes’ thinking about her curriculum was “personally purposeful.” Her views were strengthened in discussions with colleagues in a CLAS portfolio meeting. Recalling her experience reading CLAS portfolios from other classrooms, she commented, “We’ve honestly seen very limited evidence of being able to communicate for a variety of purposes, because most of them have been teacher determined, teacher directed.” To Ms. Aimes, teacher-directed assignments were at risk for stripping the opportunity for purposeful writing.

Thus our findings revealed differences among teachers in their interpretations of purposes for writing, and yet no teacher was uncomfortable with the ways that her curriculum aligned with the CLAS dimensions of learning. Ms. Aimes’ belief that her more “romantic” view was shared by CLAS colleagues points to the challenges of establishing a statewide community of professionals who use a common language for common concepts. Indeed, our findings raise issues about potentially unrecognized conflicts among teachers’ and raters’ interpretations of purpose.

⁹ See, for example, our case analysis of “Peter,” a sixth-grade teacher, in Gearhart, Wolf, Burkey, and Whittaker (1994), and Gearhart and Wolf (1994).

Genre. Consistent with their interpretations of “purpose” as an extensive range, the upper elementary and secondary teachers reported teaching the features of specific genres, and their reports were consistent with the contents of their students’ portfolios (see Table 4). Consider Ms. Cris:

They were asked to read a piece of historical fiction. I do genre studies, and in a response I was asking them to look at how often historical fiction is just a rich sharing of factual information with a plot. And often the plot is not as highly developed as it is in other pieces of, for instance, realistic fiction. It’s not as powerful, because the history is what people are looking at. So I wanted them to critique the author’s effectiveness as a presenter of historical fiction, and whether or not the plot was something which was embedded in history.

Ms. Cris provided her students with multiple opportunities to explore a variety of forms. The students’ portfolios contained examples of concrete poetry, “how to” books, fantasy, and book reviews among other genres. When students wrote about their lives, they did it within particular generic forms (e.g., a concrete poem about the tedious daily task of picking your sister up from school). With increasing exposure to multiple forms, Ms. Cris felt she provided her students with more options:

I can feel confident that if I’m providing a rich curriculum to my students, definitely the breadth issue, because I think sometimes that’s even more important than depth. If you don’t provide them with an array of things to write about, they’re not going to find one that they maybe really like. They’re going to see that depth after you’ve provided the array. I want to teach them different styles of writing for purpose . . . [so] they come into it from a reading genre but that they come out maybe writing for a purpose.

Thus, for Ms. Cris, personal purpose emerged from competence with specific forms for expression. Although she encouraged them to say “what you want to say,” she emphasized the efficacy of expected and well-defined forms, attempting to create a strong support structure for her students’ own endeavors.

The curricula of Ms. Bentley and Ms. Donner also treated purpose as a demonstration of range through genre studies. Their children’s portfolios contained multiple kinds of teacher-assigned writing, supported by an integration of language arts with social studies. Ms. Donner, for example, assigned a Mongolian newspaper. To prepare, her students studied Genghis Khan and read multiple folktales about his life and times, and they discussed central elements of

newspaper articles (“who, what, when, where, why”) as well as features of “observational writing.” Then the students wrote their own articles from the point of view of a villager attacked by the Mongols (“I hear my fellow neighbors screaming and yelling in pain. Mongols were attacking my town with arrows of fire and clubs of wood” DCJ, no date). Ms. Donner designed the assignment to “convince [herself] of their ability and their knowledge”—integrating understandings of particular genres with specific social studies content. Similarly, Ms. Bentley assigned a “miner’s letter.” Based on their readings on the California gold rush as well as their study of persuasive letters, the students wrote letters trying to persuade family members *not* to come and join them: “The weather is very cold when you are out in those mining fields, especially when you’re in ‘THE HANG TOWN RIVER.’ It just ain’t right for a whole family to be coming to California. It just ain’t right, so don’t come” (BMK, no date). Thus, the combination of specific forms (e.g., a letter) with particular content (e.g., the Gold Rush) served to support individual expression.

Consistent with her greater emphasis on personal purpose, Ms. Aimes provided her children with opportunities to make their own choices for genre at least half the time, and, rather than larger genres (e.g., fantasy, fairy tales), specific books—particularly those with highly predictable patterns—were taught and discussed. As a result, students’ portfolios contained personal narratives about their trips to restaurants, getting the chicken pox, and their wishes for horses or fantasy stories about imaginary animals, or other topics they found personally interesting. When students imitated models of prose and poetry in teacher-directed assignments, they reshaped the models to match their interests (“The important thing about birthdays is you have fun,” ATY, no date).

In summary, given the close relationship between purpose and genre (Freedman, A., 1993; Miller, 1984), it is not surprising that our findings for teachers’ treatments of genre mirrored those for purpose. Ms. Aimes saw personal narrative as the genre to meet the needs of personal expression, while the other teachers placed greater emphasis on opportunities to write in multiple genres for expression.

These findings regarding the teachers’ curriculum orientation have implications for portfolio scoring: We must remember that these teachers were also raters, and thus raters too align themselves with classical and romantic orientations. To pose an exaggerated scenario: What might happen when a

“classical” rater scores a “romantic” portfolio? Will he or she be skeptical of the lack of genre range represented in the portfolio? What might happen when a “romantic” rater scores a “classical” portfolio? Will he or she be skeptical of the lack of personal narrative? Thus, our findings call attention to the possible conflicts between the philosophical stands taken by teachers and raters, with children much caught in the middle.

Audience. It is not surprising that all of the teachers provided students with varied opportunities to consider the audience when drafting specific pieces. As Newkirk (1989) explains, “proficient writers have their eyes constantly on potential readers. Writing is a mental tennis game: The writer watches every movement of the reader across the net” (pp. 26-27).

Sometimes audience was an explicitly discussed requirement of an assignment, particularly for the three teachers who leaned toward a “classical” stance. Genre studies, for example, engaged students in addressing a variety of audiences appropriate to particular genres. The assigned audience was either very real (e.g., a foreign government) or, most often, hypothetical (e.g., an imaginary family). In either case, the intended audience would supposedly read the piece to get information, be moved to an aesthetic response, or both.

At other times, the audience was the choice of the writer and therefore not necessarily an examined aspect of the work. Reporting that “I think we’ve seen very, very limited evidence of audience in the portfolios that we read” in CLAS pilot scoring, Ms. Aimes believed that her students’ sense of audience emerged from personally purposeful work: “I think they show a better sense of audience and purpose, because the purpose is their own—at least half of the time.” However, our reviews of her students’ writing revealed that the audiences for her students’ personal narratives were either implied or not in evidence; there were few instances where specific individuals or groups were addressed in any way.

Students were rarely asked to write for an authentic outside audience. Exceptions were students’ portfolio cover letters, and Ms. Bentley’s persuasive letter assignment to the government of Belize. In conjunction with a social studies unit on the rain forest, Ms. Bentley’s students were asked to write a letter to the Belize government asking for more participation in protecting the rain forest. They studied the features of persuasive writing, which included giving “the writer’s opinion” and closing with a “strong last sentence.” In her closing, one child wrote,

“Please, you must understand the rain forest’s life is our life. We need oxygen to breathe. If the rain forest disappears, we might too” (BSL, no date). The sense of audience was essential to this piece, for the students actually sent their letters to Belize. Their teacher felt that having a real audience made a critical difference in their writing:

I think that writing to the audience made them particularly motivated to do their best work. Because they really felt—it really was a very personal experience for a lot of students. They really are very concerned about the rain forest. They’re concerned about their environment as they grow up in this world. . . . [T]hey were really motivated to write it in such a way as to really make the point very clear to them that they’re concerned. . . .

Whether the audience was required by the teacher or constructed by the writer, whether the reader was real or imaginary, for virtually every piece of writing there was a second audience of reviewers and critics who read to evaluate the students’ writing abilities and (sometimes) to offer helpful guidance. For the students in our study, these readers included those they knew—their teachers, their peers—and those they did not—raters in the CLAS trial scoring session, the outsiders for whom they were preparing their portfolios. On rare occasions, the “readers” and the “critics” were one and the same. For example, the students in Ms. Cris’s class wrote letters of introduction to the New Standards evaluators, and Ms. Donner’s students had the opportunity to prepare “portfolio presentations” for a CLAS/ETS visit scheduled for the week after our visit.

Thus we found audience handled as an imaginative exercise, as an authentic opportunity, or as a personal choice. Audience could be named (e.g., the Belize government, inner-city residents of Los Angeles), or might be indistinct (e.g., “anyone who wants to read them” ASJ). In all classrooms, writing was addressed to a second audience of reviewers and critics both inside (teachers, peers) and outside the class. Thus there was considerable variation in the opportunities provided students to conceptualize and address audience.

Students' Understandings and Portfolio Choices: Purpose, Genre, and Audience

In this section, we listen as students explain their choices for their CLAS Language Arts portfolios.¹⁰ Our findings regarding differences in the teachers' curriculum set the frame for our analyses of student interview responses: The curriculum in each classroom provided students with distinctive opportunities—to develop understandings of the CLAS dimensions, and to integrate their emerging understandings of writing into their own work and ultimately their choices of pieces for their CLAS portfolios.

We explored students' understandings of purpose, genre, and audience by asking them to compare two very different pieces of writing.

Can you show me two pieces which are really different, two pieces that you wrote for very different reasons, or for very different audiences? Tell me about how different they are. Where did you get your ideas for each of these pieces? from your own experience? from your teacher? other students? other books?

Based on both students' responses to our interviews and the contents of their portfolios, we constructed frameworks for representing students' understandings. To anticipate our findings: Given the early, formative nature of the CLAS Portfolio Assessment Program at the time of our study, we were not surprised that many students did not readily discuss the relevance of purpose, genre, or audience to their writing. We do not view students' responses to our interview questions by any means as evidence of their lack of capacity to understand purpose, genre, or audience, nor even of their lack of understanding at the time of our interview. But the difficulties we noted in students' handling of our compare/contrast questions do suggest that many students could not readily present in discourse an analysis of purpose, genre, or audience. It follows that many students could not readily make appropriate selections for their CLAS portfolios without guidance. Following

¹⁰ In part because our interviews were exploratory, we were uneven in the ways that we scaffolded children's responses. At times probing did result in more thoughtful responses, and it will be important in future studies to examine probes that help children reveal what they do understand. For example, APL first contrasted only the animals in her horse piece and her *The Three Foxes and the Two Bad Pigs*: "Because it's about horses and it's very different from foxes and pigs." When the interviewer (SW) asked, "What kind of a story is this?" APL responded, "A real story—I wish I really did have a horse." While her second response was not a profound leap into analysis of purpose or genre, it did go beyond "types" of animals to "types" of stories, separating realistic fiction from fantasy.

presentation of our findings, we discuss the implications for a model of large-scale portfolio assessment that relies on student choice.

Purpose and genre. We classified students’ responses as three interpretive sets designed to reveal whether and how students viewed genre as a resource for accomplishing specific purposes in writing (Table 5). Thus we asked: In what ways did the students themselves create a balance between established forms and personal expression?

Little analysis of purpose or genre. The first cluster contains responses that revealed little evidence of analysis of purpose or genre. Students focused on similarities and differences in the titles of the pieces, in the material form of the pieces (i.e., book vs. single sheet of paper), or retold a bit about the topics of the pieces without additional analysis of the writing. When we probed a bit further, students might acknowledge that thinking about what made their two contrasting choices different was just hard to do (“Well, this is like a story, and that is like a story . . . I don’t know.” ATY). The following quotes are illustrative.

Table 5
Students’ Interpretive Sets: Purpose and Genre

<p><i>Little analysis of purpose or genre</i></p>	<p>Focus on similarities and differences in topics, titles, or material forms (i.e., book vs. single sheet of paper)</p> <p>Mention that thinking about purpose or genre was hard to do</p>
<p><i>Personal purpose unintegrated with analysis of genre</i></p> <p>or</p> <p><i>Description of assigned genre without integration of personal purpose</i></p>	<p>Focus on personal need to write about something without any discussion of genre as a resource for that writing</p> <p>or</p> <p>Description of the assignment requirements without conveying that completing the assignment had become a personally meaningful activity</p>
<p><i>Use of selected genres to accomplish specific purposes</i></p>	<p>Integration of both the romantic and classical interpretations of purpose: A personally purposeful piece built in part upon requirements, or, a personal piece built in part on the characteristics and purposes of existing genre</p>

ACG *[How is this (chart about favorite foods) very different from the poetry book?]* It's telling about, this chart, and this isn't telling about anything. *[What do poems tell about?]* They don't tell about the same thing. . . . I don't know how to explain.

ATS This wasn't a completely different piece of writing, but this was about the sun, this was about school, and I think it's completely different because this one is—it's hard to explain.

BPG *[What kind of writing is this?]* Our feelings on what we need to improve for school, my personal goal, a recreation goal . . . *[What's a type of writing that's completely different?]* Here's one that is kinda completely different. We were supposed to write on the Indians. It's from one extreme to the next.

Students struggled to articulate the differences between pieces of writing. General content areas rather than genres were named. Words like “I don't know” and “it's hard to explain” indicated that the children were often aware of their inability to explain.

Personal purpose unintegrated with genre or assigned genre without personal purpose. Either students focused on their personal need to write *about* something without any discussion of genre as a resource for that writing, *or* students described the assignment requirements without conveying that completing the assignment had become a personally meaningful activity. These responses demonstrate a lack of balance between “romantic” and “classical” ends. At one end, a student may have a message but no genre tools to help construct it; at the other end, the student has some knowledge of tools but no personal vision for construction of meaning. Either way, the child is at a disadvantage.

Reflecting Ms. Aimes' emphasis on personal narrative, her students talked with us about their efforts to develop their own pieces, and what constituted a purpose for these young students was often something that they wanted to write about. It was very important to them that their ideas be individual and unique.

ACG I've been wanting to really write a story that had three things . . . and I've been wanting to write about that kind of thing, and I could never think of anything, because every time that I thought of something and I'm almost about to write it, someone else comes up and tells me, and it was just my very same idea. So I have to do this at home, so no one hears me. . . . I did this one today, and not at home, here. And [another boy] copied me . . . and everyone thinks that I copied him now.

For this child and others like him, individuality was key—repetition was immediate grounds for dropping an idea altogether. Yet no author works in this way. Authors lean on past forms, functions, and even phrases in their own writing. As ACG explains to us, starting from scratch each and every time, without the support of technical language and models of particular genres, leaves the author with frustratingly little on paper.

Students in classrooms engaged in genre studies often had some knowledge of communicative range, but interpreted their writing as a set of steps or “had to’s” that lacked personal motivation. Some students responded to our compare/contrast questions with lists of the assignment requirements that obscured analysis of purpose. The detail provided was at times impressive, but these students did not stand back from those details to discuss their own engagement with the writing. For example:

BPG We had this social studies book that we looked in about Indians and we have to look up the daily routines and jobs of the Indians of the missions and we write down stuff in the book and what we learned and what the Spanish explorers thought about the Indians, how the change took place and we wrote about that from the book and problems of the missions. . . . So we kinda copied the book from that and we used our own ideas from that . . .

CVC We had to do a QPCS that was Question, Prediction, Clarifying, Summarize, every time we read. We would have to answer those. And we did that on a biography book. And I was doing Florence Nightingale. And then we had to do a timeline. And then we had to talk about her personality and how she related to others. And then we did a presentation.

Only rarely did children discuss an analysis of an assignment’s purpose without a listing of the “had to” requirements.

BGL It’s kind of like a friendly letter to somebody, like Mrs. Bentley, or anybody. It’s telling them how much you like them and like, if they were sick, you say, “I hope you get better” or something to explain that you like them. [*Tell me about how (the Spanish Explorer’s Essay) is so different.*] This is just a summary. It’s just telling the words about it. . . . It’s not like the friendly letter because it’s not telling your feelings.

Integrative writing that uses selected genres to accomplish specific purposes. These responses represent a student’s integration of both the romantic and classical interpretations of purpose. A student might have been assigned writing

that fits a particular genre, but he built upon the requirements to compose a piece that is personally purposeful for him. Alternatively, a student might have been provided the opportunity to craft a piece of writing without any imposed requirements, but she built her piece in part on what she knows about the characteristics and purposes of existing genre.

We found very few responses of this kind. These rare cases, however, allow us to see the potential possibilities for students who see assigned genres as helpful frames for their own purposes as writers. In other words, they moved beyond attempting a balance to actually creating a balance between “romantic” and “classical” ends:

BSL Well we had to write a Miner’s letter. That we were a miner and we were writing back to home. And I really thought that I did a good job on it, because . . . I used the language that a miner would’ve used: “I mean this here diggings just ain’t for women.” And so I built the beginning of my letter around they should not come. Because they wanted to come, but I wouldn’t allow them and I had a son back home, who was 12 and he really wanted to come to the diggings but he had to bring his mother and his sister, but I would not allow him to come if he had to bring them.

CSG We were reading a story in my language arts class and it’s called Sara Bishop, and I had to write a story pretending that we were Sara Bishop, and we traveled through time and all of a sudden we were in today’s society, and we had to talk about our reactions to different things that were happening. And we had to write a story about that, but I chose to write a journal entry pretending that I was Sara Bishop and I wrote—*[She looks through her portfolio but cannot locate the piece.]* I wrote about, I said things like, “I’m 27 years now and my life has changed drastically. I’m married now and just”—something like that . . . And I really tried to think about—from what I read in the story about how she is as a character, how I would react to different things, and how I would write as her.

Although both BSL and CSG begin with the “we had to” language we found in so many responses, notice how they shift pronouns to “I” to discuss the planning and execution of their pieces and to assert their ownership of the writing: “I really thought I did a good job,” “I built,” and “I chose.”

In summary, our purpose was to develop a preliminary framework for analyzing the ways that students characterize the purpose and genre of the writing contained in their CLAS portfolios. Set in the context of the early phases of the CLAS/ETS portfolio program, our findings are tentative at best. Most children either talked about personal purpose with little regard for genre or saw

genre as an assignment that allowed them little room for personal voice. There are implications of these findings for both instruction and assessment. On the one hand, children’s interpretations of their writing were often echoes of their teachers’ voices; using the vocabulary associated with particular purposes and genres could be a beginning step towards integrating genre with purpose and articulating that relationship within their own writing. On the other hand, few students appeared at this time to have the capacity to analyze their writing for genre and purpose, and thus few appeared to have the capacity to select appropriate pieces without guidance. This finding certainly reflects the formative context of CLAS/ETS portfolio assessment: The CLAS/ETS emphasis on balance was a vision not fully developed in the classrooms we studied. We cannot expect children to have achieved that balance without specific support in place.

Audience. Building upon our findings that students’ opportunities to learn about audience could be characterized as four possibilities—audience as an imaginative exercise, an authentic opportunity, a personal choice, or a context for critique—we explored students’ understandings of audience. Like the findings for purpose and genre, students’ responses often suggested that they were not accustomed to thinking about or talking about writing for specific audiences. However, once asked, many students could think with us about audience in interesting ways, even if those ways seemed to be more like interview exercises than retrospective analyses. We classified students’ responses in three categories designed to reveal whether and how students considered audience when composing or analyzing a piece of writing (Table 6).

Little analysis of audience. The first cluster includes responses that revealed little evidence of analysis of audience. Students assumed that their teacher would read their writing and evaluate it, although an analysis of her role as reader or critic was not offered. Consideration of other possible readers resulted in either “I don’t know” or a vague and inexplicit hope for a generic “anybody” (“I kind of like to write them for anybody who wants to read them” ASJ). These kinds of responses were common: Because the audience was often assigned in classrooms engaged in genre studies, students still saw the teacher as the ultimate audience; with a more generic audience in the classroom encouraging personal narrative, the teacher was someone who could be at least named. The following quotes are illustrative of the focus on the teacher and the vagueness in these responses.

Table 6
Students' Interpretive Sets: Audience

<p><i>Little analysis of audience</i></p>	<p>Assumption that the teacher reads and evaluates without analysis of his/her role as reader or critic</p> <p>Vague or no consideration of other possible readers</p>
<p><i>Reflections on audience if asked</i></p>	<p>No evidence that a piece was composed with audience <i>in mind</i></p> <p>Reasonable <i>post hoc</i> reflections on possible audiences</p>
<p><i>Composed intentionally to an audience</i></p>	<p>Consideration of audience when writing. Audience could be either authentic or imagined, directly addressed or implied</p>

ATY *[Who do you think will enjoy that story?]* I don't know, but Ms. Aimes really liked it.

BMJ *[Who reads these?]* I don't know. *[Does your teacher read 'em?]* Yeah. *[Do friends read 'em?]* No. Sometimes, yeah, yes.

DDA *[Who do you think your audience was . . . ?]* Just for the teacher, I guess. *[Can you show me a piece where the audience was for someone else?]* Probably all of them are for the teacher. *[And what do you think about that?]* I don't know. It's for our teacher, I guess.

In the next example, DSS views the teacher as grader of his project, and he cannot think of any other reader or any other function for a reading.

DSS *[When you wrote the "new wall" piece, did you have a sense of who you were writing to or who would read it?]* Ms. D read it and Ms. D did grade it. If she doesn't like it, she'll come back to you.

An unusual variation on this teacher focus was its projection onto other potential readers. Here any reader becomes "someone who will evaluate me."

BDL *[Who would read this?]* Well, other writers, like yourself or something . . . like to see how creative people are.

Thus these students mainly understood audience as the context for critique, but there was no mention of what they might do with that critique to improve their own writing.

Reflections on audience if asked. The responses of many students indicated that they had not composed a given piece with audience *in mind*, but they were capable of reflecting on audience for that piece when asked. The most elementary analysis of audience we glossed as “to each his own”—e.g., some people like fiction, others nonfiction, as ACG explains:

ACG *[Who do you think might read the chart and who might read the poetry?]* People who like different things. Like if someone really liked poetry, they’d read this one. If they liked to figure out things about charts and stuff, they’d read this one.

In the next example, BPG shows that he is thinking about readers’ interests, but he focuses either on the teacher as grader or a reader’s interest just in the content of his piece.

BPG I think Mrs. Bentley would read this one because it was a homework assignment that we had to complete and do, so she would probably read that to check it over. And probably our parents too . . . And then our students would probably look at that because it’s about students and what they need to improve on about yourself and stuff.

Suggesting more complex understandings of audience, the responses of some students considered the ways that writing topics and techniques may appeal to particular kinds of readers. CVC, for example, thinks about younger readers’ appreciation of descriptions that enable them to visualize a topic in which they have high interest—

CVC I think that [my alien poem] is more to, like younger readers because they like, they like the aliens and it would just attract the younger readers more. Because they sort of like the way it would be described ‘cause they can get a picture of it.

—while CSG considers readers’ capacities to understand the content of her arguments and her vocabulary:

CSG And I think that the way I wrote that was kind of for an old audience. Also for students my age but I think some people wouldn't understand it. I say a lot of my opinions about racism and bigotry and things like that. And it's not—that's not something that's for little students, but—*[Was the letter to be sent to someone our age, or a high school student?]* It wasn't going to be sent. It was imaginary. I think it could go for a person in 7th or 8th grade or a high school person, just not like an elementary school student. I think it talks a lot about education and the importance of education. And I think that a lot of our youth today, at my age, don't realize how important education is, and they don't realize that in the future their education is really gonna pay off, and how much education you get right now determines how well you're gonna live as an adult. So I tried to instruct that in my writing, and I think that that's something my age group may understand, and older.

Because there was little evidence that students like CSG had composed their writing with audience in mind, we believe that they would have difficulty thinking about audience when reviewing their work and making selections for their portfolios.

Thus, for many students, the sense of audience seemed closest to one of an imaginative exercise. Students could name hypothetical audiences when asked, but the audiences were sometimes quite generalized (e.g., “younger readers,” “a high school person”), rendering the pieces, and sometimes our discussions of them, artificial exercises without the ring of authenticity. Indeed, some students explained to us their frustration when they felt unable to imagine an assigned reader. The lack of authenticity hampered (at least their perceptions of) the effectiveness of their writing. For example, several students in Ms. Cris's class voiced feelings that “their heart wasn't in” the letter to a Los Angeles student who had experienced the riots, because the letters were not mailed:

CAA . . . This is written as an assignment so it wasn't my true emotions inside it. It's like my heart wasn't in it . . . If this person had been real, if I really was writing to a real person, and I happened to know that person, and they had done something like that, my feelings would have been more real, and I would have elaborated my letter, because I would have had true emotion and true anger.

CFR *[Do you think it would have made a difference if you'd written to a real person?]* Yeah. *[How so?]* Because, then you would have somebody that would know what you're thinking about instead of just the teachers.

Composed intentionally to an audience. This cluster of responses showed students considering audience with little prompting on our part. The audience

they had in mind could either be authentic (as in the case of very real readers) or imagined, but, whether directly addressed or implied, the audience had sufficiently detailed characteristics that the sense of reality was quite strong. Whether the authenticity was verifiable (e.g., letter actually sent) or vivid in the imagination (e.g., with highly specific characteristics of the imagined reader), the students' writing took on more of a sense of personal purpose:

BPG We had to write to the government of Belize to not cut down the rain forest. . . . That was kinda challenging for me because I've never really written a persuasive letter to anyone from outside of the country or the continent.

BMJ We sent—this is a copy—we sent the real ones to the government of Belize. . . . The movie said, if we write it, if there gets enough people, they'll stop [cutting down the rain forest]. I'm writing to a big company and it's, like—why would they listen to a little kid?

BSL [*What do you think is the best thing about this piece?*] The way I related to how the things are going. . . . See I'm the man in this. And then I'm writing home to my wife, Irabella. My second—my other son, Henry, who is 12, and my daughters, Elizabeth and Constance. "Henry I have to admit a lot of help could be used in them diggins, but you ain't coming if you've gotta bring your mother, Irabella, and your sisters, Elizabeth and Constance. I mean this here diggins just ain't for women. Irabella don't come to them diggins. I just don't think women belong in them gold fields."

CAA It's like, the main purpose for writing my Machine Equivalence story and for writing it as it was, is because my teacher was taking many portfolios to a language arts convention, and she would show some of her best portfolios to adults. And this wasn't really meant for maybe a kid to read. It was sort of meant for an adult to read. So I used higher vocabulary then, and I didn't edit out those big words. 'Cause I wanted to impress adults by how I express myself using these big words . . .

Students who were able to visualize audience, whether real or deeply imagined, were often engaged in particular genres, predominately letters. The purpose of a letter is often to communicate with a specific individual, and if the reader/recipient is vivid in the mind of the writer, then the writing may well be more effective. Indeed, the students we quote above perceived letters written to specific audiences as more effective than many of their other pieces.

Thus in this section we have presented a preliminary framework for analyzing the ways that students characterize the audience for the writing in their

CLAS portfolios. Most children were able to talk about audience in relatively generalized terms, although there was little evidence that they had composed the pieces that we discussed with audience in mind. The generalizations were broader in the more “romantic” classroom as students talked about an unspecified “they,” while in the more “classical” classrooms, although teachers were attempting to help their students write for identifiable audiences, only in rare cases did children make the leap between what was assigned and what was deeply and personally imagined. The finding that, for most students, discussion of audience seemed to be more of a hypothetical exercise than a reflection is a concern if students are to create a balance between romantic and classical visions in their portfolios. Their explorations with us of possibilities for audience were guided by us, and it is uncertain how the children would have examined audience outside of our discourse.

Portfolios and interviews as assessment contexts: What do we learn about students’ understandings and competencies from each? The portfolios provided some evidence of the ways that the children interpreted purpose, genre, and audience outside of our supportive conversations. In this section, we explore the relationship between what we could ascertain in a dialogic context and what we suspect a rater might infer from assessment of the portfolios. The issue has central importance to the validity of any score assigned to the portfolio.

Range as evidence. The CLAS dimensions of learning place some emphasis on students’ competencies with a “range” of purposes, genres, and audiences, and thus scorers are likely to examine portfolios for the existence of range. In our earlier section on opportunity to learn, we showed how range became a fixed requirement in the more “classical” classrooms when teachers assigned a table of contents for the portfolios, and thus a rater concerned with range would find it identical among students within a given classical classroom but potentially variable across such classrooms. In classrooms where a table of contents is not assigned (Ms. Aimes, for example, was not going to assign her students a table of contents), range would reflect the choices of students and would therefore depend upon students’ understandings of both the importance of range to the assessment criteria and the features that distinguish various genres, purposes, and audiences. Could students provide raters with an appropriate range? Our analyses of students’ responses to our compare/contrast questions suggest that many students would have difficulty explaining and analyzing the range within their

portfolios, even if they could select contrasting pieces. The question emerges: What *is* the importance of range in a student's portfolio? Certainly representations of range, such as a table of contents, provide hints of diversity in the writing, but if the selections are all assigned, how will the rater come to assess the child's, and not the teacher's, interpretation of range?

Students' written reflections as evidence. What could a rater interpret of students' written portfolio reflections on genre, purpose, or audience? Our primary finding was simply lack of evidence: Students were rarely asked to reflect in writing on genre, purpose, or audience. What evidence we could find in the portfolios mirrored our interviews. Consistent with our earlier findings that most students understood purpose and genre either as imposed requirements or as unanalyzed personal choices not informed by genre, reflective self-assessments typically parroted the assigned requirements for the reflection and only briefly made reference to specific pieces of writing. For example, although DCJ begins a reflective piece about her portfolio presentation with a personal statement, much of the rest of this reflection is taken directly from the lists of terms provided by Ms. Donner:

This shows that I have become a better writer. Before this class I was a horrible writer. I was scared to read stuff that I wrote because I thought people would laugh. My rap shows that I have an ability to take a stand and express my feelings, and I can express myself through writing, speaking, and other forms. . . . Not to forget how I made connections with books, speakers, & personal experiences, and I had the ability to identify problems & improve my work, by changing opinions after hearing what others have to say.

Writings like these, consistent with the interviews, suggested that children were not typically viewing genre as a framework for writing that accomplishes specific purposes. The exceptions were children's persuasive letters. One child wrote about his letter to the King of Belize, "I tried to kidvince him that he should trie to save the rain forest. I tried to codvince him . . . by telling him a whole bunch things why he should save the rain forest" (BMJ). Thus, the highly specific audience was integrated with his purpose, which was to convince the king of his ideas.

Our findings were similar for *audience*. Although any piece of writing has potential readership and thus its audience can be productively examined and considered (Newkirk, 1989), students were not asked to write reflectively about audience, except in rare cases. What evidence we could find mirrored the

interviews. Sometimes the only hint that students had a particular reader in mind came in the form of dedications: “Dedicated to Nicole and my mom and dad and Chris. 1994” (ATY). Letters provided the greatest evidence of students’ consideration of audience. The letters not only had a direct addressee, but there was a sense of immediacy (e.g., a letter to their teachers asking for a change in seat assignment). Furthermore, whether the addressee was hypothetical or real, children were able at times to display their sense of audience with an empathy for another person’s perspective. For example, in a letter to Karana, the protagonist of O’Dell’s (1960) *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, one child wrote, “I know how you feel because I have had close friends that died too. I had animals that I really liked, and they died too. I hope you get over it” (BMJ). Here the child directly addresses Karana (you) and tries to establish a shared understanding by showing the similarity of their experiences. Thus, the child’s sense of audience is interwoven with purpose as he essentially tells Karana, “I understand.”

On very rare occasions, students wrote reflectively about or directly addressed dual audiences. After reading a piece of her writing to her class, CAA wrote a long letter to portfolio raters explaining the effects of the experience:

To me, this entry is a story worth reading to an audience. I have experienced the rewarding ecstasy when my audience exploded with cheers and momentous applause. Compared to my past work, I was able to be highly descriptive and suspenseful in such short space. It reflects my nature; I play around with a thought. It is my wild streak.

The reason why I chose to place this entry into my portfolio was because I had spent an increasing amount of time revising the story to make it capable of enthralling a reader with such mysteriously booming energy. Being adventurous in words is not my type and yet it turned out quite successful.

To me, this was like dynamite. Yes, there are some typos, but hey, I’m human! (and so is everybody else!). I feel that it holds more vibrancy than ever and I’m proud. I know I am a talented writer for my age and I’m proud to get to show something off.

CAA’s letter is an opportunity to show something off twice, for writing about the successful reaction from her classroom audience calls attention to her outside audience about her abilities as a writer. Thus, her “mysteriously booming energy” has a double effect, extending from the classroom to the world beyond.

Summary. In this section, we have produced (a) preliminary frameworks for analyzing the ways that students characterized the purposes, genres, and audiences for the writing in their CLAS portfolios, and (b) preliminary comparisons between the interviews and the portfolios as evidence of students' understandings and competencies. Our findings indicated that many students did not readily analyze their writing in ways deeply informed by the balanced aspects of the CLAS dimensions—not in the interviews, and not in the portfolios. When talking or writing about their writing or when choosing portfolio pieces, students might use some of the technical vocabulary important to purpose, genre, or audience, but not integrate these terms in reflections on the specifics of their own writing. Or, in the context of reflecting on their struggles with a personal piece of writing, students might show implicit concern with some aspects of purpose, genre, or audience, but not be able to articulate these concerns using the technical language typically associated with specific genres. Thus, for most of the children we interviewed, it was an either/or situation: Children either articulated technical vocabulary or revealed high investment in their writing. Few children did both, and we believe, therefore, that few children were ready to choose and to reflect on pieces for their CLAS portfolios without guidance.

Our findings have implications for opportunities to develop an analytic stance toward writing, a stance that might enable students to build appropriate portfolios. Like the CLAS/ETS dimensions themselves, we believe that our interview questions represented a productive “middle point” between either a “romantic” or a “classical” view: Where did personal expression meet with a demonstrated range of diverse writing? Where did a designated audience (whether real or deeply imagined) connect with a specifically selected genre as well as clear purpose? Just beginning to understand the integration of purpose, genre, and audience, the children we interviewed handled our questions best when discussing the letter assignments. This makes sense, for the letter assignments often included specific criteria for purpose (to persuade), genre (a letter), and audience (e.g., to the King of Belize). The clarity of the letter assignments served children well: Children were likely to write effective letters, and to assess their letter writing with a fairly developed analytic frame.

How might this clarity of writing and assessment be extended to other forms and purposes? We believe that teachers need both to be clear in their instruction and assessment of particular genres and possible audiences, and to challenge

children to think about and articulate their personal purposes. This can be done through modeling of their own writing experiences as well as opportunities to up the ante on discussion about why writers write. Young writers must be able to see their work as more than dummy runs (Britton, 1972); as they create stories, letters, documents, scientific or historical reports, they also engage in social work (Dyson, 1993). In this view, writing is personally powerful as well as publicly compelling.

Writing With Resources, Processes, and Reflection

In this section, we discuss aspects of the CLAS dimensions concerning “how well the student . . . uses resources to develop, refine and present ideas; uses a range of processes from planning to revising, editing and presenting; uses reflection and applies standards.” Once again, we examine, first, students’ *opportunities to learn* a dimensions-based approach to writing (based on teacher interviews) and, second, *students’ understandings* of the CLAS dimensions and the ways that these understandings guided their portfolio choices (based on student interviews and portfolios). Thus we interweave an analysis of instructional practices with an analysis of students’ ultimate choices for their portfolios among the products of their instructional opportunities.

Opportunities to Learn: Resources, Processes, and Reflection

Based on both the contents of the portfolios and the interviews, we constructed a framework for analyzing the ways that each teacher’s language arts assignments engaged students in using resources, demonstrating a range of processes, and reflecting on and/or using standards for their work (Table 7).

Using resources. All of the teachers reported that models of prose and poetry were important resources, but there were differences in the ways that these resources were used that reflected a more “classical” or more “romantic” curriculum. Teachers with a more “classical” curriculum often taught specific genres by reading and discussing exemplars of these genres. As Ms. Cris explained, “We often use reading as a way to develop our writing skills. And I ask the kids to look at the way authors use words in context, or the way they write dialogue.” In contrast, Ms. Aimes, the teacher whose curriculum we regarded as more “romantic,” emphasized the use of resources in the specific rather than in the

Table 7
Evidence of Process

Teacher (Grade)	Uses resources	Range of processes	Reflection/ standards
Ms. Aimes (2nd)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self • Peers^a • Teacher • Models from prose and poetry • Dictionary • Spellers • Computers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning (e.g., topical maps, sketches) • Multiple drafts • Drawing • Group share^a • Evidence of revision • Evidence of editing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student edit sheets • Teacher editing • Peer conference on revision^a • Teacher conference on revision^a • Author's letter to teacher about contents of portfolio
Ms. Bentley (4th)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self • Peers • Teacher • Models from prose and poetry • Dictionary • Encyclopedia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning (e.g., topical maps, sketches) • Multiple drafts • Drawing • Art (e.g., sketches, three-dimensional work) • Evidence of revision • Evidence of editing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assignment-specific rubrics • Student negotiation in creating rubrics • Peer assessment • Self-assessment • Self-comparison to peers • Group negotiated scores
Ms. Cris (7th & 8th)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self • Peers • Teacher • Models from prose and poetry • Dictionary • Thesaurus • <i>Write Source 2000</i> • Almanacs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Webs and matrices for organizing information • Notes and answers to specific questions concerning upcoming writing projects • Multiple drafts • Art (e.g., sketches, three dimensional work) • Evidence of revision • Evidence of editing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal setting letter • Author's letter to outside portfolio rater • "Personal reflection" about individual pieces • Explanation of entries (e.g., why certain portfolio pieces were picked) • "Parent reflection" • "Peer reflection" • Oral peer reflection^a • Student reflection groups • Scoring sheets
Ms. Donner (8th)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self • Peers • Teacher • Models from prose and poetry • Literature • Social studies texts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm-ups • Multiple drafts • Art (e.g., sketches, maps, three-dimensional work) • Evidence of revision • Evidence of editing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dimension-based rubrics • Student negotiation in creating rubrics • Peer assessment • Author summaries of peer assessment for teacher • Oral defense of peer assessment • Mini lessons • Analyzing writing samples on the overhead

^a The evidence is in the interviews only, not in the portfolios themselves.

generic sense. She felt that the wordless picture books and pattern books the students used provided “real comfortable support” for their own writing, support that took form as imitative possibilities in isolated contexts. For example, in one assignment students were asked to translate *The Important Book* (Brown, 1949)—a set of ideas that students generally find important—into individual students’ images of what was important to them personally.

All of the teachers emphasized the human resources of *self and peer*. Ms. Bentley commented, “They’re a lot more interested in . . . doing a better job if they know they’re going to be evaluated by their peers,” and Ms. Donner felt that “they’re most interested in their peers, so they really rely on what their peers think and what their peers have read, and it’s very effective.” However, the amount and purpose of conferencing varied across classrooms and assignments. Ms. Aimes encouraged any student who was uncertain about his writing to consult another student: “Once in a while I’ll have a kid that’ll say ‘I’m stuck. I need help.’ Most of the time they figure it out in peer conferences.” With a more classical view, the other teachers facilitated specific strategies for peer response for studies of genre or the CLAS dimensions of learning. For example, Ms. Bentley guided her class in the creation of rubrics for peer evaluation when they were studying the persuasive letter, Ms. Chris expected peer evaluation of the cover letter to their portfolio, and Ms. Donner required peer response when students were writing to demonstrate ability to take on varying perspectives. Thus in the “classical” rooms, the more defined the assignment and/or audience, the more specific the teacher’s structuring of peer response.

Perhaps because the students tended to perceive the teacher as ultimate audience, most teachers, especially those in the middle school, were challenged in their efforts to help create productive peer conferencing. Ms. Cris, for example, felt that shifting responsibility for evaluation from herself to her students sometimes “shut them down.” She explained her students’ thinking: “‘Oh, she [the teacher] wants me to make the judgment here and I don’t want to. Before, I could blame her; she made me write about this. And now it’s up to me, and oh, what should I do?’ ” All of the teachers expressed investment in peer response, and there was evidence of peer conferencing in the portfolios themselves, but there was less evidence that the students were able to make use of the advice given by peers.

The difficulty the students experienced offering helpful advice is related to issues of balance (Figure 7). To pose two exaggerated scenarios: Within a highly romantic orientation, neither students nor teachers are likely to offer advice for fear of trampling on students' personal choices. They may, in fact, see their role as one of validation and praise rather than one of constructive criticism, and, even if they criticize, students may not have the technical language or knowledge of forms that would enable them to articulate their assessment. On the other hand, within a highly classical orientation, the criticism can take on a sterile attention to rules and roles, without consideration for individual constructions. This kind of rigidity could serve to limit a writer's potential to stretch or even break generic patterns. In addition, overuse of technical language could serve to silence more innovative uses of language that capture concepts in metaphorical modes. The CLAS/ETS model stresses a balance between the two, but it is a balance that is not easily achieved.

Demonstrating a range of processes. In this category the teachers showed some strong commonalities. All of the portfolios contained artifacts that reflected a “range of processes”—evidence of planning (e.g., webs, matrices, warm-ups); the use of visual arts (e.g., sketches, illustrations) to accompany and extend the written words; drafts of work (usually limited to one draft and the final copy); revision (attention to content changes, organization, audience, genre); and editing (attention to spelling and mechanics).

The infrequency of process documentation in writing. However, teachers did not use artifacts to support all phases of the writing process, thereby impacting possibilities for students' portfolio choices. For example, in most classrooms, editing was much more commonly documented in writing than revision. Indeed, there was a tendency for teachers to create or borrow published checklists and other artifacts to support editing but not more complex, content-based processes. The infrequency of artifacts for processes that were “messier” (as Ms. Aimes called them) indicates that students were not often challenged to formalize more sophisticated processes in writing, even if in some classrooms the students were engaged in reflective dialogue about them.

Consider what would be lost to portfolio assessment in one classroom. Ms. Aimes, for example, engaged students in discussions of both revision and editing, but provided artifacts focused just on editing.

They still get mixed up on the difference between revision and editing as far as labels that we put on it. But they know that there’s a difference between what they do in group share, when they’re asking for advice and feedback, and what they do when they have to fill out this sheet.

Edit Sheet	
1. Name and date on first page of my draft.	_____
2. I read my paper softly to myself.	_____
3. I read my paper to <u>[peer’s name]</u> .	_____
4. I circled words I thought might be misspelled.	_____
5. I fixed [#] words using Quick Word or the dictionary.	_____
-first word of sentences	_____
-proper nouns (names)	_____
7. I checked to see that each sentence ended with	
. ? or !	_____

As its title indicates, this form centers on editing—punctuation, spelling, and the kinds of grammatical errors that are often picked up when a paper is read aloud. The contexts for revision were peer conferencing and group share, but there were no forms for recording the complex processes of working through a piece with a peer—discussing possibilities and setting down next steps. This becomes problematic for portfolio assessment, because Ms. Aimes made competency with peer response an objective for the year. She did a great deal of modeling in “group share”—a whole class meeting where one child reads his or her story and the other students “tell back” what the author read and then make critical commentary “and then offer suggestions or ask questions.” Ms. Aimes knew from observation that students varied in their competencies: Some students were “very good at it,” but “a lot of the times their peers aren’t even capable yet of giving them a suggestion that they can actually do anything with.” However, she did not have a way to track what her students discussed in their conferences: “Honestly I have not sat down and listened to them. I don’t know.” When a teacher has no tracking system for what occurs in peer conferences, then the implications for portfolio

raters seem clear. Notwithstanding substantial evidence in the teacher's and children's interviews that intriguing peer conversations occurred, there is no direct evidence of the quality of the interaction in the portfolios themselves.

The risks of prescriptive process for portfolio assessment. One approach to the challenges of teaching, assessing, and documenting writing processes was to prescribe them, and this was Ms. Bentley's choice. In an assignment designed to teach process, for example, her stated objective for the children's letter to the Belize government was: "To develop an understanding of writing persuasive letters using the writing process." Her objectives make it clear that, in order to produce a "written product," the students were expected to follow a specific set of steps, which often included one draft and then the final. Her "student directions" specified "Note-taking (brainstorming), Published forms for planning, Parent editing of rough draft, Final draft and evaluation." Note that a dilemma for large-scale portfolio assessment emerges when process is heavily teacher-facilitated in this way: To what extent does the resulting documentation reflect *students'* competencies with the writing process? A rater may not know. On the other hand, the teacher in the classroom worries that, without her structured guidance, her students will not engage with writing in any substantive way.

Conflicts between classroom practice and the documentation needed for large-scale portfolio assessment. While the relative absence of student documentation of "messier" processes has straightforward implications for the scorability of process in students' portfolios, it is important to make clear that what may have been "absent" in the large-scale context was sometimes the by-product of well-motivated practices in the classroom: Some of the teachers made pointed choices *not* to ask for much written documentation of certain processes in order to avoid burdening students. As Ms. Cris explained,

I'm trying to find an opportunity for them to reflect out loud. When I did my research last year, I had a lot of students complaining about all you—not necessarily us/me—but teachers in general: "When you want us to reflect, it's always in writing, always in writing, always in writing." And the thought occurred to me that if you have a student who does not write well, who does not like to write, and then you insult him after he's created the piece to write a reflection—how ridiculous. So I decided to provide more opportunities for them to talk. And I felt that often it would really put them on the spot because if they're saying it, they couldn't get away with this real superficial type of stuff. In fact, that knowledge helped us restructure our whole school portfolio process to do what we call student reflections groups, where they

come together with a set of three questions, which they design themselves, in order to present to their group and get feedback in an oral fashion, and they write down the comments that are made about how to improve their work or revise it.

Ms. Cris's commitment to her students' growth is strikingly evident. Unfortunately the opportunities that she provided for student reflection are impossible to track in the portfolios, because the conversations of the groups are captured in cryptic notes: "Do you think I met up to the expectations [of the assignment]?" "You're kinda in there. Put more into it and you'll be there." "To me, I think you missed meeting just barely. Improve a few mistakes and you'll meet." Thus what might be optimal for large-scale portfolio assessment was at times at odds with teachers' views of optimal classroom practice.

Reflecting on and/or using standards for work. Composing a piece of writing depends on understandings of processes that are likely to make the writing effective for its intended purpose. Teachers may support students by providing them with a set of "standards" for effective work—guidelines, principles, rubrics, examples of good work or work that needs improvement. The teachers we interviewed developed and utilized standards in ways that reflected both their curriculum and their beliefs about students' capacities to utilize standards to guide composing and revision processes. We learned that they were struggling with ways to encourage reflective processes without reducing processes to a set of rigid routines. A key finding was that the forms they borrowed or created to support reflection often looked more like the artifacts of past curricula than the balanced perspective advocated by CLAS/ETS. This is to be expected: The CLAS dimensions were in initial stages, and the teachers' experiences with the dimensions were relatively brief. This context, no doubt, accounts for the differences we found between classrooms that leaned more heavily towards either the romantic or classical pole.

Using standards in the more "romantic" classroom. To organize their prewriting and "brainstorming," the students in Ms. Aimes' classroom were encouraged to use *webs and suns* containing a large category in a center circle and then lines leading outward indicating subcategories. In these early efforts at organization, all lines leading from the circle were given equal weight. For example, when one child placed "birthdays" in the center circle, the lines for "pizza" and "friends" were just two of the many subtopics she addressed. Ms. Aimes accepted

that her young students might not make use of their webs and lists of ideas, but she encouraged her students to think of them as resources for their writing.

We talk about brainstorming. We talk about the fact that you just get everything out that you know. And it's a way to start thinking about what you're going to write about. I'm not sure at this point yet how many of them actually then look at [their prewriting] when they go to [write]. Although I make sure that they have all of [the] papers back when they're writing their rough draft . . . I think it's more a matter of letting them know that these are things you can do when you're thinking.

Thus the “standard” here was “think ahead” without insisting that students utilize that thinking systematically in their composing. For Ms. Aimes, this was an attempt to reach a balance—she provided a specific support structure for writing (e.g., webs), but whether a child used that support later was a matter of personal artistic preference. She hesitated to insist that a child return to and lean heavily on an earlier structure for fear that it would be too confining. Thus, for many of her students, the balance she attempted to create existed more as a possibility than a resource.

To foster personally-constructed standards, Ms. Aimes asked her students mid-year to write a letter of introduction to their emerging portfolios. The prompt for the letter of portfolio introduction follows.

A portfolio is a collection of work samples. Your teachers have been collecting and saving some of your work since you started school.

Read all the work in your portfolio. Look at the pictures.

Write me a letter and tell me about how you felt when you read through your portfolio. Think about how you have grown as a writer. What have you gotten better at? What would you like to be able to write?

The students' responses to the prompt suggest the benefits and risks of such student-centered guidelines. On the one hand, students openly shared their feelings about their work or their goals for future work: When one student thought about his early misspellings, he wrote, “I laughed so hard it felt like I was going to diye” (ASJ, 2/2/94); other responses included desires to make the writing funnier, more exciting, or to write poetry. But the content of most responses addressed

just the surface features of the writing—a failure to be “neat,” misspellings, or how “short” their early writing was. When some students talked about goals for future writing, half the students said they wanted to learn cursive.

To prepare her students for the process of CLAS/ETS portfolio selection, Ms. Aimes provided repeated opportunities for reflective dialogue:

I said, “What would this show somebody else if it was in your portfolio?” And we went through and we talked about it. And I really had to lead them . . . But we talked about the fact that it shows that you can brainstorm, that it shows that you can take in somebody else’s ideas. That it shows that you can do a rough draft and a final copy, that it shows that you can draw a picture of what you were writing about and the two match. . . . And so for the next week, until they choose their portfolio pieces, I’m actually going to go through and just hand back pieces that they might choose to put in their portfolios and talk about, “Okay, what does this show? Why would we want to put this in a portfolio? What kinds of things does it show somebody else, your third grade teacher, that you can do?”

This quote illustrates a problem in Ms. Aimes’ approach to creating a balance: She is encouraging her students to be articulate about their writing for their portfolios, and yet this kind of reflective articulation has not been encouraged in their day-to-day composing processes.

Standards in the more “classical” classrooms: Rubrics. The teachers implementing a more “classical” curriculum devised a range of methods for engaging students in particular writing strategies—self- and peer-assessment using a rubric, peer response to a draft guided by a prepared set of questions, a required series of phases or number of drafts—as well as reflection on the writing process.

With the support of either a published or a class-constructed rubric, the fourth graders in Ms. Bentley’s class were provided opportunities to reflect on almost every writing assignment. Mid-writing self-evaluations were usually supported with published rubrics, most of which focused more on mechanics than content. For example, in one “self-evaluation master” on “Writing a Persuasive Letter,” the majority of the seventeen questions dealt with issues of form, spelling, and neatness: “Did I use the correct form for a letter? Did I spell all words correctly? Did I copy my letter neatly and correctly.” The four that dealt with content were ‘yes-no’ choices that remained on the surface of writing—on the outward features of particular genres, rather than the more complex uses of

language to achieve these features: “Does the body of my letter begin with a topic sentence? Does my topic sentence give my opinion? Are all the reasons for my opinion clear? Do I have a strong last sentence?” Students’ responses made evident the limitations of such yes-no questions as prompts for portfolio assessment: Even the best writers in the class responded by parroting back the questions: “Yes, there is a strong last sentence” (BSL, no date), providing no portfolio evidence of what was understood.

The omission of opportunities to formalize content revisions in writing may explain why Ms. Bentley’s students seemed more centered on mechanics—particularly spelling. For example, after reading three peers’ comments about her work, each about her spelling, one child wrote, “I can improve my spelling some and write a lot more” (BSL, 12/10/93). Another child wrote, “I learned that I should take my time on the first draft so you don’t have to do it over again. . . . I think that I should of checked over my spelling and do more things like I could of checked capitals and periods” (BMJ, 3/3/94).

The end-of-assignment rubrics designed by Ms. Bentley’s class placed emphasis on both content and mechanics, and many assignments were scored by peers, Ms. Bentley, and the authors themselves (“How do you compare what you think you need to improve on? Or what are you proud of?”). A sample rubric follows.

Miner’s Letter Rubric	
___	CREATIVE
___	DESCRIPTIVE
___	USE OF PRIOR KNOWLEDGE
___	NEAT/ORGANIZED
___	FOLLOWED DIRECTIONS
___	ERRORS
___	Spelling
___	Punctuation/Sentences
GRADE:	___
Comments:	

Ms. Bentley expected her students to carry forward to the next assignment what they had learned from evaluative feedback, supporting transfer by encouraging students to consider similar issues in each evaluation: “Most of the assessment is given after the final draft. There have been very few instances when they’ve had the opportunity to do the revision after the assessment.” In describing the use of the rubrics, Ms. Bentley said:

Okay, this is the rubric that we all decided would be really important, and they rated somebody else’s paper. So this is not her assessment of herself or himself. It is the assessment of her peers. They also get a chance to assess themselves . . . I will ask them to turn [their peer’s responses] over: “Now what do *you* think? What is your feeling of how you wrote after you’ve had a chance to see your peer’s writing? How do you compare what you think you need to improve on? Or what are you proud of? What did you learn from it?” So it’s more of an open-ended type of answer that they’re evaluating themselves.

We noticed that repetition of evaluation components across assignments had potential benefits for the students that were often unrealized; students might use language directly from the rubric to the neglect of an analysis of the ways that the rubric applied to a specific piece of writing. For example, one student filled out a “My Portfolio and Me” paper saying that she chose her miner’s letter for a “Showcase Piece” because: “(a) It is creative, descriptive; (b) It has use of prior knowledge; and (c) I followed directions” (BMK, no date). Thus, BMK’s written reflection centered more on imitating set goals (the class rubric) than establishing personal understandings of growth.

Using standards in the more “classical” classrooms: Multiple drafts and content revision. The middle school teachers were engaged in efforts to foster an understanding of writing as an ongoing process, and therefore multiple drafts were more commonly required in their classrooms. As Ms. Cris explained, “At the beginning of the year, they’ll hear me say really ridiculous things like, you’ll never write anything once. You’ll always write it more than once. And so they know it from day one. You’re never done.” Both Ms. Cris and Ms. Donner felt that the idea of revision was a difficult concept for their students. As Ms. Donner commented, “Because I find at this age, they’re just tooth and nail—they don’t want to—they just struggle against revision. They like it the way it is the first time.” Ms. Cris explained:

I encourage them to draw lines through their errors and not erase, because I often like to see what it was they chose to take out instead of—and some of them are obsessed with erasing. Obsessed. They think a sign of growth is that they erase less on the next draft—which reminds me of third grade.

In their search for balance, both teachers found themselves in a dilemma: They had a view of writing process that was consonant in many ways with CLAS, but students who (they believed) could not utilize process in such substantive ways. Their resolution was to require a process that sometimes became a series of steps that students “had to” go through before completing a piece of writing. In effect, when encouragement and modeling was not enough to jump start students into their own reflective processing, the teachers felt it necessary to prescribe, in the hopes of helping their students capture a piece of the process.

Let’s look at some of the ways that Ms. Cris and Ms. Donner engaged students in the writing process. To encourage reflection on the writing process, Ms. Cris piloted a method from the New Standards Project, an opportunity to include a “Process Entry” in their portfolios accompanied by a set list of questions entitled “Explanation for Process Entry.”

1. How did you get started on this piece? How did you decide on the topic?
2. What happened as you worked on it? How did you go about the writing of it?
3. How did your ideas about the topic change from the beginning to the end of the piece? What did you learn about the topic?
4. What were the hardest decisions to make as you worked on the piece? How did you go about making them?
5. What are the biggest changes you made in the writing? Where should we look to see them?
6. What do you think about how the piece turned out? Why do you think this way?
7. What else is important for us to know about this work?

Unlike the second-grade “Edit Sheet” or the fourth-grade rubric’s only partial balance of content with mechanics, this sheet is completely focused on content and the substantive changes that are a part of its creation. As a result, Ms. Cris’s students were challenged, and their difficulties were in evidence in the portfolios. Of the three students who had these entries, two talked about process as “writing more” or moving the “paragraphs around so it would look right on all the pages” (CPB, 3/3/94). Only one student reflected in terms of eliminating unnecessary writing: “In the beginning my letter was too long and it babbled, so I had to cut.” Reflecting on her attitudes toward the Los Angeles riots and the study of Martin Luther King, Jr., CAA wrote, “At first . . . I was a little racist and unsympathetic but as I learned about it, I became compassionate. I learned people dared to do the impossible” (CAA, 3/3/94).¹¹

Ms. Donner determined to address her students’ resistance to revision explicitly, after returning from a CLAS session where the teachers were given an opportunity to study portfolios from other classrooms.

I told them the dilemma I saw in a lot of portfolios when I was with CLAS, and that is, at this age, it’s very difficult for them to make substantive changes. And I said, “I want you to be different; I want you to really focus on making changes that are better, instead of just changes.” So I gave them thirty points. And what they had to do is say exactly what they changed. And some of them said, “I changed the word ‘frog’ to ‘toad’ in paragraph two. And I spelled ‘their’ correctly.” And those were okay. But I was looking for—I told them that I was looking for more—They know what “showing writing” is. So they were supposed to include more showing writing. If they did that, then they got close to thirty points. If they didn’t do as much showing writing, or didn’t provide—didn’t take advantage of what other students said, then I didn’t award anything.

¹¹ In Ms. Cris’s classroom, CAA was one of the few who engaged in substantive revision. Ms. Cris described her in the following way: “She actually totally reconstructs ideas. Just heavily—it’s the essence of what I consider revision to be, which is reshaping ideas, representing things in an appropriate way.” But her competence left her without any peers as resources. Ms. Cris was very concerned:

This issue of heterogeneous grouping when you have peer editors is I think in some way detrimental to kids, because the better students have said to me that “we cannot grow from what they tell us.” “They think our handwriting is pretty, Ms. Cris. They don’t understand why I chose this adjective over the other one I had before. They can’t tell me things like, ‘Your transition between these two paragraphs is excellent, it really prepared me for what was going to come next.’ They can’t tell me my lead wasn’t good or that my conclusion didn’t restate what I had set out to do.” And you have to kind of listen to that. The other extreme is you have a bunch of kids together who don’t write well. I think if someone nurtured and fostered [more homogeneous grouping] without it being like a punishment, it could work.

Thus, with ambivalence, she decided to link substantive revision to grades. Points would be awarded if students paid close attention to peer response and incorporated the advice into their next draft. Furthermore, if the advice given was too general or focused on mechanics, the author was responsible for soliciting better advice: “They get the full ten points if they have good responses. And so if somebody gets a poor response, they can’t go, ‘Well, I didn’t get a good response.’ They have to go back and say, ‘This response doesn’t cut it. Try again.’” Thus peers became a waystation on the route to meeting Ms. Donner’s expectations.

A consequence of her decision was the presence of portfolio evidence of the ways that students were learning to provide and utilize helpful input—multiple drafts punctuated with peer exchanges. We would like to point out, however, how complex we found the process of interpreting that evidence. In the “five senses” assignment, for example, one student wrote an exceedingly brief description of an athlete named George “who played every sport.” Although the assignment asked students to create images using the five senses, there was nothing in the single paragraph that would indicate an understanding of this concept. In response, one student wrote: “You may want to use your senses. Maybe you want to tell about a certain event.” The second peer wrote: “You need to use your senses. Tell more about George playing a certain sport. What did George look like and what was his favorite sport.” The student’s letter to Ms. Donner summarized these points, and the next draft included additional events—a description of George’s long jump event as well as the football game where George made the final touchdown. In addition, the student worked to include images—the smell of hot dogs in the air, the deafening noise of the crowd, and the touch of the athlete’s shirt soaking with sweat. In his final reflection on the piece, the student wrote:

My favorite warm-up is, “He was a great athlete.” The reason I liked this warm-up is because this was about a boy who loves to play sports and I think it kind of relates to me because I love to play sports. In this warm-up, I learned that responses really help your story a lot. The story also helped me put my five senses in and make the story interesting. My story was a para[graph]long and with the responses I made it a full page. (DDA, no date)

In this reflection, although DDA seems to believe that the longer a piece is the better it is (a notion not uncommon among emerging writers), he does make some reference to revisions in content. In his work, we can see substantive changes in the content that reflected his peers’ advice: They did not simply ask him to make

it longer, but rather gave him specific advice on how to improve his piece. By adding insight into sounds, smells, and feel of the day, he gained some respect for writing with the five senses. Thus, Ms. Donner's high expectations for students to "be different" and "focus on better changes" appeared to enable some positive changes in both the advice given in peer conferences and in subsequent student revisions. Her move towards a substantive balance between personal expression and having the tools to enhance that expression seemed to make a difference.

However, a portfolio rater much pressed for time could easily miss the content changes made between drafts. Analysis involves careful tracking—analyzing the earlier draft, reading the peer responses, and then locating and interpreting possible links between peer advice and student revision. Time constraints on the rater may disallow substantive content analysis and leave a rater with an incomplete analysis of students' understandings of revision.

Summary. We found that all four teachers provided students with opportunities to utilize a variety of resources and a range of processes when composing their work. However, there were differences among the teachers that had implications both for students' opportunities to learn and for raters' capacities to make inferences from students' portfolios.

Implications for students' opportunities to learn. There was variation among the teachers in the specific writing strategies and standards taught or emphasized. The more "romantic" approach exposed children to resources (brainstorming, webs, peer conferencing, special books), but there were no demands, other than editing, that children use those resources, and thus the frame was too loosely structured to offer substantive support. The more "classical" approaches used standards as a basis for requiring the uses of particular resources in particular ways. However, these approaches were often too rigid and led students to look for quick and easy surface issues to "fix." When teachers reached a more clearly articulated balance, such as in the case of Ms. Donner's request for a "good response," the students' writing moved towards substantive revision.

Implications for raters' capacities to make valid inferences. Across classrooms, a particularly notable finding concerned the varying roles of discourse versus writing as contexts for supporting students' engagement in the writing process. When students were provided valuable opportunities to analyze their

writing in *dialogue*, they did not necessarily accompany those dialogues with writing about their work or documentation of the conversations. We deeply understand the concerns expressed so clearly by Ms. Cris—students who do not perceive themselves yet as writers may well resent being asked to write even more about writing. Indeed, how much writing can we ask of students who are just learning to write? We simply point out that, when students are not provided with opportunities to document process with written artifacts and/or to describe or analyze process in writing, they are not provided opportunities that could help the scorer of their portfolios understand what they understand and can do with writing.

There was variation among the teachers not only in the specific writing strategies taught or emphasized but also in the documentation of those processes available in the portfolios. What emerged was a very complex picture: First, phases of the writing process might be present in the portfolios—such as the webs and suns in Ms. Aimes’ room—but they might not be used in the writing. We wonder whether the presence of brainstorming lists, organizing webs, written peer advice, and multiple drafts could provide a rater pressed for time with an aura of effective processing in portfolios where closer examination would reveal that the writing of any one piece essentially stays the same at each point in the process. Second, phases of the writing process that were handled solely in the context of classroom dialogues were often undocumented in the portfolios, even when they may well have impacted deeply students’ work. Thus, while students appeared to have valuable opportunities to analyze writing in dialogue with peers or with the teacher (based on teacher interviews), a rater would have no way of interpreting students’ growth in those dialogues. Third, students were rarely asked to describe or analyze the ways they used resources, developed early plans and drafts, or revised pieces of writing. While descriptive or analytic writing about process would be a “genre” that itself would require practice and support and therefore should never be assumed to be a direct line to students’ understandings of writing, we still must point out that such writing has potential as supplementary evidence.

Students’ Choices for Resources, Processes, and Reflection

To provide insight into the bases for students’ portfolio selections, we constructed a preliminary framework for classifying students’ understandings of the writing process. Rather than report the interview and the portfolio findings in separate sections as we did for purpose, genre, and audience, we drew evidence

from both datasets, for two reasons. First, for writing process there were gaps in the evidence that impacted both the interview and the portfolio contexts. Recall that in some cases we asked students about the processes of revising a piece when all that was available to support our conversation was the final draft; in other cases, students tried to explain that the assessment of the final draft of one piece was supposed to inform the next assignment, but there was no evidence of whether or how that had been done. Second, we differed in the conduct of our interviews: SW was more likely than MG to explore a specific piece of writing with a student—an essential dialogue if the goal is to understand how that piece was composed—but both of us were pressed to complete the protocol in the time available to us and skimmed over many opportunities for exploration. We are therefore not surprised that many students responded in vague or overly general ways following general questions about process not necessarily contexted in the writing. Students’ responses almost certainly underestimated the kinds of explanations of process that we could have captured if we explored with students how they were currently composing a specific piece of writing, with the support of a more comprehensive set of process artifacts.

We explored students’ understandings of resources, writing processes, and reflection by asking them a series of questions at different points in the interview:

Where did you get the ideas for this—from your teacher, from other students, or other books?

Is there a piece where you did a lot of revision or really worked hard to change it? For this piece, once you had an idea, what did you do? Once you’d written something, did you revise? How?

When you revise, do you use classroom guidelines or the responses of your teacher or fellow students to help you? How?

Do you ever help other students revise—read or listen to their work and give them ideas? What kind of advice do you give? Can you give me an example?

Because we found that students talked most about their strategies for revision, we have organized this section around it.¹² We looked for evidence of

¹² Because most pieces in three classrooms were assigned and because the early phases of the writing process were often missing from the portfolios, we had scanty evidence of a student’s development of the initial ideas. Our efforts to probe this aspect were often unsuccessful. For example, when asked about the way he went about choosing topics for his feudal Japan report,

understanding the ways that revision can serve to improve the effectiveness of a piece for its intended purpose, and the ways that readers can support the revision process toward that end. The concept that purpose and process must co-evolve for a piece to be effective is a very complex frame for viewing process, but it captures how more accomplished writers work. For example, a writer may begin with issues and audiences she wants to address within particular genres and forms. As she writes, she is constantly calibrating her words to ensure that they are achieving her intended purpose, and she asks for advice from others (e.g., friends, editors, reviewers) who challenge her to refine her thinking even more. Thus the resulting effectiveness of her writing for its purpose is assisted by reflective processing. Note how the role of assessment is very central here: A writer must solicit the assessments of others, or anticipate their assessments as she assumes the dual role of writer and reader of her own writing, and thus students' understandings of revision are fundamentally understandings of the ways that writing can be assessed.

We classified interview responses and portfolio evidence into three categories designed to reveal whether and how students use helpful technical language to explain strategies and content revisions for specific pieces of writing (Table 8).

Little analysis of revision in terms of content and purpose, and little analysis of readers as resources. These responses were fairly common in all classrooms, especially when the standards offered as supports for revision (e.g., rubrics, checklists) centered more on convention than content revisions. Thus, the students internalized an attention to surface rather than deep revision, and few of their comments articulated a more balanced perspective.

There were several ways that students could talk about revision with little reference to the content of their writing or the ways that readers can be resources for the writer. One pattern was a focus on *external consequences*: As CFR explained to us, “If you revise it, you’ll get a better grade,” a view he presented within his portfolio as well:

DSS replied only, “We had an assignment. We had an assignment. It was assigned.” The use of a collective pronoun (“we”), the passive voice (“It was . . .”), and the triple repetition (“assignment/assigned”) demonstrate a group requirement that was essentially out of the student’s hands. The opportunities for personal engagement in such a process are necessarily limited.

Table 8

Students' Interpretive Sets: Revision

<p><i>Little analysis of revision in terms of content and purpose</i></p> <p><i>Little analysis of readers</i></p>	<p>Focus on external consequences (grades, praise, global criticism)</p> <p>Focus on editing of mechanics and on neatness</p> <p>Little analysis of readers as helpful resources</p>
<p><i>Vague and inexplicit analyses of revision</i></p> <p>or</p> <p><i>Generic analyses of revision without explication</i></p>	<p>Greater focus on the number of drafts than the content changes therein</p> <p>Mimicked explanations of process</p> <p>Elliptical peer response that is hard to follow</p>
<p><i>Explications of revision processes</i></p>	<p>Explanations of methods, concepts, and/or standards used to revise and refine the content of a specific piece of writing</p>

Why did you write these pieces? Who has read them? What have they said to you about them? [Prompt]

I wrote these piece because I wanted to get a good grade and that was the assignment. My language teacher and some of me peers. The friends liked it and my teacher like it. I got a good grade and she told me some ways that I can try it and meke it better. (CFR, 12/3/93)

Expressing a similar view, CPB viewed “getting the grade” as the goal, and thus revision could be considered a punishment for a poor first draft—

I really follow her strict directions because I thought she would be mad at me if I didn't. I thought I'd have to do it over or stuff. I'd like follow directions really good so I wouldn't have to like do it over a second time.

—and revisions that did *not* result in a good grade could be most frustrating.

CPB This one I think it was my first book report. I revised it because I didn't follow directions very well and I still ended up with a 1.5 'cause I didn't read the directions the first time and I wasn't getting it so I kept going and going and I didn't really get a good grade [anyway]. [. . . *but you really tried to change it to make it work for you?*] Yeah. [Referring to his “Scoring Sheet” for the assignment] What worked was I think my introduction about everything. I still didn't describe everything and for these other areas. I didn't write enough stuff about the directions.

A second pattern was a *focus on editing of mechanics and on neatness of the work*. For example, one student who consistently self-evaluated her work in terms of neatness received virtually the same evaluation from peers on one assignment: Three out of four peers commented that her work was “a little messy.” Displeased with her final grade, she lamented, “I did not know that we were going to pass it around. I would have done it neater!” (BMK, 12/10/93). Even students who could be highly reflective about the process of their work sometimes concentrated on convention over content:

My Favorite Showcase Piece

I like it because My writing is neat, descriptive, and well graded .
(excerpt, BSL, 11/29/93)

A third pattern was the *absence of analysis of peers or teachers as readers* who could provide useful perspectives on a draft. Some children viewed peers as generic “people who tell me what they like”—

ASJ They say, “The illustrations are really good and I like the part about” whatever.

Other students viewed teachers as evaluators who “don’t like what I write.” DHH, for example, tells us that Ms. Donner cut away at his draft when it exceeded the required length.

DHH *[What are these ‘X’s here? Is that something that Ms. D. did?]* Yeah, ‘cause when I showed it to her she’s, like, “This is way too long. You’re supposed to ask me first.” So she started x-ing out the things that I wouldn’t need in my final draft.

Although we read Ms. Donner’s response to his draft as suggestions to transform a series of “tell” and “said” to dialogue, DHH viewed Ms. Donner’s comments as orders to be strictly followed.

Either vague and inexplicit analyses or generic analyses of revision without explication. There were occasions when it was difficult to glean what the child understood about revision or the ways that he had revised. CFR, for example, struggled in his interview to explain content revisions in his piece on community service. Missing technical language for describing his content revisions, CFR’s vague explanation focused more on the number of drafts than the content changes therein.

CFR I picked this report because I knew this was the best one I did all year . . . it’s good because I took my time and wrote it and then I recopied like three times before I put it in here. . . . I did revisions, like . . . see this whole paragraph? All the paragraphs had different beginnings. And then I had just read them over and made a different one. Then I had to find out which parts should I put first. . . . And I did that one. I changed it over and over. This is my first one. Second, third, and then I had wrote it different and put the paragraphs in a different way . . . Because as I looked through all this right here, it didn’t sound as good as this one did right here. Then I had some of my friends read it over and the next day I wrote this which was better than all these. I wrote one more but I didn’t do as good as that one so I just threw that one away. So I kept this one. . . . Because I know that if you revise it, you’ll get a better grade and then you can look back and see all of the stuff that you did and the stuff you could get better and that’s hard.

His written reflection was no more revealing of his content revisions: “Well at first I didn’t write what I wanted to so I messed up a couple of times. I learned that I need community [service] no[t] just for school but many other reasons. . . . My biggest changes was I had to move the paragraphs around so it would look right.” To garner any understanding of his revision processes required our examination of all relevant materials in his portfolio. From the first draft which contained

scattered paragraphs about his community service, he shifted to a more organized series of paragraphs. He began by framing the expectations for community service at his school, then explained his personal service to his grandmother (he cleaned her garage), and finally closed with how his involvement in community service could help him get into college. We are left with a dilemma for assessment of process: Neither his interview comments nor his written reflection suggest that he was able to explain his content revisions effectively, but there was some evidence of capacity to revise in his drafts.

A generic response demonstrated the student's knowledge of at least the "vocabulary" of the writing process, but the explanation was a listing of required steps that was largely external to any piece of writing. A student might characterize revision or the role of peer response in ways that were consistent with her teacher's, but she did not articulate the links between the purpose for writing a piece and the processes she used to accomplish the writing. Granted, we were often unable to lead children into a more substantive analysis when evidence of revision was missing from the portfolio: There might be no first draft, no sticky notes from the teacher, no documentation of the content of a peer conference. Thus, by highlighting the *omission* of something, the omission of explication, we do recognize that generic explanation is questionable as evidence of lack of understanding. We make the distinction only to stress that, without explication, generic descriptions were suspect when students seemed to be simply repeating what their teachers had been telling them about the value of revision or of peer response.

Consider the ways that BMK writes about the process for several of her portfolio pieces. In the first example, she uses the now-familiar "we" to describe what was assigned, not what she did with her writing.

What I did: <u>The first thing we did was to cluster our ideas</u> <u>for getting organized.</u>

Her individual purposes and processes thus become submerged in a generalized pattern that everyone must follow. Indeed, we found this exact sentence in two

other students' portfolios (BSL and BGL) for the same assignment, which leads us to believe that the description of process may have been written on the board and copied by the students. In the second example, she reports process in generic ways that provide no convincing evidence that any of the steps or resources she used were helpful to her.

I started to do a page caled Planning my Peruasive letter. It helped me alot because I got to think about what I was going to write. Then I worte my rough draft and used the ideas from when I wrote on my Planning my Persuasive Letter. Then I started to do my finlly copy and when I was done Mrs. Bentley said its great. Then I was happy.

In the third example, however, we find along with a list of resources used some inkling of evidence in her final sentence of a specific challenge *she* faced in composing her Belize letter: "It is very hard to be in someone elses mind." However, we heard from Ms. Bentley and most of Ms. B's students that taking the perspective of the Belize government was discussed extensively by the entire class, and therefore we cannot tell from her sentence whether she is repeating the consensus of the class or reporting her own personal challenge.

What tools, books, or other resources did you use in the process of completing the assignment?

1. The movie The Donnor Party.

2. Pencil paper

3. Brain

What changed in your work and thinking as you did this assignment?

It is very hard to be in someone elses mind.

When we talked with students about the ways that peers supported composing, we heard many generic reports of what "we" (or "you") do when "we" respond to a peer's writing or revise on the basis of a peer's response. Consider

how clear the explanations are below, and yet how problematic they are in understanding how each of these students was seeking and utilizing peer response to accomplish particular purposes in his or her writing. The quote from ATS below is especially problematic, for she seems to have a clearer idea of where advice is given than what kind of advice might be most appropriate:

ATS If I get really stuck in school, I have a conference with somebody and ask them if you could help get this other part that I need to work on . . . If they say, “yeah,” then you go down and sit on the rug. I say, “I don’t know what I should write next, can you help me on my next part?”

BMJ We correct the students’ work a lot. So when we do it, they just—sometimes we write notes what you could’ve done this better, and then they give us a grade and tell us why and all that.

DCN It helps you [to] change something before you have to turn it in. Like you ask somebody, “Do you like this? And if you don’t what should I change?”

DDA And you get responses, which—someone reads your writing, your rough draft, and they respond to it, like what you can do better about it. And I got two of those and made my writing better. . . . [*Did they give you good advice?*] They like told me that I need to use more showing writing and stuff like that.

CVC’s response below is similarly generic, though note here how the interview was hampered by the way in which she ostensibly utilized peer response: She did not use her peer’s advice as a basis to revise the piece we were discussing, but rather tried to apply it to a later piece of work. Understanding how she did that would have required her to search for that subsequent piece and recall how she had brought her peer’s advice forward, and we did not ask her to pursue such an unlikely venture. Carrying advice from its application to one piece forward to another piece is a tenuous endeavor, even if the advice has overarching insight to offer on multiple kinds of writing.

CVC We read different kinds of stories and we passed them around for students to see if we described how the story was really like, and here I have an answer from one of my peers about my lead. [*What did you do with that answer?*] I didn’t revise this particular one. . . . But when she answered my lead, the next time I was sort of—I knew more like what to do . . . I thought about what her comments were and I tried to do that.

Intrigued by CVC's comments, we later located her peer's written advice:

Your lead is very good. They won't really convince other people to read the short story. You did well in rewriting a short story's lead and dialogue. What you can improve on is to make a new paragraph whenever a different person is speaking. This is a story I'd like to read because I want to know why the man's daughter went out into the crazy world.

We found her peer's comments confusing and contradictory; we wondered, for example, how CVC could sort out the "good" but "not convincing" nature of her lead. The only advice that seemed applicable to later writing focused on convention—separating paragraphs to indicate the speakers in dialogue.

CVC's case illustrates a larger issue for assessment: We found that making judgments of a student's competence with peer response—giving, seeking (asking good questions), or utilizing peer response—was a very uncertain enterprise. Writers would often get relatively opaque responses which left them little help in making their revisions. We noticed that the patterns of unintentional unhelpfulness differed for weaker writers and for stronger writers. CFR, for example, received comments from peers that were elliptical at best: "To me I think you missed meeting [the expectations] just barely. Improve a few mistakes and you'll meet." When it came time to fill in a response to the question, "Based on the responses from my group critique, I will ____," CFR left it blank. On the other hand, writers who were strong might get responses suggesting feelings of intimidation. For example, one peer responded to CAA's letter to residents of Los Angeles: "Advise the writer what you think he or she might do to make it a better letter: She should write clearly and not use high-class vocabulary words." In writing about how to improve the letter (a requirement), CAA resignedly says, "I can make it have more down to Earth vocabulary." Thus we came to see the numerous "blanks" in process reflections in the portfolios of the weaker students as metaphors for the helplessness that students may feel when faced with vague or unhelpful critique. Writers of any level of competence who received obviously inappropriate responses often chose not to use the advice, and thus we had no evidence of how the student could use more helpful advice if provided.

Explications of revision processes. Students rarely gave extended explanations of their revision processes. However, when they did, these explanations provided compelling evidence of understanding just how students go about linking purpose and audience with process. The responses we highlight here

demonstrate students' efforts to articulate their attempts to revise and refine a piece of writing:

CAA [selecting a piece that she thinks needs further work] . . . It's the growth one. . . . And here, let's see . . . I described too much, I think. And I really didn't get on to the story. [*And what does that do to the reader, do you think?*] I think it really bores the reader, and while I'm writing, though, as a writer, you don't really notice all these things . . . then maybe when you look at it, you look back and see one page full of just description. Description, I need to cut something out.

BSL [*Now is there a piece in your portfolio where you really feel like you worked really hard to change it?*] In the Belize letter—well I kept on wondering how to start this, because I was getting really nervous and pensive and everything. And like I don't know how to start this, and I kept on changing my mind. In the end I came up with: "I think you should try hard to protect the rain forest. I did this because at the rate the rain forest is getting cut down, it will not exist in 8 years." 'Cause that is like really tense, because I think, "oh my gosh this thing won't exist in 8 years" and when you're on, in the letter it says we can—"maybe we can not survive without it because it's considered the lungs of the world." . . . [*And what else do you think you need to work on as far as shaping or crafting the work?*] I think I need to work on my persuasive writing because I think that it's really hard—well I think I'm really strong in my first paragraph, but I always do my first paragraph really long and then I don't know what to write in my second paragraph. [*Oh, so you kind of run out of steam?*] Yeah. [*So you have to keep that persuasiveness up?*] It's like tea is trying to boil but it's running out of steam so it can't boil any further.

In these relatively unusual cases, students did not use the generic "we" nor did they imply that certain steps in the process "had to" be done. Instead, they used "I," making an intensely personal claim for themselves as writers as they discussed how they tried to keep a particular audience engaged or deal with highly emotional content. Thus CAA realizes that her lengthy descriptions could belabor her piece and lose her audience, a concern different from the more typical comments from other students that their writing needed more "description" or "more showing writing," mimicking words their teachers had stressed. BSL realizes that, in order to persuade her very formal and powerful audience (the King of Belize), she had to pull out all the stops. The process made her feel "nervous" and "pensive" and "tense"—words which display her engagement and effort. As BSL explains her process, she points to particular places where she accomplished her goals—remarking on the highly visual metaphor, "the lungs of the world"—as well as places where she struggled with her writing. She realizes that not only did

she need a good lead (“Well I kept on wondering how to start this”), but she needed to sustain her persuasive tone in order to convince her audience (“it’s like tea is trying to boil but it’s running out of steam”). Thus, BSL explained to us how she crafted this particular piece to meet a specific purpose and audience.

Summary. We have presented a preliminary framework for analyzing the ways that students characterize revision, both in the interviews and in the portfolios. There were three central findings, and each reflects the formative nature of the CLAS/ETS portfolio project at the time of our study.

First, there was little evidence in the portfolios of students’ competencies with revision: Documentation of revision and the feedback that supported revision were often missing, and students were not asked often to reflect on process in writing.

Second, many students discussed revision with us or wrote about revision in a vague or overly generic way. This finding is not surprising given the unpredictable evidence in the portfolios to support our interviews and the infrequent opportunities students had to reflect in writing about process. Whether in the interviews or in the portfolios, most children either focused on editing or provided an explanation of revision that seemed to be a close repetition of their teacher’s concerns for what the class “had to” do, without explication within a piece of text.

Third, there were few cases where students could articulate the links between their purposes for writing and the processes they used to accomplish their writing, perhaps because their curriculum was more closely linked to either a romantic or a classical stance. In the classrooms that leaned more towards the classical end of our continuum, students were offered rules and routines for revision, yet in most cases the classroom forms, rubrics, and nebulous peer advice led students to concentrate on conventional surface features rather than deeper structures. In the classrooms that edged more towards the romantic end, the rules and routines were less established and students could use or not use the plans they themselves had made or the advice offered by peers; a reliance on editing sheets caused these children to skim the surface of possible revision. A balanced perspective would look quite different: Students would be motivated by highly personal needs to communicate a message; they would be offered substantive tools for thinking about content revision first, and then the necessary conventions.

Our findings have implications for large-scale portfolio assessment. First, although we believe that the portfolios and the interviews underestimated students' understandings of process, the rarity of an analytic stance toward the writing process raises an issue for any model of portfolio assessment that assigns the student the responsibility for presenting evidence of her competence with the writing process. Second, differences between the children's visions of writing processes and those that could be held by CLAS raters who embrace the vision of balance in the dimensions could put children at a disadvantage in their portfolio presentations of process.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS:

TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' ROLES IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF PORTFOLIOS FOR LARGE-SCALE ASSESSMENT

In this report, we have produced preliminary frameworks for understanding two highly integrated issues: how teachers may implement a large-scale portfolio assessment program like CLAS in the classroom, and how students' understandings of their teachers' curriculum and of the portfolio assessment program may impact their portfolio choices. Findings regarding both the implementation of a large-scale portfolio program and students' understandings of it have implications for the design of a system of large-scale portfolio assessment: (a) for the comparability of portfolios and the meaning of scores assigned to the portfolios, (b) for the kinds of support needed by teachers, students, and raters, and (c) for the potential impact of the program on students' growth. Based on a small sample of teachers and students as well as on a portfolio assessment program that to date has only trialed approaches to implementation, our findings serve simply as a frame for productive discussion.

We focused our research on two aspects of writing competence that are important in the CLAS Dimensions of Learning in Language Arts and central to most current models of portfolio assessment—the purposes for writing and the processes of writing. To address the CLAS dimension on purpose, we asked teachers to explain the ways that their curriculum spanned a variety of genres, and we asked students to pick two very different pieces to compare and contrast in terms of purpose, genre, and audience. To address process, we asked teachers to explain how they taught their students about writing as an endeavor, and

students to select pieces of writing that exemplified how they developed and revised their work. We visited a classroom at each of four school sites just after or just before students made their choices for their CLAS portfolios. Teachers discussed their writing curriculum with us, and students shared their portfolios as they responded to a series of questions about the ways that the portfolios revealed—or did not reveal—their competencies with purpose and process. From copies of the portfolios, we were also able to consider ways that students’ understandings of purpose and process were or were not reflected in their portfolio choices.

Opportunity: The Implementation of the “Dimensions of Learning” in the Classroom

Understanding students’ portfolio choices requires understanding the possible choices available to students in particular classroom contexts. The question is: What opportunities did the students in this study have to compose and analyze writing in ways that were aligned with the CLAS dimensions of learning? Below we consider two patterns in our findings that have implications for portfolio assessment: Teachers’ *curriculum* varied in ways that provided students with quite different opportunities to learn about the dimensions of learning; and, teachers varied in their approach to *documentation* of students’ writing in ways that provided students with quite different opportunities to choose samples of what was available at the moment of portfolio choice.

Variation in Approaches to Alignment With the CLAS Dimensions

From our analyses of the teacher interviews, we found that the teachers varied in their understandings of purpose and process in ways that were related to the curriculum they offered to their students and, as a result, the possibilities available to students for their portfolio choices. We interpreted patterns in the teachers’ assignments in the context of current tensions between the “romantic” and the “classical” schools of composition theorists (Hairston, 1986). In the romantic view, students must write from their own questions and emotions in order to make their own meaning in the world. The purpose of writing in this school is highly individual, and the process of writing is flexible and responsive to the current piece. In the classical view, students are taught to analyze many kinds of writing as a grounding for their efforts to extend their range and flexibility

as writers. Writing in this school is more pragmatic, the range of purposes is far reaching, and the process is more procedural as well as aligned with particular purposes.

The CLAS/ETS vision emphasizes a balance of personal purpose with established forms—a vision that is perhaps easier to achieve in theory than in the practice of individual teachers. Although none of the teachers in our study fully represented that balance, neither did they remain firmly entrenched at either end of the romantic/classical continuum. The three teachers whose curriculum we viewed as somewhat more classical developed assignments as genre studies, assigned specific authentic or imaginary audiences, and required the use of particular writing processes, emphasizing the use of standards. Their students' portfolios were built upon the teachers' assigned tables of contents. In contrast, the teacher whose curriculum we viewed as somewhat more romantic placed emphasis on writing from personal experience, and exposed children to options for the writing process but did not require their use. Her students' portfolios were a matter of student choice. Thus the curriculum in place in four classrooms varied in its alignment with the dimensions of learning, jeopardizing the comparability of portfolios across their classrooms.

It is noteworthy that all of these teachers had participated in one or more CLAS meetings to collaborate on the design of the assessment methods, and yet, despite their differences in philosophy, no teacher was uncomfortable with the ways that her curriculum aligned with the CLAS dimensions of learning. While this finding is to be expected in the early phases of any portfolio assessment program, there is a point worth mentioning: In the CLAS model (as in several other large-scale portfolio assessment programs), teachers are raters, and raters are teachers. Unrecognized discrepancies in *teachers'* implementation may reflect unrecognized conflicts among *raters'* interpretations of purpose and process.

How might teachers and raters build shared understandings of the CLAS dimensions and the ways that the dimensions can inform the design of curriculum and the assessment of student work? We suggest that our research provides a model of the enterprise that may be needed. We found that we could engage teachers and students in dimensions-based discussions of curriculum and student work most effectively if we focused upon aspects of the dimensions. Our questions served as fact-finders—exploring the curriculum, instruction, and assessment that was in place at the time. Analytic conversations contexted in *both* (a) the

emerging framework and artifacts of a portfolio program *and* (b) examples of teachers' and students' work can serve to highlight where change in either is needed.

Whether the goal is collaborative design of a new assessment program or its subsequent implementation outside the original working group, these efforts must be grounded in clear explorations of where teachers are in terms of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The CLAS/ETS dimensions are purposefully open-ended to allow for individual interpretation, but if the participants are not engaged in explicitly articulating the parameters for interpretation, the emphasis on balance may be lost. All participants in a high-stakes system of portfolio assessment need to be engaged (Figure 6). Teachers' interpretations are vital to the development of authentic portfolio assessment—they are experts in their children's capabilities and well understand how their personal educational philosophies support children's growth. On the other hand, researchers have deep understandings of how portfolios need to be structured in order to obtain statewide or national comparative data on how our children are doing. Experts in literary interpretation (e.g., Rosenblatt, 1991) remind us that texts are subject to highly personal interpretations and that coming to some sort of consensus on a "group text" (Pearson & Fielding, 1991) emerges in extensive and explicit group discussion.

Variation in Documentation

There was variation among the teachers not only in the content of their curriculum but also in the documentation of their curriculum available in the portfolios. For example, while range of purposes was set by those teachers who assigned a table of contents, it was unpredictable in the portfolios of students left to student choice. Reflecting a more complex pattern, while range of processes was evident in many portfolios, many artifacts that could have provided evidence had not been saved or had never been created (e.g., reflective writing on process). This proved to be particularly worrisome when phases of the writing process that were handled solely and routinely in the context of classroom dialogues were undocumented; because evidence of children's uses of critical dialogues was implied rather than an actuality, we had no basis to assess students' uses of these as resources for revising. Furthermore, what artifacts there were, were not necessarily a "direct line" to children's competencies with the writing process. Phases of the writing process might be present in the portfolios, but they might

not be used in the writing. Close examination of brainstorming lists, organizing webs, written peer advice, and multiple drafts often revealed that the writing of a piece essentially stayed the same through each point in the process.

Two concerns for large-scale portfolio assessment emerged from our analyses of curriculum documentation, and both have implications for the use of portfolios to assess opportunity to learn as well as student performance. First, portfolios were missing important evidence of dimensions-based competencies or included evidence that was very complex and time-consuming to interpret. This was particularly the case with writing process, and we feel that the design of a portfolio assessment of the writing process represents a considerable challenge to everyone participating within the system—the teachers and students who must ensure that interpretable evidence is produced, and portfolio scorers who must score it. Second, portfolios varied in their fidelity to the curriculum (insofar as we could discern it). Both assigned representation in the more “classical” classrooms (tables of contents) and uncertain representation in the more “romantic” classroom raise concerns for portfolio assessment in a model like CLAS, where portfolios are expected to demonstrate students’ competencies with two broadly encompassing dimensions. Where there is less provision for student choice, students’ *understandings* of the curriculum may not be revealed through their assigned selections; where there is greater opportunity for student choice, variability in portfolio content may reflect the difficulties students are experiencing regarding the bases for their choices.

How might teachers and raters build shared understandings of what is needed to ensure comparability of evidence in CLAS portfolios? Our findings make evident the need to analyze closely (a) how the presence or absence of particular kinds of evidence impacts particular kinds of rater judgments, (b) how the need for evidence in the large-scale context may impact curriculum and pedagogy in the classroom, and (c) how particular pedagogies in the classroom may support or impede the availability of evidence for large-scale portfolio assessment. Our results spoke most directly to issue (c), and we were particularly struck by mismatches between the CLAS/ETS dimensions and the assessment artifacts (e.g., editing sheets, rubrics) the teachers used: The trial scoring rubric based on the CLAS dimensions asked for reflective revision, and yet the day-to-day work of the classrooms centered on surface features. Our findings suggest that these curricula impacted both the availability of portfolio evidence and students’

capacities: When we asked students to reflect on the content of their portfolio pieces and the processes by which they were composed, their responses mirrored the kinds of artifacts provided to support their composing and revision.

We repeat the need for collaborative dialogue, with particular attention to the artifacts that are used prior to and throughout the implementation of new programs. Conversations around curriculum and assessment artifacts that support (or hinder) children's growth in building reflective and representative portfolios are essential: What is the central focus of this artifact? Does this artifact promote content revision or surface editing? How does this artifact align with or veer from the focus of the dimensions? How might we adapt the artifact to create a better match with the dimensions? Conversations around students' responses to those artifacts are also essential. Teachers might find it helpful to use our preliminary frameworks for students' "interpretive sets" (Tables 5, 6, and 8) as guides to discussions about students' understandings: How does this student's written reflection reveal her understandings of purpose and genre? How does this student's assessment of a peer's writing reveal what he understands about revision? Efforts to develop and implement portfolio assessment programs will benefit if everyone works to develop better understandings of what students understand and can do, and the ways that curriculum and assessment are supporting (or hindering) students' growth.

Students' Choices: Students' Understandings of the Dimensions and Their Portfolios

Are students in "romantic" classrooms capable of bearing responsibility for preparing appropriate portfolio evidence? What do students in "classical" classrooms understand of the assigned range in their portfolios? We found that, at this time in the evolution of the CLAS program, many students could not readily analyze their writing in ways that would enable them to build an evidentiary portfolio for CLAS without substantial support. Given the integrated balance inherent in the CLAS dimensions in language arts, we argue that the capacity to build a portfolio independently would depend on the student's capacity for *integrated analysis* of critical aspects of the writing; yet, across interview and portfolio data, we found very few examples of students who could demonstrate the integration of purpose and audience with particular genres and processes. Thus, depending on the romantic or classical orientation of their classrooms, children

tended to talk about personal purpose with little regard for genre, or saw genre as an imposed assignment which allowed them little room for personal voice. Although they were often able to talk about audience in relatively generalized terms, there was little evidence that they had composed the pieces that we discussed with audience in mind. Revision was typically described in vague or overly generic ways: Most children either focused on editing or provided an explanation of revision that seemed to be a close repetition of their teacher's concerns for what the class "had to" do, without explication within a piece of text. These findings are not surprising, for the children's teachers aligned themselves in either romantic or classical camps—a polar position that precluded a more balanced and integrated stance. Whether a more integrated curriculum would enable children to develop the analytic capacity necessary to prepare an appropriate portfolio is a critical question.

Our findings from the student interviews and portfolios suggest a need to balance the vision of student choice as a desirable *goal* for students with what is needed (a) to benefit their growth as writers and (b) to ensure that portfolio raters are provided appropriate evidence (Figure 6). Let us consider each of these issues in turn.

First, how could we enhance the likelihood that students could learn to understand their writing in the ways that professional writers do and thereby build portfolios as writers would? We saw great promise in the ways that many students engaged with the more "classical" curriculum used the technical vocabulary associated with purpose and process, and in the ways that many students engaged with the more "romantic" curriculum expressed investment in crafting a unique and personally meaningful piece of writing. The "classical" children were echoing their teachers' voices, and there is much research that calls for explicit models of instruction (Paris, Wasik, & Turner, 1991) with highly specific vocabulary attached (Palincsar & Brown, 1986). Articulating voices that are not originally their own can be a resource to children as they come to adopt and transform those words into their own words and actions. The "romantic" children were giving expression to individually created ideas and images, but they were working without the resources constructed and modeled by other writers. Newkirk (1989) suggests that "many of the difficulties experienced by writers are due not to the inherent cognitive difficulty of the tasks that they attempt, but to their lack of familiarity with the conventions of that discourse" (p. 28), and thus

using the vocabulary associated with particular purposes and genres could be a beginning step towards integrating genre with purpose and articulating that relationship within their own writing. Indeed, the words of the CLAS dimensions themselves raise the ante on what students can and should understand, for they imply student writers who are highly articulate about the integration of purpose with process. The CLAS dimensions work as guides to these conventions, supporting students and their teachers in using a set of discourse expectations that can be met by paying attention to the vocabulary, questions, purposes, and processes that professional writers use. Thus the value of portfolio building for students and teachers is very clear. What is uncertain is the appropriate role for students who are only just learning to analyze their writing.

Second, how could we enhance the likelihood that raters will be provided with appropriate evidence? This very question presumes positions on both the purpose of portfolio assessment and the validity of the assessment for its intended purpose (Herman, Gearhart, & Aschbacher, in press; Herman & Winters, 1994). The purposes of portfolio assessment include assessment of individual students' competencies and program accountability—the latter being either an index of student accomplishment at the program level, or an index of opportunity to learn. Using portfolio scores to measure individual student achievement seems particularly problematic, in that the portfolio contains writing composed in complex social contexts with highly variable support from teachers, peers, and parents (Gearhart & Herman, 1995). Nevertheless, we suggest that the challenges facing the validity of individual student portfolio scores are no different whether the portfolio is built with the instructional support of teachers or built independently by students; in either case, the portfolio still contains socially contexted writing. Furthermore, if the portfolio is built alone, it is at risk for a conundrum: An emerging writer not yet capable of integrating aspects of the assessment dimensions in her writing is asked to select evidence of her competencies *with* those aspects. To benefit her growth as a writer as well as to provide raters with appropriate evidence, she needs guidance.

Portfolios are being asked to serve a number of purposes. At the accountability level, they are being asked to perform as measures of student performance, as motivators for instructional reform, and as an index of that reform. When used to assess opportunity to learn, an instructionally supported portfolio should pose no greater (or no lesser) problem than the instructionally

supported writing within. In short, we do believe that the construction of the portfolio for any purpose needs support from the teacher—or, rather, by someone who has a deep understanding of the assessment dimensions and the ways that portfolio evidence is interpreted in the large-scale context. Guidelines for the support will certainly be necessary to comparability across classrooms, guidelines for a “middle road” between an assigned table of contents and student choice. Two of the teachers we interviewed were experimenting with possibilities: One who assigned a table of contents asked students to explain how each entry demonstrated competence with the dimensions of learning; the other engaged her students in extended conversations about the rationale for their choices. A balance is needed between what Rief (1990) calls external criteria by the teacher and internal criteria by the students. Further dialogue is needed among teachers and assessment experts regarding the ways that teachers and students may build a portfolio together and the implications for the meaning of portfolio scores.

Conclusion

This report provides analyses of both the curriculum and pedagogy of four teachers, and the understandings and writings of their students. Findings that teachers had different frames for considering the alignment of their curriculum with the CLAS dimensions of learning suggest that an analytic enterprise like our own can benefit the design and implementation of large-scale portfolio assessment. Teachers need opportunities to voice and discuss what they are trying to accomplish in their curriculum; assessment experts need opportunities to voice and discuss what they are trying to accomplish with portfolio assessment; everyone needs to listen as students voice and discuss how they are utilizing the opportunities provided them, in order to design feasible, productive, and developmentally appropriate standards. These analyses of opportunities and understandings must include very specific talk about raters’ expectations. Indeed, teachers and their students need to know in advance how raters read and assess portfolios. Teachers (particularly those who may not also be raters) and students need opportunities to learn the assessment dimensions, perhaps through case examples of how raters interpreted individual portfolios or through “think-alouds” of a rater’s reaction to an individual piece. At the same time, teachers too need to provide their own “think alouds” and case examples, which might focus on the reasoning behind particular artifact use and specifics on how they model peer

conferencing, as well as analyses of how specific assignments have the potential to achieve the balance between romantic and classical viewpoints. Understandings of cases and think-alouds can then be melded with individual philosophies and turned into curriculum and assessment practices that help students and teachers think about the evidence necessary for effective portfolios, and help researchers and raters interpret portfolios appropriately.

Documentation of participating teachers' curriculum and assessment practices—goals, content, methods—and their matches and mismatches to the CLAS dimensions and rubrics will contribute to the construction of a coherent assessment system. All participants in the system can contribute to the building of that documentation—teachers, students, and researchers. To build coherence at all levels of a large-scale portfolio assessment program requires analyzing what does and does not fit and representing what has been learned in explicit ways. By emphasizing congruence, we are not suggesting that all portfolios or curricula have to mimic one particular form. There is room for individual play within a frame, provided that it has emerged from collaborative analysis and provided that teachers and raters create ways to set their work—curriculum and assessment—within it. Thus to ensure comparability of implementation within the CLAS frame, we view the two CLAS Dimensions of Learning in Language Arts as the frame that can context assignments featuring specific kinds of writing, ways of writing, and ways of assessing writing.

This report has been designed to provide insight into the ways that student portfolios were supported or constrained by curriculum and instruction, and the implications of these findings both for raters' judgments in a large-scale context and for the benefit of large-scale portfolio assessment for students. We have shared our conversations with students and teachers, as well as their stories about their conversations with one another, and we hope that this reveals the value and careful consideration of talk. Outside the classroom, teachers and assessment experts need opportunities for analytic dialogue about curriculum and assessment, with close looks at one another's approaches, in order to develop understandings of the possibilities for alignment. In the classroom, the kinds of questions we asked students represent possibilities for instruction and assessment. Too often the voices of assessment experts, teachers, and children are separated—expressing themselves in distant contexts and rarely meeting in conversation. The lack of dialogue between them often ensures that voices will

not be heard and expectations will not be met. Thus, the purpose of this report is to bring these voices together in dialogue that will inform all concerned. Much as the children in our study were challenged to envision an audience for their writing, our report stresses the importance of students, teachers, and raters envisioning each other's positions and finding points of analytic congruence that will help young writers learn their craft.

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