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**A STUDY OF THE WAYS AND THE EXTENT TO WHICH FIFTH
GRADE TEACHERS AND THEIR STUDENTS IN ONE RURAL
SCHOOL PREPARE FOR, PARTICIPATE IN, AND REFLECT UPON
THE NEW STATE OF MICHIGAN WRITING ASSESSMENT**

**by
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ABSTRACT

A STUDY OF THE WAYS AND THE EXTENT TO WHICH FIFTH GRADE TEACHERS AND THEIR STUDENTS IN ONE RURAL SCHOOL PREPARE FOR, PARTICIPATE IN, AND REFLECT UPON THE NEW STATE OF MICHIGAN WRITING ASSESSMENT

By

Eleanor L. Wollett

In March of 1996 Michigan teachers administered the new Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) Writing Assessment for the first time. This descriptive study examines how a team of fifth grade teachers [four classroom teachers; a Title I at-risk teacher; a special education (inclusionary learning disabilities) teacher; and an associate (student) teacher] collaborated as they and their 115 students prepared for, participated in, and reflected upon the test.

Data was collected through taped interviews with the teachers and selected students, parents, administrators, and school board members. Additional data came from student and teacher reflection logs, classroom observations during the test, and tape recordings of assessment team meetings. Testing guidelines developed by the Michigan Department of Education and seven principles delineated by George Madaus on the effects of all major tests on curriculum provided the two frameworks used to examine the data.

The National Writing Project served as a model for the teacher collaboration in the study. This team used strategies such as “center-group” modeling for peer conferencing and a team developed test to prepare students for the MEAP. The teachers rated student writings on both the trial test and the actual MEAP Writing Assessment (unofficial judgments) using the holistic scoring rubric provided by the Department of Education. Teacher ratings showed that seventeen percent more students reached a score at the “proficient level” (2.5 or more out of 4 points) on the MEAP Writing Assessment than on the trial test.

Since the new writing test is an “authentic” (performance based) assessment where students are asked to use the writing process, teachers and school districts are expected to revamp the writing curriculum if it does not result in adequate test scores. Teachers need to resist, however, teaching to the test, narrowing the breadth of students’ writing opportunities and audiences, and giving unwarranted value to students’ test scores. If they are to grow as teachers of writing, teachers will need opportunities for additional professional development. The Department of Education will need to explain writing test results to the public and provide safeguards against limiting the writing curriculum.

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Dedication

In memory of my mother

Eleanor H. Zuchowski Ball

who gave me the faith, hope, love,

and determination

to follow my dreams.

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Chapter I
IDENTIFYING THE STUDY
Introduction

During the 1995-96 school year, the Michigan Department of Education, under mandate from the State Legislature, administered the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) Writing Assessment across the state:

The Mission of MEAP is to develop the best possible assessments of student outcomes, including knowledge, skills and behaviors. MEAP will provide assistance to interpret, use and report student outcomes information as one basis for improving schools' instructional programs. MEAP assessments will also provide an indicator of educational progress over time (MEAP Handbook, 1995, p. 1).

Student writings were rated for the first time at grades five, eight, and eleven. As an elementary teacher and doctoral student in teacher education with an emphasis in literacy, I am especially interested in the role this assessment plays in elementary classrooms. Will it alter the way writing is perceived, and therefore taught, in schools?

Historically, writing has been defined as the study of how culture teaches and individuals learn and practice written language throughout life (Harris and Hodges, 1995). Unlike content areas such as math and science, writing may be considered as having no definite subject matter which is easily assessable; composition authorities would argue, however, that it is a subject - a process to

be learned and practiced - as well as a learning tool for other subject areas. While participating in the writing process students learn about genre, audience, organization, style, voice, and writing conventions that are included in high quality writing. "Language differences (including writing) are perhaps what most often prompt teachers and many others to unwarranted judgments about the ability and knowledge of their students" (Hillocks, 1995, p. 17). Since the State of Michigan, however, has instituted a separate assessment for writing, it is assumed that officials conceive of writing as a subject and/or skill area. This year they also are beginning to use writing as a process for determining students' learning in subject areas through content area assessment tests that require writing. Will the new Michigan Educational Assessment Program's Writing Assessment become the most important tool for measuring the ability and knowledge of students? Will it influence both teachers and students as they strive to improve writing instruction and student writing in Michigan's schools? This study, therefore, looks at writing from the subject matter perspective of MEAP.

It was my intent to investigate the learning and attitudes of students, teachers, an associate teacher, administrators, parents, and school board members in my school district, Anderson School District, as we embarked on the maiden voyage of the statewide MEAP Writing Assessment for fifth grade students. The school in which I currently teach became the focal point for this investigation of the new MEAP, the first such study of the impact of the writing test. What does it mean for a group of Michigan students and teachers? Will this new assessment drive the curriculum - and should it? How will teachers, students, administrators, parents, and school board members view the assessment? The assumption held by many is that testing improves teaching and student performance. Does it actually improve teaching or does it interfere

with it? I explored these questions by taking a look at one rural elementary school in Michigan. This study may be useful to this faculty as it plans its future programs, and by implication it may be helpful to a wider audience of educators and policymakers.

Research Questions

As this study began to develop, a working hypothesis surfaced in the form of a question:

IN WHAT WAYS AND TO WHAT EXTENT DO FIFTH GRADE TEACHERS AND THEIR STUDENTS IN ONE RURAL SCHOOL PREPARE FOR, PARTICIPATE IN, AND REFLECT UPON THE NEW STATE OF MICHIGAN WRITING ASSESSMENT?

As Geer (1969) writes:

One type of hypothesis is drawn up before entering the field. Essentially a list of variables which theory or common sense suggests may be relevant to what the investigator wishes to study; the hypothesis, for the field worker, takes the practical form of kinds of people to see, places to go, and questions to ask (p. 152).

The question above is that hypothesis and it provides a time frame for studying the MEAP up to and including attitudes about the assessment after the test had been given. This study will delineate in more detail the three time segments that the study is examining. The following additional questions were designed to be focused, and yet open-ended.

Subsidiary Questions

I. Preparation for the assessment

- a. What are the attitudes about writing, writing instruction, and writing assessment of teachers, an associate teacher, students, administrators, board members, and parents as they anticipate the testing experience?
- b. How knowledgeable are teachers and students in the writing process?
- c. What are the attitudes of teachers and students toward students' sharing ideas about writing? How well prepared are students to do this?
- d. What strategies do selected teachers use as they prepare students in their classrooms for participation in the new fifth grade writing test? Why do they use these strategies?
- e. In what ways are teachers adjusting the curriculum to accommodate the test?

II. Participation in the assessment

- a. What accommodations are made for students in the classroom during the test?
- b. Are students able to:
 - brainstorm ideas on selected topics,
 - share ideas with peers,
 - draft,

participate in peer response,
revise their drafts,
edit for standard writing conventions?

III. Reflection following the assessment

- a. What are the attitudes of students and teachers as they reflect on the test and the testing experience?
- b. How well prepared do students and teachers now perceive they were in the writing process?
- c. How did the opportunity to share ideas, and give and receive peer response, work for the students?
- d. What strategies used by teachers do students and teachers now perceive as helpful in preparing students for the MEAP?
- e. What suggestions do teachers and students have to help in future preparation for the test?
- f. In what ways (if any) do students and teachers think the curriculum should be adjusted to accommodate the MEAP?

IV. Observers' notes on students: how do they react to components of the test

- a. prior to the test?
- b. during the test?
- c. following the test?

Significance of the Research

Although the body of literature published about writing, writing instruction, and writing assessment offers an abundance of publications, this is an initial exploration of the new Michigan Educational Assessment Program's Writing Assessment. The data collected is being used to document the ways and the extent to which fifth grade classroom teachers and their students in one school prepared for, participated in, and reflected upon the new MEAP Writing Assessment. This study is based on the on-going dialogue with the teachers throughout the data collection process. Also important to the study are interviews with students, administrators, parents, and school board members; providing additional lenses through which I am able to examine the data. The use of audio recordings and logs provide unlimited access to revisit the interviews and log responses.

Since this is the first year for the State of Michigan Writing Assessment, this study provides an initial intervention study upon which future researchers might expand. The results of the study, although limited to the particular school and student population researched, has the potential to offer insights about the testing of writing that will benefit other schools, other researchers, and assessment policy developers.

Definition of Terms

Since this study is concerned with the MEAP Writing Assessment, which is a tool for assessing student progress in writing in the state of Michigan, the definitions published in the 1994 draft of the State of Michigan Core Curriculum Content Standards will be used. It defines **curriculum** as, "a coherent plan for instruction and learning. Curriculum serves as the basis for teachers' and

students' active involvement in the construction and application of knowledge." This same document defines **curriculum framework** as "a state level document used by local districts curriculum committees/teachers to align classroom instruction with Michigan's Core Curriculum Content Standards, to improve student achievement" (p. iii).

Language Arts - *The Literacy Dictionary* (1995) defines language arts as "the school curriculum area particularly concerned with the development and improvement of reading, writing, speaking, and listening" (p. 133). The Anderson District Language Arts Curriculum defines its language arts philosophy as:

Language arts will include meaningful experience in reading, writing, speaking, and listening/viewing. Through a positive classroom climate each student will see the purpose of working toward his/her potential and its relevance for his/her life.

Anderson Elementary language arts curriculum is also in writing and available for teachers (See Appendix E for the Fifth Grade Language Arts Curriculum).

The emphasis in this study is on writing; however, it is important to remember that all four areas of language learning are interdependent. Although writing is related to the other language processes of listening, speaking, and reading, for the purposes of this research I will be examining it separately to determine its role in the curriculum of one Michigan elementary school. Before 1996, only reading was tested as a part of the MEAP. Beginning with this year's assessment (1996), in addition to the writing test, a writing component was also added to the science MEAP. It has been proposed that in the future writing will be a part of additional MEAP content area assessments.

Writing - *The Literacy Dictionary* (1995) defines writing as “the use of a writing system or orthography by people in the conduct of their daily lives and in the transmission of their culture to other generations” (p. 284). It is one of the four processes of the language arts. It, along with speaking, is considered an expressive language skill (Fitzgerald, 1989, p. 2). For the purposes of this paper, writing will refer to the act by which students create meaning on paper for the purposes of communication. Since the MEAP Writing Assessment is a testing situation with an “unknown” audience and other constraints, the writing students compose for the assessment may not parallel other writing they do.

Composition in writing, or in speaking, according to *The Literacy Dictionary* (1995) is defined as “the process or result of arranging ideas to form a clear and unified impression in order to create an effective message” (p. 38). Historically, this concept of “composition” has evolved from a study of grammar and penmanship to the broader criteria and expectations for writers outlined on the new MEAP Writing Assessment rubric, a process focused orientation. This process forms the subject matter of writing instruction as teachers prepare students for the MEAP.

Writing Process - The MEAP Writing Assessment assumes students and teachers are cognizant of the writing process. Process writing is “a writing instructional model that views writing as an ongoing process in which students follow a given set of procedures for planning, drafting, revising, editing (proofreading and correcting), and publishing (sharing by some means) their writing” (*The Literacy Dictionary*, 1995, p. 195). Graves claims that this process is recursive rather than lock step (1994, p. 82). The MEAP Writing Assessment may be forcing students to conform to the format (a linear interpretation of the

writing process) specified for the assessment because of the requirements for meeting MEAP specifications (See Chapter 3). The stages of the writing process in MEAP include: prewriting, drafting, sharing, revising, and editing.

Many people refer to MEAP as an evaluation in the form of an assessment test. Yet, some authorities make distinctions between assessment, testing, and evaluation. “**Testing** refers to formal means used to get people to perform so that their behavior can be measured” (Purves qtd. in Fitzgerald, 1991, p. 405). The MEAP is a formal test used by the State of Michigan; it asks students to write to obtain a measurement of student abilities in writing. MEAP, therefore, is most assuredly a test.

In contrast, **assessment** is the process of gathering evidence, perhaps over an extended time and in a variety of contexts, of what a student can do. “Assessment,” however, is sometimes used interchangeably with “testing”, which is the case with the MEAP Writing Assessment. I will use both “assessment” and “test”, therefore, when referring to the MEAP.

Evaluation is the process of interpreting the evidence and making judgments and decisions based on it” (Burke, 1993, p. xvi). In this study, evaluation is the reflection and/or interpretation of the process of administering the MEAP Writing Assessment.

Reflective Practice - For the purpose of this study, reflective practice will be defined as a practice that permits practitioners to learn through their practice, not simply through trial and error (Hillocks, 1995; Schon, 1987). This involves metacognition, which is an awareness and knowledge of one’s mental

processes such that one can monitor, regulate, and direct them to a desired end. Throughout this study, data collection opportunities will provide insights into teachers changing perceptions of their task. These perceptions will be examined through their views stated in taped oral interviews, written logs, and in taped recordings of team meeting interactions.

Collaboration is the act of working together. For the purposes of this study, collaboration will characterize both students and teachers working together in small groups for the purpose of learning. Schmoker (1996) describes collaboration as a means by which teachers are allowed to “capture each other’s fund of collective intelligence. A clear goal optimizes the quality of their sharing; they are organized to succeed. In the isolation and crush of events that is a teacher’s life, time to evaluate and refocus is limited” (p. 92).

Rubric - The term rubric means a rule or guide. “The vehicle used to guide human judgment is a rubric, which has its origins in the Latin *rubrica terra*, referring to the use of red earth centuries ago to mark or signify something of importance” (Marzano, Pickering, & McTighe, 1993, p. 29). A scoring rubric, which refers to the type of guide used in this research, provides a clear set of guidelines for scoring student work. These are typically written in increasing order of difficulty. Each step is assigned a numerical value, thereby moving what might have been considered subjective judgments in the past to seemingly more clearly defined (and defensible) numerical scores.

There are three basic types of rubrics used for evaluation of writing: holistic, analytic, and primary trait. The **holistic rubric**, which is used as an evaluative tool for the MEAP Writing Assessment, focuses on the piece of writing as a whole and on those features most important to the success of the

total piece. The tryout draft of the MEAP Assessment Rubric described the characteristics of a mature writing as:

Central ideas are clearly developed. The writing may have a natural flow and a clear sense of wholeness (beginning, middle, end); the organization helps move the reader through the text. There is likely to be a clear voice that is precise and interesting. The text demonstrates standard writing conventions (See MEAP Rubric, Chapter 3, Figure 3).

A holistic rubric, such as the one used in the MEAP Writing Assessment, helps the teacher to evaluate quickly, consistently, and pointedly. The rating is quick because the rater does not take time to circle errors or make marginal notations. Also, after the rater has practiced the procedure with other raters, “the rating is consistent because the rater uses the same carefully developed criteria on all pieces of writing. This consistency is evident not only from piece to piece rated by the same rater but also between different raters rating the same piece” (Kirby & Liner, 1981, p. 188). Since a holistic rubric is used to score the MEAP Writing Assessment, and raters will have been trained to do the scoring, it is the intention of the State that this same consistency will occur on the Writing MEAP.

To understand holistic scoring, it is necessary to contrast with the other two types of rubrics. The **analytic** scale provides a more defined, less impressionistic, evaluation. Kirby and Liner describe the analytic scale as:

a more precise and carefully articulated grading scale. Analytic scales direct the reader's attention to specific features of the piece of writing and suggest relative point values for each feature. . . Such a scoring tool is more pointed than impression marking because the rating guide defines and illustrates the grading criteria to writers and raters alike and keeps raters on track during the marking procedure. Such guides, when carefully shared and explained to students, can demystify the final grade and highlight strengths and weaknesses in their writings. The guides also ensure that certain surface features in the piece (handwriting, spelling, punctuation) do not influence the rating of the piece out of proportion to their importance to the piece's effectiveness (1981, pp. 190 & 191).

Although also not used in this study, there is a third type of rubric called the **primary trait** rubric. Primary trait rubrics “emphasize those writing features particular to the type of discourse written” (Sperling, 1994, p. 1052). For example, separate rubrics might be designed for evaluation of poetry vs. drama, each exemplifying the characteristics of the particular discourse.

Holistic assessment, therefore, is only one recognized method for judging writing. Holistic assessment, however, will be the focus of this research since it is the method used for the MEAP Writing Assessment.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

To frame the central question of this study: **In What Ways and To What Extent Do Fifth Grade Teachers And Their Students In One Rural School Prepare For, Participate In, and Reflect Upon the New State Of Michigan Writing Assessment?** in this chapter I will review literature on the history of writing instruction and assessment as well as teacher learning about writing and curriculum change in writing. Throughout this review, I will try to show ways in which writing instruction and assessment have developed and/or remained the same over time. Testing of the writing curriculum is new and I know from previous experience in Michigan that when only read and math were tested, they became the dominant subjects in elementary school teaching. The discussion is organized into five sections that discuss the history of writing, the history and uses of the testing of writing, large scale testing of writing in Michigan, teacher learning about writing, and curriculum change in writing. I will argue that the MEAP writing test both reflects an evolution in how writing is conceived and taught, and that it is likely to shape what gets taught, that is, determine the writing curriculum.

History of Writing

Historically, "writing , like reading, was considered a skill taught in the primary grades, where children learn handwriting, spelling, and skills of punctuation and capitalization" (Dyson, 1994, p. 170). Dating from the sixteenth

century on, school books showed a concentration on the mechanics of writing, such as:

correct techniques for sharpening quills, improved formulas for ink, appropriate size and slant for cursive strokes, and even the precise degree of angle permissible between quill and cheek--- but showed little recognition of its communicative aspect. For the most part, writing, over and above what we would now refer to as penmanship, was an integral part of the study of grammar, calling for the written application of previously memorized language rules: not only as it was necessary to dot the *i* and cross the *t*, but also to punctuate, capitalize, and spell correctly (Donsky, 1984, p. 795).

However, by the middle of the nineteenth century, a shift in educational thinking occurred, allowing a subject defined as “composition” to emerge (Monaghan and Saul, 1987, p. 88). At that time, composition meant that teachers assign topics, look for errors in student writing, and occasionally have students recopy their writing making the required corrections.

Prior to 1840, materials available to help and encourage teachers of writing at the elementary level were practically nonexistent (Quackenbos, 1867 in L. Jackson, 1986, p. 601). Yet, one British text did suggest that “Children should write paraphrases of stories told orally by the teacher, but only after the initial abilities of writing letters, words, and sentences had been developed.” (Wilson, 1830 in L. Jackson, 1986, p. 602). Consequently, composition opportunities were infrequent and varied according to the skill and commitment of the teacher.

One exception was Bronson Alcott, father of Louisa May Alcott, the nineteenth century author. As a teacher in a Boston school, he had his students begin each school day by writing in journals. A teacher-reporter commented, “He (Alcott) knows that in journal writing he is also assisting them (the students) in the art of composition, in a way that the rules of rhetoric would never do” (L. Jackson, 1986, p. 602). This practice of journaling is one way in which students

were given an opportunity to draft writings of their own, rather than work on grammar and/or handwriting.

In the 1840's, *Hints for Teachers* included teaching suggestions for composition in elementary schools. These hints were based on presentations made at teachers' institutes held annually in Massachusetts. However, due to the expanding frontier with many one-room schools and the large number of immigrants, the incorporation of composition instruction remained spotty. Teachers taught mainly the three R's - reading, (hand)writing, and arithmetic (L. Jackson, 1986).

Beginning in 1860, there were calls for improving composition instruction. Examples include the following three quotes taken from an article in the *Language Arts Journal* in 1986":

Barnard (1860) stated firmly, "To become useful, rhetoric should include the practice of daily writing for successive years; frequent exercises in the logical arrangement of thought should be accompanied by close study and critical analysis of works of distinguished writers."

Barnard emphasizes the importance of improving writing by both practice and the study of the works of successful authors. These two ideas are important in the study of the composition of writing in many schools today.

Pinneo (1864) in the preface to his composition text, reminded teachers that "the study of composition should be commenced at a *very early* age, as soon, indeed, as the learner can read and write with tolerable accuracy."

Although Pinneo encourages writing at an earlier age, he also suggests that the writing be tolerably accurate. What does he mean by tolerably accurate? Were students encouraged to draft for meaning and then edit, or were drafting and editing concurrent processes?

Swinton, in his textbook preface (1875) shared the information that “in the new courses of study in most of our cities, lessons in writing and speaking English are begun quite early” (L. Jackson, 1986, p. 604).

These quotes emphasize that the idea of students “learning to write by writing” did not originate in the last few years; it has been around for more than a hundred years.

By the end of the nineteenth century several committees were appointed to consider the study of composition. The first of three Harvard reports stated:

It is obviously absurd that the College - the institution of higher education - should be called upon to turn aside from its proper functions and devote its means and the time of its instructors to the task of imparting elementary instruction which would be given even in ordinary grammar schools, much more in those higher academic institutions intended to prepare select youth for a university course (Gere, 1986, p. 360).

The committee also suggested that if schools did not spend more time teaching writing, their students would not be accepted at Harvard. Other schools began to follow Harvard’s recommendations and even accepted their definition of writing:

This definition was characterized by statements such as it is “little less than absurd to suggest that any human being who can be taught to talk cannot likewise be taught to compose. Writing is merely the habit of talking with the pen instead of with the tongue.” This narrow view also emphasizes mechanical correctness in writing above all else. The 1892 report contains many negative comments about students’ poor usage and gives special attention to neatness and handwriting. Because composition instructors had no coherent philosophy against which to evaluate such statements, these limited views gained currency and shaped ensuing instruction (Gere, 1986, p. 36).

Throughout the late nineteenth century the idea of writing and the importance of practice in writing had begun to evolve.

The role of English as a school subject became clearer as a result of the 1894 Report of the Committee of Ten which stated:

For the first time in the history of education, presented a unified view of English teaching from the earliest grades through high school...In the lower grades the Committee identified three strands of instruction (a) "language" and composition (b) formal or systematic grammar, (c) reading, or lessons in literature. Children would not begin composition writing until the third grade (Monaghan and Saul, 1987, p. 89 -90).

Composition in writing was missing below grade three. This suggests that students were expected to acquire sufficient skill in reading before composition in writing became a part of the curriculum.

In 1896, C. F. Adams, chairman of the Harvard Committee on Composition, wrote:

Proficiency in athletics does not come by studying rules printed in books devoted to athletic sports or by listening to lectures on throwing curves and the like, but by practice It is only through similar, daily, and incessant practice that the degree of facility in writing the mother tongue is acquired, which always enables the student or adult to use it as a tool in his work. This is the crux of school composition. Nothing but plenty of writing, and particularly non-formal or extemporaneous writing, as in the daily work of the school under a moderate tension of criticism, will transmute the pupils' specific skill into formal skill (quoted in L. Jackson, 1986, p. 605).

Once again the idea of practice is encouraged, this time with a "moderate" amount of criticism. Was this "criticism" given by the teacher and based on the rules of grammar extracted from student texts? Hinsdale (1896) wrote that not until the idea of teaching composition from a book was banished from school would children be taught to write properly (L. Jackson, 1986).

Chubb, in his 1903 book, The Teaching of English: In The Elementary and The Secondary School, stressed the importance of composition in the elementary grades:

Expression is natural and necessary to the child; and wherever there is expression, be the medium what it may, there is composition. If the medium is words, oral or written, the child is engaged in the process of literary composition. The task of the teacher is to help the child to refine

this natural process, and to raise speaking and writing to the dignity of an art that shall make that converse agreeable and effective (p. 173).

This early twentieth century book for English educators emphasized the relationship between speaking and writing in the composing process.

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, however, instruction began to feel the effects of the social efficiency movement:

The attempts to control the vagaries of competitive capitalism through a planned economy managed by corporations and government resulted in extending to the public schools the concept of "social efficiency." As Joel Spring explains, schools were to provide curricula that met "the future social needs of the student," taught "cooperation as preparation for future social activities," and provided for "the future social destination of the student." (Berlin, 1990, p. 192).

This impacted writing instruction in programs such as the *Experience Curriculum*, which "linked reading, writing, and speaking through language experiences that were designed to accomplish social as well as academic tasks" (Tchudi, 1991, p. 6).

The subjects for writing proposed in *Elementary English Composition*, a text book for schools, emphasized "the relation of the writer or speaker to the entire rhetorical context - the audience and larger community, the subject from these perspectives, and the role of language in each and all" (Berlin, 1990, p. 195). The text also explained that, when leading writers to a topic, teachers should choose a real life situation, suggest a personal relationship to the situation, and provide an audience. Thus writing was to be taught in "a situation that was thoroughly social without denying the importance of the individual" (Berlin, 1990, p. 195).

It is important to remember that at this time the school dropout rate was three times what it is today. The social, rather than the academic, became a priority. Those choosing to leave the educational system were not thought of as

“at-risk” as they are today, since the society and economy offered opportunities for them to succeed without completing their formal education (Stiggins, 1994). The need for effective writing skills, therefore, was not viewed as a necessity for entering the work force.

In the period between the wars, there arose a resistance to social efficiency in the name of the individual. The center of composition activities for an increasing number of teachers became expressive writing about personal experience and sometimes creative or imaginative writing. The classroom was to provide an environment where students could unlock, or free, their creative springs of feelings. Writing became a form of art which was capable of being, “learned, and learned by all, but not taught” (Berlin, 1990, p. 197). The work of the teacher was to provide an atmosphere in which writers could learn what they were unable to attain through direct instruction.

This enthusiasm for expressive writing was challenged by the work of Edward L. Thorndike. “Thorndike argued that whatever exists, exists in some quantity and so could be measured. His research sponsored a behavioristic approach in which teaching objectives were stated in measurable terms and the learning then measured through the appropriate testing device” (Berlin, 1990, p. 199). Behaviorism had widespread influence that continues today, fitting nicely with packaged curriculum in textbooks and workbooks - but not with student generated writing.

The writing project movement, begun in 1974 by James Gray, helped spur renewed discourse about the teaching of writing. Influenced by social and developmental theorists such as Vygotsky, writing was newly defined as:

A cultural tool with roots in young children's social experiences in families, communities, and classrooms... Children learn about the use of literacy through engagement in valued literacy activities with helpful

others, who model, guide, provide information, and serve as collaborators and audiences (Dyson, 1994, p. 171-2).

However, the movement of this theory into classroom practice is challenging. Donald Graves and others write about the difficulty teachers have changing their paradigms about writing instruction (Cohen, 1989; Grossman, 1990; Lortie, 1975). He relates his own avoidance of writing to that of a teacher in the classroom:

As the deadline nears, tension mounts, and my repertoire for avoiding writing expands...Writing is a painful business. It is normal to avoid it... We have not yet recognized our strategies for avoiding writing in American education. So often our preoccupation with handwriting, grammar exercises, language arts activities in spelling books are all preliminaries, avoidances, for an event that never occurs, writing. We have lulled ourselves into the belief that for all our activity, writing is actually in full flower and practice. It isn't (1979, pp. 635-6).

Teachers' avoidance of writing in the classroom is often due to their lack of experience as writers. Graves quotes Linda Rief as she relates her own history in the teaching of writing:

I hadn't been doing enough writing myself to know what a real writer does. I think I was relying on my past history with teachers myself. I waited for their topics, waited for the teacher to fix it, recopied their corrections, then handed it in for a grade. I knew that wasn't right, because I never felt like a writer when I wrote under those conditions (1990, p. 8).

Due to the lack of required courses in writing during their teacher preparation programs, many teachers enter the classroom feeling inadequate when it comes to teaching writing. Requiring courses in writing may not guarantee knowledge about writing instruction, but it may assist teachers in their understanding of the complex processes all writers are involved in and/or convince them to build on the strengths of students. Without this explicit attention to writing, some teachers might think that writing develops naturally.

Teachers who are not knowledgeable about what and how they are teaching are less likely to deviate from the norm and take the risk of experimenting with alternative strategies in their classrooms (Grossman, 1990; P. Jackson, 1968; Lortie, 1975). In order for teachers to build confidence and competence as facilitators and models for the teaching of writing, they need to become writers themselves (Graves, 1983; Rief, 1992). Graves claims that teachers, as well as students, need to enter what Vygotsky calls their “zone of proximal development” (going beyond their own knowledge to learn from others):

The zone of proximal development should become a zone of high expectations. As teachers, our expectations are high only when our own literacy is high. It is difficult to expect from children what we ourselves will not perceive and practice. This is why our own reading, writing, and engagement with the world are so important (Graves, 1991, p. 148).

This suggests that just because the process of writing, in addition to the product, is being emphasized, the quality of writing need not decline. The quality of students' writing is determined in large part by teachers' expectations and their own involvement in writing (Atwell, 1987; Graves, 1994).

During the 1970's and 80's, the writing process approach gained favor. Its premise, according to James Moffett, is that children learn to write by writing (Larson, 1994). Chubb (1903), as well as the Harvard Committee (1896) talked about this premise over ninety years ago. Children's attention is focused on the process, more than the product, by looking at such strategies as how to choose topics, brainstorm ideas, draft texts, gain feedback, revise, and edit. The major goal of the process approach is to help students view themselves as “real writers,” people who write for a purpose, who write for “real audiences,” not just the teacher (Rief, 1992; Routman, 1991).

Like any new movement, new problems arise. First, there is the concern that placing too much emphasis on process may encourage educators to teach in a routine way (Monday - prewriting, Tuesday - drafting, Wednesday - sharing, Thursday - revising and editing, Friday - publishing) (Graves, 1994). In order to meet the specific demands of various kinds of writing tasks (genres) across the curriculum, such a rigid approach needs to be avoided:

We need to acknowledge in our teaching the realities of writing. A crucial reality is that good writers and writing don't take less time; they take more. Too many accounts of professional writers' practices have been published - *Writers at Work* is probably the best known series - for us to continue to cling to school myths of polished, first-time final drafts or weekly assignments (Atwell, 1987, p. 56).

A second concern is that student writers, if left to their own choices, may not choose to learn to write in ways necessary for school success. In "The Silenced Dialogue" Lisa Delpit writes, "If teachers do not ensure that all children receive specific information about the expected features of certain genres, about the prescriptive rules of standard English, or about the mechanics of writing, children who learn such discourse skills at home may have an advantage over those who do not" (1988, p. 286).

Delpit (1991) also argues that the writing process approach further disadvantages underserved learners. She claims that process approaches often ignore the needs of non-mainstream children:

Strategies, for me [Delpit], are processes or procedures that literate people consciously control which enable them to comprehend and compose text. The direct instruction of certain kinds of strategies would also help children acquire the culture of power because it would give them access to a major medium of power, writing (1991, p. 541).

According to Delpit, teachers must teach all students the explicit and implicit rules of the power of language. She believes that non-mainstream learners

want and need guidelines to work from. When teaching across cultures, people have different sets of understandings and learning styles (1991; Heath, 1991).

In his latest book, A Fresh Look At Writing, Donald Graves encourages process focused teachers to be more assertive about when to step in, when to teach, and when to expect more of writers. However, Graves (1994; as well as Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1991; Rief, 1992; Rosen, 1987) emphasize that direct instruction (teacher explanations in formal class lessons) must be situated within a curriculum in which children engage in much actual writing for authentic purposes.

Public opinion on the role of formal or informal grammar instruction is divided:

Many people, perhaps the majority of those who bother to think about the subject at all - are convinced that grammar instruction is the cornerstone of literacy, a necessary prerequisite to mastering written English. Others feel that a different emphasis in schools - on critical thinking, on self-expression, on meaningful communication - would be more productive. (Hartwell, 1994, p. 539).

These views have grown out of the historical trends. Until the late nineteenth century, when the idea of writing and the importance of practice in writing began to evolve, grammar held the dominant role in English instruction. Early twentieth century research raised questions about the lack of a positive effect of grammar instruction on writing (Braddock et al., 1963). Today we still have two fields of thought, outgrowths of earlier movements, one supporting grammar focused instruction and one favoring emphasis on the writing process.

One means educators are using to help students see the importance of writing as an integral part of their lives is called "writing across the curriculum" (WAC). By writing in all subjects of the curriculum, learners are given "the notion that writing should be an integral part of the learning process throughout a student's education" (Townsend, 1994, p. 1299). He also added:

As faculty come to understand writing as a habit acquired during lifelong practice rather than a set of skills to be learned by a given point in one's education, program goals often shift to include writing to learn as well as learning to write... Characteristics of WAC courses include seeing students as makers and discoverers of meaning and seeing instructors as coaches and learners along with students, rather than as the center of authority (Townsend, 1994, p. 1301).

WAC courses often include multiple drafts of writing, journal writing and collaborative writing, incorporating active learning techniques and emphasizing the writing/speaking relationship. There is usually less emphasis on lectures and a greater emphasis on discussion.

Computers offer three primary benefits to the WAC movement. First, they provide instructional programs, such as writing exercises, as well as grammar, style, and spelling checkers. For example, students struggling with spelling are able to express themselves in writing and use the spell check on the computer to assist as they edit. Second, they provide network-supported communication tools, such as electronic mail, and bulletin boards, which may broaden students opportunities to write for real purposes. By using programs such as electronic mail students are able to communicate with individuals (audiences) around the world. Finally, they support on-line tutoring services giving immediate response to student learning (Palmquist, 1994, p. 1303).

Even with the the new changes, the writing process and writing across the curriculum, and new tools such as computers, much in the teaching of writing has remained the same. Although some progress has been made - little has influenced most school districts. Even at high school level if writing is expected at all it is rarely more than a paragraph in length. Their intent to do process writing is compromised by organizing instruction according to a linear model and the apparent need to provide skill practice in isolation. Schools are ill prepared for testing competence in writing, yet the current focus for change in

the teaching and learning of writing is most directly influenced by the testing of writing.

History and Uses of Testing of Writing

“(T)he lesson of history is clear. Tests can be, have been, and in some places are the engines that drive teaching and learning” (Madaus, 1988, p.84). Testing, according to Madaus, is rapidly replacing the role of curriculum in defining education in the United States. In a quest to examine this assertion, one of the central questions in this study is how the MEAP Writing Assessment affects curriculum development at Anderson Elementary.

Early writing assessment in this country focused primarily on spelling and handwriting . The emphasis upon good penmanship was showcased when pieces previously judged by the teacher were exhibited for visitors on the last day of the school term (W. Smith, 1973: Johnson, 1963 in Brinkley, 1992, p. 60). However, around the time of the Revolutionary War, literature was added to the curriculum as a primary knowledge base upon which writing assignments and assessments could be based (Applebee, 1974, p. 30 in Brinkley, 1992, p.60) and to replace the oral exams which were prevalent at the time:

(W)ritten exams provide all students the same question in the same setting. Oral examiners necessarily had to ask different questions during their turns. Oral examiners also could phrase their questions so that some answers were more obvious than others. As a result some students received easy questions, while other students received difficult ones (qtd. in Moore, 1983, p. 958 qtd. in Brinkley, 1992, p. 60).

At the beginning of the twentieth century a new-type of testing surfaced, the objective test. The social goals of schooling were now becoming secondary to the sorting of students. Due to the large number of immigrants, the population was becoming increasingly diverse:

We (United States) aspired to a common language, culture, national experience, and heritage. To achieve this end, we sought a homogenizing experience, and decided that schools could provide that common ground. So we conceived of the standard curriculum for all students, and we sent out word via compulsory attendance laws that everyone would have to come to school and be educated (Stiggins, 1994, p. 22).

With the growth in the number of students attending schools, and large class sizes, it was extremely difficult to read individual essay assessments. Therefore, objective and standardized tests were welcomed by teachers and administrators (Brinkley, 1992, p. 62). Since the 1930's, when computers were first developed, objective tests have taken on greater and greater significance. Large numbers of tests could be scored more easily, and more comparisons between groups of students could be made.

Thorndike envisioned the mind as a machine with thousands of connections, a kind of switchboard with wires connecting discrete points:

The mind in his view consisted not of large capacities such as memory and reasoning waiting there to be developed, but of ...a kind of switchboard with innumerable wires connecting discrete points...The curriculum had to be so designed as to teach people specifically and directly those exact skills required for the tasks that lay before them in life. .. Since future citizens were to perform different and complementary tasks, a differentiated curriculum was needed in line with the determination of native capacities that a scientific system of mental measurement would provide (Kliebard, 1987, pp. 107 -109).

Another reason for the growth in objective testing was the unreliability of individual classroom teachers' assessments as reported by Starch and Elliott (1916). This study discovered that one paper received more than 30 different scores from different readers that ranged over 40 points. "Given these conditions and concerns ... it is not surprising that 'scientific,' i.e., standardized and objective, tests soon captured the attention of English and language arts educators at all levels" (Brinkley, 1992, p. 62).

Stiggins (1996) reports:

This new kind of test was referred to in the professional literature as “scientific” in that it was capable of controlling for inherent biases and idiosyncrasies of teacher subjective judgment, which prior to this time had formed the basis for assessment in schools. Also, as advocates pointed out, this new kind of test could be mass produced, mass administered, and mass scored very efficiently - and efficiency was seen as essential in those times of rapid growth in education and limited resources to accomplish it.

This test also brought with it an even more important advantage: It was able to produce the quintessential sorting criterion - a score had exactly the same meaning for every student who took the same test. It offered concrete, apparently “scientific” support for the sorting function of schools.

This new entry in the assessment arena was, as you may have deduced, the objectively scored paper and pencil test. Because of its great efficiency and the comparability of its scores, this assessment option became so popular that it dominated our conception of educational assessment for sixty years (1986, pp. 22 & 23).

Yet, English educators in the first half of this century were still faced with the dilemma of how to test composition efficiently in order to meet the needs of teachers who desired to assign and correct weekly compositions. Various “scales” were developed in order to provide objective standards for assessment. These “scales,” or “range finders,” were used by teachers to compare their students’ writing to a set of samples (Noyes, 1912, in Brinkley, 1992, p. 63).

Use of these scales also suggested other possibilities to the educational community. Administrators were able to use the samples to “compare classes of the same grade in different schools, in different cities, or under different teachers” (Noyes, 1912, in Brinkley, 1992, p. 63). This suggestion:

. . . emphasized the external administrative uses that could be made of test scores and at least implied the possibility of linking teacher evaluation to student performance on the basis of what were thought to be objective measures (Brinkley, 1992, P. 63).

Most educators in the first half of the 1900's sided with Daniel Starch, who argued that "any quality or ability of human nature that is detectable is also measurable" (quoted in Brinkley, 1992, p. 67). Consequently, by the mid-1900's most English language arts educators seemed convinced that numerical scores from the "new-type" tests were the best way to set student performance standards. In fact, in June 1923, the first sentence of a report issued by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) read, "The Committee on Examination desires to stimulate an interest in a more widespread use of standard tests in English" (Certain, quoted in Brinkley, 1992, p. 67).

The promise that standardized tests and scores held for English language arts educators is easy to understand. Why wouldn't the same impersonal efficiency which worked on factory assembly lines and promised quality control and higher productivity also prove beneficial in English language arts evaluation? According to Stiggins:

Large-scale assessments tend to rely on the objective paper and pencil test format to produce acceptable data at minimal cost. Huge numbers of tests can be machine-scored very quickly, and computers can generate interpretable score results with relative ease. It is often the case, out of necessity, that the fidelity of large-scale assessment results be sacrificed somewhat for the sake of economy...Because of the broad scope and considerable cost of these assessments, they tend to occur infrequently, often no more than once a year. Also, the time allotted for completing them is limited (1994, p. 45).

Objective tests do not put students in situations where they must write and coordinate all of the individual skills involved: these tests test spelling, grammar, and punctuation in isolation from writing. An alternative to the objective test surfaced with the advent of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Since its inception in the late 1960s, NAEP has conducted a new form of large-scale assessment. NAEP includes activities that

are quite unlike typical objective tests. In English language arts evaluation this includes regular writing assessments:

Alternatives to objective paper-and-pencil testing figure prominently in current proposals for educational reform. It is widely held that overreliance on multiple-choice and similar item formats has led to curricula and instructional methods that encourage learning isolated bits of information and mechanically applying isolated skills, at the expense of more complex reasoning and meaningful problem solving. The solution proposed by advocates of assessment reform is to create tests that we would want teachers to teach to. High-stakes tests, those that have significant consequences for schools, teachers, and students, should comprise assessment activities that are also models of good instructional activities (Haertel and Mullis, 1996, p. 288).

Objective tests require memorization, not higher level thinking skills. Alternative measures of writing attempt to capture what writers know and are able to do in non-testing situations. This presents the additional issue of how a writing test shapes a total curriculum for writing. As stated by Madaus in the opening quote of this section, we see the argument that tests, in this case a test of writing, drive teaching and learning. Will curriculum change occur as a result of such large scale assessments?

With NAEP comes a major leap to national, public comparisons of test results. NAEP is a federally funded testing program currently administered under contract to the Educational Testing Service of Princeton, New Jersey. For each area in the test, samples are taken from representative geographic and social status groups across the country. NAEP writing assessments are especially significant because they have played a major role in legitimizing direct writing assessments (samples of student writing) and have provided a model for state tests of writing. In NAEP, as well as in most state tests, this means that students write essays, and results are scored holistically. For MEAP, however, every student at specified grade levels in public schools participates.

Yet, NAEP has been criticized for the limitations of the writing samples collected (Applebee, 1994). Students typically write only first draft responses: they write from fifteen minutes to an hour on a set topic, with little room to exercise whatever process related skills they have developed:

If multiple-choice tests of grammar and usage worked against teachers' attempts to require students to write, so the current, limited samples of student writing work against attempts to require extended writing experience, where students engage in a meaningful way with questions of some import to them (Applebee, 1994, p. 41).

Concerns of using writing samples such as NAEP include the limited amount of time, student ownership, and incorporation of the writing process into the assessment. This has significance in determining how much the NAEP or state writing assessments should influence writing instruction. Because students are encouraged to work on one piece of writing for an extended period of time and have ownership of their writing and writing process, writing assessments with assigned topics, specific procedures, and time limits send a mixed message to both teachers and students about what is of importance in writing (Applebee, 1986).

Although the school reform movement also has promoted efforts to change the ways in which students' work and learning are assessed, it too has received criticism:

Much of the rationale for these initiatives is based on growing evidence that traditional norm-references, multiple-choice tests fail to measure complex cognitive and performance abilities. Furthermore, when used for decision making, these tests encourage instruction where the emphasis is on decontextualized, rote-oriented tasks that impose low cognitive demands rather than on meaningful learning. Thus, efforts to raise standards of learning and performance must rest in part on efforts to transform assessment practices (Darling-Hammond and Ancess, 1996, p. 52).

Darling-Hammond and Ancess give credence to the efforts of the Michigan Department of Education to use alternative assessments instead of traditional objective tests of writing. Yet, they caution that these new assessments may not improve instruction.

If performance-based assessments are used in the same fashion as current externally developed and mandated tests are used, they are likely to highlight differences in students' learning even more keenly, but they will be unlikely to help teachers revamp their teaching or schools rethink their ways of operating. If tests arrive in secured packets and leave in parcels for external scoring, teachers will have only a superficial understanding of what the assessments are trying to measure or achieve. If assessments are occasional externally controlled events used primarily for aggregated measures of student achievement levels, they are unlikely to be constructed in ways that provide rich information about how students learn and how they approach different kinds of tasks and opportunities.

The MEAP attempts to provide information on how students learn to write, but forcing the test to meet the range of teacher knowledge and student knowledge about writing in the State of Michigan restricted the test in ways that make it less informative about individual children's strengths and needs. In the long run teachers are losing control of assessment. Taking the development of the test out of the hands of almost all teachers means that the teachers are unlikely to change practice based on test results.

Consequently, teachers will have little opportunity to use the results to understand the complex nuances of student learning in ways that support more successful instruction, and little information on which to act in trying to rethink their daily practices. They will have no new grist for ongoing conversations with parents and with their peers about the insights and dilemmas raised through an ongoing, integrated, collaborative process of teaching, learning, and assessment. Furthermore, if the results are used to allocate rewards and sanctions for students, teachers, and/or schools, the assessments will inspire fear and continual gameplaying to manipulate student populations, but they will be unlikely to open up the kinds of honest inquiry and serious innovation needed to stimulate new learning and transform practices in fundamental ways (Darling-Hammond and Ancess, 1996, p. 52).

Even though one of the purposes for performance-based assessments may be to drive the curriculum, Darling-Hammond and Aneess bring up several problems with this argument. The perception of the public and even of educators is that we have taken a giant step forward: the new writing assessment is a closer match between what happens in the classroom and objective, machine scored tests. Since MEAP does not test isolated writing skills, as in traditional multiple-choice tests, but rather assesses a piece of student writing in which students apply the various writing skills, the test appears to provide a closer match with writing instruction. The problem is helping people realize that this new assessment brings with it its own set of issues. For example, the fifth grade writing assessment is given at the end of fifth grade and the results are not available until the following fall. By this time, students and teachers are no longer in the context (classroom) in which they completed the assessment, eliminating the possibility of any follow-up instruction based on the results of the assessment that teachers and students might have incorporated into the curriculum.

Darling-Hammond and Aneess (1996) warn that if assessments are used to rank schools, districts, and states on performance-oriented tasks, certain criteria must be followed:

Due to their intended uses, the tests will need to be carefully controlled and managed to ensure scoring reliability and security. This means local teachers, parents, and students can have little voice in choices of tasks and assessment opportunities or the means of configuring them; that those assessments that count will still be occasional and threatening rather than continuous and developmental; that the strategies for assessment will be limited to what can be managed with external development and reliable scoring at "reasonable" costs; and that the learning available to school people will be limited to that which can occur at several removes from hands-on participation (1996, p. 76).

Darling-Hammond and Aness argue that if tests are to be used for comparison purposes across schools, districts, and states, they must necessarily be both controlled and managed. If they are not, they will be of less use to teachers, students and parents as a means of improving teaching and learning. As Darling-Hammond and Aness point out, control and manageability are strongly influenced by practical issues such as reliability and cost containment that supersede concern for instructional practices.

The reliability factor is an issue addressed by Burger and Burger in "Determining the Validity of Performance-Based Assessment." They are in favor of retaining computer scored, objective tests, which can get high reliabilities. They claim that rater reliability in large scale writing assessments is faulty, and favor delaying further performance based testing until they are proven reliable.

The rather low interrater reliability found for the writing assessment in the current study supports Haertel's (1990) observation that the subjective nature of many performance measures increases the risk for problems with reliability. Research thus far has failed to demonstrate that performance assessments are consistently replicable (Mehrens, 1992). The authors are inclined to agree with Beck (1991) that performance assessment is not ready to implement on a large-scale basis; that it is not yet socially, politically, or legally viable. In the midst of the current enthusiasm for performance assessment, it should be remembered that such measures will be fair and credible only with continued careful empirical development based on rigorous and widely accepted standards (1994, p. 14).

They argue that computer scored, objective tests have shown high reliability over time, while large-scale performance based tests are in the formative stages and must be closely monitored.

The question remains: Can large-scale performance assessments that comprise "activities that are also models of good instructional activities" (Haertel and Mullis, 1996, p. 288) be administered and provide results that are both valid

and reliable? Beyond this question, however, is an equally important question: what impact will these tests have on curriculum and instruction?

In his article "The Influence of Testing on the Curriculum," George Madaus writes about the impact high stakes tests of any kind have on curriculum and instruction. "It is testing, not the 'official' stated curriculum, that is increasingly determining what is taught, how it is taught, what is learned, and how it is learned" (1988, p. 83). Walter Loban said it twenty years ago. "The curriculum inevitably shrinks or expands to the boundaries of what is evaluated" (1976, p. i). This ongoing discussion of curriculum, instruction, and controversy related to large scale testing of writing on the national level prompts a need for close examination of the issues related to testing in Michigan.

Large Scale Testing of Writing in Michigan

The State of Michigan Department of Education currently tests all public school students, and private schools students who choose to participate, in reading, math, science, and writing. "The purpose of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) is: to provide information on the status and progress of Michigan basic skills education to the State Board of Education, the Executive Office, the Legislature, local educators, teachers, students, and parents" (Michigan Educational Assessment Program Handbook, 1989, p. 15) MEAP was initiated by the State Board of Education, supported by the Governor, and funded by the Legislature (The Michigan State Board of Education, 1989).

The State seems to use the term "assessment" in its title for the writing test because "testing" has negative connotations for many students and teachers that "assessment" usually does not. Although the MEAP is titled an "assessment," it only partially meets the definition used for this study: "the

process of gathering evidence of what a student can do" (p. 7). The test is a formal means used to get students to write so that their writing can be measured, but it is only one measure on one day. It does not demonstrate what students can do over time in normal learning situations.

In their flier "Are we alone in this venture???", the Michigan Department of Education emphasizes that other states are also in this testing venture:

- ◆ Statewide assessment is almost universal. Forty-five of the 50 states have implemented some form of statewide assessment.
- ◆ Writing is assessed in 39 states, or approximately 85 percent of the states with assessment programs.
- ◆ States are most likely to assess students in grades four, eight, and eleven.
- ◆ The most common pattern for a state assessment system...includes...a writing sample (to assess the ability of students to write--an almost universal outcome).
- ◆ State activity in the development of nontraditional [constructed response assessment] exercises is up in all subjects, with the biggest activity in development apparent in writing....(1995).

The state of Minnesota is currently developing basic-skills math and reading tests for the class of 2000 and will be adding a writing test for the class of 2001. A newspaper article reported: "The firm (Sugenblick and Myers) will release a cost estimate for the writing test this fall, but Myers said a 'ballpark figure' for the per-student cost of the test to school districts would be about \$30 per student" (Star Tribune, June 26, 1996). Although no complete figures on the cost of the test in the State of Michigan are known to me at the present time, the state is investing heavily in MEAP Writing Tests.

The first MEAP tests were given in Michigan during the 1969-70 school year in the areas of mathematics and reading to fourth, seventh, and tenth grade students. All of these were "objective" (computer scored) tests until the

spring of 1996. Over the years, the tests have been revised and the program expanded to include a science test in the fifth, eighth, and eleventh grades. The Department of Education has established a three week window for schools to administer this battery of tests.

Since the time the MEAP assessment program was incorporated into Michigan's curriculum, ideas about teaching and learning have been revised in the state curriculum. According to some authorities, as a result of tests, learners are no longer considered as passive recipients of knowledge transmitted by the teacher (Jackson, 1968; Brinkley, 1995; Cohen, 1989) (although historically few authorities on education favored passivity for student learning.) Rather they are active participants in the learning process. This has particular significance for writing.

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.... 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 assessments - since writing provides proof of students' ability to think and to use language to generate and communicate knowledge (Brinkley, 1995, p. 87).

This "proof" relates back to Haertel and Mullis (1996), as well as Darling-Hammond and Aneess (1996) when they describe their rationales for moving from objective tests to performance based assessments. Will large-scale performance based writing assessments in Michigan lead to students becoming more active participants in the learning process?

During the current school year, 1995-96, the State of Michigan has instituted both the new writing and science MEAP assessments, and in the near future there will be revised versions of the reading and math assessments. All

four assessments will include writing components as means of assessing student performance in the various content areas.

Among the problems of implementation is identifying the the relationship between assessment and curriculum. As Edward White writes, “ Make no mistake: assessment defines goals and expresses values. When our students ask us whether a class topic will be on the test, they are expressing this same view: if you really value it, you will assess it. The converse is also true: what you assess *is* what you value” (1994, p. 293). In the case of MEAP, the “you” would refer to the State of Michigan and the core curriculum, not the teachers. Although the core curriculum is not mandated by the State Legislature for use in Michigan's schools, the MEAP is based on benchmarks outlined in this document. Schools, therefore, are choosing to base their curriculum on these guidelines as a means of preparing students for the MEAP.

There must be a reciprocal relationship. “The curriculum frames the assessment, but the assessment, in turn, drives the curriculum” (Sudol, 1994, p. 17). Yet the curriculum and assessment are and must be different things: the curriculum needs to be process oriented while assessment is product oriented. Educators warn that the process cannot be broken down into discrete stages applicable to every writer and readily measurable:

The challenge for teachers is to find ways to help students internalize their individual writing processes. The assessment instruments themselves cannot be expected to assure students will perform the preliminary and revisionary activities that might improve their performance. However, the assessment needs to provide sufficient time for planning central ideas, organizing, revising, and editing by writers (Sudol, 1994, p. 16).

As a part of the curriculum, teachers will help learners prepare for assessments such as the MEAP. They may give students opportunities to develop their own

writing processes which then assists them as they participate in large-scale assessments such as MEAP.

A second problem with implementation, in addition to determining the relationship of assessment and curriculum, is assuring that the writing be assessed and rated equally for each writer. "Even though raters are requested to consider in their evaluations such attributes as content and organization, they may permit their impression of the grammar and mechanics of the compositions to create a 'halo effect' which suffuses their general rating" (Braddock, 1963, p. 15). This may work in the reverse as well, with an over-emphasis on the rhetorical aspects of writing such as the use of details and the overall organization at the expense of usage and mechanics which also affect overall quality. It is a challenge to investigate these aspects of writing assessment in a scientific way, if that is possible.

According to the International Reading Association- National Council of Teachers of English Standards For the Assessment of Reading and Writing "The assessment problem becomes, then, one of setting conditions so that the classroom becomes a center of inquiry where students and teachers investigate their own learning, both individually and as a learning community" (1994, p. 16.) As John Dewey (1938) explained in his principle of continuity of experience, each new experience (in this case assessment), "both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after" (p. 35). Effective implementation of a writing assessment depends on continuing informed reflection and discussion about the aims and methods of assessments and the aims and methods of instruction.

In this era of accountability, constituencies are demanding that writing be taught better. However, many are unaware of the implied competencies that teachers and writers must cultivate and coordinate (e.g. critical reasoning and

logic, composing techniques like drafting and revision, content knowledge, social knowledge about audience, etc.). "Writing is so deeply identified with everyday experience, human identity, and social power that beliefs about it carry a heavy emotional charge; it seems in some sense to be everyone's business rather than the property of experts" (Phelps, 1994, p. 236).

By calling for essay testing and more recently for portfolio assessment, teachers have hoped to gain power over assessment and hence over the definition of what is to be valued in education. They have attempted to impose the educational vision of assessment as a vital support for the learner onto the institutional vision of assessment as a sorting and certifying device (White, 1994, p. 292).

Since large scale, high stakes testing seems to be here to stay for some time, educators are attempting to correlate assessment tools with quality classroom learning experiences.

Writing in reference to state assessments, Barnard (1994) talks to the issue of the influence on curriculum.

How curriculum is imparted to students is heavily influenced by state assessments, mandated in some form in every state (Madaus and Tann, 1993). A common tenet of the national movement is that changing the way students are assessed has strong influence on classroom practices. Testing is the fastest means to change what is taught and how it is taught (1994, p. 349).

If Michigan legislators see writing as important - and they must since they have mandated that there be a separate assessment for writing - they seem to intend that classroom instruction in writing be influenced by the MEAP Writing Assessment.

The International Reading Association (IRA) and National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Standards for the Assessment of Reading and Writing seem to support this view that assessment influence instruction. "The central function of assessment ... is not to prove whether or not teaching or

learning have taken place, but to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and to increase the likelihood that all members of society will acquire a full and critical literacy" (p. 15).

Although an assumed purpose is to improve the teaching of writing, the major purpose of MEAP is to provide data on the current status and progress of education in Michigan.

Teacher Learning About Writing

All teachers on the assessment team in this study were veteran teachers except the associate teacher. Research on how to support and stimulate the professional development of veteran teachers suggests that the view teachers take has less to do with individual characteristics and more to do with the opportunities and expectations of the context in which they learn and work (Jackson, 1968; Lortie, 1966). In this study, the expectation of the State of Michigan that teachers and students participate in the new MEAP Writing Assessment has served as an incentive for teacher learning about writing in some school districts.

Too often the training is perfunctory with no follow up help. As a result teachers do not adapt new approaches to their own teaching situation and school practices do not change. In short, improving the practice of experienced teachers has not been taken seriously as a legitimate inservice priority (Feiman-Nemser, 1983, pp. 163-164).

Inservice programs which promote teachers' continued learning and openness to new ideas particularly about writing instruction and assessment often are brief and superficial when compared to the breadth and depth of expertise needed to teach writing.

Since learning is a social experience and does not occur in a vacuum, collaboration plays an important role in teacher learning. As learners gain

knowledge of subject matter, they are welcomed into a community of discourse (Gee, 1989). A community of discourse is described as a socially accepted way of using language, of thinking and acting by a particular group. For example, if a teacher is knowledgeable in the area of writing, he/she will be able to enter the "conversation" of writers and/or teachers of writing, both dead and alive. By being a participant in this ongoing conversation of subject matter, the teacher is better prepared to facilitate transactions with that same subject matter for his/her students. It is during the transaction between the learner, the subject matter, and the teacher that knowledge is constructed and reconstructed (Hawkins, 1974; McDiarmid, 1989; Rosenblatt, 1978).

Since each learner constructs and reconstructs knowledge for him or herself, it is important that the individuality of the learner is not overlooked. Not only are classrooms filled with students but also teachers of varying abilities. This can be both a strength and a weakness. It is a strength in that the variety of abilities in our teaching force provides students with opportunities for multiple learning experiences. The weakness surfaces when teachers deny themselves the opportunity to continue learning and improving their knowledge and teaching strategies. Often teachers will teach defensively (McNeil, 1986) out of fear of administrative evaluation or lack of content knowledge. Rather than take the risk of what Lortie has called, "teaching against the grain" (Cochran-Smith, 1991), they will revert to subject-centered strategies learned during their "apprentice-of-observation." This lack of knowledge and self-confidence cannot help but sell students short (Sedlak, 1986):

As teachers learn about how students approach tasks, what helps them learn most effectively, and what assessment tasks challenge and support the kinds of learning desired, they find themselves transforming both their teaching and their assessment strategies. The more information teachers obtain, the more capacity they have to reform their pedagogy,

and the more opportunities they create for student success (Darling-Hammond and Aneess, 1996, p. 65).

Staff development is one way in which teachers receive information and support for reforming pedagogy and creating more opportunities for student success. In Staff Development for Education in the '90s, Ann Lieberman and Lynne Miller suggest that when inservice is provided, change can only occur when there is a "balance between system-driven collegiality and collaboration and the preservation of teacher individuality" (1990, p. 105). They also list what they feel are the starting points for considering staff development which encourages change.

- ◆ Staff development is culture building. Activities should connect the renewal of schooling and the renewal of educators.
- ◆ Teachers need to write and have feedback on their writing and find the joys and challenges that writing offers through the staff development.
 - ◆ Staff development is teacher inquiry into practice. Opportunities for "reflective practice" (Schon, 1983) should be provided.
- ◆ Teachers need to have significant input into the design and implementation of staff development in writing as well as opportunities to examine their current practice and discuss it in relation to new learnings about writing.
 - ◆ Staff development is about human development and learning for both students and teachers. Staff development needs to connect the activities it organizes and promotes for adults with learning outcomes for students.
- ◆ Teachers rightfully insist that staff development opportunities relate directly to their opportunities to help students perform better in writing.
 - ◆ Teaching is a craft. No matter how school cultures are transformed, the individual teacher continues to make and remake the classroom, based on his or her own imagination, spirit, inspiration, and learning.

Writing knowledge and skill is insufficient if staff development opportunities do not promote teachers' interest and commitment.

Since many classroom teachers have not participated in courses in writing instruction, well designed staff development opportunities may be one means of providing support and encouragement for teachers. Reflecting on one's practice and collaborating with fellow educators are necessary components for successful professional development.

Because the individual teacher does "make and remake the classroom," many researchers are highlighting the importance of getting teachers out of the isolation of their classrooms into collaborative situations where they may share and reflect upon their own learning and that of their students.

- ♦ The give and take of conversation among persons at different places in learning to teach would expand the universe of concrete alternatives and overcome the limits and biases of personal experience" (Feiman-Nemser and Buchmann, 1985, p. 72).
- ♦ (W)hen schools wrestle with their own standard setting, the collective struggle to define directions, to evaluate progress, and to "map backward" into new curriculum and teaching possibilities can create an engine for school wide change that is absent when assessment is entirely externalized. If authentic forms of student assessment are shaped and implemented by members of the whole school community, they can enable the kinds of teacher, parent, and student learning that are needed to support the classroom and school wide changes required for student success (Darling-Hammond and Ancess, 1996, p. 53).
- ♦ (T)he public has rediscovered something most educators have always known - the importance of the teacher. There can be no excellence in education without first-rate teachers. One can change the curriculum, buy more materials, refurbish the physical environment, lengthen the school day, but without good teachers, change will not produce the desired effect (Zumwalt, 1986, p. vii).

Larry Cuban reminds us that debates about how teachers should teach, the role of content in classrooms, and how children learn are familiar:

When value shifts occur in the larger society, schools accommodate...(R)eforms do return as the cycle shifts but they wear different clothes. Stability exists amid change...What often ends up in districts and schools are signs of reform in new rules, different tests, revised organizational charts, and new equipment. Seldom are the

deepest structures of schooling that are embedded in the school's use of time and space, teaching practices, and classroom routines fundamentally altered even at those historical moments when reforms seek those alterations as the goal (1990, pp.7 - 9).

I know from twenty-eight years of teaching that teachers are isolated in their classrooms with very few collaborative opportunities. If reform is to occur, even if it returns wearing "different clothes," teachers need to have and/or make opportunities to join the "community of learners" as they reflect upon and reconstruct their paradigms about writing instruction and assessment.

Writing projects, such as those offered by National Writing Project (NWP) affiliates, provide a form of inservice that has touched the lives of many teachers and children. Their focus is on teacher to teacher learning. Through the reading of research, writing, and sharing of ideas, teachers learn and grow both as individuals and teachers of writing. Teachers are provided with the opportunity to participate in an inquiry based environment of participation and reflection, a model of an environment they might create for their students. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) write concerning the Bay Area Writing Project:

The part captured by that project is getting the teacher to function as a learner with respect to writing. Note that this is quite fundamentally different from the more commonplace notion that the teacher of writing must be a good writer. Many teachers might be unable to meet that requirement. But the requirement that the teacher be able to function as a good learner of writing seems, to judge from the experience of the Bay Area project and its offshoots, to be within the capabilities of the majority (p. 26).

Besides providing opportunities for continued learning and growth as teachers of writing, writing projects also provide follow-up opportunities and encourage ongoing networking of teachers as a support system through times of change. Writing projects are one way of networking. Networking is a means teachers may use to support each other through periods of change such as the

introduction of the new MEAP Writing Assessment. The assessment is here; it is a change, and teachers need to decide how and if they need to adjust their writing curriculum to prepare for the assessment. The assessment seems to require some sort of networking because many teachers do not get district provided inservice. Other networking possibilities initiated by teachers individually are E-mail correspondence, subgroups participation within professional organizations such as NCTE and IRA, and use of internet chat groups such as NCTE's Talk. I am not aware, however, that many teachers use these, except teachers who are highly committed to those forms of interactions.

Even if teachers network or find individual ways to become knowledgeable about writing assessment Darling-Hammond and Ancess caution educators about using assessment to bring about transformation in schools:

Assessments that are externally developed and scored are unlikely to transform the knowledge and understandings of teachers - and of school organizations - even if they are more performance-based than are current tests. This is because teachers' learning about the deeper structures of curriculum, the nature and nuances of students' thinking, and the connections between teaching efforts and student performances derives substantially from firsthand, constructivist encounters with assessment development and the subsequent evaluation of students' work. Assessment reforms can increase students' success by increasing organizational learning if they change not only the kinds of tasks students are asked to engage in but also the kinds of inquiry schools and teachers are called upon to undertake as they bring assessment into the heart of the teaching and learning process (1996, p. 53).

"With the kinds of inquiring schools and teachers are called upon to undertake" curriculum may be changed. As Cuban notes, however, we may continue to reform "again, again, and again?" (1990, p. 11). The history of educational reform in writing instruction is relatively recent. So change can be expected in the coming years. This may further discourage teachers, however, because

repetitive changes means they will be less able to count on firm expectations that will inform their teaching.

Curriculum Change In Writing

There have always been attempts to change or revise curriculum. Yet, stability is also necessary so that teachers and learners know what to expect. When the need for change arises, however, it is often unsettling. Why is curriculum change so difficult in school culture? Sarason relates that one reason might be structure.

(E)xisting structure of a setting or culture defines the permissible ways in which goals and problems will be approached. Not so obvious, particularly to those who comprise the structure, is that existing structure is but one of many alternative structures possible in that setting and that the existing one is a barrier to recognition and experimentation with alternative ones (Sarason, 1982, p. 12).

He also suggests that it is a near impossibility for most people to view alternative structures dispassionately, "because it confronts them with the necessity of changing their thinking, then changing their actions, and, finally changing the overall structure of the setting" (p. 13).

The MEAP Writing Assessment was mandated by the State of Michigan without providing the majority of teachers with the necessary professional development to assist them in changing the writing curriculum. The State has initiated consequences, however, for not achieving satisfactory scores on the MEAP: both funding and school accreditation are linked to results. Wilson, Mill and Yerkes (1992) feel that the explanation for a lack of change in schools needs to go much beyond threats:

We work in a professional development school, an environment in which there are financial and personal incentives; a great deal of intellectual and organizational support; facilitative and supportive conditions. Yet with all of these supports and resources, the process of changing our

practice has been difficult and slow. It is our collective experience that changing one's teaching practice-no matter the conditions-is difficult work. As we think back on our work together, four factors seem critical to us: time and trust, courage and communication (pp. 4 & 8).

Teacher collaboration and networking provide opportunities for teachers to support each other through periods of change, such as the institution of the MEAP Writing Assessment. They provide teachers with the time and opportunities to learn to trust, to encourage one another, and to communicate as they learn and grow as teachers of writing.

Even if teachers go back to colleges and universities for more study, their graduate programs may not include anything in writing instruction. School districts offering their own inservices may not offer sessions on writing for teachers, particularly long-term, in-depth programs that allow teachers to participate in the process as writing authorities have indicated is necessary. Teachers, as students of writing and writing instruction, need to join the ongoing conversation about writing:

Literacy can be thought of as the series of clubs we want our students to join - the science and math and writing and art clubs. In joining they take part in the long human conversation that includes the dead, as well as the living, and will go into a future we can hardly imagine: (Holmes, 1990, p. 17).

In this way, teachers of writing are constantly reflecting on and revising their writing curriculum.

State writing tests are here. If these tests do affect curriculum and if students in Michigan are involved in the process of writing in these tests, it is paramount that educators have information about how teachers and students prepare for, participate in, and reflect on the new MEAP Writing Assessment in Michigan. The problem is complex: How knowledgeable are teachers and students in the writing process? In what ways are teachers adjusting the

curriculum to accommodate the test? How did the opportunity to share ideas, and give and receive peer response, work for students? What suggestions do teachers and students have to help in future preparation for the test? This study is an initial attempt to explore these complex issues and others. The next chapter provides a description of the methods used to frame this study of the new MEAP Writing Assessment as it is initiated into one elementary school in Michigan.

Chapter III

THE DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Introduction

This study originated in the fall of 1995 as I began to consider the new fifth grade writing assessment mandated for the State of Michigan. As a fifth grade teacher, I was concerned about its implications for my students, my colleagues, my district, and myself as a teacher. Knowing that this new test would be playing a prominent role in my teaching agenda for the school year of 1995 and 96, and having the encouragement of my advisor, Dr. Fitzgerald, I embarked on an adventure with my colleagues at Anderson Elementary as we sailed the maiden voyage of the statewide writing assessment.

Having worked with one of the current fifth grade teachers in a collaborative situation for ten years, and another teacher less formally for approximately two years, I decided to invite them, along with four other teachers, to become members of a team that would work collaboratively as we prepared ourselves and our students for the new assessment. The team consisted of the four fifth grade teachers, one special education (inclusion) teacher, a Title I (at-risk) teacher, and an associate (student) teacher. All three of the support individuals were working in one or more of the four fifth grade classrooms daily.

This is the account, therefore, of four fifth grade classroom teachers, and three special teachers, as they work together as a team to prepare for teaching and participate in the fifth grade writing MEAP in their individual classrooms.

How the Study Was Conducted

Methodology

The methodology for this research is within the framework of qualitative research. *The Literacy Dictionary* defines qualitative research as, “research that is conducted in naturalistic settings in order to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings that people bring to them” (1995, p. 200). The location for this research was the “naturalistic setting” of an elementary school and the purpose was to “make sense of” the new MEAP Writing Assessment “in terms of” the teachers administering the assessment and their students. Qualitative research, therefore, is appropriate for this study.

Bogdan and Biklen describe qualitative research as studies that share certain characteristics:

The data collected have been termed *soft*, that is, rich in description of people, places, and conversations, and not easily handled by statistical procedures. Research questions are not framed by operationalizing variables; rather, they are formulated to investigate topics in all their complexity, in context. While people conducting qualitative research may develop a focus as they collect data, they do not approach the research with specific questions to answer or hypotheses to test (1992, p. 2)

The elementary school setting for this research exhibits the following characteristics of qualitative research:

1. the natural setting as the direct source of data (the classroom setting),
2. the use of descriptive data (audio and video taping, field notes, interview transcripts, and documents),
3. the concern for process, not only outcomes or products (observing the teaching and learning as students and teachers prepare for the writing MEAP),

4. the analysis of data inductively (discovering the strategies that best assist students as they improve their writing skills and prepare for the MEAP), and
5. the essential concern for "meaning" (examining perspectives of participants to discover how the teaching and learning processes taking place).

(paraphrased from Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, pp. 27 -30).

Because I was teaching and had previously conducted classroom research at this site, I was readily accepted as a participant/observer. Since I was a fifth grade teacher in a fifth grade classroom at Anderson Elementary (pseudonym), I attempted to increase reliability of data by having another teacher record field notes during each testing situation (Athanases and Heath, 1995, p. 281). One teacher administered the test and the other served as a proctor. This was a disadvantage as well as an advantage because the teachers knew my background in writing project work and my expectations for quality in a writing program, so they may have adjusted their teaching more dramatically than they would have had I not been a colleague.

After receiving approval from UCRIHS (University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects) (see Appendix C), weekly meetings of the MEAP Writing Assessment team between February 2 and March 18 were audio-taped. Logs of individual teachers' thoughts and classroom strategies were collected. Notebooks on how students were preparing themselves and their reflections upon their learning also were collected. One other participating teacher and I administered and proctored the writing MEAP in each of the classrooms on the days of the test. Each recorded observational notes either during or following the administration of the assessment. In the

case of my classroom, one other participating teacher was invited to observe and serve as proctor.

Qualitative research, therefore, seemed especially appropriate for examining the research questions of this study:

(Q)ualitative researchers attempt to expand rather than confine understanding. They do not attempt to resolve such ambiguity by seeing the differences as a "mistake" and so attempt to establish a standard definition. Rather, they seek to study the concept as it is understood in the context of all those who use it. Similarly, when going to study an organization, one does not attempt to resolve the ambiguity that occurs when varied definitions of the word *goal* arise, or when people have different goals. The subject of the study focuses instead on how various participants see and experience goals. It is multiple realities rather than a single reality that concern the qualitative researcher (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 42).

Yet, there are also disadvantages related to qualitative research. For example, the issue of reliability and validity that critics raise as an objection to the use of writing samples in assessments may also be raised about the teachers and students' writing samples used in this qualitative research study. Later I will consider the limitations of this study (See Chapter VI, p. 197).

Types of Data Collection

Data collection began February 1, 1996, and concluded at the end of the 1995 - 1996 school year. It included:

1. Audio-taped and/or video taped interviews with selected students and the teachers both before (the last two weeks in February) and after (the first two weeks of April) the MEAP Writing Assessment: Teacher interviews were conducted either before school, during released time, or after school. Since one from our team of teachers was in my classroom each day, I was able to conduct student interviews during school hours.

The school librarian set up the video camera for taping of student interviews. In order to make students feel more comfortable with the taping, I had them look through the camera before their interview, something they enjoyed which also relaxed them for the interview. Student interviews were also audio taped, so I had two transcripts of these interviews.

2. Teacher's logs of their experiences from February to April as they prepared students for the writing MEAP. Each teacher used his/her own format for these logs. Most of the teachers wrote their reflections directly in the logs; one teacher chose to take notes and elaborate in his log at a later date.

3. Copies of written reflections from all student participants following the test. Each student completed a reflection log. Formats for these entries were at the discretion of the individual teachers. For example, one teacher had students respond to specific questions at the end of a writing workshop while another chose to have students respond following each day of the actual assessment.

4. Copies of information and history of MEAP writing assessment from Michigan Department of Education. These were provided by the county MEAP Coordinator. After contacting her for an interview, I received a packet of all the information she had received from the State, and she continued to send copies of additional materials as she received them.

5. Copies of the Anderson Elementary School Writing Curriculum: This curriculum was revised during the 1994-95 school year. Each teacher has a copy, however, it was never implemented, I believe because Anderson has a new curriculum director who does not feel an ownership of its stated curriculum.

7. Audio-taped interviews with the Intermediate Schools District MEAP coordinator, Anderson's superintendent, principals, school board members, and parents: These interviews were conducted either before or after school, either in my classroom or the interviewees' offices.

8. Observational notes recorded during the administration of the assessment: Two team members, a proctor and the classroom teacher, were present during each day of the assessment. General notes were recorded, with special attention given to selected students.

These sources provided the available data on the major question and substantial data for the other questions under study. The study, however, is limited to the range of data available and to the samples of data collected.

Focus of the Study

Description of MEAP Writing Assessment

Although the State of Michigan has administered MEAP Assessments in reading and math since 1965, and science since 1990, this is the first year the Department of Education assessed writing. This new writing assessment breaks tradition because all previous MEAP assessments were in a multiple-choice, one right answer format. The writing test, however, was an open-ended writing prompt. The 1996 science test, given during the same window of March 4 - 22, also had a new format; it incorporated open-ended questions on science topics to be answered in writing. This coming year, revised assessments in reading and math on the MEAP also will include writing components.

Teachers were given specific directions for administering the MEAP Writing Test. The use of dictionaries, thesauri, spelling books, grammar books, and wall charts are permitted; however, no electronic devices such as Franklin spellers, word processors, or computers were allowed. Students were given

the choice of writing in either pen or pencil. Student information sheets, located on the cover of the final draft booklets, were to be completed with a No. 2 pencil. Watches were permitted for students wishing to pace themselves; however, the use of alarms was not allowed. The exact, word for word, instructions for administering the test were printed in the manual.

The assessment was administered over a three day period: Day I, Prewriting and Drafting; Day II, Drafting and Revising; and Day III, Revising and Proofreading. Testing time for each day was approximately 45 minutes.

On the following pages you will find replicas of descriptive assessment materials provided by the State of Michigan. Figure 1 is the Grade 5 Assessment Plan; It provides the agenda and time allotments of Days I, II, and III of the assessment. Figure 2 is a Sample MEAP Topic on "Change;" this was provided as an example of the format of the actual topic. The final example, Figure 3, is a draft of the rubric provided as a guide, or target, for students and teachers as they prepared for the assessment.

Figure 1**Grade 5 Writing Assessment Plan**

DAY 1 (45 minutes + 5 minutes preparation): Prewriting and Drafting

- Getting Started (5 minutes)

Students are given time to think about a provided topic.

- Peer Discussion (10 minutes)

In small groups, students discuss questions that help them explore and clarify ideas about the topic.

- Listening to and Sharing Responses (10 minutes)

Students share ideas from peer discussion with large group.

- Prewriting and Drafting (20 minutes)

Students begin drafting a response to the writing prompt.

DAY 2 (45 minutes + 5 minutes preparation): Drafting and Revising

- Review of Writing (3 minutes)

- Drafting and Revising (25 minutes)

Students work on the development, focus, and organization of their pieces.

- Peer Response (17 minutes)

Students confer with peer partners from Day 1.

DAY 3 (45 minutes + 5 minutes preparation): Revising and Polishing

- Review of Writing (5 minutes)

Teacher reads aloud checklist of items to consider in revising and polishing piece.

- Final Revision and Polishing (40 minutes)

Scoring

The revised and polished piece of writing will be scored using 1) a 4-point holistic scale, 2) a scoring guide written by Michigan educators, and 3) sample scored papers selected by Michigan educators (Michigan Department of Education, 1995).

Figure 2
Sample MEAP Topic

TOPIC:

Change

THINKING ABOUT THE TOPIC:

- . What kind of changes have you faced?
- . Have you faced changes like having a new baby brother or sister, or getting a new pet?
- . When have you made changes like going to a new school, making a new friend, or becoming part of a team?
- . How did you handle these experiences?
- . What changes do you look forward to in the future?

WRITING ABOUT THE TOPIC:

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

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 little
- 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 (Michigan Department of Education, 1995).

Figure 3
MEAP Assessment Rubric

Tryout Draft
Holistic Scorepoint Descriptions
Grade 5

These are designed to be used in conjunction with illustrative base papers and 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 Mature | Central ideas are clearly developed. The writing may have a natural flow and a clear sense of wholeness (beginning, middle, end); the organization helps move the reader through the text. There is likely to be a clear voice that is precise and interesting. The text demonstrates standard writing conventions. |
| 3 Capable | A recognizable central idea is evident throughout. The writing has a sense of wholeness (beginning, middle, end) although it may have extraneous details. Word choices and sentence structure are likely to be interesting. There may be surface feature errors, but they don't interfere with understanding. |
| 2 Developing | The writing shows a recognizable central idea, yet it may not be sustained or developed. There is an attempt at organization be well connected or developed. Vocabulary may be limited or inappropriate to the task; sentence structure may be somewhat simple. Surface feature errors may make understanding difficult. |
| 1 Emerging | The writing shows little or no development of a central idea. There may be little direction or organization but, nevertheless, an ability to get important words on paper is demonstrated. Vocabulary and sentence structure may be simple. Minimal control of surface features, such as spelling and usage, may severely interfere with understanding (Michigan Department of Education, 1995). |

I had two frameworks from which I intended to analyze the results, Framework I from Department of Education guidelines and Framework II from the writings of an authority on the implications of testing for instruction. I will begin by describing Framework I and Framework II; these will serve as the basis for Chapters V and VI.

Framework I: Assumptions in the MEAP Writing Assessment

Framework I is derived from assumptions made by the MEAP creators concerning the fifth grade writing curriculum. I felt that their test would bring attention to writing, that it appeared to make use of important elements in the writing process, and that it would improve writing instruction in my school district. Since I wanted to use a framework which would look at the test positively, I constructed Framework I from the assumptions undergirding the MEAP Writing Assessment. I also wanted to find out what students and teachers understood about the tasks required in the MEAP Writing Assessment. For the purpose of identifying these terms and tasks, in which students and teachers need to be competent in order for students to score at a passing level (See Chapter 4), each will be printed in bold print the first time it appears.

The MEAP Writing Assessment is a **timed** test which must be completed over a period of three days with specific **time limits**. Students and teachers are to be cognizant of and have a working knowledge of the **writing process**; the format of the assessment itself is designed around the process. After being given an assigned topic, students are asked to **brainstorm** ideas. Students are then given the opportunity to work **collaboratively** with their peers, both in large and small groups. Next, students are asked to begin **drafting** a piece of writing on the assigned topic. They need to begin to develop a piece of writing on the assigned topic for an **audience** of adult readers (unknown to

the writers) for the **purpose** of assessment. Following a twenty minute drafting session, the writings are collected.

The second day the students' pieces are returned. They are then given a 25 minute session in which they are asked to review their piece and then continue drafting and/or begin **revising**. They then return to their small groups from the previous day for the purpose of giving and receiving **peer response** on their writing. At the end of this 17 minute activity, their rough draft booklets are collected once again.

Day III provides a 45 minute period for the purpose of completing revision and **proofreading (editing)** their writings. They are then required to copy their rough drafts into their Final Copy Answer Booklet. These polished pieces of writing are then collected for assessment by National Computer Systems of Iowa City, Iowa, a measurement company hired by the State of Michigan. Only ten percent of the writings are rated in Michigan, with ninety percent being rated in Iowa.

Each of the assumptions about students' knowledge and ability to perform the tasks required in the MEAP Writing Assessment were examined and findings are presented in Chapter V.

Framework II, described below, questions the values of high stakes tests and takes a broader look at the effects of tests, such as the MEAP Writing Assessment, on curriculum, teaching, and learning. Findings of the study using Framework II will be examined in Chapter V.

Framework II: The Impact of the MEAP Writing Assessment on Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning

The MEAP Writing test, however, fits into a larger picture of testing and its implications for all who are concerned about the schooling of children. George

F. Madaus (1988), professor at Boston University, a widely published authority on the influence of testing, presents seven central principles about large scale testing, all of which raise potential dangers of high stakes testing. This framework was chosen because it contrasts with Framework I in intent and because it raises issues directly implying curriculum development, the underlying concern of the major question addressed in this study: **In What Ways and To What Extent Do Fifth Grade Teachers And Their Students In One Rural School Prepare For, Participate In, and Reflect Upon the New State Of Michigan Writing Assessment?**

Framework II is based on seven principles. Although the principles are not hypotheses by which the results of the study are measured, they do provide additional lenses from which the MEAP Writing Assessment can be viewed.

Principle 1: The power of tests and examinations to affect individuals, institutions, curriculum, or instruction is a perceptual phenomenon: If students, teachers, or administrators believe that the results of an examination are important, it matters very little whether this is really true or false - the effect is produced by what individuals perceive to be the case.

Madaus gives credit to Benjamin Bloom (p. 88) for this first principle. When people perceive something as fact, they act in accordance to their perceptions. In other words, if people (students, teachers, parents, administrators, society) perceive the results of MEAP as important, it will be important; these perceptions will have a powerful impact on curriculum and instruction.

As Madaus states, the power of tests in the minds of the general public is enormous. "The numerical scores from high-stakes tests have an objective, scientific, almost magical persuasiveness about them that the general public and policymakers are quick to accept" (p. 89).

Principle 2: The more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision making, the more likely it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor.

Madaus gives credit to Donald Campbell (p. 89) and his work on social indicators for this principle. The effects of this principle “are not limited to testing per se. . . Any measurement of the status of an educational institution, no matter how well designed and well intentioned, inevitably changes its status” (p. 89). Madaus emphasizes that when test results are used as a basis for important social decisions, the resulting changes brought about tend to be “both substantial and corrupting.” The following principles describe reasons for this:

Principle 3: If important decisions are presumed to be related to test results, then teachers will teach to the test.

Madaus speaks of this principle as a “double-edged sword.” First, if a test measures basic skills, the test has the possibility of serving as a lever to improve those skills through preparation for the assessment. Evidence, however, shows that “scores on tests of basic skills rise, not that the skill necessarily improves” (p. 90). In other words, the scores on a test of writing may improve, yet the day to day writing of students in regular class work may not demonstrate that same improvement. Secondly, if the test specializes on a particular curriculum area, such as writing, “the examination will eventually narrow instruction and learning, focusing only on those things measured by the tests” (p. 90).

Two explanations are given for the phenomenon of cramming for a test. First is the pressure of society on teachers to see that students perform well on tests. Second, the assessment results are so important to teachers (as well as students and parents) that their own self-interest in respectable test results demands that they spend considerable instructional time preparing.

The positive aspect of this principle is that the assessment can serve as a lever for reform by reprioritizing curriculum areas. “However, a paradox still remains. Despite the ability of the examination to introduce new material, the weight of examination precedent soon takes over, and the way in which the new material eventually comes to be taught is determined by the examination” (pp. 92 & 93).

Principle 4: In every setting where a high-stakes test operates, a tradition of past exams develops, which eventually de facto defines the curriculum.

This principle explains how teachers cope with the pressure of the assessment. According to Madaus the answer is simple. “Teachers see the kind of intellectual activity required by previous test questions and prepare the students to meet those demands” (p. 93). If the skills are well chosen and the tests measure those skills, then some argue coaching is the answer. Madaus, however, goes on to explain that if the professional worth of a teacher is based on the results of an exam, “teachers will corrupt the skills measured by reducing them to the level of strategies in which the examinee is drilled” (p. 93). If perceptions of the test are important enough, commercially prepared coaching materials become available. This currently is happening in reading, math, and now writing. The danger of Principle 4 is that while students may be successful at passing tests, they may remain “profoundly uneducated” (p. 95).

Principle 5: Teachers pay particular attention to the form of the questions on a high-stakes test (for example, short answer, essay, multiple-choice) and adjust their instruction accordingly.

The problem defined by this principle is the narrowing of instruction to fit test expectations. For example, students are apt to find themselves spending more time taking practice MEAP assessments and less time experimenting with other writing activities in various genre for a variety of audiences.

Principle 6: When test results are the sole or even partial arbiter of future educational or life choices, society tends to treat test results as the major goal of schooling rather than as useful but fallible indicator of achievement.

Madaus sees the effects attributed to assessment in this principle as perhaps the most damaging. He refers to Ralph Tyler (p. 97) and his warning that society tends to treat the results of assessments as the major end of schooling, "rather than a useful but not infallible indicator of student achievement" (p. 97).

Principle 7: A high-stakes test transfers control over the curriculum to the agency which sets or controls the exam.

The agency responsible for the assessment assumes a great deal of control over teaching and learning. Madaus warns that since most state-level assessments are developed and validated by outside contractors, "the state may be effectively delegating this very real power over education to a commercial company whose interest is primarily financial and only secondarily educational" (p. 98). In addition, a local or district determination of curriculum is turned over to the state. In the conclusion of his article, Madaus says that what is needed in United States education is more discussion of creative counter strategies where curriculum and instruction are driving testing, rather than testing driving curriculum and instruction.

Madaus' principles provide Framework II for this study. In Chapter V, the results at Anderson Elementary School were examined to note elements in the data that support or fail to support these seven principles.

To sum up, I have presented here two frameworks, one takes the state test at its word and the other takes a more critical stance. Both Framework I, the MEAP Assumptions and Framework II, Madaus' Principles, were used to

examine the data collected in this study. The data includes team meetings, interviews, and observations.

Setting for Study

The setting for this research study was Anderson Elementary School (pseudonym) located in Anderson, Michigan. This is a rural community with a general population of 2,580 located in the lower peninsula. The Anderson Area School District has a student population of 1,219. It has one parochial elementary school and two public schools, an elementary school and a middle/high school housed in one building. Anderson Elementary School has a student population of 522 students, kindergarten through fifth grade. The demographic make-up is predominately Caucasian, with five Hispanic Americans and one African/Oriental American. Approximately one-third, 168 out of 522 students, at Anderson Elementary qualify for the federally funded breakfast and lunch program.

Anderson Elementary has four fifth-grade classrooms with a total of 115 students. Four students are serviced by resource room teachers, two by the instructor for the emotionally impaired, and forty by the Title One At Risk Program. Selection of the forty Title I students is based on their fourth grade end of the year grades, MEAP reading and math assessment scores, as well as teacher recommendation.

During the 1995-96 school year, the Title I Program teacher is assisting students in the areas tested by MEAP: reading, writing, math and science. In Frederick County, of which Anderson is a part, there are 2,162 students identified as eligible for Title I services. Anderson Elementary, therefore, provides a research setting much like other rural Michigan - basically Caucasian - districts with high percentages of low income families.

Participants

It was the intent of this study to examine the classroom practices of the four fifth grade teachers, and other related faculty, at Anderson Elementary School as we prepared our students for the new MEAP Writing assessment. Since I was one of the fifth grade teachers, I was a participant as well as a researcher. Each of the key teacher participants had taught twenty or more years. I had extensive training in writing through participation in seven summer writing projects at three different sites. The only inservice on writing the other six team members had received was in a 1988, on-site, intensive five day (one day per week), required, district sponsored workshop on the writing process. The institution of the MEAP Writing Assessment, therefore, presented a challenge for team members.

Faculty participating in this study were informed that the intent of this research is to explore teachers' and students' attitudes about the MEAP Writing Assessment and various ways of approaching the writing students will encounter for the first time in formal assessment. As the teachers reflect on their practice, this team of four teachers may have a better understanding of the variety of strategies available for improving writing instruction. To the extent that Madaus's seven principles hold true, however, the team would need to be on the lookout for distortion of writing instruction that might result if assessment drives the writing curriculum.

In order to acquire a sample of students to interview, each teacher used his/her own judgment to divide the children in his/her classroom into three categories: proficient, average, and less proficient writers. Each teacher selected one student from each category in his/her classroom, thereby identifying a total of twelve students to be interviewed. Answers to interview

questions were analyzed according to the various categories (proficient, average, and less proficient), not by classroom, to preserve anonymity.

One parent of the selected students from each of the four classrooms was interviewed. This group included two parents of proficient writers, one parent of an average writer, and one parent of a less proficient writer. The purpose of the interviews with parents was to gain their perspective on the importance of the new MEAP Writing Assessment.

Two additional parents of an average student also were interviewed since one of the school board members selected for interviewing happened to also be a parent of a fifth-grade student. Also interviewed were an associate teacher, an elementary principal, an assistant elementary principal/curriculum director, a Title I at-risk teacher, a special needs teacher, two school board members (one also being a parent), a superintendent, and an Intermediate School District MEAP coordinator. Each of these interviews was conducted to deduce perceptions on the importance of the MEAP Writing a Assessment and the role its inception will play in the writing curriculum. The following descriptions provide more detailed information on the assessment team: the four fifth grade teachers, associate teacher, special education teacher, and at-risk teacher.

Teachers

Teacher I: Participant/Researcher

For the past twenty-two years I have been teaching at Anderson Elementary. Besides full-time teaching in a fifth grade classroom at Anderson, I have also been Language Arts Coordinator for the K-12 Anderson School District for the last four years. Figure 4 is a job description for that position.

Figure 4**Duties of the Curriculum Coordinator**

1. Resource Person
 - a. Aid teachers upon request with teaching strategies.
 - b. Keep abreast of research based teaching materials and methods.
 - c. Share new research based teaching materials and methods with staff.
2. Collaborate with District Curriculum Coordinator and Building Principal.
3. Member of District Curriculum Council.
4. Facilitate communication of subject area outcomes in conjunction with K-12 staff and administration.
5. Review and update subject area outcomes in conjunction with K-12 staff and administration.
6. Facilitate the use of new research based material and methods with teachers.
7. Initiate curriculum development activities with K-12 staff and provide written recommendations to the Curriculum Council.

During my first three years as coordinator, I met with each grade level to discuss and revise the language arts curriculum, wrote a mini-grant for copies of *Teaching Writing: Balancing Process and Product* by Gail E. Tompkins to give to each second through eighth grade language arts teacher, and facilitated language arts inservices for the District. Due to time constraints, this limited contact with teachers personally was all that could be accomplished.

As I listened to the stories of fellow participants in this study, I also had the opportunity to reflect upon and compare my own experiences in the area of writing with theirs. Consequently, I discovered that our early experiences were quite similar. My elementary, junior high, and high school experiences with writing were limited. The majority of instructional time was consumed with grammar, vocabulary, and spelling exercises. The little writing I did in school

was evaluated mainly for errors in grammar, vocabulary, and spelling, with scant attention given to ideas/ content, purpose, audience, style, or voice.

My college experiences during my undergraduate and graduate programs were much the same. Out of a total of 150 semester hours for my BA in English and 33 semester hours for my MA in Elementary Education, not one course was in the area of writing. When I entered the classroom as an elementary school teacher, my “apprenticeship of observation” experiences as a writing teacher were limited. As Grossman (1990) writes, “Many of teachers’ ideas of how to teach particular topics can be traced back to their memories of how their own teachers approached these topics” (p. 10).

The one course I remember as significant was a music course in which I completed a research project. The instructor evaluated my writing on content, wrote positive comments on my work, and asked to keep a copy for his files. I obviously appreciated the attention given my writing because I still have that paper today.

Since 1981, when I first participated in a writing project, I have become increasingly interested in improving the teaching and learning of writing in schools. Between 1981 and 1995, I participated in six writing projects, four with the Southeast Michigan Writing Project at Adrian College, the Red Cedar Writing Project at Michigan State University, and the Coastal Georgia Writing Project in Savannah, Georgia.

In 1990 I began work on my doctorate in Curriculum, Teaching, and Educational Policy, with an emphasis in literacy, at Michigan State University. Through my coursework, I discovered that my professors were incorporating in their classes the philosophy of writing I encountered in my various writing project experiences. During this same period of time, I taught courses in writing instruction for both Michigan State University and Siena Heights College

located in Adrian, Michigan. In each of these teaching and learning situations, one of the major concerns of the participants, kindergarten through university level, was the assessment of writing.

From 1990-1993, I contributed to a three year portfolio assessment project where analytic assessment was used to evaluate student writing. During this project, I collaborated with fellow team members as we developed criteria and rubrics for the assessment. We then used these as tools for rating student papers over the three year time period.

These experiences spurred my interest in the teaching and learning of writing. When the new MEAP Writing Assessment was proposed for 1996, I chose to focus my doctoral research on the impact of this test on the teaching and learning of writing. Rather than focusing on student outcomes on the test, the focus of this study would be on students, teachers, administrators, school board members, and parents attitudes, as well as classroom practices, as students prepared for participated in, and reflected on the new MEAP Writing Assessment for fifth grade students. As a result my major research question evolved: **In What Ways and To What Extent Do Fifth Grade Teachers and Their Students In One Rural School Prepare For, Participate In And Reflect Upon the New State Of Michigan Writing Assessment?**

Teacher 2: Ben

Ben, a veteran teacher of 24 years, has a BS degree in elementary education. During his pre-assessment interview, he reflected on his background in writing instruction:

I'm trying to think what classes I had. I think some of my graduate classes were in writing of short stories or something like that. But that was a number of years ago. Some of the graduate work I took involved language arts. And then I had the writing experiences for a newspaper.

When asked how he taught writing during his early years of teaching, Ben responded:

I was thinking about that yesterday for some reason. We had the basal reader, but we really didn't teach writing. We had the English books that we used, but most of it was all question/answer. I think that we really never wrote an essay or a story. Most of the writing centered around the reading and then answering the questions that might come up from that.

. . . And we had spelling. The spelling book was more my tool for teaching grammar. I was more comfortable with it and I think the kids were too. I think the English book intimidated them; I know it intimidated me. I also seemed to get more parental involvement if I sent the spelling book home. Parents like the spelling book. I still have spelling lists just because I think the parents want to sit down and have them [their children] do it. So I can't really consciously think that we actually really wrote anything that long. Maybe a paragraph to go with a picture.

Ben and I had team taught for ten years. During that time period we met daily during our morning released time to coordinate our plans. For the majority of those ten years, Ben was responsible for teaching math, science, and health; I shouldered the responsibility for social studies and language arts. One of our priorities was to include "writing across the curriculum" in our program. For example, if Ben was beginning a study of atoms in science, I would have students do a free writing on atoms as a means of discovering their prior knowledge. Ben then used these writings as he developed the study. As a means of assessment at the conclusion of the study, the papers were returned and students were once again asked to write what they knew about atoms.

Four years ago, Ben and I decided to return to self-contained classrooms. We made this decision for two reasons: First, we were assigned a total of 70 students, which we found to be too many for us to get to know and give the needed individual attention. Secondly, we felt we would be able to incorporate more cross curricular activities in self-contained classrooms. We did, however, continue meeting and collaborating during our released time. Due to staff

adjustments, a new teacher, Ruth, joined the fifth grade staff and readily accepted our invitation to collaborate.

Teacher 3: Ruth

According to Ruth, the majority of her early background in writing instruction was acquired from her experiences in special education and learning disabilities. She has a BA in regular and special education, and an MA in learning disabilities. In the past 26 years, Ruth has taught both regular and special education classes.

During the pre-assessment interview, I asked Ruth about her own background in writing. "If I go back to my own writing, I am not a confident writer. But I don't remember, I guess, writing and being encouraged. It was just doing reports. Maybe that's why I don't have the confidence."

Ruth showed that same lack of confidence when she first joined our fifth grade planning group four years ago. Today, however, she is an extremely confident contributor to the group. One might describe her as vibrant, and exhilarating, overflowing with ideas. When a former elementary counselor, Beth, joined the fifth grade staff as a teacher three years ago, Ruth was ready to serve as her mentor.

Teacher 4: Lynn

Lynn has a BA in elementary education and an MA in counseling. The 1995-96 school year is her 20th year of teaching. When asked about her background in writing instruction, she responded:

Well, I've taken all the classes, of course, as far as reading and language arts. I did take the writing project for a one week summer session. Also, being involved in the reading room, we did a lot with the writing process in its connection - or its correlation - with reading.

Lynn has taught in the regular classroom, has served as Title I reading teacher, and has been an elementary counselor. This is her third year in fifth grade. When asked about the ways in which her teaching of writing has changed over the years, Lynn reflected:

Oh, drastically! When I was teaching younger students, writing was basically for pure enjoyment - to share their thoughts; to share their ideas. I don't know if it's been my own thoughts to change writing or if it's been because of the upper el students. I perceive writing now not only as a means of communication, but a means of enjoyment, a thought process, a skill, more or less a sharing. It's more or less a refined skill that takes that sharing to a higher level. Maybe the bridge, we've crossed the bridge, we're not at the other end yet, but we've crossed it. We get our thoughts across and we try the different techniques. I guess that's how it's changed; it's evolved a little bit as my students have gotten older.

Two years ago, when the administration decided to transfer Ben to fourth grade, our team meetings disbanded. After a year in fourth, Ben moved with his class back to fifth, and Lynn joined our team as we prepared for the MEAP Writing Assessment.

Additional Faculty:

Associate Teacher: Jill

Serving as an associate teacher in Ruth's classroom, Jill brings the perspective of youth to our team. Jill's background in writing instruction is also limited. When reflecting on her high school years, Jill remembers grammar being emphasized during her seventh and eighth grade years. Ninth through twelfth grades consisted of more creative writing experiences.

I was just basically given the assignment. We did go to the library and do research on some of our papers. The teacher gave you help if you needed it. After that, you came back and wrote your paper. You didn't really get to check it through. I mean you checked it over before you handed it in for anything you thought was wrong. You corrected that, and then you just handed it in to the teacher and it came back corrected. It usually had things like, "This is wrong." And they had it circled. And they had arrows drawn all over the place.

Jill, however, at the time of this research was enrolled in a writing class taught by the same professor that facilitated the 1988 week long writing workshop for teachers at Anderson Elementary.

Really the only writing that I've ever done is my high school writing and my college writing. And most of that has been what they tell you to do; you write the paper and you turn it in, and you get a nice red pen all over the place when you get it back. That's the only writing that I have ever had except the two classes I've taken lately in college. Like the one I'm taking right now: you discuss your paper, they tell you what they think you can do better, what they think you can revise.

Jill graduated from college in May and is applying for an elementary teaching position.

Special Education Teacher: Liz

Our sixth team member is Liz, an inclusion teacher for special education. Liz spends two hours and fifteen minutes a day in my classroom working with two students labeled as learning disabled (LD). She also assists other students by including them in small group work with the LD students. In addition to working in my classroom, Liz assists a student from Ben's room and five other LD students in a fourth grade classroom.

Liz has taught for 26 years in a variety of regular ed, special ed, and inclusionary classrooms. When asked about her writing background, she replied:

I liked writing as a child. I liked writing plays. We wrote and performed plays. I liked it up until college and then it wasn't fun because it wasn't imaginative, it was too much nonfiction type writing. As far as learning how to write, I think probably [high school teacher] taught me more than anyone else. As far as grade school, I don't remember really learning how to write. I remember writing stories, but not anything concrete. But with ____ in high school, we wrote a lot and we'd get it back and she'd comment. She was striving for perfection, not [absolute] perfection, but our best. And an "A" from her meant a lot. She always gave two grades, one on mechanics and one on creativity.

When it comes to teaching writing, Liz says she thinks she follows the trends:

The current trend is what I try. I've always tried to get kids to write a lot. [In] kindergarten, we did a little bit with creative writing and dictation. When I got to fourth grade, we did a lot of stories, we did plays, things like that, probably a little bit more formalized with grammar. With my special education kids, its just getting them to have the confidence to put anything on paper. Whatever they put down is wonderful because they are so afraid. I've had a few classes on the current trends, but they were LD classes.

Liz is an excellent role model for students in using the "current trend," the writing process. She has a talent for conferencing with students on their writing: she is able to praise them for their strengths, and at the same time, encourages them to improve their writing.

Title I "At-Risk" Teacher: Annette

During her twenty years of teaching, Annette has taught special education, first grade, fourth grade, and now "at-risk" students. Annette reflects on her experience teaching writing:

When I first taught, it was just basically copying something from the board. Students were just parroting. Granted, it was a good example. But there were very few creative stories. Today they get to write their own creative stories. I look back on that correcting and remember dreading it because you'd have to try to decipher all that stuff. If we just had all the tools back then, the yellow books (individual student spelling references) where they can reference themselves. If they just learn to do that, there would be fewer errors in their daily work. Writing has grown by leaps and bounds from the late sixties and early seventies. It is now a process and it was not. There was no correcting; you just gave a paper back to a student with red marks on it. Probably not very good for their little egos.

Like the other veteran teachers on the team, Annette attended the district's week long writing inservice in 1988.

Attending that writing inservice gave me a lot of insight as to the writing process, because I was unfamiliar with it. That's when I was teaching first

grade, but I carried it over into fourth grade. The process just takes a little longer and it's a little more refined.

This year, 1995-96, Annette began a new Title I At-Risk Program for students in third through fifth grades at Anderson. The goal of this program is to provide "at-risk" students with extra support in reading, writing, math, and science.

Besides being in charge of the At-Risk Program, Annette has also been assigned other responsibilities. She is MEAP Coordinator for Anderson Elementary. She coordinates the Reading and Math MEAP Tests for fourth grade, the Science and Writing MEAP Tests for fifth grade, and the CTBS Tests for first, second, and third grades. Student mentors, high school freshmen, are also her responsibility. This entails assigning and supervising approximately 20 students, who spend one class period a day working in elementary classrooms. Annette is also director of the Gifted and Talented Program at Anderson. This involves coaching and facilitating eleven quiz bowl teams, as well as working with parents to facilitate an "Odyssey of the Mind" team for competition.

These seven teachers formed our assessment team as we embarked on the journey that would lead us through the unknown territory of the new MEAP Writing Assessment. Chapter IV relates "Our MEAP Story."

Chapter IV

Our MEAP Story

Preparation For the MEAP Writing Assessment

In this chapter I will be describing the ways and the extent to which fifth grade teachers and their students in Anderson Elementary prepared for, participated in, and reflected upon the new State of Michigan Writing Assessment. This chapter is a straight description without much interpretation or analysis. Later, in Chapter V, I will examine the results using Frameworks I and II as described in Chapter III.

This study began in February 1996 when I met with the other three fifth grade teachers at Anderson Elementary School. In keeping with the tenets of qualitative research, I had few preconceived ideas on how the teaching strategies for the test might develop and what they might include other than that written logs and oral interviews would be included. The team of teachers, working together, would develop the intervention plan.

Although the teachers were well aware that I was doing research, it was evident throughout the study that they were treating me as a colleague. The kind of support I provided was something that they had learned to expect from me. My role as researcher was always there, but it did not intrude upon the task of accomplishing the MEAP Writing Assessment. I presented the merits of the study and the teachers were enthusiastic about the project. Both our principal and superintendent gave their approval and stated that they thought the research would benefit our school. After presenting my proposal to my

Michigan State University doctoral committee and receiving their approval, I applied to the URICHS, and received approval (see Appendix C), to be sure that the rights of all participants were being considered. Each teacher signed a letter of consent before participating in the project.

At this meeting on February 2, we discussed what we would be doing during the project. Topics on the agenda included: consent forms (Appendix D), reflection logs, student interviews, and parent interviews. I explained that a letter (Appendix D) would be sent home with each student describing the project. Ruth and Lynn requested that I come into the classrooms and explain the project to the students and hand out the letters. Ben chose to handle the explanation and letters on his own. We also discussed ways of choosing the students that I would be interviewing. We decided that each teacher would select one proficient writer, one average writer, and one less proficient writer from his/her classroom. These selections, however, would depend on whether or not the child's parents signed the consent form. We also decided on one parent, identified by the teachers, to interview from each classroom. These four included two parents of proficient writers, one parent of an average writer, and one parent of a less proficient writer.

We talked about reflection logs and their use and purposes for both teachers and students. Teachers, using their own choice of method, would keep reflection logs of the thoughts and methodologies they were going through as they prepared for, participated in, and reflected on the MEAP Writing Assessment. Students would have reflection logs to use in the classroom with their teachers for whatever purposes or questions they wanted to bring up after the test.

On February 6, we met again to discuss which students would be interviewed and to schedule teacher interviews that would help me discover

what prior knowledge the teachers had concerning the MEAP writing assessment. At this same meeting, I scheduled visits to each classroom to observe students during a regular writing class period so that they would be comfortable with my presence in the classroom before the actual testing dates. These visits also provided an opportunity to observe targeted students during a regular writing workshop.

As Language Arts Coordinator, it was part of my job description to share what I learned concerning the writing MEAP with staff members. At each meeting I tried to incorporate some more of the information that I was receiving. For instance, at the February 6 meeting I distributed copies of the MEAP practice test on "Change" and a sample rubric for evaluation which I had received from the Red Cedar Writing Project. After handing them out, our building MEAP coordinator commented, "Oh, yes. I do remember receiving these." It is understandable that she would not realize the significance of these materials for the teachers considering the number of responsibilities to which she had been assigned.

During the same meeting, Ruth planted the seed that would later develop into a staff inservice: "I think we should give this rubric (MEAP rubric) to fourth grade teachers and have them rate their students." Other significant comments made at this meeting were:

- Jill (associate teacher): What a great year to be student teaching!
- Ruth: Well, it [the MEAP] is pushing me as a teacher!

These two gave evidence of the positive participation I observed from all the teacher participants. All comments, however, were not positive; team members were concerned about various genre being applicable to the rubric and the banning of computers for final drafts.

Following the meeting, I wrote in my reflection log, "Wonderful discussion and collaboration of teachers as a result of the MEAP! The assessment has given us an opportunity (forced us) to collaborate as a means of preparing our students."

Early in our meetings several concerns surfaced:

- ◆ What type of writing will be accepted, fiction? nonfiction? poetry? After discussing the issue the team decided that the format and rubric for the assessment were best suited for the personal narrative/essay.
- ◆ What about students who consistently use computers for their final drafts? Even though the assessment stated that neatness did not count, the team decided to emphasize the importance of writing so that their piece could be easily read by raters.
- ◆ Are special education students required to take the test? In order for students to be exempted from the assessment, a special written request must be received from parents. Parents, however, are unaware of this. The team decided that special education students should participate in the assessment, but the box on the answer booklet marked "excluded" would be marked so that their writings would be rated, but they would be excluded from the school composite.
- ◆ What score do students need to pass? After attending a conference the team was told that 2.5 would probably be the passing score, since at least one rater would have given the writing a higher level rating of 3.
- ◆ When will test scores be returned? The scores will not be returned to school districts until September of the coming school year.

During the February 12 meeting, held in my classroom, team members noticed the large (24" by 30") revision and editing charts on the wall (Figures 5 and 6). The two charts contained lists of revision and editing possibilities

Figure 5**Revision Possibilities**

1. Add description (senses)
2. Too many of the same word (said, and, he, then, the, well)
3. Add feelings
4. Add conversation
5. Add details
6. Think about audience
7. Add suspense - make audience anxious
8. Paragraphs - indent
 - a. Change of events (make something else happen)
 - b. Start talking about something else (subject, new idea)
 - c. Somebody else talks
 - d. Change of time
 - e. Change of location (place)
9. Read orally for sense
10. Omit (leave out) unneeded sentences
11. Change some words (Thesaurus)
12. Check conclusion - bring ideas together
13. Introduction that catches readers' interest (beginning)
14. Complete sentences
15. Be sure sentences aren't too long (run-on)
16. Stick to the point
17. Use a variety of sentences
18. Check homonyms (too, to, two, their, there, they're)
19. Check beginning of sentences for variety.

Figure 6**Editing Possibilities**

1. **Capitals**
 - a. Beginning of sentences
 - b. Names, initials
 - c. Places - states, towns, buildings, (McDonalds)
 - d. Holidays
 - e. Months
 - f. Days of week
 - g. Important words in title (a, an the)
 - h. I
 - i. acronyms (IRS, VCR, TV, YMCA, NBA)
2. **Punctuation**
 - a. Quotations - person talking
 - b. End of sentences (. ? !)
 - c. Apostrophe
 1. Jamie's toy
 2. Contractions - don't
 - d. Comma
 1. Before "but"
 2. List (shoes, toys, and candy)
 3. Say more about something
Mrs. Friday, our special helper, came today.
3. **Indented paragraphs**
4. **Spelling**
5. **Margins - left and right**
6. **Space between words**

brainstormed by students in my classroom earlier in the year. Lynn, Ruth, and Ben asked if they might have an adult aide make copies for each of their classrooms. I almost said that I felt their students would have greater ownership if they brainstormed their own charts, but I decided that it was more important for me, as facilitator, to accept their suggestion as part of our intervention plan.

As a team, we had received scant information concerning the MEAP Writing Assessment directly from the State Department of Education. This may have occurred because our building MEAP coordinator was also the at-risk teacher for eleven classrooms, supervisor for high school peer mentors, and director of gifted and talented programs at Anderson Elementary; she was very busy. Because I am involved with the Red Cedar Writing Project (RCWP) and have a continuing relationship with the directors of this group, our main source of information were those RCWP participants who worked with representatives of the State on test preparation and pilot assessments. I also talked directly with the county MEAP coordinator, and she mailed me copies of all the information she had on the MEAP. She also provided us with a copy of a videotape of a MEAP/HSPT teleconference held on February 8 for the specific purpose of answering teachers' questions concerning the MEAP. I introduced the tape at the February 12 team meeting, and each teacher viewed it individually at home. From this tape we became aware that the charts (Figures 5 and 6) for editing and revision normally used in the classroom could remain on the wall during the test, that white-out was not to be used in the test, and that brainstorming ideas were not to be written on the board during the test. Ultimately, my team probably had more information available to them than other fifth grade teachers in Michigan, further supporting the unique dimensions of this study.

Then at the February 12 meeting, I shared a strategy which I had previously utilized in my classroom; I was reminded of the technique at the

semester gathering of the RCWP. "Center group modeling" served as a vehicle for students to share and evaluate each other's writing. Three volunteers from the classroom shared their papers as they might do during the MEAP Writing Assessment. The rest of the class sat in a circle around the edge and listened. Following the reading and discussion of all three papers by the volunteers, the discussion was opened to the large group. This process helped to model ways that students should, and/or should not, use the brief sharing time they had during the assessment. We tried the same process a second day, and it was much easier for them to share and stay on task rather than go off on tangents. Ruth, one of the teachers, chose to use this strategy in her classroom.

When Ben expressed concern that he had not started to use the student reflection logs, Ruth shared how she had used the logs for students to respond to the "center group modeling activity" and small group sharing. After having three students model sharing, she asked students to respond to two questions: "What did you think about the experience? What did you notice?" The next day, after sharing their writings in small groups of three, students wrote about their feelings during the experience. The following are examples of Ruth's students' responses to this activity. (Students' spelling and punctuation have been corrected in all entries from student journals.)

- I thought that when three people got up in front of my classroom and were demonstrating how you feel about one another's story, I thought it would be kind of hard because I wouldn't want to hurt anybody's feelings or something like that. But, I feel that the opinions were very good.
- I think this process of sharing stories is pretty cool. It gives us kids a chance to give our opinion about other kids' stories. It also gives us a

chance to share our personal stories. I like to hear comments about my stories even if they're bad ones.

- I think that sharing stories is great because when you hear the stories then you can find the mistakes in them. You can also tell kids the good things about the stories.
- I thought reading to my friends made me nervous. I bet my friends were nervous too!
- I thought it was nice to give opinions. I think sharing helps.
- I learned that sharing can help people. I think if you share, you can help people make their stories better. It will help me on the real test because I will know what to do. I will know how to think of things.
- I like to give good ideas about things the kids wrote. I really love to listen to stories. I think it is good to give good advice to people.
- I don't like trying to share stories in a room that is so noisy.
- I've noticed when I read out loud my problems just pop right out in front of me.
- I think this was one of the best revising activities that I've seen.
- I think the process of sharing is a good thing to do because if kids read their stories out loud, the other kids can give their opinions on anything. They might want the other person to add to their story to make it more interesting.
- I think this sharing thing is good and bad. I think it is good because by making positive comments you can increase the other people's feelings about their work. I think it is bad because some people think that work is stupid and don't like it at all. So by making comments about the things that they need to work on, it might make their feelings about their story

worse. ... but I liked this because it gave me a lot of things I can start doing when I'm writing.

- I think that by doing this I learned to be a better listener. I learned that when you are in groups you need to listen to ideas so the idea will help you on your story. I also learned to be open to new ideas and comments in groups. I think this will help me on the test because I will pretty much know what to do. I also think this will help me because I will get the feel of taking the MEAP Test because this is my first year in Michigan schools.
- Today I realized how fun writing could be. I mean, in writing you can express your feelings. Today we read our stories to each other and helped one another with problems. I think that I can do good on the test. I think the people in my group can too.
- My partners sounded like they hated my story. They don't know this, but they hurt my feelings because I can't help it if I write long.
- I enjoy working in groups and talking to the class because we come up with a lot of good ideas.

Although they only used one opportunity to do this activity, nearly all of the students in Ruth's class were positive about it and saw it as a useful preparation for the MEAP. Several students commented that they felt sharing would help them on the test. Others reflected on the need to be careful of the feelings of their classmates. A few wrote that reading their stories out loud and talking with others helped them gain new ideas and revise. In conclusion, students not only liked sharing, but felt it was meaningful to their writing.

Another strategy I shared with the team was the practice rating of student writings. On February 8 and 9, I attended sessions on classroom assessment conference in Grand Rapids, presented at the Classroom Assessment Conference. Since I am a member of the Frederick County Assessment Team,

my expenses for this conference were paid for by a grant through the Frederick County Intermediate School District. This highlights the importance of assessment in Frederick County. One of the sessions at the conference described the rating process for the MEAP Writing Assessment. To facilitate the rating of papers in a fashion similar to the MEAP, we were told to place any set of student writing in piles according to rubric criteria. In other words, all the one's in one pile (lowest rated papers), two's in another, three's in a third, and four's (top rated papers) in the final pile. The presenter stressed the importance of utilizing all four categories, that at least one paper must be in each.

Later, I did that exercise with a set of student writings from my classroom. As I perused the papers, I looked to see what qualities would represent good writing. I also looked for common problems in student papers. Upon completion of the rating, I returned the papers to the students, along with a copy of the rubric. Then, as a class, we discussed common errors and strategies for improvement.

Following my presentation of this exercise to the team of fifth grade teachers, Ben suggested that we do it in all classrooms as preparation for the MEAP, and that we choose a topic that would be the same for each classroom so each room would have the same type of intervention.

Is there any time left in this meeting that we could use to pick a central topic? Let's all do it in the MEAP time frame. I'm sort of just floundering around here. Now I've got a little more of a grasp. That "Change" thing [the topic suggested as a MEAP practice exam] threw me. Let's have a mock thing. Let's pick a topic and start this thing off on an equal basis.

This is sort of a little trial.

The team agreed, however, that they did not care for the "Change" topic. Ruth volunteered to work with me to create a new practice assessment. Lynn

Figure 7
Team Developed MEAP Topic

TOPIC:

Pets

THINKING ABOUT THE TOPIC:

What kind of pets have you had?

Have you had an interesting experience with a pet?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of owning a pet?

What experiences have you had getting or losing a pet?

How did you handle these experiences?

WRITING ABOUT THE TOPIC:

**Many people own pets and have a variety of relationships with them.
Write about a pet.**

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

- . tell about an experience from the point of view of your pet**
- OR . show how a pet can become a member of your family**
- OR . explain how owning a pet makes you feel**
- OR . tell what you need to know to take care of a pet**
- OR . write about an imaginary pet**
- OR . describe a strange or unusual experience you've had with a pet**
- 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.

suggested that we chose the topic of "Pets." We created a sheet to give the students and then took them through the process in a manner similar to the writing MEAP (Figure 7). This is one example of teacher initiative that surfaced throughout the study. Given a prompting, this group of teachers provided a model of the assessment for students.

Ben opened our February 19 meeting by saying, "OK, we're going to do this thing [practice assessment] on what kind of a schedule? Tell me what to do!" After a brief discussion, we designated three days the following week, but it was conference week so we taught only half days. The majority of the time on those mornings, therefore, could be spent in preparation for the MEAP Writing Assessment. School was delayed on these days due to fog, however, so our available time was less than we expected. The week previous to the practice assessment, five fifth grade boys were placed on school suspension for one day, Day 1 of the practice assessment. With the cooperation of the administration, the five students were allowed to return to the room for the forty-five minutes necessary to complete the practice assessment. Upon my request the administration supported our efforts to prepare all students for the MEAP.

We went through the process in all of our classrooms using the same time constraints and directions that would be used during the actual assessment. To facilitate the rating of papers, on the third day students were given final draft paper with their student numbers from the teacher's attendance book written at the top in a particular color (red, green, black, or blue to designate classrooms). We then collected the student writings, and the team of teachers exchanged papers. The team (four fifth grade teachers, the learning disabilities teacher, the at-risk teachers, and the associate teacher) read and rated student writings using the rubric from the state. All writings were

read by team members other than their own teacher. We then returned the papers to the teachers to average and come up with the ratings.

The presenter at the assessment conference session on ratings that I attended said that the two ratings by the raters would be averaged. Therefore, final scores could be 1.5's, 2.5's and 3.5's. In our classes, each teacher discussed the writing with his/her students individually. They talked about the score the child earned and what he/she might do to improve on the next writing. This gave the students an example of how their writing might be assessed after the actual MEAP Writing Assessment:

- I liked the part that we got to practice because practice makes perfect.
- I think nothing would of made the MEAP easier than the fake MEAP.
- It will help on the test because I know what to do and how to do it on the test to help me get the grade I want.
- It will help me for the real one by giving me an idea of the real test. And it won't bother me as much. It will also keep me from getting frustrated.
- I learned that it takes a while to think and write out a story. And knowing what it's like to do this will help me on the test. And I think if you get to practice for a test, you could know what to do and how to do it better.
- I learned that it is a neat way to learn how to think of ideas. This will help me to see how the real test is going to be like. The fake test is really going to help me to see how hard it is.
- I think that the writing MEAP practices are a good idea on our scores because we might get a better chance of getting a 3 or 4 if we are prepared. And it helps us get ready for the real MEAP test.
- This will help me not to be scared, and I will know more what I should do on the test.

- I learned that when writing a story, the MEAP Test can be fun. It will help me on the real test because I know what it's like.
- I learned what our tests are going to be like. I learned not to just make a mapping of something. I learned to add more description to the beginning, middle, and end. I learned to get the reader's attention and add lots of detail.
- I learned that when I do this again I'll do better in it if I think of more ideas and go slower in it. It is not a race to see who has more pages.

Many students felt that the combination of the trial assessment on "pets," the rating they received, and the follow-up student/teacher conference helped them prepare for the real assessment. Two students reflected that their stress level would be lower for going through the process before taking the actual test.

Not all of the students, however, had such positive experiences. As two students commented:

My score was a 2. I know I have to stop jumping things. I hope that we don't have to write about a pet. I hate this test. It's too hard. I hope that I get a better grade on the real test than on the practice one. I'm definitely gonna study on the MEAP test.

My score was 2.5. Oh, man, I had a darn good story and those jerks gave me a 2.5. That is disgusting. . . I am a good writer and no one will keep me from being one. I'll show them. They'll be sorry.

This seems to show that less than satisfactory scores on this pretest were very discouraging for these students. They both indicate, however, that they intend to do better on the actual MEAP.

In addition to the practice test for students, at conference time we provided parents with a description of the writing assessment (Figure 1), the rubric (Figure 3), and a letter explaining the schedule of test dates (Figure 8). That letter follows:

Figure 8
Parent Letter Prior To Assessment

February 22, 1996

Dear Parents,

The following is the MEAP Assessment Schedule for fifth grade students. It is important that your son/daughter be present on testing dates if at all possible. Also, we would ask your assistance in seeing that your son/daughter has plenty of sleep on the nights before each of these testing dates.

Fifth Grade MEAP Assessment Schedule

Tuesday, March 5	Preliminary instructions, fill in computer sheets
Wednesday, March 6	Writing Assessment, Day I
Thursday, March 7	Writing Assessment, Day II
Friday, March 8	Writing Assessment, Day III
Tuesday, March 12	Science Assessment, Day I
Wednesday, March 13	Science Assessment, Day II

Attached you will find copies of the Description of the Grade 5 MEAP Writing Assessment Plan and the rubric (scoring instrument) that will be used when rating student writing. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions. Thank you for your assistance!

Fifth Grade Teachers

During our preparations for the MEAP Writing Assessment, we (the team) discovered firsthand just how difficult it was to schedule weekly meetings and have all seven members present. Lynn had to miss a number of days because she was scheduled for major surgery, and her mother had suffered a stroke. She was able to delay the surgery until the week following the MEAP, but her mother needed her help. Other difficulties included:

- ◆ Announcements over the public address system which interrupted our discussion
- ◆ Parents needing homework
- ◆ Short term teacher illness
- ◆ IEP (Individual Education Planning) meetings for special education students
- ◆ Finding a place to meet when students remained in the classroom for inside recess on bad weather days
- ◆ Not enough aide help to cover classrooms during inside recess
- ◆ Phone calls
- ◆ Other meetings such as the Reading Month Committee which planned assemblies, special contests, and reading activities for the same week as the Writing and Science MEAP Assessments.

Nothing in MEAP guidelines acknowledged the difficulties of day to day living in classrooms. Even with the best of intentions, teachers are plagued with difficulties and interruptions. Through it all we survived, and at our March 5 meeting the team planned the daily schedule for testing (Figure 9) and we reviewed the entire process.

Figure 9
Writing MEAP Testing Schedule

Times	Teacher
8:15 - 9:15	Lynn
9:25 - 10:25	Ruth
10:35 - 11:35	Eleanor
12:30 - 1:30	Ben

The teachers rejected a plan to alternate testing times on different days. Lynn felt her students would do best with the early morning time. Ruth didn't want the third time period since that conflicted with gym class. Ben preferred the afternoon time period; he felt his students worked best at that time of day. Lynn commented, "I suggest we do the same times every day."

I responded, "If the team feels it is going to be just as reliable, then we will go with that schedule." We were then ready to begin the actual MEAP Writing Assessment.

Participation in the MEAP Writing Assessment

Ben's Story

Day 1

As I entered Ben's classroom, students had their rough draft booklets and pencils on their desks, with extras available on the teacher's desk. As he began reading directions, he was very soft-spoken, quite a contrast from his usual bold, far reaching tone. He explained to the class that he was required to read the directions in a certain way and that they could ask questions when it was all over. Before reading the topic to the class, he commented, "Now, for the most

important part; this is like opening a magic envelope!" Then he announced the topic, "Firsts." His humor and suspense set a very relaxed atmosphere in his classroom.

As they began the small group sharing portion of the test, Ben suggested to his students that they might want to use the area at the bottom of the page to write down ideas they wished to share. Prior to the testing time, he had arranged his students in groups of three, with two groups of two. As the students brainstormed in their small groups, Ben wandered about the room asking questions of groups, spurring on conversations.

As a bridge between the small and large group sharing times, Ben said, "I'm interested. I need your attention. I want to hear a few things." Students were anxious to share. Occasionally, Ben would facilitate the discussion by asking a questions such as, "How about when you do something the first time but then say, 'That's the last time I'm going to do that?'"

As Ben commented in his log, "Idea generation was lively - it was hard not to intrude with my own thoughts."

After Ben read the directions for beginning the twenty minute drafting period, one student asked: "Can we use imagination?"

"I don't know if your imagination is going to make you write any better," replied Ben, "but that's up to you." He then reminded the class to keep in mind that their aim was to write the best that they could about the topic they'd been given. They then returned to their own work area and began the silent writing portion of Day I.

For the next twenty minutes, students worked individually. Seven students started mapping, one drawing an intricate spider web of ideas. Several students chose to go to the restroom, get drinks, and wash hands during the drafting session. Except for these students, all others were on task.

There was a table in the back of the room with references books for the students to use as needed. Ben wandered about the room talking to a few students. He did not write reflection notes during the testing session, but rather chose to do it later.

At the conclusion of the twenty minute time period, Ben gave students 15 seconds to finish, put their pencils down, place the book cover up, and pass booklets up from the back, leaving them on the front desk of each row. The students then traded the rough draft booklets for their reflection logs or diaries. He commented, "We're still taking a test, in a way, so don't talk much." He then gave students the following ideas for topics to write about in response to the assessment:

- How do you feel about the topic you were writing about?
- What difficulties are you having?
- How can you make your writing better?
- Plan in your mind how to prepare this to be a better piece than you wrote the last time [the trial MEAP].

The closing comment in Ben's log for Day I read, " Good start. I think I've got them sold on the importance of a good effort."

Day II

Ben had this same plan in mind when he began directions for Day II. As I arrived his first comment to the class was, "Don't waste time! Use your time!" He then continued passing out pencils and explaining once again that if their pencils broke, extra pencils were available on his desk.

As suggested in the manual, Ben reread the examples from Day I, but this seemed redundant at this point since most of the students were well into their pieces. They were then given three minutes to reread what they had

written yesterday without adding anything to it. One student sat poised with her pencil ready to begin. I had overheard her asking Ben before the assessment if she might begin a whole new draft. Another student asked about beginning a new draft, and Ben reminded her that she likes her work to look neat and that she doesn't like to be rushed. She opted to continue her previous draft.

During drafting I observed the following:

- Stopping one student who frequently looks up words in the dictionary on the way to look up a word, Ben asked, "Have you got a beginning, a middle, and an end [to your writing]?"
- Ben's conferencing with a student during the test seemed to me to distract other students.
- Another student asked a question about the spelling of a particular place name. Ben suggested he look at a map in an encyclopedia or his social studies book.
- Ben read another student's paper and attempted to help him refocus. The student rebelled and put down his pencil. A few minutes later he crossed out his writing.
- One student completely erased a whole page and started over.

At this point it seemed a very artificial writing situation. It seemed some students were freezing, others rebelling. I began to think it was the pressure of the actual testing situation, yet, writing is not easy; It can be messy and stressful in the best of circumstances.

According to Ben's reflection log , however, he felt his students' Day II was positive.

Got a good effort from everyone including my few 'I can't's' who seemed defeated yesterday. The sharing time went better. Changed a couple of groups. Still think reading it aloud isn't as good as the other person

reading it silently, and then questioning the author on unclear areas or corrections needed.

Day III

"You can use all available resources except me," announced Ben at the beginning of Day III. Since this was a forty minute revision and editing session, students were working independently. The room was quiet and students were diligently working on their final copies. Many students made use of the dictionaries available on the reference table at the back of the room.

Ben had much difficulty abiding by his first statement. He felt the need to assist one student as he searched for a word in the dictionary. He stopped by one student's desk (a brain cancer survivor) and suggested he continue working if he wanted to get his piece copied. This child had less than a page to begin with. Ben continued to walk around, pointing out something on one student's paper, not saying a word.

As we neared the final call, Ben commented in an aside to me, "Some of my better writers just won't make the deadline. They don't work that way." However, in his reflection log Ben wrote, "Went well - believe everyone finished in time - those who got done early put efforts into corrections - changes. The couple of boys I was concerned about gave it a decent effort. We're done!"

I saw Ben as being extremely organized. He was very explicit in his direction and, consequently, his students knew exactly what was expected of them. His use of the suspense of opening the "magic envelope" had his class's devout attention. They were ready and excited!

Ben's daily teaching manner is to frequently question students in order to facilitate their critical thinking and help them become problem solvers. He had such a deep concern for his students that he found it difficult to stand back and

let them struggle without facilitating their learning. The MEAP guidelines did not allow him to fulfill this role because questions and interactions between teachers and students about their writing were not allowed.

Lynn's Story

Day 1

Like Ben, Lynn was well organized. As students enjoyed crackers and peanut butter, she gave a quick verbal review of the assessment process. Teachers were free to give students the parent provided treats whenever they chose. She also reminded them that they were allowed to use dictionaries, the Quick Word Finders, and charts on the wall. She used her watch as a timing tool.

Realizing that they did not need # 2 pencils, Lynn let students use their own pencils for the writing and use the # 2 pencils only for the required cover sheet. Each student received a manila folder with three pieces of paper and his/her rough draft booklet. She asked them to put names, first and last, on their booklets and to number their pages. Lynn decided to have students use the regular paper they used in class instead of the rough draft booklets "to keep it more 'normal'."

As Lynn began reading the directions printed in the book, she held up her assessment manual so the students could see the shaded area. At the same time she commented, " All other fifth grade teachers in Michigan are reading these same directions. You will notice it's not the way I would ordinarily talk."

Lynn had randomly selected her small groups by using the 1, 2, 3 method in her attendance book. Group discussion started out slowly, but students began to get a little more involved after about five minutes. Lynn

wrote in her log, "I tried to follow the directions word for word. Can they write on the prewriting and drafting pages? It seemed confusing to me." I did not observe that any of the students were taking notes on these pages during the small group sharing time.

As she began the large group sharing session, Lynn began to paraphrase directions from the manual. She was talking as herself, and it seemed much less artificial. Students shared their ideas for five to seven minutes, with Lynn facilitating the discussion by asking a question intermittently. For example, when one student suggested " [the first time I had to make] a decision between friends," Lynn asked, " How did you come to the decision?" She had them complete the sharing time by using the last two minutes to jot down some of their thoughts.

Before starting to draft, Lynn had her students make sure that they had their own spaces and that desks were not touching. During the twenty minute drafting time, everyone appeared to be on task. Lynn commented in her log, "Most students are seriously working, even the ones I was concerned about." However, as in Ben's room, toward the end of the allotted drafting sessions, a few were visiting the restroom and making trips to get and return dictionaries. Lynn commented to me, "I wish they realized that this is precious time they're wasting!"

At the conclusion of the twenty minutes Lynn announced to the class, "Finish up the sentence that you're on, put your pencils down; I need your 'eyeballs'." She had them place their rough draft paper inside their rough draft booklet.

Day II

Unique might describe this morning's activities for Lynn's classroom. The day began with crackers provided by the parents' group. The students then

attended the high school band concert held across the hall from the fifth grade classrooms. Following the concert, they began Day II's writing assessment.

Reading over what they wrote was the first item on the agenda for Lynn's students on Day II. Soon all were on task either continuing to draft or beginning to revise. As Lynn wrote, "Kids relaxed - smooth transition from yesterday to today's writing. All seem to be editing - writing." Many students had dictionaries and Quick Word Finders on their desks. A few had questions. For example one student asked, "When I write Uncle Steve, would 'uncle' be capitalized?"

Knowing that teachers are not allowed to answer questions of this type during the testing period, Lynn replied: "Sorry, I can't answer that. It's something you can ask a question about later on today and fix tomorrow." The majority of students remained on task during the twenty-five minute drafting session. Lynn observed that students were, "using spell check and dictionaries, but not as much as I thought they would." She was also concerned that, "Some students appear to be finished within twenty minutes or less. This concerns me. Especially when I notice who they are !!" She felt that her students were, "not using time for revision and editing wisely. Directions are not clear."

There were also several distracting factors. Someone came to the door, ignoring the testing sign on the outside of the door. The second performance of the band concert could be heard in the background. When the audience was dismissed, there was no one in the hall to monitor for noise. In fact, the custodian and assistant principal were making much noise as they carried on a conversation outside her classroom door.

As sharing time in their small groups commenced, one student commented, "I had to start over and I didn't finish."

Lynn suggested, "Read what you have done and maybe they (your peer group) can help you." She also told the students that this was the time to peer

edit. "You cannot write on each other's papers, but this is definitely a helping time."

In an aside, Lynn commented on the long titles that students were using. She thought they were trying to get "firsts" in the title or some of the phraseology from the questions. For example one student's title read, "The First Frog I Caught and Then Stolen in My Hands." As I was wandering around, I noticed one student ask her group to assist her with a title, but they were not listening and continued working on something else. It was soon time to collect their manila folders, concluding Day II.

Day III

"You're going to have to judge your own time. Time is precious. Use it, don't abuse it. Don't waste it." These were the words with which Lynn began Day III of the writing assessment with her class. It was not long until all were heeding her direction. They were on task and most seemed intent on doing their very best writing. According to the manual, they had a choice of writing either in cursive or manuscript; everyone chose manuscript. Lynn observed, "Some students are still doing rough draft writing; others are working on their final copy. This is basically how they are in daily writing tasks also. Some are slow to start; others are actively enjoying writing. The students 'read me' well enough to know I am taking this test very seriously - maybe too much so - but..."

One student inquired about starting a new paragraph when another person talks. Lynn responded by saying, "I really can't tell you, but use your own good judgment about what I've told you in the past." Another student, who spends a portion of each day in the classroom for emotionally impaired students, had his literature and social studies books on his desk as well as a dictionary and assessment papers. Lynn very quietly removed the unnecessary

materials and placed them on a shelf nearby. Still another student had not taken her medication at home that morning and came in and threw her book bag down. Lynn was concerned about how she would perform on the test.

As we moved through the drafting period, I noticed several students perusing the charts on the wall. These included the revising and editing charts that were in all three classrooms, a list of adjectives brainstormed by students, as well as the following two charts:

there - place	Capitals
they're - they are	Over-all-edit
their - ownership	Punctuation
	Spelling

Lynn forgot to tell the students when there were twenty-five minutes remaining, as the instructions requested, so she did it when there were fifteen minutes left. At one point she also encouraged students to read over their writing and be sure they hadn't left out any words. As a final comment in her log for Day III, she wrote, "As I walk around I see many errors - fragmented sentences - simple misspellings - AH AH AH!!! I must remember they are fifth graders! Lots of room for improvement."

Like Ben, Lynn appeared both well organized yet frustrated by the MEAP guidelines. For example, having students keep their materials in labeled manila folders facilitated the assessment process. When it came to reading the test directions, Lynn stated them in a very artificial tone (quite unlike her normal way of speaking), however, it was not long before she returned to her easy (explicit) manner of relating directions to her class. Both she and her students seemed much more relaxed.

Lynn took the assessment very seriously and wanted so badly for her students to succeed. She was very frustrated when she observed students

wasting "precious time. As noted in my classroom observations and interviews, Lynn had worked extremely hard on instilling editing strategies and she became anxious when students did not appear to be utilizing them.

Ruth's Story

Day 1

As I arrived, Ruth's students were organizing their desks so that they did not touch. She explained that during the conferencing sections of the test they would be moving their chairs, but they would not need a desk in between them. Ruth passed out pencils, saying that if a student broke a lead he/she could get an extra # 2 pencil from the jar on the table. Jill, the student teacher, moved the clock to the front of the room.

Before reading the directions from the manual, Ruth exclaimed, "Ready, serious, quiet, ready to concentrate!" As she read, she moved the cart containing dictionaries to a handy spot. Jill passed out the rough draft booklets. As soon as the introductory directions were completed, students moved into groups of three. Ruth organized her groups, "by leadership skills - strong 'talkers' together, quiet together," thinking that in this way the talkers would not intimidate others. She placed two poor spellers in a group with good spellers. There were two absent so two of her groups had four instead of three members.

Ruth observed that the "quiet groups had trouble getting started, but all seemed to share." All groups appeared to be on task and working together productively. As I was moving around the room during this small group sharing time, I heard one student comment, "Our topic is boring!"

Jill wrote, "I thought that having the topic of "firsts" would be difficult, but they seem to comprehend." Jill did notice that there was one group that didn't

seem to be collaborating on the topic. She commented, "As a teacher, I am finding it very hard not to interfere."

The large group brainstorming moved along rapidly, however, with Ruth repeating each idea as it was given to be sure everyone could hear. Students gave their ideas, but they did not expand on them. As Ruth wrote in her log, "Students seemed to be dreaming up ideas as they heard others. . . Ideas tended to piggyback off each other. Trips were often mentioned, as well as bikes, etc."

Jill observed, "Most people seemed willing to share their ideas." During the twenty minute drafting time, all students were on task. Everyone was writing in his/her rough draft booklet. Jill wrote, "They are writing at an unbelievable rate. Some did do mapping, but most had a set idea and started writing right away."

Ruth noticed that six students began by mapping, while one student began looking through Richard Scary's Dictionary. She wrote, "I saw several students still spending thinking time after fifteen minutes. . . One girl, who reads only historical biographies and historical fiction is usually an excellent writer. She was stymied by this topic."

In my role as proctor, I noticed that one student had not written anything after about nine minutes. I asked him if he had an idea. He did, and I suggested that he might want to get started. I told him that if he didn't like what he wrote, he could start over again tomorrow. Jill also spoke to this same student, prodding him to get on task. As Jill reflected in her log, "It is really hard not to tell them what to do." Another student wondered if he could write about something that he had written about before, but had never completed. I don't know how far I should go [in helping]," Jill commented.

Students didn't seem to mind the "five minutes left" interruption. They just kept on writing. By the time the booklets were collected, everyone had the beginnings of a draft.

Day II

On Day II Ruth needed to make group adjustments because one student arrived late. She just got the class settled when a second student who had been absent on Day I came in. I suggested she send the Day I student with Jill, the student teacher, and have that student complete Day II with my class. Ruth sent her to do Day I with Jill, and the child conferenced with a student from my room and completed the second day with my class. Jill wrote,

Today I went to give an individual make-up test. The two girls were really nervous doing the test without other classmates around. When you are doing this sort of test for make-up, I don't believe it works very well. Mrs. Wollett sent a very good communicator, Amy (pseudonym), to work with Carol (pseudonym), the child who had been absent. The only problem was Carol wouldn't talk. By the end of the first ten minutes, Amy was running out of things to say. I believe if I could have left the room, the two girls would have had no problem talking and getting things accomplished.

As the actual Day II procedures commenced, the students in Ruth's classroom were given three minutes to reread their work from Day I. It seemed to be a long time; students wanted to get going. Ruth then read the final directions before beginning the twenty-five minute drafting session. After reading the direction, "You may use as much or little of your prewriting as you wish," Ruth commented, "That means you can start over." However, she also noted in her log that there were not enough additional pages in the rough draft booklet for students who skipped lines or started a totally new second draft.

One student asked, "Can I ask people to spell right now?"

"No," responded Ruth. "Circle the word, and when you share, you can do it [ask for help]." Two other students asked questions concerning spelling, and Ruth suggested they circle words and then discuss them in their groups.

At least four students asked what to do when you have it just the way you want. Ruth suggested they might reread, revise, get a dictionary and check their spelling, or use the wall charts as a guide for correcting. She forgot to have students get out their Quick Word Finds, so she interrupted and presented that option.

After ten minutes of drafting, someone came to the door, and we realized that the testing sign was not on the door. It took a minute to locate it behind some other charts. Near the end of the drafting session, students were becoming restless. One student had his desk open and was painting an eraser with whiteout. Another was reading a book.

As the class moved into their groups for the sharing portion of Day II, Ruth commented, "Give the person your attention when he/she is reading." In her log she related, "The classroom was too noisy for my distractible, attention deficit students to concentrate on the stories being read to them."

Day III

Day III in Ruth's room moved along smoothly. As students entered in the morning, a message on the blackboard asked them to put dictionaries on their desks. One student had white out on his desk, so Ruth once again reminded students that it was "against the rules" to use it on their final drafts. Another student asked if he had to have a title. Ruth replied, "That's your decision; you're the author."

While reading directions for Day III, Ruth pointed to each of the wall charts on revision and editing (Figures 5 and 6). She completed the manual directions by requesting that students not open their final copy booklets until they read over their previous day's writing.

Students were on task during the first twenty five minutes of the forty minute drafting period. As Jill observed, "They seem to want to go right to their final draft. They don't want to do revision. This is something that has to be worked on." Once they finished copying their final drafts, however, they had difficulty knowing what to do. They kept asking how much time was left. Lower achieving students needed to be told to reread. As soon as they wrote their last word, they closed their book and were done. I noted one student organizing inside her desk, while another student held her test because it slid off her desk onto the floor. She was oblivious to others trying to work around her. Jill requested that the student spend time rereading her paper. Another student was coloring with a pen on a napkin. Two other students had to be asked to return books to their desks, while a third was studying states in his social studies packet. Ruth reflected in her log, "I should have told them when they finished early that they were only going to be allowed to rewrite, reread, make corrections, or sit."

Jill wrote, The 'perfect' student finished early. He then came up and wanted to go to the library. You really learn what the kids need to work on when doing a test like this. For instance, I know my kids need to work on revising, time-on-task, and some discipline problems."

Ruth closed the session by asking students to finish the sentence they were on and put down their pencils. Before I left the classroom, one student pointed at his two drafts and commented, "My final draft turned out to be much longer because I added things as I was writing." Just like real writers, I thought.

Unlike Lynn and Ben, Ruth's strength was not organization. Her enthusiasm and animation, however, assisted her class as they gathered materials. Through both observations and interviews, I discovered that Ruth had prepared her students to be both creative and descriptive in their writing. In contrast, Jill was much more reserved and less animated. This combination seemed to prove a good balance within the classroom. Ruth, however, was quite concerned that her students would not be prepared for the MEAP. Since she had handed over the writing workshop to Jill, she felt limited control of the teaching and learning process.

My Story

Day 1

Having had a substitute teacher in my classroom for the three days proved challenging. Students wanted to talk with me about a variety of issues; however, I needed to get them on task so they could complete the testing session before lunch. Just before testing time I had students organize their desks in tables of three facing each other. They had been assigned to their groups previously. Groups were numbered, and they moved to the area of the room assigned to their number.

I then gave students an opportunity to ask questions before we started. They asked the following questions:

- Will we be able to follow along while you read?
- Is today science or writing?
- How do I know the final copy pages from the first draft? (I held up the rough draft and final draft booklets and explained their use.)
- May we skip lines?
- What if we run out of space?

I then distributed the materials and began reading the directions. Students viewed the topic of "Firsts" in a variety of ways. One of the students commented, "There's always a first for everything!" Another, just as seriously, contributed, "This is going to be a hard story."

To organize groups, Liz, the learning disabilities teacher, and I divided the students according to their classroom performance in writing. We placed one proficient writer, one average writer, and one less proficient writer in each group. We also looked at personalities and how they might interact with each other. Ruth, who served as proctor and recorded reflection notes during the test, described the groups by saying, "Some groups went through the questions, and others got interested in someone's idea and asked questions such as what? when? etc. One student monopolized his group discussion by telling a whole story. Only one group finished early and just sat."

During the large group brainstorming session, students readily shared what they had discussed. I tried to facilitate the discussion in a way that provided each of the groups an opportunity to participate. According to Ruth's observation notes, I "asked for groups to share their ideas and then asked for new ideas that came up." None of the students took notes during either the large or small group brainstorming sessions to remind them of possible ideas they could use.

Most students began drafting right away, with only two choosing to start by mapping their ideas; this was contrary to our usual procedure of mapping or playing with ideas on paper. I thought perhaps it was because the directions did not tell the students that it would be all right to do a mapping, and I did not feel comfortable interjecting that possibility into the directions.

Ten minutes into the twenty minute drafting period, one of the learning disabled students erased everything. I told her just to try to get her ideas down,

and she could cross them out later. One of the students required a medication for hyperactivity during the session, so I brought him a glass of water and his pill. I had requested his medication from the office that morning so he would not have to leave the room.

At the end of the drafting period, one student was still mapping; she had not yet begun her first draft. I felt comfortable with that; I knew that she was a proficient writer and would have a quality piece of writing by the end of the third day. Another student stopped drafting as soon as I gave the five minute warning. He wrote "The End," closed his booklet, and sat there for five minutes.

Day II

I began session II by saying, "Remember, stay on task from the time we start until the time is up. Put other thoughts from your mind and spend this time on your writing." Students had dictionaries, Quick Word Finds, their rough draft booklets, pencils, and red pens on their desks. They were still seated in their groups of three, facing each other.

Before we began the actual twenty-five minute drafting session for Day II, students had several questions:

- "When we're rereading can we make corrections?" Not seeing any reason why they shouldn't, I answered in the affirmative. (I wondered why we place students in such a testing environment that they feel the need to ask such a question.)
- Can we find names in the dictionary?
- Can we use a title from another writing?
- Do we have to have a title?

Most students began drafting immediately following the three minute perusal period. One of my learning disabled students was playing with a red

pen, shaped in the form of a cartoon character, and I traded with him for a regular red pen with him for the duration of the test. Three minutes later he asked, "Can we write some more on this?" At the time, he had completed only one paragraph. Another learning disabled student, the one who had completely erased her paper on the previous day, asked if she could just cross hers out and start a new one.

Ruth and I made the following observations in our reflection logs during the Day II drafting session:

- Several students said that they had checked their papers and they were done.
- One student was looking at the charts on the wall for revision ideas. I suggested that others might want to do the same.
- A student inquired, "Do we have to write a second draft?"
- Another student looked in a dictionary, her Quick Word Find, and thesaurus and couldn't find the spelling of "Nintendo" (She had it spelled correctly.) I suggested she might want to check it that evening.
- "Do we capitalize each letter of the first word of a title?" asked another. I responded by saying I really couldn't tell him, but he might want to check it out between now and tomorrow.
- With five minutes remaining, only five students were just sitting and looking around. Three of them restarted and continued editing.
- Even though the testing sign was on the door, the MEAP coordinator walked into the classroom to deliver the juice the parents club had provided for the students on Day III. She apologized later; she was having a discussion with someone and had not noticed the sign.

The visiting student from Ruth's room, who had made up Day I with Jill earlier that morning, was readily accepted in the group assigned to her in my

classroom; they let her go first. Most groups were on task. One student suggestion noted by Ruth was, "You shouldn't use 'stuff'. Use a 'gross' word like squishy or slimy." However, for the most part I was displeased with the use of student time. The noise level seemed to be higher than on Day I. The one learning disabled student who had previously erased her writing, and later requested to begin a new piece, kept asking questions of her partners that they had already answered in their writing. She also made noises whenever they tried to read. Another student yelled to a friend across the room.

I decided there were two possible explanations for these disruptions. First, the lead into the conferencing time was different from what I might have done; I would have given more preliminary directions and provided a scaffold or framework for the sharing time. Secondly, my students might have been unsettled because they had been with a substitute teacher on the previous day, except for Day I testing time and for two hours on Day II; also, they had just returned from recess at test time.

Day III

On Day III, students were given both their rough draft booklets and their final copy booklets. They had a choice of using either pens or pencils for their final drafts. There was no need for # 2 pencils since the papers would be hand scored. Students were not allowed to use whiteout.

Day III directions called for the teacher to read aloud a checklist of items for students to consider as they revised and polished their writing. Then students were asked to spend five minutes reviewing their drafts before beginning the final forty minute revision and polishing session. Although I encouraged students to take time to revise and edit their rough drafts, several students began writing their final copies immediately. Fifteen minutes into the

40 minute drafting period, all students were copying into their final draft booklets. There were four students absent, but since students were working individually for the entire testing session, it did not affect the day's proceedings.

The learning disabled student who had only one paragraph yesterday worked diligently. His writing showed a great deal of growth over his work from the beginning of the year when it was a struggle to even get him to write anything. It troubles me to think of how he will feel after working so hard but probably earn only a rating of "one."

In a way, I felt that my students were cheated by my participation in this study. First, they had a substitute teacher for all three days of the assessment. Their regular school day, therefore, was not typical. On days when there is a substitute, students are usually more anxious and less comfortable with the situation. Secondly, due to my intense work on this study, I was unable to give them the attention I might have.

On the positive side, however, my students were team players in the study. They were excited about the project and their participation in the MEAP. They benefited from experiencing the trial assessment and receiving ratings from the team of teachers.

Make-ups

Make-ups proved to be challenging. The instructions given for make-ups in the instruction manual read:

A student who is absent for Day 1 of the Writing Test cannot take Days 2 or 3 until after taking Day 1. Similarly, a student who is absent for Day 2 of the test cannot take Day 3 until **after** taking Day 2.

We had very few absences the first two days and were able to have Ruth and her Jill, her student teacher, give the Day 1 and Day 2 assessments to those

students. Three students missed Days 2 and 3 and six were absent on Day 3. Annette, the at-risk teacher, administered Day 2 and Day 3 of the assessment to those students the following week. Bruce (pseudonym), interviewed as a less proficient writer, was absent on both Days 2 and 3. In his post-assessment interview I asked how he felt about having to complete Days 2 and 3 as a make-up. He responded:

It was ok. It's just that I didn't want to miss those two days. I forgot my story so I didn't know what I wanted to put down again. So I tried to think of the same story again.

Annette commented on Bruce as she reflected on Day 2 of his make-up in her log:

Bruce began rereading his piece and added some omissions (very few). After a few revisions, Bruce closed his rough draft book and waited. Then in another five minutes he opened the booklet, only to read directions for Day 3. Then Bruce closed his rough draft book again and stared around the room. He seems finished even though there are glaring errors in his rough draft. . .

During the seventeen minute peer response, Bruce had difficulty reading his - getting the sense of it all (heavy story). He also had a difficult time responding - listening.

For students like Bruce, the writing assessment was especially challenging even if completed in a familiar context. However, having to do a make-up test in different surroundings, with a different teacher and different students, made it even more of a challenge for him. Teachers also became frustrated by the difficulty of scheduling make-ups which had to be given during regular classroom times when students were missing other classroom activities.

Reflection on the MEAP Writing Assessment

Student Reflections

Several students reflected on the MEAP Writing Assessment in their reflection logs (interviewed students have been noted in parentheses following their comments):

- I like it, but it took a lot of thinking. I'm glad it's over.
- The MEAP helped me. It help me speed up my writing.
- I think MEAP did help me because you are on a time limit, so you don't write long, long stories.
- This is real fun, but I want to know why they did this thing. I'm going to take this one again in the 8th grade and in high school.
- I was glad when it was over. That way I wouldn't have to worry about testing anymore and I could get a good night's sleep.
- I put my heart into my writing.
- I don't think anybody can help me unless somebody created the oral-automatic pencil and pen. Or something to make me love writing!
- I think it really helped me because I really wanted to do good. So I put as much detail as I could in my story (proficient).
- I think that I put in my best effort towards my piece of writing. I should have a good enough piece to receive a 2.5 or higher. I'm proud of myself for how good I think I have done (proficient).

Following the completion of the MEAP Writing Assessment, the team of teachers continued to meet to reflect on the assessment and to consider possible changes in the curriculum and testing procedures for the following school year, 1996 - 97 . Several ideas flowed from the blending of minds at these meetings. First, we decided to do our own rating of the actual assessment writings in the same way we had rated the practice assessment. This idea originated in interviews with a school board member (also a fifth grade parent)

and his wife. They related their concern with the lack of information for parents when such assessments are given to their children. Then in my interview with the superintendent, he suggested that it would be interesting for the team to rate actual MEAP assessment writings and compare the ratings with our previous ratings on the "Pets" writings. I then took these ideas back to the team. They were enthusiastic and felt this would give them even more information about the part that team interventions had played in student writing growth during preparation for this assessment.

Rating of Student Papers

Several students projected what they thought their scores would be on the MEAP Writing Assessment when they wrote reflections in their logs:

- The thing I like about the MEAP Test is that I am good at it and it makes me feel neat when I get good numbers.
- I think I have a four because I put my full effort on it. I put a lot of details and conversation between people. Plus I wrote neat.
- I think this was a great test. I think I got a four. because I went through step by step and had a start, a middle, and an end. I think I did a great job on the test. I hope that I pass it in the eleventh grade so that I can get out of school and go to college.

These three students were confident in their ability to write according to MEAP specifications and receive a passing score. Although official ratings of these papers were not available at the time of this study, the team of teachers did rate student writings. The results of these ratings may be found in Chapter VI.

Inservice

On March 14, the team was given the opportunity to present its findings to the Anderson Elementary kindergarten through fourth grade faculty at an

in-service meeting. This came about because a first grade teacher prompted the curriculum director to invite us, only one day prior to the actual in-service date. No administrators attended the in-service. Figure 10 is the agenda for the meeting.

After a brief introduction, Ben explained the test format to the group. He opened by saying, "I bet everyone thought it would be a cold day in ____ before they saw me up here at an in-service." This was especially appropriate since Ben is known for his dislike of meetings. As he commented in his reflection log in early February, "There are more people involved in this than I'm comfortable with. I do best one on one when working with adults/teachers. More than that takes some real effort on my part."

In spite of his notoriety, he held the audience spellbound. They knew that his participation as a team member in this project meant it would be beneficial. For over ten minutes, he shared the test format as well as his own feelings concerning the assessment.

A panel comprised of Lynn, Liz, Annette, and Jill then discussed their parts in the team's work throughout the project. (Ruth was out of town at a conference.) Lynn spoke from the viewpoint of a classroom teacher, Liz from her learning disabilities background, Annette as the MEAP coordinator, and Jill from the student teacher's perspective. Following the panel discussion, we distributed a copy of the MEAP holistic rubric (Figure 3), which would be used by an Iowa assessment company employed by the State to rate papers (see Chapter III), and Writing Rubric I, the analytic rubric (Figure 11), used previously by our fifth grade teachers in their classrooms. I then described the difference between the two types of rubrics and the information about student writing each will generate.

Figure 10

Fifth Grade MEAP Writing Assessment Inservice
What Is It? What Can I Do To Prepare My Students?
Presented by the
Fifth Grade Teachers' Writing Assessment Team
March 14, 1996

- I. Introduction
- II. Test Format
- III. Panel Discussion
- IV. Rubrics
 - a. Holistic
 - b. Analytical
- V. Rating Papers
- VI. Reflection Activity
 - "How might these ideas be applied in my classroom?"
- VI. Group Sharing
- VII. Questions

Figure 11**Writing Rubric I****Focus**

1
No! This piece goes all over, or it is too big.

2
Focus is pretty clear. Only a few things don't fit.

3
Very clear focus. It stays on track and isn't too big.

Details

1
Very few details.

2
Some good details.

3
Lots of great details.

Lead

1
Needs work!

2
Just okay.
Good try.

3
Great! It catches my readers' attention

Ending

1
No end in sight. It just stops.

2
Pretty good. I can tell it is finished without "The End."

3
Awesome! The end is tied to the beginning and pulls the whole piece together.

Spelling

1
Tons of mistakes.

2
A few mistakes.

3
Very few mistakes.

Punctuation and Capitalization

1
Lots of missing periods, capitals, commas.

2
Only a few missing periods, capitals, commas.

3
Almost no errors on periods, capitals, commas.

Faculty members then were given the opportunity to rate student writings using the MEAP rubric. We distributed copies of the practice assessment on “Pets” (Figure 7) and five selected student writings to each faculty member. Ruth had selected and prepared these materials before leaving for her conference. She did not want to let the team down by not doing her share.

Everyone (including me) was astounded that the ratings done in this meeting were close to our own fifth grade team’s ratings. All teachers wrote comments in answer to the question, “What do you remember most about the inservice?”:

- The stories we rated were neat. Our ratings were similar.
- Grading the writings and basically how close we were.
- Most of the staff was within one point in grading essays.
- Agreeing on scores!
- I remember you talking about the Writing MEAP test, your meetings, and that you are scoring all of the tests to see how these scores compare with actual scores (given by the hired raters).
- Ben’s explanation! Ha!
- Distinguishing good stories from poor stories.
- The way the Fifth Grade worked together and did team/grade level planning.
- Very organized, task oriented, useful, informative - involved us.
- Reading the students’ work. It is wonderful to see the level some of our students have achieved. Too often I begin to wonder - do many of our students write really well? Obviously, some do.
- How much the test changes.
- Ben’s performance (3-14-96).

- Your sharing the students' stories to get a better idea of fifth grade work.
- I would be a good judge for rating the work.

The second question asked staff members to reflect on ways the information gleaned from the inservice would be helpful to classroom teachers. The following are all of the responses:

- Perhaps altering the way I do writing with the class to better prepare them for what is expected.
- (From a Title I teacher) If I were in the classroom, I would do more conferencing. This inservice also gave everyone a goal. They now know what is expected on MEAP Writing test.
- Helps keep us on track when we are rating our own papers.
- The procedure for MEAP Writing could be nicely adapted to second graders. It's hard for some to come up with ideas to write. And it may help others figure out they could add. Just getting the thoughts will help them out because their experiences are so limited. Sounds like help to a beginner.
- It gives me a basis for instruction and for critiquing of stories. It also helps me to see a goal or desired level of writing to guide my third grade students toward.
- It will help me prepare my kids for the Fifth Grade MEAP test.
- The ideas on the procedure for administering the test will allow me to begin setting up my first graders for similar writing experiences. It gives me an idea of what is expected of older students in the area of writing.
- You reinforced my confidence - that I am already doing something right!
- Utilize more rubrics.
- To better prepare our writers - to help them perform at a higher level

- The forms for evaluating student writing are great. I have always had trouble with that aspect of writing and have never had a concrete evaluation tool before. I will definitely be using the forms to grade writing in the future. It is probably one of the most helpful things I have gotten from an inservice this year. It is useful, and I can apply it to my teaching situation and methods.
- To raise our expectations in K - 3.
- We have a lot of work to do.

The inservice concluded with large and small group sharing of ideas. The following day I was stopped in the hall by the curriculum director who told me that she had heard that the inservice was good. She suggested that the team might present this same inservice to teachers at the middle school this coming fall. Ben said he would have to think about that one for a while. He even jokingly played with idea of "taking the show on the road."

I believe the collaboration of our team of seven teachers benefited both the students and ourselves. Through the use of reflection logs, each team member was given the opportunity to reflect upon their own learning and concerns about the MEAP Writing Assessment. Additionally, through the use of student reflection logs, regular classroom teachers gained further insight into student learning and concerns. Through team meetings we were able to discuss our concerns and share both positive and negative experiences with strategies used in our classrooms. Finally, developing and presenting an inservice in which we told our MEAP story to teachers in grades K - 4 provided us with a final reflection as a team.

So concludes our MEAP story in the classrooms. In Chapter VI, I will begin the analysis of the study by using Frameworks I and II as described in Chapter II.

Chapter V

Analysis of the Results of the Study

Chapter V looks at the two frameworks in relation to the results of the study. The introduction will note the assumptions of design and implementation of the MEAP Writing Assessment. This is followed by an examination of the frameworks. Framework I (Chapter III, p. 59) is the writing process as defined by the MEAP exam and Framework II (Chapter III, p. 60) is derived from Madaus' seven principles taken from his article on "The Influence of Testing on the Curriculum" (1988).

Certain assumptions are embedded in the MEAP Writing Assessment, assumptions that result from decisions by state legislators to mandate such a test and the State Board of Education to have it designed in particular ways. Throughout the first four chapters of this study it has been assumed that since the State of Michigan has instituted the new MEAP Writing Assessment, legislators and the Department of Education must feel that writing is important, and that it should be the responsibility of the schools to teach it. Teachers need to be knowledgeable, therefore, in writing and writing instruction so that they may assist students as they become comfortable with all aspects of the writing process.

Loban notes that "the language arts curriculum inevitably shrinks or expands to the boundaries of what is evaluated" (1976, p. i). Since writing and reading, not listening and speaking, are assessed by the State, they must be the more important language skills to the originating governmental agencies.

Because writing is incorporated into MEAP subject area assessment tests, as well as tested in the MEAP Writing Assessment, it must be significant for demonstrating knowledge in content areas also.

Finally, it is assumed that the writing process can be systematized for the purpose of the MEAP Writing Assessment to provide a valid and reliable assessment, the results of which are important information that the citizens of Michigan need.

These assumptions relate directly to assumptions embedded in the test itself, summarized in Framework I.

The Results Examined Using the MEAP Framework

Assumptions Concerning the Writing Process in the MEAP

Teachers need to know and be able to teach the writing process. I will begin by discussing the Anderson Elementary assessment team's knowledge of the writing process, their writing curriculums, and their reasons for teaching writing the way they do. Then, I will relate students' knowledge of the writing process as gleaned from the twelve student preassessment interviews. Finally, since knowledge of the writing process (as defined by the State) is necessary for successful completion of the MEAP assessment of writing, I will discuss the following components individually: time, audience, generation of ideas and drafting on an assigned topic, peer conferencing, revision, editing, and preparation of a final draft. Throughout the discussion, I will incorporate students' and teachers' viewpoints on the various topics as gleaned from both interviews and reflection logs.

Teachers' Knowledge of Teaching the Writing Process

The first assumption made by the State is that students will have a working knowledge of the writing process. This assumes that teachers know, understand, and can transmit this understanding to students. In the case of Anderson Elementary, each of the teachers on the planning team, except the associate teacher, had only participated in a one week, all day workshop on the writing process held in 1988. None had preparation for teaching writing in their teacher training programs, but I had extensive post-graduate experiences in three writing project centers. During the research, the associate teacher was participating in a college course on the writing workshop. As Annette, the at-risk teacher, commented, "Attending the district writing inservice gave me a lot of insight about the writing process because I was unfamiliar with it. It all goes to problem solving. I think the writing process is problem solving." She is noting correctly that in the case of the Writing MEAP, students are using the writing process to solve the problem of writing to the prompt assigned by the State in a specified amount of time. Since my colleagues had no college preparation for teaching writing from a traditional or process perspective and a one week workshop, mandated by the district eight years, ago was their only inservice preparation for the MEAP Writing Assessment, they had every reason to be fearful of the exam.

During interviews, I asked the teachers both to describe their writing curriculum and then to explain why they teach writing the way they do. The following are their responses:

Ben

Ben described emphasis of his writing curriculum as that of building sentences and paragraphs that make sense.

I try to make it so that the kids will write in a complete thought. Hopefully, it's something approaching a complete sentence at most times. We then try to be able to string sentences together into something that has some sort of logic to it. Sentences are together for a reason, to make some sort of a paragraph. We generally work in something around three paragraphs, just because I want them to get the idea that one paragraph should take care of one area or one thing, and if you change paragraphs there's a reason. It's not because you've accomplished so much on a page.

Ben's students do the majority of their final drafting in the computer lab. He felt this might be a problem for them on the MEAP, since they were used to typing and printing their final drafts rather than writing them free hand.

Taking students to the computer room and having them print their writings has been an eye opener. They're seeing that something that takes up a given amount of space on a page doesn't look like anything you thought it was going to when you print it.

When asked why he teaches writing the way he does, Ben commented that he does not think that writing is something that you can teach out of a book.

I guess I look at it with the idea that it's like trying to teach somebody to ride a bike. You could probably read to them how to ride a bike, but I don't think until they've gotten on and fallen off that they're going to have the skill. . . . My viewpoint is more: Does it look right? Does it sound good? Can somebody else read it and make sense out of it? That's really the only basis that I have.

Lynn

When describing her writing curriculum, Lynn related the importance of creating an atmosphere where students love to write. She tries to provide an opportunity for students to write in different genres.

This year's kids write historical fiction. I think that's partly because our social studies book and trade books do so much with it. If I ask the students to just write a story, nine times out of ten it will be related to sports or a past experience. It may or may not have some fiction added to it. They are not big on poetry.

When asked why she teaches writing the way she does, Lynn commented that she doesn't really know if there is any "right" or "wrong" method.

I teach writing with maybe more emphasis on editing and a lot on punctuation. We pull the grammar in too. We correlate a lot of writing with our skills activities. If we're working on pronouns, then sometime during that week we will do a writing piece and go through and not be able to use any pronouns. We then have a peer go through and take out

all the proper nouns and put in all pronouns. We've done that kind of activity, so I feel like I'm teaching writing as more of a hands on activity. . . I guess I teach writing in what I've seen from you and other teachers. Just hit and miss; kind of what has been successful in the past.

In her reflection log, Lynn wrote, "My students seem to enjoy writing and art. I try to emphasize that writing is an art form!"

Ruth

Ruth described her writing curriculum, beginning with an emphasis on quantity and gradually moving toward quality as they go through the school year.

I start out in the fall with free writing. I give students a spiral notebook and their first pages are prewriting activities, things about themselves. I try not to start with a list of things. I start with scary things that have happened to them, or exciting ones. Then I go on to give them different topics, and they add thoughts about these different topics. Finally, they organize these ideas into a web about themselves.

The first nine weeks I encourage free writing; I encourage quantity, not quality. Several times a week I give them time for free writing, and if they fill up a page, they get three points, a half a page two points, and one sentence one point. After I think they have enough in their spirals, I pick one and have them go through the writing process.

Jill described the writing curriculum in Ruth's classroom during the second semester from the perspective of an associate teacher:

Creative, free writing process, is incorporated into the thematic units. We give the students a theme and they can write anything they want on it. Then we take them to the computer room and have them type it up. They then bring it back and we give them suggestions. Like today, we didn't

tell them what was wrong; we gave them suggestions. We said you don't have to change it if you don't want to; it's your story.

Having taught in special education settings as well as both lower and upper elementary classrooms, Ruth's writing curriculum has evolved through a variety of experiences.

The year I taught primary, the class between kindergarten and first, I stepped right into the middle of the writing process. The third year I was in there, I learned about the writing process. All of a sudden they were saying "invented spelling" (student generated spelling), so I started at the ground roots, with the first level of kids who weren't going to be successful in first grade, doing invented spelling, getting them to do creative writing.

. . . When I switched to fourth grade there were too many subjects to get under my belt. I went with developmental writing centers. So anything I've done since first grade in regular ed has all been in the writing process. I guess it probably came from educating myself in the primary and the special ed background that says you take them from where they're at.

It's what I've learned in the last five to eight years. It's the way I was told that you should teach, probably in the writing project [required five day writing inservice at Anderson Elementary]. Maybe when I took the writing workshop I was at a formative point. I was starting fourth grade and I needed something to latch on to.

In her reflection log, Ruth wrote about the process she uses to teach writing. "The way I teach writing mimics the way the MEAP is organized."

During her pre-assessment interview, Ruth expressed concern about handing over the teaching of writing to her student teacher with such a high stakes test on the horizon. When I asked Jill, the associate teacher, about her experience in the teaching of writing, she commented:

Basically, I have never taught a writing class before, so what I'm getting now is really the start of my background. . . with just the little experience I've had, I like it a lot better. Comparing the writing I did in high school and the writing that I'm helping the kids do now, you can see they enjoy it a lot more. And to me if they enjoy it a lot more, they're going to learn better [than I did].

Liz

When asked to describe the writing curriculum she facilitates for her learning disabled students, Liz commented:

In the learning disabilities program, it varies among the kids. If they're pull out kids, we use the computer for journal writing and try to emphasize certain things in each journal. I've done a lot with short, self-awareness writings about feelings and themselves because they don't like to write long things.

With reading, we've always written what we think about the reading; I don't call them responses, but it's the same thing. I'm just

trying to use writing to reinforce reading words, certain words that they have to use in sentences.

For sentence formation, I also use the pyramid things where you start with one word like

horse
black horse
big black horse

so you come up with a pyramid. It doesn't always work, but I try.

One of the reasons Liz teaches this way is to try to get the kids more comfortable with writing:

If they're not ready, they're not going to write. Like Leo (pseudonym). Leo does not like to write; its like pulling teeth to get him to write. Now this year he's more ready. He's getting more sight vocabulary so he feels more confident and sure of himself.

When I asked Liz about Leo taking the test, she replied, "It might be worth it. I'd like to have him try. I think he's going to be frustrated. I'd like to have him try, but I don't know if his results should be counted in."

Leo did participate in the actual writing test, and in his reflection log he wrote, "It is easy. It is cool." He had a good feeling about his writing, and it was good for him. The question is how will he feel upon receiving his actual rating from the state?

A female learning disabilities student reflected in her log, "I learned that it was the first time I could write that much. The first time I like writing."

Another reason Liz gave for teaching writing the way she does once again expresses her concern that students feel comfortable and enjoy writing: "Trial and error seems to have had the most success. If it's too restricted, the kids are bored with it; they don't want to do it. It becomes a chore. It's not fun. You still need to make it fun. Especially [kids] with learning disabilities."

Although the MEAP assumes that teachers need to have had a great deal of preparation in the writing process if their students are to do well, our team of teachers had little. Assessment team teachers at Anderson Elementary, however, pooled their limited knowledge as they prepared their students for using the writing process during the MEAP Writing Assessment. Further MEAP testing of writing will increase the need for teachers to learn more about the writing process.

Students' Knowledge of the Writing Process

A second assumption of the MEAP Writing Assessment is that students know and can apply aspects of the writing process. Since knowledge of the writing process is necessary for successful completion of the MEAP Writing Assessment, I asked students during their preassessment interviews, "What do you know about the writing process?" Out of the twelve students interviewed, four were able to answer that question without further prompting. Three of the four were students from my classroom and were acquainted with the terminology and practice of process writing.

The following are the responses of student answering without further prompting (teacher assigned ability levels are noted for each respondent). The first student was not a student in my class.

- I need a couple of drafts to correct spellings and complete sentences and capital letters and correct punctuation marks. (proficient)
 - Free copy. Just cross out stuff, go back and revise and fix your mistakes. Then before you write your final copy you've got to go to make sure all your editing is done. All your periods in, all punctuation. Then final copy. (average)
 - Well, I skip lines on a first draft, and then write it and revise what I w a n t to change. Then I go on to the second draft, write it and edit it again. . .
- [I asked, When you say you revise, what do you mean by that?] I change what I don't really like. It's not really good. . .
- [I asked, What is the difference between revision and editing?] Editing is more like spelling and periods; Revision is changing words and making something sound better than it did before (proficient).
- Give us a topic and then we're going to write about it. Then we're going to get like in little groups and check it over, read it to the other people, get information. (less proficient)

The students acquainted with the writing process had a limited understanding of the drafting, revision and editing processes. With the other eight, I needed to develop the question further by saying, "What I mean by the writing process is the way you go about writing stories, the process you go through. The following are their responses:

- First, I just come up with something I write about. Sometimes I'll want to write outside and maybe write about something out there. I'll maybe draw a picture of it and look at that and write something about it. Sometimes I'll just pick a subject and start writing about that. (proficient)
- Well, I make a rough draft. I jot all my ideas down on a piece of scrap paper. Then I go from there to put in extra words and extra sentences. (proficient)
- I look up a spelling if it's a word I don't know or try and think really creative about writing. (average)
- I just start writing it and get pictures in my mind. (average)

- First get a scrap piece of paper and write an idea of what I want it to be. Then I get a piece of paper and start writing just whatever comes into my head, read it over and if it sounds good I'll go home and I'll type it. Mom types it for me. (average)
- Spelling, start with the title and leave a space. Start a new paragraph. (less proficient)
- I don't know a lot. Jot down things. (less proficient)
- I don't really know anything. (less proficient)

As can be seen from the wide variety of responses by these twelve students, each has his/her own idea based on his/her incomplete knowledge of the writing process: although some did struggle with getting an idea and others mentioned spelling, these eight students didn't understand the functions of drafting (exploring multiple ideas, selecting a central idea, initiating the composition), peer response (what to say to peers, what to ask of peers, how to handle suggestions), and revision (reformulating an idea, reorganizing the text, recrafting the document).

The third assumption of the MEAP Writing Assessment is that the writing process used by students will enable them to complete the writing assignment in a specified amount of time, that the students will be able to have a sense of audience; generate ideas and draft them about an assigned topic; that students can peer conference, revise, edit, and prepare a final draft . I would now like to address each of these procedural assumptions individually.

Time

The first component of the test, time, assumes that students are able to complete the total writing process in three, forty-five minute periods on three consecutive days. This was one of the major topics of concern expressed by many students in their reflection logs. (Logs were collected from all students in

the class, not only those selected for interviews, so more students' written comments will be listed below. Proficiency abilities will be indicated only when the selected students' responses are used.) Time guidelines may be required to achieve validity and reliability in the minds of test makers, but it often is a constraint for students trying to produce their best work. The following examples from student logs confirm that time was a major concern:

- I wish you wouldn't have to do it in a certain length of time 'cause sometimes I have to write really fast.
- I feel like I am being stretched to the limit. I really wish we had more time. But unfortunately we don't.
- Today I guess I got kind of mad when the teacher said stop writing because I really like to write. I hate working under a time limit because you can't hardly ever finish anything.
- I would have liked a longer time to fix problems.
- But we've got to get it done in 45 minutes. If we don't, it just stays like that, not one more word. (Average)
- I'm glad I got my piece done in time! I would have liked to have something around 60 minutes.
- It is real hard to be timed when you are writing a story because they don't give you enough time to think about what you want to write in your story.
- I thought it was hard to beat the time of 40 minutes. My fingers got cramped. I had to crack my fingers and my mom said it was writer's cramp.
- What would have made it easier would [that it] not be timed.
- We can't have any extra time because it's in the rules and regulations that (Day II) has about 25 minutes for writing, 17 for peer response and 8 for looking over, revising, editing and rewriting. I wonder if we had 45 minutes for just writing, if I'd do better? (Proficient)
- I couldn't get my story finished in time so I just added an ending.

- I think we should have had a lot of more time for writing because some of us like to write for long periods of time. So I think we should have more time to write more stuff.
- I felt nervous at first but after a while I wasn't. It was hard being timed to write a story in 40 minutes. It was fun though because I got done before the time was over.

Three students addressed the issue of the lack of quality in their writing due to the restricted time limits:

- I think that if I would have had more time I could have done better and been more precise. (Proficient)
- My writing was so long that I had to write sloppy just to get it done and cut some off of it.
- We only got a 45 minute time to write the story. And when I have to do something my best in a hurry, then I mess up and don't think because all I want to do is get it done...But still I wish we could have more time, because I'm only on the second paragraph and I know what and how to make my story better...I didn't like the MEAP test. Not because it was a test - because we had to rush. And I was only on my second paragraph. And I'm tired of tests that the teachers rush us on and say do better. You can only do "your" best.

Positive comments, however, were expressed by four students concerning the time limits:

- I liked the certain amount of time you had because then you wouldn't keep on writing.
- I liked the amount of time because I had plenty of time. I got to just sit around for 10 minutes.
- I thought we had too much time. He should have gave us 30 minutes instead of 45 minutes.
- Today I finished the MEAP test. I didn't do too bad. This time I got it all done and I didn't have to think too much.

Further comments on the time limits of the MEAP Writing Assessment were given by three students during their post assessment interviews:

- It was a bit challenging because I wanted to write more about the topic and I had to shorten it down. I didn't know if it was ok when I shortened it down. I didn't know if I had the right things in it. (Proficient)
- You've got to make your story not too big. Make it big enough so you can write it in the given amount of time. (Average)
- It was a good experience. It was nerve racking just because we didn't have enough time. I mean lots of kids did but you've got to get yourself confident enough to believe that you can get it all done in the time that you are given. (Proficient)

Time was a major concern for these students. Some felt nervous about meeting the deadline; others were challenged, "stretched to the limit." Student expressed issues related to time included not having enough time to think or fix problems. One felt he was receiving conflicting messages when asked to rush and do his best at the same time.

Two of the teachers also commented on the time factor in the test. During her post assessment interview, Lynn told about preparing her class for the time limits of the writing assessment:

As far as the time limits, my kids take a long time writing. Maybe that's because I stress to them "reread things, read it as a stranger." They were prepared for the actual writing, but I don't think they were prepared well enough for the actual time restraints.

When asked what she might do differently to prepare students for next year, Lynn responded:

Earlier in the year I would do little mini writing sessions that are timed. I would then let students do some editing within the time frame of the what the MEAP allows then to. Some of the kids I think have a tendency just to ramble and start over and get off task. So it might help them to zero in and realize that they have time restraints that may be a problem. Some of the kids need to realize they have to do this writing. They've got to get it done in this amount of time. I think that would help them. I'd do that more towards the beginning of the year, not just second semester.

Ruth, however, felt that her students were prepared for the time restraints of the assessment. "I think we prepared them fairly well for the procedure of the test, the functioning of the minutes and the amount of time."

Both students and teachers accepted time limitations as a factor in testing, probably because they had no choice. Usually in process writing time, is not as much of a factor. Often students make decisions, with the help of the teacher, about when they are done. Sometimes they work on their writing at home. Time is considerably more flexible. Even the students in my own classroom who were more experienced in writing had problems with time constraints.

Both students and teachers varied in their perspectives of and attitudes toward the time limit. Although the majority of students did complete their writings in the specified time, however, many felt that given more time the quality of their writings would have improved.

Audience

The audience for which fifth grade students write during the school year is most often their teacher or fellow students. In the case of the MEAP, however, they are asked to write for unknown adults who will be evaluating their papers. For students at Anderson Elementary, this was a new experience. The following are a few comments from their logs:

- I tried to get my story to make the adults who are reading it get really interested.
- I tried to do my best and I might catch the readers' attention.
- I do not know how to make my writing good enough for a grown up audience. (Less Proficient)

- In my stories I like to use similes. I think it makes it easier for the reader to understand what's happening. Here's one of my similes (The girls ran through the door like a herd of buffalo).
- The assessment wasn't hard, but I don't see how the things that were supposed to get you going on your writing could grab a reader's attention. They could put [in] more suspenseful ideas. (Proficient)

Two other students, selected as proficient writers by their teachers, commented on audience during their post assessment interviews:

- I feel really good myself, and I was reading my story and (the teacher observer) was right beside me and she looked really interested. I mean if she was really interested in it, then the people that are reading it are going to be really interested in it too.
- I think I have a pretty good chance of passing. I like my work that I did. My piece I thought was pretty good. You'd like it if you're into piano like I am, but you'd still like it pretty good if you don't know a thing about piano.

Although the students were writing for adult raters, the majority did not seem threatened by the experience. Perhaps students didn't know enough about the writing process to worry about the reaction of adult readers they did not know. As they and their teachers become more familiar with the MEAP, I think they will quickly adapt to writing to an unknown audience, particularly if teachers broaden the types of audiences for whom students write in their ongoing process writing program. I have known this to be true in my own classroom: students portfolios (collections of writing) show over time increased ability to adapt their writing to specific audiences.

Generating Ideas and Drafting On an Assigned Topic

The opening activity for the Writing MEAP asked students to generate ideas on a given topic, in this case "Firsts." They were given time to think quietly, as well as brainstorm both in small and large groups. During the small

group peer discussion, the students were given ten minutes to discuss questions, supplied by the State, for the purpose of generating ideas on the topic of "Firsts." In the directions, students were instructed to be sure everyone in their group had an opportunity to speak. The groups were then asked (during a ten minute brainstorming activity) to share some of their ideas with the class. Since it was unclear whether they were to do any writing or jotting down of ideas during either of these activities, most students chose to just sit and listen even though they ordinarily used strategies such as listing or mapping for class writing projects.

According to Liz, the LD teacher, during the "trial" MEAP, students in my classroom were beginning to create webs as they brainstormed in the small and large group portions. In the "real" MEAP, however, they just sat there as if they were afraid to put pencil to paper until they were instructed to do so.

Ben commented on his class's difficulty generating ideas without a certain amount of guidance:

Give them [the class] an idea and they'll go along and do it, and do a pretty reasonable job. But they don't generate outstanding ideas on their own. They're the sort of group you have to lead one way or another. They don't go off and lead in their own direction. They aren't creative.

As part of our team meeting on February 19, we had a discussion on brainstorming. Annette, the at-risk teacher, stressed the importance of students needing "to know how to piggy back off another's ideas."

We also discussed the difference between "stealing" and "sharing." Liz commented, "It's just brainstorming, not giving enough of an idea to reveal the whole story."

As an inclusionary teacher in my classroom during the brainstorming session of the trial MEAP, Liz observed that brainstorming was possibly the most difficult portion of the assessment for my class. During the whole class

brainstorming activity, I wrote student suggestions on the board (later, upon receiving final instructions from the State, I learned that this was unacceptable during the “real” MEAP). I felt as if I wanted to interject questions to keep the discussion moving, yet a little voice inside kept telling me it would be inappropriate or unethical according to test guidelines. This approach was contrary to our past experiences with brainstorming where I had served as facilitator and asked questions along the way to keep the dialogue going.

Later I discovered that the actual test guidelines stated (in bold print): **“However tempting, do not add any of your own responses. Do not write students’ responses on the board; this is simply an opportunity for them to hear each other’s ideas”** (MEAP, 1996, p. 22). The directions went on to say (in plain text) that students were allowed to take notes in their booklets; they did not, however, supply students with this information in the directions that teachers read to them.

After brainstorming, it was assumed that students were ready to begin drafting on the assigned topic. Ruth commented that after reading her students’ writings, she thought the topic of “Firsts” did not lend itself to bringing out students’ creativeness.

According to their interview and log responses, students had mixed feelings concerning the topic of “Firsts.” Several students openly disapproved of the topic:

- I think you should give a better topic than firsts because I haven’t did a lot of firsts that were cool.
- I like writing better when we’re not assigned to write about something, but when its your pick.
- The topic was hard. You really had to think on that topic. You had to go back in time to get your first for so and so. (Average)

- I think that the topic is stupid...Besides the topic makes absolutely no sense to me - firsts, why firsts? Blah! (Proficient)
- I think the topic is harder than pets because you have to look back in your memories to remember what happened on your trip or what happened any time.
- Three students expressed that they had difficulty getting started, but eventually liked the topic:
 - At first I didn't think it was a very good title because it was first, but then after I thought about it there were a lot of things to write about. (Average)
 - I think the hardest part was trying to find a story for "firsts," but once I did it was easy, because once I start writing I never want to stop.
 - (This child changed her mind from Day to Day III.) Day I: I don't like the topic at all because I don't remember all of this stuff. It was a long time ago. I need to write about something I like... Day III: The topic was not really that bad after I got through with it.

Still other students liked the topic right from the beginning and felt they were able to write to it with a minimum amount of difficulty:

- I didn't use any of the ideas but they did get me started. (Proficient)
- I liked the topic because I had a lot of things in mind to write about.
- The topic that we are on I think that it is good because it makes you think back about what happened when you were born to about now.
- I really enjoy our new topic. We get to write about our firsts. Like when was our first trip with our families and other really cool things. This is so much fun. I get to tell about my past.
- I think firsts is the best topic because your parents probably remember more of your first than you do. And it's always great to ask your parents for help.
- I think it was very easy. I did great, especially what the topic was. It really got me started. It was motivating. The best part was the writing, where I got rid of my ideas but I have many more! (Proficient)

All fifth-grade students at Anderson Elementary did complete a writing on the topic of "Firsts." As expressed in their responses, however, some students felt their writings would have been better if they had written on another topic, perhaps one of their own choosing. Most did not complain. In fact, it may have been comforting to some to be given a topic which was broad enough for them to have something to say. Part of the ease with which students addressed the topic may have been due to the way it was presented by teachers. For example, Ben went outside the MEAP guidelines and presented it in a magical way. His students were fascinated. Restricting teachers to particular words, which test makers determine will increase reliability, is not what teaching is about. Guidelines have to be loose enough to allow for the teacher's "voice" to be heard.

Peer Conferencing

Assuming that students were able to complete their first drafts in the specified amount of time, they were then asked to return to their small groups for the purpose of sharing drafts and receiving peer response. "The group sharing wasn't real productive in some cases," reflected Ben following his class's experience with the practice MEAP. "They're used to reading each other's [papers] rather than listening and commenting. Some aren't listening; readers are too soft spoken." A few days later Ben reflected in his log, "A couple of good ideas to get better use of Day II group time: get them to listen, and if they have time, get started on what changes they want to make." Following Day II of the "real" MEAP, Ben addressed this same topic. "The sharing time went better. I changed a couple of groups. I still think reading it aloud isn't as good as the other person reading it silently, and then questioning the author on areas unclear or corrections needed."

Before the assessment, I asked students during interviews if it was helpful for them to share their writing with peers. Three students responded that it is sometimes helpful:

- Sometimes, because they can tell you what's right and what's wrong. What you should take out and what you should put in. (Proficient)
- Sometimes I do, not much. (Less Proficient)
- Most of the time. Unless it's something you don't want to show them. (Less Proficient)

Nine students considered the opportunity to share their writing with classmates a positive advantage:

- Yeh, because you get their ideas. Then you can write more about it. (Proficient)
- Yeh, cause you can get more than one person's ideas to put in your story. (Proficient)
- Yeh, because then you know what they think of your writing and come up with new ideas. Tell you different ways to make your story improve. (Proficient)
- Yeh, because when you read it to yourself you don't find as many mistakes as you do when you read it out loud. (Average)
- Yeh, because then they can correct you. It feels better to help than to have someone help you. (Average)
- Yeh, because you get other people to read it and they really like to read it. (Average)
- Yeh, because it's helpful if they'll be honest with you and tell you where you need to work on it. (Average)
- Yes, because you can get new ideas. Like if you put something that didn't work in with your story, you might want to change some things - make it longer or shorter. (Less Proficient)
- Yeh, because they may not know what to do and if you help them make it better they they can help you. (Less Proficient)

At the end of Day II, students were given an opportunity to conference with the same groups as Day I. The directions stated in the administration manual said: "Next, each of you will read your writing aloud to your partners to answer the questions. Partners must listen carefully so they can help the person reading" (MEAP, 1996, p. 26). The two questions suggested for discussion by groups were: "Which parts of my writing do you want to know more about? What do you want to know?" (MEAP, 1996, p. 25). Students were asked to make sure that during the seventeen minutes allotted for this activity each group member received comments on his/her writing.

When reflecting on Day II of the test, Ben wrote about the format, or time line, of the assessment. "Sharing at the end of Day II doesn't give a chance for a rewrite by the author until the next [testing] session." Children in our classes are used to making changes in their drafts soon after they hear their peers' suggestions.

Following the assessment, students reflected on the part that group sharing played in the writings. Because this factor of peer collaboration was also frequently mentioned by the total group of fifth graders, comments by other students are included with those in each classroom targeted for study. Many of the comments were positive:

- When I went in my group, the thing that helped me was reading to people.
- What helped me was reading orally because I could get ideas for my story.
- When I'm in groups I learn things I could change, things that don't make sense, and things that I should just plain leave out. Sharing with other people helps a lot. It helps because it helps me reach out and see problems the group sees that I don't. It really helps when they're pondering something so you'll know to put it in your story.

- It helped me in my group because they told me that I needed to add details in my story.
- The group was helpful because we had questions to go through and they weren't discussing other things.
- When you are in a group, you get much better stories because group members notice things you wouldn't notice on your own.
- I think it helped me to share because I can get someone else's ideas, so when I'm ready to write I can make my story sound good. (Proficient)
- When we were sharing our stories it felt good to help other people and give them advice. (average)
- I think that when I read aloud I find more mistakes than I do when I'm just reading to myself.
- I think reading aloud helped me understand my story better. And when I get some ideas from other people I just write them down and think about them.
- It's a lot easier to work in groups instead of by yourself. You can have someone else give you some ideas for your writing. Someone could catch a mistake you made or an error you made.
- I like when people compliment my stories. But I like it more when people give me advice about my stories.
- One thing I liked about the MEAP test was you got to share with people because if you have something wrong they might spot it.
- I like it because you get more ideas in your head when you listen.
- It helps me because I can ask questions of my group and they give me ideas.
- My group helped me realize what wasn't making sense and what did make sense.

Some of the students had negative experiences in their groups. They did not feel it was helpful for them to share:

- What didn't help me was after I read it they didn't have anything to say about my story. If they can say something about my story it would help. They don't see anything wrong with my story. (Proficient)
- What didn't help me is that the people in my group don't know very much about hockey.
- It doesn't help me when a member in my group just sits there and doesn't do anything. I've only had that happen once. Next time I might try to find more things to help the other persons.
- What didn't help me is when members of my group started talking about basketball game when I was reading my story. What I might do differently is try and help those boys get on track when we're in a group. (Proficient)
- No one really suggested anything and I really don't like to share stuff I write.
- I hope that members of the group that I'm in did a good job. Even though your supposed to give your other members an honest opinion I don't think that I received one. But, of course, they probably didn't want to hurt my feelings. I did a pretty good job on giving them tips.
- I do not like the group. I am in a group with 2 boys. They don't take things seriously and I'm trying to take it seriously.

Other students commented on what they learned from their experiences sharing during the writing assessment.

- I learned that people around can help us learn. We can help them learn...I learned that you have to respect the people you are working with because they respect you.
- I learned that one person can't take a lot of time or the other kids won't get time. It helps by looking it over with someone instead of doing it by yourself and when you read ask yourself if it makes sense. (Less Proficient)
- I learned that sharing with another person is great and that person can give you ideas for your writing. That your suggestions help them also. It helped a lot to share. It helped to experience new ideas from other people and it makes you feel good to know that you helped that person with their writing also.
- I learned that stories don't just come from my mind but others too.

- I learned that if you hear ideas from other kids I could do better on the test. It just puts stuff in my head I guess. The real test seems like it's going to be easy now.

One student explained how his early negative experience with sharing on the practice assessment, but later on the "real" assessment he had a positive experience.

- Really not much worked because of all the sarcasm. I mean everybody in my group just said I talk fast and not giving me any ideas, questions or comments. All they said is I talk too fast...I think I did better this week and I had a great group of listeners. They were full of questions, comments and ideas. A person in my group told me I needed detail and in which places so I wrote it down and the other person gave me a couple of good similes that I would have never gotten before. I used two I think. But I did better and it wasn't so bad working with assigned partners if they give good ideas. (Proficient)

Ben commented that his students, when working in small groups, were much better at helping their peers edit than they were at revising:

I don't think my kids are really that strong. When they write something, they tend to not change very much unless I look at it and project ideas. Then they can do that. But that's not the way it's supposed to be. As far as getting ideas from each other, they're more into the nuts and bolts and the mechanics of it. They'll try to help each other find the mistakes. As far as getting someone to say "that part is kind of boring" or "you might want to change this part," I don't get much of that.

When asked what he would do differently in preparing for next year's MEAP Writing Assessment, Ben replied:

I'd have them actually reading [aloud] something to each other [in contrast to passing papers to be read silently]. Generally we don't do that much reading. Now, with the Christmas stories, we did. It was more to practice the presentation than to fix things in the story, because most of that had been ironed out before they got into the actual reading of it. I'd do more out loud editing.

Ruth, when asked during her post assessment interview how well she thought her students were prepared for the assessment, replied:

I guess my concern would be that I don't think I prepared them well enough to help each other. I have been doing a lot of, "What are some positive things that you can say about the writing? What are some things you noticed that you can help with?" But I tend to be an overly positive person myself, so I'm always looking for, "Oh, that was really a clever word you used!" or "This was really nice." I don't tend to give them the kind of criticism maybe that they need modeled. I don't tend to say, "Oh, wait a minute, here was a confusing part." or "Why don't you try putting something in about..." I haven't done enough of that modeling. I think the kids need more of it. I need to do it as well as they need to learn how to do it for each other.

As I reflect on student comments about peer conferencing, I note that the majority of students enjoyed the experience and felt that working in groups helped them improve their writings. The avenue of peer conferencing provides one way for students to improve their writing. As a teacher who believes strongly in the value of students' teaching each other, I was pleased to see the writing team's concern for peer conferencing. Through modeling, using strategies such as center group modeling (See Chapter III), students began to learn to help each other. The teachers and some of the students, however, felt that more modeling and experiences with group work would have been beneficial. A good place to incorporate modeling of ways to assist peers without hurting their feelings would be to include them in the oral language curriculum.

Revision

Following small group response time, the papers were immediately collected and not returned until the following day. At this time, the students were given an opportunity to revise and edit their papers. Although these two processes may occur concurrently, I will be discussing them separately. Gail E. Tompkins, in her book Teaching Writing: Balancing Process and Product (1990), a copy of which each team member received through a mini-grant,

emphasizes the importance of separating revision and editing for elementary students:

(R)esearch has shown that when they (revising and editing) are grouped together, the emphasis of both teachers and students will be on editing - the error-hunting activity. The two activities should be separated so that proper attention can be given to each in the writing process (p. 72).

During an interview, one student gave the following distinction between revising and editing. "Revising is changing words and making something sound better than it did before. Editing is more like spelling and periods." Revision and editing possibilities, brainstormed by my class and utilized as charts in all four classrooms (see Figures 5 and 6), highlight the distinction between the two stages of the writing process for the assessment team and the students we teach.

Students were given an opportunity to revise, or read their papers carefully in order to make corrections during the MEAP. They were to have checked their writing to be sure it had a clear focus, a clearly developed central idea, a natural flow that helps the reader move through the text, a clear sense of wholeness, and a clear voice that is precise and interesting. According to the team of teachers, this was by far one of the greatest challenges of the Writing MEAP. Few students or teachers understand that this is what revision is about. Most do not make a useful distinction between revision and editing. Most rely on editing for improving writing because mechanical errors are much more readily identifiable and correctable.

Ruth is confused about revision in her classroom where grammar and usage errors are attended to:

Revision is, of course, the toughest thing; they don't want to address it. My approach to mistakes or corrections comes from the writing. For example, I just did the section in our social studies book on the Seven Year's War that goes with the social studies we just read. The idea came right out of the book. I had them write a paragraph in past tense. Then

that's the thing we went through and corrected for, past tense. ...Then I did a lesson on "lay" and "lie," because they had so many times where they "laid the gun down," and "they are laying in the mud." I spotted it as I was reading their paragraphs and so I made a lesson out of it...So my approach to the teaching revision comes from their writing.

Lynn describes how her class uses colored pencils to fix or change their writing during revision:

What they like to do on their rough drafts, once they know they don't have to erase, is to get out their colored pencils and fix or change. They read it as a stranger would read it. We do a lot of that. We do a lot of just "let's hear your rough draft," and every time we hear something that we're not really sure what it should be, we raise a hand, and that's an area where you put a little star; that's an area where you go back through to edit yourself.

Annette, when revising with her at-risk students, works to, "eliminate unnecessary information. It's hard for them. They think more is better...And sometimes they are just overwhelmed...They'll probably feel that way when they open that little [MEAP] booklet. They'll think they have to fill all the pages, and they don't."

The following are examples of student comments in their reflection logs on revision:

- You can read one sentence, stop, then look at the next. You think if you should add something, take away the period and connect the sentences, or subtract something you don't need and it's fine without it.
- I learned that I don't have to stick with my first opinion on my story, and that I can change anything anytime. (Proficient)
- I think that making my story shorter helped a lot so I had more time to go and read over my story and find more mistakes.
- I need help on running on with sentences and I think I make my stories too long. I need to find a way that I can be so creative but still keep my story short, interesting, catching, good, and the ways I want.

In her post assessment interview Ruth commented, "In looking at their revision skills, I think fifth graders tend to think the first thing they put down is perfect. They don't even imagine that it could stand any kind of revision. And that is a drawback because they don't seem to make changes. That holds them back."

The following dialogue occurred during our March 18 team meeting as we were reflecting on revision:

Liz : One of the things I noticed the most is that the kids don't revise. They just don't see it. They edit, but they don't revise. We really need to work on it.

Jill: I even brought in one of my papers I'm writing for college right now. I read it for them the first time and I made corrections on it. Then I brought it in the next time; I revised it and I'm still revising it.

Liz: I think you have to build up to it and try just picking adjectives out or just changing sentences around, one little step at a time.

Ben: For example, of your x number of sentences in a paragraph, only one can begin with "the" or use this word only once.

Revision understandings are limited in our team of teachers, but revision is difficult to convey to young students. Jill reflected on her experiences sharing her writing with the class, "I did share my writing with them. I know we have a lot of trouble with revising. I had revised my story twice. I read it to them in different ways and they still didn't grasp the concept."

During her post assessment interview, Lynn commented that when preparing her students for revision next year, she would want to begin working on adjectives earlier. "My kids really started picking up on adjectives after the first of the year. After our Christmas stories, they started looking more at adjectives. I'd like to start them first semester working more with adjectives, for example, telling them to use the word "good" only once.

Team members agreed that revision is a difficult concept for fifth grade writers. Even the teachers didn't seem to understand the range of revision possibilities, something that comes with more knowledge of the writing process than their backgrounds in writing had offered. Revision was a new concept for students also, and it was difficult to get them to see past the word and sentence level. The range of possibilities in revision could include: more precise language, clear cut ideas, better organization, more engaging style, and stronger voice. The need for extensive modeling of a variety of revision strategies was apparent.

Editing

During editing, the students were to peruse their papers to be sure they had demonstrated standard writing conventions. Ruth expressed a concern that the small group sharing at the end of Day 11 for the purpose of peer response was held too late in the process. She normally would hold this conference earlier and give students another conference for the purpose of editing later in the process. Students wanted to get at editing, with little or no concern for revision. Ruth picked up on this and was concerned. She would prefer a separate conference for revision followed by a separate conference for editing. With the current MEAP agenda, students have little opportunity to conference with peers on editing their work.

During her discussion of editing in her post assessment interview, Ruth commented:

I'm concerned about their editing because I think they really don't see that words are misspelled. To them it looks right! It's hard for them to spot that they didn't put a question mark or that they didn't spell it right. Those are the kinds of things that we do when we try to help them with the writing, and they don't have that help during the MEAP. . . So I worry about that. I don't know that they have as many skills as they maybe need in spotting things that are wrong because their own work looks right

to them. They can see it in somebody else's, but they can't see it in their own.

Jill, Ruth's student teacher, when asked if she thought the students were learning usage skills through their writings commented:

Oh, definitely, I have the perfect example. Today one boy was reading this story out loud to everybody and he had "me and Amelia." He read it and stopped and then he put "Amelia and I."

One student from Lynn's classroom remembered the advice on the wall chart as she wrote in her reflection log:

Remember for MEAP

Capitals

Over-all edit

Punctuation

Spellings

Lynn felt that as far as their editing skills, her students were in the 75% bracket; 75% of them were pretty well prepared.

Another student commented in her post-assessment interview, "You just want to make sure you've got words capitalized, words where they should go. Because this is a test you want to invest more than a regular assignment."

The emphasis at Anderson Elementary during the MEAP Writing Assessment, like that in the research discussed by Tompkins (1990), was on editing rather than revision. This may have been due, in part, to factors such as the lack of teacher and student knowledge of the writing process or the assessment format and time constraints. As Ruth noted, however, even good editing may not be easily achieved by students. As process writing authorities indicate, proofreading skills need to be developed, and correctness needs to be valued in many types of writing.

Final Draft

The directions for Day III, Revising and Polishing, of the MEAP Writing Assessment read:

Reread your writing. Then, think about these questions as you work on your own to revise and polish your writing from Days 1 and 2. Be sure to plan enough time to copy your paper beginning on page 3 in the *Final Copy Answer Booklet*. Use as many of the blank pages as you need to write as complete a response to the topic as you can; you do not need to fill every page. Only the writing in your *Final Copy Answer Booklet* will be scored, so you must have your entire paper copied into this booklet by the end of the next 40 minutes. You may cross out any errors you make; but neatness does not count. (MEAP Administration Manual, 1996, p. 28).

This gives young writers a confusing message. Students who don't know much about revising and polishing have enough trouble meeting requirements of the test without confusing directions for the test. First, the State has proposed that this be an assessment of the student's best writing, on an assigned topic, in a specified amount of time. The reality of it is, however, that the students must rush to revise, edit, and complete their final copies in a 40 minute time period. Secondly, although the writing is assumed to be quality work, the directions state that students may cross out errors and that neatness does not count. "Best writing" to students would be correct writing. Students assume the final copy answer booklet means that their work should be written correctly and in their best handwriting. This is particularly difficult because it is in contrast to the writing process. If teachers adjust the curriculum and teach in this manner, students will begin to get the impression that doing their "best work" is not important.

A few students addressed these issues in their reflection logs following the assessment:

- I think if the State of Michigan gave us more time to do the MEAP and if they gave us more paper, there would be better stories for the MEAP writing.
- I think that I did bad because I did not get to finish it. I had two more pages to write. I hope that the people grading it will give me a good grade, at least a grade that will pass. Please, whoever is checking it, I think I wrote much too much!

One student, Crystal, who enjoys writing poetry and experimenting with different genre wrote:

- I think I make my stories too long. I need to find a way that I can be creative, but still keep my story short, interesting, catching, good, and the way I want. My Mom said that I have a great talent and to not ever loose it. But I think that I am some way too different.

Most students seemed to accept the restraints and expectations for final copies. Students like Crystal, with a special talent for writing, need to be encouraged to be creative rather than discouraged by the constraints of the testing situation.

Beth, one of the student interviewed, commented in her reflection log, "I do think the MEAP Test has helped me. It was something hard for me to do and challenging" (average). Another student wrote, "Do not panic about it. When it gets close just stay calm and practice," (less proficient).

One of the successes that I noticed was collaboration: teachers with teachers, teachers with students, and students with students, each learning from and helping the other. Second, was the accomplishment of completing a task: students, teachers, and administrators felt a sense of pride and/or success upon finishing the assessment. Finally, the team of teachers provided an audience by fulfilling the role of "raters" for student writing; this helped both teachers and students gain a better understanding of the assessment. As Lieberman and Miller(1990) pointed out:

staff development is about human development and learning for both students and teachers. Staff development needs to connect the activities it organizes and promotes for adults with learning outcomes for students.

Time restriction was one of the problems which placed a limitation on the quality of student work. Also, having an assigned topic, rather than being able to write on a topic of their choice, probably limited some students. A third problem area noted throughout was revision. Both teachers and students were confused and would benefit from further experience in this area. Finally, the test directions were a limitation. They placed constraints on teaching styles and were confusing at times.

The institution of the MEAP Writing Assessment has brought writing instruction and the writing process to the attention of Anderson Elementary teachers, students, and administrators. It also seems to have alerted the public to the importance of writing, but not necessarily to an understanding of the writing process.

The Results Examined Using the Madaus Framework

Influence of the Writing Assessment on the Curriculum

The second framework I elected to consider for examining the data gleaned from my research at Anderson Elementary was taken from George Madaus's seven principles outlined in his article, "The Influence of Testing on the Curriculum" (1988). According to Madaus, "Testing is fast usurping the role of curriculum as the mechanism of defining what schooling is about in this country" (p.83). An example of this may be seen right here in Michigan. This past year the Michigan State Legislature voted to **recommend** that school districts follow the state curriculum while at the same time they **mandated** state testing of that same curriculum. In the case of writing, how is the test affecting

curriculum? I've already shown using Framework I there is a mixed response to the guidelines set by the State of Michigan for the test as expressed by teachers and students involved in the study. As stated in Chapter III, Madaus's principles offer a framework that puts into question the positive framework presented by the MEAP Writing Assessment guidelines and teachers' and students' responses to that framework. By using Madaus's (1988) seven principles of the impact of testing on curriculum, teaching, and learning, I will consider the effects on Anderson Elementary's curriculum for the teaching of writing.

Principle 1:

Importance of the MEAP Writing Assessment

The power of tests and examinations to affect individuals, institutions, curriculum, or instruction is a perceptual phenomenon: If students, teachers, or administrators believe that the results of an examination are important, it matters very little whether this is really true or false - the effect is produced by what individuals perceive to be the case.

This principle is supported by Anthony Robbins in his book, Awaken the Giant Within: "It's not the events of our lives that shape us, but our beliefs as to what those events mean" (1991, p. 73). In state newspapers the importance of the MEAP Writing Assessment has been highlighted at state, district, and local levels.

Importance at the State Level

Mandated by the State of Michigan, the MEAP Writing Assessment has gained significant importance at the State level. Special MEAP preparation conferences were held throughout the State. The assessment was to be administered during a specific three week window (dates selected by the State). Preparation for the administration of the assessment was considered to be front page news prior to and during the opening week of the testing window. For

example, the *Detroit Free Press* published an article on March 4 discussing the ways in which districts within the State were overlooking the rules and guidelines established for the assessment. These guidelines included specific directions such as the following: "Do not add any of your own responses during the class brainstorming sessions; All used and unused MEAP rough draft booklets are to be destroyed or recycled." Following the assessment, all answer booklets were sent to the state. Finally, a company outside of Michigan was hired to rate results of the assessment. The costs in time, effort, and money for development, distribution, rating, and reporting results of the MEAP Writing Assessment will significantly impact state taxpayers.

Importance at the District Level

The school districts in the county in which Anderson is located hired a MEAP Coordinator in charge of communication and inservices, as well as distribution and collection of all MEAP materials. Teachers often get conflicting messages from their superiors about what is important. When asked about her understanding of the MEAP Writing Assessment, the county coordinator responded that she sees the exam as having potential for improving writing instruction:

My understanding of the purpose of the new Writing MEAP is to assess students' ability to write and to communicate in writing, which is something I think we've been saying for a long time students should be able to do. I think it's wonderful. I really believe in the writing process. I admire the fact that they're [State of Michigan] going to assess writing in what is a sort of natural way. I just think it's real admirable to try to do some state assessment in writing. It really is a very authentic type of assessment. I like the classroom discussion, peer discussion, all of the things we actually do as we write. I kind of like MEAP, but I don't tell too many people.

Unlike the county MEAP coordinator, the superintendent of the Anderson School District is not an advocate of the MEAP, primarily because he sees flaws in the public's perceptions of test scores when comparing results year by year:

My attitude about the MEAP is not good. I don't like it. I don't mind assessment using a criterion reference test, but I mind the way it is used because we try to compare groups using a criterion referenced test and you really can't do that. MEAP itself keeps track of how this year's kids do, and this year's, and this year's, and they think that somehow you can compare this year's to last year's, and you can't. It's a different group of kids. If you're using the same instruction and the same objectives and everything, then the only variable there is is a different group of kids. I really don't see how they can do that. So I don't like MEAP altogether.

On this point Anderson's Dr. Thomas, the superintendent, addresses an issue discussed by Fitzgerald (1996):

(A) common practice is to compare MEAP scores for a grade level in a school with the scores earned at that grade level - the year before - to despair that the scores have dropped or cheer that the scores are up - yet the groups tested are different students; they may have wide discrepancies in abilities or backgrounds (p. 65).

Dr. Thomas went on to say that even though he did not agree with comparing different groups of students on the assessment, he thought the writing part was all right. He was concerned, however, about the loss of instructional time:

I think it's just one more thing to do and one more thing to correct, and more time out of instruction that we can't afford. But as far as wanting to assess kid's writing skills against some criteria, which all the others [reading, math, science] are assessed against, then that's ok. Again, as long as they're sure the criteria are valid and the assessment is reliable - and I question both of these.

When asked what preparations the district has made to assist teachers and students as they prepare for the new assessment, Dr. Thomas replied:

A few years ago we began writing across the curriculum instruction, and I think we've done a good job with that. While we've done that, I think we've neglected some areas, construction, and what I call "grammar." But, I think kids feel freer about writing, better about writing, more creative and so forth.

To support the superintendent's feelings about the MEAP, he has designated a staff member in charge of MEAP in each of the various levels: high school, middle school, and elementary. At the elementary school, a Title I MEAP Coordinator/At-Risk teacher has been hired to facilitate the preparation for, administration of, and follow up on the MEAP assessment. It is her job to travel from room to room (eleven third, fourth, and fifth grade classrooms) and assist the regular classroom teachers as they prepare students for the MEAP. Dr. Thomas also has established a grammar committee made up of teachers and administrators to develop strategies for improving grammar instruction in Anderson Area Schools.

I believe the county MEAP Coordinator views the test as the needed push for more and better writing instruction in classrooms, something that could not be accomplished without the test. The superintendent, however, did not seem to be firm in what writing should be and how it should be assessed and reported. There are mixed reactions. I believe the MEAP Writing Assessment is forcing an examination of the importance of writing, but it will be some time before perceptions are sorted and teachers have clear messages about what students need to know about writing to be able to do their best on the assessment.

The importance of the MEAP Writing Assessment to Anderson District was also highlighted by the granting of permission for this study to take place in the district. The superintendent, principal, assistant principal, and two school board members were all willing to be interviewed. Also, a substitute was hired for the three days of testing so that I was able to be present during the administration of the assessment in all four fifth grade classrooms.

Importance to Administrators

At the school level, teachers were getting the message that good test results were important for the school. Prior to my interview with Anderson Elementary's principal, Mr. Parks, he requested a copy of the interview questions. He also gave a copy to his assistant principal, Mrs. Randall. When asked about his understanding of the Writing MEAP, Mr. Parks replied:

My understanding of the Writing MEAP is that it is the State's purpose to assess the writing skills of our students. I also believe the State will set writing curriculum expectations from those results. Writing is just another piece of their overall plan, which I really believe is the total curriculum and state mandated assessment.

If the assessment is realistic about our students' achievements, I don't have a problem with it. One of the biggest changes I have seen with these assessment tests in the past would be the addition of classroom teachers directly in the making up of the test. I think when we first got started, it was just people in the state department. I think we've made some inroads by allowing classroom teachers, the people that are in the trenches, to play a part in it.

Mrs. Randall, the assistant elementary principal/curriculum director for Anderson Elementary expressed her opinion concerning the assessment:

I think we all want to look good by whatever tool that is used to measure. We would hope we would measure up. . . I think that this assesses our program better than probably anything else we've had. Whether a child can read, do math, write, incorporate concepts and problem solve - it just brings it all together. So it really is evaluating not just fifth grade, but our whole program. So it should be interesting for us.

The importance of the Writing MEAP for both administrators was highlighted by the fact that they came to the interview for this study with prepared answers for the interview questions. However, they also seemed concerned that their viewpoints would be tape recorded, so they requested the opportunity to prepare for the interview.

Importance to School Board Members

Two School Board Members were interviewed about their understanding of the MEAP Writing Assessment. Ms. Ireland responded:

I'm not that familiar, but I would imagine it's like the rest of the MEAP, to assess where the students are and how well they are doing compared to other school districts and how they would be going to accomplish what the curriculum demands of them. If it's writing I assume they're going to be working on their grammar, and their spelling, and the vocabulary.

I think that an important part of their schooling is writing, and I would like to see them get more substance in the writing. I think for a while they got away from the bare bones of teaching writing and got more into the use of your imagination, not worrying about the spelling, vocabulary, and grammar. I think that might have been a mistake.

Ms. Ireland's comments reemphasized Superintendent, Thomas's remarks concerning the need to place a greater emphasis on grammar. As suggested by Tompkins (1990) in the discussion of revision and editing earlier in this chapter, most of people place greater emphasis on grammar and editing skills than on organization, development, and revision.

Dr. Thomas's comments on the issue of time taken from regular curriculum instruction resurfaced in my interview with Mr. Davis, the second board member, also a parent of a fifth grade student. Mr. Davis did not sign the permission form for his son to participate in the study, but he was willing to talk with me about the assessment:

It's supposed to be a gauge of how the kids pick up at certain levels through the school, to be able to build or track the progress of that whole group. Something that the State of Michigan came up with. The thing I don't like, as a board member, is how many days are wasted to try to make sure that their MEAP comes off right, plus the days of testing. I don't care what the teachers say, everybody wants those kids to do well. It reflects upon the teachers if they do poorly.

The terminology used by both board members suggested to me that they had received their information about the MEAP Writing Assessment from the

superintendent because they reiterated Dr. Thomas's concerns for grammar and the use of instructional time for testing. Both, in this brief interview, gave no indication of an understanding of the writing process. The two school board members and the superintendent had little current knowledge of the writing process. They were not apt to encourage teachers to use it or provide the materials and services that teachers would need to grow in the ability to teach the writing process.

Importance at the Building Level

The importance of the MEAP Writing Assessment may be exemplified at the building level by looking at happenings during preassessment, the actual administration of the MEAP Writing Assessment, and post assessment activities. All seven teachers on the assessment team felt that it was important to meet and work together to help our students prepare for the test. Special notices of MEAP testing dates appeared in weekly parent newsletters and the local paper, as well as on the sign in front of the building. Parents of fifth grade students received a special letter encouraging them to be sure that students had enough sleep and a good breakfast in preparation for testing. Banners, signed by parents, staff, and students, wishing students good luck on the MEAP lined the hallways.

On the days of the actual assessment, as part of the morning announcements all students in the building were asked to be especially quiet so that they would not disturb fifth graders taking the test. There were two, and at times three teachers present in each classroom during testing. The parents' group supplied snacks for students such as juice, crackers, peanut butter, animal crackers, and pretzels.

Following the completion of the MEAP Writing Assessment, teachers on the assessment team continued to meet and decided to rate actual test papers using the State rubric, even occasionally working beyond school hours. They also planned and participated in an inservice for the purpose of informing the lower elementary teachers about the MEAP Writing Assessment and what they might do to help prepare their students.

Importance to Teachers

At our February 13 team meeting, Liz, the LD teacher, emphasized the importance of attaining high scores on large-scale assessments such as the Writing MEAP. Because her daughter, a high school freshman, had scored high on the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) and MEAP, Liz said she was invited to participate in special gifted and talented programs. She also began to receive college invitations from prestigious colleges and universities.

Due to the importance placed on the assessment, teachers sometimes feel an added amount of stress; this is exemplified by Ben's comments throughout our team meetings. Here are a few of his comments from our February 19 meeting:

- OK, we're going to do this thing on what kind of a schedule, practice wise? Tell me what to do!
- When are we actually going to do this stuff?
- I don't know; I haven't got a clue.
- OK, I've got these little booklets that are stapled together. What am I supposed to do with them?
- Can you set aside five minutes to meet with me tomorrow before school to make sure I'm laid out. Make sure I've got this?

Ben's frustration with the testing situation was also apparent as I read his reflection log:

Am I doing the right things these last few weeks to get ready for the test? It seems like the others are ahead of my class, or am I just paranoid about this whole thing?

There isn't enough time for us to meet and do everything on the agenda. It takes too long to get us all in one place. As usual, we are all so wrapped up in the day to day - kid to kid - events of being a teacher that we can't find time to push those things aside to deal with a major situation like this writing test.

Following Day 1, however, when writing in his reflection log, Ben expressed his satisfaction that his students understood the importance of the test. "Good start - I think I've got them sold on the importance of a good effort."

Lynn too expressed her perception of the seriousness of the test that she portrayed to her students:

The students "read me" well enough to know I am taking this test very seriously - maybe too much so - but . . .

As I walk around I see many errors - fragmented sentences - simple misspellings - AHAHAH!!! I must remember they are fifth graders! Lots of room for improvement.

During her pre-assessment interview Jill expressed the importance of the test from her perspective as a student teacher.

If the writing assessment is going to be the same as what we're doing in the classroom right now, I don't think it's going to limit our students at all. As long as you're not doing everything through basals and phonics, it shouldn't limit you at all. If anything it's going to help, because of the fact that this is the way we're doing it in the classroom. A lot of the kids when they see a test from the State, they think, "Oh, this is important!" I think that they're going to see that this is how somebody important wants it done! So this is going to help the teacher even more.

During her post-assessment interview Jill wrote about the stress involved for both teachers and students:

I learned that it's not just the teachers that worry about the test; the student also worry. I learned that, from the educator's standpoint, it's very stressful on you. You're worried about giving the test and getting good scores. You don't want the school to look bad, and you want to make sure you're teaching the class right. That's one of the biggest things. . . I sat back and listened to you [the team] and inhaled all the information that was coming out. It was interesting to see how the group went through the process for the first time taking a test and see how you handled it, how everybody prepared for it and how worried everybody got. It makes it a lot easier for me to know that when I have my own classroom I'll be able to remember how everybody went through it here. I was worried about it from the student teacher's standpoint because I want my class to do well too, because that reflects on me later on. It was a relief to see that everybody else was worried about it too!

The importance of the assessment to team members was also apparent in decisions we made to assist parents when receiving test results. The team decided to photocopy each student's writing so that there would be a copy to give to parents. They also planned to provide, along with their child's writing, the rating from the State and a copy of the State rubric used to rate papers.

The team also decided to start a file of papers with ratings of 1, 2, 3, and 4. These would be used next year as samples to show students what a 4 looks like and so on.

Each teacher on the team felt it was important to participate in an inservice to inform lower grade teachers about the MEAP Writing Assessment. Annette, the at-risk teacher commented, "It's nice that they see a MEAP, that everybody owns the MEAP."

The teachers not only rated the practice MEAP and the actual MEAP this year, but they made plans to begin doing one each nine weeks next fall. In this way, they will be able to watch for growth over time, rather than have a one time assessment. In attitudes expressed and in action initiated by the teachers, they

showed commitment to the test and an acceptance of their responsibility in administering the test as well as commitment to their students' learning to write.

Importance to Students

Student reflection logs gave information as to the importance of the MEAP Writing Assessment to student participants. The comments of all students who wrote about the importance of the test follow:

- I think we should take this serious and really use our brains. This is really important to all of us.
- This is a very important test to be doing. Nobody should be messing around.
- This is serious even if it doesn't effect our report cards. This is a challenge. This is hard but I can do it.
- I think this is very important because the parents, teachers, principal, and the State of Michigan are going to see it.
- Some kids were fooling around and I don't think it's fair to the other students. It's hard, but you can do it. If the people did not think you could do it they would not give us it to do. But they know we can do this. It will not affect our grades on the report card.
- Our teacher really took this test seriously. She said for us to get lots of sleep the night before and have a good breakfast and wear comfortable clothes.
- I think it is going to help a lot of kids learn how to really care and depend on writing.
- I'm taking this seriously because my teacher told us that is is very serious.

Because of the importance placed on the test, some students commented on being nervous:

- I felt nervous because it was the final day. I'm scared right now because I didn't get it done.
- I was very nervous and I was twiddling my thumbs.

- Today I was nervous. We never got to work in groups [on Day III] and the teachers were walking around lots more.
- The teachers were watching us and writing things down. What was she writing? They were making me nervous.
- It kind of makes me feel weird because there are people going around the room looking at your writing.
- Today we did revision and I did good. I'm getting kind of worried about this. So much is going through my mind like if I don't pass I won't graduate.
- I'm really tired out now. I was so nervous. I think I'm going to go home and sleep.

One student summarized the importance of the assessment during her post-assessment interview:

It makes kids want to go further than they go for a regular writing assignment. If I were just writing a plain old piece to put on the wall, I wouldn't put as much time or effort into it. It gets kids more into writing and they want to go further than they'd normally go.

These comments indicate that students felt the importance of the test enough to write about it in their logs. Although their commitment was encouraged, I saw students applying themselves to this test more than any test before. Several students noted the seriousness of their teachers concerning the test; if their teachers were serious about it, it must be important. Others expressed the importance they were feeling though their nervousness. Still another student felt that because the assessment was important, she was willing to go further than she normally would. Of course, what we want ultimately is that students take writing seriously, not just testing.

Importance to Parents

During his interview, Mr. Davis, the school board member, also spoke from his perspective as a parent :

As a parent, and as a board member, we're getting something thrown on us that we don't know about by a State that supposedly represents us. As parents we don't know what questions our kids are being asked. We don't even get to see the test. How can we sit here and criticize you for the test scores our kids are receiving if we don't know what the test is like? Why couldn't it be published in the paper? It's almost like it's a secret and we're supposed to be kept out of it.

Four other parents were interviewed about their understanding of the MEAP Writing Assessment, two parents of proficient writers, one parent of an average writer, and one parent of a less proficient writer. The following are their responses:

- My understanding of the MEAP Writing Assessment is that it is meant to evaluate, on a state level, where kids are strongest and weakest, and I would assume adjust [the curriculum]. I think it's fine. Not only does the state find out where they [students] are in their education, but we [parents] get a good idea of how our son rates within the system too. You know kids don't take tests the same, but it's a good base to work with. (Proficient)
- My understanding is just basically that they are given a topic and that they are asked to expound upon the topic. I think it's wonderful. I think any way we can see where our children stand in their educational process and make improvements or corrections that will provide them with better skills is important. (Proficient)
- I know that in the MEAP test they [State Department of Education] are to make sure our kids have a well rounded education. It's kind of what I hope is coming out of this. It's fine, I'd like to know if he's low, and if he needs help. Now is the time to get it. Don't wait until the junior high and high school years and make him struggle. If he needs help, let's start working on it now so that his years ahead will go easier for him. (Average)
- I read the sheet that she brought home and it's basically going to be how to properly compose a story or an essay doing it by the guidelines. I think it made me nervous only because I know how I reacted to essays. She doesn't seem to have any problem with them, and I haven't passed on

my anxieties. . . I think the assessment is more for the teaching institution than the student. If there is a problem in how things are being taught, it will show up because there will be something lacking in all those students. Overall, I feel that testing is not as fair to the student as what they're doing everyday. . . I came from a Regents [state exam] state. You could be an A student and fail the Regents and not pass. So sometimes I think they're unfair, especially for the kids that don't react well under pressure and feel the pressure on this kind of test. You know some students it doesn't bother, it's just another test. But some kids tend to take this pressure situation and then that kind of short circuits what they really know. (Less proficient)

Three of the parents were positive about the MEAP Writing Assessment, but two saw problems with the fact that the State mandates the test and that testing puts some students under extreme pressure. They hoped their children would do well on the assessment and that the Anderson School District would use the results as a tool for assessing and improving the writing curriculum. Teachers need to take responsibility for educating parents about writing and the testing of writing, going much beyond encouraging parents to give children a good breakfast before they take a test (see parent letter).

In Principle 1 Madaus states that if the assessment is perceived as being important, it will be. Reflecting on our preparations, it seems that at times we were sending the message that every other day of writing was not important, or if important at all - it would lead to the test. As a team we perpetuated this with our letter asking parents to prepare students for the test, not realizing that we were implying that other days of writing are not as important.

Administrators, school board members, parents, and teachers' perceptions of the assessment differed. Everyone interviewed, as well as all the students, appeared to be willing learners. Teachers need to make use of every occasion to educate administrators, parents, and other interested adults as to how and why we teach writing.

**Principle 2:
Distortion of the Writing Process**

The more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision making, the more likely it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor.

Although the MEAP Writing Assessment is scored by individual raters and not by a computer, the actual scoring device (rubric) and the final rating received by the districts are quantitative. From past MEAPs in reading and math teachers are well aware of the public display of numerical ratings in newspapers.

Our district superintendent, Dr. Thomas, expressed his concern over the objectivity of the raters who determine the numerical scores:

Part of the problem is you can give the readers the criteria by which to judge this assessment and you can say this is very objective, but I don't believe that it is. I think that it's going to be quite a bit subjective. You can look at the criteria and say that they did this or they didn't do it, but when it comes to judging creativity, how to get your point across, or ability to write complete thoughts . . . If you were to read a paper and I were to read it, we might have different opinions depending on our own background. And I don't think that's something that you can control. I don't know the answer to the problem, but I just think there's going to be so much difference in results; the test is so new, that I don't know that we know how to prepare for it.

Whether or not it will distort and corrupt the schools, teachers, curriculum, and students it is intended to monitor will be something to consider as time goes on. It is important that students, parents, teachers, administrators, the public, the media, and the State recognize that the MEAP Writing Assessment is only one assessment, given over three days, and that a variety of assessments are required to give an accurate picture of a student's ability in writing. As Stiggins writes:

We must constantly urge those who support, design, and conduct standardized testing programs to keep these tests in perspective in terms

of their relative importance in the larger world of educational assessment. We must constantly remind ourselves and others that these tests represent but a tiny fraction of the assessments in which students participate and that they have little influence on day to day instruction (1994, p. 356).

This study indicates, however, that parents, administrators, teachers, and students view the test as very important, as the single most important measure of writing competence. Although the quantitative results were not available at the time of the study, past history had made educators and the public aware that quantitative results allowed comparisons of school districts, classrooms, and teachers. This has and will continue to place test results high on the priority list for schools. They will feel obliged to use the limited instructional time they have for writing to focus on test preparation at the expense of broad and deep writing experiences for students.

Principle 3: Teaching to the MEAP Writing Assessment

If important decisions are presumed to be related to test results, then teachers will teach to the test.

Were there curriculum changes at Anderson Elementary as a result of the writing assessment? I believe, given the power of the test, changes were inevitable and to some extent positive. This was partially enhanced by my conducting an important study at the time of the test. For two months prior to the test, the entire writing curriculum was built around preparations for the assessment. Plans for next year are to begin earlier in the year with some preparation beginning in the lower grades. More time, therefore, is planned for attending directly to the test.

Overhearing a discussion of the preparations for the MEAP Writing Assessment that fifth grade teachers were doing with students, a fourth grade

teacher commented: "I think Anderson was the last school in the county to start teaching to the test. They finally figured out that our scores were low and everyone else was doing it [teaching to the test]." When asked if I could quote her for this study, she responded: "Sure, I really believe that we need to teach to the test."

Lynn, Ben, and Ruth described, during preassessment interviews, the ways in which they were adjusting the curriculum in their classrooms in anticipation of the test. Lynn stated:

I'm trying to go back and make sure that I've filled all the gaps. I'm trying to make sure that all the students know the difference between proper nouns, pronouns, common nouns, when you will use commas, when you will use correct punctuation. In getting ready for this writing assessment I have made myself a checklist. Have I introduced this? Have I taught this? How proficient are they at this? Because it's obvious it's going to show up on the test if we have missed something. Not every kid catches onto everything; I know that. But I want to make sure that the basics have been covered. I guess it's making me realize I need to go back through my lesson plans and make sure I have checked off the areas.

Lynn's comments reiterated her emphasis on the study of grammar and editing as important to the success of her students on the writing assessment.

Ben on the other hand, although appearing nervous about the assessment at times, felt confident that he had been headed in the right direction with what he was doing in the classroom with his students:

I can't think of any real changes. I guess I sort of have faith that what we've done is headed in the right direction. I can't believe that it hasn't. If it hasn't, then I guess I'm going to be very shocked. I guess I've sort of gone along with what I've read in the book that we have (*Writing as Process and Product*) and the examples that I've seen in there. It seems to me that our kids are progressing on a par with what it appears to be the average group of fifth graders that are in this sort of a language arts program. If we aren't, I will be real shocked and I think you will be too. I just can't believe that whoever is making this thing up is going to go off and have some other idea. I just can't comprehend that. I don't know what it would be.

Ruth didn't think she needed much change in her teaching. She felt she was doing the same things only labeling them differently:

I'm calling attention to it or pointing it out to the kids: We are doing it this way because on the test you are going to be expected to do this. I don't think I'm changing my teaching. I think I'm just trying to verbalize and label it so the kids know what it is that I'm doing and why I'm doing it. I'm trying to relate it that way. I don't really think my teaching is changing that much because, as I perceive it, the test is going to be similar to my writing process.

As this preassessment interview indicates, Ben and Ruth had positive feelings about their teaching of writing. Later, their concepts of writing process would show interesting changes. Here Ben sees himself as on track; later, after involvement in preparation for the MEAP and the practice test, he was very concerned about the limitations his controls on student writing put on the students' creativity. Ruth also was pleased with her teaching of writing initially. Later, she expressed a concern that she had not prepared her students "well enough to help each other." This indicates a matter of growth in her understanding, a necessary first step towards further professional development.

Jill presented her idea, from the student teacher's perspective, on how the curriculum was being adjusted for the assessment:

We [Ruth and Jill] discussed this morning about the test and how we needed to change some things to get ready. So far she's changed the way kids read and revise their stories. She had the kids reading their stories out loud in groups of three rather than having them conference individually with her. She said to me today that she stops and thinks about what needs to be done for the test and she knows that she's not doing some of the things so she comes and talks to me quite a bit.

During her preassessment interview, Liz, the inclusion teacher working with learning disabled students in my classroom, commented on how she was changing her curriculum to assist students as they prepared for the MEAP.

I emphasize: Does it make sense? This is what you have. Is this what you want to say? How can you put down what you need to say? Working on that more; trying to just constantly reinforce with them in writing complete sentences, not one word answers. Answer the why. More detail too.

Teachers at Anderson report they are teaching to the test format and are planning more change in that direction in the future. I believe that at this point this is improving their teaching, but without further insights, they are not apt to become stronger process writing teachers. In addition, I fear that concern about writing for the test may consume inordinate amounts of instructional time.

Stiggins warns:

Make sure the curricula to be tested are covered. But keep this in perspective. If the standardized tests you are using only represent a fraction of your total curriculum, allocate your instructional time accordingly. To do otherwise is to permit the test to inappropriately narrow your instructional program (1994, p. 354).

Although I would agree that the current test far surpasses any objective measure of writing (spelling test, grammar test, punctuation test) it does not represent the flexibility and commitment to writing that are central to the writing process movement. Teachers need to be very careful to use the majority of the time available for writing for significant writing process goals and only minimal time for writing test preparation.

Principle 4: Definition of the Writing Curriculum

In every setting where a high-stakes test operates, a tradition of past exams develops, which eventually de facto defines the curriculum.

Since this was the first assessment of this type, our team at Anderson decided to use the sample assessment on "Change" as a guide to develop our own practice assessment on "Pets." For next year, the team's plans include

carrying out a practice assessment each nine weeks as a means of showing growth over time. I do not believe this violates MEAP directives because the Michigan Department of Education has determined that it is inappropriate or unethical only to use current or past MEAP assessments, or portions thereof, as preparation for the assessment (1996, MEAP Instruction Manual, p. 31).

In her reflection log, Ruth wrote that she felt her students benefited from completing the "trial" MEAP:

The actual test preparation involved running a mock test with the topic of "Pets." I think it helped establish the aspect of a time limit. I had several students tag on an ending when time ran out. One student realized she had to cut several pages out or she wouldn't be able to get it copied over in 45 minutes. I believe the way we ran the mock test helped the test taking procedure. It didn't invalidate the test because we used a different topic.

Ben expressed his relief that we were able to give a practice test and prepare both ourselves and the students for the "real" MEAP. "I'm glad we got a chance to try this. It gets them used to what I've got to say and how they'll be grouped."

Liz explained the importance of preparing students through practice on the format of the test:

Practice! Practice! Practice! Practice! Have them comfortable with the procedure. Not as much in terms of knowing the exact questions, but knowing what's going to happen, how it's going to happen, and what kind of things are expected of them. I think it's good for them to see a preliminary rating, and conference as to why they received that rating. In this way they know where they need to work and where they need to go. I think it's a big revelation for them too, especially some of the ones that go on and on and on and on. They see they can't do that. They have to keep it within a certain framework.

Liz says that through this experience she has learned to expect more from her special education kids. They want to be involved, and she thinks that if they're comfortable enough with the procedure they will achieve more.

The MEAP Writing Assessment has opened the door for professional publishing companies to prepare and sell test preparation materials to assist teachers as they help their students prepare. One example I received in the mail was entitled, "MEAP Writing Preparation Materials" (1995). The flier encouraged school districts to order materials immediately to assist teachers in MEAP preparation. "Increase your students' skills in Test Taking. Prior knowledge about tests pays off with higher achievement scores. " As related earlier in this chapter, it is assumed that students will be familiar with the writing process. This flier claims:

Successful Test Taking: Writing 5 emphasizes the writing process applied to test taking. This series of three books contains activities that lead students through each step of the writing process. Students will find the books helpful for guiding both personal writing and conferencing. Designed to be student friendly, the writer will have guidance for producing a personal narrative.

The test has established patterns for instruction that teachers plan to follow closely; companies are advertising test preparation materials that individual teachers or school districts may purchase for instruction. I find that most of the materials are not helpful to teachers and often give a prescribed format for test preparation which limits students and teachers use of the writing process. Anderson's team of teachers has not discussed purchasing prepared materials; however, they do report that they intend to further align the curriculum with test expectations. The inability to prepare Michigan's teachers quickly for the test may encourage teachers to take quick steps to purchase commercial materials which may further distance them from using student strengths and needs as the basis for writing instruction.

**Principle 5:
Adjustment of the Writing Curriculum**

Teachers pay particular attention to the form of the questions on a high-stakes test (for example, short answer, essay, multiple-choice) and adjust their instruction accordingly.

The assistant elementary principal/curriculum director commented on preparing students for the assessment:

Many times I think we're teaching a concept but maybe not presenting it the same way that maybe it's asked on the test, or presented on the test. And when kids are under pressure they forget. So I think teaching the kids some test taking strategies is beneficial. . . To me, the base year, when people see what a test is like, we cannot teach necessarily to the test. But we can teach a format that kind of prepares the kids for that.

Because of the MEAP Writing Assessment, more frequently students may be asked to write on an assigned topic in a given amount of time rather than choose their own topic and write about it in an unspecified amount of time. However, teachers, as prompted by writing process authorities, have started modeling peer conferencing techniques. This probably will continue because it is required in the MEAP and is valued in process writing to assist students as they work in groups, so they probably will be successful at it during the assessment; this may also encourage peer conferencing for other writing experiences. Anderson's team of teachers, however, need more staff development as to what real peer conferencing looks like to assist them in developing student competencies (positive support for peers, accepting criticism, valuing standards).

Unfortunately, a particular genre, the personal narrative/essay, may be highlighted at the expense of others because that is what is expected in the test. The assessment team, even though we had some creative poets in our classrooms, discussed discouraging our students from writing poetry. The team

felt that the rubric was geared to an essay format and would not serve well for poetry.

This same issue is discussed by Fitzgerald in her article, "Facing Up to the New Writing Assessments" when she writes, "Because they have so little time for teaching writing, teachers may limit the range of writing opportunities that children should have, e.g. narratives, poetry, letters etc. to concentrate on the essay format that the tests require" (1996, p. 65).

In her pre-assessment interview Liz expressed her concern about the loss of student creativity:

One of the things that I hate to see happening is that we become so test conscious and so fearful that we lose student creativity. They're going to be afraid to go off on their own. They will stick to what's required in the assessment. I think that's a definite limitation.

The flier described in Principle Four advertised materials to assist students as they prepare to write a personal narrative. They, like the teachers on our team, have assumed that the personal narrative, although not required by the test, is best suited for the test format and rubric.

Principle 6: Society's Treatment of Results of the MEAP Writing Assessment

When test results are the sole or even partial arbiter of future educational or life choices, society tends to treat test results as the major goal of schooling rather than as a useful but fallible indicator of achievement.

Since results of MEAP are published in the newspaper and may also be used as a tool for deciding on allocation of state funds, test results are definitely major. The main goal of schools may not necessarily be to help individual students to improve and satisfy themselves, but rather to improve the group percentages on MEAP.

Large-scale assessments are seen as the guardians of our educational standards. We use them as hallmarks, as we strive to keep those standards high. That is, we set as our public goal the desire to attain the highest possible scores (Stiggins, 1994, p. 44).

One piece of evidence is that the only new position added at Anderson Elementary last year was an at-risk teacher who was to be responsible for improving performance of low achievers and raising MEAP scores.

Once again, it is important to remember that the MEAP Writing Assessment should be only one assessment used for determining student achievement in writing, but it is fast becoming the central determinant. It is particularly unfortunate to use MEAP as a primary measure of student writing because it represents what can be accomplished under prescribed and limiting circumstances. As Liz indicated in her pre-assessment interview:

Anything that you can do to find out more about what you need for your curriculum is beneficial. You need to get another objective viewpoint, and not just your own. Sometimes you have such a preconceived notion of what that child is capable of; your feelings about that child get in the way. We also need to have students do a self-evaluation of their own writing when they're through. I think they always need to evaluate themselves. I don't think we've had kids do that.

During this study, student reflection logs provided students with the opportunity to evaluate how they were doing on the assessment, but, as Liz indicates, self-assessment needs to be a regular piece of evaluation data because the student is the final judge of what he/she can and must do.

The assistant elementary principal/curriculum director also warned against using this assessment as the sole indicator of student writing ability:

I think we need to realize this is just one tool, and it's only measuring those children, at that particular time, on those particular concepts. We also need to keep that in mind when we're making judgments how to change or adapt our curriculum. If we make changes now, the kids coming next year are a whole different group of kids. They may react differently to the same material.

I think it's always hard that they put it in the newspaper like they did in the *Detroit Free Press*, comparing public schools to private schools. They're different. We try to educate every student that comes to us. . . I think we are to some extent doing a good job of educating all children. If we could pick and choose [kids], we'd have great scores. But the public doesn't think of that. They judge us. I'm not saying that we don't need to improve. But I think school comparisons paint a picture that is much worse than it really is.

Madaus and Tann (1993) remind us that thirty years ago Ralph Tyler warned about society's perception of large-scale test scores:

(S)ociety conspires to treat scores on important certifying tests as the major end of . . . schooling, rather than as a useful but not infallible indicator of student achievement. . . Tests have too often been uncritically

accepted by far too many people as authoritative and appropriate, without properly evaluating their impact. This is especially true of tests mandated by state law or regulation. The mandate itself lends a legitimacy to a test that is not true of most other technologies. Because testing is so entrenched in our culture, and so taken for granted, most people fail to consider how education is transformed by the mediating role of testing (pp. 74 & 75).

I believe the test is a useful, however, fallible indicator of writing achievement. It will be important to warn educators and the public that the MEAP Writing Assessment should not be the only indicator of student writing ability because it is such a limited measure of student potential. As an experienced teacher I see other indicators such as students' day to day writing and collection of writings in their portfolios as providing a much fuller picture of student growth in writing over time.

Principle 7: Control Over the Writing Curriculum

A high-stakes test transfers control over the curriculum to the agency which sets or controls the exam.

The State of Michigan hired individuals both to create the assessment and rubric and to rate student writings. Even though the State Legislature feels that this assessment is based on the core curriculum recommended by the State, the actual power over the assessment lies with the commercial contracting company preparing the assessment, as well as with the raters and their trainers hired to score the writings.

Loss of control over the curriculum, especially this new MEAP Writing Assessment, also concerned Ben. He wrote in his reflection log: "I don't like the sense that we as teachers don't know what the writing test is going to be like. . . It's like none of us really knows what's going on, but we're expected to do well on these tests." A little later he wrote, "I've always felt teachers are day to day people - let someone else worry about the "big picture," be it testing, curriculum, or objectives or whatever." Although concerned about the loss of control over the curriculum, Ben, like many other teachers, has accepted the fact that his job is to "teach" the curriculum suggested by the State and "assess" students on that curriculum by using the State mandated MEAP Writing Assessment. Control of the curriculum has moved from the local to the State level; they are determining the curriculum.

By instituting the new MEAP Writing Assessment the State has sent a message to its constituents that writing is important. Through the design of the assessment, it is also evident that both teachers and students need to be cognizant of the writing process. As suggested by Madaus, the assessment is bringing about change in the writing curriculum.

Madaus's seven principles provided a framework for consideration of the implications of the MEAP Writing Assessment on students in Michigan, including those students at Anderson Elementary. The need for constant

evaluation and reflection of the impact of this assessment on curriculum is extremely important.

As this study shows, this writing exam energizes teachers who are ill prepared to teach writing and school districts and administrators who lack knowledge as to how to guide teachers to accept writing as an important piece of the curriculum. Yet, the negative dimensions of the seven principles were evident in this study. What his principles failed to document, however, which I believe could be an Eighth Principle of testing influence on the curriculum: when a curriculum area has been neglected, testing that area of the curriculum can rapidly and forcefully bring it to the attention of teachers, administration, and the public. I believe that this one principle contains as many potential positive implications as negative. However, unless handled correctly it also is fraught with all the problems that Madaus indicated.

In this chapter, I have analyzed the results of this study through the use of the MEAP and Madaus's frameworks. In Chapter VI I will look beyond our experiences at Anderson Elementary and consider conclusions, recommendations, and implications for future research.

Chapter VI

Looking Beyond Our Experience

In the introduction to this study I asked, "Will the new Michigan Educational Assessment Program's Writing Assessment become yet one more tool to measure the ability and knowledge of students? Or, will it assist both teachers and students as they strive to improve writing instruction and student writing in Michigan's schools?"

Reflecting on the data I collected from Anderson Elementary, I would say that both teachers and students have benefited already from going through the process of the writing assessment. Barth wrote, "When the need and the purpose is there, when the conditions are right, adults and students alike learn, and each energizes and contributes to the learning of the other" (1991, p. 45). Since both teachers and students were mandated by the State of Michigan to participate in the new MEAP Writing Assessment, the "need and purpose" were present. The "conditions were right," since all seven teachers were willing to share ideas and work together to prepare our students.

I will begin this chapter by discussing my conclusions based on the data in relation to my main question: **In What Ways and To What Extent Do Fifth Grade Teachers and Their Students In One Rural School Prepare For, Participate In And Reflect Upon the New State Of Michigan Writing Assessment?** Next I will discuss recommendations for school districts, teachers, teacher education, and the State Department of Education. Finally, I will suggest possible implications for future research.

Conclusions: Preparation For the Exam

Faced with the new MEAP Writing Assessment, the fifth grade staff at Anderson Elementary formed a team to prepare students for this assessment. This seven member team of teachers decided to use this opportunity and turn the assessment into a teaching and learning tool for both teachers and students. As Little writes, "The task of teaching is rendered more and more complex; it is arguably the case that even the most knowledgeable and enthusiastic teachers cannot credibly do the job alone" (1992, p. 157). Schmoker (1996) agrees with Little when he writes that the performance of schools would improve if teachers worked in focused, supportive teams .

The assessment did drive the writing curriculum at Anderson Elementary. Having the common goal of preparing our students for the MEAP Writing Assessment and meeting weekly for discussion and collaboration enabled our team to make a difference (Schmoker, 1996). The writing curriculum in all four fifth grade classrooms was enhanced as we prepared for the assessment. Our team of seven teachers collaborated on strategies to prepare students. Uncertainty about the assessment brought teachers out of the isolation of their classrooms and encouraged them to share their ideas, as well as glean new ideas from other team members, bringing about a win-win situation (Covey, 1989).

I believe that creating a new focus on writing was the second most important outcome of the new MEAP Writing Assessment at Anderson Elementary. New ideas were incorporated into the writing program. Teachers used center group modeling and worked with their students to improve group sharing strategies. Charts of both revision and editing possibilities, brainstormed by students, were placed on each classroom wall. A "trial" assessment, created by team members, using the topic of "Pets" was

incorporated into the curriculum in each classroom following the actual MEAP guidelines for administration.

Conclusions: Participation During the Exam

Although there were two or more team members in each classroom during the actual MEAP Writing Assessment, one other team member and I, this did not alter the testing conditions. In each case, the regular classroom teacher facilitated the assessment as well as recorded notes, while the other team member served as proctor and recorded notes as well. With an additional teacher(s) in the classroom, the importance of the assessment was highlighted for students. Because of the visitors, the majority of students were on task, following directions and writing to the prompt as asked. A few, however, expressed added stress and anticipation due to the extra teacher(s) walking around the classroom. I believe that observing in other teachers classrooms, during process writing lessons as well as during testing, benefits teachers observational skills and suggests new techniques to them.

As long as all the students were in attendance, the format for the assessment was easy to follow. When students were absent, however, they needed to make-up Day I before Day II, and Day II before Day III. This made scheduling of make-up assessments particularly challenging for teachers and students. These problems and other interruptions need to be addressed by faculty and administrators.

Conclusions: Reflection After the Exam

It is my opinion that as a result of our work together each team member felt a "deep ownership" (Fullan, 1993, p. 127) that arises from problem solving situations such as how to prepare students for the MEAP Writing Assessment.

These teachers gave extra time, extra effort, and extra thought to this examination. "Working in concert" (Little, 1987, p. 504) each of us reduced our individual planning time and increased our repertoire of ideas. We not only listened to each other, as fellow team members, but also to our students.

Rosaen writes:

As I got better at learning to listen to the students and to perceive their participation -- whatever it was -- as feedback about the curriculum, I was more able to pinpoint where the sources of struggle were and how to address them. . . . Teachers can learn to make better use of the information available to them -- how their students interpret the curriculum -- in making curriculum and instructional changes" (1993, pp. 60 & 61).

Teachers and students at Anderson Elementary were working together as a "community of learners" (Barth, 1991; Graves, 1994), each posing his/her own questions and enlisting colleagues as resources to assist in finding answers. One reason the work of our assessment team was successful is that we had a common goal, preparing students for the MEAP Writing Assessment:

Working together requires some topic of compelling importance to work on. (Teaming for the sake of teaming is predictably short-lived.) Teams are more likely to form when the work at hand is complex enough to make two (or six) [or seven] heads better than one and to make it probable that the reflected glory of the team will outshine success that each member could expect from working alone (Little, 1987, p. 510).

The work at hand was complex and at times stressful for both teachers and students. Most of the teachers had little training for teaching writing or assessment of it. Since this was the first year of the writing assessment, the anticipation of the unknown added another dimension of anxiety. The teachers and students at Anderson Elementary, however, benefited from participating in the process, learning much about the writing process and formal assessment.

All seven team teachers were willing to spend time rating the "Pets" writings using the MEAP rubric. As an outgrowth of interviews with

administrators and parents, the team decided to have copies made of the actual assessment and the team of teachers once again spent time rating student writings.

Team members felt positive about their collaboration and were willing to share their findings with fellow staff members. Hampton (1994) writes that teachers are more likely to accept change “when a significant number of faculty members are involved with making the new methods work” (p. 127). At the request of a lower grade teacher and as a culminating activity for the team, an inservice was held for the K - 4 faculty at Anderson Elementary. The purpose of this inservice was to inform teachers about the writing assessment and give them an opportunity to rate actual fifth grade writings using the rubric from the State. Through a reflective writing at the end of the inservice, the team learned that lower grade teachers now have a better understanding of the new MEAP Writing Assessment and possible ways they might begin incorporating some of the strategies used in the assessment into their writing curriculums.

The team also generated several suggestions for next year such as sending home copies of the actual student writing to parents along with the rating from the State. Another suggestion was to administer a practice MEAP each marking period, preparing students for the actual assessment, and providing more writings and the opportunities to observe growth over time.

When asked what advice he would give to teachers preparing their students for a similar writing assessment, Ben commented:

Do what we did. Let your kids see what the format is about so that they are familiar with everything. I'd do a practice assessment. I think that rating the writing put a little bit of interest in the whole thing for the kids. They got a chance to see some instant feedback. If it would have been just the test itself, they wouldn't receive their ratings until sixth grade. I'm sure by then they will have forgotten what they wrote about. So I think that what we did was valuable as a writing experience whether it's reflected on how they do on the MEAP or not.

Lynn agreed that she would recommend that teachers collaborate as a team to prepare for the assessment:

Do exactly what we did. Sit down at grade levels and discuss the assessment and share ideas. Support each other and be positive. I think you need the support from your fellow teachers that we gave each other; the adult peer relationship is a necessary support system.

Lynn was not alone in seeing how our experience could be of help to other teachers. The teachers were proud of what they did, particularly in collaboration, and felt their efforts would benefit other teachers.

Ruth, giving advice to future teachers faced with the challenge of giving the MEAP Writing Assessment, contributed:

Have your students use the writing process all the time, all year long. Use the format of sharing and getting with partners so that it doesn't feel so foreign to them [students]. . . I like the idea of taking samples and having the kids rate them with the rubric. They need to see what is going to be judged. I only did that once. I think if I had done that more often during the year, and talked about the criteria, then they would know what the target is. All they're doing is writing; they don't know what the target is. Good writing, maybe they don't know what that is. They may be hearing it, they may be seeing it, but if you don't point it out, they don't recognize that this is what we want. This is what we want you to achieve.

Both team members and our students learned from the experience of creating, administering, and rating the "trial" assessment on "Pets." Teachers and students were given the opportunity to become familiar with the format of the test. Any problems that arose were then discussed both by the team and in individual classrooms with our students. As a result, many of the problems and questions that might have occurred during the "real" assessment, were dealt with during the "trial" assessment.

Because we decided to rate actual MEAP Writings the team was able to compare student ratings from the "Pets" practice test to the "Firsts," MEAP

writing, and look for change over that two week period. The results of this comparison are in Figure 12.

Table 1
Writing Assessment Ratings

Ratings	Pets	Firsts
1	9	4
1.5	9	8
2	43	31
2.5	23	34
3	20	20
3.5	3	10
4	5	5

As Table 1 shows, we did see growth. Out of the 112 students completing both writings, there were 51 (45%) scoring high enough to pass the “Pets” writing and 69 (62%) scoring high enough to pass the “Firsts” writing. With the assumption that 2.5 is a passing score, 18 (17%) more students passed the second assessment.

Recommendations: School Districts

School districts need to provide ongoing inservice opportunities in writing instruction to assist teachers and administrators who are poorly prepared to teach writing, as well as to update those who are well prepared. It is important to include administrators in inservice sessions since it is their job to encourage and evaluate teachers of writing; many administrators are poorly prepared to do so. One significant way for school districts to provide further

training in writing instruction is by encouraging teachers to participate in summer writing projects where direct participation in the writing process as well as study about it are central to the writing project experience. In order to participate in one of the writing projects in Michigan, teachers must file an application stating their qualifications and be accepted as a participant. Those taking part in writing projects usually receive a stipend to help defray expenses. Since writing projects will not be available to all, inservices in writing are important. School districts need to identify and call into service those with expertise in writing obtained through current graduate studies and/or writing project participation.

I would also encourage collaboration among teachers. Even teachers who are well prepared to teach writing benefit in the same way students in our classrooms benefit from collaboration. School districts need to value the ongoing development of their teachers. They can do this through providing professional libraries with books and journals as well as ongoing inservice opportunities for teachers. Currently, no inservices related to writing, except the ones I initiated, have occurred at Anderson Elementary.

Recommendations: Teachers

Teachers in this study were beginning to form a network for professional development. As implied by this study, teachers need to become responsible for continuing their own education in the teaching of writing. Anderson School District does not provide a professional text library, professional journals, or regular inservice. Teachers need to seek opportunities to become involved in inservices and conferences offered by professional organizations and writing projects. Other ways of continuing their education in the teaching of writing are through e-mail with other educators, internet chat groups, and through active

involvement in professional organizations. Becoming involved in such organizations also helps teachers build a network with whom they are able to communicate and collaborate on writing instruction. I do not see teachers taking this responsibility, so it behooves the school district to place a value on teachers continued education in the teaching of writing.

Recommendations: Teacher Education

The teacher preparation and graduate programs of this team of teachers were many years in the past and did not provide the necessary background in the writing process for helping these teachers feel competent teaching writing to their students. If the State is to continue assessing writing, it is imperative that teacher education programs, graduate programs, and professional development programs offer opportunities for teachers to help them acquire the current knowledge they need. Jill, the student teacher on our team, learned from working with veteran teachers struggling with change.

Struggling with experienced teachers who are working to reform teaching within complicated and highly specific situations inside of schools is the only context within which student teachers can have theory - and practice - based conversations that deal with the extraordinary complexity of teaching and reforming teaching (Cochran-Smith, 1991, p. 301).

Jill provided our team of veteran teachers with a youthful perspective. She kept us mindful of the challenges of the novice teacher.

If the teaching of writing is to be improved in Michigan schools, colleges and universities need to require courses in methodologies for the teaching of writing, especially those that help teachers become writers who find interest and challenge in their own writing (Atwell, 1987; Graves, 1994; Routman, 1996) and provide them with a thorough understanding of the writing process.

Because writing needs to become a part of the curriculum in all subject areas and because content area writing is now required in science (also soon to be included in elementary reading and math MEAPS), content area subjects in schools and professional education programs need to incorporate writing into their curricula. Students and teachers need to learn the importance of writing in all fields of study for internalizing content by writing their ideas.

Recommendations: State Department of Education

There is great danger that the MEAP agenda or format become a rigid plan for student writing process instruction (Day I, Day II, Day III). Also, since the State rubric is designed primarily for use with essay or personal experience writing, other genres are apt to be neglected in the writing program throughout the year. The principles delineated by Madaus and supported in this study suggest that the State Department needs to minimize the destructive elements of comparing schools, districts, and teachers, particularly when student populations across the State differ so much in background and motivation. This can be done initially by stressing the limitations of the test as a measure of students' competencies as writers. They also need to evaluate and update the assessment so that it becomes the most reliable and valid tool possible for the large-scale assessment of the breadth of writing skills and attitudes our students need to learn in Michigan schools.

Implications For Future Research

In spite of positive outcomes, such as the focus that the exam gave to writing and teachers' collaboration that this study generates, questions remain. First, continuing involvement of teachers, even at the school in this study, won't be easily achieved. The collaboration of my school faculty took place through

the impetus of this dissertation. Although the teacher dialogue that ensued as a result of this study was a positive experience for each member of the team, this group of fifth grade teachers will need administrative encouragement and strong personal commitment to continue to meet and work as a team in the future because I believe it will not happen without both. Research is needed on ways to achieve on-going professional development initiated by teachers. Anderson Elementary teachers were not working together and there was no impetus from the school district to do so. Although the district placed no limitations on my initiating this study, collaborative preparation for the test probably would not have happened without the impetus of this dissertation because I did not have the support from the school district in other efforts I was making in the writing process as Language Arts Coordinator. I had found it more satisfying to put my efforts into projects outside of school. I think other teachers feel the same.

Secondly, curriculum areas may have been neglected as the team in this school directed their focus on the writing assessment. Since writing and science were tested at the fifth grade level, social studies and math may have been slighted as preparations for the MEAP Assessments took priority. Research on the testing of writing needs to include the impact it may have on areas in the curriculum not included in high stakes testing.

Third, since this assessment will not be repeated by this same group of students for the next three years, writing growth must continue through their sixth and seventh grade years. Educators need to know what happens to writing instruction in school years when teachers and students don't feel the pressures of the test.

Fourth, short term inservice, the week long inservice these teachers attended in 1988, gave understandings that they could apply to the new

challenge of the 1996 Writing MEAP. The format, content, and methodologies of ongoing writing inservice, however, need to be examined if new and veteran teachers are to continue as learners in the writing process.

Fifth, the pressures brought on by high stakes tests are real and demanding of both teachers and students. Teachers may neglect to value the day to day teaching of writing and in some cases feel a need to prompt students to insure higher scores on the assessment. Studies should be conducted on how teachers respond to the need for students to do well on the tests.

Lastly, since this study indicates that the formal test drove curriculum changes in one school, research is needed on the benefits and problems of test driven curriculum in all Michigan classrooms.

Each school faculty, however, must discuss the dangers that test-driven curriculum can have on the motivation of students to learn to write, the potential for warping recognized methods of writing instruction to find shortcuts, and the pressures on teachers who have little preparation for teaching writing well (Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 69).

My research documents a process of preparing for, participating in, and reflecting on the MEAP Writing Assessment that happened to one team of teachers and their students in one set of circumstances. I was fortunate to have the cooperation of this special group of teachers who facilitated my roles as researcher and participant. Although Anderson Elementary is a unique school with a unique context, there are lessons with potential carryover to other groups. These include the following:

- ◆ As Lieberman and Miller (1990) encourage, teachers working together has value both for teachers and students. The ongoing dialogue about writing and writing instruction brings teachers out of the isolation of the classroom and enhances the writing curriculum. This dialogue also has

value for the school and district as teachers and students share their learning and progress with others.

- ♦ The use of a pretest served as a valuable strategy for our team of teachers as we prepared our students for the assessment. The impetus in this case was a pilot study in the process of reform as a result of the new MEAP Writing Assessment at the fifth grade level in the State of Michigan. Other teachers in similar assessment situations may find it valuable to use such a pretest.
- ♦ Teachers in Anderson Elementary who were not involved in the actual assessment also benefited from the research. Through the ongoing dialogue in the inservice, the lunch room, and the hallways, the entire staff became interested in learning about the assessment and possible ways to begin preparing their students through enhancement of their writing curriculum.
- ♦ Through reflecting on their own learning, as well as the learning of their students, throughout the assessment, each teacher on the team reevaluated and reformed his/her own writing curriculum, at least in the short term. Ongoing reflection and transformation of curriculum will proceed at different speeds and different levels, but is necessary throughout the educational community if we want to provide the best education possible for our students.

Anderson Elementary, like all other schools in Michigan, must meet the challenge of the MEAP Writing Assessment.

Our challenge as a school culture and as a larger society is to keep these standardized tests in perspective in terms of their impact on student learning. Large-scale assessment results do not have as big an impact on student learning as do classroom assessments. Yet our allocation of assessment resources, media attention to test results, and political emphasis on such assessments would lead one to believe that they

represent the only assessments worth caring about. In this regard, our assessment priorities have been out of balance (Stiggins, p. 334).

Our challenge is to see that the MEAP Writing Assessment is only one of many assessments. Ongoing classroom assessment, with immediate feedback and reflection for students, has a greater impact on student learning.

The lessons described above seem to be applicable across school districts; however, there are some limitations to this study. First, the objectivity of me as a participant/researcher could be called into question because I have such an intimate connection with the scene and situation and because I have limited training as an ethnographer. I was necessarily selective in my use of rich data sources and use of examples from data. Someone else might have selected other examples. Although I had high interest in collaboration at the beginning of the study, based on experiences at writing project centers, I developed even stronger commitment to the value of teacher collaboration as I saw it drive the study.

Secondly, although I did not have strong feelings about high-stakes testing of process writing at the onset of the study, I developed strong concerns about the current direction of the testing of writing as the study developed in spite of some values that were evident. This may be reflected in my conclusions. "Testing and assessment have important roles to play in education; what we need for the remainder of this century - and into the next - are ways to properly evaluate, prioritize, and monitor those roles" (Madaus and Tann, 1993, p. 75).

I feel, however, that there are several advantages to this study. First, it focuses on real people in real settings and therefore has the potential of making an impact on teachers and students.

Secondly, it has utility. Testing is a current dilemma in schools and educators need insights and understandings. As a teacher, it was my strong need for this understanding that prompted this study and was served by it. The study may help people stop and reflect on what the testing of writing is doing and how it should be done, if done at all.

Next, I allowed for change in the process of the study in order to more clearly meet the needs of students and teachers. For example, at the beginning of the study I had no idea that the team would plan and give the pretest or present the inservice for teachers. The avenue for change was left open for the needs of students and teachers.

Finally, the research is accessible to teachers because it is written by a teacher who has lived through the assessment experience and knows how to speak to teachers. I have every belief it will be credible to other teachers and administrators because of my twenty-eight years as a successful classroom teacher.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Timeline

February, 1996	Distribute permission letters to all participants Compile documents of school district writing curriculum and guidelines Compile lists of available resources Conduct interviews with students and teachers Conduct interviews with administrators and parents Collect data of teacher planning meetings by taking field notes and audio taping Collect data in the form of field notes during observations of classroom writing instruction
March, 1996	Continue data collection at teacher planning meetings Collect data in the form of field notes during test administration
April, 1996	Continue data collection at teacher reflection meetings Collect student and teacher logs Conduct post-testing interviews with teachers and students
May, 1996	Begin analysis of data and drafting of dissertation
June - October 1996	Continue to draft
August - November 1996	Revision of draft
September, 1996	Present initial chapters of the study to Doctoral Committee for reaction
December 1996	Final Ph.D. Oral Exam

Appendix B**Interview Questions**

Following are some interview questions that might begin to guide the research. I have designed the questions to be somewhat focused, and yet open-ended. As related by Bogdan and Biklen (1992),

Even when an interview guide is employed, qualitative interviews offer the interviewer considerable latitude to pursue a range of topics and offer the subject a chance to shape the content of the interview. When the interviewer controls the content too rigidly, when the subject cannot tell his or her story personally in his or her own words, the interview falls out of the qualitative range (p. 97).

As the study develops, additional or alternative questions may be appropriate.

Questions for administrators and school board members:**Pre-assessment:**

What is your understanding of the purpose for the new writing MEAP?

What is your attitude concerning this new assessment?

What expectations does the school district have for this assessment?

What possible curriculum changes do you foresee as a result of the implementation of this assessment?

What preparations has the district/school made to assist teachers and students as they prepare for the new assessment?

Questions for teachers and associate teacher:

Pre-assessment:

What is your background in writing instruction?

How would you describe the writing curriculum in your classroom?

Why do you teach as you do?

In what ways has your teaching of writing changed over the years you have taught?

In what ways are you changing your curriculum to assist students as they prepare for the new writing assessment?

How do you think this assessment will benefit students?

How do you think this assessment will benefit teachers?

Post-assessment:

What is your attitude toward the MEAP after administering it to your students?

How well do you think your students were prepared for the assessment?

Why?

What might you do differently to prepare your students for next year's writing assessment?

What advice would you give to other teachers who are preparing their students for a similar writing assessment?

What did you learn from this experience?

Will you make adjustments in your writing curriculum as a result of this assessment? Explain.

Questions for students:

Pre-assessment:

- How important is writing to you?
- How would you describe someone who is a “good writer?”
- What do you think about the new writing assessment?
- What do you know about the test?
- What do you think would be the best way to prepare for the test?
- What do you think you will be able to learn from this experience?
- What have you been doing in your classroom to prepare for the test?

Post-assessment:

- What are you thinking about the assessment now?
- What did you learn from your experience with the writing MEAP?
- What advise would you give to future students as the prepare for the writing MEAP?
- What do you think classroom teachers might do to help students prepare?

Questions for parents:

Pre-assessment:

- What do you remember about writing instruction when you were in school?
- What types of writing assessment do you remember?
- What is your understanding of the new MEAP Writing Assessment?
- How do you feel about having your son/daughter take this test?

Appendix C
Consent Letters For Research
Parent Letter from the Principal

February, 1996

Dear Parents,

In March of this year, each fifth grade student in the State of Michigan will be taking the the MEAP Writing Assessment. In the next two months, the fifth grade teaching staff at our school will be working together as we assist students in preparing for the administration of this test.

To help us come to a better understanding of how best to prepare our students for this new assessment, one of our teachers, Eleanor Wollett, will be observing and interviewing students. She will be conducting this research in partial fulfillment of her doctoral degree from the Department of Teacher Education at Michigan State University. To get an accurate record of what the students say, she will occasionally video and/or audio tape the students' comments during her conversations with them, during class discussions, and while students work together. In addition, written logs of students' opinions and reactions to the writing assessment will be collected and examined.

All of the data in the study will be treated with strict confidence, and every effort will be made to insure confidentiality. Your child will be asked to give his or her verbal assent to being tape recorded and for use of copies of his or her log in the research. You and/or your child are free to decline to participate in this study or to withdraw from it at any time without penalty. Your decision will have no effect on your child's grade or performance in the classroom.

I hope that you will allow your child to participate in this study. I believe that the knowledge gained will be valuable to us as a staff and to others interested in helping children improve their writing skills as they prepare for the new writing assessment.

Please sign the attached consent form indicating whether your child may or may not participate in the study. If you have any questions about this project, you may contact Eleanor Wollett or me at -----.

Sincerely,
Principal

Student Consent Form

The goals, procedures, and duration of my child's participation in the MEAP Writing Assessment research project have been explained to me. I understand that the researcher will be interviewing, observing, and collecting data from students in my child's classroom.

By giving permission for my child to participate in Mrs. Wollett's research, I understand the following:

1. I consent to have my child discuss his or her thinking about and experiences with the new MEAP Writing Assessment with the researcher, and I allow my child to provide the researcher with copies of his or her log about taking the test.

2. I understand that the data collected will be used as partial fulfillment of Mrs. Wollett's research requirement for her doctoral studies at Michigan State University, and that the data may be used for articles, presentations, and instruction.

3. I have been informed that every effort will be made to insure confidentiality of the data collected, and my child's identity will not be known to anyone except my child's teacher and the researcher.

Please sign and return.

.....

I freely agree to allow my child to participate in the MEAP Writing Assessment research project.

Student's name _____

Signature of parent or guardian _____

Date _____

Teacher Consent Form

I agree to participate in the research study, "In what ways and to what extent do fifth grade teachers and their students in one rural school prepare for, participate in, and reflect upon the new State of Michigan Writing Assessment?" I understand that this study is partial fulfillment of Mrs. Wollett's doctoral degree requirement from the Department of Teacher Education at Michigan State University. The purpose and procedures of this research have been explained to me, and as a collaborator in this research, I understand that I will be expected to do the following:

1. Allow the researcher to observe me during writing instruction and as I administer the MEAP Writing Assessment.
2. Be interviewed (formally and informally) regarding my background and attitudes concerning the teaching of writing and the MEAP Writing Assessment.
3. Permit the researcher to record our conversations and interviews to insure that we have an accurate record.
4. Keep a log of my perceptions and reflections upon classroom writing activities and the MEAP Writing Assessment. This log will become an artifact to be used as data for the research project.
5. Take part in weekly planning meetings as the teachers involved in the project discuss ways to assist students as they prepare for the assessment.

I also understand that I may receive the following benefits from participating in the project:

1. I will have the opportunity to gain insights into my own thinking and practice.
2. I may gain information about ways I might assist students as they prepare for future MEAP Writing assessments.

Finally, I understand that:

1. Data collected will be used in Mrs. Wollett's doctoral dissertation and may also be used in articles, presentations, or instruction.
2. Grade level meeting notes and curriculum planning documents produced prior to this study will be used to help reconstruct the study's origin.
3. Because the researcher is a fifth grade teacher in the district, there are some limits on the confidentiality that can be guaranteed me. However, I have been assured that every effort will be made to insure confidentiality of information about me, for example, by using pseudonyms in any written reports, publications, and presentations.
4. I may waive my personal confidentiality should I wish to do so as in the case of authoring papers or making presentations about the research or by giving the researcher written permission to identify me in articles or presentations she might make about the research.
5. I have the right to decline to answer any question I choose during interviews. I may request that segments of any taping in which I am identifiable not be used in reports and presentations. I may withdraw from this study at any time without recrimination.

Teacher's signature _____

Date _____

Administrator Consent Form

I agree to participate in the research study, "In what ways and to what extent do fifth grade teachers and their students in one rural school prepare for, participate in, and reflect upon the new State of Michigan Writing Assessment?" I understand that this study is partial fulfillment of Mrs. Wollett's doctoral degree requirement from the Department of Teacher Education at Michigan State University. The purpose and procedures of this research have been explained to me, and as a collaborator in this research, I understand that I will be expected to do the following:

1. Be interviewed (formally and informally) regarding attitudes and expectations concerning the MEAP Writing Assessment.
2. Permit the researcher to record our conversations and interviews to insure that we have an accurate record.

I also understand that I may receive the following benefits from participating in the project:

1. I will have the opportunity to gain insights into my own thinking concerning the MEAP.
2. I may gain information about ways I might facilitate teachers and students as they prepare for future MEAP Writing assessments.

Finally, I understand that:

1. Data collected will be used in Mrs. Wollett's doctoral dissertation and may also be used in articles, presentations, or instruction.
2. Because the researcher is a fifth grade teacher in the district, there are some limits on the confidentiality that can be guaranteed me. However, I have been assured that every effort will be made to insure confidentiality of information about me, for example, by using pseudonyms in any written reports, publications, and presentations.
3. I may waive my personal confidentiality should I wish to do so as in the case of authoring papers or making presentations about the research or by giving the researcher written permission to identify me in articles or presentations she might make about the research.
4. I may withdraw from this study at any time without recrimination.

Administrator's signature _____

Date _____

School Board Member Consent Form

I agree to participate in the research study, "In what ways and to what extent do fifth grade teachers and their students in one rural school prepare for, participate in, and reflect upon the new State of Michigan Writing Assessment?" I understand that this study is partial fulfillment of Mrs. Wollett's doctoral degree requirement from the Department of Teacher Education at Michigan State University. The purpose and procedures of this research have been explained to me, and as a collaborator in this research, I understand that I will be expected to do the following:

1. Be interviewed (formally and informally) regarding attitudes and expectations concerning the MEAP Writing Assessment.
2. Permit the researcher to record our conversations and interviews to insure that we have an accurate record.

I also understand that I may receive the following benefits from participating in the project:

1. I will have the opportunity to gain insights into my own thinking concerning the MEAP.
2. I may gain information about ways the Anderson Area School Board might facilitate teachers and students as they prepare for future MEAP Writing assessments.

Finally, I understand that:

1. Data collected will be used in Mrs. Wollett's doctoral dissertation and may also be used in articles, presentations, or instruction.
2. Because the researcher is a fifth grade teacher in the district, there are some limits on the confidentiality that can be guaranteed me. However, I have been assured that every effort will be made to insure confidentiality of information about me, for example, by using pseudonyms in any written reports, publications, and presentations.
3. I may waive my personal confidentiality should I wish to do so as in the case of authoring papers or making presentations about the research or by giving the researcher written permission to identify me in articles or presentations she might make about the research.
4. I may withdraw from this study at any time without recrimination.

School Board Member's signature _____

Date _____

Parent Consent Form

I agree to participate in the research study, "In what ways and to what extent do fifth grade teachers and their students in one rural school prepare for, participate in, and reflect upon the new State of Michigan Writing Assessment?" I understand that this study is partial fulfillment of Mrs. Wollett's doctoral degree requirement from the Department of Teacher Education at Michigan State University. The purpose and procedures of this research have been explained to me, and as a collaborator in this research, I understand that I will be expected to do the following:

1. Be interviewed (formally and informally) regarding attitudes and expectations concerning the MEAP Writing Assessment.
2. Permit the researcher to record our conversations and interviews to insure that we have an accurate record.

I also understand that I may receive the following benefits from participating in the project:

1. I will have the opportunity to gain insights into my own thinking concerning the MEAP.
2. I may gain information about ways the parents might facilitate teachers and students as they prepare for future MEAP Writing assessments.

Finally, I understand that:

1. Data collected will be used in Mrs. Wollett's doctoral dissertation and may also be used in articles, presentations, or instruction.
2. Because the researcher is a fifth grade teacher in the district, there are some limits on the be made to insure confidentiality of information about me, for example, by using pseudonyms in any written reports, publications, and presentations.
3. I may waive my personal confidentiality should I wish to do so as in the case of authoring papers or making presentations about the research or by giving the researcher written permission to identify me in articles or presentations she might make about the research.
4. I may withdraw from this study at any time without recrimination.

Parent's signature _____

Date _____

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

February 1, 1996

TO: Eleanor L. Wollett
653 S. Meridian Rd.
Hudson, MI 49247

RE: IRB#: 96-026
TITLE: A STUDY OF THE WAYS AND THE EXTENT TO WHICH
FIFTH GRADE TEACHERS AND THEIR STUDENTS IN ONE
RURAL SCHOOL PREPARE FOR, PARTICIPATE IN, AND
REFLECT UPON THE NEW STATE OF MICHIGAN WRITING
ASSESSMENT
REVISION REQUESTED: N/A
CATEGORY: 1-A, B, C, D, E
APPROVAL DATE: 01/31/96

The University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects' (UCRIHS) review of this project is complete. I am pleased to advise that the rights and welfare of the human subjects appear to be adequately protected and methods to obtain informed consent are appropriate. Therefore, the UCRIHS approved this project and any revisions listed above.

RENEWAL: UCRIHS approval is valid for one calendar year, beginning with the approval date shown above. Investigators planning to continue a project beyond one year must use the green renewal form (enclosed with the original approval letter or when a project is renewed) to seek updated certification. There is a maximum of four such expedited renewals possible. Investigators wishing to continue a project beyond that time need to submit it again for complete review.

REVISIONS: UCRIHS must review any changes in procedures involving human subjects, prior to initiation of the change. If this is done at the time of renewal, please use the green renewal form. To revise an approved protocol at any other time during the year, send your written request to the UCRIHS Chair, requesting revised approval and referencing the project's IRB # and title. Include in your request a description of the change and any revised instruments, consent forms or advertisements that are applicable.

**PROBLEMS/
CHANGES:**

Should either of the following arise during the course of the work, investigators must notify UCRIHS promptly: (1) problems (unexpected side effects, complaints, etc.) involving human subjects or (2) changes in the research environment or new information indicating greater risk to the human subjects than existed when the protocol was previously reviewed and approved.

If we can be of any future help, please do not hesitate to contact us at (517) 355-2180 or FAX (517) 432-1171.

Sincerely,

David E. Wright
David E. Wright, Ph.D.
UCRIHS Chair

DEW:bed

cc: Sheila Fitzgerald



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Appendix D
Team Meeting Agendas
February 2, 1996

- I. Consent Forms
- II. Students selected for observation
 - a. Male - female
 - b. Minorities
 - c. Prepaid lunch/breakfast
 - d. One parent households
 - e. Proficient, average, less proficient
- III. Parents for interviews
- IV. Schedule interviews for teachers
- V. Reflection logs - share ideas
- VI. Discuss Writing Project meeting this weekend
 - a. Group sharing during testing - modeling
 - b. Resources
 - c. Focus idea
- VII. Next week
 - a. Review test format
 - b. Discuss practice ideas

February 6, 1996

- I. Students observations
 - Interview schedule - Wednesday morning, February 7

II. Draft of test -

- a. discuss format
- b. practice

III. Sample Rubric

IV. Reflection logs - share ideas

V. Classroom observation of selected students during writing instruction

February 12, 1996

I. Collect signed permission forms

II. Review data on selected students

III. Share ideas from classroom (teacher reflection journals)

IV. Discuss student reflection logs

V. Schedule observations

any day 8:15 - 9:15

1:15 - 2:15

Tuesday and Thursday 1:30 - 11:15

VI. New information from assessment conference

- rating process
- rubric
- passing score
- topics - family, pets, vacation, disappointments
- right of passage

VII. Trial assessment

VIII. Other (questions, ideas, concerns)

February 19, 1996

- I. Observations
- II. Interviews
- III. Plan for practice MEAP Writing Assessment
 - a. Procedure
 - b. Rating
- IV. Scheduling for week of actual MEAP
- V. Absences
- VI. Other

February 26, 1996

- I. Final Planning - Writing MEAP
 - a. Schedule
 - b. Procedure
 - c. Questions
- II. Science MEAP
- III. Other

March 5, 1996

I. Writing Assessment

- a. Schedule
- b. Daily process according to instructions
- c. Reflection logs
- d. Make-ups
- e. Copies of papers
- f. Post assessment interviews
 - 1. Students
 - 2. Teachers

II. Science Assessment

- a. Schedule
- b. What to do if I finish early
- c. Make-ups

III. Other

March 10, 1996

I. Science Assessment

- a. Schedule
- b. Procedures
 - 1. What to do when done?
 - 2. How to keep on task?

II. Writing Assessment

- a. Make-ups
- b. Run- offs
- c. Rating of papers
- d. What we learned

- e. Collect reflection logs
- f. Student post-assessment interviews
- g. Teacher post-assessment interviews

March 18, 1996

- I. Inservice
- II. Interviews
- III. Copies
 - a. CA 60's (orange folders)
 - b. Parents?
- IV. E-Mail Conversation
 - a. Copies
 - b. Incentives
 - c. Stress
- V. Ratings
 - a. Procedure
 - b. Deadline
- VI. Where do we go from here?
- VII. Other

Appendix E

Language Arts Curriculum

Language Arts Philosophy Statement

Language Arts will include meaningful experience in reading, writing, speaking, and listening/viewing. Through a positive classroom climate each student will see the purpose of working toward his/her potential and its relevance for his/her life.

Implementation of the Writing Program

In order to provide a balanced writing curriculum, the student needs to experience the writing process in three modes.

Writing Process

The writing process involves specific stages, each flowing naturally into the next. This does not mean using a lock-step order through each stage. The process can stop after any stage and it can loop back to a previous stage in a recursive way. All writings are not meant to be taken to the publication stage. Students should be carefully guided by teacher, peer modeling, and other strategies through each stage.

The writing process consists of :prewriting, drafting, revision, editing, and publishing. Sharing may take place at any stage of the process. While taking a piece through the writing process, the student needs to make decisions concerning the following: audience, genre, voice, tone, and purpose.

Mini-lessons of from five to ten minutes are times when the teacher addresses the whole, or small, group on an issue or convention related to language arts. Examples: how to punctuate a dialogue or how to self edit.

The Three Modes

Modeling

The instructor places correct examples of the printed word before the child. In this mode, the student does not do the writing himself/herself but is simply exposed to correct samples of writing.

Directed

The teacher structures the writing assignment and the student does the actual writing under the instructor's direction.

Independent

A mode of written expression that is unstructured and allows the student to have choice of what to write and what form to use.

Stages of the Writing Process

Prewriting

Prewriting is a planning stage in the writing process. The writer calls upon prior knowledge as he/she generates and discovers ideas and considers purpose and audience for their writing.

Drafting

The writer organizes his/her thoughts initiated in the prewriting stage on paper. At this stage meaning is stressed, not correct mechanics and spelling.

Revising

This is the stage in which writers “re-see” and make decisions about the content of their writing. This involves adding, deleting, rearranging, and substituting words, sentences, and paragraphs to clarify meaning. One or more revisions may be necessary before continuing on to editing.

Editing

This is the stage where spelling, punctuation, capitalization, sentence structure, usage, etc. are stressed.

Publishing

In this final stage the writer prepares and presents his/her final copy in various forms to an audience. This involves checking for neatness, legibility, and correct form.

Sharing may take place any time during the process.

K - 6 Language Arts Curriculum**Introduction**

The format of the K - 6 Language Arts Curriculum illustrates the integration of the Language Arts. In the center you will find the theme around which each of the areas (reading, writing, speaking, listening/viewing) are listed separately. At the bottom of each page are the conventions which will be taught at each grade level. Each year it is expected that students will review concepts previously taught, only at a more sophisticated level.

Listening/Viewing

think alouds
 demonstration speeches
 constructive criticism
 peer critique
 role playing
 model correct grammar
 bodylanguage

Speaking

think alouds
 demonstration speeches
 peer critique
 role playing
 Christmas stories
 speak expressively by varying
 volume, rate, and pitch,
 eyecontact
 bodylanguage

Communication Strategies
Self and Others
Fifth Grade

Reading

determining author's purpose

Writing

demonstration speeches
 peer critique

Conventions

individual responsibility to group
 value the group's goals and opinions
 art - representation, reaction
 metacognition
 dictionary skills
 library skills
 understanding of word structure
 self-evaluation
 point of view
 identify audience
 courtesy
 editing

Listening/Viewing

predicting outcomes
 sharing
 to stories read by teacher
 model writing process
 context clues

Speaking

role playing
 choral reading
 book talks
 oral reading
 sharing
 responses
 relate to life

Literature Fifth Grade

Reading

for enjoyment
 predicting outcomes
 inferential
 context clues

Writing

fictional writing
 mapping
 responses
 relate to life
 writing process
 prewriting
 drafting
 revising
 sharing
 editing
 publishing

Conventions

story features - setting, characters, plot, theme
 prior knowledge
 vocabulary
 understanding characters' emotions/motivation
 editing - punctuation, capitalization, sentence structure, paragraphs, spelling
 descriptive language
 genre - poetry
 fiction - historical, scientific, realistic,
 Fantasy
 drawing conclusions
 cause and effect
 dialogue
 point of view

Listening/Viewing

for directions
 logical analysis of audio/visual
 teacher modeling
 for information
 forming inferences
 drawing conclusions
 content/context

Speaking

oral presentations
 answering questions
 asking questions
 acting out - dramatization

Science Fifth Grade

Reading

for information/directions
 drawing conclusions
 context
 forming inferences
 supporting details

Writing

note taking
 summaries
 research reports
 draw a sketch (model)
 diagram
 mapping
 log responses
 pictorial visualization

Conventions

interpreting diagrams
 vocabulary
 problem solving
 logical reasoning
 main idea
 brainstorming
 predicting outcomes (reasonable)
 editing
 making comparisons
 prior knowledge
 library skills

Listening/Viewing

teacher modeling through
mini-lessons
videos
interviews
current events

Speaking

answering questions
role play - acting out
historical events
oral presentations
framing questions
current events
choral reading
demonstration speeches
using notes to formulate
reports

Social Studies Fifth Grade

Reading

for information
drawing conclusions
context/content
current events

Writing

letter writing
using notes to formulate
reports
current events
outlining
forming and answering
questions
essay - contest
evaluation
mapping - webbing
apply historical knowledge
to fiction
research/reports
biography/autobiography
interviews

Conventions

vocabulary
main idea - supporting details
using text - text structure, captions, headings, main topics
library skills
tables, charts, graphs, maps
fact/opinion
cause/effect
critical thinking
prior knowledge
sequencing

time Lines
plays
comparing
brainstorming
editing

Math Fifth Grade

- estimation
- sequencing
- logic
- vocabulary
- punctuation
- understanding process (recognizing)
- concentration
- brainstorming
- editing
- prior knowledge

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