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Rebecca Arndt: Why I Teach

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Today, MAEIA launches the Michigan Collaborative Scoring System field test (MI-CSS powered by Oscar Classroom™) for 2019. The following article was written by MAEIA Leadership Fellow, Rebecca Arndt, based on her participation in the MAEIA CSS pilot in 2017-2018.

It's a cold and windy day in the downriver area. I am sitting at my computer and working on all the things that teachers work on during the day, I find myself asking why?

Why is it such a struggle to pick good music for my students?

Why can't this child just follow directions?

Why is it so hard to reach all my students?

Why do I need to give another test?

Or better yet, how do I give assessments that will give me accurate and authentic information for each of my students?

How can these assessments drive my teaching?

I may not be able to answer all these questions everyday but I can answer how I can use authentic testing and scoring to drive my teaching.

Being part of the MAIEA 2017-18 Collaborative Scoring System team has truly helped me understand my students and has given me authentic feedback to what they are understanding and implementing. I am using three different MAEIA assessments with grades five, two, and one.

I just gave my fifth graders a listening and create assessment. The students needed to write and answer five questions then they were asked to create a piece of artwork or write a poem or short story to depict what the composer was trying to convey.

WOW! What an amazing moment for me as I was grading their written answers to the listening. Many of these students are below grade level and struggle with writing. I was so very proud of these answers. I could honestly tell that they were listening, using the tools in the classroom to explain their reasoning. This is one of the many “aha” moments that I had while being part of this team.

Although I am part of the CSS team, there are still days that I have found myself teaching to the next test (the ones I have to use for report card purposes) and not teaching for those “aha” moments. But it is those “aha” moments are the reason I and many others got into teaching.

As I navigate through our curriculum each year and highlight in my calendar when I need to give each assessment and what are the outcome goals for those assessments, I need to remind myself I am in the arts. The arts are a performance-based curriculum.

I believe that if we use the mindset of “Think, Create, Perform”, we will be able to better understand what are students are truly learning and our assessments can be truly authentic and meaningful. Using authentic testing and scoring will give me a better understanding of where our students are and it will create more and more “aha” moments versus let’s take the next test. Testing is important but so is the journey of learning.