

In a landmark effort in 1969, the Michigan State Board of Education created the Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP) to assess students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Since then, the MEAP has tested all 4th, 7th, and 10th graders each fall in mathematics, reading, and science. We use tests based on essential skills written by curriculum specialists and classroom teachers. Since the development of our first criterion-referenced tests in 1971, test development has generally been the work of similar individuals, with the assistance of a test development contractor and the staff of the assessment program. We periodically revise the essential skills in each subject area to reflect current thinking about student outcomes and instruction. The MEAP collects this information so that teachers can provide appropriate instruction, school districts can review and improve educational programs, and the state can monitor student achievement.

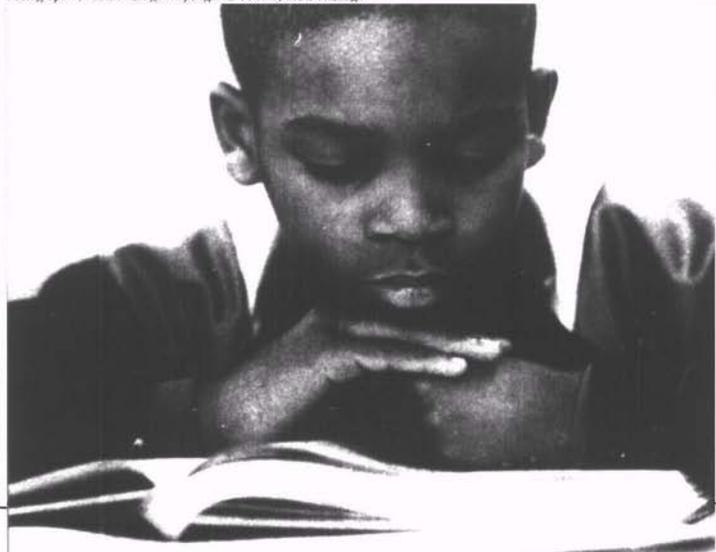
Revising the Reading Test

In the early 1980s, reading teachers, specialists, and researchers began to contend that the prevailing skills-based approach to instruction and assessment was not appropriate. Teachers were viewing skills as things that could be taught, learned, and used independently, rather than teaching them in an integrated manner. The Michigan Department of Education, in cooperation with the Michigan Reading Association (MRA), responded to this misperception by developing a different conceptual approach to reading.¹ Not surprisingly, this redefinition of reading created the need for a different approach to assessment. From this redefinition, a revised set of objectives was developed.

Michigan's Innovative Assessment of Reading

The Michigan Education Assessment Program has developed both formal and informal reading assessments that reflect up-to-date reading theory.

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DIRECTIONS

There are three parts to this reading test and **Topic Familiarity** is the first part. You will be tested on how well you know certain topics or ideas. Be sure you understand all the directions before you begin. You will have as much time as you need to complete the 24 questions in this test booklet.

Begin marking your answers on the answer sheet in the area labeled **Topic Familiarity**. Use only a No. 2 pencil to mark your answers. If you change an answer, be sure to erase the first mark completely. Mark only one answer for each question.

Now look at the Sample Items below.

Sample Item 1. Does brave help to tell about a hero? A B

- A Yes
- B No

Since a **hero** is usually thought of as **brave**, the correct answer is **A**. You would have filled in circle **A** for Sample Item 1.

Sample Item 2. Is a bird finding twigs for a nest an example of gathering?

- A Yes
- B No

Collecting or finding twigs to build a nest is the same as gathering; therefore, the correct answer is **A**. You should have filled in circle **A** for Sample Item 2 on your answer sheet.

Sample Item 3. Heroes try to cause danger. Is this correct?

- A Yes
- B No

Heroes get involved with danger, but they do not try to cause danger; therefore, the correct answer is **B**. You should have filled in circle **B** on your answer sheet for Sample Item 3.

Remember, mark only one answer for each numbered question. Make a dark mark that fills the circle. If you change your answer, erase your first answer completely. Use the No. 2 pencil, NOT a pen.

When you are done answering the **Topic Familiarity** questions, close your test booklet and put your pencil down so your teacher will know you have finished.

FORM T12A

3

WAIT: DO NOT GO ON
UNTIL TOLD TO DO SO

A Reading Test Development Coordinating Committee subsequently developed an MEAP Blueprint² in order to specify how each test element would be assessed. The four components of the test are Constructing Meaning, Knowledge About Reading, Attitudes and Self-Perceptions, and Topic Familiarity. Once the committee had determined these components, they selected reading passages and began to write test items. The reading passages were of two types: (1) narratives (from children's magazines and literature) and (2) informational (from textbooks). The committee chose materials of 500-2,000 words—substantially longer than the norm for reading tests. Readability and appropriateness of each selection were based on how well the text was structured, literary merit, use of adjunct aids, and so forth.

Initial item writing was slow because the Coordinating Committee was unsure what to measure. During the winter of 1985, the committee met with Taffy Raphael of Michigan State

The test development committee chose materials of 500-2,000 words—substantially longer than the norm for reading tests.

Fig. 1. Directions Page from Booklet A

DIRECTIONS

In this test, you will use your reading abilities. You will have as much time as you need to finish the test. It is important to read each story completely. Each story or passage is divided into numbered "Sections." These Section numbers will help you look back to answer questions quickly and easily.

For each question, choose the BEST answer. If you are not sure of the answer to a question, make your BEST choice and go on to the next question. If you change an answer, be sure to erase the first mark completely. Mark only one answer for each item.

Read the story below and answer the sample items on the next page.

Daniel's Duck

Jeff and Daniel were brothers. They lived in a cabin on a mountain in Tennessee. Jeff had a good knife, and he could carve things out of wood. He made a dish, a cup, and a spoon. "Some day," Jeff said, "I want to carve an animal like Henry Pettigrew."

Henry Pettigrew lived in the valley, and although Jeff and Daniel had never met him, they had seen his work. Some said he was the best wood carver in Tennessee. All his animals looked real; his birds looked as if they could fly, and his horses looked as if they could run.

"I want to carve an animal, too," said Daniel. "You're not old enough," Jeff told him. "Yes, I am," said Daniel. "I could carve one if I had a good knife and some wood."

"It takes more than a good knife and some wood," said Jeff. "Animals are hard to do, and you have to know how."

"I know how," answered Daniel. "Let's see if you do," said his father, and he gave Daniel a knife like Jeff's and a block of wood.

SECTION 1

SECTION 2

SECTION 3

SECTION 4

FORM T11

2

GO ON TO THE NEXT PAGE

Fig. 2. Directions from Booklet B

The committee wrote items that ask about the students' interest in the reading selection and the amount of effort they put into reading the text and answering the items.

Sample Item 1. Who is Mr. Pettigrew?

- A Daniel and Jeff's father
- B a talented wood carver
- C a farmer and friend of Jeff
- D a beginning wood carver

Since Mr. Pettigrew was a skillful carver, the best answer is B. You would have filled in circle B for Sample Item 1.

Sample Item 2. What is a main purpose of Section 3 in "Daniel's Duck?"

- A to show where Daniel and Jeff live
- B to tell when the story took place
- C to show that Daniel and Jeff disagree
- D to show who is telling the story

Section 3 shows that Daniel does not agree with his brother about carving. The answer is C. You should have filled in circle C for Sample Item 2 on your answer sheet.

You may look back to the story or passage any time you need to. Some of the questions will be like Sample Item 2 and will ask you to go back and reread a section to find the answer.

Another type of item that you will answer will ask how you feel about reading the passage or story and answering the questions. Read each sentence and decide whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree.

Sample Item 3. It was easy for me to read the words in "Daniel's Duck."

- A strongly agree
- B agree
- C disagree
- D strongly disagree

Since answers to this type of item will be different from one person to another, you should have marked the letter that BEST shows how you felt about reading "Daniel's Duck."

You will have as much time as you need to complete Part 1. When you have finished answering the questions for Part 1, close your test booklet and put your pencil down. DO NOT GO ON TO Part 2.

FORM T11

3

GO ON TO THE NEXT PAGE

Fig. 2. Directions from Booklet B, continued

University, who suggested "mapping" each selection to produce a holistic interpretation that would ensure that test items focused on important ideas. The narrative maps contained these elements: Theme (Main Idea), Theme (Abstract), Problem, Resolution, Major Characters, Setting, Major Event, and Vocabulary. The informational map elements included Central Purpose, Major Idea, Supporting Detail, and Vocabulary.

Because maps indicate key concepts and relationships between concepts in each passage, once they were com-

The Constructing Meaning section is viewed as the primary outcome measure, while the other sections are provided for explanatory purposes.

An Evolving Process

Once we had constructed the Blueprint, we were able to complete a lengthy item writing process. First, each item writer was trained in mapping and writing each type of test item. Then several different groups of item writers worked on different grade levels and types of test items. Next, technical editing of the items was conducted by the MEAP test development contractor, BETA, Inc. Finally, there were three rounds of statewide trials and conceptual reviews.

Unlike other test development projects where everything is well defined in advance, item construction was an evolving process that required rewrites and re-edits as new understandings led to revised wordings of items. Item refinement continued through all steps of test development.

In Addition to the Test

At the same time that the MEAP staff and the MRA were developing the formal MEAP assessment, they were also concerned about improving the informal assessments teachers make in their classrooms. Since formal assessments such as MEAP occur only periodically, teachers must be able to make reliable judgments of students' progress throughout their instruction. The informal assessment project is designed to meet this need.

We have gathered a variety of informal assessment techniques for use in grades 4-6, as well as explanations on their use and record-keeping forms. These are now being piloted. Materials for grades K-3, 7-9, and 10-12 are being developed. In all cases, the materials will suggest how teachers can make valid judgments of students' abilities in Topic Familiarity, Constructing Meaning, Knowledge About Reading, and Attitudes and Self-Perceptions. Our intent is to parallel the formal MEAP assessment with informal assessment materials and to make these materials available to all classroom teachers.

Proposed Assessment for 1989

The formal tests for 1989 were piloted in 1988 in grades 4, 7, and 10. Each test includes two selections (one narrative and one informational), plus test items

measuring Topic Familiarity, Constructing Meaning, Knowledge About Reading, and Attitudes and Self-Perceptions. At each grade the test is divided into two booklets: Booklet A contains 24 Topic Familiarity test items (12 for each reading selection), while Booklet B contains the two reading selections and 92 test items (20 Constructing Meaning, 14 Knowledge About Reading, and 12 Attitudes and Self-Perceptions items for each reading selection). Booklet A will be administered to all students before Booklet B.

Figure 1 shows the directions page from Booklet A. This page shows an example of each type of Topic Familiarity item.

Figure 2 shows the directions pages for Booklet B.

Reporting the Test Results

The MEAP will prepare several reports of results for local educators, including statements about each selection and each component of the test. The Constructing Meaning section is viewed as the primary outcome measure of this test, while the other sections are provided for explanatory purposes.

Figure 3 shows an example of a proposed Individual Student Report. MEAP has also developed a proposed Classroom Listing Report that summa-

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izes data from various Individual Student Reports and a proposed School Summary (the same form is used to report district- and state-level results). Other report forms, such as a Parent Report, will be designed and used in 1989.

Preparation for Implementation

Much preparation for the 1989 assessment has been taking place. The MDE Reading Specialist, Elaine Weber, and her Curriculum Review Committee have held several statewide conferences and one national conference to train trainers to disseminate information on the redefinition of reading to local districts.

Both MRA and the Michigan School Public Relations Association (MSPRA) will be working this year to develop materials to help local districts discuss the changes in definition and MEAP assessment with various groups (teachers, administrators, parents, school boards, and the news media). Finally, the districts participating in the 1988 pilot test are working collaboratively with MRA and MDE so that they can take the lead in using assessment to review and improve their reading instruction program.

This monumental task is well begun because so many people believe, as MDE does, that the revised MEAP Reading Test will help local districts as they align their assessments to an updated definition of what good readers do. More work lies ahead, but those of us involved in this major redefinition of reading and revised reading assessment can at last see the light at the end of the tunnel. □

1. See Valencia et al. (p. 57 of this issue).

2. The MEAP Blueprint, available from the Michigan Department of Education, contains a sample of each type of passage and each type of test item for each section of the test.

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Institutes:

Seattle, Washington
July 23 - 26, 1989
SeaTac Red Lion Inn

Participants attending these institutes will gain a clear understanding of the background, premises, and implementation strategies for improving schools and school districts based on Effective Schools Research. These institutes are appropriate for school and district staffs who are considering the ESR approach to improvement or those who desire additional knowledge and skills to enhance existing programs. The programs feature outstanding nationally known researchers and practitioners.

Minneapolis, Minn.
July 30 - Aug. 2, 1989
Radisson Plaza Hotel

Saratoga Springs, NY
October 19 - 21, 1989
Gideon Putnam Hotel

Symposia:

Farmington, Conn.
July 16 - 19, 1989
Farmington Marriott

Participants attending this Symposium will focus on current national issues and recent research which impact existing school effectiveness programs. This Symposium will be valuable for state, regional, and district leaders who have responsibility for effective schools programs and who have a significant knowledge base of effective schools research and practice.

Tarrytown, New York
May 22-23, 1989
Westchester Marriott

Participants attending this Symposium will have the unique opportunity to receive two full days of in-depth training by Dr. Lawrence W. Lezotte, including dialogue on local issues and concerns which accompany implementation of Effective Schools Research. This Symposium features a personalized format for leaders who desire additional information to enhance existing improvement efforts.

Institute/Symposium fees range from \$200 - \$500 and include on-site services of top national consultants, a comprehensive school improvement notebook, refreshment breaks, some meals, and special hospitality functions.

For more information, please contact:

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