



NOTES from the NATIONAL TESTING NETWORK IN WRITING

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This publication marks the second effort to bring together researchers and practitioners in writing assessment. The October 1982 *Notes from the NTNW* addressed a wide range of topics; offered sketches of assessment programs in a variety of settings across the country; and provided some practical advice about finding topics, evaluating papers, establishing programs, and considering attitudes toward writing, among other concerns of teachers and administrators. In this issue, we continue to examine the broad and controversial field of writing assessment.

The issue begins with several articles concerned with the connections between tests and institutional policy, programs, and curriculum. **Rex Brown** discusses the implications of the most recent National Assessment for Educational Progress findings for tests and teachers, especially with regard to the apparent decline in complex, higher-order skills among 17-year-olds. **Catharine Keech** calls attention to the fact that student writing progress toward higher levels of competence may be accompanied by flaws that are a normal part of the process of learning to write better, requiring new ways to assess the effects of instruction. **Charles Chew**, in describing the New York State Regents Competency Program, notes that the writing part of the test has been a strong impetus for change in the schools, and has already had a measurable impact on the curriculum. **Kenneth Bruffee, Robert Esch, and Richard Brengle** illustrate from their own institutional perspectives how tests have influenced instruction. Bruffee focuses on the interlocking relationships among the goals set for the basic writing program at CUNY, the Writing Assessment Test, and the curriculum model developed out of both. Esch reports on the results of efforts to create a junior level writing proficiency test at the University of Texas at El Paso, which has resulted in the redesign of its curriculum to include writing throughout the college and a required communications course. Brengle gives an overview of writing assessment at the University of Michigan, calling attention to the faculty's ongoing reevaluation of the assessment procedure and of the kinds of instruction that will best serve students.

Four authors address the testing question from the viewpoint of students. **Rosemary Hake** reports that students' writing improved enormously as a result of publishing "hints" about the topics ahead of time. **Richard Larson** urges a reconsideration of the single

mode writing test in favor of tests in several modes in which writers must address specific audiences and in which the test questions offer models for response. **James Broderick** examines students' changed perceptions of the Core Curriculum and accompanying Writing Proficiency Exam at U Mass/Boston after several years of its being in place, and concludes that while students have come to accept both as desirable, they do not fully appreciate the real purpose of the writing test. The response to **Scott Drakulich's** questionnaire to junior college students in New Jersey confirms the view that students have come to accept the use of writing tests to assure proper placement.

Test development and design are the subject of several essays. **William Lutz** insists that we have not yet fully researched the efficacy of multiple-choice tests to assess writing skills, while **Miles Myers** argues that the issue is no longer essay tests versus multiple-choice tests, but rather *which* writing samples should be collected and *whether* to use prototypes or a list of features in holistic scoring. **Lawrence Biemiller** reminds us that microcomputers will bring radical changes in testing in the next ten years and exhorts teachers to take up the challenge of this new medium. **Joe Steele** discusses the assessment instruments developed by the College Outcome Measures Project (COMP) for the American College Testing Program designed to measure students' ability to apply writing skills to practical writing tasks required for effective functioning in adult society.

Finally, several contributors summarize the results of national surveys on the "state-of-the-art" of competency testing in writing around the country. **Rosentene Purnell** reports on the response to a survey she conducted as Chief Investigator for the CCCC Task Force on Testing in 1979-81. **Michael McCready** and **Virginia Melton** describe a two-phase research project conducted by Louisiana Tech University under an NIE grant: a questionnaire to state departments of education and large-scale school systems, and a follow-up conference of writing administrators. **Marcia Farr** closes this issue with a review of current research in writing assessment, noting the shift toward processes in assessment paralleling a similar shift in research in writing and in the teaching of writing.

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