

including surveys, portfolios, observations, and conferences. These assessments are the primary focus of this chapter, so we turn our attention to classroom-focused, research-based practices that teachers should use to improve daily instruction.

Trying to identify which classroom-based literacy assessments are “best” in some absolute sense is a task fraught with perils, because the field of literacy has a huge array of classroom assessment methods and strategies that can be used either effectively or inappropriately. For example, we have informal reading inventories; running records; concepts about print tests; assessments for emergent literacy; tests for book-handling knowledge; miscue analysis; portfolios; conference guides; anecdotal records; guides for evaluating metacognitive awareness; holistic and analytic evaluations of writing; interview, attitude, and disposition surveys; retellings; basic skills tests; decoding skills tests; comprehension checklists; spelling checklists; vocabulary tests; student self-assessments of reading and writing; observational checklists for reading and writing; checklists and surveys for parents; literacy profiles; language records; developmental scales for emergent reading and writing; performance tasks, rubrics, and benchmarks for literacy; instruments for placing students in programs; instruments for taking students out of programs; and methods for teachers to evaluate the teaching of literacy.

And, of course, the general field of education has all kinds of performance-based assessments, standardized tests, diagnostic tests, norm-referenced tests, criterion-referenced tests, constructed response tests, psychoeducational batteries, achievement tests, minimum-competency tests, group tests, individual tests, graduation examinations, or college entrance examinations, all of which involve the assessment of literacy. Please note that we have not even mentioned issues such as report cards, computer-based assessments, assessments for special populations, or many of the other assessment-related topics. (Here is an interesting factoid: The National Center for Fair and Open Testing (www.fairtest.org) estimates that more than 100,000,000 standardized exams are administered in America’s public schools each year, including IQ, achievement, screening, and readiness tests. Clearly, one best practice would be to reduce the amount of testing that takes place, especially for young children!)

Because of the critical importance of achieving educational excellence for *all* students, it is worth asking what some of the best assessment strategies are for working with culturally and linguistically diverse students. In 1990, approximately one-third of school-age children in this country were considered to be at risk for academic failure, the majority of whom were non-native speakers of English (Scarcella, 1990). Garcia (1992) associates this failure with lack of literacy development in English for language-minority students. Although some gains in reading development

have been made by language-minority students, educators in the United States remain challenged by the low academic achievement of a great number of these students.

From the time that second language learners enter school, they score consistently and significantly lower than other minorities in reading and writing (Applebee, Langer, & Mullis, 1989). Disproportionate numbers of culturally and linguistically diverse students are placed in lower reading groups and special education programs in U.S. schools (Oakes, 1985). Once these students are placed on a slower track, they remain behind their peers in reading throughout their elementary school years (Barr, 1989; Goodlad, 1984). Other problems associated with the reading achievement or the literacy development of these students have been attributed to the organization and content of instruction in U.S. classrooms (Beck & McKeown, 1984; Langer, 1984; Purves, 1984). In attempting to explain the role that society and school plays in creating the disparities between the reading development of language-minority students and white European American students, Au (1993) emphatically states:

Schools function primarily to maintain the status quo, not to provide all students with high-quality education. The familiar old patterns of instruction that prevent students from diverse backgrounds from achieving high levels of literacy, such as assessment that devalues their home languages and instruction that violates the values of students' own cultures, result from the power dominant groups have to impose their values and standards upon subordinate groups. (p. 10)

Although many educators may not intend to discriminate against students whose cultural and linguistic backgrounds are different from their own, Spindler and Spindler (1990) document teachers' practices of unconsciously selecting those students who are from higher status, mainstream backgrounds (like their own) to succeed in academic areas. This selection process is often part of teachers' informal and formal ongoing assessments of the child's literacy development. This type of discrimination can be seen in the treatment of students who have weak English skills and who attend all-English classrooms. These children are often sent out of the classroom for remedial reading instruction or are placed in low reading groups that follow transmission models of instruction that focus on oral reading, isolate skills, and rote learning (Allington, 1991). These students, then, fail to progress well in developing reading and writing skills, and they often demonstrate negative attitudes toward school, and toward using literacy skills (Au, 1993).

Because our space is limited, we focus on a few assessment strategies that we find particularly helpful for students, teachers, and parents. These

strategies grow out of the national debates about excellence and equity, and the concerns surrounding the limitations of traditional, multiple-choice tests. A number of researchers have attempted to develop forms of assessment that are based on current models of learning, enhance and strengthen the curriculum, are easily understood by stakeholders, and produce valid results and positive educational consequences for all children. The class of approaches, loosely labeled “alternative assessments,” performance assessments, or authentic assessments, is the result of these efforts (U.S. Congress, 1992; Wiggins, 1989).

Alternative assessment is assessment that occurs continually in the context of a meaningful learning environment and reflects actual and worthwhile learning experiences that can be documented through observation, anecdotal records, journals, logs, work samples, conferences, portfolios, writing, discussions, experiments, presentations, exhibits, projects, performance events, and other methods. Alternative assessments may include individual as well as group tasks. Emphasis is placed on self-reflection, understanding, and growth rather than responses based only on recall of isolated facts. Alternative assessments are often called performance-based or authentic assessments, because they are intended to involve learners in tasks that require them to apply knowledge faced in real-world experiences rather than a test given after, and disconnected from, instruction. Alternative assessments are also intended to enhance teachers’ professional judgment rather than weaken it, and to provide teachers with systematic opportunities to engage in linguistically and culturally appropriate evaluation and instruction.

In the remainder of this chapter, we examine four recommended authentic assessment strategies for use in classrooms:

1. Contextual and cultural surveys
2. Observation strategies: literature discussions, anecdotal records, and developmental checklists
3. Portfolios
4. Student–teacher conferences

It is important to note from the beginning that these strategies are interrelated. Surveys will provide the importance context for the information contained in portfolios, gathered during observations of daily student work, and the conversations that take place between students and teachers. Portfolios will contain, among other things, evidence of the students’ performance in writing and reading, records of the teacher’s observations, and conferences with students. Portfolios, anecdotal records, and developmental checklists provide important starting points for conferences between teachers and students.

It is also important to note that our discussion of these strategies is only an introduction to what is available. The field of literacy has benefited from a long list of outstanding educators and researchers who have made, and are making, critical contributions to the field of assessment. Here are a few sources of assessment instruments and approaches that will provide you with a sample of what is available: Clay (1985); Darling-Hammond et al. (1995); De Fina (1992); Gambrell and Almasi (1996); Goodman, Goodman, and Hood (1989); Harp (1994, 1996); Hill and Ruptic (1994); Johnston (1991); Morrow and Smith (1990); Rhodes (1993); Rhodes and Shanklin (1993); Sharp (1989); Stiggins (1997); Tierney, Carter, and Desai (1991); and Valencia, Hiebert, and Afflerback (1994).

Contextual and Cultural Surveys

Constructive evaluations for all students, but particularly for diverse learners, require that teachers, students, and parents work together to improve the child's literacy learning. The learning environment, the tasks and processes students are expected to perform and master, and the culture of the learner's household must all be considered when assessing the literacy skills of these students (Crawford, 1993). In order to respond adequately to the literacy needs of diverse student populations, educators must begin developing a sound knowledge base about histories, contributions, and values of the cultural and linguistic groups that represent diverse students in our classrooms.

Furthermore, our literacy teaching must clearly reflect this knowledge, so that all students are able to see the value of their own experiences and to mobilize their "funds of knowledge" (Moll & Díaz, 1985) through a variety of forms of literacy. In other words, students should be able to read and write about familiar topics that they understand well. This enables these students to express themselves in a coherent manner and to use all of the specialized vocabulary they might already have. If students write about what they know, they can become increasingly sophisticated in their expressive forms. For example, they may write about their parents' occupations or family rituals (Moll, 1992). Helping students to build on this knowledge is crucial to developing students' self-confidence in communication skills.

Knowing who your students are and what your classroom setup (e.g., curriculum, assignments, and ways to interact) may mean for each one of them is often difficult to fully understand. People (particularly from different cultures) often understand or interpret language and communication in different ways. Cumulative folders from former teachers and standardized test scores may indicate some important information about the child's literacy learning, but they may not provide a full picture of

the child and his or her literacy development. In fact, it is possible that context may have greatly affected how the student performed on each of the assessment samples. The point is, context always matters, and we should be able to investigate, for ourselves, what context we are providing for the children's literacy learning in our classrooms.

The surveys illustrated in Figures 11.1 and 11.2 include a rich range of questions that teachers can use to better understand who the children in their classrooms are and how the outside world affects their literacy learning.

Classroom Interaction

A number of important studies were published in the 1980s about classroom discourse (what is talked about, who gets to talk, and when) and its role in teachers' assessment of minority students' literacy learning (e.g., Carrasco, 1984; Cazden, 1988; Heath, 1981; Michaels, 1981). These studies showed us that cultural and linguistic communication differences between teachers and students could have a positive or negative effect on how a teacher assesses and teaches a particular child during literacy instruction. These studies also suggested to us that teachers have the responsibility

1. What is the general socioeconomic and ethnic makeup of the community and school? Are there adequate resources (e.g., grocery stores, parks, banks, religious institutions, medical facilities) for the community to thrive?
2. What are some of the parents' occupations within the community? How are these related to students' funds of knowledge?
3. In general, how many years have most families lived within this community?
4. In general, what is the nature of the family structures of the children in your classroom? For example, are the children from single-parent homes, two-parent homes, multiple-family homes?
5. What is the primary language of the students at home and in the community? Do they speak the same or a different language with their brothers and sisters? (In many bilingual homes, the children often speak to siblings, who are at a third-grade level or higher, in English, while speaking to their parents in another language.)
6. What evidence of parental interest and support of the school do you see? What has been communicated to you about this? In general, what is the feeling about parents and their ability and willingness to participate in their child's education?
7. Try to observe the treatment of parents in the office of the school. How are parents talked to? Is the treatment fairly equal for most parents you observed? Are they treated as though they communicate well?
8. What is your attitude about the parents? How do you demonstrate this attitude to your students?

FIGURE 11.1. General community and classroom survey.

1. Describe, in general, the literacy levels of the students in your classroom?
2. How were reading levels determined? Were various forms and texts used for assessment? What was really measured by the assessment instrument, decoding or comprehension skills, or both?
3. Take a look at the materials being used in the classroom. What cultures are represented? Are there any books on the shelves or in reading book baskets that are "culturally familiar" to your students? How many? List the titles? Does each English language learner have books in the classroom collection that he or she can read?
4. Do you require students to write in daily journals? What other kinds of assignments require students to use their funds of knowledge?
5. Do students get a substantial silent-reading period? Do you model this procedure? What kinds of materials are used for silent reading?
6. What kind of grouping strategies do you use? Do second-language learners have the opportunity to practice speaking?
7. Is literature infused in most lessons? How do you do this?
8. Is there evidence of reading and writing for every subject, every day?
9. Do you use an integrated approach to the curriculum? For example, do your students use the science text during your reading/language arts block?
10. Do you regularly allow for "sharing time" to listen carefully to student voices and to allow them to process their thinking out loud or on paper? Do the children use examples of experiences from their home lives?
11. Are *all* students required to be "on-task" during lessons? Who is off-task and why? Who is not communicating or engaging in learning? How might the classroom structure or your beliefs and expectations be related to the students' lack of participation?

FIGURE 11.2. Literacy survey.

to understand their own communication expectations and those of their students (Au, 1993).

Figure 11.3 is an example of a self-observation guide that teachers can use to examine their own classroom interactions during a lesson. Teachers should also do their part to understand, accept, and build on their students' communication styles.

Surveying Home Literacy

Understanding how different families use and value literacy practices at home can greatly help us contribute to our understanding of such communities. We define literacy broadly; in other words, we see it as all of the forms of communication that have been modeled for the child at home. Literacy learning at home includes listening, speaking, reading, and writing in a particular sociocultural context. For example, if a child comes from a home where storytelling plays a major role in learning morals and values, then it is likely that he or she will be able to under-

FIGURE 11.3. Classroom interaction self-observation guide.

1. What is the procedure for calling on students? Do all get spoken to, and do all speak? How much?
2. Do you accept the contributions from all students? Is anyone left out or cut off?
3. What levels of talking are accepted? Who gets to talk? Who is asked to talk or read aloud?

To answer these questions, you will need to make a drawing of the classroom. Next, label each desk with "G" or "B" for "girl" or "boy" or label each desk with the child's name. During a teacher-directed lesson, put a dot on the space of each child who is talked to, asked a question, listened to, or responded to in any way by the teacher. Do this for at least a 30-minute period when the teacher is direct teaching. Take a tally, explain in detail the patterns you see. Who gets called on or talked to by the teacher? Who does not? Why?

CLASSROOM INTERACTION OBSERVATION

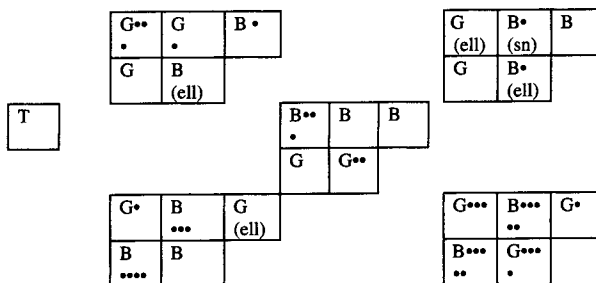
Materials needed: classroom map, video camera, or observer

Instructions:

1. Label each desk on the map with the student's name.
2. Label each student's desk with a "G" (girl) or "B" (boy).
3. Indicate differences/special needs/ethnicity of children with abbreviations—for example, sn (special needs), hi (hearing impaired), ell (English-language learner), asa (Asian American), etc.
4. Teach a 30- to 60-minute teacher-directed lesson and videotape it, making sure that the teacher and all the students can be seen throughout the lesson, or have someone else observe the lesson.
5. On the map, mark or have the observer mark the student's desk as the student speaks or is spoken to by the teacher.
6. Tally the number of marks for each student and analyze the patterns you see.
7. Commit to an action plan to improve classroom interactions.

SAMPLE CLASSROOM MAP AND TALLY SHEET

T—teacher; G—girl; B—boy; ell—English-language learner; sn—student with special needs



Girls: ### ## ## ## 15, Boys ### ## ## ## // 23

(continued)

FIGURE 11.3. *continued*Initial Patterns I See

- I called on students who sit on my right side; they are mostly my “high” kids.
- I mostly called on boys. I did a lot of behavior corrections; boys call out a lot.
- I only called on one English-language learner, one time.
- I asked yes/no, low-level questions of my “low kids.”
- I only praised girls for good, quiet behavior.

Plan of Action to Improve Classroom Interaction*Questions for Self-Reflection:*

1. What procedure do you use for calling on students? Do all students get spoken to, and do all get to speak? Who gets to? Who does not? Why?

Suggestion: Survey the students to ask how they feel about your system for calling on students.

2. Do you repeat all student’s contributions or just some? Is anyone left out?
3. What volume levels of talk do you accept? Do second-language learners have enough time to practice speaking?
4. Who is asked to talk or read aloud? Why?
5. Do you speak to one side of the room more often than the other?
6. How much “wait time” is given to students? Do some get more than others?
7. Are there differences in how you respond to girls as opposed to boys? Who is praised for behavior? Who is not?
8. Do you talk differently to students from particular ethnic groups? If so, how?

stand the main ideas of stories. Having the child use home stories to illustrate comprehension of stories would be another way to understand his or her comprehension skills.

Gender, age, and topics of discussion play a major role in how language is used in various situations including the classroom. Understanding the role(s) of the child may help the teacher to make better judgments about how to interpret the child’s literacy interactions in the classroom. Teachers can learn how to relate the contributions of the family to the child’s needs in school literacy learning (e.g., storytelling, humor, musical, etc.). Visiting the homes of all children in a classroom can prove to be extremely worthwhile for the teacher, the family, and the student. Making home visits with children from unfamiliar cultural groups may require that the teacher visit with a fellow teacher or friend, and make clear the intention of the visit (e.g., to learn about the family history and literacy practices to better serve the interests of their child).

Because cultural differences can have powerful effects on student achievement in literacy, it is useful to gather some systematic information about children and their families. The Home Literacy Survey presented in Figure 11.4 provides teachers with a useful and appropriate tool for gathering such information.

Contextual surveys are invaluable for learning more about how the outside world influences your students' literacy behaviors. Now, we turn our attention to ways that you can focus your observations even more precisely on the ways students read and write.

Observation Strategies: Literature Discussions, Anecdotal Records, and Developmental Checklists

Most of the information that teachers gather about their students comes from observation. Yetta Goodman (1978) coined the term “kid watcher,” and it is clear that good teachers are constantly watching their kids. Kid watching can take many forms, from informal observation on the play-

Inquire about the family and child's demographic/historical information. For example, if appropriate, learn about the following topics:

- The number of household members
- The occupations of the household members
- Number of years in this country (for newer immigrants)
- What brought them here
- Ethnicity of family members
- Languages that are spoken and by whom
- Language the child speaks and to whom—since birth and today
- How the child learned to communicate (stories, songs, rhymes, etc.) and in what language
- Formal education of grandparents, parents, siblings, and child
- Perception of the role of school in the household
- Family's view of the child's current school
- How the family communicates (talking, storytelling, writing notes, etc.)
- Who in the household reads and writes
- The role of talking
- The child's history of literacy learning (when the child started to speak, when it is appropriate for children in the family to speak)
- The role of gender as related to literacy use in the family
- Who helps the child with schoolwork
- What resources (books, games, etc.) are available in the home
- The appropriate titles, names, of people in the home

FIGURE 11.4. Home literacy survey.

ground to systematic keeping of anecdotal records, to more structured observations using checklists. In this section, we examine how teachers can use anecdotal records and developmental checklists to assess students' growth in literacy.

The use of observation as a means of assessment has a number of advantages. For example, anecdotal records, developmental checklists, and other forms of observation

- Provide teachers with a way of assessing how students interact with a complex environment, both in and out of classroom.
- Provide teachers with an efficient method of assessing students in many different situations over longer periods of time, thus increasing the reliability of the assessment data.
- Focus the teacher's attention on what the student can do rather than on what the student has yet to learn.
- Provide a relatively stress-free form of evaluation for students, especially those students who become anxious when they take standardized tests.

Literature Discussions with a Focus on Student Reading Processes

1. Have students read a short story or a chapter from a trade book written in English and underline the parts of the story that they did not understand.

2. When the students finish reading the selection, they retell the story in writing. This activity allows them to formulate their thoughts before participating in the group discussion. They are reminded to write everything they can remember about the story (before and during this activity, there is no discussion).

3. Once all retellings are turned in, discussion about the story takes place. Ask students to tell what they noticed about the story, how the story made them feel, what the story reminded them of in their own lives, and how difficult was it for them to understand the text. Probe further to get them to elaborate on their thoughts and on the parts of the story that they underlined when they initially read the text. Encourage them to use examples from the text to explain what they mean.

4. After each discussion about the story takes place, a related topic associated with reading should be discussed. During these discussions, students often refer back to the texts they read together in the past to clarify their explanations. Using open-ended questions, such as, "What do good readers do when they read stories?" Probe for more discussion on the following general topics:

- Good readers versus poor readers
- Student and family reading practices
- Understanding some stories versus other stories
- Silent reading versus reading aloud
- Personal choices in reading selections
- Use of voice in stories (e.g., first person)
- Unknown vocabulary (strategies used)
- Pronunciation in English
- The kind of “talk” used in books
- Influence of bilingualism on students’ English reading

Anecdotal Records

Anecdotal records are informal observations about what students are learning, how they are responding to instruction, or any other student behaviors, actions, or reactions that might provide teachers with some insight. The best time to take anecdotal records is while observing the students, and it is often helpful to focus on the following questions:

- What can this child do?
- What does this child know?
- How does this child read, write, work on projects, work with others, or deal with other important aspects of the school curriculum?
- What kinds of questions does the child have about his or her work?
- What does the child’s attitude reveal about his or her growth and progress?

In addition, anecdotal records often include teacher comments and questions that are particularly useful in helping teachers become more reflective about their teaching. Experienced teachers record their observations of a student over time and then analyze their anecdotal records for patterns of what the student knows and can do. This information is then used to plan appropriate instruction.

Occasionally, some teachers find anecdotal records a bit overwhelming and difficult to keep. In our experience, this happens when teachers are making anecdotal records more complex than they need to be. The purpose of anecdotal records is to provide teachers with a tool for sharpening their professional judgments. Fowler and McCallum (1998) suggest using a focused approach to anecdotal records:

- Select a focus for your anecdotal record keeping. In reading, for example, the focus may be on fluency, comprehension, response,

or interests. In writing, the focus may be on voice, organization, or mechanics.

- Develop a simple form that includes space for the date of the observation, the names of the students being observed, and the focus of the observation.
- Observe the students you are most concerned about, and take notes about what you see in terms of the focus area.
- Use the anecdotal records, along with any other evidence you have gathered, to plan instruction. As you work with the students, continue to observe how they perform and grow in the areas you identified.

Fowler and McCallum (1998) suggest a simple anecdotal record (see Figure 11.5) for keeping track of anecdotal records for individual students.

Developmental Checklists

Checklists are a common and useful way to evaluate students' growth in literacy. A major reason for their appeal is that they can be used in a wide variety of instructional contexts. Teachers interested in looking at examples of checklists will find lots of good ideas in the literature on assessment (e.g., Clay, 1985; Goodman et al., 1989; Harp, 1994, 1996; Kemp, 1989; Routman, 1988, 1991; Sharp, 1989).

Individual Anecdotal Record

Name _____

Date	Reading	Writing	Oral Language

FIGURE 11.5. Fairfax County Public Schools' individual anecdotal record. Reprinted with permission of Fairfax County Public Schools.

Figures 11.6–11.8 are checklists for observing student’s use of reading strategies before, during, and after reading. Figure 11.6 comes from some of our earlier work, whereas Figures 11.7 and 11.8 are from Fowler and McCallum (1998).

Reading Strategies Assessment

Name _____ Date _____

Directions: As you observe each student, place a check mark beside each behavior in the appropriate column: Most of the Time, Working On, or Not Yet. You may wish to note the circumstances or activity in which observation occurred, write in additional criteria or notes about the evaluation, and write ideas for next instructional steps.

Circumstances or Activity				
Behavior	Most of the Time	Working On	Not Yet	Notes/Next Steps
THINK AHEAD				
Previews the reading text				
Recalls prior knowledge				
Sets purposes for reading				
Understands different ways of reading				
THINK WHILE READING				
Checks and clarifies comprehension				
Understands different kinds of meaning				
THINK BACK				
Reviews comprehension				
Applies different kinds of reading				
Additional Criteria:				

FIGURE 11.6. Checklist for evaluating the use of reading strategies before, during, and after reading.