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# Rethinking Writing in the Classroom: Planning for the MEAP and Proficiency Tests

Ellen H. Brinkley

When an elementary principal called a couple of years ago to ask about the new statewide writing assessments, I described the plan for the Writing MEAP and waited for his response. He seemed very pleasantly surprised and said, "Well . . . gee . . . our students should do very well. They're already doing in their classrooms all the things you described." Not all principals are so enthusiastic about the new writing assessments, but all are surely concerned that their students do well.

What can teachers do so that their student writers will do well on the new statewide writing assessments? The short answer might be to keep doing what you're already doing, to follow best practice for the teaching of writing, i.e., writing every day in many content areas, conducting classroom writing workshops, forming writing response groups, and more. This article expands on the short answer and offers suggestions to help teachers consider more fully ways to rethink writing in the classroom and to plan for the Writing MEAP and Proficiency Tests.

## ***1. Think about Learning, Assessment, and Writing.***

During the last twenty years we've changed some of our thinking about teaching and learn-

ing, and we've changed some of our thinking about tests and assessment. We once thought of learners as passive recipients of knowledge that could be "transmitted" from teacher to student. Today we think of learning as an active process that happens only when learners "construct" knowledge by interacting with information and ideas encountered. Just as we think that learning should be active, we think assessment should be active as well. In the real world there is seldom an occasion to demonstrate what we know and can do simply by identifying somebody else's right answers, as happens on multiple-choice tests. In the real world we demonstrate what we know and can do by actively articulating knowledge and ideas. And it's not enough just to be able to articulate someone else's knowledge. In today's world we ask learners to think critically and creatively to use what they know to make new meaning.

Writing is the key to new forms of assessment featuring a demonstration or "performance" of what one knows and can do. Writing is especially important to large-scale performance assessment—since writing provides proof of students' ability to think and to use language to generate and communicate knowledge. Those who designed the proficiency tests in mathematics, read-

ing, and science decided they too wanted to include writing. Not that they wanted to test students' writing skill, but they wanted to use writing as a way to judge more accurately what students know and can do within their content areas.

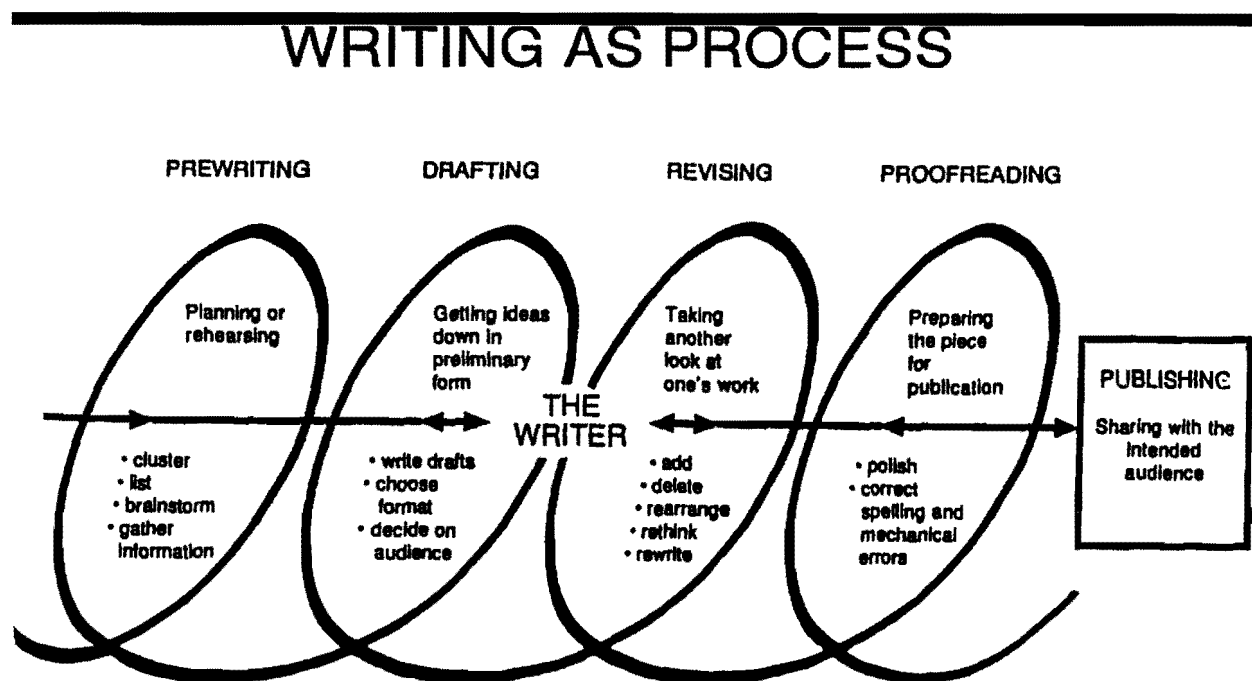
## 2. Understand the Research Base for Writing Assessment.

Michigan's new writing assessments are grounded in over twenty years of research (Diederich, 1974; Hillocks, 1986). Researchers have focused little attention on routine writing tasks, e.g., jotting a note to a co-worker or writing a grocery list. Instead, they have worked with both student and professional writers to study how they compose meaning and produce their best writing (Emig, 1971; Perl, 1980; Flower and Hayes, 1981). What research shows is that few writers follow the model many of us were taught—generate a thesis statement, construct a formal outline, then write five paragraphs. Many, if not most writers begin with a variety of possibilities, talk ideas over with a colleague, and allow the writing to lead them to their central focus and to their best support and development. As thoughts

emerge and are shaped, writers refine ideas and the language to express them. Frequently they try out early drafts on listeners and benefit from reading excerpts aloud, knowing that the ear can often hear what the eye may have missed. Eventually, writers revise, edit, and “publish” their writing.

Composition research is reflected in official state documents about writing, upon which Michigan's writing assessments are based—the Michigan Core Curriculum Outcomes (1991) and the Michigan Essential Goals and Objectives for Writing (1985). In 1993 the Michigan Council of Teachers of English used the state documents to begin its contractual work with the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) to develop the writing curricular framework and high school proficiency test assessment plan. (*LAJM* readers who haven't read the State Board of Education approved Assessment Frameworks may want to request this document from their building principals or from the MEAP Office (517) 373-8393. The original state documents were refined and extended to reflect writing research and best practice. Writing is defined as a recursive process of thinking and composing meaning, as depicted in Figure 1 from the Writing Framework:

FIGURE 1



Prepared for the Michigan Proficiency Examination Framework for Writing by the Michigan Council of Teachers of English (1993)

Another graphic (Figure 2) was created to highlight writing as a process of (1) reflecting and

exploring ideas and feelings, (2) creating knowledge and meaning, (3) communicating ideas, and (4) validating learning:

FIGURE 2

<b>Writing:</b> Reflecting and Exploring Ideas and Feelings Creating Knowledge and Meaning Communicating Ideas Validating Learning				
<b>WRITER'S PRIMARY PURPOSE →</b>	<b>EXPRESSIVE</b>	<b>INFORMATIVE</b>	<b>PERSUASIVE</b>	<b>IMAGINATIVE</b>
<b>A R A N G E O F P O S S I B I L I T I E S</b>				
<b>Audience</b>	<i>self/trusted others</i>	<i>others in a specific situation</i>	<i>self and targeted others</i>	<i>others/self</i>
<b>Text Features</b>	<i>informal, often narrative...</i>	<i>factual, explicit...</i>	<i>argumentative, factual, rhetorical, strategic...</i>	<i>poetic, fictional metaphorical...</i>
<b>Sample Formats</b>	<i>journal entry, prediction, reminiscence, learning log, observation, prereading, reflection on writing/learning, accessing prior knowledge, personal reactions..</i>	<i>letter, memo, report, essay, news article, lab report, math story problem, chart, time line, survey, progress report, computer program, fact sheet, pamphlet, instruction manual...</i>	<i>editorial, essay, case study, campaign pamphlet, list of possible solutions or arguments, pro's and con's, problem solving matrix, letter to editor, debate, proposal, dialogue...</i>	<i>poem, play, story, dramatic monologue, quick write, role play, simulation, word play, fictional biography, TV scenario or script, news program, song lyrics, advertisement, cartoon...</i>
<b>Reader's Purpose</b>	<i>understand, identify with writer...</i>	<i>gain information, examine facts/ideas...</i>	<i>reconsider ideas, understand, decide...</i>	<i>enjoy, vicarious experience...</i>

Prepared for the Michigan Proficiency Examination Framework for Writing by the Michigan Council of Teachers of English (1993)

Experienced writers know that writing is not just a process, however, but that it usually leads to a written product as well. The Figure 2 graphic can help teachers, students, and parents understand the “range of possibilities” writers have to communicate their meaning effectively for a variety of purposes. Although researchers and theorists argue about labels, most agree that writers use a variety of formats to express, to inform, to persuade, and to imagine.

### 3. Become Familiar with the Writing Assessments.

Writing teachers notice that the MEAP (Michigan Educational Assessment Program) writing assessment and the Writing portion of the Communication Arts Proficiency Test honor writing as both process and as product. That is, time is provided for the recursive process—for the thinking/writing and rethinking/rewriting that writers need to produce a thoughtful, polished piece. Time is provided for exploring ideas with others and—for fifth and eighth graders—for sharing works in progress. (See Figure 3).

FIGURE 3

Michigan's MEAP Writing Assessments for Grades 5 and 8
<p><b>Day 1 - PREWRITING AND DRAFTING (45 minutes)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Getting started. Students are given time to think about a provided topic.</li><li>• Reading/viewing materials (8th grade only). Students read and view materials relating to the topic.</li><li>• Peer discussion. In small groups, students discuss questions that help them explore and clarify ideas about the topic.</li><li>• Listening and sharing. Students share ideas from peer discussion with large group.</li><li>• Prewriting and drafting. Students begin drafting a response to the writing prompt.</li></ul> <p><b>Day 2 - DRAFTING AND REVISING (45 minutes)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of writing.</li><li>• Drafting and revising. Students work on the development, focus, and organization of their pieces.</li><li>• Peer response. Students confer with peer partners from Day 1.</li></ul> <p><b>Day 3 - REVISING AND POLISHING (45 minutes)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of writing. Teacher reads aloud checklists of items to consider in revising and polishing final piece.</li><li>• Final revision and polishing.</li></ul>

Eleventh graders are asked to produce more than one piece of writing—one a polished piece written over time and two short pieces written under tight time constraints. (See Figure 4).

Although students taking the new assessments won't be free to decide their topic or specific writing tasks, they'll have a great deal of freedom in deciding how best to carry out the specific task. For example, fifth graders might be asked to write about the topic of "change":

*Things change in our lives. It might be someone's looks that change, how you change as you get older, or how people change their minds. Write about a change.*

*(MDE Sample Assessment)*

Unlike several other states' writing tests, Michigan's writing assessments do not specify that the writing must be done in a particular genre. Once student writers understand their specific task, they are immediately prompted in their test booklet to consider a variety of approaches:

*You might, for example, do one of the following:*

- tell about a time when you changed classes or teachers
- OR  describe how you have changed from when you were younger
- OR  show how someone can change his or her mind
- OR  explain how changes in the weather make you feel different
- OR  write about the topic in another way.

*You may use examples from real life, from what you read or watch, or from your imagination. Keep in mind that your writing will be read by adults.*

*(MDE Sample Assessment)*

Given Michigan's richly diverse student population, students across the state need several

FIGURE 4

<b>Michigan's High School Communication Arts Proficiency Test Part 1 - Writing</b>
<p><b><u>Portfolio Pieces</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students select two pieces of their own writing that best demonstrate their writing proficiency.</li><li>• One piece must be from a class other than English/Language Arts.</li><li>• These pieces become part of the student's assessment but are not scored.</li></ul>
<p><b><u>Part 1 - Reporting and Reflecting (30 minutes)</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students write in response to a prompt which asks them to focus on their portfolio pieces and/or their own writing processes.</li><li>• This piece is composed quickly and scored as single-draft writing.</li></ul>
<p><b><u>Part 2 - Composing and Communicating Meaning: Reading/Viewing/Talking Task (40 minutes)</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students read/view brief items focused on a topic.</li><li>• Students write in response to a prompt which asks them to generate and focus ideas on the topic.</li><li>• This piece is a quickly-composed exploratory piece of writing and is scored as single-draft writing.</li><li>• Students are given a set of questions to help them start small group discussions to focus/clarify ideas.</li><li>• Students come together as a large group to share ideas.</li></ul>
<p><b><u>Part 3 - Composing and Communicating Meaning: Extended Writing Task (110 minutes)</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students compose an extended piece of writing in response to a prompt that is linked to the topic from the previous day's activities.</li><li>• Students are encouraged to consider a variety of approaches to the writing task.</li><li>• Students are encouraged to revise and edit this piece, which is scored as a polished piece of writing.</li></ul>

options to be able to demonstrate their writing skill successfully. Students can use factual information, their own experience, or even ideas from their imagination. They can write a letter, an essay, or possibly even a poem. Many choices are left to students themselves as they decide how best to handle the assessment situation.

#### **4. Rethink the Teaching of Writing.**

English language arts teachers can begin to rethink the teaching of writing by considering how closely their current practices match what is generally considered best practice. Teachers who follow the best practice suggestions such as those in Zemelman, Daniel and Hyde's *Best Practice: New Standards for Teaching and Learning in*

*America's Schools* will be simultaneously preparing their students for Michigan's new writing assessments:

Although the new writing assessments are consistent with recommended classroom experience, that doesn't mean there is a perfect match between what happens in classroom writing workshop sessions and what happens as students take the new writing assessments. In real classroom conditions, for example, writing a thoughtful polished piece often takes considerably longer than three 45-minute periods or one 110-minute writing session. The tests do, however, reflect best classroom practice to the extent that is possible within the reality of standardized test conditions.

Often, teachers who become familiar with the writing assessments begin to look more closely at their teaching of writing. The following self-evaluation (Figure 5) for teachers provides a starting point for objectively studying what actually happens in classrooms.

The self-test highlights the value of writing and the fact that it needs to be foregrounded in English language arts classes, not simply included as a supplement to reading or literature. The self-test also stresses the use of writing for thinking and learning in all content areas. Groups of teachers might use the self-test to generate discussion and to consider how they might want to reshape their writing program.

### **5. Provide Time for Writing and Opportunities to Talk and Write about Writing.**

The Michigan Essential Goals and Objectives for Writing (1985) clearly specifies the need for daily writing: "Students should write each day beginning in kindergarten and continuing throughout all levels" (5). There is no substitute for actual writing time in the classroom, where student writers can learn from experience to write and rewrite.

Student writers also need to learn to talk about writing. Just as basketball or tennis players can usually talk at length about the details of their game, so also writers need to understand and be able to articulate their own experiences as

FIGURE 5

<b>Writing Self-Evaluation for Teachers</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What did my students write in class during the past week? (Copying doesn't count, filling in the blanks doesn't count, spelling/vocabulary tests don't count . . . think instead of writing as thinking and as composing thoughts.)</li><li>• What opportunities did my students have during the past week to share their writing with their classmates or another real audience?</li><li>• What of my own writing did I share with my students during the past week? What writing-related story from my own experience did I share with my students during the past week?</li><li>• How many minutes would I estimate that my students spent last week actually composing and expressing their own thoughts in writing?</li><li>• To what extent are my students aware of real writing processes--the prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing that experienced writers work through before "publishing" a piece of writing? To what extent do they have the opportunity to work through similar thinking/writing processes?</li><li>• To what extent have I used writing as a way of learning? As a pre-discussion strategy? As a pre-reading strategy? As a post-discussion or reading strategy?</li><li>• To what extent am I aware of my students' individual writing strengths and weaknesses? To what extent could I describe their writing habits, their favorite topics, their favorite genres?</li><li>• What evidence would a visitor to my classroom and to our school see that would show that I value writing? Are students' writings displayed prominently? Do posters, quotations, etc., highlight writing?</li></ul>	

writers. Talk supports writing. During classroom writing workshop sessions, teachers can conduct writing conferences with individual student writers, nudging them to (1) talk about writing possibilities before they begin, (2) read aloud from works in progress, (3) explore revision possibilities, and (4) make editing corrections. As students begin to anticipate the questioning nudges their teachers offer in writing conferences, young writers learn to conduct writing conferences with their peers, acting as a helpful real audience. They work in small writing response groups—listening to pieces others read aloud, reading their own work in progress, and responding to writers' questions. For teachers who work with four to six classes of students a day, a school-wide writing center can provide the time and place for the additional attention some student writers want and need.

Occasionally throughout the writing process students can be asked to write brief memos or journal entries about how their writing is going. Reflective prompts can help students recall what

they have learned as writers during the writing of a particular piece. (See Figure 6).

Students who learn writing in such an atmosphere will be simultaneously preparing for the new Michigan writing assessments, since during the assessments, students will work briefly with a small group of peers early in the writing process, using talk to support their writing. At the eleventh grade level, students will also be asked to be explicitly articulate about their writing, responding in writing to a prompt such as:

*Look over the two pieces of your writing that you have in front of you. Identify ideas or words that you think work well in your pieces of writing and explain why they do.*

*(MDE Sample Assessment)*

Students who have considerable experience with writing conferences and writing response groups will find such testing tasks a natural extension of their classroom experiences.

FIGURE 6

<b>Questions to Encourage Reflection about Writing</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did you go about writing this piece?</li> <li>• How did you choose your topic?</li> <li>• What problems did you encounter as you were writing?</li> <li>• What did you learn as you wrote this piece?</li> <li>• What part was easy to write? What part was difficult?</li> <li>• What surprised you as you wrote?</li> <li>• How does this piece compare with other pieces you've written this year?</li> <li>• What makes this piece one of your best?</li> <li>• Are there places in the piece that you think are especially strong? Where are they? Why are they strong?</li> <li>• What makes a piece of writing really good?</li> <li>• Of all the authors you've read, which ones write in a way you especially like? What makes you especially like their writing?</li> <li>• What might make your writing even better?</li> <li>• How else might you have approached this topic?</li> <li>• How do you feel about this piece? Is there anything that disturbs you, that seems wrong?</li> <li>• How might an audience respond to this piece? What might they think as they read it? What questions might they ask?</li> </ul>	



## **6. Integrate Writing with Reading, Speaking, and Listening.**

Teachers involved in the Michigan English Language Arts Framework (MELAF) Project have been working to develop statewide integrated English language arts standards. These teachers know that if their class is, for example, reading *The Summer of My German Soldier*, they can extend students' learning by using writing as a pre-reading strategy. They might, for example, ask students to write about what they may have heard from grandparents or great-grandparents about World War II: "How might growing up in the US then have been different from growing up in the US now?" Teachers know that as students think and write about what they know and don't know, and as they compare their thoughts with their classmates, they'll develop a point of reference from which to begin their reading. As they do similar quick-writes from time to time during and after their reading, they'll deepen their understanding of the novel and of history and human nature as well.

High school students who link writing and reading will be preparing for both parts of the Communication Arts Proficiency Test - Writing and Reading. The writing portion of the Communication Arts test asks students to read brief items on a particular topic, such as "justice."

Students are asked to write as a way of extending their thinking about the topic, responding to a prompt, such as, "What does injustice mean to you?" Eventually they are asked to write an extended piece on the same topic, and ultimately the ideas that emerge will be shaped and refined as a way to demonstrate writing skill. The reading portion of the Communication Arts test also links writing to reading but for a different purpose. Student readers are asked to use information and/or examples from the considerably longer selections that appear in the Reading assessment to support a position taken as a way to demonstrate reading skill.

## **7. Encourage Teaching Colleagues to use Writing Across the Curriculum.**

During the last fifteen years more and more teachers of all content areas at all levels (K-

university) have begun to use writing as a tool for teaching all subjects. They have realized that writing slows the thinking process so that ideas can develop clearly. They've learned that asking students to write means that students become actively involved in their own learning, that writing requires the ordering of ideas, and that writing improves understanding of topics. Writing that is done for the purpose of learning often means quick writing that never gets beyond a first draft, since its purpose has been served once the writing has helped the writer better understand the topic being considered. In the classroom such writing is usually personal, informal, tentative, exploratory, reflective, unpolished, and ungraded.

Given recent attention to writing across the curriculum, it's not surprising that writing is included among the tasks students are asked to perform on all the newly created high school proficiency tests, i.e., on mathematics and science tests as well as on the Communication Arts test. The mathematics test includes such writing tasks as asking students to explain what should happen next, to make explicit the thinking that has gone into solving a problem, or to give an example and explain why. The science test includes such writing tasks as writing a response to an investigation by identifying weaknesses in procedures or describing how students might correct weaknesses they identified. Other science writing tasks ask students to explain evidence that's included or that's omitted. In every case, they are expected to think critically about issues, to make judgments based on prior knowledge and experience, and to express information and ideas on a wide range of subjects. Clearly, students who do well on the new tests will demonstrate considerable knowledge and skill.

## **8. Establish Classroom Writing Folders and School-Wide Writing Portfolios.**

Teachers of writing, and teachers who use writing to teach other content areas, often collect and store writing pieces in classroom writing folders. Students can select pieces from the collection—sometimes in consultation with their teacher and/or peers—and continue working on the selected pieces to shape, revise, edit, and

eventually “publish” selected polished pieces of writing. Often these polished pieces are collected in a portfolio of best work, though the portfolio could include representative quick-write pieces as well. Generally speaking, writing portfolios offer the most authentic mechanism for managing and for evaluating writing in the classroom (1) because portfolios allow for thoughtful writing composed over time, (2) because writers’ best writing often emerges from writing about topics and in forms entirely selected by the writer, (3) because writers can select among many pieces of writing the few to be evaluated, and (4) because the portfolio allows for holistic evaluation on the basis of a body of work rather than on individual, sometimes anomalous pieces of writing.

Some states are beginning to use large-scale portfolio writing assessments, though in most of these cases—unlike Michigan—the writing of only a sample of students is used to make judgments about the writing of the student population as a whole. Increasingly, writing portfolios are also being used by universities to determine placement in freshmen English classes. Miami University (Ohio), for example, asks entering freshmen to include in their portfolio (1) a reflective letter about their writing, (2) a story or description, (3) an explanatory, exploratory, or persuasive essay, and (4) a response to a written text. Closer to home, the University of Michigan now requires all entering freshmen to submit a writing portfolio and to include (1) a response to a text read in English or another class, (2) a writing-to-learn piece from a class other than English, (3) a self-selected best or favorite piece of writing, and (4) a “self-assessment” that discusses the portfolio.

High school teachers who want to help students prepare for the writing portion of the Communication Arts test will make a point to develop portfolios partly because students learn from the self-evaluation required to create a portfolio and partly so that students will have the required two pieces of writing to bring to the test site. Because one of the two pieces must come from a class other than English, teachers in all content areas need to be involved in encouraging students to save pieces for the portfolios. Detroit Public Schools

has identified a district-wide “Portfolio Awareness Month” and provides a folder for each high school student in preparation for the writing assessment. The outside cover of the folder provides space to record the school, the teacher, and the date that particular pieces were filed. When the folder is opened, inside are printed the “Writing: A Range of Possibilities” graphic and reminders about the specifications for the two writing pieces, e.g., that two-ten total pages should be included, that the pages be free of teacher comment, etc. Statewide testing makes these particular portfolios especially important in a practical way, but I predict that keeping the portfolios will also encourage more writing self-assessment, more respect for writing, and ultimately better writing.

### ***9. Teach Students to use Michigan’s Scoring Guides to Become Better Writers.***

Michigan’s new writing assessments are criterion-referenced tests, that is, the criteria for evaluating the writing are established ahead of time. Four criteria have been identified: (1) ideas and content, (2) organization, (3) style, and (4) conventions of writing. A four-point scale is used to indicate the quality of each piece of writing, taking all the criteria into consideration. Michigan teachers who have participated in scoring the writing MEAP tryout and pilot papers have quickly become proficient with the process that builds consensus among scorers about what each scorepoint means when applied to pieces of writing. Scoring guides are developed for each writing task, one for fifth grade, one for eighth grade, and one for each of the three eleventh grade writing tasks. The scoring guide (1995 draft) for the eleventh grade Part 3 writing task appears in Figure 7:

FIGURE 7

### Holistic Scorepoint Description Grade 11- Part 3

(These are designed to be used in conjunction with illustrative base papers or other range-finder papers and are intended to describe characteristics of most papers at a particular scorepoint. The aim is to determine best fit; a paper at any given scorepoint may not include all characteristics.)

- 4 The paper is engaging, original, clear, and focused; ideas and content are richly developed with details and examples. Organization and form enhance the central idea or theme; ideas are presented coherently to move the reader through the text. The voice of the writer is compelling and conveys the writer's meaning through effective sentence structure and precise word choices. Skillful use of writing conventions contributes to the polished effect of the writing.
- 3 The paper is reasonably clear, focused, and well-supported; ideas and content are adequately developed through details and examples. Organization and form are appropriate, and ideas are generally presented coherently. The voice of the writer contributes to the writer's meaning through appropriate and varied sentence structure and word choices. Surface features don't interfere with understanding or distract from meaning.
- 2 The paper has some focus and support; ideas and content may be developed with limited details and examples. The writing may be somewhat disorganized or too-obviously structured. The voice of the writer is generally absent; basic sentence structure and limited vocabulary convey a simple message. Surface features may reduce understanding and interfere with meaning.
- 1 The paper has little focus and development; ideas and content are supported by few, if any, details and examples. There is little discernible shape or direction. The writer's tone is flat. Awkward sentence structure and inadequate vocabulary interfere with understanding. Limited control of surface features make the paper difficult to read.

Not ratable:

- 6 completely off topic
- 7 completely illegible
- 8 written in a language other than English
- 9 completely blank

Michigan teachers can share the scoring criteria and the scoring guides with students before the testing. Using a policy so unfamiliar in most standardized testing situations, teachers are encouraged to tell student writers ahead of time how their writing will be evaluated—i.e., to share the scoring “secrets.” Some teachers are occasionally using the rubrics to evaluate students' writing,

and some even train their students as scorers. Several years ago as a high school teacher I trained students to score their own writing and was delighted to see their writing improve as they used rubrics to reflect on and to self-evaluate their own emerging and polished texts. Students with scoring guide experience usually come to understand what constitutes good writing and to

internalize the criteria. They also become articulate in talking about their own writing and the writing of others—all benefits worth pursuing.

### **10. Keep Learning About Writing and the Teaching of Writing.**

Although this article has turned out to be longer than I'd originally planned, it's really just a place to begin. Teachers who will administer the new writing assessments need to consider a variety of nuts-and-bolts test issues, beginning with a careful reading of the somewhat cumbersome Administrative Manual. What is more important, they will want to continue to seek ways to help students become better writers. Teachers can continue to learn about writing and teaching student writers by attending conferences and reading about writing, by becoming writers themselves, and by interacting with student writers in the classroom. These strategies are at the heart of the National Writing Project (Berkeley, CA) and its Michigan NWP sites, which provide summer institutes and school-year professional development programs for teachers. Hundreds of teachers in Michigan—and thousands of teachers across the country—attest to the dramatic impact of the writing project experience on their students' writing and on their professional and personal lives as they have been encouraged to rethink writing.

I don't know whether it's a true story or not, but somewhere I heard that Lucy Calkins called Nancie Atwell one day and said, "I've got to give a speech about testing and wondered if you knew

any little jokes about testing. . . ." Apparently Atwell paused a moment and then said, "Lucy, there are no little jokes about testing." Certainly in Michigan, given high stakes that tie high school diploma endorsements and school funding to test scores, MEAP and Proficiency Tests are serious business indeed. Careful rethinking of writing in the classroom and planning for the new assessments, however, can result not only in higher test scores but in better writing and learning.

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