NOT ONLY ASSESSMENT: TEACHERS TALK ABOUT WRITING PORTFOLIOS

Wendy Bishop and Gay Lynn Crossley

Experienced teachers often talk about writing portfolios and how they help contextualize assessment. Portfolios have been developed for high-school level assessment (Camp), and portfolios help college writing program administrators obtain more valid measures of the writing abilities of in-coming and exiting students than can possibly be obtained with multiple-choice or timed essay testing (Anson and Brown; Condon Hamp-Lyons; Elbow and Belanoff). But writing portfolios are useful beyond assessment.

In terms of our individual classrooms, portfolios "promote a richer and more sophisticated understanding of writing" (Elbow "Introduction" xiv). Portfolios also help balance the classroom focus to include process *and* product. Much of the growing literature on portfolio use in classrooms points to the way portfolios move students from the extrinsic rewards of grades toward the desirable intrinsic rewards of writing, including "some freedom to feel curiosity . . . to muster the long-range commitment that makes deep and lasting learning possible and with it the kind of deepening perception, steady concentration, critical thinking, and creative imagination that we hope our students will aspire to" (Lucase 3). Through this type of movement, portfolios radically change the writing classroom. Kathleen Blake Yancy observes:

> Writing portfolios within the classroom are thus paradoxical. On the one hand, they are quite simple: a mere pedagogical tool with assessment capability. On the other hand, writing portfolios promise to change significantly what goes on in writing classrooms—because of the messages they send, the authority they assign, the ways they motivate students, and the insights they challenge students to perceive and articulate. (105)

If portfolios challenge, motivate, change authority and send messages, they not only change the classroom and the writing student, they must also play a significant role in teachers' development.

GTA Teachers' Views

During the 1991-1992 academic year, as a Writing Program Administrator and GTA Program Assistant, we worked with a set of Graduate Teaching Assistants who were moving to portfolios. They had a range of teaching experience from two to nine years, and we consulted them once in the fall and again in the spring (for questionnaires, see Figures 1 and 2). Our writing program consists of 70 GTAs who teach 2600 first-year students; at this time, no faculty members teach first-year writing on a regular basis. Our *Teachers' Guide*—written by a first-year writing committee of rhetoric professors and GTAs—encourages teachers in this large program to move to portfolio evaluation as long as a mid-semester grade-in-progress is shared with first-year writing students.

Originally, we intended to study what happened when our program began to move from product grading to process grading, asking if it would cause problems for students, GTAs, or program administration. However as we read the first questionnaire responses, we found ourselves caught up in the changes individual teachers were undergoing. Their responses suggest to us that portfolio evaluation can dramatically change the ways teachers think about their place in the writing classroom community and the ways they view students and students' writing.

Equally, perceptual changes seemed to be translating into practical changes in these teachers' classrooms. Certainly we had expected some changes and resistance to change since

results of an earlier study had shown us that the change from paper-by-paper grading to portfolio evaluation could prove taxing or difficult for new teachers ([Author's name and title]). Moreover, Marjorie Roemer, Lucille Schultz, and Russel Durst found that portfolio assessment does not have to be taken into the classroom to initiate "sweeping changes" (as discovered during their pilot of exit portfolio assessment) (456). Roemer *et al* find that even switching from an exit exam to portfolio assessment "changes the teaching of writing," not just the evaluation of writing (466). They conclude that portfolio assessment offers us "a powerful teacher training and professional development too!" (467). Therefore, it was not surprising to us that the nine GTAs who completed both questionnaires say that portfolio grading has changed their writing classrooms, and eight feel that portfolio grading has made them rethink how they teach. Of particular interest to us, as we analyzed these teachers' reactions to and observations about writing portfolios, was the *degree* to which portfolios—and the development they initiate—has helped them move toward the emphasis on process our program advocates.[1] In the following pages, we offer a reading of these teachers' questionnaires as a preliminary look at the possibilities of portfolios for initiating teacher change.

From "Gatekeeper" to "Facilitator"

Before switching to portfolio grading, these GTAs saw themselves as "evaluator[s] of content," "task master[s]," editor[s]," and "gatekeeper[s]," roles that made doing their job as process teachers difficult and contradictory, especially when responding to student writing. While these teachers felt they should emphasize process by reading all student writing as a "draft," they found their roles as graders in conflict with their process-oriented responses.

One teacher writes, "I commented heavily [on student's writing], but since the comments came along with a finalized grade, it was hard for me to figure out what their function ought to be." With portfolio evaluation, this teacher notes a shift in his role and feels his comments become more purposeful:

> Portfolio grading hopefully allows me to act as a coach, a guy trying to help students make better papers and there-

fore, better grades. The goal and purpose of responding is much more specific since it is assumed that each paper will be revised.

The other teachers note a change in their roles as well, now comparing themselves to a "facilitator," "coach," "the student's ally, the advocate who can champion your cause." These changing roles influence the ways these teachers approach and evaluate student texts. One GTA writes:

> I associate 'grading' strongly with 'evaluating something that is finished.' That is, it's backward-looking; it passes judgment on what has been done. [With portfolios,] my daily role is more forward-looking, toward what is yet to be.

GTAs in our program are teaching two classes and enrolled as graduate students in two classes; they are extraordinarily busy individuals. An evaluation method that lets them look forward seems to us to be extremely useful.

As this teacher continues, we learn not only that he is a more appreciative reader of the potential in student writing but also that his expectations of student writing have changed:

> Since everything in a portfolio is in the process of becoming right up until the end of the term, my orientation has changed . . . . I focus more on content now. . . . I'm far less concerned with grammar and mechanics . . . because I expect everything to be revised anyway . . . Maybe that's the key—my expectations have changed.

Several of the teachers in this study note changing expectations of student writing. They pay more attention to what the student has to say or what the student is in the process of saying. Seven of the nine teachers even say that they are more open to students' ideas using the portfolio method.

In our writing program, we collect copies of student work for possible grade appeals and store them for six months in "theme-heaven." Reviewing these papers, we know that many teachers enter our program as "graders," current traditional teachers trained to annotate papers by way of handbook editing marks. So we view this shift in perspective as a welcome one.

These teachers don't lose their ability to pay attention to writing (texts), but we do find them—through portfolios—broadening their attention to consider writers (their processes and developing identities). The teacher who can see and understand dual roles—or even her movement from one role to another, say "gatekeeper" to "coach"—will be better prepared to deal with the complicated and normal teaching "contraries" in her work life (see Elbow "Embracing").

Shifting Authority

As GTAs begin seeing themselves as coaches and facilitators, authority in the classroom is redefined. Many of these teachers mentioned how portfolio grading changes the dynamics between student and teacher. One teacher writes, "[Portfolio grading] makes you get down off the podium, makes you create more of a balance with the students." Another teacher explains:

> I chose portfolio grading, in part, because it appeared to be an alternative to the unsatisfactory role of 'divine writing god' which standard grading so often imparts. Instead of functioning as one to whom students must appeal to gain wisdom, I can engage in dialogue. There is a great deal more parity in such discourse and, along with parity, come students who willingly take responsibility for what they learn and what they write.

Eight of the nine teachers in the survey noted this increased sense of responsibility on the students' parts. As teachers distance themselves from the role of "end-all source of knowledge," students are encouraged to claim responsibility over their texts, their subjects—over their learning.

The new roles teachers found for themselves allowed students to take on more active roles as readers and writers. If allowed, students *will* act, read, and talk like writers, as this teacher suggests:

> I think [portfolio grading] creates more of a dialogue in the classroom. You and the students are more on equal terms with portfolio grading. I think. . . . Students were really good at reading texts and discussing them . . . . It gave

> them a way of feeling confident about what they were doing as writers that I don't think they get in the traditional classroom.

Several teachers, then, believed students placed a greater value on response as students began to take themselves and each other more seriously.

From "Kids" to "People"

As students began claiming responsibility and independence, it seems that they weren't the only ones seeing themselves talking, acting, and thinking like writers for the first time. With portfolio evaluation (and the process self-analysis papers that often accompany students' portfolio work), the GTAs, as well, began to see their students as writers—or at least began to see them as more than just "kids."

> When [students] have to look over their writings and evaluate them and think about them and then talk to me about them, their writing means more to them. [They talk about] what they have done so far and how they feel about their writing, and it made me pay more attention to the fact that they were thinking these issues through . . . . I saw some of the best work I've seen come out of students. It's easier to see the thinking behind what they are doing. It changes your value system; you see them more as thinking, working people. It's easy to slip into thinking, "Oh, the kids . . . ." It [using portfolios] changes how you look at them. You [start to] value them.

And the cycle of teacher change can become even more dramatic. When teachers are careful readers of student texts, students can be transformed into knowledgeable writers with ideas to share:

> I learn a lot from them (students)—about popular culture, the south, fundamentalism, etc. I can be more open to ideas when I'm not holding in my mind how to critique the quality of ideas. They're really bright students.

As this teacher suggests, when teachers begin to redefine themselves and their students, when they listen to and learn from

students, they change their perceptions of student writing. When students are perceived of as bright and knowledgeable, they may also be respected as individuals with lives beyond the writing classroom:

> I always have been interested in treating students as people with outside lives—people whose identity didn't rest on being students in my class. Portfolio grading helped me to see that my past practices weren't allowing as much for those people's voices. Portfolio grading has allowed me to listen to the voices of my students more.

This changing perception of students and students' writing signals a change in the GTAs' attitudes toward instruction that we also noted in an earlier study of teacher change where an experienced teacher moved from seeing her students as irresponsible kids in a product-oriented classroom to responsible writers and peers in her newly instituted process-oriented classroom ([Author's name and publication).

In fact, according to Donald Murray, to institute a process pedagogy, you need "a teacher who will respect and respond to . . . students, not for what they have done, but for what they may do" ("Teaching" 17). While we understand that the pedagogical debate is more complicated these days than *process or product*, we do hope teachers in our program respect students not for what they *should* do, but for what they did do, not for who they might become but for who they are as writers. By considering the answers given by GTAs to our questionnaire, we found that switching to portfolio evaluation may prompt teachers to reconsider how they see themselves and their students. As these teachers moved to portfolio grading, they learned to re-examine their authority and name new roles for themselves. In doing this, they seem to have learned to respect their students. Respect for students is necessary for process instruction to work. For Murray, learning to respect students—and all the shifts in authority that it implies—takes acts of courage ("Our Students"). While portfolios don't make the transition any easier, perhaps they do make that need for courage more necessary at the same time that they support courageous thinking.

Changing Practices

It follows that as these GTAs begin to see their students as writers (to whatever degree), they become more concerned with what students are trying to do in their writing and how they are working toward those goals. According to the questionnaire responses, eight of nine agree that portfolios help them to teach revision. All feel that portfolios help them think of writing as work in progress. As one teacher explains:

> Portfolios allow students (and the teacher-facilitator) the opportunity to understand why writing should be emphasized as a process . . . . Writing becomes noticeable as the marker of thinking—as revisions progress, ideas become more refined and developed.

This emphasis on revision is apparent when these teachers talk about evaluation concerns and teaching practices. They find themselves evaluating the improvement in a student's efforts over the semester as well as the quality of individual texts. One teacher feels he is "less judgmental about the 'quality' of a student's writing" because drafts are now seen as "launching points." "I look at their writing skills development over the long-term," writes another teacher, "Instead of trying to get results in each assignment, I look at how they progress over the range of the semester." Similarly, another teacher finds that the focus on revision allowed for within portfolios has helped her acknowledge the strengths of student writing:

> At mid-term grading, I've seen what the students can do, so my evaluation is fairer, can emphasize what's there. I can stress the good points in their writing, not focus on the weak points . . . . With portfolios, I pay more attention to content. I enjoy the text more.

This focus on writers developing their writing plays out in more specific ways for many of these teachers, especially in their classrooms. One teacher describes how switching to portfolio evaluation has initiated several changes in her teaching, from assignment making to responding:

> Before I was having [students] write these papers that no one cared too much about, on topics that ranged from peculiar to dull to absurd to stimulating. Now, I feel students must create writing situations, understand themselves as writers. . . . I talk about the writing more than the future of the writing [in terms of publishing], and I talk about the student more than the audience of general readers she may meet . . . I am also demanding A LOT more writing. . . . I have certainly seen faster, more significant improvement with these classes.

We find that using portfolios can change the site of teaching—teachers may become facilitators, share authority, become more sensitive readers, begin to like students and student writing more. To the degree that portfolio evaluation encourages teachers to entertain such change, portfolios go beyond assessment and become a core support for progressive writing teacher education programs.

Resistance to Change

What we find in the GTAs we consulted, then, are dramatic attitudinal shifts. But certainly not all teachers were able to make changes without hesitations and problems, without experiencing personal resistance. Since our survey found that eight out of nine teachers feel using portfolios makes them rethink how they teach and since an equal number say portfolios make them focus on students' processes and focus on students themselves, it is no surprise that they sometimes register confusion or contradiction:

> It was great to ask, 'Which one [essay] do *you* feel like revising and working on?' But disheartening to hear, 'Oh, I don't care. Which do you think is better?' I think the assignments I gave were so specific that they ended up feeling constrained. They basically didn't care about the topic.

GTAs like this one found that they could not simply insert portfolios into an old curriculum; portfolios provoked them to rethink assignments and reconsider their evaluation practices.

The use of portfolios defers or changes discussions of grading; it does not eliminate grading in writing classrooms. In fact, portfolios may seem more time consuming, more subjective, and more problematic to a teacher who is just beginning to use them. New to portfolio evaluation, teachers often struggle with questions of student belief and involvement in writing:

> There is a lot more emphasis upon student responsibility, and I have had to establish some rather *objective* criteria to balance the extreme subjectivity that the method seems to bring to the course. The objective criteria include progress reports and self-imposed due dates.

While we believe that portfolios provide a more valid, context-based evaluation method, this doesn't mean that portfolios eliminate grading or evaluation considerations. Quite the reverse. When using portfolios, teachers are often called on to look more carefully and seriously at their curriculum and their grading criteria. And though portfolios allow us to respond to writing and learning processes, they never eliminate our responsibility to respond also to the written products. As in any teacher education program, a large portion of our training hours are devoted to issues of response, evaluation, and grading.

Grading—Objective or Subjective?

Not unexpectedly, our questionnaire produced an interesting split regarding the objectivity or subjectivity of grading written texts. Five of these GTAs agreed that portfolios made them state more clearly their expectations regarding good writing and four GTAs were undecided. Altogether, six GTAs disagreed (one strongly) that portfolios are more subjective than other methods of writing evaluation; often teachers found portfolio grading liberating. But several narrative responses (and a subsequent survey of new GTAs) show that some teachers *experience* evaluating portfolios as a more subjective, unfamiliar, unclear activity than responding to a single paper and affixing a grade. These teachers struggled with what seemed to be constantly shifting criteria:

> But, of course, PG is more subjective than grading was. I will make comments on rough drafts and final drafts, but

> when I grade I will be grading whole class performance. That is subjective—real hard to put a letter grade on. If students ask you to back up a grade all you can say is this is what I *see* you doing.

This sense of subjectivity can be exacerbated by the broadening from product to process *and* from product to person that takes place when teachers use portfolios. As one teacher discovers, "The text becomes the person." And portfolio evaluation may seem more subjective than paper-by-paper grading because teachers have not themselves been graded this way. Often, they have not even looked at a set of evaluated portfolios before they begin evaluating their own students in this manner. Finally, teachers who have themselves been graded paper-by-paper for years often believe in the infallible, objective nature of such grading.

Inevitably, as we have pointed out, a large amount of time in our teacher education classes is devoted to reviewing research and theory on written response, noting the variability of readings a group of teachers may give to similar papers, and discussing ways to set up classroom evaluation criteria and effective methods of teacher and peer response to writing. Unfortunately, GTAs who come to our program with previous training and classroom experience are exempted from this part of our training program and these discussions of grading variability. While they are not the only teachers to experience difficulties or to choose not to use portfolios, we suspect teachers who do not engage these issues will struggle longer with the objectivity-subjectivity problem raised by our questionnaires.

The Questionnaire Overall

Our original analysis of GTAs' responses, then, yielded a picture of teachers who were generally enthusiastic about their first portfolio classrooms. Their responses suggest the ways portfolios contribute to a teacher's introduction to process pedagogy. One teacher writes, "We're practicing what we preach—we are grading the process." And portfolio grading helped convince those resistant to the philosophy advocated in our writing program: "I'd have a hard time going back to grading the traditional, 'grade this paper' way. It'll change how I teach—it'll probably change how I even teach a literature course."[2]

All the teachers we surveyed felt they would continue using some method of portfolio grading but several—as we have noted—had identified important problems, finding they needed to offer students the freedom necessary to increase writers' motivation or to clarify their classroom evaluation criteria. In addition, these teachers had questions about portfolio use that may help to guide future researchers. They wanted to know if/how portfolio evalution produced a long-term effect on their students. They wanted more help shaping classroom practices like responding to drafts in progress and teaching revision. They wanted more information on the theory and research undergirding portfolio evaluation (see Table 1). And these teachers offered advice to other teachers using the method. Overall, they suggested reading the available literature, talking extensively to other teachers who use portfolios, looking at actual portfolios, and jumping in and trying portfolios (see Table 2).

Coda: New GTAs

Finally, because we were intrigued by what we learned by reading and categorizing these GTAs' responses, we couldn't stop asking teachers to tell us what they thought. During the summer of 1992, as we trained the next years' GTAs who were choosing between paper-by-paper or portfolio grading as they developed their first curriculum, we asked these new GTAs to explore their choices during a class freewrite, explaining why they were choosing or not choosing to use portfolios. In these freewritings, they struggled with issues similar to those we identified through our original questionnaires.

Overall, new GTAs who chose to remain with paper-by-paper grading did so because it felt safe, familiar, and under their control. They felt they had enough to do just becoming a writing teacher without taking on additional tasks, such as understanding a new philosophy of and method for evaluation. Several were afraid that portfolios would be terribly time consuming and/or diminish their classroom authority. Some responses demonstrated that new GTAs felt they would simply be deferring the moment of grading and had underdeveloped understandings of how thoroughly drafts are responded to throughout the semester in a process classroom *no matter how the final course grade is figured.*

GTAs who chose not to use portfolios also held strong beliefs about the students they had not yet met. Some felt students wouldn't put up with deferred grading or that they strongly desired to be ranked. Many of these teachers drew these beliefs from their own pasts as students. One said; "I know that [as a first-year student] I preferred to know exactly how I did on a paper."

Teachers who decided to use portfolio evaluation also often based their decision on past classroom experiences. Those who hated to be graded, or who had negative grading experiences in their own schooling, saw portfolio evaluation as an exciting alternative. Overall, the new GTAs who decided to use portfolios, like the teachers in our original survey, saw this method as being most supportive of the general philosophy of our writing program: they see portfolios as being liberating for students and for teachers (see Table 3). Finally, and perhaps most interesting, these new GTAs saw portfolios as a chance to be more clear in their grading since they believed using portfolios required them to examine, articulate, and share their evaluation criteria with their students: "Portfolios allow you to construct the grade with the student, including criteria that are in sync with the course." For teachers like this, portfolios help negotiate a balance between process and product, objectivity and subjectivity, teacher and student authority, and teacher goals and student goals.

It has long been our understanding that portfolios allowed students to reflect on their writing and grow into their roles as writers. In one classroom study, a teacher claims: "It was the process of reflection that enabled my students, too, to see beyond the printed page" (Weinbaum 214). We'd like to reverse that observation based on our discussion here. It is the process of reflection on the portfolio-based classroom that allows teachers to see beyond the printed page. In our experience, new *and* continuing GTAs who were using portfolios reconsidered themselves as readers, investigated their classroom authority, enlarged their practice—from making assignments to teaching revision—and came more fully to understand their philosophy of teaching.

Portfolio evaluation and grading foreground the many paradoxes and contraries of writing classrooms in useful ways, leading us to ask with one of the GTAs we studied "Why isn't this the preferred method for all TAs?" Our talk with teachers using portfolios highlights the way their own background, prep-

aration, beliefs, and fears may keep portfolio evaluation from being a preferred or successful classroom practice. Our job now remains to make GTAs' transition to portfolio evaluation and grading more secure, to offer teachers healthy encounters with portfolios in the classes they take as well as the classes they teach, and to work, always, to reduce their fears. We believe such efforts will lay the groundwork for important growth and change.

NOTES

[1]We see our program, in general, as process-oriented although we realize that orientation is not without problems. We advocate a student-centered, response workshop pedagogy (see Brooke) and emphasize writing to learn. To acknowledge and explore the social nature of composing, we have developed five or more teaching strands for each of our two semesters of required first year writing. An individual GTA may choose a Writing Across the Disciplines strand, a Reader-Response Strand, a Themed strand (writing about authority, etc.), a Personal Discovery strand, a Media strand, and so on. While we emphasize process, we showcase products—encouraging the production of class books, student work shared in portfolios, and so on.

Many teachers chose to continue with paper-by-paper grading; all teachers teach revision and editing and offer an introduction to the library and CLAST preparation (a junior level, state-wide proficiency exam that emphasizes grammar and requires skills in the traditional timed essay format). Since many of our Ph.D. level GTAs arrive in our program with two to nine years of previous, often current-traditional, writing experience, our *Teachers' Guide* can appear deceptively process oriented as we try to broaden teachers' repertoires to include student-centered classroom techniques: small group work, one-to-one conferencing, co-authoring, invention, etc. Our pre-service and in-service classes and workshops include readings that critique, support and contextualize process instruction (texts by Bizzell, Faigley, Bartholomae, Elbow, Moffet among many others).

[2]Again, though we do understand the problems GTAs will encounter in adhering to a single writing program philosophy, we have the responsibility of developing a definable curriculum that provides the most support and direction for new teachers and their students based on the context of our university and our understanding of composition theory and practice. Through our use of strands, we try to allow for natural and necessary differences in instruction. See Welch for a story of a program that, according to Welch, conflated teacher-education with teacher-conversion.

WORKS CITED

Anson, Chris and Robert L. Brown, Jr. "Large-Scale Portfolio Assessment Ideological Sensitivity and Institutional Change." In Belanoff and Dickson. 248-269.

Belanoff, Pat, and Marcia Dickson, eds. *Portfolios: Process and Product.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, Boynton/Cook, 1991.
[Author's name and title]
[Author's name and title]}
Brooke, Robert. "Modeling a Writer's Identity: Reading and Imitation in the Writing Classroom," *College Composition and Communication* (Feb. 1988) 23-41.
____. *Writing and Sense of Self: Identity Negotiation in Writing Workshops.* Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1991.
Burnham, Christopher. "Portfolio Evaluation: Room to Breathe and Grow." *Training the New Teacher of Composition.* Ed. Charles Bridges. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1986. 125-39.
Camp, Roberta. "The Writing Folder in Post-Secondary Assessment." *Directions and Misdirections in English Education.* Ed. Peter J.A. Evans. Ottawa, Canada: Canadian Council of Teachers of English, 1985.
Camp, Roberta and Denise Levine "Portfolio Evolving: Background and Variations in Sixth-Through Twelfth-Grade Classrooms." In Belanoff and Dickson. 194-205.
Condon, William and Liz Hamp-Lyons. "Introducing a Portfolio-based Writing Assessment: Progress Through Problems." In Belanoff and Dickson. 231-247.
Elbow, Peter. "Embracing Contraries in the Teaching Process." In *Embracing Contraries: Explorations in Learning and Teaching.* NY: Oxford UP, 1986.
____. "Forward." In Belanoff and Dickson. ix-xv. "Assessment: Ideological Sensitivity and Institutional Change." In Belanoff and Dickson. 248-269.
Lucas, Catharine. "Introduction: Writing Portfolios—Changes and Challenges." In Yancey. 1-11.
Murray, Donald. "Our Students Will Write—If We Let Them." *Learning by Teaching: Selected Articles on Writing and Teaching.* Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Heinemann, 1982. 146-151.
____. "Teaching Writing as a Process Not Product." In *Learning by Teaching.* 14-17.
Roemer, Marjorie, Lucille M. Schultz, and Russel K. Durst. "Portfolios and the Process of Change." *College Composition and Communication* 42 (December 1991): 455-469.
Weinbaum, Kerry. "Portfolios as a Vehicle for Student Empowerment and Teacher Change." In Belanoff and Dickson. 206-214.
Welch, Nancy. "Resisting the Faith: Conversion, Resistance, and the Training of Teachers." *College English 55.4* (April 1993): 387-401.
Yancy, Kathleen Blake "Portfolios in the Writing Classroom: A Final Reflection." In Yancey. 102-116.
Yancy, Kathleen Blake, ed. *Portfolios in the Writing Classroom: An Introduction.* Carbondale, IL: NCTE, 1992.

Figure 1: First Questionnaire

Dear

We'd like to ask for your help as we try to learn more about portfolio grading. Could you complete the following questionnaire? You can do this by sitting down and writing answers or by making an appointment with either of us to talk through your responses. Then, in the spring semester, we'd like to conduct a follow up survey. Thanks for your help.

Directions: On this sheet, please supply answers to questions 1-6c. Then, you'll need to use additional paper and share your thoughts regarding question 7-18.

1. How long have you been teaching first-year-writing?
2. How long have you been using some form of portfolio grading?
3. How did you arrive at your method of portfolio grading?
   (a) trial and error (b) reading in journals (c) training class (d) with the help of another teacher (e) FSU teacher's guide (f) other;
4. If you started by using the teacher's guide discussion, how much modification have you done?
   (a) none (b) a little (c) a lot
5. Rank yourself on a scale of 1-10 (10 high) as to your confidence with your current portfolio grading method;
6. List at least three immediate/pressing/current questions you have about portfolio grading:

For the next set of questions, please write the fullest possible answers:

7. Before using portfolios, how did you grade?
8. What role as a teacher did you take with that previous grading method? (Some examples: coach, editor, general reader, etc.)
9. What role as a teacher does portfolio grading allow you to take on?
10. With portfolios, is there a difference between your "daily" role and your "grading" role?
    (a) If so, can you describe it? (b) If so, did you expect this? (c) If so, how have you and/or your students adjusted to these changing roles?
11. Does using portfolios change the way you think about student texts? And talk about your expectations of them in the classroom? If so, please explain.
12. Why did you choose to use portfolios?
13. What as you see it are the benefits and/or drawbacks of that choice?
14. What challenges, if any, do you face as a teacher using portfolios?
15. Can you imagine any particular training sequence that would have better prepared you for dealing with or avoiding those challenges?
16. When you use portfolios, just exactly what are you evaluating?
17. Exactly how do you grade portfolios?
18. What advice would you give to the teacher considering using portfolio grading?

Figure 2: Second Questionnaire*

[*Note, the questions for the second questionnaire were mainly adaptations of assertions made by this same set of GTAs as they responded to our first questionnaire. This questionnaire was designed as a poll, intended to gauge whether teachers agreed or disagreed with claims made by peers.]

As you know, we're still trying to understand how teachers use portfolios in the classroom. Please help us by completing both sides of this questionnaire. We'd like your forms back as you finish the semester; since your final grading might influence your thinking about using portfolios, why don't you return this to us as you turn in your grades. As always, thanks.

Name: Date:

There are no right answers to the following questions; please circle the answer that best indicates your feelings at this time: Strongly Agree; Agree; Undecided; Disagree; Strongly Disagree.

1. Portfolios have not change my writing classroom.
2. Portfolios have made me rethink how I teach.
3. Using portfolios allows me to like my students' writing.
4. Using portfolios has changed the way I view my students as writers.
5. Portfolios allow me to emphasize readers and audiences.
6. Using portfolios, I focus more on students' process of writing than on their final products.
7. I'm reading student work like a general reader rather than as a judge or authoritative teacher.
8. Portfolios help me to teach revision and help students make effective changes in their texts.
9. Portfolio grading is more subjective than other methods of writing evaluation and grading.
10. Using portfolios, I focus more on the student than on the text.
11. Portfolios help me think of writing as work in progress.
12. With portfolios, I pay more attention to students as people.
13. Using portfolios, I now focus on helping students determine and accomplish their own purposes and intentions.
14. My students do not appear to write better because of my movement to portfolio evaluation.
15. I feel better about evaluating writing using this method.
16. Portfolios make me state more clearly my expectations regarding good writing.
17. After this semester, I will not use portfolio evaluation again.
18. I'm more open to student ideas using this method.
19. Using portfolios, students don't see my response as significantly different from a peer response.
20. With portfolios, I can not help students improve their basic grammatical and usage skills.
21. Portfolios allow most students to become more responsible for their writing and more independent as writers.
22. Portfolios have helped me to be more consistent as a teacher and evaluator.

Please provide specific responses to the questions on the reverse of this page; feel free to expand on your remarks on additional sheets of paper.

1. What insights has portfolio evaluation given you into your teaching practices?
2. Has portfolio evaluation influenced the way you talk to students about their work in your class? If so, how?
3. What do your students think/tell you about portfolio evaluation?
4. In what ways has portfolio evaluation influenced the criteria of writing you emphasize in the classroom?
5. In what ways, if any, has portfolio evaluation led you to re-envision the way you teach writing?

Table 1: 1991-1992 Questionnaire—Teachers' Questions About Portfolio Grading

QUESTION: List the three immediate/pressing/current questions you have about portfolio grading.

EFFECTS

1. What if any lasting benefit accrues for the student from the portfolio experience?
2. Do students who accumulate a portfolio of work continue to use revision skills acquired in writing [these] assignments throughout their academic careers?
3. Are my students really improving as writers?
4. Is it helping to facilitate the learning of writing?

PRACTICE

1. How to indicate the student's level on the non-letter-graded drafts?
2. How to organize the assignments and rewrites?
3. What am I actually grading? (progress? revision? process? product?)
4. How to handle portfolio grading when I have three sections of 20-25 students each?
5. Do I present enough evidence of C—B—A— portfolios?
6. How to keep the emphasis on revision when a student doesn't write until it's "perfect" in his or her head?
7. How to handle last minute disagreements about quality of work?
8. How to encourage less-motivated students to try new things and to stick with the revision process?
9. Should I give fewer grades?
10. Should I give students more time to work on revisions?
11. Should I grade all the work included or choose a few pieces?

THEORY

1. Why isn't this the preferred method for all TAs?
2. Is delayed grade feedback a problem for students?
3. Is what I am doing portfolio grading?
4. Is portfolio grading actually more work?
5. Would immediate feed-back on assignments help student work?
6. Does withholding grades really encourage more genuine communication?
7. Would grading each paper serve as a motivation for most students?
8. How much weight should be given to product, and how much to process?

N = 10 teachers; some answered with 0,1,2,3 questions.

Table 2: 1991-1992 Questionnaire—Sampler of Teachers' Advice to New Teachers Considering Portfolio Grading

LEARN FROM OTHERS

::Review examples of C, B, A portfolios.

::Read a lot of articles on it. Talk to eveyone else who does it. Assess the way you grade and decide what YOU want out of the experience.

::How much portfolio grading you do depends on seeing teachers modeling it.

LEARN FROM EXPERIENCE

::Just do it (like the Nike ads).

::You might try using portfolios in one class and another system in another section of the same class, for comparison.

PRACTICE

::Be careful to make global comments if you expect global revisions.

::Don't procrastinate on those midterm grades! The students need some sense of where they stand and plenty of time for revising during the second half of the semester.

:Conference often and give yourself a lot of time to grade.

::Don't worry about doing a lot of responding to the revisions, just focus on the drafts in progress that are handed in.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY

::Emphasize to students that the portfolio system gives them the opportunity to improve their grades, but that the responsibility is on them to take advantage of it. They really get out what they put in.

TEACHER RESPONSIBILITY

::Be real clear about what good writing is.

::Figure out what you want to accomplish and how portfolios may help you accomplish it.

::Be prepared to make mistakes, respond to changing needs, give students an active role in determining what *they* need to learn.

N=9

Table 3: Summary of Freewriting Responses with Selected, Illustrative Quotes

A. THE DECISION NOT TO USE PORTFOLIO GRADING:*

1. *Teachers have not experienced this method, are worried about teaching in general, and perceive paper-by-paper grading as offering needed structure or as being easier for the teacher.*

- "I will go with the safe, paper-by-paper grading. I've done it before and I know I can handle it . . . right now I'm just being selfish and thinking of myself and what *I'm* comfortable with."
- "[With paper by paper grading] *both* teacher and student know where each stands—i.e. no surprises at mid-semester when a student says 'But I thought I was doing A work.'"
- "I'm not sure I feel comfortable enough, especially my first semester of teaching, with portfolio grading . . . . It seems more structured to grade each paper and I guess that's what I feel I need for the first semester."
- "I'm slightly intimidated by portfolios. I'd rather become adjusted as a teacher before I start a portfolio system."

2. *Portfolio grading seems like more work or too much work.*

- "I think that portfolios would be a big chunk of work that I would find extremely intimidating—I prefer to do things "along and along."
- "I'm afraid I'd be swamped at the end of the course with enormous portfolios to grade."

3. *Giving up paper-by-paper grading means giving up power.*

- "I'm sorta excited about being a position of authority, of handing out grades—even though I'll always agonize a little over each one."
- "Grading each paper also helps keep *me* current."

4. *Teachers feel they wouldn't have benefited from portfolio grading and/or students can't dealwith deferred grading.*

- "I remember being a freshman and worrying all the time about what my GPA might be."
- "They don't like it. I know that we don't have to do exactly what the student wants, or likes, but if they've got such a strong desire to be ranked, maybe I'll give it to them."

B. THE DECISION TO USE PORTFOLIO EVALUATION:

1. *Teacher has negative feelings about grading.*

- "I hate grades."
- "I think all grading has an element of absurdity," but I feel the element "reduced" by using portfolios.

2. *Grading interferes; portfolio evaluation enhances.*

- "Grades can block communication."
- "What if a student experiments, maybe for the first time, and receives a poor grade?"
- "When I ask a student to do something, I want her to think of the *task at hand*, not the grade that it will produce."
- "I'm teaching *process*—I want to see the process in action; minimizing performance on a *series* of drafts to a single letter on a single (final) paper seems to tell the student that *product* is more important than *process*."

3. *Portfolios can change attitudes and classroom power structure.*

- "I think students feel less anxiety when they are not always waiting for a grade."
- "I would like to move away from the authoritarian action of blessing or cursing a paper with a letter [grade]."

4. *Portfolios require/allow for clarification of grading criteria.*

- "I want to think about how to grade a little more before I actually have to—that is, I want time to figure out my own standards before imposing them on others.
- "Portfolios allow you to construct the grade with the student including criteria that are in sync with the course."

N = 16 *Drawn from freewriting responses to the question: "Will you choose to use portfolio evaluation? Why or why not?" completed by 16 graduate students in a seminar "Teaching Writing in College": 1 student had previously taught junior high school English; 1 student had previously taught first-year college writing; 14 students had never taught; 13 students were expecting to teach first-year college writing within the next four weeks.

NOTES

[1]We see our program, in general, as process-oriented although we realize that orientation is not without problems. We advocate a student-centered, response workshop pedagogy (see Brooke) and emphasize writing to learn. To acknowledge and explore the social nature of composing, we have developed five or more teaching strands for each of our two semesters of required first year writing. An individual GTA may choose a Writing Across the Disciplines strand, a Reader-Response Strand, a Themed strand (writing about authority, etc.), a Personal Discovery strand, a Media strand, and so on. While we emphasize process, we showcase products—encouraging the production of class books, student work shared in portfolios, and so on.

Many teachers chose to continue with paper-by-paper grading; all teachers teach revision and editing and offer an introduction to the library and CLAST preparation (a junior level, state-wide proficiency exam that emphasizes grammar and requires skills in the traditional timed essay format). Since many of our Ph.D. level GTAs arrive in our program with two to nine years of previous, often current-traditional, writing experience, our *Teacher's Guide* can appear deceptively process oriented as we try to broaden teachers' repertoires to include student-centered classroom techniques; small group work, one-to-one conferencing, co-authoring, invention, etc. Our pre-service and in-service classes and workshops include readings that critique, support and contextualize process instruction (texts by Bizzell, Faigley, Bartholomae, Elbow, Moffet among many others).

[2]Again, though we do not understand the problems GTAs will encounter in adhering to a single writing program philosophy, we have the responsibility of developing a definable curriculum that provides the most support and direction for new teachers and their students based on the context of our university and our understanding of composition theory and practice. Through our use of strands, we try to allow for natural and necessary differences in instruction. See Welch for a story of a program that, according to Welch, conflated teacher-education with teacher-conversion.

WORKS CITED

Anson, Chris and Robert L. Brown, Jr. "Large-Scale Portfolio Assessment: Ideological Sensitivity and Institutional Change." In Belanoff and Dickson. 248-269.

Belanoff, Pat, and Marcia Dickson, ed. *Portfolios: Process and Product.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, Boynton/Cook, 1991.
[Author's name and title]
[Author's name and title]
Brooke, Robert. "Modeling a Writer's Identity: Reading and Imitation in the Writing Classroom," *College Composition and Communication* (Feb. 1988): 23-41.
____. *Writing and Sense of Self: Identity Negotiation in Writing Workshops.* Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1991.
Burnham, Christopher. "Portfolio Evaluation: Room to Breathe and Grow." *Training the New Teacher of Composition.* Ed. Charles Bridges. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1986. 125-39.
Camp, Roberta. "The Writing Folder in Post-Secondary Assessment." *Directions and Misdirections in English Education.* Ed. Peter J.A. Evans. Ottawa, Canada: Canadian Council of Teachers of English, 1985.
Camp, Roberta and Denise Levine "Portfolios Evolving: Background and Variations in Sixth-Through Twelfth-Grade Classrooms." In Belanoff and Dickson. 194-205.
Condon, William and Liz Hamp-Lyons. "Introducing a Portfolio-based Writing Assessment: Progress Through Problems. In Belanoff and Dickson. 231-247.
Elbow, Peter. "Embracing Contraries in the Teaching Process." In *Embracing Contraries: Explorations in Learning and Teaching.* NY: Oxford UP, 1986.
____. "Forward." In Belanoff and Dickson. ix-xv. Assessment: Ideological Sensitivity and Institutional Change." In Belanoff and Dickson. 248-269.
Lucas, Catharine. "Introduction: Writing Portfolios—Changes and Challenges." In Yancey. 1-11.
Murray, Donald. "Our Students Will Write—If We Let Them." *Learning by Teaching: Selected Articles on Writing and Teaching.* Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Heinemann, 1982. 146-151.
____. "Teaching Writing as a Process Not Product." In Learning by Teaching. 14-17.
Roemer, Marjorie, Lucille M. Schultz, and Russel K. Durst. "Portfolios and the Process of Change." *College Composition and Communication* 42 (December 1991): 455-469.
Weinbaum, Kerry. "Portfolios as a Vehicle for Student Empowerment and Teacher Change." In Belanoff and Dickson. 206-214.
Welch, Nancy. "Resisting the Faith: Conversion, Resistance, and the Training of Teachers." *College English* 55.4 (April 1993): 387-401.
Yancy, Kathleen Blake. "Portfolios in the Writing Classroom: A Final Reflection." In Yancey. 102-116.
Yancy, Kathleen Blake, ed. *Portfolios in the Writing Classroom: An Introduction.* Carbondale, IL: NCTE, 1992.