

In assessing children's writing, the goal is to uncover the child's knowledge about written language, which will guide the teacher in planning instruction for the child. Clay (1975, 1993) recommends that writing be evaluated in terms of the language the child uses, the concepts about the purposes of writing that are displayed, and the directional principles that are evident. In terms of language, the rater determines whether the child used letters, a word, a word group, a sentence, a punctuated story, or a paragraphed story. In trying to determine the child's concept about the functions of print, the rater determines if the child: conveys a message, copies a message, uses a sentence pattern repetitively, attempts to write a message, or produces a complete composition. In examining directional principles, the child is rated as exhibiting no evidence of directional knowledge, some knowledge of directional principles, correct use of directional principles, correct use of directional principles and spacing between words, or having no difficulties arranging text on a page.

For more experienced first-grade writers and most second-grade writers, we suggest that teachers examine samples of the child's writing on three dimensions—meaning, structure, and conventions. In meaning, we look for ideas, clarity, and relevance to form and the purposes of writing. In assessing structure, we look at organization, unity, and sequence. As we look at conventions, we focus on spelling, vocabulary, usage, and punctuation. Teachers can determine which system of assessment best meets the needs of their students. Each of the assessments suggested will provide the teacher with specific information about the child's developing skill as a writer and will guide instructional planning. For example, if the child is using capital letters at the beginning of sentences and periods at the end of the sentence, but not using the apostrophe of possession, you can help the child learn to use that mark. If the child is not aware of directional principles, you can model these principles while reading aloud and while demonstrating writing. If the child does not sequence the elements of his story properly, you could put the story on sentence strips which are then cut apart,

and ask the child to reorganize the sentences. Good assessment leads to good instruction that is useful to the learner.

## **Putting Research Into Practice: Strategies for Assessing and Evaluating Both Reading and Writing**

There are some assessment and evaluation strategies that apply equally well to both reading and writing. There is no point in discussing their applications in these two areas separately. Here we look at the power of reading and writing interviews and a developmental continuum in reading and writing.

### **Reading and Writing Interviews (Goals 4, 5, 6, 7, and 14 in Figure 13.1)**

Reading interviews are question-and-answer sessions conducted one-on-one between you and your students. The purpose of the interview is to learn how children view reading and to gain insight into their understanding of the reading process and how it operates. We suggest conducting these interviews as early in the school year as possible and with each child who comes new to your room during the year. Some teachers find it helpful to conduct reading interviews periodically throughout the year to track children's changing views as they learn more about reading and the reading process.

When interviewing children about reading, you may wish to ask some of the following questions:

What is reading?

What do you do when you read?

If you wanted to help someone be a better reader, how would you help that person?

For children who are beyond the emergent reader stage, you may wish to ask additional questions, such as:

What parts of the text you read were difficult for you?

What made them difficult?  
 When you come to a difficult part, what do you do?  
 When you don't understand what you are reading, what do you do?

Children's responses to questions like the above can give you valuable insight into what beginning readers know or anticipate reading to be, and what kinds of instruction developing readers may have previously experienced. For example, if a beginning reader responds to "What is reading?" by saying, "Reading is saying words," you will know that you need to work on helping that child appreciate reading as a meaning-making process as you read to children and as you do shared reading. If a child new to your second-grade room responds to the same questions with "Reading is sounding out words," you may suspect that he or she has had intensive phonics instruction but does not appreciate the role phonics plays in helping readers create meaning with text.

Interviewing children about the views of writing is easily done during writing conferences. Questions you may wish to ask about writing include:

What are you doing well as a writer?  
 What is something new you have learned to do as a writer?  
 What would you like to be able to do better as a writer?  
 When you have trouble with your writing, what do you do?  
 If you were going to help someone become a better writer, how would you do it? (Harp, 1996)

### **A Developmental Continuum (All Goals Listed in Figure 13.1)**

Learning to read and learning to write are both highly developmental processes. The use of a developmental continuum helps us maintain a developmental perspective and track the progress our learners are making.

Developmental continua specify indicators at various stages of development that guide our

assessment and evaluation of children's progress in reading and writing. Developmental continua are a resource to help us look at what children can do as readers and how they do it. In this way we are able to look at accomplishments and plan for instruction that carries children further along the path toward fluency. Some school systems have developed their own continua as part of curriculum frameworks. There are commercially available continua such as those in the Australian program, *Reading Developmental Continuum* and *Writing Developmental Continuum* (Education Department of Western Australia, 1997).

Space limitations preclude the inclusion of a developmental continuum in this chapter. However, we recommend that you consider the continuum presented in the IRA/NAEYC's 1998 joint position statement, "Learning to Read and Write." We recommend this particular continuum because for each phase, examples of what children can do are offered, as well as examples of what teachers can do and what parents and family members can do. This view of reading and writing instruction as a collaboration between learner, teacher, and family is also consistent with the recommendations of the NRC.

We recommend that you make copies of the continuum so that you have one per student. You can then develop a schedule that will allow you to carefully observe each of your learners as readers and writers for the purpose of placing them on the continuum. For example, at the beginning of the year, you should make judgments as quickly as possible (in the first 2 weeks) about each learner. As you observe a behavior, note the date on the continuum when you are confident that behavior is consistently exhibited. After you have placed each child on his or her continuum, create a schedule so that you deliberately reconsider each child in light of the continuum. If you have 24 students, you might identify which six that you will carefully attend to—in terms of the continuum—each week. That way, every 4 weeks you will have reviewed each child's placement on the continuum. Of course, whenever you see a "breakthrough," you will want to record it. The items on the continuum are not intended to be inclusive. You may find that you want to add

## AN IDEA FROM A TEACHER

### Portfolio Friday

It is important to me to be consistent in collecting samples of students' work for evaluation. To maintain an accurate view of improvement in writing and reading, I set aside time each week for assessment. Every Friday is Portfolio Friday. My students know that they will be assessed for learning during the course of the day, and that their work should be as neat and creative as always. The students first receive a creative writing assignment and work independently, both writing and illustrating their work. During this time, I call up children to make running records of their reading. When the children have finished working and I have completed the running records, they place their work in a writing portfolio and I place their running records in a separate folder for each of them. Then I read a passage from a book and ask comprehension questions. Children write their responses on a piece of paper that I collect. This paper goes into yet another folder for each child. This routine is consistent and well received. The children come to expect the portfolio performance challenge and enjoy reflecting on their improvement at the end of each marking period. At the same time, I am able to take these folders home and browse each weekend to identify where children are struggling in writing, reading, and comprehension, to target my instruction for the following week. The folders are also a wonderful resource for conferences throughout the year.

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items that fit your learners or that bring the continuum in line with your curriculum.

We have presented an array of assessment and evaluation tools useful for monitoring the reading and writing achievement of young children. The most important use of this information is, of course, in planning instruction that meets the individual needs of each learner. A second, highly important use of these data is in communicating with significant audiences.

### **Communicating with Parents, Administrators, and the Public in the Age of Accountability**

In the not too distant past, our methods of communicating children's progress in reading to parents, administrators, and the public were

archaic compared to the kind of information we can share using today's assessment and evaluation tools. Instead of reporting that Nathan is reading "at the primer level" or that Estelle is "reading at the 2.1 level," we can be very specific about how children are applying skills and strategies to maximize the use of the reading process. We can share children's perceptions of reading and writing from information gained through interviews, and we can report which of the cueing systems the child is using from annotations in running records. We can be very specific about the reading and writing behavior the child is exhibiting since our last report by using a developmental continuum. It is possible to confidently report a child's instructional reading level using the accuracy rate and retellings identified in running records.

Although you will use the information you collect on a daily basis to plan instruction, it is

<b>SUMMARY OF READING AND WRITING DEVELOPMENT</b>	
Name: _____	
Date: _____	
<i>Concepts About Print</i>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Orientation of book	<input type="checkbox"/> Reordered letters
<input type="checkbox"/> Print carries meaning	<input type="checkbox"/> Question mark
<input type="checkbox"/> Directional rules	<input type="checkbox"/> Punctuation
<input type="checkbox"/> First and last	<input type="checkbox"/> Rev. words
<input type="checkbox"/> Picture inversion	<input type="checkbox"/> Letter concept
<input type="checkbox"/> Print inversion	<input type="checkbox"/> Word concept
<input type="checkbox"/> Line sequence	<input type="checkbox"/> First, last letter
<input type="checkbox"/> Left before right	<input type="checkbox"/> Capital letter
<input type="checkbox"/> Letter order	
Impressions drawn from reading interview:	
Impressions drawn from writing interview:	
<i>Running Record</i>	
Accuracy rate: _____	
Error ratio: _____	
Self-correction rate: _____	
Current independent level: _____	
Current instructional level: _____	
Adequacy of retellings:	
Use of cueing systems:	
<i>Reading and Writing Developmental Continuum</i>	
Current phase: _____	
Key indicators of placement in phase:	
<i>Writing Development</i>	
Major strengths:	
Current goals:	

important to organize the data in such a way that it can be easily presented to parents and other audiences. Figure 13.4 shows an example of a summary sheet you might develop to organize the information you have collected across an array of assessment and evaluation strategies. We hope you will modify it in ways that make it especially useful to you and your learners, and we wish you the greatest success in coming to know your students as readers and writers!

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**Figure 13.4**