

# Workshop 7

## Assessment

*“One of the things that I really find valuable...with assessment is having the kids...reflect on their goals. What goals did you meet? What goals did you not meet? Why did you not meet these goals? What could you do next time...to meet those goals? What goals are you going to set...?”*

—Flora Tyler, Sixth-Grade Teacher, Picacho Middle School, Las Cruces, New Mexico

### Description

Few aspects of education pose knottier problems for teachers and students than issues of assessment and evaluation. While the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, it is helpful to distinguish between them. Some educators are using the terms informal and formal assessment to make the same distinction.

Assessment means looking at what students can do in order to determine what they need to learn to do next. That is, assessment, whether of individual students or an entire group, is done to enhance learning and inform instruction. Typically assessment is holistic, often recorded anecdotally, via checklists, or simply as “credit” or “no credit.”

Evaluation occurs after a concept or skill has been taught and practiced, and is recorded via a grade or scaled score, indicating the level of achievement or degree of competence a student has attained. Graded writing assignments, test scores, and report cards are common examples of evaluation.

A particular mechanism might serve as a tool for either assessment or evaluation, depending on how it is used. Written work, a performance, or even an objective test could be used either to assess student capabilities to determine further instructional steps, or to provide a quantifiable evaluation of performance.

Effective instruction is directly linked to thoughtful assessment and evaluation. As effective teachers develop curriculum, they are conscious of the ways in which both they and their students will assess progress and developing understandings. Assessment becomes an organic component of classroom instruction, and evaluation in such classrooms is designed to target the specific knowledge, skills, and understandings identified by curricular standards, presented via explicit instruction, and practiced as students develop mastery.

In Workshop 7, teachers focus on issues of both assessment and evaluation as they discuss both theoretical concerns and practical strategies for responding to student efforts.

### Key Points

- In the envisionment-building classroom, assessment is an ongoing process that:
  - focuses on how students are thinking and how they are growing as thinkers;
  - focuses on ways students develop interpretations of texts;
  - focuses on the expression of multiple perspectives about texts; and
  - focuses on ways of going beyond the text to ways the text connects with other texts and with students’ lives.
- Students in envisionment classrooms participate in self-reflection and self-assessment.
- Assessment helps teachers and students gauge how and what students are learning and thinking.
- Assessment can help teachers shape timely instructional strategies targeted to immediate student needs.

- Using many different assessment tools provides a rich picture of students' capabilities as well as a composite picture of what students are learning.
- By tracking what students are reading, teachers can assess their growth as readers and help them choose literature that is right for their abilities as well as suited to their interests.
- Whole-class and small-group discussions offer teachers a number of ways to assess student understanding.
- Writing such as reading logs provides a useful tool for both students and teachers to track students' progress as readers and thinkers over time. It can reveal:
  - the depth of student thinking;
  - the quality of student thinking; and
  - the strategies students use when they experience literary texts.
- Portfolios are useful tools to assess students as developing readers and writers over the course of a year or over the course of several years.
- Portfolios help develop student awareness of their growth as readers, writers, and thinkers.
- When students choose specific pieces for evaluation, they are learning to recognize quality work as they assess their own efforts.
- Portfolios enable students to choose their best work to demonstrate their capabilities.
- Self-assessment helps students reflect on what they are learning and pushes them to think more deeply about what they are reading, writing, and thinking.
- Self-assessment helps students recognize what they need to learn next and set learning goals for themselves.
- Self-assessment helps students assume responsibility for their own learning.
- Teachers in envisionment-building classrooms often use student projects for assessment or evaluation. Offering students project choices gives them a sense of ownership over their work as they demonstrate what they know and what they can do.
- Rubrics help students understand the criteria on which evaluation is based. Students can participate in the process of developing rubrics; doing so helps them understand the levels of mastery reflected in different grades.
- When developing tools for assessment or evaluation, teachers should be aware of what they are trying to assess or evaluate, as well as how the particular tool connects to the instruction students have received. In addition, teachers should ask themselves, "What do students need to know and be able to do in order to succeed?" and "Do they have the tools to succeed?"
- When developing tools for assessment, teachers might ask themselves, "What activities do I need in order to inform my teaching?" and "What activities will help students understand what they can do and what they need to learn to do next?"
- Assessment and evaluation should be flexible and determined by what the students need.
- Standardized tests should be used thoughtfully and viewed as one part of the assessment/evaluation puzzle and used in conjunction with other assessment/evaluation tools.
- Students who learn to be good, thoughtful, critical readers do well on standardized tests and have abilities that will serve them well throughout their lives.

- Because testing is pervasive in American society—within schools and beyond—teachers should help students learn the test-taking skills they need within the context of the curriculum.
- When developing assessment and evaluation instruments, teachers in envisionment-building classrooms focus on the kinds of thinking they want students to do and develop tools that allow students to demonstrate it.

### **Learning Objectives**

After viewing this program, you will be able to:

- understand the differences between assessment and evaluation and the uses of each.
- develop and use a number of different instruments such as observation, writing, reading, discussion, and projects for assessment and evaluation.
- develop ways to include students in their own assessment via self-reflection, self-assessment, and the development of rubrics.
- understand the importance of integrating assessment and evaluation with instruction.
- understand the importance of establishing clear and publicly explained criteria for evaluation.
- understand the value of standardized tests, their place in our educational systems, and ways to prepare students to succeed on them without making such preparation the centerpiece of instruction.

### **Background Reading**

In preparation for this workshop, read “Ongoing Assessment: Evolving Goals” in Dr. Judith Langer’s *Envisioning Literature* from the Teachers College Press. Copyright 1995. ISBN 0-8077-3464-0.

You may also be interested in the panelists’ professional biographies found in the About the Contributors section of this guide.

For additional online resources, go to [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature). Select *Making Meaning in Literature: A Workshop for Teachers, Grades 6–8*, click on Workshop 7, and go to Additional Reading.

# Workshop Session (On-Site)

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## Getting Ready (30 minutes)

Review the introduction to this workshop program, emphasizing the differences between assessment and evaluation (also thought of as informal and formal assessment). During the discussion presented on the workshop video, participants often use the two terms casually, collapsing their meaning. As you listen, think about the activities you use in your classroom. How do you distinguish between assessment and evaluation (or between formal and informal assessment)? Are your distinctions useful for both you and your students?

### Discuss:

Discuss the following questions:

- Did you have any uncomfortable or unpleasant experiences with grading as a student? What made them uncomfortable or unpleasant?
- Did you ever receive a grade that you felt was unfair, either because it was too high or too low? Why was it unfair?
- As a teacher, have you ever had difficulty assigning a grade to a particular students' work? Or to a particular activity? How did you resolve the problem?
- What are the most effective forms of assessment and evaluation that you use in your classes?

**Site Leader:** Use these questions to spark discussion before viewing the workshop program. Participants may write answers to the reflection questions in their journals, as time permits. You may use all of the questions or select only a few.

If you have Internet access, display the workshop Web site at [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature), making participants aware of online resources and interactive opportunities.

### Reflect in Workshop Journals:

Respond to the following questions in your workshop journal:

- What are the qualities of assessment that is effective for both teachers and students? What are some examples of effective assessment in your classroom?

Keep your responses to these questions in mind as you listen to the comments offered by the teachers in this workshop video.

## Watch the Workshop Video (60 minutes)

### Think About and Discuss:

**Pause** at the title card "Assessing Through Discussions."

- What are some ways you can assess your students as readers? How can you use these assessments to inform instruction?
- What are some ways to use writing (both formal and informal) as a tool for assessment and evaluation? What makes writing an effective tool?

**Site Leader:** If you are watching on videocassette, you may pause at the segments indicated here to give participants opportunities to discuss, reflect, and interact with the program. If needed, rewind and replay segments of the program so that viewers can thoughtfully examine all pertinent information. If you are watching a real-time broadcast, ask participants to consider the questions as they view the program, and discuss them later.

You may select any or all of the questions to discuss, as time permits and according to the interests of your participants.

# Workshop Session, cont'd.

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- Have you ever used reading logs (literature logs)? How did you use them? What values did they offer you and your students?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

**Pause** at the title card "Assessing Through Portfolios."

- How do you use discussion in your classroom? Are you comfortable with small groups, or, are you like Linda Rief who prefers whole-class discussions? Or are you comfortable with both? What values does discussion offer you and your students?
- If you use small-group discussions, what strategies have you developed for ensuring that students are on task? How do you assess the quality of their discussions?
- In whole-class discussions, what strategies have you developed for keeping track of what has been said and who said what? How do you manage and/or respond to the silent students who choose not to contribute?
- What strategies do you use to help students improve the quality of their discussions, both in terms of discussion content and group interactions? How can you assess their development?
- What do you mean when you talk about "good questions" or "deep questions" about literature? How can you teach students to ask such questions? How might you assess the kinds of questions students have learned to ask?
- For readers, what is the value of making personal connections to a literary text? How can you help students learn to do this in meaningful ways? How might you assess this?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

**Pause** just at or before the title card "Grading."

- What are some ways you might use portfolios in your classroom?
- What are some ways you might have students assess themselves? How could you use those assessments to help them develop as learners?
- When you think of assessment and evaluation, what are the traditional instruments you think of using?
- What are some non-traditional assessment/evaluation tools you might incorporate into your classroom and what values do they offer you? Your students?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

**View program until the end.**

- What strategies do you use for giving students credit for work completed?
- What strategies help you quantify intangible aspects of student performance (such as "class participation") when you are required to assign grades?
- What evaluation tools such as formal papers, projects, or tests have you found particularly useful in your classroom? Why?
- How have you used rubrics to clarify criteria for evaluation?
- What kinds of standardized tests do your students encounter? What do you do to help them prepare?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

# Workshop Session, cont'd.

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## Going Further (30 minutes)

### Work in Groups:

In groups, follow the instructions below, based on the assignment given to you by your Site Leader:

- **Alternative Assessments:** Brainstorm a list of as many different alternative assessments as you can. Prepare to share your list by writing it on an overhead slide. Be ready to discuss what each assessment instrument might show about what students can do as envisionment-building readers.
- **Portfolios:** What artifacts might you ask students to include in a portfolio to show who they are and what they can do as readers of literature? Prepare to share your list by writing it on an overhead slide. Be ready to discuss what each artifact might demonstrate about a student.
- **Rubrics:** Choose an activity appropriate for an envisionment-building classroom and describe it briefly on an overhead slide. On another overhead slide, create a three-point rubric (1 = excellent work; 2 = average work; 3 = unsatisfactory work) to assess or evaluate the activity. For each number, list at least four characteristics that describe work at that level. Prepare to share and discuss your rubric. You may find it useful to refer to the teacher resource *Designing and Using a Rubric* found in the Appendix of this guide.
- **Standardized Tests:** Choose a standardized test with which you are familiar. On an overhead slide, make a list of some things students need to know and be able to do in order to do well on the test. Prepare to discuss ways you can integrate what students need within the context of your existing curriculum.

**Site Leader:** Divide the participants into groups of three to five, assigning each group one of the tasks listed here.

Give each group 10-12 minutes to discuss their topic and prepare their presentation. Use the remaining time for them to share and discuss.

# Between Sessions (On Your Own)

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## Homework Assignment

### Journal:

Respond to the following in your workshop journal:

- Make a list of the assessment instruments you typically use to track student progress. Choose one and analyze its usefulness to you and your students. What can it show you and them about their growth as learners? Are there ways you might revise it or rethink its use to make it even more effective?
- Make a list of the formal evaluation tools you typically use. Choose one and analyze what students need to know and be able to do in order to be successful. Evaluate how well the tool is tied to your existing curriculum and instruction and think about what you might wish to do to make it a more effective instrument.

### Reading:

In preparation for Workshop 8, read the introductory segment of “Strategies for Teaching” and “Closing Thoughts: Literature in School and Life” in Dr. Judith Langer’s *Envisioning Literature* from the Teachers College Press. Copyright 1995. ISBN 0-8077-3464-0.

In addition, you may wish to read the abstract of Judith Langer’s article “Excellence in English in Middle and High School: How Teachers’ Professional Lives Support Student Achievement” available online at <http://cela.albany.edu/publication/abstract/odds.htm>.

For additional online resources, go to [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature), select *Making Meaning in Literature: A Workshop for Teachers, Grades 6–8*, and look under Additional Reading for Workshop 8.

## Ongoing Activity

### Channel-Talk:

You are encouraged to participate in an email discussion list called Channel-Talk. Send comments and questions regarding the workshop to other participants around the country. Comments can also be viewed on the Web site. Go to [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature), select *Making Meaning in Literature: A Workshop for Teachers, Grades 6–8*, and click on Channel-Talk.

## Extension: Classroom Connection

### Teacher as a Reflective Practitioner:

Make a list of the tools you use to assess and/or evaluate students. Your list might include informal writing such as quick writes and literature logs; check sheets; quizzes and tests; formal, graded writing; presentations and performances; data from conferences; and portfolios. Chart your list items under the following categories: tool, what tool demonstrates about student learning, formal or informal assessment tool (or both).

As you review your chart, ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I successfully tracking student learning with these tools?
- Am I using a wide enough range of tools to allow students to fully demonstrate what they know and what they know how to do?
- Am I using an appropriate balance of formal and informal assessment methods?
- What might I do to improve the assessment/evaluation in my classroom?

# Between Sessions, cont'd.

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## Student Activities:

Try these activities with your students.

- Choose an activity—formal or informal—that your students do several times during the semester (e.g. read a novel, write a formal paper on an aspect of the reading, give a booktalk, etc.). As a class, discuss criteria that describe an excellent piece of work for that activity (work that would deserve an “A”), listing them on chart paper or on an overhead slide. Then talk about what an inadequate performance (a “D”) would look like, suggesting that a failing grade is reserved for no performance. Continue to work together until you have developed a rubric for evaluating that activity. Before students do the activity the next time, have them review the rubric. After they have completed their work, ask them to use the rubric for self-assessment, writing an explanation for the score they assign. You may wish to give them the option to revise their work to earn a higher mark.
- With student help, create a check list that you could use to assess the quality of group discussion. You may wish to include things such as “connects response to earlier comments,” “doesn’t interrupt,” “refers to passages in text to support a point.”
- To explore some materials used by teacher Joe Bernhart to assess and evaluate students, refer to the activity sheets *Be as Smart as an OWL*, *OWL Log*, and *Book Group Presentations* in the Appendix. To review an assortment of techniques related to student portfolios, refer to *Designing and Using Portfolios in Envisionment-Building Classrooms*.

## Additional Reading

Belanoff, Pat and Marcia Dickson, eds. *Portfolios: Process and Product*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1991. ISBN 0-86709-275-0.

Black, Laurel, Donald A. Daiker, Jeffrey Sommers, and Gail Stygall, eds. *New Directions in Portfolio Assessment: Reflective Practice, Critical Theory, and Large-Scale Scoring*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1994. ISBN 0-86709-338-2.

Calkins, Lucy, Kate Montgomery, and Donna Santman. *A Teacher’s Guide to Standardized Reading Tests: Knowledge Is Power*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998. ISBN 0-325-00000-X.

Claggett, Fran. *A Measure of Success: From Assignment to Assessment in English Language Arts*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996. ISBN 0-86709-373-0.

Courtney, Ann M. and Theresa L. Abodeeb. *Journey of Discovery: Building a Classroom Community Through Diagnostic-Reflective Portfolios*. Newark, DE, 2001. ISBN 0-87207-291-6.

Falk, Beverly. *The Heart of the Matter: Using Standards and Assessment To Learn*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000. ISBN 0-325-00280-0.

Graves, Donald H. and Bonnie S. Sunstein, eds. *Portfolio Portraits*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1992. ISBN 0-7725-1938-2.

Hansen, Jane. *When Learners Evaluate*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998. ISBN 0325-00094-8.

Herman, Joan L., Pamela R. Aschbacher, and Lynn Winters. *A Practical Guide to Alternative Assessment*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1992. ISBN 0-87120-197-6.

Hewitt, Geof. *A Portfolio Primer: Teaching, Collecting, and Assessing Student Writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994. ISBN 0-435-08834-3.

IRA/NCTE Joint Task Force on Assessment. *Standards for the Assessment of Reading and Writing*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1994. ISBN 0-8141-0213-1.

# Between Sessions, cont'd.

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Kent, Richard. *Room 109: The Promise of a Portfolio Classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997. ISBN 0-86709-429-X.

Langer, Judith. *Envisioning Literature*. Columbia University: Teachers College Press, 1995. ISBN 0-8077-3464-0.

Porter, Carol and Janell Cleland. *The Portfolio as a Learning Strategy*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994. ISBN 0-86709-348-X.

Power, Brenda Miller. *Taking Note: Improving Your Observational Notetaking*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 1996. ISBN 1-5711-0035-0.

Ryan, Concetta Doti. *Authentic Assessment*. Westminister, CA: Teacher Created Materials, 1994. ISBN 1-55734-838-3.

Strickland, Kathleen and James Strickland. *Reflections on Assessment: Its Purposes, Methods and Effects on Learning*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998. ISBN 0-86709-445-1.

Sunstein, Bonnie S. and Jonathan H. Lovell, eds. *The Portfolio Standard: How Students Can Show Us What They Know and Are Able To Do*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000. ISBN 0-325-00234-7.

*Professional journals about literature instruction:*

**ALAN Review:** The National Council of Teachers of English's Assembly on Literature for Adolescents produces a review of adolescent literature and literature instruction three times a year (fall, winter, and spring).

**CELA Newsletter:** The National Research Center on English Learning and Achievement, State University of New York, Albany, publishes a newsletter in the fall, winter, and spring. The newsletter addresses a wide range of issues concerning literacy. The newsletter can be accessed for free on their Web site at <http://cela.albany.edu>.

**The National Council of Teachers of English Journals:** NCTE publishes many subscription journals, including *The English Journal*, high school level, *Voices From the Middle*, middle school level, and *Language Arts*, elementary and middle school levels.

*Texts mentioned by teachers in this workshop program include:*

*The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* by Christopher Paul Curtis

*A Girl Called Boy* by Belinda Hurmence

*The Giver* by Lois Lowry

*Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen

*Holes* by Louis Sachar

For additional resources, go to [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature). Select *Making Meaning in Literature: A Workshop for Teachers, Grades 6–8*, Workshop 7, and Additional Reading.

# Notes

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