



Lecture Transcript

Session 7: Assessment

Dr. Jeanne R. Paratore: At the outset I want to say to you that we're going to differentiate what I would call large scale assessment from classroom assessment. In today's world, we're asked to engage in all types and forms of assessment. And lots of it is considered - "high stakes assessment." It's a phrase we hear a lot. Those types of tests tell us about trends in our classroom, trends in our school, trends in our districts. And that information is very unreliable in telling us about the individuals we teach.

Dr. Paratore: (VO/Interview) Most of the teachers in today's classrooms learned to assess through fairly formal instruments. And those are really important and valuable measures. But, in addition to those measures, good teachers assess children within the context of daily instructional routines.

Dr. Paratore: If I want to know what I should plan next week for Adrienne, if Adrienne's in my classroom, I have to pay attention to what Adrienne did on classroom activities. In making instructional decisions, I want to know how children are doing in response to what I'm teaching. Essentially I want to know, are children learning what I've taught? That's what will help me guide day-to-day instruction in my classroom. So, I'm looking for classroom assessment that utilizes multiple measures. And what does that mean?

Literacy is many things. So, I need assessments that tell me how children do at the word level; how they do at the comprehension level; how they acquire and use language. I also need to know how they perform in different contexts. I want to know how they do when they read grade level text; how they do when they read text that's been matched to their level; how they do when they read text that they choose on their own. I want to know how they do if they read with me, the teacher, in a small group, and I want to know how they do if they read with a friend, or on their own. When we say that effective instruction utilizes multiple measures, what we mean is that the assessments we use are both multiple in nature, word knowledge, comprehension, writing, and multiple in context. They look across different literacy tasks and contexts.

Now, to say that assessment is embedded in the instructional context, means that teachers don't set aside separate periods for assessment, because assessment happens as they're teaching. It's part of the very teaching act. Assessment is continuous when teachers continually gather information, day-to-day-to-day and week-to-week-to-week. Realistically, what you probably do is gather weekly data on the children about whom you have some

very serious questions. And maybe you gather monthly data, or bi-weekly data, on children who are less of a challenge to you. To say that assessment is consequential in future learning tasks, means simply this. To the extent that you gather assessment data, and file it in a folder for the purposes of reporting, you're not meeting this particular principle. Assessment is consequential when teachers use it to inform instruction. Assessment is consequential when what you learn from the assessment measures you use, changes or informs what you're going to teach. Anything less than that can only be termed evaluation. OK? Four very basic principles.

Now, let's come over this way for a minute and take a look at this empty semantic map.

Narrator: In filling out the semantic map, teachers consider the daily literacy routines that provide evidence of their students' word knowledge, fluency, language, comprehension, writing, and motivation and interest.

Dr. Paratore: What are your current assessment practices? What counts as evidence for you when you go about the process of trying to learn about children and their literacy abilities, and literacy behaviors? What counts as evidence of their word knowledge? What do you use right now? Lisa?

Lisa Wallace: The first thing that popped into my mind was running records.

Dr. Paratore: What does the running record tell you?

Lisa Wallace: Are they skipping words they don't know? Strategies that I can infer that they're using. Are they looking at the beginning sound of a word? Are they trying to make sense? Are they just inventing words?

Dr. Paratore: So it tells you about their word-reading strategies, and I think you also said it tells you about their ability to construct meaning. Great, who else? Adrienne, what do you consider evidence?

Adrienne Bradshaw: Well, if I look back into the cum. record, I might be able to find out some information about their word knowledge and their language; how much comprehension they have from a previous....

Dr. Paratore: For you, what counts as evidence is a prior record on any of these?

Adrienne Bradshaw: Exactly.

Dr. Paratore: All right, I agree that on entry to the second grade, you might very much want to look back at the first grade record. But, let's now make the assumption it's the second, or third, or fourth week of second grade. How do you determine the children are learning, or have learned, what you're teaching, or have taught?

Adrienne Bradshaw: Maybe I'll even speak with a colleague that they go to, a specialist teacher, and see how they're doing in that particular classroom, say

computer or art, or what have you. And we can talk back and forth, and see....

Dr. Paratore: OK, I'm just going to sort of call this general information. As opposed to these separate categories. And, you will consult....

Adrienne Bradshaw: ...the different teachers that they interact with, other than myself.

Dr. Paratore: ...resource teachers, if you will.

Adrienne Bradshaw: All right.

Dr. Paratore: Makes good sense. Go ahead, Kemp.

Kemp Harris: You could also gain evidence from having a teacher and student conference about their reading or about their writing, as you're about to have them work on an assignment.

Dr. Paratore: That could tell you about their writing....

Kemp Harris: Their comprehension, sure.

Dr. Paratore:...that could tell you about comprehension....

Kemp Harris: ...motivation, interest, I would imagine.

Dr. Paratore: Could tell you about motivation, interest....

Kemp Harris: I'm looking at fluency also, because I mean, in terms of if you pull that child over to have that individual... I want to listen to you read at this point. I'm considering that the conference. So, just sort of whenever you pull the child, individually, to read, to look at their writing, to discuss their assignment, whatever that is.

Dr. Paratore: So, I'm putting it everywhere, basically? OK. Go ahead, Jodi.

Jodi Wollner: If I am visiting with a first grader at the beginning of the year, and I want to find out more about their word knowledge, I may do a variety of things. I'm going to have them do some writing for me; I may have them....

Dr. Paratore: Writing to learn what?

Jodi Wollner: I may have them write words that they know how to spell. I may find out their knowledge of how words look and how you combine letters to put words together. I may also have them read a list of sight words. And then, based on that, I may do additional assessment. If I find that the child is reading, I may do a running record, or I may pull some more formal, but less formal than a standardized, measure. I use the reading inventory to gauge the level at which a reader is at.

Dr. Paratore: May I ask you a question? You're using this informal reading inventory for word knowledge and for anything else?

Jodi Wollner: I would be using it for comprehension as well. There are questions that are factual questions that are inferential questions, evaluative questions, and that would tell me if the child can understand more of the higher level thinking.

Dr. Paratore: Does anyone have strategies that they're using right now, that provide evidence of children's language? Go ahead, Meynardo.

Meynardo Gutierrez: I do use anecdotal records.

Dr. Paratore: Say more about that. What do you mean by anecdotal records?

Meynardo Gutierrez: Actually you keep jotting down everything that you observe. Because we know that assessment,... you're always assessing, no matter what you're doing.

Dr. Paratore: What are you writing about? What are you watching? You're watching....

Meynardo Gutierrez: Their behavior. How the child arrives at that kind of thinking. What is he showing at that moment? It could be in a different situation, if he's reading, then reading behavior. The conversation that he made with a classmate.

Dr. Paratore: OK, so observations of the child reading...

Meynardo Gutierrez: Uh huh...talking and work, in particular.

Dr. Paratore: OK. I'm going to scoot us on here to fluency. The only indication of fluency we have so far is in a teacher/student conference. How else do you observe children's fluency? Go ahead, Robin.

Robin Peterson: During shared reading times. If children have an opportunity to read in my classroom, that might be reading a sentence of the morning message, or helping to read the daily poem. But I know people do all different things. Can I sneak one into the general information gathering? Talking to parents,... I find always very helpful.

Dr. Paratore: OK, great. All right, I'm going to leave this open and hope that we'll return to it after each of our small group discussions today, and again at the end of the workshop. I want you to think about....

Dr. Paratore: (VO/Interview) What I observed was a tendency for teachers to speak in generalities about children's abilities. And about their assessment routines. And I think that's very common. And I also think that's very problematic, because, to the extent that we cannot articulate the types of evidence we use on a day-to-day basis, we will be bound by more formal assessments. And, the more formal assessment, generally, the less congruent it is with the child's day-to-day experiences. And the less congruent it is with the child's day-to-day experiences, often the less trust worthy it is as a measure of what the child really knows and does.