
WRITING ASSESSMENT IN QUEBEC: THE STATE OF THE (LANGUAGE) ARTS

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This session began with a description of the integrated secondary Language Arts Curriculum prescribed in 1982 by the Quebec Ministry of Education (M.E.Q.). For the first time, teachers throughout the province faced a rationale and methodology of teaching English predicated on the principles that language serves as an agent of communication and conceptualization. In 1990, the common provincial exam for graduating students will be based on this new curriculum.

This common exam has served as a catalyst to the provincewide discussion of several major issues: Should examination questions be linked directly to specific works? Should talk occur during the examination? Should rough drafts and outlines be graded as part of the examination? Each of these issues is currently being addressed by the M.E.Q. through in-service training and the development of evaluation models.

Over the past several years we have used both college English grades and midterm ratings of writing ability by college English teachers as standards against which to measure the effectiveness of various methods of placement in writing courses. Although the research was originally intended to compare the relative reliability of a holistically scored writing sample and a multiple-choice test, statistics on secondary school records were also gathered. Recent data analyzes indicate that the correlations between the secondary school grades and college standards have risen dramatically.

Although it is premature to conclude that the improved correlations are the result of the new secondary school curriculum, the data encourage further testing of this hypothesis.

However, it seems that secondary school English grades (based in part on the evolving provincial exam and in part on the teacher's assessment of work throughout the year), are more valid measures of writing ability than current one-shot placement tests.