

Workshop 8

Reacting to Students' Work

"Success looks different to me with each student. For some students, just being able to talk about a book at all is a plus. And then other students are able to come up with questions that go beyond the book. They are able to talk about meanings, about interpretations...and that's success."

*—Latosha Rowley, Fourth- and Fifth-Grade Teacher,
Indianapolis Public Schools Center for Inquiry, Indianapolis, Indiana*

Introduction

Identifying appropriate and useful assessment tools is a complicated task in any classroom. In envisionment-building classrooms, finding relevant means of assessment becomes even more complex. How do teachers fully assess students' understandings of literary texts or students' abilities to participate in discussions about those texts? How do they judge the richness of student thinking? Clearly many quantifiable paper and pencil tools—true/false or multiple-choice tests, for example—provide inadequate representations of the intricate and nuanced web of knowledge and skills that students bring to literary discussion. Out of necessity, teachers devise other means of representing student progress and identifying directions for further instruction.

Focused as much on students' developing understandings and interpretations of texts as on their understanding of any single text, teachers in envisionment-building classrooms rely heavily on ongoing means of recording student progress. Habitual note-taking focusing on developments in student performance, areas of difficulty, and ideas for later discussion; checklists; anecdotal records; informal conferences; and portfolio collections of student work all contribute to building a richly refined portrait of each student's abilities as a reader of literature. By and large, the activities commonly a part of envisionment-building classrooms and instruction help students perform well on state standardized tests with only a modicum of explicit test preparation.

Additionally, in this video you will listen as the workshop teachers describe ways in which they have developed procedures that involve students and parents in their assessment processes. Appreciating the power of authentic assessment and valuing their own on-going professional development, several of these teachers reverse conventional patterns and ask students for feedback on their teaching as well.

Key Points

Informal Assessment:

- Informal note-taking capturing developments in student performance is a useful assessment tool in envisionment-building classrooms.
- Informal individual conferences provide teachers with an opportunity to assess student understandings and abilities as well as an occasion to offer one-on-one support and coaching as needed.
- Teachers in envisionment-building classrooms sample student behaviors when students are in the processes of reading, thinking, writing, and talking about literature to provide authentic assessments.
- Authentic assessments guide teachers' on-going instruction because they reveal areas where individual students or groups of students need additional coaching and encouragement.
- Sharing observations of what individual students or groups are doing effectively helps other students develop as well.

Formal Assessment:

- Recording on-going observations of student performance and comparing them with earlier observations gives teachers a sense of students' developing abilities.
- Teachers connect assessment tools to their explicit instruction. If they have been helping students learn to make connections, inferences, and predictions as well as ask questions, those are the behaviors they look for while observing students discussing literature.
- Writing—both informal responses and formally crafted pieces—provides additional assessment opportunities.
- Assessment rubrics give students a clear idea of what they need to know and do to succeed.
- Explicit discussion of assessment standards and guidelines helps both students and parents know what is expected while helping develop students' intrinsic motivation.
- Many teachers are learning to understand assessment as a partnership between student and teacher designed to support the growth of the learner.
- Teachers can help students prepare for state-mandated high-stakes assessment tests by helping them understand how the test works, what it evaluates, and what it expects in terms of successful responses; they can then apply what they have been learning every day to the demands unique to the testing situation.

Self-Assessment:

- Offering students opportunities for self-assessment supports their learning as well.
- Honest self-assessment, although difficult, helps teachers grow as professionals. Some keep a daily teaching journal; others make notes of classroom successes (and failures). Others ask students for feedback on what is or is not working, using that feedback to guide their development.

Learning Objectives

After participating in this session, you will be able to:

- Understand a range of authentic assessment tools appropriate for envisionment-building instruction, and integrate those you find useful into your assessment procedures.
- Consider ways to involve parents and students in assessment processes.
- Use self-assessment strategies to support your professional growth.

Background Reading

In preparation for Workshop 8, read "Strategies for Teaching" in Dr. Judith Langer's *Envisioning Literature* from the Teachers College Press, 1995.

For additional online resources, visit the *Envisioning Literature* Web site at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature, select *Engaging With Literature: A Workshop for Teachers, Grades 3–5*, and look under Additional Reading for Workshop 8.

Workshop Session (On-Site)

Getting Ready (30 minutes)

In this video, you will see the workshop teachers share the various ways in which they handle assessment in their classrooms. Much of what they do is on-going informal assessment in which they gather information about how their students are learning to think about and discuss literature. Like teachers everywhere, they also are responsible for framing formal evaluations of each student as well as preparing students for state-mandated tests and they discuss how they respond to those obligations. As you watch, think about the assessment tools you commonly employ. Would any of these be useful additions to your repertoire?

Site Leader: Use the questions below to spark discussion before viewing the workshop program. Participants may write answers to the questions in their workshop journals, as time permits. You may use all of the questions or select only a few. If you have Internet access, display the companion Web site to this workshop at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature, making participants aware of online resources and interactive opportunities.

Discuss:

Discuss the following questions:

- What assessment tools do you use to develop a picture of how your students read and think about literature?
- How do you use the results of your assessments to inform instruction?
- Have you ever involved students in the process of assessment? If so, in what ways and with what results?

Reflect in Workshop Journals:

Respond to the following in your workshop journal:

- In my classroom, assessment is...

Watch the Workshop Video (60 minutes)

Watch and Discuss:

Pause at the title card "Assessing the Discussion."

- How can you tell that students are developing as literary readers and thinkers?
- What key strategies do you teach students to help them grow as literary thinkers?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

Pause at the title card "Assessing Writing."

- How do you assess the effectiveness of literary discussion groups?
- How do you help discussion groups become more effective?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

Site Leader: If you are watching on videocassette, you may pause at the segments indicated below 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 below to discuss, as time permits and according to the interests of your participants.

Workshop Session (On-Site), cont'd.

Pause at the title card "Grading and Evaluating."

- In what ways do you use writing as a formal or informal assessment tool?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

Pause at the title card "Student Self-Evaluation and Parent Participation."

- How do you go about preparing formal grades or evaluations for your students?
- How do you determine what to value as you prepare formal assessments for students?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

Pause at the title card "High-Stakes Tests."

- How do you involve students in self-evaluation in your class?
- What responsibilities do students assume for their own learning in your class?
- How do you communicate to parents what students need to accomplish in your class?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

View program until the end.

- How do you help students prepare for standardized tests?
- How do you assess yourself as a teacher? Are there additional strategies you might be comfortable trying?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

Going Further (30 minutes)

Discuss:

In groups, brainstorm a list of effective assessment tools used in your classrooms. When you have a list of at least six, discuss them, focusing on when you employ each, and what makes it particularly effective. Each group should choose one or two tools to share with all participants.

Between Sessions (On Your Own)

Homework Assignment

Journal:

Respond to the following in your workshop journal:

- What are your feelings about formally assessing students? About giving grades? How do you try to ensure that your grading system fairly and adequately reflects student learning and performance?

Reading:

In preparation for Workshop 9, read “Closing Thoughts: Literature in School and Life” in Dr. Judith Langer’s *Envisioning Literature* from the Teachers College Press, 1995.

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, select *Engaging With Literature: A Workshop for Teachers, Grades 3–5*, and click on Channel-Talk.

Extension: Classroom Connection

Student Activities:

Try these activities with your students:

- Experiment with some of the Suggested Ongoing Assessment Tools listed in the Appendix.
- Consider asking students to assess themselves using tools such as BJ Namba’s Book Club Discussion Self-Assessment or her Discussion Group Self-Assessment. Both are found in the Appendix to the *Envisioning Literature* library guide. You can find this guide on the *Envisioning Literature* Web site.
- Develop a rubric for helping students assess their work. You may wish to use BJ Namba’s Journal Response Rubric found in the Appendix to the *Envisioning Literature* library guide as a starting point.
- At the end of a lesson, a day, or a week, ask students to write you a note telling you what you did during that time period that was particularly helpful to them as learners.

Teacher as a Reflective Practitioner:

What are your strengths in assessing your students? How would you like to improve your assessment skills? If you are not already in the habit of self-assessment, think about making one or more assessment strategies part of your professional practice. You may find Self-Assessment Strategies for Teachers included in the Appendix a useful starting point.

Additional Reading

- Belanoff, Pat and Marcia Dickson, eds. *Portfolios: Process and Product*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1991.
- 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.
- Calkins, Lucy, Kate Montgomery, and Donna Santman. *A Teacher's Guide to Standardized Reading Tests: Knowledge Is Power*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998.
- Claggett, Fran. *A Measure of Success: From Assignment to Assessment in English Language Arts*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996.
- Courtney, Ann M. and Theresa L. Abodeeb. *Journey of Discovery: Building a Classroom Community Through Diagnostic-Reflective Portfolios*. Newark, DE, 2001.
- Drummond, Mary Jane. *Learning To See: Assessment Through Observation*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 1994.
- Falk, Beverly. *The Heart of the Matter: Using Standards and Assessment To Learn*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000.
- Fehring, Heather, ed. *Literacy Assessment: A Collection of Articles From the Australian Literacy Educators' Association*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2003.
- Grant, Janet Miller, Barbara Heffler, and Kadri Mereweather. *Student-Led Conferences: Using Portfolios To Share Learning With Parents*. Markham, ONT: Pembroke, 2000.
- Graves, Donald H. and Bonnie S. Sunstein, eds. *Portfolio Portraits*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1992.
- Hansen, Jane. *When Learners Evaluate*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998.
- Herman, Joan L., Pamela R. Aschbacher, and Lynn Winters. *A Practical Guide to Alternative Assessment*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1992.
- Hewitt, Geof. *A Portfolio Primer: Teaching, Collecting, and Assessing Student Writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994.
- Hill, Bonnie Campbell and Cynthia A. Ruptic. *Practical Aspects of Authentic Assessment*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gorden, 1994.
- Hill, Bonnie Campbell, Cynthia A. Ruptic and Lisa Norwick. *Classroom Based Assessment*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gorden, 1998.
- IRA/NCTE Joint Task Force on Assessment. *Standards for the Assessment of Reading and Writing*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1994.
- Kent, Richard. *Room 109: The Promise of a Portfolio Classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997.
- Porter, Carol and Janell Cleland. *The Portfolio as a Learning Strategy*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994.
- Power, Brenda Miller. *Taking Note: Improving Your Observational Notetaking*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 1996.
- Ryan, Concetta Doti. *Authentic Assessment*. Westminster, CA: Teacher Created Materials, 1994.
- Stephens, Diane and Jennifer Story, eds. *Assessment as Inquiry: Learning the Hypothesis-Test Process*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999.
- Strickland, Kathleen and James Strickland. *Reflections on Assessment: Its Purposes, Methods and Effects on Learning*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998.
- 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.
- Wong-Kam, JoAnn, Alice K. Kimura, Anna Y. Sumida, Joyce Ahuna-Ka'ai'ai, and Mikilani Hayes Maeshiro. *Elevating Expectations: A New Take on Accountability, Achievement, and Evaluation*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001.

Additional Reading, cont'd.

Professional journals about literature instruction:

CELA Newsletter: The National Research Center on English Learning & Achievement, State University of New York, Albany, publishes a newsletter in the fall, winter, and spring addressing a wide range of issues concerning literacy.

The National Council of Teachers of English Journals: NCTE publishes many subscription journals including *Language Arts* for the elementary school level.

The Reading Teacher from the International Reading Association typically includes excellent articles about literature instruction as well as regular reviews of new children's literature titles.

Texts mentioned by teachers in this workshop program:

Souder by William Howard Armstrong
Because of Winn-Dixie by Kate DiCamillo
The Breadwinner by Deborah Ellis
The Color of My Words by Lynn Joseph
You Are Special by Max Lucado
Mick Harte Was Here by Barbara Park
The Great Gilly Hopkins by Katherine Paterson
Dangerous Skies by Suzanne Fisher Staples
War and Peace by Leo Tolstoy

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Notes
