

Reading Assessment

ARTFUL TEACHERS, SUCCESSFUL STUDENTS



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Principles
in Practice

LITERACY ASSESSMENT

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Classroom Portraits of Artful Teachers

As a teacher educator, I have long believed that preservice teachers would benefit if the first thing we helped them learn was how to get to know one child. Every time I have that thought, I am reminded of a 1984 column, “To Beth’s First-Grade Teacher,” that Dick Abrahamson wrote for the *Houston Chronicle*. In the current era, the column may seem dated, but his point holds across time and audience. Writing about how he felt as he and another father walked their daughters to their first-grade classroom, Dick stated that he “didn’t know the man in front of me that morning. But I did notice that we both walked a little straighter, a little more proudly, as our daughters held our hands” (p. 15). After leaving their daughters, Dick Abrahamson wrote an open letter to his daughter’s teacher:

There were so many things we wanted to tell you, Teacher. Too many things were left unsaid. So I’m writing to tell you the things we didn’t have time for that first morning.

I hope you noticed Beth’s dress. She looked beautiful in it. Now I know you might think that’s a father’s prejudice, but she thinks she looks beautiful in it, and that’s what’s really important. . . . I wonder if you noticed. Just a word from you would make that dress all the more wondrous.

Her shoes tell you a lot about Beth and a lot about her family. At least they are worth a minute of your time . . . solid, well-made shoes, not too stylish, you know the kind. What you don't know is how we argued about getting the kind of shoes she said all the girls would be getting. . . . In the end, she tried the solid blue ones and, with a smile, said she always did like strap shoes. That's the first born, eager to please. She's like the shoes—solid and reliable. How she'd love it if you would mention those straps.

I hope you will quickly notice that Beth is shy. She'll talk her head off when she gets to know you, but you'll have to make the first move. Don't mistake her quietness for a lack of intelligence. . . .

Did you know that Beth and her friends played school all summer in preparation for their first day? . . . Her play this summer was filled with positive reinforcement and the quiet voice of a reassuring teacher. I hope that her fantasy world will be translated into reality in your classroom. . . .

I did want to tell you about the night before that first day. . . . [After tucking her in], I gave her a kiss and started to walk out of the room. She called me back in and asked me if I knew that God wrote letters to people and put them in their minds.

I told her I never had heard that but I asked if she had received a letter. She had. She said that the letter told her that her first day of school was going to be one of the best days of her life. I wiped away a tear as I thought: Please let it be so. . . .

Well, Beth's first grade teacher, I think you're so lucky to have her as a student. We're all counting on you. Every one of us who left our children and our dreams with you that day. As you take our youngsters by the hand, stand a little taller and walk a little prouder. Being a teacher carries with it an awesome responsibility. (p. 15)

If preservice teachers saw each child the way Dick Abrahamson saw his daughter, they could approach the rest of their education classes knowing they were going to be responsible for supporting the learning of many wonderful, unique “childs.” I would hope too that all inservice teachers take the time to really *see* each of the childs in their classroom. By emphasizing our responsibility to individuals—to *childs*—rather than to groups of children, we could fundamentally alter education in this country.

For classroom teachers, however, it is challenging to develop systems for getting to know every child. First, unlike the reading interventionists, they may be dealing with twenty or more children at any given time. Second, they do not have the luxury of daily small-group meetings with all of the students in their care. Third, they are responsible for multiple subject areas. Despite these challenges, many teachers have figured out how to teach a room full of unique “childs.”

The eight teachers featured in this chapter have developed systematic ways to pay attention to each child—to get to know each and every one, both in and out of school—to know their families, their interests, their hopes, and their dreams. By assessing children in this way and then marrying assessment to instruction,

these teachers are changing futures. In all of these classrooms, effective instruction begins with effective assessment.

The following portraits provide a close look at the tools teachers use to assess and document student growth and the subsequent instructional moves they make to ensure progress. In classrooms like these, more than 80 percent of students end the year reading on grade level and are therefore able to achieve the standards set for their grade. The teachers who help them do so are not only teachers of children. By example, they teach us all.

Preschool through Kindergarten

In early childhood classrooms, teachers are able to help children develop generative theories long before the children make conventional use of print. They accomplish this by reading to children and giving them time to read independently. They also provide students with time to write. All of these experiences provide children with the opportunity to learn that print is meaningful and pleasurable. Because they feel this way about print, they choose to read. If they did not see themselves as readers and writers before entering these classrooms, they become readers and writers in these classrooms—at ages three, four, and five. As part of getting to know each child as a reader, a move that for us is synonymous with assessment, teachers of young children talk to them, observe them closely, and create systems for keeping track of their growth.

Done well, this kind of assessment looks simple. It is, however, an art—one that is driven by a passion to know and support every child. The following three portraits detail this artfulness and illustrate how these teachers learn about their students. In the first portrait, Professor Julia López-Robertson and teacher Tammy Spann Frierson explain how Tammy learns about her preschool students through talk and story. In the second, classroom teacher Hope Reardon (writing in the first person, with Professors Diane DeFord and Lucy Spence) explains how she uses extensive informal and formal assessment in her kindergarten class for four-year-olds. In the final portrait, Professor Tasha Tropp Laman shows how classroom teacher Louise Ward uses observation and conversation to help her five-year-old kindergartners learn to read and write through writing.

Portrait 1: Tammy Yvonne Spann Frierson, Preschool Teacher

Julia López-Robertson with Tammy Yvonne Spann Frierson

Tammy and the Sensations: Assessing through Talking about Stories—A Preschool Approach

Background and Context



Tammy Spann Frierson has been a preschool through kindergarten teacher for sixteen years and has been at Spears Creek Road Montessori School in Columbia, South Carolina, for the past thirteen years. Located in a suburban area about twelve miles northeast of downtown Columbia, Spears Creek is part of Richland School District Two, the largest school district in the greater Columbia area. It serves about 25,000 students and is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. One hundred children attend the school, divided equally among the five multiage classrooms. The program for three- and four-year-olds is tuition based and the kindergarten is state funded. South Carolina ABC childcare assistance vouchers are also accepted for qualifying three- and four-year-old children.¹

Tammy refers to the children in her classroom as “the Sensations—a beautiful eclectic group of nine boys and eleven girls who thirst for learning new things.” The children range in age from three to five years old; eight of the children are kindergartners, five are four years old, and seven are three years old. Of the twenty children in the classroom, three are Latino, two are biracial (one is African American and Latina; the other is African American and European American), three are from India, seven are African American, and five are European American. The languages represented are English, Spanish, and Tamil. Whereas the diversity found in this classroom is representative of the population of South Carolina, it is unusual for diversity to be so well exemplified in one school.

Tammy knows that, in the United States, learning and schooling privilege some groups over others (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 1999); therefore, she strives to make learning exciting and relevant for all her students. Because she believes that family is the child’s first teacher and that a child’s culture must be made part of the classroom, she invites families into the classroom to share their language, stories, and cultures. Families take advantage of Tammy’s invitation and spend time in the classroom teaching about different cultures and languages.

Tammy not only learns about her children by talking with them, listening to them, and observing them, but she also learns about them through their families. Tammy’s assessment tools are consistent with Standard 9 of *Standards for the Assessment of Reading and Writing* (SARW; IRA–NCTE Joint Task Force on Assessment (2010), which states that “assessment must be based in the local school learning community, including active and essential participation of families and community members” (p. 26). Tammy’s ideas are supported by several researchers who urge teachers to use authentic assessment so they can learn about what children truly know (Owocki & Goodman, 2002; Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982).

Learning with the Sensations

The heart of Tammy’s classroom is a spacious multicolored carpet in the center of the room. The large blue section in the middle of the carpet is called “the ocean” and surrounding it are colored squares. Each child has his or her own spot on the squares; the ocean is reserved for Tammy and for group activities. The children know who all the squares belong to and they monitor this carefully. From their spots on the carpet, the children face the large whiteboard and the Smart Board, which are located at the front of the classroom. There is a chair next to the whiteboard where Tammy sometimes sits during whole-group instruction, although most days she can be found on the carpet with the children, figuring out mathematics problems, talking about current events, engaging in their unit of study, or telling stories. Next to the chair is a mini-sofa where the children sit when they

bring in items for show-and-tell and read aloud to the class. Around the edges of the classroom are a computer area with three computers; an area for math exploration, full of math manipulatives and various types of puzzles; and a science area, anchored by a large fish tank. The children spend thirty to forty-five minutes a day working in these centers. The children gather at three round tables for writing or guided reading groups with Tammy or with the classroom aide, Mrs. Robinson. Mrs. Robinson and Tammy have been together for fourteen years and have their teaching routines down; they work completely in sync.

Tammy works with different groups of children at various times during the day. She groups them by age—threes, fours, and kindergartners. She also works with individual children throughout the day. She feels that grouping them by age allows her to focus on teaching the standards for that particular age group. She is especially concerned that the kindergartners leave her class well prepared: “I don’t ever want any of my kids to feel unprepared when they enter first grade.”

All of the children meet with Tammy and/or Mrs. Robinson daily for reading instruction; lesson length and format depend on the age of the children. The five-year-olds, for example, spend about twenty to twenty-five minutes in small reading groups, and they spend time individually with Tammy if they need more support with particular strategies.

During one-on-one time, Tammy focuses on getting to know the children as individuals—learning their interests, their family stories, and “what makes them tick.” This, she says, provides her with ideas about units of study and helps her plan instruction to meet individual needs. In addition to the designated spaces already described, the classroom contains several areas for writing as well as bookshelves filled with a variety of children’s literature. The children access books throughout the day and also have twenty minutes of free choice reading after lunch and recess; during this time, they read books from home or the classroom bookshelves. While the threes and fours take their afternoon nap, the kindergartners read alone or with a friend.

The day always begins as a whole group, with the children gathering at their spots on the carpet. The opening routine includes a variety of literacy-related activities. On the whiteboard is a list titled “Today’s Lunch” with two columns that read “school lunch” and “lunch box.” To the left of the list are dolls that represent each of the children. The felt dolls were created by the children; they bear each child’s name. When the children come together in the morning, Tammy asks them, “What are you having for lunch today?” Each child walks up to the whiteboard when called, selects his or her doll, and places it under the appropriate heading: school lunch or lunch box. This informal assessment is part of the daily routine. The children must be able to recognize their name on the doll and be able to distinguish the difference between the words *school lunch* and *lunch box*. After

the lunch count, Tammy usually reads aloud from a book related to the unit of study. She follows this by discussing the book and singing songs, which are written on chart paper. For example, one day when the class was studying life in the sea, Tammy read *Mister Seahorse* (Carle, 2004), followed by singing the song “Down by the Bay” (Raffi, 1987). This opening routine lasts between thirty and forty-five minutes. Afterward, Tammy tells the children what they will be doing next. They spend the following hour or so in small-group activities geared to their age group. On a particular day, Tammy might explain to the group, “I need my threes on the carpet for a math lesson, my fours up on the platform for writing, and my fives at the reading table.”

Tammy has an engaging and calming manner with children; she is gentle but firm and knows each of the children well. She uses her knowledge of children to shape the curriculum. For instance, in the fall, while the other classrooms were focused on apples, pumpkins, and harvest, her students were particularly interested in birds. Instead of focusing on what the rest of the school was studying, Tammy followed the children’s lead and started a month-long study of birds. Tammy wove assessment into this study and used it to guide instruction. One morning, when the children were all gathered around the carpet attentively listening and quietly focused as Tammy read *Amazing Birds* (Kindersley, 1990), she stopped reading and asked the children to remain silent for a few minutes to let the information “sink in.” There was total silence for a good two minutes—anyone who has been in a preschool classroom knows that this is not an easy task—before Tammy said, “So, we heard a lot of information on this page. Do you have any questions? I know I have some. Mrs. Robinson, do you have any questions? You know what I am going to do? I am going to write down your questions right here on our whiteboard.” One by one, the children raised their hands and asked their questions or gave comments: “How do birds poop?” “What color are their eggs?” “Why are there so many seagulls in the parking lot at Target?” “Why is bird poop white sometimes?” “What do they eat?” “Do all birds eat mice and squirrels?” Tammy repeated each question or comment as a way to double check that she understood what the child had said and as a way to gauge the speaker’s recollection of what he or she had said. She then wrote the comment or question on the board. When their discussion was finished and the board was full of questions, Tammy told the children how impressed she was with all the information they knew about birds and invited them to follow along with the pointer and read the list with her. Then she asked, “How are we going to find out all these answers?” A kindergartner’s hand shot right up: “Mrs. Frierson, we can go on the computer!” and another child said, “We can read more books.”

The kindergartners had been with Tammy for three years; they knew exactly what was happening—Tammy was introducing their unit of study. From that discussion, the children conducted individual and group research, which involved books and the computer and taking notes on the information they found. All the children took notes as appropriate for their age—some drew their notes and, with their teachers' help, labeled their illustrations; others used a combination of drawing and writing. All used invented spelling. The children then met every morning as a class to share what they had found, raise questions, and read more books about birds. These whole-class meetings served as an informal assessment that provided Tammy with “a quick look” at what the children were learning. While the children shared, Tammy took anecdotal notes; later, she met with them individually or in small groups to address any inconsistencies and provide missing information.

All of Tammy's units of study end with some kind of project showcasing what each individual child has learned. One day toward the end of their bird study, for example, Tammy was on the carpet with all of the kids listening to them talk about birds:

Okay, we have spent about a month learning all about all kinds of birds. I learned things that I didn't even know about birds! Here is what we are going to do. You are each going to pick a bird that you like and think is cool, and then you are going to do some research. You will go on the computer with a grown-up and find out some facts and write them down for us, look at some books, draw some pictures, and then share it with all of us. Now, my kinders, you know that your parents can't do any of the writing or drawing, it's all you. I want it on a nice poster so that we can all see your beautiful work and hear about all of your information. I will get this out to your families this afternoon. I think this is going to be fun! What do you think?

Because of the enthusiasm with which Tammy explained this assignment, all of the children were excited to start their bird projects. Based on the initial research they did as a class, each child selected a bird to study independently. Some of the birds chosen were hawks, parakeets, vultures, and chickadees. The project requirements differed by age: the threes drew and labeled pictures with help from their parents; the fours drew, labeled, and wrote some information with a little parental help; and the kindergartners drew, labeled, and reported specific information about their particular bird with little, if any, help. Each child then presented his or her poster and reported the information to the class. By following the children's lead, Tammy was responsive to their particular curiosity about birds and was able to capitalize on their general interest in science. Tammy explained that through these types of projects she was able “to learn what each of the children learned. I am not giving them tests; the projects are pretty open-ended, and I get a lot of information back from the kids.”

Children's Talk as a Means of Assessment

A lot of time in this classroom is spent talking—about current events, stories, and the unit of study and while playing. Tammy values this talk because, as an experienced early childhood educator, she knows that children's talk “is a window into their knowledge and thinking” (Owocki & Goodman, 2002, p. 49). Tammy uses student talk in several ways. First, she uses it to assess their engagement. When students talk through their thinking without being prompted, she knows they are meaningfully engaged. On the other hand, a lack of talk suggests that she hasn't provided a significant or engaging task, or that her students don't see the task as important. Second, Tammy uses talk to assess understanding. When students produce seemingly abstract pieces of work, they also explain their work. In this way, Tammy gains insights into their thinking. Third, the constant dialogue in the classroom allows Tammy to diagnose and supportively address learning issues as they arise and before they become what others might describe as “deficiencies” in her “little people.” In addition to assessing naturally occurring student talk in these settings, Tammy holds intentional conversations with children that allow her both to assess and to teach.

It's All about Comprehension

When it comes to reading, Tammy believes that comprehension is the most important element for her to focus on with her multiage students. As she explained, “Many times they can read the words easily, they have figured out how to decode, but if I ask them *what* they read, they have no idea. This doesn't help anyone. They have to know what they read or what I am talking about.” Through talking and informal assessments, Tammy determines whether the children understand that reading is about comprehending.

Tammy often crafts stories to get the kids thinking about real life in order for them to make sense of the book they are talking about. For example, when a child was reading a book about a missing dog and Tammy wanted to ask the child how the characters found the dog, she began with “I lost my favorite cup the other day when I was at home. I couldn't find it anywhere and I was so upset. Then my husband walked in and I said, ‘James, have you seen my cup, you know my Carolina cup I use to drink my water?’” Then she asked the child, “What did I do to find my water cup?” The child responded, “You asked Mr. Frierson for help. That is the same thing that they did in the book, they asked somebody else for help!”

Tammy's conversations with children are simultaneously teaching and assessment moments. Her questions send the message that reading is about making sense, that the children are capable readers, and that reading is pleasurable. At the same time, Tammy is able to use what she learns from the children to make

curricular decisions. For example, to help the children understand the significance of what she means by “understanding what you read and hear,” she told them the story of the missing keys:

I left Mrs. Robinson a note on my computer and it said, “Mrs. Robinson, don’t lock the door. I can’t find my keys and I won’t be able to get back in.” Well, Mrs. Robinson read my note; she said every word nicely and pronounced each letter just right (you know Mrs. Robinson knows how to read). But you know what? She locked the door! So now I ask you, what happened? Mrs. Robinson read my note; she knew what all the words said and told me every letter on the note, but what happened?

The children raised their hands wildly and called, “I know, Mrs. Frierson, I know what happened!” Tammy asked a couple of the kids to explain; one said, “She read it and didn’t get it.” Others added, “Mrs. Robinson reads in Spanish not English,” “She was busy and didn’t have time to remember what the note said,” and “The words didn’t make sense to her, so she needs to read it again so it makes sense. Right, Mrs. Robinson?” Tammy accepted all their ideas and added, “The most important part of reading anything is understanding what you read. It isn’t going to help anyone if you know all the letters and words but don’t know what they mean. See what happened to me—I got locked out!” In this exchange, Tammy helped the children understand what reading is, and she gathered information about what each child already understood. Tammy often holds such whole-group conversations; she also makes ample time for one-on-one teaching–learning conversations.

Listening to and Learning from Michael

Michael is a four-year-old African American boy whom Tammy has known all his life. This is his second year in her class; his brother, Mason, also spent three years in her class. On this particular day, once all of the other children were working independently in centers, Tammy casually invited Michael to “talk about a story.” Michael had not yet chosen to read independently; he read only when asked to and, while he always followed along when a peer read, he had not yet shown any interest in deciphering words or pictures. Instead, he focused on the social aspect of sitting with someone while they read him the story. During reading choice time, Michael often could be found enjoying books with his classmates. This indicated to Tammy that Michael understood reading as meaningful and pleasurable and that reading was “coming” for Michael.

As Tammy started walking toward the table where she would sit with Michael, she was interrupted by several children who exclaimed, “Mrs. Frierson, I want to talk about a story!” She happily responded that right now it was Michael’s turn and reminded them that everyone would have a chance later to talk to her about a story.

Tammy and Michael comfortably settled at a table, sitting next to each other with their bodies turned so they could see each other. Tammy opened with a casual, “Michael, how are you doing today?” to which he responded, “Okay.” Tammy then offered, “I’m working on a story and I want you to tell me if it’s any good. I need you to listen and tell me what you think. Do you want to hear it? Can you help me?” Michael nodded and Tammy then said, “Okay, once I am done, I am going to ask you some questions so you can tell me about the story. Okay, ready?” She read the story while Michael listened carefully.

After she finished the story, Tammy asked Michael to tell her everything that he remembered about the story. Michael began to retell the story and stopped at one point and said, “I don’t think that I remember anything else. That’s it.” Tammy asked him a couple of detailed questions, but Michael showed no interest, so she moved on. Tammy later explained to me that she had chosen a story about a dog because Michael loves *Clifford the Big Red Dog* (Bridwell, 1963), and it is always best to begin with the child’s interest because “I get more out of them when they care about the story.”

In what follows, Tammy was trying to gauge Michael’s interest in books—trying to see what he was interested in reading. She began with a story:

I was at Books-A-Million the other day. You know I like to read and I was looking for a book to read. Have you been in that store? You know it’s big? So I was walking around looking at all sorts of books and couldn’t decide on one. Finally someone that works there came up to me and asked me what kind of books I like to read; she was trying to help me find one. I told her what I liked and then she led me to the aisle and I found a great book. Michael, do you like to read books?

Michael (M): I like Harry Potter.

Tammy (T): You read Harry Potter?

M: At summer camp.

T: You enjoy books being read to you? I know you do, because when I read at school you always listen.

M: I found a book about cars.

T: Can you tell me about your favorite book? I like *The Napping House* [Wood, 1984].

M: *Go Dog Go!* [Eastman, 1961]. That’s the book I like.

T: Yeah, I’ve seen you reading it. Michael, what do authors do?

M: They write the words.

T: What about the illustrator? Do you know what the illustrator does?

M: No.

T: I'll tell you what they do—they make all the pretty pictures in the books.

M: I see all those pictures on my computer and on my brother's [Nintendo] DS. I have a game with a lot of cars.

T: I have seen you reading books about cars here in school. Michael, let me ask you one more thing and then we'll be done, okay?

M: Okay.

T: I forgot my glasses today and I am trying to give Mrs. Robinson this list of words, but I don't know what it says because I can't see them. Can you help me figure them out?

M: Okay, I will help you!

T: Thank you, Michael. Here we go.

[Michael reads the words on the list, which were from the story he had just heard.]

T: Michael, you know that I am very proud of you. I needed help reading these words and help with my story, and you did such a nice job helping me. Thank you.

M: You are welcome, Mrs. Frierson. If you need more help, let me know.

Tammy began the assessment by inviting Michael to talk about a story with her; his subsequent retelling of the story indicated that he was able to capture the main idea of the dog story. This helped Tammy assess whether Michael understood that reading meant making sense of text. She combined what she observed with her other observational data and concluded that yes, he did understand this. She then conducted a mini-interview that also began with a story so that she could share her interest in reading and find out what books Michael liked to read. She was able to elicit that Michael listened to J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series while at summer camp and that he liked to read about cars. Although he said that he didn't know what an illustrator did, he was able to make a connection to the pictures he saw on his computer and his brother's Nintendo DS. This confirmed for Tammy that Michael was a "thinking" listener. Tammy's assessment ended with Michael successfully reading a list of words that were drawn from the story. This provided Tammy with data showing that Michael was making connections between what was read and what was on the page and that he had a strong visual memory.

Tammy values what she learns about her students from these story talks. She noted that by telling the children stories about things that interest them, "I really get to know what they understand and what they are thinking about." She added, "If they don't like a story, they don't seem to listen as much."

Listening to and Learning from Parents

To learn even more about her students, Tammy periodically sends questionnaires home with the children that ask family members to provide her with information that will help her be a more effective teacher. Sample questions include: *What is your child interested in? What does your child like to play with? What kinds of print materials are available in your home? What language(s) are spoken in the home? What would you like your child to accomplish this year in reading?* Tammy uses the responses along with what she learns from the children themselves “to create meaningful conditions for learning” (Owocki & Goodman, 2002, p. 23) for each of the Sensations. By using information from questionnaires, from parent–teacher conferences, and from talking with families when they drop their children off in the morning, Tammy is able to craft units of study that are of interest and relevant to her children. For instance, while talking with one of the fathers at drop-off time, Tammy found out that he was an assistant football coach at a local university. She and the children were all excited to learn this, since all were fans of the team. Everyone became even more excited when they learned that they were going on a field trip to the football stadium and that they might meet some of the players. Tammy planned a unit of study around this event, which involved learning the names of some of the players, estimating the length of the football field and how much time it would take to run from one end to the other, and making thank-you cards for the student’s dad. The unit was relevant to the children and their families, and each of the children was actively engaged.

Learning across Assessments

Tammy recognizes the importance of using assessments, both formal and informal, as tools to inform her teaching and to provide her with a more complete picture of her students. She merges data from more formal reading assessments, the district’s Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), with her informal assessments—observing, talking, listening. Then, by involving the families in the process as “active, essential participants in the assessment process” (SARW, p. 29) and using that information to build her curriculum, Tammy has multiple data sources she can draw from, which is consistent with the SARW’s Standard 8: “The assessment process should involve multiple perspectives and sources of data” (p. 24). Tammy ends with a more complete picture of each of the Sensations and, as a result, is better able to teach them and “improve the quality of teaching and learning” (p. 16).

Through her artful use of assessment tools and instructional moves, Tammy is helping these three-, four- and five-year-olds develop a generative theory of reading. By reading to them, talking to them about books, and giving them time to

read and talk with one another about books, she provides them with the opportunity to learn that reading is a meaning-making process, that they are readers and members of the literacy club (Smith, 1987), and that reading is pleasurable. She also helps expand their oral vocabulary so that when they begin to conventionally read they will be familiar with an academic register and the types of words found in books.

See Figure 9 for a list of the assessment tools and instructional methods Tammy uses in her classroom.

Figure 9. Classroom teacher Tammy Spann Frierson's assessment tools and instructional moves.

Assessment Tools

Observation
 Listening
 Inquiry (asking questions to understand)
 Interviews
 Storytelling with retell
 Word lists
 Parent questionnaires
 Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA)

Instructional Moves

Read aloud.
 Provided time for independent reading.
 Provided time for writing.
 Created authentic opportunities to use reading and writing.
 Asked questions based on meaning.
 Provided mini-lessons about reading as meaningful.
 Wrote songs on chart and referred to it during singing.
 Modeled fluent reading.
 Let children know she believes in them as readers and writers.
 Crafted curriculum tied to student interests.

Portrait 2: Hope Reardon, 4K Teacher

Hope Reardon with Diane E. DeFord and Lucy K. Spence

Support and Engagement in a Kindergarten for Four-Year-Olds (4K)



I (Hope) teach four-year-old children in an urban school that is tucked within a small neighborhood. The school's 388 children are 85.3 percent African American. The poverty level is high, with 86 percent of the children receiving free or reduced price lunches. My classroom is made up of thirteen African American, five Latino/a, and two European American children, all of whom receive free lunch. At the beginning of the year, the school screens all children using the *DIAL-3: Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning*, Third Edition (DIAL-3; Mardell-Czudnowski & Goldenberg, 1998). This is a three-part early childhood screening for language, concepts, and motor abilities. The school uses the results to place children in my 4K child development class. Last year the DIAL-3 screening assessment identified twelve of my twenty students as being at risk, or below the 33rd

percentile. At the end of the year, the children are given this same assessment to document progress and growth and to make decisions about student placement and services.

Throughout the year, I use informal checklists, kidwatching notes (Goodman, 1978; Owocki & Goodman, 2002; Whitin, Mills & O’Keefe, 1991), photographs, and video to document learning. Six different times during the year, I use the “Inventory of Letter Knowledge” from the *Dominie* (DeFord, 2004). In January, to assess the children’s knowledge of print concepts, I use the “Show Me Book,” also from the *Dominie* (DeFord, 2004). I purposefully use observation of students as an ongoing form of assessment within my classroom. I am constantly taking notes about my students as they interact with one another within instructional engagements (learning centers, journal writing time, read-alouds, etc.). By combining notes, photographs, work samples, and the assessment tools I used to guide my observations, I have an ongoing record that provides me with different sources of information from which to determine the strengths and needs of the students I teach. This information influences my teaching and allows me to document the progress of each child. I use these ongoing observations, informal assessments (including running records, teacher-made inventories, writing samples, and anecdotal records), and district standardized tests to help me devise lessons, craft new experiences, and gather additional resources so that all of my students can develop as well-rounded readers and writers.

As a 4K teacher, I believe that my responsibility is to offer the richest literacy experiences possible to support children’s development. I target key interventions as necessary, focusing on what children show me they know, not what they don’t know. I believe strongly that “assessment should emphasize what students can do rather than what they cannot do” (SARW, p. 11).

I use data from these informal and formal assessments to plan small-group and classroom instruction. I structure flexible small groups in this classroom; groups change almost weekly based on particular skills and strategies for which I’ve identified a need. In the classroom, I take anecdotal notes as the children work in their different learning centers. I use these notes along with more formal checklists to help inform my small-group instruction. For example, the children love to play with magnetic letters on a cookie sheet. As they play and make words, we discuss the different letters they are working with. This informal assessment helps me truly understand whether the children are still struggling with certain letters or if they have mastered letter knowledge. Another favorite is the big book center. When the children read in the big book center, I note the print concepts or strategies they use when they play “teacher.” While the children rest each day, my assistant and I discuss our observations of the children. I use these conversations to plan future

small-group instruction. This practice is similar to one established for other emergent literacy settings that use flexible, small-group interventions for the youngest students (Scanlon & Anderson, 2010).

I have taught for fifteen years, including four years as a literacy coach. To help me conceptualize my constructivist, child-centered classroom, I draw on the scholarly writing of Cambourne (1995), Vygotsky (1978), Harste (in Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984), Halliday (1969, 1973), Genishi and Haas Dyson (2009), and Paley (1981, 1990). In my classroom, the children have hundreds of books to read and a variety of writing tools. I put books in all of the centers. I label classroom items and display environmental print. To personalize the room, children also bring material from home. I help the students use these tools and use language (spoken and written) as the medium of exchange for ideas, discoveries, questions, problems, and solutions.

In my class, children engage in meaningful learning; there is a purpose for everything they do. They never do mindless busywork. When they receive letters in the classroom mailbox, they see a purpose for writing letters. They eagerly read their mail, write letters back to their friends, and “mail” them. My teaching assistant, Tina, and I accept the children’s approximations as they make marks to represent writing. I expect all of my students to become readers and writers by the end of the year. I plan ways for them to use and practice new learning, and I provide feedback as they take their next steps. I make time for them to talk about what they are learning, and I take the time to listen and respond.

My classroom curriculum is based on children’s interests and what they want to learn. I embed key skills into each experience. At the beginning of the year, I make home visits to find out more about the children and their families. For example, one little boy loved dinosaurs, so I made sure to have dinosaur books and toy dinosaurs in the block center. To help build a sense of family in our classroom, we begin the year with games from *The Peaceful Classroom* (Smith & Downing, 1993). I encourage talk and sharing. In this socially active community, it is the children themselves who welcome visitors and new children into their classroom family. My teaching assistant and I plan and work together to facilitate children’s learning within this classroom. Throughout the day and within instructional engagements, informal assessment guides my instructional decisions.

Informal Assessment across the School Day

Beginning the Day

Tina and I greet the children as they arrive in the morning, unpack their bags, and pick out new books to take home. They sign their names in the daily sign-in book and begin independent reading time with books from their individual book bags.

Independent reading is not a quiet time. Children gather in small groups on the carpet with their reading pillows to laugh and talk about their books. They also read their favorite shared reading books together. On Friday, at the end of independent reading time, they look for books for the next week for their book bags. They have the option to keep books they have in their bags or get new ones. Their favorite books and the new books their friends like are quickly snapped up.

This morning routine is a key time for me to take note of several things. I pay careful attention to how the children sign their names, as this helps me understand their developing understanding of concepts about the letters that constitute their names. I listen when children talk to one another and use language to express ideas. I notice what books they choose and I think about their interests so that, as needed, I can suggest new titles.

Morning Meeting Time. After independent reading, the children gather as a family for morning meeting time. They notice if any of their friends are absent and send good thoughts out the window for the absent child. Music and movement are a part of all activities during this time. I project many of the children's favorite stories or songs on to the Smart Board so they can follow the printed text as they sing. Morning meeting ends with an interactive read-aloud projected by a document camera. I always have a planned read-aloud, based on a unit of study or author study, but if the children have a request, Tina or I will read it. Tina uses different voices while reading aloud to the children and they love that.

I watch how engaged the children are with the different books, what they respond to, and how their use of "book language" is coming along. Do they repeat refrains? Do they use the pictures? Do they offer up connections they are making between their lives and the information in the book and pictures? Do these book themes, characters, and the language of books find their way into center and play times?

Center/Work Time. Center time is an hour of free exploration and activity for the children. The learning centers all feature books, pictures, and print to support the activities and children's learning. These are the traditional centers you will find in any early childhood classroom: housekeeping (based on themes or seasons), blocks, painting, sand and water table, art center (markers, stamp pads, alphabet stampers, play dough), math center, flannel board center with cutouts made from shared reading books, puzzles and games, reading center with a large collection of books and pillows, puppet center, Smart Board, computer center, and a writing center with a variety of writing materials.

Center time follows High Scope's Plan, Do, and Review framework (Hohmann, Weikart, & Epstein, 2008), in which the children plan their center time with an adult. The children then work and play independently in their chosen center. Afterward, they talk with one another about what they did. During center time,

when I gather children for small-group instruction, I integrate my observations and assessment information into the lessons, and I note additional information about student-initiated activity. Are students using literacy experiences purposefully as they work and play together? When I expose them to new ideas, or practice something with them that we have worked with before, are they incorporating what they've learned?

Writing Workshop. Writing workshop begins with a mini-lesson of a skill or strategy, modeled on the interactive whiteboard, with the child or adult talking as he or she writes. Then the children go off to write in their journals. The adults in the room move from child to child to talk about each child's individual writing and to write comments on sticky notes placed in the child's journal. At the end of writing workshop, I ask a child or a volunteer to share the writing with the class. Two to three children share their writing each day. The author asks for "questions and comments" from the audience, and I record the author's responses. I scan the children's writing into a document so I can write their words as they share, and we videotape these sessions. Toward the end of the year, the children's writing from the previous day becomes the mini-lesson for the day. I invite the author to come up and tell about her writing and what she might change or add. Sharing is the highlight of writing workshop time for the children. My notes about their application of skills and strategies as they write and talk about their writing, as well as the video and writing sample records, are a key part of the assessment data I use to follow children's progress in writing, social interaction, language use, and how concepts of print are being applied as they write and then further discuss their writing with others.

Shared Reading. During shared reading, we all enjoy reading and rereading big books and poems. (The children especially love hearing the same text read again and again.) If a particular big book is not available, we use the document camera instead to project the text onto the board.

During this time, Tina or I model particular concepts of print. When possible, I find an audiobook or a version of the story that is set to music so the children can hear the text in other formats. I create cards with pictures so the children can retell or sequence the story in a pocket chart. To aid story retellings, I make flannel board pieces to accompany the picture cards. I also create character name and picture "vests" for the children to wear as they act out the stories. After we read the books and then work with sequencing cards and flannel board pieces, we place these materials in a center so the children can revisit the story during center time.

I am particularly interested in seeing how children's life experiences and their new literacy learning experiences are being integrated. Because many of these four-year-olds are just now being introduced to the world of books, numbers, print, formal educational practices, structured play, and self-initiated, school-based

activity, I can use my notes, classroom artifacts, photographs, video, and informal and formal assessments to judge the effectiveness of my teaching and how children are adapting to these experiences.

Math Time. Our math time usually begins with a picture book that is based on a math concept. We read many math books by Stuart J. Murphy (e.g., *Double the Ducks*, 2003). After the read-aloud, the children and I model what to do with the math materials, and the children then go off to practice. After math they have free exploration. During this time, Tina and I take note of who was not yet able to complete the task independently, and we place these children in small flexible groups for more practice.

Recess and Lunch. Recess is free exploration outdoors. We play racing games, dig in the wood chips, and play on the tricycles and playground equipment. Sometimes this play turns into a spontaneous group game. For example, after reading *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* (Galdone, 2008) during shared reading, I observed the children using the bridge on the playground to retell the story, with one child under the bridge and other children “stomping” over it.

Ending the Day

Near the end of the day, the children rest on mats and listen to soft music. This quiet time begins with reading aloud *Sleepy Bears* (Fox, 2002), using the children’s names in the story. As I read, I walk around the room and stop at the child whose name I add. Once I read their names in the page from the book, the children almost always close their eyes. They seem to wait until they hear their name read aloud. At the end of the story, I walk around again and wish “sweet dreams” to each child. A few months before the end of school, instead of reading *Sleepy Bears*, we read from chapter books, beginning with *Charlotte’s Web* (White, 1952/2004). Once the children wake up, they pack up their folders and eat a snack. After the snack, they read books until their bus or their parents arrive. They choose favorite books that we read during the day or books I’ve made multiple copies of so that they can read side by side with their friends and family. I take this opportunity to meet with individual children and read with them, chat informally, and talk about their school day.

My philosophies about assessment and instruction inform my decisions about teaching whole groups, small groups, and one on one. The case study that follows details what this looks like up close. The informal and formal assessment data I collected on Democlease, a child who struggled with learning to read and write, were an important source of information the school needed to make decisions about what additional resources to employ in this child’s literacy education.

Assessment and Instruction: The Case of Democlease

Democlease was one of the lowest-scoring children on both formal and informal assessments. In terms of formal assessment, on the DIAL-3 100-point scale, Democlease scored a 2 at the beginning of the year. At the end of the year, he scored 34, just above the 33 percent cutoff score. Ongoing classroom assessments show that his knowledge seemed to ebb and flow across the year (see Table 3).

Democlease joined our classroom at the end of October as a quiet and reserved child. As with many new children, he mostly watched and listened. I soon learned that his maternal grandmother was raising him (he referred to her as “Mom”). After two weeks in the classroom, I noted a change in Democlease’s quiet, watchful attitude during our shared reading of *The Little Old Lady Who Was Not Afraid of Anything* (Williams, 1986). When the children began to clap, stomp, nod, and wiggle, for the first time Democlease actively joined in. For the next two weeks, when we read this story, the children wanted to act it out using character vests. Democlease wanted to be the little old lady—and he made an awesome one.

Democlease seemed to blossom socially as we read and reread this book. He started smiling and talking with the other children and built some important new friendships. When we celebrated him as the main character in *The Little Old Lady*, he grew in confidence. I also witnessed Democlease singing songs and stories that were set to music. Observing Democlease in this rich literacy environment allowed me to get to know him as an individual and fueled my reflections, decisions, and instructional moves. As the SARW suggest, this observation “provide[d] useful information to inform and enable reflection” and “yield[ed] high-quality information” (p. 12).

My observations also led me to see changes in Democlease during center time. At first he chose solitary activities, but within a month he began playing

Table 3. Informal Assessment Results (Democlease)

Time of assessment	Colors	Shapes	Number recognition	Counting (up to) without missing a number	Uppercase letter recognition	Lowercase letter recognition
October	2/10	3/8	0/21	5	0/26	0/26
November	5/10	2/8	1/21	9	0/26	0/26
January	2/10	2/8	0/21	11	0/26	0/26
February	7/10	3/10	0/21	9	1/26 (<i>E</i>)	0/26
March	2/10	3/10	0/21	6	0/26	0/26
May	6/10	2/10	1/21	12	3/26 (<i>D, G, Z</i>)	1/26 (<i>u</i>)

blocks with the other children. He also began talking to children in the housekeeping center as they took turns playing the mother or the father. He loved dressing up and often fought over the little pink poodle skirt. When we made the housekeeping center into a costume shop, Democlease found the cups and tray that I had put away. He donned the apron and started “serving” the children who sat at the little table outside the center watching the fashion show. Democlease became very inventive with materials in his environment and used them to create new stories and act them out with other children. This helped him integrate socially into this new classroom and engage more actively with others. In the puppet center, for example, he often grabbed a friend to scrunch down below the screen, open the curtains, and “pop up” with the puppets. Democlease also liked to use flannel pieces in the flannel board center to tell his favorite stories.

In November I administered the “Inventory of Letter Knowledge” (DeFord, 2004) and could see the impact these social interactions and classroom experiences had on Democlease’s literacy learning. He associated certain letters (*U, M, S, B, V, D, A, N*) with the letters in his name and the names of his friends. For example, for the letters *S, B,* and *D,* he said, “That’s my name.” For the letters *U, M,* and *N,* he said, “That’s Mohammad’s name.” For the letter *V,* he said, “That’s Victor’s name,” and for the letter *A,* he said, “That’s De’Aja’s name.” His morning sign-in sheet showed he was not yet using letters in writing his name, but he did separate drawing from writing and wrote about meaningful events in his life. In a sample from his journal on November 17, Democlease attached a word card. What I found interesting was that he used the word *family* and drew a family. Vygotsky discusses this very shift in learning:

There is a critical movement in going from simple mark-making on paper to the use of pencil marks as signs that depict or mean something. All psychologists agree that “the child must discover that the lines he makes can signify something.” (1978, p. 113)

These informal teacher tests and formative assessments, such as letter knowledge and book handling assessments, provide critical information that helps me make instructional decisions. As noted in the SARW, such “formative assessments that occur in the daily activities of the classroom” are “the most productive and powerful assessments for students” (p. 13).

Democlease needed to learn more about letters, colors, shapes, numbers, and concepts about print. So, with information gathered from an alphabet assessment, the “Show Me Book” from the *Dominie* (DeFord, 2004), and observations during shared reading and writing workshop, I developed focused small-group lessons. We played games with letters, objects, and different shapes; read a lot of predictable texts; and, while reading, reviewed the print concepts we were working on during shared reading. To help with his emerging math concepts, we counted out

objects and worked on creating patterns. To help him learn the letters in his name, we formed letters with play dough and Democlease wrote letters and words in shaving cream.

Occasionally I worked more closely with Democlease on the letters in his name in one-on-one time. He made his name with magnet letters, wrote it in shaving cream, and then wrote it on paper. As we worked with these letters, we talked about them and made connections between the letters in his name and things that were meaningful to him. For example, he loved to eat Doritos, so he knew that his name started just like the word *Doritos*. These one-on-one interactions involved a lot of talking, writing, and reading predictable texts—texts we created as a whole class as well as stories Democlease wrote in his journal and for which I provided the conventional spelling.

In addition to the daily homework folder, Tina made file folder games (letters, shapes, and numbers) for several of the children to take home. For Democlease these folders included the letters in his name and several differently colored shapes. The instructional goal for Democlease was the same as for all children in terms of literacy learning: to use literacy in a variety of settings and to learn more about literacy through reading, writing, talking, and listening. As part of the children's daily homework, they picked a book from the classroom library to read at home with their families. The children knew they could pick any book they liked. Sometimes the book they chose was one of the stories we had read aloud the previous day; other days it was a book from their individual "just right" reading bags. In the beginning of the year, we held a parent workshop on reading with your child during which we modeled with the children an interactive read-aloud and showed the families how they could involve their children in the reading of the text. In the part of the weekly newsletter where we shared with families our shared reading story, I also included the current concept about print skill we were working on and gave the families tips on how to work on this skill at home with their child.

Democlease's oral language, self-confidence, and literacy knowledge increased throughout the year. He moved from being a silent child to one who talked freely with others—one who was interested in reading and in what others were doing. Still, at the beginning of March, I remained concerned with his letter and number recognition. When he picked a word card for writing workshop and I asked him what the word was and which letters were in it, he was unable to tell me. During our morning meeting, when we talked about a friend's name and the letters that make up the name, he still could not tell us the letters in his own name. The informal letter and number assessment that I complete on each child throughout the year confirmed my observations from writing workshop.

I could have arranged for Democlease to receive supplemental services, but I decided to keep him in the regular classroom environment and increase my

interventions with him. I felt I knew him better than anyone else did and that I could help him learn more about the print concepts we were working on in shared reading; I was confident that I could use his small-group time to really focus on the skills he was still struggling with. Because I understand that children grow and develop at different rates, I was hoping that Democlease was a “late bloomer”—just like other four-year-olds I had seen in the past—and I believed that it was still possible for him to catch up. I decided to request a meeting with our school’s support team to discuss my concerns. At our school, the principal, school psychologist, special education teachers, and classroom teachers meet formally at the request of a classroom teacher to discuss and offer suggestions and support for students whom the teacher is concerned about. In March, I requested one of these meetings to discuss Democlease’s particular needs. The meeting would not be held until the following fall, which gave me plenty of time to collect the required six weeks of data.

By May, Democlease was able to identify three uppercase letters (*D*, *G*, *Z*) on a letter identification test and *u* in the lowercase set. This score placed him in the 2nd stanine, or low-achievement band (see Figure 10). By contrast, the letter knowledge of the two other children whose literacy learning I had worried about had escalated (the mean was 24.7); 57.8 percent of the remaining children were in the average or high-achievement bands (stanines 4–9) on the “Show Me Book” from the *Dominie* (DeFord, 2004), which measures a student’s knowledge of book handling, including identifying the title. Democlease scored five out of seventeen (which is in the 2nd stanine) on turning pages, finding the print on the page, etc. He knew where to start reading, he could locate the first and last letter of a word, and he could find the word “*no*” on a page of the book. The majority of children in the classroom also could identify these concepts. Most of the children could also read and write their first name, demonstrate left-to-right directionality of print, and return to the next line of text. Democlease could not.

When I checked on Democlease the next fall, his kindergarten-for-five-year-olds (5K) teacher said he struggled at the beginning of the year with letter knowledge but had learned his colors, shapes, and numbers up to ten. Democlease moved from our school at the end of February, in his 5K year. At that time, he knew all of his letters and was beginning to read very easy, predictable books from the district reading series.

This story of Democlease demonstrates how young children emerge into literacy in my classroom. I believe all children need a rich literacy environment in which to learn. They need opportunities to talk and learn through play and through involvement in authentic literacy experiences. Although district-required assessments were necessary to place children in my class, and uniform measures were needed to track children’s progress across classes and schools, individualized, formative assessment was the most useful in helping children make progress as

Figure 10. Concepts of written language.

Concepts known by more than 50% of the class	Write first name (61%)	Read name (56%)	Start left page (94%)	Start right page (94%)	Left to right directionality (83%)	Return to next line (61%)	Show first letter in a word (94%)	Show last letter in a word (61%)	Locate the word <i>yes</i> (50%)	Locate the word <i>no</i> (61%)					
Democlease's Scores	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0
Concepts known by less than 50% of the class	Write last name (28%)				Matching one to one (17%)		Locate one letter (33%)	Locate two letters (22%)	Locate one word (11%)	Locate two words (11%)					Read "I like to read and write" (0%)

readers and writers. Without the ongoing observation and analysis I do throughout the day and across weeks, I would not be able to design effective instruction that takes into account children's individual strengths and needs. The key to good teaching is for teachers to be artful kidwatchers—to notice what children can do, what they can almost do, and what new learning may be difficult for them. All of this must be contextualized to inform me about how classroom engagements stimulate these children to learn. Every teacher must take the time to talk with children, to discover each child's thoughts and interests. With this information, teachers can effectively support the learners in their classrooms.

See Figure 11 for a list of the assessment tools and instructional methods that I use in my classroom.

Figure 11. Classroom teacher Hope Reardon's assessment tools and instructional moves.

Assessment Tools

Listening

Inquiry (asking questions to understand)

Daily sign-in sheet

Teacher-made checklists (numbers, counting, shapes, colors)

Photographs of writing samples, center work

"Inventory of Letter Knowledge"

"Show Me Book"

Dial-3 (Beginning and end of year)

Creative Curriculum Work Sample Assessment (Fall, Winter, and Spring)

Reflection

Instructional Moves

Created extensive classroom library.

Put books in all the centers.

Labeled classroom items.

Displayed environmental print and materials from home.

Created classroom mailbox.

Accepted approximations.

Expected all children to be readers and writers.

Made home visits.

Embedded skills into authentic experiences.

Integrated children's interests into curriculum.

Encouraged talking and sharing.

Created checkout system for books that go home each night.

Provided time for independent and paired reading.

Put stories and songs on Smart Board.

Used document camera for interactive read-aloud.

Used reading and writing workshop curricular structures.

Met with children in flexible small groups based on need.

Portrait 3: Louise Ward, 5K Teacher

Tasha Tropp Laman with Louise Ward

Writing in Support of Reading: Teaching into Agency



Twenty-two kindergartners who attend an urban school in the southeastern United States sit on a large alphabet rug at the front of their classroom. The children in this kindergarten class resemble the diverse racial and cultural demographics of their school, where 55 percent of children receive free or reduced lunch and where more than fourteen languages are represented. Their teacher, Louise Ward, points to the morning message written on the whiteboard. It contains blank spaces. As she and her students read the message aloud, Louise calls on the children to fill in the blank spaces, using their growing repertoire of reading and writing strategies.

Morning Message

Hello, Amigos,

Today is _ebruary 23rd. We will learn _____ things in math measurement. We also _____ music _____ library.

Louise: Eleanor, what is missing in the first blank?

[Eleanor writes a capital *F* on the whiteboard.]

Louise: Let's look at what Eleanor wrote. Why do we need a capital?"

Thomas: [raises his hand] It is at the beginning.

Louise: [gently] Let's look. It isn't at the beginning of the sentence.

Thomas: Because it is in the middle!

Louise: [smiles] Do you want to get a friend to help you?

[Margaret whispers to Thomas.]

Thomas: Because February is a name.

[Louise then goes to the next sentence and the children read together, "We will learn some things in math."]

Louise: I'm going to underline some parts of this word [*measurement*] and maybe we can say it.

[She underlines the *m*, *s*, *r*, *m*, and *t*. The children slowly say the sounds and then say "measurement."]

Louise: You used clues you know to sound out that word. That was a BIG deal, kindergarten. Kiss your brain.

[Louise then has the children fill in the two remaining blanks with the words *have* and *and*. She then points to the words *where*, *house*, *cat*, *am*, and *tree*, which are written on the whiteboard below the morning message. She calls on Alex to read the word *where*. Alex does not reply.]

Louise: This is a question word. It is the /wh/ sound and the *r*. Does anyone have another way to help Alex know this word? Don't tell him. Help him.

Sophie: Where.

Louise: Say it loud now. Alex, say the word. What does the word *where* mean? Look at me, because you want to learn that word. Alex, where are you?

Alex: School.

Louise: When I ask, "Where?" I want to know a place. *Where* are you going after school? If I ask, "Where you are going?" you would tell me the name of a place.

Similar morning message routines are repeated daily in early childhood classrooms across the country. These brief messages offer children a forecast for their school day—glimpses of what they will study, think about, and experience. Many teachers, like Louise Ward, see morning message time as an integral part of reading instruction. Through daily messages, teachers can highlight text and print features within an authentic text and reinforce key concepts about print such as sound–symbol relationships, punctuation, and spacing. Morning messages also give children the opportunity to see high-frequency words.

Although these morning message routines may be familiar to many educators, what I am always drawn to as a researcher in Louise’s classroom is the language she uses inside of structures like morning message to support and get to know children as readers and writers. Louise sees assessment as extending power to her students so that they become agents of their own learning. Johnston (2004) contends that language is the tool of our teaching, emphasizing:

Teachers’ conversations with children help the children build the bridges between action and consequence that help the children develop their sense of agency. They show children how, by acting strategically, they accomplish things, and at the same time, that they are the kind of person who accomplishes things. (p. 30)

Whether she is teaching calendar math or holding reading or writing conferences, Louise is constantly assessing for understanding through her questions, comments, and observations. She tailors her teaching to each child and emphasizes students’ participation in talking about their thinking and their learning—offering students agentive positions. She understands, after thirty-seven years of teaching, that assessment is both highly interactive and ongoing. In her exchange with Alex, Louise slowed down the quick review of high-frequency words to make sure that Alex and everyone else on the floor understood the word *where*, which will appear throughout their reading lives. In my observations of Louise and my talks with her about her assessment strategies, she emphasized that she:

feel[s] obligated to know that [the children] truly understand what I am teaching. It always runs my lessons long because I have a drive to help them understand. It takes extra time. When I realize that they don’t understand something I want them to understand, when they aren’t answering a question, I want them to know that it isn’t just about answering the question that I am asking. I want them to be able use the tool [that I am teaching]. There is power in that. I want *them* to have the power. I don’t need it.

Louise embodies the SARW. She knows that her questions and her students’ answers are neither right nor wrong. Instead, she views her teaching as part of a bigger picture. She understands that, by highlighting the thinking behind her actions and interactions, she raises her teaching to a metacognitive level. Because of

this, she is able to help her students learn to use the tools and access the power of learning and literacy. She helps them own their learning.

Louise is like all busy teachers; she gets to work early and stays late. She continually has questions in mind about her students' literacy learning and what she expects children to develop during their kindergarten year with her:

What's helping them understand the text? Are they reading the pictures? Can they read patterned books? Are they using text and beginning sounds? I want them to understand they can stretch out a word from beginning through the middle and to the end. I notice the words they are using all the time in their writing.

Like all great teachers, Louise also knows that each child has unique needs. When I ask her what she looks for in children's writing, for example, she says:

It depends on the child. Can Dawson get his ideas down without me next to him? For Celina, I want to see her try what I taught in the mini-lesson. For Kyra, I want her to ask herself, "Is there something I need to fix up or fancy up?"

During the day, Louise writes anecdotal notes about her students that will jog her memory in the evening. And every evening she writes reflective notes about the day (see Figure 12). Louise's notes are rich resources that she uses to direct her instructional decision making. Assessment, then, informs her instruction. The children know this and often leave her little notes about things she needs to remember the next day. In this way, Louise uses assessment to extend power to her students.

Louise began teaching within a writing workshop structure five years ago as a second-grade teacher. Writing workshop provides multiple opportunities for authentic assessment and responsive teaching. It supports both readers and writers and makes assessment highly personal and interactive (SARW, Standards 3 and 5). Louise considers writing workshop a transformative part of her professional development. Her students produced stronger writing and were more engaged in writing and reading when she taught relevant mini-lessons, conferred with writers during independent writing time, and asked them, during share time, to reflect on what they had learned about themselves as writers. Children who were often reluctant to read began initiating their own reading and made more progress than in years past. When Louise moved to kindergarten, she was committed to using writing workshop with her new, younger students.

Writing workshop positions her kindergarten students in powerful ways. Louise has noticed that the children are interested and motivated when they write about things that matter to them. They want to read their own texts and the texts generated by their friends. What they learn as writers helps them as readers. As writers, children learn that texts make sense, that they carry meaning. They also learn that they can write and read and that texts are pleasurable. In this way, writ-

Figure 12. Sample of Louise's reflective notes.

Cumulative Writing Record for _____ School Year 2011-12				
Date D/W Book or Booklet Topic/Title	Knows About Craft (sense of story, organization ...)	Knows About Conventions (spelling, punctuation, etc.)	Needs to Learn	When to Teach
Raccoons 2-13-12 3-8-12 3-14-12 Non-fiction writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interested in non-fiction writing effective use of anchor charts independently Notices non-fiction craft in other books illustrations match writing relates his writing to what is happening in his world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> listens to sounds in words independently but often hears sounds incorrectly "hudrs" for hunters "tarts" for tracks includes vowels in most words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> blends tr (tracks) trees) endurance for working independently w/o teacher approval/help writes minor backwards liat for tail in diagram occasionally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WS - focus on blends IW - focus on tr ML - model my story and writing to share it before it is complete
Poetry 3-19-12 3-27-12 I Want a Pet Lion Monster Trucks My Toys My Dad Golf	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very receptive to writing form Does not use shared writing poem topic but takes something from his knowledge Writes at least 1 poem a day easily thinks of topics 	<p><u>craft</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> picks up forms of other poems read during ML poems easily read with creative spelling gofo = golf pakds = practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> some poems still written in sentences ↳ can be ok depending on how it is written on page uses x for s sound at end of Trucks = <u>trucakx</u> Don't understand ③ means more than one. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WS - small group ML - model other kid writing IW -
ML = mini-lesson IW = interactive writing Conf = conference RA = read-aloud Conv = conversation MM = morning meeting WS = word study				

ing helps the children build a generative theory of reading. Children bring these understandings to the stories they read in class. They expect books to make sense, they expect to be able to make sense of books, and they enjoy reading. From writing, children also learn how texts work—that they have a beginning, middle, and end; that sentences can continue on another line or another page; that pictures help tell stories, etc.—and this helps them better understand the texts they read. In addition, writing provides an opportunity for the children to learn about sound–symbol relationships. They pay close attention and take an inquiry stance toward letters and sounds because they want to communicate a message to others. Phonics knowledge, then, is useful to them, and the knowledge they gain about it as writers helps them as readers to problem-solve unfamiliar words they encounter in their reading.

In the following transcription of a writing conference, zoom in on the moment-to-moment teaching and interactions that occurred on one day in Louise’s writing workshop. This mini-lesson and the ensuing writing conference provide a lens into what it means to teach young readers and writers. Notice how Louise continually assesses her students as she teaches toward reading and writing competence. Notice also how she positions her students through her language in agentive ways that ask the learners to talk through their thinking. The skills and ideas she highlights are those she wants her students to carry with them throughout their lives.

On this February day, more than halfway through the academic year, Louise gathers her twenty-two students on the large alphabet rug in the front of the room. She sits in her white rocking chair, ready to begin the day’s mini-lesson. She uses her anecdotal notes as a launching point:

Louise: Who can tell me what we have been doing in writing?

Sarah: Writing about a moment in our life.

Louise: What moment have you written about?

Jackson: Soccer, getting a pumpkin.

Louise: Yesterday I was reading your stories and I noticed you are doing lots of smart things. We have been stretching our stories. What do we want to add?

Alex: Words!

Louise: [Louise takes out Sophie’s book and holds it up for the students to see.] Look what Sophie did. I am not going to say anything. You tell me what she did. [Louise slowly turns the pages of Sophie’s book.]

Student: Shows pictures!

Student: Showed details.

Louise: She did show details in her pictures.

Gerald: She drew before she wrote.

Louise: Is that a good idea? How does she know what she wants to write about? She drew the pictures. She knows what happened first and next and last.

Louise: [to Sophie] Can you tell us what you want to add to this page?

Sophie: We are going to see my grandma.

Louise: Could you tell us how? We want to see those details. Then what happened?

Sophie: She was excited.

Louise: What do you do when you see your grandma?

Sophie: Sometimes we eat her blueberry muffins and play with her dollhouse!

Louise: [to whole class]. Do you remember the story I told you about the fire drill? Remember, we have to have details. You are doing a great job. I want to know all the little details like Sophie just shared about the blueberry muffins and the dollhouse. Today I will be at table 3. Remember, we are working on beautiful pictures and great stories.

Louise's mini-lesson draws on what she knows about the particular children in her room, literacy theory, and how children learn through authentic literacy practices. She moves seamlessly between teaching readers and teaching writers. She tells her students that they have been learning to stretch stories across many pages, just like writers do. When Louise shares Sophie's writing with the children, she is showing them that authors add details to help their readers. She is putting meaning first.

Writers hold a vision of readers in their minds when they construct texts, and Louise reinforces this idea throughout the mini-lesson. All year she has taught her students to "see" images when they read. In the mini-lesson, she makes it clear that these five-year-old writers also need to help their readers see the details of their texts.

Louise fills the mini-lesson with assessment and instruction. She begins by making a connection to the children's ongoing writing work. She reminds the children about what they have been doing—stretching a story across many pages by adding details. Louise makes clear that she is an interested reader—she takes

their writing home at night and reads it; she notices and remarks on their growing repertoire of writing strategies.

Louise then holds Sophie's writing up for all of the children to see. She slowly turns the pages of the book so that the kindergartners can see what their fellow classmate has done. Louise doesn't talk. The children share what they notice about Sophie's latest book—that she “shows pictures” and “shows details.” Because Sophie's book is unfinished, Louise asks Sophie, “Can you tell us what you want to add to this page?” This is a powerful question. Louise is clearly positioning Sophie as the author of this text—the only person who can determine what goes next. She expects that Sophie will have an answer to her question. Louise does not leave it there. She asks Sophie questions to elicit more words from Sophie, such as the details of her story (and the focus of the mini-lesson). These details are just what the children have talked about all year as readers. They are now learning how to craft the kinds of texts rich with details that will create pictures in their readers' minds. Louise ends the mini-lesson by reiterating her teaching point, that writers add details through “beautiful pictures” and “great words.” Implicit in this lesson is the understanding that readers expect details from authors.

After the lesson, the children gather the books they are making and return to their tables. Louise joins table 3 to conduct individual writing conferences. She starts with Aisha:

Aisha: [holds her book with white stapled pages and tells Louise] I'll read it to you. “When I first saw Santa Claus. I was” [Aisha gets stuck at the word *thirsty*, and Louise slowly moves her finger under the word and helps her remember the word.]

Louise: Do you remember what you wanted to say?

Aisha: I wanted some water.

[Louise nods in agreement. Then, because she has noticed that Aisha has run out of room on the page for her writing, she asks] Do you remember what you can do if you run out of room on the page?

Aisha: I can turn the page and add my words.

Louise: What can you do? [Coaches Aisha in a soft voice as she turns the page] Add your *I*. Authors work hard to make an *I*. Will you make it little or big? Remember, we always make *I* big when we write it by itself.

[Aisha erases everything on her page and then writes, *I got some water*.]

Louise: Is it okay to stretch your words across to a new page? It is a very grown-up thing to do. You are doing such big thinking. Let's go back and read it.

Aisha: [reading the text] "When I first saw Santa Claus I was thirsty so I . . ." [Aisha then turns the page over and writes *got*.]

Aisha: Um um [as she slowly says "some"] "Wa-wa- wa-ter."

Louise: Is that the end of your sentence? So what goes there? [Louise then reads] "When you went to get some water." You just wrote a beautiful sentence. What was your next thought?

Aisha: "I saw him." Capital *I*?

Louise: Yep. That is the next thought in your beautiful head.

Aisha: [writes "hem" for *him* and says she needs to sharpen her pencil] I'll be back as soon as I can. [She returns and writes *i* in *him*.]

Louise: Where did you see him? [Santa Claus]

Aisha: At my Christmas tree. [Says "Christmas" very slowly] "C-r tree." I already knew how to spell it.

Louise: Give me five. That was a complete thought.

Aisha: He shhh me. [Puts her finger to her lips.] He shushed me and I went back to bed.

Louise: [giggles and repeats] He shushed you.

Louise: *I*. What did I tell you about *I*?

Aisha: Capital *I*. [Looks at the word wall for the word *went*.] That is all I can think of! I'm out of ideas!

Louise: Let's read the whole thing. I want you to try to write very clearly so I can read it. I read late at night so I need help seeing the words clearly. What is your next job?

Aisha: Draw pictures.

Louise: You want to draw. The illustrator's job is hard too because they have to look at the words first then draw the pictures. What will your first picture be?

In her content and coaching conference (Anderson, 2000) with Aisha, Louise continually shifts the focus of her teaching between reading and writing. For example, in line 2 of the conference, she asks Aisha what she wants to say next in her writing. She makes it clear to Aisha that Aisha is the only person who knows her story and what she wants to say. This teaching move may seem insignificant.

It is not. Its importance lies in how Louise positions Aisha and makes identities available to her. Every time Louise says, “What did *you* want to say? What will *you* do next?” she puts Aisha in an agentic position as an author—someone who is capable of writing, telling stories, and creating texts that are relevant to *her* life and that others want to read. In line 8, Louise identifies Aisha’s understanding about stretching text across multiple pages as “big thinking” and “a grown-up thing to do.” This understanding will help Aisha as she reads more complex texts in which words and ideas extend across pages.

Louise’s words gesture toward the big ideas of literacy: “Writers make decisions, writers write from their lives, writers know what to do when they run into a problem and are able to solve it. Writers are strategic.” Similarly, at every turn Louise demonstrates how texts work. She asks Aisha, for example, to punctuate her sentences and reminds her that stories contain “complete thoughts.” As Louise works with Aisha, she makes notes—ideas and insights—that will inform her reflections later that evening. Most notably, she records Aisha’s newest growth—her understanding that, when all of her words do not fit on one page, she can carry them over to a new page.

Some researchers have argued that writing should be taught before reading because the very act of writing demands meaning-making (Chomsky, 1971; Elbow, 2004; Bomer, 2007). Elbow (2004) reminds us that nothing can be read unless it was first written, and Bomer (2007) suggests that we cannot ignore the teaching of writing because, for some children, “writing leads” (p. 151) their literacy development. Thus, reading and writing are interrelated and interdependent processes. Children engage in similar practices whether they are reading or writing (Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984). Writing instruction is therefore inseparable from reading instruction. As shown in this interaction, Aisha, as a reader and as a writer, is steeped in learning letters and sounds (phonics) in the context of her own messages because it matters to her that her audience understand her. And the same is true for reading. Aisha is also learning about how books work. Louise shows Aisha how to take text onto a new page. This is an important understanding for young readers who may have, thus far, read only books in which each page contains a single sentence or idea and limited vocabulary. At every turn, Louise demonstrates how texts work. She does this when she asks Aisha to punctuate her sentences and reminds her that stories contain “complete thoughts.” And she does this when she asks Aisha to read the finished text, a completed book that will entertain Aisha’s classmates and delight her family.

Now that Aisha understands how to stretch a story across pages, she is also prepared for books she will encounter when she is reading independently, as well as positioned to notice more about the books that Louise reads aloud—books that use rich language, varied sentence structure, and complex story lines. This constant

movement between reading and writing supports Aisha as a person who is learning to make meaning as she reads and constructs texts.

After twenty-five minutes of independent writing time, the children gather back on the carpet for share time. Louise holds Aisha's book in her lap.

Louise: I want to share one thing today. I was working with Aisha and she did something so smart. [Louise holds up Aisha's book and slowly turns the pages.] What did Aisha do first? This is something exciting. I don't know if anyone has done this yet. See if you can see it. [Louise slowly turns the pages again and begins reading.] "When I first saw Santa Claus I was thirsty so I got some water. He shushed me so I went back to bed." What did she do?

Brandi: She took one page and didn't finish it and stretched it to another.

Louise: Exactly! You can do that too when you are writing and you run out of space; you can turn the page to add your words to the next page.

Share time is an important space for noticing and naming (Johnston, 2004) what children do as writers and how that writing work is related to reading work. Louise does not use this time to have every child read his or her writing, though there are days when children do share their most recent publications. Instead, during share time Louise may ask children to share something they tried that was new, and she will record this sharing to document the student's growth. On this particular day, Louise chooses to elevate Aisha's work by marking it as a landmark learning moment. Louise says, "I don't know if anyone has done this yet," which documents an understanding of this class' collective growth as writers. Just as she did in the mini-lesson, she uses the children's writing to showcase an example of literacy growth and development. This time Louise highlights Aisha, who wrote her words before adding illustrations, which is a different writing move from the one she highlighted in the mini-lesson, where the child author drew her pictures before adding words. This deliberate teaching move demonstrates for children that there are multiple ways to write texts—you can start with pictures or you can start with words.

Louise's success across all of these settings (morning message, independent writing time, writing conferences, and sharing sessions) is due in part to her way of being with children—she creates a warm, supportive academic environment in which children are helpful to one another; she actively encourages reflection and helps develop agency by asking questions that only the child can answer; she

answers children's questions; she names their strategic moves; and she responds as a reader and a writer to their literacy work. Most important, Louise is a deliberate and diligent teacher who pays close attention to her students and uses what she knows about them to refine her instruction. Because of this, she succeeds in having a positive impact on children and their literacy development. This kind of artful teaching shapes children's literacy learning in Louise's kindergarten classroom today and provides a strong foundation for her students' lives, filled with learning literacy and making meaning.

See Figure 13 for a list of the assessment tools and instructional methods Louise uses in her classroom.

Figure 13. Classroom teacher Louise Ward's assessment tools and instructional moves.

Assessment Tools

Listening
Observation
Inquiry (asks to understand)
Anecdotal notes
Reflective notes (based on data Louise brings home)
Children's notes

Instructional Moves

Created morning message.
Conducted writing conferences.
Designed and carried out mini-lessons.
Modeled thinking.
Named children's strategic moves.
Coached during composing.
Focused on meaning.
Encouraged reflection.

First and Second Grade

In first and second grade, some children already have a generative theory of reading, and teachers help them hold on to and deepen that theory. Other children do not yet have a generative theory, and their teachers help them build one. In most elementary schools, first and second grade is a time when children are expected to be able to independently and conventionally make sense of print, aka “be able to read.” To help children reach this goal, their teachers carefully and systematically gather data that help them form hypotheses about every child as a reader. While continuing to focus on meaning and agency and to emphasize reading as pleasurable, they collect data about the reading processes of each student. This is often a collaborative process. In Ryan Brunson’s first-grade classroom, Ryan collaborates with her literacy coach, Kristy Wood, and the reading interventionist, Susie Lafitte. Together they collect and analyze data and use it to make curricular decisions. University faculty member Pamela Jewett visited with this team and worked with Ryan and Kristy to tell their assessment story. In Tim O’Keefe’s classroom, Tim explicitly collaborates with the children. He is assisted by Heidi Mills, a university faculty member who, along with Tim and others, started their school; she serves as curricular facilitator. In the portraits that follow, both teachers foreground one student to show how their collaborative problem-solving and instructional sessions ensure that all students grow as readers in their classrooms.

Portrait 4: Ryan Brunson, First-Grade Teacher

Pamela C. Jewett, Kristy C. Wood, and Ryan Brunson

No Such Thing as Perfect: The Need for Multiple Assessments and Assessors



We—classroom teacher Ryan Brunson, literacy coach Kristy Wood, and university faculty member Pam Jewett—all recognize that there is no such thing as perfect where assessments are concerned. Each assessment procedure has its own limitations and biases, sometimes favoring one student over another. The need for multiple indicators is particularly important in assessing reading and writing because of the complex nature of literacy and its acquisition. A single measure is likely to be misleading or erroneous for individuals or groups. For example, assessing students who are new immigrants to the United States by asking them to read a book about a culturally specific topic like the Fourth of July would not be a fair assessment, nor would it help us understand how they might read other texts. Instead, to better understand students as readers, we need to collect data from multiple sources.

We also believe that there is no such thing as a perfect assessor. Our beliefs about assessments and assessors are best reflected in Standard 8 of the SARW,

which states that the assessment process should involve not only multiple sources of data but also multiple perspectives. We acknowledge that our perspectives about what it means to be a teacher or a literacy coach influence how we interpret assessment data. For example, two educators with different points of view on literacy might describe data about the same student in very different ways. However, exploring these different perspectives through dialogue, with all of its meaning-making potential, may enrich our understandings of a student's development and broaden possible interpretations. This belief in multiple assessments and assessors plays out most noticeably in our school's Student Growth Meetings, in which several educators meet to evaluate student growth. In the following exchange, excerpted from one such meeting, Ryan, Kristy, and Susie Laffitte, the school's reading interventionist, met to better understand Evan, a first-grade reader:

Kristy [speaking to Ryan and Susie]: In our Student Growth Meeting today, I want to begin with the conversation we started in study group and look at Evan, a student who both of you [Ryan, as his teacher, and Susie, as his interventionist] work with. I went ahead and looked at his latest *Dominie* [DeFord, 2004] text reading level assessments [oral reading passages], and I want to begin with sharing what I noticed based on analysis of data, and then I want to spend time comparing this to what you are seeing daily in your classroom.

Ryan: Good, because the other day in the Student Growth Meeting, when we began analyzing Evan's data, a teacher said that, based on his text reading assessment, it looked like he doesn't know high-frequency words. I question that observation because in my classroom he seems to have a good core of sight word knowledge in isolation. What I think is that he doesn't use those words in reading.

Even in this short excerpt, we can see how these teachers valued multiple data sources in understanding students' learning and held multiple perspectives for analyzing and interpreting the data they collected. By talking about data from formal and informal assessments, they came to understand the theories of reading that Evan held and then used this knowledge to plan instruction that would help Evan develop a more generative theory about reading. Meetings like these are one way to honor the teachers' beliefs about multiple assessors and assessments.

In this portrait, Kristy and Ryan explain their stances toward assessment and how immersing themselves in multiple assessments affects coaching and teaching at their school. Pam then discusses what assessment looks like in the same school from an observer's perspective.

In Kristy's Words: Taking an Inquiry Stance toward Literacy Coaching

Ben Hazel Primary is a rural K–3 school with 56 percent European American students, 41 percent African American students, and 3 percent classified as “unknown.” Fifty-six percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. The faculty hold weekly study group sessions to support our growth as professionals and weekly collaborative planning sessions about “how” we teach. However, we strongly believe that we must also have structured time to focus primarily on children. To create this time and space and to keep student growth at the heart of our thinking, we conduct weekly Student Growth Meetings. In these meetings, multiple assessors come together to evaluate student progress.

We schedule these meetings so that different groups of teachers meet on alternating weeks (see Figure 14). During the meetings, regular school volunteers come in and take each class to recess and lunch so teachers are available to meet and discuss the students they have concerns about. Each teacher brings artifacts to share with the team, and someone records the session. Typically, the teachers, literacy coach, and administrator are involved in every meeting. Other teachers, such as interventionists, attend if schedules allow.



To guide the Student Growth Meeting, teachers complete a planning sheet beforehand, which gives them an opportunity to think about their students before the meeting (see Figure 15). On the planning sheet, teachers explain their areas of concern, what evidence they have related to the concern, and what actions students take (if any) to problem-solve. At every meeting, we address a series of guiding questions, including:

- Are there different approaches the student/teacher could use to problem-solve?
- What are ways to teach for alternative approaches?
- Do you need to collect more data? What data do you need?
- What resources are available to help?
- What are some structures/ways to hand over control to the student?

In a two-week cycle of action and reflection, on the week teachers do not meet, they have time to implement what was discussed at the meeting, reflect on student progress, gather and analyze further data, and plan for interventions and the next Student Growth Meeting.

As a school, we agree that “seeking multiple perspectives and sources of data . . . takes advantage of the depth of understanding that varied assessment perspectives afford and the dialogue and learning they produce” (SARW, p. 25). Data collection is followed by reflection. The give-and-take of talk between team members



Figure 14. Schedule for student growth meetings.

 Ben Hazel Primary School Student Growth Meetings 2011–2012 		
Schedule		Expectations
10:05–10:40 Kindergarten 10:45–11:20 1st Grade 11:35–12:05 2nd Grade 12:20–1:00 3rd Grade	**Every Monday** *Meetings will be held in the Data Room**	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ FOCUS— Reading/Writing ~ Each teacher will bring artifacts from one student to share with team. ~ One member each week will act as the recorder for the session and complete the documentation form. ~ The purpose is to support growth in ALL students—high and low performing. ~ Any teacher who didn't get to share their student during the meeting will share the next session. ~ Begin the next session with a follow-up on student progress and instructional strategies from previous meeting. ~ Stay on task and use a timer!

brings our multiple perspectives into a cycle of data collection, reflection, and planning.

I have been a coach or consultant since 2006, and before that I was a K–4 teacher for eleven years. As a coach, I find that taking the time to sit down with colleagues to talk about children, share data, and reflect together is extremely helpful in moving students forward. The act of slowing down, noticing and naming,

Figure 15. Planning worksheet for student growth meetings.

 Student Growth Meetings—Planning Worksheet 
<p>This section to be completed prior to Student Growth Meeting.</p> <p>What is the area of concern?</p> <p>What is the evidence (data)?</p> <p>What independent actions does the student take to problem-solve?</p>
<p>Guiding questions to be discussed/documented during Student Growth Meeting:</p> <p>Are there different approaches the student/teacher could use to problem-solve? What are ways to teach for alternative approaches? Do you need to collect more data? What data do you need? What resources are available to help? What are some structures/ways to hand over control to the student?</p>

and looking across multiple assessments from various contexts is powerful—and one of the most important ways we support one another and our students. Working with others not only helps us see students from different perspectives but also allows us to become more intentional in our support of these children. For example, some of our students receive reading support/intervention from various teachers, and they often get mixed messages across these learning contexts. Therefore, when all teachers work together, we create a common language and a shared focus for our students. One way we’ve found to help create that commonality is through a shared framework for assessment and subsequent classroom strategies.

Framing Our Assessment Work

In this excerpt from Jon Muth’s (2002) picture book *The Three Questions*, the main character, Nikolai, seeking to be the best person he can be, asks his mentor, Leo, these universal questions:

Nikolai: When is the best time to do things? Who is the most important one? What is the right thing to do? . . .

Leo: Remember that there is only one important time, and that time is now. The most important one is always the one you are with. And the most important thing is to do good for the one who is standing at your side. For these, my dear boy, are the answers to what is most important in this world. (Muth, 2002, n.p.)

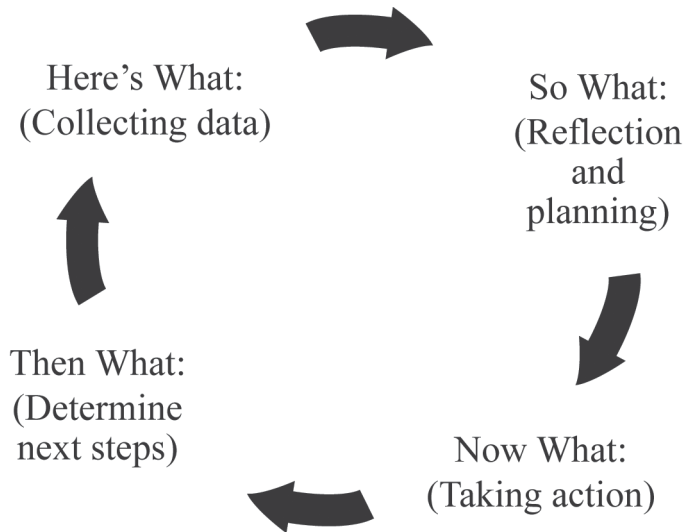
As a literacy coach, much of my day revolves around similar questions that lead me to better understand the teaching and learning of the teachers and students I serve: Could it be? Did you notice? Can you tell me more?

I believe that inquiry is at the core of real understanding; it is the heart of authentic assessment. As a literacy coach, I too seek understanding. Living in the moment and being aware of those around me are powerful guides for “doing good”—for improving the practices of teaching and learning. I believe that good teaching is reflective teaching—really “looking closely and listening carefully” (Mills, O’Keefe, & Jennings, 2004) to the children that you teach. To me, this is the true purpose of assessments.

However, I have found that without some type of framework, assessment becomes the end of the road instead of the beginning. Assessments, then, tend to focus on what students struggle with instead of where their strengths lie. In our study groups, we have read about assessment from many practitioners (e.g., Hindley, 1996; Hubbard & Power, 1993; Rasinski, Padak, & Fawcett, 2010; Routman, 1996; Taberski, 2000). Of those, I have found Johnson’s (2006) assessment framework to be particularly teacher-friendly. It was included in professional development courses taken by many interventionists and became the model that I suggested for our school (see Figure 16). Johnson’s framework became the basis for our Student Growth Meetings and is at the heart of our conversations about how to be intentional with our teaching and move students forward.

My role is to create such opportunities for teachers and interventionists to come together with a common language and plan to help students succeed. Whether it’s during Data Days, when we spend time in vertical and grade-specific teams analyzing data from various formal assessments such as the *Dominie* (DeFord, 2004), or through classroom observations that focus on informal assessment procedures such as questioning, response strategies, observations, anecdotal notes, running records (Clay, 1993), and miscue analysis (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 1987), the teachers and I continue to ask those three important questions: “When is the best time?” “Who is the most important one?” “What is the right thing to do?”

Figure 16. Johnson's (2006) assessment framework.



In Ryan's Words: Formal and Informal Assessments and Learning from Tests and Talk

As a classroom teacher, I too believe in situating assessment in multiple perspectives and data sources. I have been teaching preschool through first grade for eleven years, the last nine of them at Ben Hazel Primary School. I strongly believe that instruction begins with the individual first graders in my classroom. I use a variety of tools to assess areas of strengths and places where students may need support. I believe that the “reliability of interpretations of assessment data is likely to improve when there are multiple opportunities to observe reading and writing” (SARW, p. 25). Three times a year, I use the *Dominie* (DeFord, 2004) to document my students’ abilities with sentence writing and spelling, text reading levels, and core reading words. As I learn more about each student, I am able to differentiate instruction to meet all of their needs. For example, in my guided reading groups, I incorporate reading, writing, and word study and then differentiate based on what the next step would be for each group. One group might work on comprehension, another on word work strategies to attack unknown words, and yet another on increasing fluency through readers theater.

Although I conduct ongoing informal assessments such as running records (Clay, 1993), observations, anecdotal notes, and over-the-shoulder miscue analy-

ses (Davenport, 2002), I also believe in talk as a significant way to learn from and about my students. It is one of the primary forms of ongoing, informal assessment in my classroom. Talk is an important way for students to share what they know with me. As we move through a balanced reading curriculum, I learn about my students through their questions and comments. For example, we hold story time each day. I read chapters from books such as those in Mary Pope Osborne's Magic Tree House series, and I encourage my students to "turn 'n talk" (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007) about the story. Their talk gives me a window into their thinking and helps me understand the knowledge they are building from the reading about the story content, plot and characters, and craft of the author. I use what I learn to focus my support.

I do not, however, want to be the only teacher in my classroom. I believe that my students should also be teachers. Because I believe that learning is a social practice, my classroom is full of spaces for students to support one another through talk. They gather at tables, on rugs, at the Smart Board, at kidney shaped tables, and in cozy, defined reading areas. I encourage them to share their learning with one another. They readily confer when they are in literacy centers, reading big books, reading the room (with pointers and flashlights), reading in the book nook, and also when they are writing responses to literature in their journals. For example, one of my students tried to spell the word *Australia* in his response journal and could not figure it out. He conferred with his neighbor, who reminded him that he could go look on the globe, and together they found it.

From Pam's Perspective: Layers of Assessment and Assessors

As an observer in Ryan's classroom, I can see that the assessment-assessor environment is complex. Ryan creates multiple layers of formal and informal assessments to better understand her students' learning and shapes instruction to support them. She is familiar with the various types of formal assessments (such as district and state evaluations) and informal assessments (such as running records, observations, and anecdotal notes). And she is cognizant of the multiple assessors at her school site who collaborate to assist her in assessing her students' literacy learning. Despite all of this, Ryan clearly believes that it is not mandatory that assessments be designed by professional educators, nor must assessors always be classroom teachers, literacy coaches, or interventionists. She honors this belief by providing space and time in her classroom for students to learn with and assess one another as they confer about their learning in spaces such as literacy centers, book nooks, and writing centers. In the case Ryan described earlier, in which one student helped another determine how to spell *Australia*, these two students—in thoughtfully crafted learning environments—assessed their knowledge and inquired together to

find an answer. Ryan also uses the classroom learning environments she creates to listen carefully to her students' talk, believing that it is "a window into their thinking" and another source of assessment data for her. In Ryan's first-grade classroom, there is an ongoing and integrated spiral of multiple assessments that are interpreted by multiple and multiaged assessors. The following case study is an example.

Inquiring about Evan: Cycles of Multiple Assessments and Multiple Perspectives.

Student Growth Meeting. Learning more about Evan as a reader started with a Student Growth Meeting. The meeting included Kristy, the literacy coach; Ryan, his classroom teacher; and Susie, the reading interventionist. The literacy team met to better understand what was happening as Evan read. Evan was currently meeting the criteria for a *Dominie* (DeFord, 2004) Level 3B, which at that point in the year meant he was reading below grade level. He was not successful at the next benchmark. His accuracy at Level 3B was 92 percent, his fluency was three out of four, and his comprehension was 100 percent. Based on their talk about data collected from formal and informal assessments, the team determined what kinds of reading strategies would best support Evan. Ryan and Susie would then document Evan's progress as new strategies were implemented, using the Johnson framework that Kristy described earlier.

Here's What. Evan had participated in Reading Recovery, but those services were discontinued after the maximum twenty weeks of one-on-one support. The literacy team, however, did not feel that Evan was making adequate progress and so decided to provide him with supplemental (Tier 2) small-group reading instruction with Susie.

So What. Through careful analysis of formal and informal data (including running records, miscue analysis, anecdotal records, observations, and student talk), Kristy, Ryan, and Susie noticed that while Evan was in Reading Recovery, he used two cueing systems—semantics (meaning cues) and grapho-phonemics (visual cues)—to make predictions about words he did not know. However, once Reading Recovery was discontinued, he rarely used meaning and most often used visual cues only. Based on talk about data, the team decided that their goal in both classroom and intervention settings would be to teach for monitoring and cross-checking.

Now What (in the Classroom). The team decided that the next step for Evan was to work toward using multiple cueing systems, starting with meaning. Since data showed that he tended to rely on only one cueing system when problem-solving, they decided that the "Guess the Covered Word" strategy would help him slow down and think about what he knew. After predicting what would make sense for the covered word, they would ask him to check his prediction with the

visual cues. Ryan brought the big book *Case of the Missing Chick* (Frost, 1991) to read with the group; she had strategically covered up a few key words for the children to problem-solve. She began by asking the students to share the strategies they used when they came upon words that they did not know:

Evan: Sound it out.

Jamel: You can take away the word.

Ryan: Do you mean skip the word, read on, and then come back? Well, that is what I want us to work on today. To skip the word, read to the end of the sentence, and think about what would make sense. In today's story, I have covered words and I want you to try that. Then we will check our guess by seeing if it looks right with the text.

Next, Ryan shared pages from the big book and demonstrated how to cross-check meaning cues with visual cues. She reread the sentence and asked the students to "think about what would make sense."

Ryan: "She took her shopping basket and _____ off to the market."

Devante: Went.

Evan: Hurried.

Tyler: Ran.

Jamel: Zoomed.

Ryan reread the sentence with each child's prediction and asked, "Would that make sense?" The children decided that all of their words would make sense. Ryan then said, "Now, let's see which word will work with the text." She uncovered the first letter, *b*. "What do you see?" Students then eliminated their guesses by checking it with words that began with an *b*.

Ryan: So can it be *went*? Can it be *ran*? Can it be *zoomed*? Can it be *hurried*? What do you see? Let's check more of the word.
h—u—r

Evan: I was right, it's *hurried*!

Ryan: [Reading a second sentence] "Call me when the chick _____, she squealed."

Devante: Hatches.

Jamel: Gets here.

Evan: Pops.

Ryan: Let's reread to see if it makes sense. [Rereading each example] These do make sense, but do they match the text? What do you see? [Uncovering the first letter, *a*.] So could it be *hatches*? *gets here*? *pops*? Do they fit?

Students: No.

Ryan: Let's look through this word.

She began with *a*, then went to *arr* and reread the sentence, including that part of the word. That is when the students predicted *arrived*.

Ryan: What does it mean?

Evan: It means *come*.

Ryan: So today, when you are reading and you come to a word you don't know, I want you to try this strategy—skip the word and read on to think about what would make sense, then check your guess with the text to see if it matches.

Then What (in the Classroom). Evan successfully used this strategy when prompted to do so. Ryan then planned to look for examples of him applying it independently without her support.

Now What (with the Interventionist). Susie had previously demonstrated the “Guess the Covered Word” strategy with Evan's small group. Next, she focused on providing practice in encountering words students did not know. In this lesson, each child read the text and Susie listened and prompted as needed. As they read, Kristy noticed that Evan said “the” for the word *them*. Evan had monitored his reading and realized something was not right with the meaning when he miscued. He then went back, reread, and self-corrected. When Susie asked him, “How did you know something wasn't right?,” Evan said that the sentence didn't make sense. Susie celebrated what Evan did and used his monitoring example as her teaching point.

Then What (with the Interventionist). Susie used the same technique with Evan until he was fluent with this strategy. She worked toward having Evan articulate what he was doing instead of giving him the language to describe his practices. Like Ryan, Susie scaffolded Evan's learning only as needed and helped him strive for independence in cross-checking meaning and visual cues.

Learning through Inquiry and Dialogue: Analyzing Multiple Data Sources and Interpreting through Multiple Perspectives

To support their students' learning, the student literacy team at Ben Hazel Primary School analyzes multiple data sources. Wolcott (2009) argues that analysis

follows standard procedures for observing, measuring, and communicating with others about the nature of various kinds of data, and data are examined and reported through procedures generally accepted in schools. Because each assessment procedure has its own limitations and biases, the team analyzes data from a variety of sources, including formal assessments such as the *Dominie* (DeFord, 2004) and informal assessments such as observations, anecdotal records, and running records (Clay, 1993). The focus of these analyses is to create a picture of how a student is learning, and they often result in both quantitative and qualitative descriptions. Assessments function as tools that provide information about a student in a particular moment.

Kristy, Ryan, and Susie, along with members of other literacy teams, go beyond careful analysis of data to interpretation. Interpretation, unlike analysis, is not necessarily derived from agreed-upon, carefully specified procedures, but rather from efforts to make sense of analyzed data (Wolcott, 2009). At Ben Hazel, it goes beyond information gathering to focus on how knowledge informs the kinds of instruction that will support a student. Whereas each person involved in assessment is limited by his or her perspectives on the teaching and learning of reading and writing, interpretation “invites the reflection, the pondering, of data in terms of what people make of them” (Wolcott, 2009, p. 30)—and, as noted in the SARW, “The more consequential the decision, the more important it is to seek diverse perspectives and independent sources of data” (p. 24).

The literacy team accomplishes interpretation through the multiple perspectives brought together through their talk. As literacy coach, it is Kristy’s role to create spaces for this kind of interpretive talk. She does this very intentionally. Not only do the team’s different perspectives lead to instructional plans for students, but they also allow children like Evan to receive the same instructional focus from multiple teachers. The literacy team creates a common language and common learning experiences for the student.

In the SARW, assessment is defined as a form of inquiry. The end result of any inquiry should be thoughtful new action (Short, Harste, & Burke, 1996). In Evan’s case, the team’s actions supported his learning. Rather than treating assessment merely as a series of facts about a student, Kristy, Ryan, and Susie took an inquiry stance. Through talk, which they view as the most important way to help them make sense of data and build functional understandings, they built knowledge about both Evan’s learning and their teaching. As Kristy noted, “Talk is the breath and life of our process.”

While no assessment system is perfect, it is clear that the literacy team at Ben Hazel successfully use multiple perspectives to interpret multiple forms of assessment. They use assessments as tools for inquiry, tools that provide multiple opportunities for the teacher, coach, interventionist, and other educational stakeholders

to talk together. In so doing, they learn about their students as readers and about themselves as teachers.

See Figures 17 and 18 for lists of the assessment tools and instructional methods Kristy and Ryan use with their students.

Figure 17. Literacy coach Kristy Wood’s assessment tools and instructional moves.

Assessment Tools

Observation

Listening

Inquiry (asking questions to understand)

Johnson’s (2006) framework for assessing student learning

Dominie “Oral Reading Passages” and “Sentence Writing and Spelling”

Instructional Moves

Encouraged a cycle of data collection, reflection, and planning between teachers.

Scheduled Student Growth Meetings: Provided time and space for teachers to engage in dialogue as they inquired into and reflected on test data in order to refine teaching practices and better understand student learning.

Reviewed test data with teachers and created environment that allowed teachers to slow down, notice, and name what students were learning.

Brought together vertical and grade-specific teams for analyzing data.

For focus student Evan:

- Provided place to talk about test data as well as informal assessment data from teacher to formulate instruction for Evan.
 - Decided that he was not making adequate progress and would benefit from practice with two cueing systems—semantic and grapho-phonemics.
 - Determined how or if instruction was working for Evan.
 - Aligned Evan’s instruction from multiple teachers. Monitored progress with interventionist.
-

Figure 18. Classroom teacher Ryan Brunson’s assessment tools and instructional moves.

Assessment Tools

Listening

Observation

Inquiry (asking questions to understand)

Informal assessments, e.g., over-the-shoulder miscue analysis, running records, anecdotal notes

Dominie “Oral Reading Passages,” “Sentence Writing and Spelling,” and “Core Reading Words”

Reflection

Instructional Moves

Provided time for students to “turn ‘n talk” to each other about their reading as a window into their thinking and to understand the kinds of knowledge they were building.

Determined Evan’s abilities with sentence writing and spelling, text reading levels, and core reading words assessment.

Challenged the assumption that Evan did not know high-frequency words and suggested another hypothesis about Evan’s reading.

Decided to teach for meaning and cross-checking with text.

Employed “Guess the Covered Word” strategy.

Demonstrated how to read for meaning and cross-checked meaning with text and observed as Evan used these strategies.

Listened to Evan’s reading as he cross-checked meaning with text and scaffolded him by rereading, asking questions, and providing practice.

Asked Evan questions about strategies for reading, e.g., “What would make sense here? Which words work with the text?”

Portrait 5: Timothy O’Keefe, Second-Grade Teacher

Heidi Mills and Timothy O’Keefe

Growing a Reader: From Kidwatching to Curriculum



“My Favorite Teacher at CFI”

My favorite teacher at CFI is Mr. O’Keefe. He has dedicated his own time after school for Literacy Club. I actually get excited about the Literacy Club! He really cares for ALL of his students. I really like when he plays the guitar in the classroom. Thank you, Mr. O’KEEFE, I am actual . . . ly reading now!

This Facebook post was created by Cameron toward the end of her second-grade year at the Center for Inquiry (CFI) in Columbia, South Carolina. CFI is a suburban magnet school, jointly supported by Richland School District Two and

the University of South Carolina. About 51 percent of the students are European American, 47 percent are African American, and the remaining 3 percent are Korean, Chinese, African, and Latino/a.

At first glance, Cameron's entry is simply adorable, yet it is so much more than simple or adorable. When you look below the surface, her post reveals critical reasons why Cameron closes with this most powerful accolade—she is “actually reading now!” Cameron *is* a reader. Her identity has shifted over the school year. When Cameron entered second grade, she lacked both confidence and competence as a reader. She avoided reading. Now she embraces it. She sees herself as a reader; she is invested in the process. Cameron has a greater sense of agency, and she chooses to read in and outside of school.

At CFI, Cameron was immersed in a culture of literacy, one in which reading was valued and woven throughout the fabric of the curriculum, day in and day out. Cameron's immersion in a culture of literacy at CFI began in kindergarten. Teachers at CFI teach the same group for two consecutive years, so Cameron had 360 days of rich, authentic, meaning-based reading experiences with her kindergarten and first-grade teacher, Jennifer Barnes. Tim, her second- and third-grade teacher, was standing on Jennifer's shoulders as they both made instructional decisions from careful kidwatching data. Both teachers embrace the SARW and believe that “the most productive and powerful assessments for students are likely to be the formative assessments that occur in the daily activities of the classroom” (p. 13). Additionally, Tim collaborated extensively with Cameron's parents. As recommended in the SARW, Tim established an honest, trusting relationship with them and engaged them as valuable partners in the assessment process. He kept Cameron's parents abreast of their daughter's progress by sharing data collected from both formal and informal assessments. In return, they helped Tim understand Cameron's life outside of school. Tim lived the charge laid out to teachers in the SARW:

Schools have a responsibility to help families and community members understand the assessment process and the range of tools that can be useful in painting a detailed picture of learning, including both how individual students are learning and how the school is doing in its efforts to support learning. (p. 27)

Tim and Cameron's parents worked together to ensure Cameron's success as a reader. They moved in and out of mentor and apprentice roles as they learned about Cameron as a reader and provided her with literacy experiences that propelled her forward.

Why a Culture of Literacy Matters in the Classroom

Classroom teachers can make a significant difference in the current and future life of a child. They have the gift of time—seven hours a day—with their students. When teachers send children ongoing messages about the value and enjoyment found in reading; when they take the time and care necessary to get to know children as readers so they can make wise teaching moves on each child’s behalf; and when they teach children how to talk with one another, reader-to-reader, lives change (Mills, O’Keefe, & Jennings, 2004). In Tim’s second-grade, self-contained classroom, he uses a variety of curricular structures to help Cameron and her classmates grow and change as readers, including:

Read-alouds. Reading high-quality picture and chapter books to the class followed by engaging conversations that deepen comprehension and appreciation of the text.

Language appreciation. Shared reading of a poem, article, or song as part of morning meeting rituals. After reading the piece together, the class holds reflective conversations about its meaning and about the author’s craft.

Independent reading (IR). Extensive time reading “just right” books independently.

Reading conferences. During IR, Tim coaches his students as readers and audiotapes them as they read passages from their selected books. He also takes notes about fluency, intonation, and the nature of miscues (high or low quality) and concludes each conference by talking about the story, the child’s book selection, and the reading strategies used by the student.

Whole-class strategy sharing. Immediately following independent reading, Tim holds a strategy-sharing meeting for the whole class. He begins the meeting by highlighting the strategies his students used during IR. He then invites them to share the strategies they use to figure out unknown words or passages.

Literature circles. Students regularly participate in small-group conversations around chapter books. They often read a chapter or two for homework, complete a literature response entry, and then come together to talk about the book. The goal is for students to leave the conversation with a deeper understanding and appreciation of the text.

Literacy Club. One afternoon each week after school, Tim meets with a small group of students who need additional, focused support as readers. During these meetings, Tim teaches for strategies. Through ongoing small-group instruction across the year, the majority of these

children, all of whom entered the year reading below grade level, end the year reading at or above grade level. Most important, they leave as invested, confident readers who choose to read.

Making Strategic Assessment Choices within and across Literacy Structures

We have learned that it is not enough to simply engage students in rich literacy experiences. Teachers also need to be careful kidwatchers who identify patterns in children's reading and make instructional decisions, using both formal and informal data (Goodman, 1978; Johnston, 2005; Strickland & Strickland, 2000). When doing so, they teach from an inquiry stance (Mills, 2011) and access the potential of each curricular structure. For them, as noted in the SARW, "the most productive and powerful assessments for students are likely to be the formative assessments that occur in the daily activities of the classroom" (p. 13).

When students are engaged in strategy sharing after independent reading, they attend to strategies that accomplished readers use. When they engage in literature circle conversations, the focus is on talking their way into understanding things such as text, plot, and characters. Each curricular structure has different instructional purposes and assessment opportunities. Careful kidwatchers ask questions such as:

- What is the purpose/focus/function of this structure?
- What are the essential questions we want to ask ourselves about children's literacy learning when engaged in this structure?
- What are the natural opportunities to gather information from the process and products that are naturally embedded in the life of this structure?
- How might naturally occurring data help us answer our essential questions about individuals, groups, and our whole class?
- What tool(s) might complement and extend naturally occurring data in this structure to answer our questions and help us make informed instructional decisions and teach responsively (professionally published, teacher-created, created with and for children)?

Teachers need to know about the strategies their students employ, their reading preferences, their investment when given time and choice to read, and the ways in which they respond to texts and to one another. To gather this information, kidwatchers access naturally occurring data within curricular structures and then turn to formal and informal assessment data to fill the voids. They understand that each form of assessment reveals certain things and conceals others. Teachers use assessments rather than being used by them.

Tim has been a classroom teacher for thirty-three years and has become a strategic kidwatcher by creating his own system that is focused yet efficient and captures what he believes matters most as he confers with readers. He documents miscues on sticky notes or on his ELA clipboard, which consists of blank paper divided into sections with each class member's name (see Figures 19). As much as possible, he interprets miscues "in the midst" or immediately following the conference. He codes miscues in this way: NMC (no meaning change), SMC (some meaning change), and MC (meaning change). If students self-correct, he adds SC next to the miscue because he wants to capture the nature and frequency of self-corrections. Just last week, Tim took notes as Cameron, now in third grade, was reading *The Music of Dolphins* (Hesse, 1996). He noticed: "She was focused and ready to read. She read 'if' for *is* and self-corrected the miscue. She read 'probably' for *perhaps* and self-corrected." Tim coded the miscue as NMC because it didn't change the meaning, i.e., it was a semantically acceptable miscue. Cameron sought help for the word *swimmer*. She read "Shay" for *she*, which didn't change the meaning (NMC). Finally, she substituted "waits" for *watches*, which Tim coded as SMC (see Figure 20). He made a note about his teaching point with an asterisk. During this conference, he reminded Cameron about the value of rereading when she miscues because he noticed it has made a difference in her fluency and comprehension over time.

Cameron as a Reader in Second Grade—in Tim's Words

Cameron was absent on Friday. She had missed her student-led conference earlier in the week, and we needed to reschedule. Her brother, Chase, was in school so I asked him about Cameron. "She has a fever," he said. That afternoon, I was pleased to see Cameron in her mom's van as they came to pick up Chase.

"Hi, kiddo. We missed you today," I said reaching into the van to touch her cheek.

"I missed you guys too. I'm feeling better now. Did you read *Holes* (Sachar, 1998) today?" She was referring to the chapter book our student teacher was reading aloud to the class.

"Yes, we read a chapter this afternoon."

"Uh-oh," her mom said. "We read three chapters today."

"Yeah," Cameron said. "We're up to the part where Stanley finds Zero in the desert under the boat. Do you know the part?"

I knew the part. It made me smile to hear that Cameron and her mom had spent a good part of the day reading together. That wasn't always the case for Cameron.

"Sure," I said, "We only read a chapter together, so you're ahead of us."

Figure 19. Tim's kidwatching notes.

Made a personal connection - "My dog can run like nobody's business", "I like the part that said it was a race against time - it made me want to read on" enthusiastic
Garrett

"They put in a lot of cool descriptions about Grandfather and all the flashbacks so we really get to know him better.. That really makes me care for him."
Serenity

Wears her glasses today! much better apparent comprehension, reads a little word-for-word, "It says a lot of details about how sick Grandfather is. I feel sorry for him."
Cameron

Talks about his own dog, great personal connection, "So far I like it because it's about a dog. You know how much I like dogs!"
Samuel

"I wonder who the antagonist is who's waiting on the porch," very invested in the conversation, "How little Willie has to feed Grandfather... I like how we get to him when he wasn't sick - through flashbacks."
Brandon

12/5

Reading Stone Fox // Comments in small group/
whole group

Figure 20. Tim's reading conference notes.

Cameron C. Music of Dolphins
 1/12/12
 ready to read! (I f-Is) SC
 Very insightful comments,
 (probably - perhaps) NMC /sc
 ASKS for 'swimmer'
 (Shay-She) NMC (waits - watches) SMC
 * Go back and reread when
 you miscue!

“Oh, don’t worry,” she said. “I won’t give it away.” And I trusted that she wouldn’t. Cameron’s mother and I chatted a moment about rescheduling our student-led conference. Chase climbed into the car and before they drove away, I asked Cameron what she would read for her parents at the student-led conference on Monday morning. She beamed. It was a beautiful, confident smile, full of her high dimples and sparkling eyes, one that said so much more than the few words she spoke next: “*Frog and Toad*, of course!”

Now it was my turn to smile. *Frog and Toad Together* (Lobel, 1972). As they drove away into the weekend, I remembered how important Lobel’s stories were to Cameron when she was first becoming a reader. When I met Cameron in August of second grade, she avoided reading. I documented a number of instances that revealed this troubling pattern on my clipboard of anecdotal notes. I make ongoing observations of each student, documenting what they say or do during whole-group, small-group, and individual literacy experiences. These notes are really for my eyes only. They are brief yet detailed enough to remind me what mattered at that moment with each individual child (see Figure 19).

When we engaged in shared reading during language appreciation, Cameron did not join in and actually turned away from the text, which was written on large sheets of construction paper or on the Smart Board. When we sang songs together,

she did not look at the song chart to read the lyrics, even though I made my expectation clear and reminded the children to do this for the first few weeks of school. When Cameron's peers were discussing a particular passage in small-group literature circle conversations, she did not try to find the relevant page or track down the passage. When one of her friends chose a passage to read aloud, Cameron did not focus on the text enough to even read along. The first time I asked her to read, she was very reluctant. "Couldn't you read with someone else today?" she pleaded. Now Cameron asks if she can read first.

Seeking to Understand Cameron as a Reader

In my initial reading conference with Cameron during the first week of second grade, I asked her to read the first story out of the 2.1 basal reader. I do this with every child at the beginning of the year to give me a feel for the range of readers I have in class. I rarely use the basal texts for reading material, but I do use them for purposes like this and when I need multiple copies of a story for a small- or large-group literature conversation. This year the first text I used to get a sense of readers in the class was *Ronald Morgan Goes to Bat* (Giff, 1990). When I met with Cameron, I took notes as she read softly and hesitantly. I noticed that her energy was devoted to sounding out words, with little regard for meaning. Almost every miscue I recorded reflected visual information or decoding, with little regard for syntax or semantics. She read "hitted" for *heard*, "toaged" for *tagged*, and "team" for *turn*. She frequently pleaded with me to tell her the unknown words.

Cameron offered additional evidence that she was not tracking for meaning or engaging with the text. She did not talk about the story or smile at the funny parts. There was no spontaneous chatter about the characters or the plot. When I asked Cameron to tell me about what she had read, she said that she did not want to talk about it and asked if I could read with someone else. Reading was an unpleasant task for Cameron at the beginning of second grade—something she did to comply but did not enjoy. She was visibly relieved when our conference was over and I told her she could join her classmates in independent reading.

Cameron did not choose to read. During independent reading, I often pause between reading conferences to check on the status of the class—I make notes about book choices and evaluate how invested the students are as readers. My record sheets are simple, triple-spaced rosters, with titles, a few observations, and a rudimentary scoring system, with "scores" ranging from one to three. This simple yet efficient record-keeping strategy helps me learn about my students as readers and reveals important investment patterns. Each time I look to see what a child is doing, I record a "score" on the chart. A "one" signals (as far as I can tell) that the child is reading—his or her eyes are on the text. This is the easy one. A "two"

means the student was not reading when I looked his or her way but may have been off-task for just a moment—e.g., had briefly turned away, was looking for a different book, or was enjoying the pictures in the current one. A “three” means that the student is not reading and/or is not consistently engaging with the text. This kind of data is especially important to me at the beginning of the year, as I get to know the children as readers.

To help me identify investment patterns across the class, I try to make at least ten of these observations each week. If the majority of my observations are ones and twos, I feel pretty good about how IR time is being used. If the scores include mostly twos and threes, this tells me that there may be issues that need to be addressed with individual readers or the entire community. It may be that we need to find some “just right” books or perhaps a more suitable reading spot in the room. Or it might just mean that a child is avoiding reading for some reason. Cameron’s scores for those first few weeks of school were consistently threes with a few twos. She often chose books that were too challenging for her to read on her own or magazines with text that she couldn’t understand. Based on patterns in my independent reading data, one of the first and most important moves I made was to help Cameron learn how to make “just right” book choices. I wanted her to find books she could read successfully so she would find reading enjoyable and employ a range of cue systems to construct meaning, instead of defaulting to “sounding out,” which is the pattern I identified during my first conference with her.

I made another critical move when I invited Cameron and four of her classmates to join me for Literacy Club every Thursday after school for about ninety minutes. We begin Literacy Club with fellowship—we straighten up the room, share a snack, and play word games. We then spend at least an hour reading and writing together. If we are reading a book together as a class, we read ahead in Literacy Club. This makes it possible for all of the kids to engage successfully with the texts their friends are reading and allows them to be full-fledged members of what Smith calls the more generalized literacy club (Smith, 1987). Other times, we select a book to read as a small group over a several-week period. We read, talk, share strategies and connections, then read some more. The environment is intimate and nonjudgmental. This close, personal time gives me an opportunity to speak with children reader to reader and friend to friend. Typically, when we reach the end of a page, we talk. We share connections, predictions, and ideas about characters. I share from my notes. I always find something positive to share about each child, and I often coach toward a more holistic, meaning-based set of strategies. As Cameron read in our small group, I provided her with focused feedback, which I subsequently recorded in my kidwatching notes:

I love how you changed your voice when David was talking, that really shows me that you are understanding this page. You can always tell when dialogue is coming up

when you see quotation marks, right? How did you figure that word out? *Mysterious* is a long one. I could tell that you knew it was an exciting part because I could hear it in your voice.

In the beginning, I did all of the coaching in the Literacy Club. Now, all of the children coach and learn from one another. These consistent, weekly literacy engagements have made a tremendous difference in Cameron's confidence and in her competence as a reader. Finding herself in a position to appreciate and coach another student elevated the way she looked at herself as a reader. As the year progressed, she developed a generative theory of reading and used it to coach her friends.

Another essential feature of our classroom that helped Cameron develop as a reader is our emphasis on whole-group strategy sharing. To conclude independent reading, I ask the children to use a sticky note to write down the strategies they use when figuring out unknown words or passages. As they write, they become more aware of the strategies they employ as readers, get in touch with their own reading process, and reflect on their habits or the strategies and patterns they use across texts. I add my own sticky note observations to the mix and access them just as the children do, to remember and highlight effective strategies I noticed individual students using during IR (see Figure 21).

After independent reading, I ask the children to gather at the front of the room for strategy sharing so they can share what they do when they read and how they figure out the meaning of challenging words and passages. At first, Cameron never shared. I think she felt that she had nothing significant to add to the conversation. I continued to nudge her to share every time we conferred. When I read with Cameron in January, I asked if I could share some of what I noticed. Not only did she agree, but she also shyly recorded a strategy of her own, "I look at the pictures." She read what she wrote to the class in a voice barely above a whisper. It was a powerful moment—the very first time she agreed to share in this forum.

"How does looking at the pictures help you figure out what you are reading?" I asked.

"It tells me more about the story," she said, a little breathlessly.

"That's right," I said to the class. "She was sitting next to me, reading a Frog and Toad story, a really cool story, very funny; she turned the page and before she even looked at the words, she told me what she saw in the two pictures. And then she started reading those words. In my notes, I wrote that it helped her to make a prediction about what was going to happen on those two pages. And she was exactly right. Those pictures went with the words so well."

With Cameron's permission, I went on to tell the class some of the things I noticed that might help the other students. I mentioned that Cameron came across

Figure 21. Tim's student and teacher reflections.

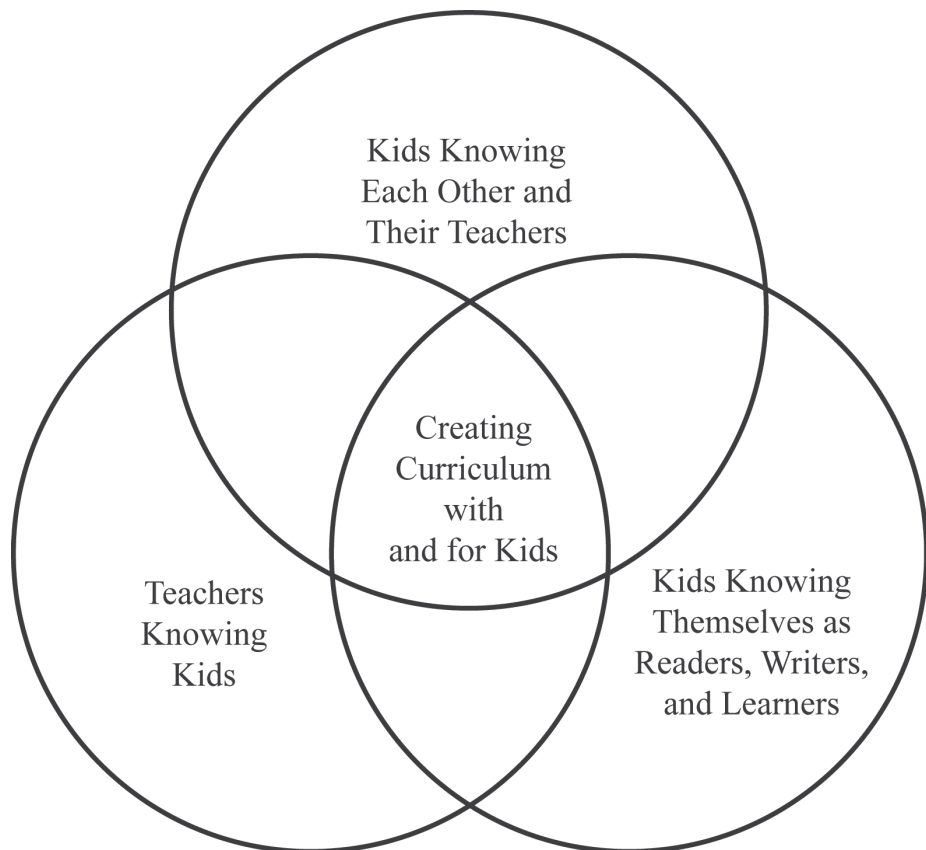


the word *skip*. "The sentence read, *skip through the meadow*. First she said 'spit,' then 'skate.' Then she said, 'skip, skip through the meadow.'" Turning to Cameron I asked her, "How did you know that? How did you figure that out?"

"I read along," she said. I then explained that Cameron read the rest of the sentence and then came back to it. Others nodded and agreed with one another that they too used the strategy of reading on and then coming back. This was a breakthrough moment for Cameron. I believe it was transformative. When Cameron changed her mind, she became a reader in her own eyes. She assumed the identity of a reader and took action to help her friends do the same. By contributing to the conversation during strategy sharing, she was assuming a leadership role in the literacy club of our whole classroom.

At CFI we have expanded our vision of kidwatching beyond that of the teacher taking careful notes and then making instructional decisions from kidwatching data (see Figure 22). While we believe that kidwatching begins with the teacher making careful observations and interpretations of children as readers and writers, it doesn't stop there. It becomes even more powerful when children get to know one another as readers and writers and get in touch with themselves and the reading-writing process. Strategy-sharing sessions promote thinking together about the reading process, noticing and naming strategies readers use individually and collectively to construct and share meaning. Strategy-sharing sessions promote all three dimensions of a richer, expanded vision of kidwatching: teachers knowing kids, kids knowing each other and their teachers, and kids knowing themselves as readers, writers, and learners. My classroom does not consist of one teacher and twenty-two learners. We are twenty-three teachers and twenty-three learners.

Figure 22. Expanded vision of kidwatching.



Another positive shift for Cameron came during literature circle conversations, in which she became much more animated about the books we read together. In small-group as well as whole-group conversations, it was obvious that Cameron was investing more and more in the books. “This chapter is one of the best I ever read!” she said enthusiastically toward the climactic end of *Skylark* (MacLachlan, 1994).

In her last two responses to *Caleb’s Story* (MacLachlan, 2001), Cameron was so much a part of the story that she responded, “It was intense! When Grandfather tells Caleb that they have to go dig Sarah out of the snow[,] . . . I did not know if Sarah was going to live. . . . I love this chapter. Grandfather stayed!” These comments show she was reading for meaning. She was making predictions. She was understanding and investing in the story line. Cameron loved the story and the reading process. She demonstrated the power of talk as an assessment tool. As noted in the SARW, “[M]uch of the assessment information in classrooms is made available in students’ talk about reading and writing” (p. 14).

In March, when we were preparing for student-led conferences, we took several mornings to discuss and reflect on the children’s growth and change as readers, writers, mathematicians, scientists, social scientists, and community members. The day the children considered their growth as readers, Cameron responded to the fill-in prompt “This is how I would describe myself as a reader” with “I love it. When it was the first day of school I did not read good but now I am here longer I CAN READ GOOD!! I think I am a good, fast, great reader.”

During Cameron’s student-led conference, she read one of her favorite stories, “Dragons and Giants” from *Frog and Toad Together* (Lobel, 1972). She read confidently and fluently and with expression. When I asked her to describe why she liked this book so much, Cameron replied, “Cause I really like the characters. I like how they play together. I like what good friends they are.”

Cameron’s mother chimed in with, “When I was young, I just loved the story ‘Cookies’ (Lobel, 1979) about Frog and Toad. When Cameron and I read those, we were just crying and laughing.” Then she went on with another milestone for Cameron and one of her “Proud Mom” moments. The previous week, Cameron’s brother, Chase, went to a birthday party at a bowling alley. Cameron went along, staying on the sidelines watching. Cameron’s mother nearly cried when she said, “And do you know what? Cameron wanted to bring along a book. Can you believe it?”

I *could* believe it. Cameron sees herself as a reader. She truly enjoys reading on her own and delights in sharing information about the stories she reads. As her teacher and her friend, I can’t imagine anything more gratifying.

See Figure 23 for a list of assessment tools and instructional methods I use in my classroom.

Figure 23. Classroom teacher Tim O’Keefe’s assessment tools and instructional moves.

Assessment Tools

Informal miscue analysis

IR investment checklist

Reading conference notes

Observations during literacy engagements such as language appreciation and singing class songs

Kidwatching notes during reading conferences

Observations made during Literacy Club when students listen to one another read, make notes, and notice and name the strategies their friends are using

Observations made when students reflect on strategies they use to make sense or construct meaning when they come to something (words or passages) they don’t understand and then document their strategies on sticky notes

Instructional Moves

Coached explicitly for meaning-based strategies during reading conferences.

Helped Cameron find high-interest, just-right chapter books for Independent Reading.

Invited Cameron to join Literacy Club (90 minutes a week of intensive and meaningful after-school, small-group literacy instruction).

Named and celebrated specific, effective strategies that Cameron used to construct meaning (e.g., use pictures, skip it, ask yourself if it makes sense).

Helped students learn to talk reader to reader and eventually coach one another as readers.

Had students share strategies they used during Independent Reading.

Complemented and extended student reflections by naming strategies used strategically.

Held student-led conferences in which Cameron, her mother, and her teacher all celebrated her growth as a reader by telling stories and offering examples of high-quality miscues, as well as celebrating her capacity to choose just-right books and her investment in reading outside of school.

Third, Fourth, and Fifth Grade

In third, fourth, and fifth grades, the foci from the earlier grades continue: teachers help students develop or solidify a generative theory of reading, as well as the skills and strategies necessary for them to consistently experience success with texts. In addition, teachers at these grade levels help students become explicitly aware of themselves as readers so that they can use that metacognitive knowledge to become increasingly more independent and comprehend more complex texts.

Third grade is often a transition year, as some students enter without a generative theory. The responsibility of the third-grade teacher is to ensure that those students leave not only with a generative theory but also with the necessary skills and strategies to be on the path toward independently comprehending more complex texts. In Portrait 6, district instructional specialist Robin W. Cox visits Sandy Pirkle Anfin's third-grade classroom to document how Sandy accomplishes this by supporting all students as members of a literacy club. Within that club structure, Sandy, like all the teachers in this book, gathers data about her students as readers. She expertly guides the students to notice and name what they do as readers, an extension of the process that Tim detailed for second graders in Portrait 5.

In Portrait 7, university professor Jennifer Wilson and fourth-grade teacher Erika R. Cartledge describe how Erika nudges her students closer to metacognitive awareness by encouraging them to watch themselves while she watches them. Through this lens, she deepens their metacognitive awareness and facilitates personal reflection as a lifelong endeavor. Next, university faculty member Amy Donnelly shows how teacher Amy Oswalt develops systems in her fifth-grade classroom for collecting data that inform her and her students. Amy Oswalt demonstrates how fifth graders can reflect on their own learning and, in turn, become partners with her in evaluating their own progress from the data she collects.

Across all of these portraits, we see affirmation, expert guidance, and self-reflection—the building blocks of independent, strategic readers and writers.

Portrait 6: Sandy Pirkle Anfin, Third-Grade Teacher

Robin W. Cox and Sandy Pirkle Anfin

Growing into the Intellectual Life around Them



Children excitedly enter the room, sharing stories, settling in for the day, and finding books to read. This is my (Sandy's) classroom—a place where I want everyone to feel that it is okay to be where you are. It [the classroom] is a work in progress. By most measures, my students are below grade level. Many are in special education and others receive services from our reading interventionist. Being honest with children about where they are as readers and praising them for their growth is a constant source of tension for me.

I am a third-grade teacher in a Title I school in the suburbs of a mid-size southeastern city. 62% of our students are European American, 36% are African American and 2% are Latino/a. 44% of the children are on free or reduced lunch status. In my five years of teaching, I have come to understand that although I have standards to address, I also have to know my readers and the reading process. I think that the reading process is like building a house. You cannot put a roof on the house if you don't put

the walls up first. Reading is the same. You cannot help children achieve standards until they have all the necessary reading processes in place. When I try to help children reach standards without first addressing reading needs, I am wasting my time and theirs. To be an effective teacher, I have to look at what the child knows and is, and is not yet, able to do.

—Sandy Anfin, October 22, 2010

I (Robin) am the elementary language arts instructional specialist in Sandy's district; I have known her for several years. This year I had the opportunity to spend extended time in her classroom and look closely at how she uses assessment data to guide instruction. When I first began observing Sandy, I immediately realized how easily she relates to her students. She is kind, genuinely interested in their lives, and demonstrates understanding in all that she does. It is not uncommon for a child to approach Sandy to tell her about something that happened at home or to mention a concern. Just recently, when a child came to tell Sandy that she had forgotten her report at home, Sandy knelt down and said, "That's okay, you can bring it on Monday." The child's worried look melted away and she returned to her desk with a smile. These small but significant interactions communicate that, to Sandy, teaching is more than knowing or being able to relate content. It is about understanding learners deeply and being concerned about their lives on a personal level. In *Choice Words* (2004), Peter Johnston quotes Vygotsky and adds his own thinking:

If we have learned anything from Vygotsky (1978), it is that "children grow into the intellectual life around them" (p. 88). That intellectual life is fundamentally social and language has a special place in it. Because the intellectual life is social, it is also relational and emotional. To me, the most humbling part of observing accomplished teachers is seeing the subtle ways in which they build emotionally and relationally healthy learning communities—intellectual environments that produce not mere technical competence, but caring, secure, actively literate human beings. (p. 2)

As part of helping children grow in the intellectual life around them, the stance of kindness that Sandy takes with her students is more than a personality characteristic. It is part of her professional commitment to help all of her students feel that they are special and that they are valued members of the literacy club (Smith, 1987) that Sandy establishes in her classroom. Frank Smith describes the literacy club as a place where readers interact with and learn from one another. As he argued, "We learn from the company we keep" (Smith, 1992, p. 432). Teachers who establish their classrooms as literacy clubs go out of their way to make sure that every child, regardless of ability, sees him- or herself as a successful reader and writer. Sandy accomplishes this by the way she talks with children, by the way she encourages them to talk with one another, by the curricular decisions she makes, and by her efforts to raise their awareness of themselves as readers and writers.

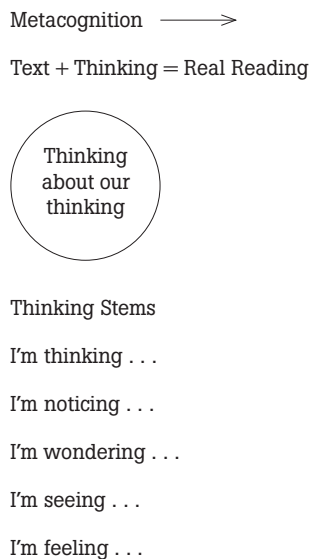
A typical day in Sandy's classroom begins with the third graders gathering on the carpet in front of the easel. Sandy provides a demonstration, usually in the form of an interactive read-aloud, and engages the children in conversations around reading as a meaning-making process. When I spent time in her classroom in September, she was introducing the idea of metacognition: she had co-constructed a chart with the class the day before (see Figure 24). Sandy told the class, "I am going to show you how I am thinking as I am reading. I am going to do some thinking aloud and when I do that, is it a time for you to talk?" The children respond, "No." She then began to read aloud Patricia Polacco's book *Thank you, Mr. Falker* (1998). She stopped a couple of pages into the text and said, "I remember when I was a little girl starting school. I remember wanting to read, so I can understand how the girl in the book feels." This comment is not accidental. Sandy had previously told her students that at one time she did not feel like she was a part of the literacy club: she was not a reader, but now she is and wants them to be also. She continued to read and stopped periodically to demonstrate her own thinking. At the end of the read-aloud, she gave the children time to process this strategy of stopping to think and make meaning. She asked the children why it might be a good idea to do this. One child responded that stopping helps you remember the story and think. Another child said that you can make sure you are understanding the story. Sandy affirmed both children and told the class that today during independent reading she wanted them to try this strategy. She was going to give them sticky notes as a way of marking the places where they stopped, but the most important thing for them to do was to think while they read.

The children then quickly moved from the gathering place on the carpet to their seats, where bags of carefully selected books waited. Sandy noticed a child looking for a book to read and checked in with him to make sure he knew what he needed to do. She then moved to a small table to have a one-on-one conference with another child.

Sandy listened to him read a *Dominie* text (DeFord, 2004) and marked the miscues as he did so. While he finished the book silently, she analyzed the record for meaning and visual cues. When he was done, Sandy asked him to retell the story and followed up with comprehension questions about the book.

As soon as conferences were over and the timer rang, the children returned to the carpet for a debriefing. The talk returned to what they were learning about being strategic readers. Students shared what they tried as readers, what worked and what didn't. They listened intently to one another and often add comments such as "I tried that too!" This is a literacy club in action. Children were talking about books, believing in their ability to make sense of text, and discussing what they were learning about how to stretch themselves. As the district instructional

Figure 24. Sandy's metacognition chart.



specialist, I see that teachers sometimes skip this opportunity with their students. Sandy understands the value of having children debrief.

When we met to talk about my observations of her classroom, I asked Sandy about her independent reading time. She felt it was critical that students were in love with books and reading ones they could and wanted to read. For this to happen, students needed to first understand that reading was about making meaning. This was often something Sandy needed to help students learn. She noted, for example, that the child she was reading with earlier thought reading was about getting the words right. Other readers were not making inferences, not thinking deeply, while they were reading. She also shared observations of students' use (or not) of picture cues and of monitoring (or not) for meaning. Sandy keeps track of this kind of assessment data and uses it to inform her teaching. She explained her instruction process:

I think first of all, it's having lots of conversations whole class [about] "What is reading? What does that mean to you?" And kind of fixing some of those misconceptions and . . . helping kids . . . come to the realization of, "Oh, it's not just about if I can say all the words." [In this way, I help] more proficient readers lead some of the less proficient readers to those understandings; [I have] that community talk . . . about books and around what reading is.

And then creating an environment that it's okay to be where you are. . . . I almost cried the other day because I have one child—Nadaria—one of my resource students who refuses to read what's on her level because she's embarrassed about it. And another little boy who is the lowest reader in my class [he's on a 4A], and he heard me talking to Nadaria in the library and she was saying, "But I want to read chapter books." And I was saying, "But Nadaria, if you can't understand the words, then what is the point?" And he leaned over and said, "Nadaria, if you read—the more 'just right' easy books you read—you're gonna get there one day, but we have to read easy books first or we're never gonna get there."

It was clear to me why Sandy almost cried.

In an earlier conversation in the fall, I asked Sandy who had been influential in her learning about reading. She stated, "Well, I think foundationally Frank Smith and that whole idea of the literacy club. I think I always kind of go back to him because I can connect to it, because I didn't feel a part ever until I was in my master's program. And so I think that really shaped [my thinking]. Once I learned about that [the literacy club] and read him that very first class, it was kind of like it made sense why I struggled in school and why I hated school."

As we wrapped up this discussion, I asked Sandy how she made decisions about what to teach each day. She quickly responded that she used her miscue analysis (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 1987, 2005) on the *Dominie* "Oral Reading Passage" assessment (DeFord, 2004), her anecdotal notes during reading and writing workshops, and her observations during class discussions about reading. She then formed small groups around the patterns she had identified. We continued our conversation, which led to a discussion about her concerns for her student Anton. In first grade, after insistence from his mother that Anton must be learning disabled (his father was, so she thought Anton must be), Anton was identified for special services. As a result, he had an individualized education program (IEP), and he received daily reading instruction from a special education teacher.

At the beginning of the year, Anton had also taken the national Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test (Northwest Evaluation Association, 2008). He was in the 19th percentile in reading and the 1st percentile in language development. However, while Sandy uses the MAP assessment data as information, she knows that it cannot replace sitting side by side with a child and listening to him read. As noted in the SARW:

Teacher knowledge cannot be replaced by standardized tests. Any one-shot assessment procedure cannot capture the depth and breadth of information teachers have available to them. Even when a widely used, commercial test is administered, teachers must draw upon the full range of their knowledge about content and individual students to make sense of the limited information such a test provides. (p. 15)

When Sandy first sat with Anton, she interviewed him using the Burke interview (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 1987) and her own interest inventory. She found that he hated school and specifically hated reading. His interests were in trucks and trains, and he did not want to discuss reading at all. Normally this would not have been a major concern for Sandy, as she frequently encounters children who do not yet love to read. However, because he left the room every day to get help from a special education teacher, Anton spent only fifteen to twenty minutes a day with Sandy for reading. That was not much time for her to help him choose to read.

Sandy was also concerned that the instruction Anton received from the special education teacher might not be consistent with what he received from her. On the *Dominie* “Oral Reading Passage” assessment (DeFord, 2004), Anton’s instructional level was an 8A (equivalent to the sixth month of second grade). His meaning cue use was 33 percent and his visual use, 17 percent. He self-corrected at a ratio of 1:7. Sandy’s greatest concern was that Anton would not even attempt to read an unknown word. He had few, if any, problem-solving strategies. Sandy wanted to help Anton focus on reading as a meaning-making process. She knew that the focus in the special education classroom would be on sound–symbol relationships.

Sandy subsequently talked to Anton’s special education teacher and shared her data. She explained that she thought it was essential for her to match Anton with fun and easy books and that he needed to see reading as an enjoyable experience. It was important to Sandy that Anton develop a theory of himself as a reader and join the literacy club she was establishing in her classroom. The special education teacher agreed to allow Anton to read for meaning and to encourage him to think about what would make sense when he came to words he did not know. She also reduced his special education services time to thirty minutes to allow Anton to be in the classroom for longer periods during reading and writing workshop.

Initially, Anton read slowly; he sounded out every word and had few high-frequency words under control. Sandy started with two goals. First, she wanted to help Anton understand that he was a reader and that reading was a meaning-making process. Second, she wanted him to hear multiple models of fluent reading. She began by matching him with books that were fun and easy for him. When he came to a word he did not know, Sandy gave it to him. She talked to his mother and asked her to do this as well. She also asked Anton’s mother to read to him as a way to help him fall in love with books. Sandy gave Anton time with books on an MP3 player and on the computer so he could further experience fluent reading.

Over time, Anton increased his knowledge of sight words and was more confident as a reader. When Sandy saw this shift in him, as evidenced by his willingness to read with her and his desire to listen to books on tape, she decided to

start having him “skip the word.” Sandy often discussed Anton’s progress with him when they met. She wanted him to see that he was growing as a reader and how he was doing this. When she discussed the growth with him, she would often ask him why he thought he was improving. Sandy felt it was important for Anton to take a metacognitive stance, to recognize that these strategies were working and also to understand that his commitment was making a difference.

Skipping words worked well for a while, and because he was reading at appropriate text levels, Anton was able to comprehend much of what he read. In time, Sandy decided that she wanted him to substitute meaningful words when he came to those he did not know. At this point, she hit a block. Anton refused to do it. He started sounding out words again, and even when she covered a word for him, he refused to make substitutions. Sandy decided to stop asking him to do this. She went back to having him skip the word and then, at the end of portions of the text, she would talk to him and ask him what was happening. She found that when she did this, Anton would describe what had happened and his vocabulary matched many of the words he had ineffectively tried to sound out.

Sandy also saw a shift in Anton when he began asking her if he could listen to chapter books on tape. He wanted more sophisticated texts and she made sure he had them. At this time, Anton independently decided to read *SpongeBob SquarePants* books. Sandy initially underestimated the power of using a text about characters that Anton knew from television. However, she quickly realized that because Anton could “hear” the voices and knew the actions, the books were easier for him, and he was able to read the *SpongeBob SquarePants* books fluently. To Sandy’s delight, Anton also independently began making meaningful substitutions for unfamiliar words.

On a *Dominie* (DeFord, 2004) text reading in March, Anton read a *Dominie* 10A (seventh month of third grade) text with 100 percent comprehension and 95 percent accuracy. He had gained nine months over the course of seven. Anton’s fluency still needed work, but he had improved considerably since the fall. The biggest change Sandy saw was that he was choosing to read, and he used more effective strategies to figure out unfamiliar words. On the Measures of Academic Performance (Northwest Evaluation Association, 2008), Anton was in the 72nd percentile in reading (compared to 19th percentile in the fall) and the 26th percentile in language development (compared to the 1st percentile in the fall).

Sandy hoped to have Anton more secure in his strategy use by year’s end. His use of meaning cues was still around 20 percent; Sandy felt it would take a bit more time for him to learn to use both meaning and visual cues. However, he was attempting unknown words, he had developed a desire to read, and he had grown in his ability to make sense of text.

Sandy is committed to every student in her classroom and knows that the most powerful information is the assessment data that provide explicit direction for instruction. As stated in the SARW:

A teacher who knows a great deal about the range of techniques readers and writers use will be able to provide students and other audiences with specific, focused feedback about learning. Indeed, students learn things about themselves and about literacy from teachers' feedback that no standardized test can supply. (p. 15)

Recently, Sandy held another conference with Anton to discuss his progress and share her excitement at his reading and effort. She asked him what he thought he had done to improve and was pleased when he said that, originally, when he didn't know a word, he skipped it, and now he went back to reread and think about the book. He said he was happy about his growth as a reader. He had become more aware of himself as a reader and was seeing himself as a part of the literacy club.

See Figure 25 for a list of assessment tools and instructional methods Sandy uses in her classroom.

Figure 25. Classroom teacher Sandy Anfin's assessment tools and instructional moves.

Assessment Tools

Listening
 Observation
 Inquiry (asking questions to understand)
 Anecdotal notes
 Burke interview
 Modified miscue analysis
Dominie "Oral Reading Passages"
 Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)

Instructional Moves

Helped students find books that are both fun and easy.
 Helped students develop a sense of agency.
 Provided books on tape to help develop fluency.
 Demonstrated fluent reading through read-alouds and shared reading.
 Allowed use of texts such as *SpongeBob* books.
 Focused on meaning for prompts during independent conferences and also during whole-class and small-group lessons.
 Ensured that all remarks help students develop agency.
 Provided time for students to engage in reading and writing.

Portrait 7: Erika R. Cartledge, Fourth-Grade Teacher

Jennifer L. Wilson and Erika R. Cartledge

“They Always Know My Eyes Are on Them”: Using Kidwatching to Inform Teaching



Erika's Classroom

Erika Cartledge's fourth-grade classroom is truly a community of learners, one in which students have frequent opportunities to express themselves and make informed choices. It is a print-rich environment with a well-organized, attractive, and easily accessible classroom library. Anchor charts surround the room. A meeting area is set up at the front of the room. Students sit at tables, which are grouped heterogeneously. A kidney table located in the left front corner is used for conferences, small-group instruction, and assessments. The twenty-one students in Erika's classroom are racially, educationally, and economically diverse—52.0 percent are African American, 29.0 percent are European American, 9.5 percent are Latino/a, and 9.5 percent are Asian American. Two of the students have an IEP or 504 plan, and 38 percent qualify for free or reduced lunch.

A Typical Day

On a typical day, the students enter the classroom when the first bell rings at 7:40. They follow the morning routine, which includes reading the interactive morning

message and listening to the morning announcements. Around 8:05, the class musician plays a CD of “Colorful World,” a transitional song for reporting to the meeting area for morning meeting. Then the students greet one another and hold share time. Two students sign up each day to share something about what the class is learning, what they as a community have learned, or what they will be learning. Erika uses this time to learn about and from her students.

The Helper of the Day then reads the interactive morning message. In this classroom, the students are in charge—they practically run the classroom. The students take the lunch count, set up the technology, facilitate morning meeting, and more. When discussing these tasks and the students’ responsibility for them, Erika emphasizes the importance of trust: “Trust is a huge factor. In order for everything to work well, I have to trust myself, the students, and the process.”

During morning meeting, Erika launches reading workshop, which includes high-quality read-alouds, shared reading, and word study within a content workshop. Independent reading and writing take place daily for thirty minutes each after related arts. Math workshop follows writing workshop. After lunch and recess, the class conducts further exploration of content literacy. To support the learning of US history, Erika uses readers theater, book clubs, content clubs, poetry, and songs. The day of learning concludes with hands-on science exploration.

One day during reading workshop, I captured this reading conference:

Erika: Nicole, what will you be reading today?

Nicole: *Judy Moody* [McDonald, 2000].

Erika: Okay, *Judy Moody*. . . . What made you check out that book?

Nicole: Because in the summer I read . . . I read the first book *Judy Moody* and I thought it was really good, so I’m reading the second one.

Erika: Okay . . . wonderful . . . and how many books are in this series? Do you know?

Nicole: Six.

Erika: Six books . . . okay . . . so I’m thinking you have plans to keep going.

Nicole: Yes, ma’am.

Erika: Yes, okay . . . so where are you in this book? And I will need you to speak up please, ma’am.

Nicole: Yes, ma’am . . . I’m at the beginning of the book.

Erika: Okay.

Nicole: And so far Judy Moody wants to be famous because her friend . . . ummmm . . . Jessica Finch got famous about the spelling bee, and she wants to look up words to spell.

Erika: All right . . . I'm going to get you to pick up where you left off on page 26, I guess.

Nicole: Yes, ma'am.

Erika: All right, and remember, I do need you to speak up.

Nicole: Yes, ma'am.

[Nicole reads page 26 and part of page 27.]

Erika: All right, stop right there, please. Thank you very much. Do you think this is a "just right" book for you, Nicole?

Nicole: I think it's kind of easy.

Erika: Yeah, it seems to me too like it's easy. I know you're enjoying it . . . right? And it's almost like you know all the words or almost all the words. Okay . . . and sometimes it's okay for us to read easier books as long as we make sure in our diet that we have some that are going to stretch us a little bit more as a reader.

Nicole: Yes, ma'am.

Erika: Okay . . . all right . . . thank you very much.

Nicole: You're welcome.

Getting to Know Her Students

Erika conducted this particular conference at the beginning of the school year as part of her "getting to know" each reader time. From her observations, interactions, and a reading-writing survey, she had already learned that Nicole read and wrote independently and with a purpose, had a balanced reading diet, liked to read mysteries, made connections when she was reading, used expression, read on grade level, and thought that to be a good reader "[y]ou have to read different books and genres." Erika knew that Nicole thought reading was easy for her when "it's all quiet" and hard when "there's a lot going on." She also knew that one of Nicole's goals was "to read more science books," and that the best books she had ever read were Ron Roy's *A to Z Mysteries*.

Erika asks students to choose the book to share in these reading conferences; as she noted, "I have no way of knowing which book they will choose. . . . Book selections reveal so much about them as readers. I get a small window into a reader's favorite genre, book series, overall interests, and their level of confidence

as a reader.” During the book conference, Erika pays close attention to what the students are reading. She considers it both her responsibility and the students’ to “monitor their reading diets.” Erika believes that reading in just one genre will not help students grow as readers. At the same time, she “make[s] every effort to support their favorite genre.” To do this, Erika makes sure to give her students plenty of time and space for book talks. She feels that this empowers them as readers.

As Erika listened to Nicole read, she noted that Nicole read for meaning and self-corrected when meaning broke down. She made one miscue that was not self-corrected (“carton”/*cartoon*) and two that were corrected (“even”/*everybody* and “we were”/*were*). Nicole’s pacing and use of expression was appropriate and she attended to punctuation. On other days and in other conferences, Erika used retrospective miscue:

This type of reading conference [retrospective miscue] allows me to share my noticings on the running record with the reader on the spot. Questions I have about this reader could possibly be answered during this time. I certainly become more knowledgeable about this reader and his or her reading process.

While Erika conducts reading conferences in the classroom or works with small groups, the other students read independently. Sometimes this independent time involves readers theater and book clubs. Students maintain a reader’s notebook that includes a monthly reading diet graph, twice-weekly written responses, and an accountability log. Erika explains:

It’s important for my readers to see themselves as readers. We begin the year talking about what readers do and how they can live a reading life. The reader’s notebook is simply a system for kids to be accountable for their reading. Each day, my readers record the date, title, pages read, and how they felt about themselves as a reader. They only respond in writing to their reading twice a week. The accountability log reveals to me book completion or abandonment, the way a reader feels about how he or she spent his or her reading time, and communication of the genre. Is this reader choosing “just right” books? Is this reader stuck in a genre or series? The written responses uncover strategies that this reader could possibly be using such as finding places in the text that are confusing, visualizing, questioning the text, making predictions or inferences, etc.

Involving Parents

In the student conference described earlier, Erika asked Nicole a couple of times to speak up so she could be heard clearly on the recordings that Erika shares with parents. In her conferences with them, Erika gives parents a copy of their child’s text so they can follow along and encourages them to write on the sheet and share their observations with her about their child. Erika has found that sharing these

recordings with parents helps position the parents as their child's advocate and first teacher. This allows parents to see firsthand why, for example, "sounding it out" is not the only possible reading strategy. Indeed, Erika intentionally makes a point of having parents prompt more for meaning: Does that make sense? What would make sense? Erika encourages parents to give her feedback about the conversations she and they have: What was most beneficial? What suggestions do they have? Erika has found that most parents love hearing their child's voice while seeing what their child is doing as a reader, and she plans to continue engaging parents in these authentic conversations. The parents' feedback helps inform Erika's instruction, and she hopes that the language she models to support readers will become a part of the students' home language. These conferences also help parents understand just how well Erika knows their child as a reader, writer, and learner. What a valuable strategy for teaching parents how to have an authentic literacy conversation! Erika shares more about this process:

When the parents first arrive, I provide them with a note-taking sheet that basically outlines our agenda. I share celebrations first and then summarize their child's reading life. This year, I began this portion of the conference with a video of their child performing a readers theater performance of autumn poetry.

Then I move into reading survey results. Parents get to "see" my thinking based on informal data/direct quotes I have taken from their child. It brings me joy to see the parents' faces "light up" when they hear their child articulate strategies and reveal their reading confidence. My favorite part of the conference comes next. I tell parents, "We will now listen to a voice recording of your child reading. Here is the text that your child chose to share with us at this conference. Please feel free to mark on the sheet. We will discuss our reader after the text is read." We then talk reader to reader, not just teacher to parent, about what we notice. I ask parents, "Is this consistent with what you are noticing at home?" This allows me to position the parents as an advocate for their child and to show the true meaning of a team: the child, parent, and teacher. Parents often say things like "This is what I see at home"; "He sometimes leaves out words when he reads"; "She reads fast like me"; "I would like her to read more like she's speaking"; "I want him to read for understanding because it's essential"; "She has been wanting to read more independently"; "Her reading is a lot better than last year"; "He doesn't like to read. I've tried everything"; "He used to love to read but lost interest in it last year." Last, we then talk about the child's reading diet: How balanced is this reader's diet? How do I begin helping this reader choose other genres to read?

Kidwatching

Erika's smooth, intentional orchestration of her reading and writing workshops is grounded in her *kidwatching* abilities. Kidwatching, first coined by Yetta Goodman

in 1978 and then extended by Dorothy Watson in 1992, is a staple in an effective classroom. Kidwatching gives teachers insight into their students' literacy learning through:

- Intensely observing and documenting what students know and can do,
- Documenting their ways of constructing and expressing knowledge, and
- Planning curriculum and instruction that are tailored to individual strengths and needs (Owocki & Goodman, 2002).

Teachers who are strong kidwatchers rely on their theoretical knowledge of reading and the personal and sociocultural factors that influence children's literacy learning. Kidwatchers document their observations through field notes, anecdotal notes and checklists. However, they don't stop at observation and documentation. Effective kidwatchers use the data they collect to make instructional decisions. The International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English (IRA–NCTE, 2010) emphasize the importance of this process in *Standards for the Assessment of Reading and Writing* (SARW), particularly Standard 2, in which they posit that the teacher is the “primary agent” (p. 13) of assessment information and should not be a passive consumer of the data:

Because of such important consequences, teachers must be aware of and deliberate about their roles as assessors. . . .

[A]s agents of assessment, teachers must take responsibility for making and sharing judgments about students' achievements and progress. (pp. 13–14)

As teachers engage in kidwatching, they are actively observing students, collecting data, and making informed classroom decisions. The agentive role that teachers take on as kidwatchers expands the traditional view of assessment and creates a more responsive and flexible approach to informal assessment. Consistent with the SARW, “[M]uch of the assessment information in classrooms is made available in students' talk about their reading and writing” (p. 14).

Beliefs about Teaching and Learning: “I Had to Get My Beliefs and My Practice Realigned”

Erika taught for twelve years and then left the classroom for four years to work as a literacy coach. The year before she became a coach, she was a partner-teacher with the district literacy coach. She was able to see firsthand how best practices in literacy produced lifelong readers and writers. Through exploration of these practices and ongoing collaboration, Erika became more knowledgeable about reading process, research, theory, and best practices, and, from her perspective, she also became a much better teacher of readers. This reflective practice allowed her to continually examine her beliefs in relation to practice. She asked herself, “What are

my beliefs? What are my current practices? If I believe that learning is social, then how am I providing space and time for my students to talk?”

During and after her year as a partner-teacher, Erika participated in a four-year, intense professional development sequence that included study groups of teachers and administrators. This ongoing network was truly life changing for her. The first year allowed her to focus on her classroom instruction, and the following year she moved into a literacy coaching position. Recently, she returned to the classroom. As she explained to me:

This is me. I had to get my beliefs and my practice realigned. I needed to be grounded in some real theory. I needed to be able to say, “My room is set up like this because learning is social. Why do I have an interactive word wall? Because learning is playful.” If you ask, I can tell you why, rather than just saying, “because they told me to” or “because everyone else is doing it.”

Erika’s strong theoretical background in sociocultural literacy learning means that she sees learning as social (Vygotsky, 1978) and that she creates opportunities for students to talk and interact in small and large groups. She also understands that learning is playful, and she creates an environment in which students can enjoy language. She believes that instruction should be authentic and so creates literacy engagements that encourage students to position themselves as real readers and writers. She sees both students *and* teachers as learners and experts (Short, Harste, & Burke, 1996) and encourages students to share what they are learning with one another. Last, she believes that effective literacy instruction offers students choice and allows for voice and ownership (Johnston, 2004).

Combining these beliefs, Erika implements a balanced literacy approach that creates a predictable structure in her class. At the beginning of the year, she works with her students to create procedures and routines through shared writing pieces. First, the students decide what the morning and dismissal routines will be. Once they agree on a draft, Erika publishes it by posting it in the classroom. The students also decide what their expectations should be during independent reading and writing times. They call this “Our Workshop Guidelines.” During this time, while simultaneously getting to know them as readers and writers, Erika creates opportunities to help the children choose books, chats with them about what they like and dislike, and teaches into the data that surround her:

You need to get to know your kids. I use the first two to three weeks of school just getting to know them. You wouldn’t believe how much information I have gained just from that. That intimate setting in the beginning, one on one, you have to start there. I don’t make assumptions. I model what conversation should look and sound like. When I launch something—I don’t launch too many things at one time—we talk about “What is it? What should we expect to see? What should we expect to do?” I

get a lot of feedback in here from them. Once we generate our own guidelines, then I am looking and listening for what we have decided as a class or set as expectations. We come to a compromise.

Erika draws extensively on one-on-one reading and writing conferences with her students:

Before when I used to have a student conference, it was very stressful. Once I made the shift and saw conferences as a conversation between readers, it took away a lot of stress. Letting the students lead by asking, “How’s it going?” Asking a little question like that you get so much information! I find out answers to questions like these:

- Does this child see himself as a reader?
- What kind of environment does this reader prefer?
- Does this child understand what reading is?
- Does the reader have other strategies besides “sounding it out”?
- Is this reader able to set a reading goal?

Learning to talk reader to reader did not evolve overnight for me. Not until I treated this special time as a conversation did I realize the joy of conferring. When the teacher places him- or herself in the position of a reader and not as the all-knowing teacher, then space is there to become a learner and not the only expert. I no longer have to be the mind reader. My language now sounds like: “What did you think about your reading just now? I noticed that you were using your finger. What does this do for you as a reader? Is it working well for you?”

Erika intentionally plants the seeds of learning in her classroom environment and instruction and then lets her students grow as readers. She explains:

If you are not actively engaged in the classroom, you aren’t going to get that from the students. Readers don’t waste their time. When you plant the seed that learning is important, they are going to really take ownership of it.

Eitelgeorge, Wilson, and Kent (2007) state that “[r]eading and writing are complex processes that call for multiple layers of assessment” (p. 52). Erika agrees with this; she understands that literacy is more than word calling or answering basic comprehension questions. She observes while her students engage in literate interactions. These kinds of observations allow her to more closely align her instruction with what she knows is important for the growth of her students. Erika explains that this was a significant shift for her. In the past, she considered the classroom “hers.” Now she makes deliberate efforts to give the students a voice. In the past, she felt she was teaching subjects, not students. Now she teaches students, and her role looks more like that of a teacher-facilitator. Because she better understands the conditions that support learners, she provides more time for reading and writing and focuses more on what students are doing. During book clubs, she

listens to the language her readers are using. “Do they know how to talk as readers? Is it appropriate talk? Does it sound artificial? Are they really talking reader to reader? Who is participating? Who is not?” During readers theater practice, Erika looks closely and listens carefully for the ways students support one another as readers: “No, the author wanted it read this way” versus “You keep reading it wrong,” or “Please show more expression” versus “That’s not how you read a question!” Erika believes that she should hear students using with one another the language she uses with them: “If there is not, then maybe I am not using it as consistently as I had thought.”

Organizing for Kidwatching

Erika is an extremely knowledgeable and organized teacher. When she is observing students, she knows what she is looking for and she keeps track of her documentation in a systematic way. Her students know that she is always watching them: “They always know my eyes are on them.” Kidwatching takes place every day. Erika constantly shares with the students what she notices: e.g., “I saw you doing that and I want to know more about it.” The students know that Erika is going to ask them questions like “What kind of a reader were you today? What kind of a writer were you today?” Erika often compares her notes and observations with how the students answer such questions and develops her lessons around areas where her notes and the students’ responses do not match. Sometimes, for example, she reteaches theme or spends more time helping students understand point of view. Erika explains:

Anecdotal notes for me are informal data that inform my instruction. If we are in independent reading, I’m looking to see if they are using a particular strategy. I am looking at the level of engagement. “Are they enjoying the text they are reading and being strategic about their reading?” It reminds me of what my next teaching point will be, the next conversation with readers and writers. It is a way for me to have a focused conversation. I also like to know what my children are noticing.

Erika also encourages the children to share what they are learning about themselves. She does this because she believes that students need to share their learning among themselves and see themselves as experts:

We have a strategy share in case I didn’t see something. It’s important that children can articulate the moves they are making. There are two designated opportunities for students to share. One is during morning meeting following the greeting. The second is strategy share, which occurs at the end of independent reading and writing. This basically involves me posing the question: “What move or moves did you make as a reader or writer today? Who would like to share something that he or she did that

made a difference in their reading today?” I ask the children to make their thinking and/or new learning public.

During this share time, students make these kinds of comments: “When I was reading this chapter book, I was confused about who was saying what, so I . . .”; “While I was reading this nonfiction book, I did not know how to pronounce this word, and so I read ahead and thought about what would make sense”; “I wanted to find out how Ferdinand Magellan died, so I used the index in my book”; “I made a prediction and found out on page _ that I was right”; “I know that I inferred on this part of my book because . . .”; “I know that this book is a myth because . . .” Erika comments on this:

The students’ sharing supports what we are doing in the classroom. I am in learner mode and I absolutely love it. This is definitely the gradual release of responsibility [Pearson & Gallagher, 1983]. I am taking it back to the kids. They do such a wonderful job of going to the text on their own and sharing pieces of information that helps us all see that strategy in a new way. It is certainly a celebration for us as learners.

Kidwatching has become natural to Erika. She does it without even recognizing she is. It is a part of how she sees her role as a teacher. She is continually observing what students are doing, comparing it to what she knows literacy learners need, and making adjustments to her instruction from that data:

During independent reading, I am looking to see if students are pretending to read. I watch for facial expressions, conduct quick conferences (e.g., “Tell me about what you are reading” or “What are you reading right now?”) and pay attention to whether their reading diet is balanced. I look at their reader’s notebook—they keep a reading graph of genres—and sometimes I have to say, “Sweetheart, I’d like to see you add more of ____ to your reading diet.” In thirty minutes, I can confer with my whole class.

Shared reading takes place every single day, and it is a strategic teaching time for me to recognize what the students are doing. Even when it is whole group, I can make those notes. I am on the spot. If I am noticing it, I can take action so that the misconceptions don’t continue.

I look for celebrations, things that might be challenges, things I need to re-teach. I think “this is not working” or “they totally misunderstood what I was asking them to do” or “they are not owning this.” Kidwatching is so important because if you put the time in up front, they will eventually own their learning. Book clubs—they own it. Author’s chair—they own it. I am just very direct. We don’t play games with their learning—i.e., “I noticed that you made three trips to the classroom library; now you only have twenty minutes left—why?” For the most part, they want to be a reader who uses his or her time wisely. The conversations are open and transparent with the kids so all members of the community are clear about what each other is thinking, wanting, expecting, and showing.

When Erika first began systematically collecting data through kidwatching, she tried several different formats to help her organize the information. However, as kidwatching became more natural, she eventually “grew out of forms.” In the past, she used a binder with individual sheets to record notes for each reader and writer. Other times she had a checklist attached to a clipboard, a daily “Kidwatching Report,” which she compiled in a binder, and then she used grids in a lesson plan book to record data. She no longer tries to keep all her data in one place:

I’m still taking notes, but it’s not all in one place. If it’s formal data, like a running record, then I write my notes on the actual piece of data. The look is more conversational. There are more sticky notes and class spreadsheets. I know my readers better. Little notes here and there like “Continue to work on ___” or “Still needs to read through the end of words” or “Phrasing is excellent.”

Erika often synthesizes data across students (see Figure 26), allowing her to see her entire class at a glance. This was a whole new way of teaching for Erika. At first she was uncomfortable taking the time to write her anecdotal notes, but she soon learned the value of documenting her kidwatching:

I am not a sitting teacher. But I’ve had to make myself sit an extra two minutes to keep up with the paperwork. Every minute counts for me if I am going to maximize my instructional time. I say, “Erika, give yourself those two minutes. It’s okay!” Those two minutes allow me to think more deeply while analyzing my data. Does the reader have a sense of story? Can the reader retell? What percentage of miscues have meaning? Is this reader reading at the word level? What reading behaviors did I observe (asking for assistance, using finger to track text, failing to honor punctuation, not reading through the end of words)? Which cueing systems does the reader have under control? Is there a balance of cueing systems used? Is this reader self-monitoring for meaning? What could it be that this reader is or is not doing?

Johnston (1997) reminds us that “viewing assessment only as a set of techniques for collecting data will not get us very far” (p. 157). Erika, however, not only has techniques, but she also knows what she’s looking for and she gives herself time to record what she notices. This grounds her instruction.

Using Data to Inform Instruction

Erika explains that her kidwatching and subsequent anecdotal notes let her “go deep rather than broad” with her teaching and allow her to focus her instruction on the specific needs of her students:

Kidwatching helps me to see the needs (individually, small group, and whole group). I know what needs to be taught and how to best teach into this need. It clarifies the best balanced literacy structure to use. It also lets me know how well the scaffolding/

Figure 26. Sample of Erika's synthesis across students.

	AUGUST	Focus on...
Low Meaning and High Visual	Monet (11) Raymond (11) Precious (11) Jamie (11)	Meaning
High Meaning and Low Visual	NONE	Meaning
Low Meaning and Low Visual	Jason (7B) Christian (11) Jared (10) Kentrell (10)	Nicole (11) Cedric (11) Grace (11) Chad (11) David (11)
	Diane (10) Craig (11) Brigitte (10B)	Meaning
High Meaning and High Visual	NONE	

gradual release process is going. Is more or less teacher support needed? Do the learners own the process?

Erika often shares her anecdotal notes with her students:

I share this kidwatching report with the children. They need to know what my observations are as well. How are things really going? I first begin to look at the "Celebrations," which helps to confirm that specific learning has occurred and/or provides

evidence of prior mini-lessons taught. Am I seeing evidence of my teaching? The “Challenges” lead to additional mini-lessons (management, content, strategy). Where do we need to move from here?

Consistent with the IRA–NCTE *Standards for the English Language Arts* (1996), Erika wants her students “to participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities” (p. 3). At times, this is a collaborative effort:

There are always opportunities for kids to give feedback. How did book clubs go today? Let’s give this writer or group “a plus, a wonder, and a wish.” In the beginning, I have to give them prompts as I teach how the language should sound: A plus would be something like “I like the way you . . .” A question might be “I wonder how/what/why . . .” A wish could be “Please next time . . .”

By taking what she notices and directly turning that into instruction, Erika “maximizes her instructional time.” This allows her to be more intentional in her teaching: “Kidwatching has certainly made me a more reflective teacher-learner. Because of it, I tend to make fewer assumptions but more informed decisions. What really matters now? What could really be going on?” This intentionality is what the SARW refer to as the teacher being the primary agent rather than the passive consumer of assessment data (p. 13). Erika is not a slave to the data; instead, she uses data as one more tool to meet her students’ needs. As articulated in Standard 2 of the SARW: “The sense [teachers] make of a student’s reading or writing is communicated to the student through spoken or written comments and translated into instructional decisions in the classroom” (p. 13).

Pulling It All Together

Erika’s curriculum is grounded in her kidwatching. She explains that, through her kidwatching, she is more able to “identify patterns, such as gaps/misconceptions, ‘ah-ha’ moments, wonderings, etc.” Kidwatching, for Erika, reveals what her students are “using but confusing,” which is what she sees as their instructional level. She sees herself as a teacher of readers and writers, as opposed to a teacher of reading and writing:

When I “taught reading and writing,” I missed the naturally occurring data right before my eyes. I did not know what to look or listen for. I used to be the basal queen while teaching programs. The textbook writers were making decisions for my students that I should have been making. Ultimately, it takes you getting in touch with your own reading process before you can begin to understand that of your students.

This switch in her perspective helps her feel more connected to the needs of her learners. She credits this connection to her kidwatching abilities. She explains: “My students know that their learning matters to me and that learning is not an option—it’s required—when we are together in our class community. My eyes and ears are always open for looking and listening.” Consistent with Standard 11 of the SARW, Erika explains that she and her students “are there for one another, benefiting from one another’s insights and knowledge.”

Teaching in this way requires a strong understanding of what readers and writers need to be effective, and that requires a teacher who is willing to take the time to observe closely, document clearly, and create instruction with intentionality. Erika describes this process best:

Data is everywhere! It is naturally occurring in the classroom. We just need to take time to see it, take time to listen to it. The sticky notes that students use during independent reading—they tell me what this child thinks. This is data. It’s everywhere. It tells me so much. It tells me where they are in their thinking. I learn so much about each student and the class as a whole from the conversations that go on throughout the day. I know that data is everywhere! If we make the time for it, it can be an amazing thing for our instructional decisions.

See Figure 27 for a list of the assessment tools and instructional methods Erika uses in her classroom.

Figure 27. Classroom teacher Erika Cartledge’s assessment tools and instructional moves.

Assessment Tools

Listening

Observation

Inquiry (asking questions to understand)

Anecdotal notes

Anchor charts of kids’ responses

Notebooking

Exit slips

Student reflection

Modified miscue analysis

Dominie “Sentence Writing and Spelling” and “Oral Reading Passages”

Words Their Way spelling inventory

MAP and PASS testing

Instructional Moves

Conducted morning meeting to launch literacy and content workshops.

Used Smart Board and document camera for shared reading.

Focused on reading as meaning.

Provided daily time for independent reading and writing.

Encouraged readers theater.

Established book clubs.

Used flexible, small-group instruction.

Had students share strategies.

Used an author’s chair.

Developed interactive morning messages.

Provided talk time.

Created a literacy-rich environment.

Portrait 8: Amy Oswalt, Fifth-Grade Teacher

Amy Donnelly and Amy Oswalt

Finding Children's Strengths: Assessment as a Thinking Process



Amy Oswalt teaches fifth graders in an emerging suburban neighborhood near a southern metropolitan city with a population of more than 100,000. The school serves 815 children, 97 percent of whom are European American and 4 percent of whom are African American, American Indian, Asian, or Latino/a. Of the twenty-two students in her classroom, twenty are European American, one is Latino/a, and one is African American. In her classroom, Amy develops systems for collecting data that inform her instruction (whole group, small group, and one on one) and that are self-informing for students and parents.

Amy develops her vision for this system before ever meeting the children. She modifies this plan throughout the school year—and makes it meaningful—as she gets to know the children as readers, writers, and social scientists. She explains:

Reading and writing are complex processes. Knowing children well is the key to making standards work to facilitate learning. The state standards are great guidelines, but

they are not a step-by-step checklist to be followed. To teach and assess using standards as the ultimate checklist would result in the curriculum becoming meaningless to students. When planning for our year, the fifth-grade teachers at my school work hard to try to unite the reading and writing standards. We draft units of study that help children learn standards through the real acts of reading or writing. This is one way we initially try to keep instruction and assessment authentic. This also helps keep learning flowing. What we want to avoid is choppy instruction that happens when teachers address one standard or one skill at a time. This means that we look at the standards and make decisions on which reading and writing standards could be best addressed within the same units of study.

Let me break that down. We usually start with the writing standards and see which genres of writing students are expected to learn. We then look at reading standards while intentionally keeping our final writing product for the unit of study in mind. For example, when we designed our nonfiction unit, we began with the nonfiction writing standards. We created a rubric that incorporated them. Then we looked at the reading nonfiction standards. We designed lessons that incorporated the nonfiction standards smoothly into our everyday study of nonfiction. We then added some of those concepts into our rubric. We all actually began the nonfiction unit with reading. That way, children are able to learn about nonfiction by reading nonfiction. Over time, children become comfortable talking about the genre and the text features commonly used. After a couple weeks of immersing ourselves in nonfiction, we took a look at the nonfiction rubric and began our writing.

This is the way we begin thinking and planning our yearlong instruction. This kind of planning helps me have learning destinations firmly in mind as the year begins and helps me feel more comfortable in letting the children's strengths and needs guide my daily instruction and keep learning purposeful.

Amy's initial system for assessing and evaluating young readers and writers intentionally integrates both standards and thinking with colleagues; put into practice, this approach helps children see and understand the interplay between authentic acts of reading and writing. By focusing data collection on the processes of learning, rather than learning as an end point evaluation, Amy understands that her plan will be modified as she gathers other data throughout the year.

Amy also has well-thought-out ideas about assessment. She believes that it should support children's learning and involve self-reflection:

The instructional tools we design help us, as teachers, support children's learning and assess our own teaching. After creating instruction of any kind, we then must be reflective and ask ourselves: Is there a better way to ask that question? Can I teach that skill another way? Should I pull a small group to revisit that concept? What did I say that confused students so badly? Well, that worked well so can I incorporate that same structure into other units? Did I assess a student on a genre she or he was unfamiliar

with? Why was that student unsuccessful with that text? It is not only my actual teaching that comes into play here, but my decision making as well.

These questions help Amy evaluate her instruction and reflect on children's learning behaviors relative to standards. They inform her decisions about new instructional moves that will focus on children's identified needs and help children better understand the learning process and themselves as learners.

For Amy, the teacher is the driving force of assessment, a model that is reflected in the SARW:

Most educational assessment takes place in the classroom, as teachers and students interact with one another. Teachers design, assign, observe, collaborate in, and interpret the work of students in their classrooms. They assign meaning to interactions and evaluate the information that they receive and create in these settings. In short, teachers are the primary agents, not passive consumers, of assessment information. It is their ongoing, formative assessments that primarily influence students' learning. (p. 13)

A Classroom for Thinkers

Amy, in her third year of teaching, believes that she is:

responsible for the learning environment, the energy that surrounds learning. I want children to be themselves and share their dreams and goals so that learning will be our joint purpose. I am responsible to help every child reach his or her potential, and that's lots of responsibility!

Amy's students begin their day with reading. They rush into the classroom, sharing news and insights from the previous afternoon and evening, unpack their book bags, get ready for the day, and read the morning message written on the whiteboard.

Child 1 (C1): Oh look, she did it again! That word should end in *ly*.

Child 2 (C2): No, it's okay to say, "Turn in your paper prompt."

C1: Oh. I didn't think we were talking about writing prompts.

C2: Yeah. Why would we turn in our writing prompts? We made them up for each other.

C1: Exactly! She means turn in your social studies work promptly. I bet so we won't be late for the book fair.

It is no accident that children in Amy's room notice words, look closely at language, and think about meaning. Children in this fifth-grade class enjoy daily read-alouds from texts such as *The Lost Hero* (Riordan, 2010), *Where the Red Fern Grows*

(Rawls, 1961), *Swine Not?* (Buffett, 2008), and *Martin's Big Words* (Rappaport, 2001). These are books that Amy suspects the children might not choose to read on their own. Each day, in a whole group, the children talk about their interpretations, confusions, wonderings, and feelings connected to the text that Amy reads aloud. The whole-group conversation ends with the children making predictions about what will happen next in the story. Amy records the children's predictions on a chart to hold their thoughts until the next day. This chart becomes an organically grown whole-group assessment tool that Amy uses to tailor the next day's instruction, ensuring that children's misconceptions and insights become focal points in the conversation.

Every day the children read independently. During this time, Amy meets with individual readers—she records each child's oral reading and retelling and checks for understanding by having conversations about books. She uses the anecdotal notes as an assessment strategy to monitor the growth of each reader in her class. Amy also uses these notes to better engage each child in conversations about the story and provide demonstrations of strategies to help each child understand what he or she is trying to accomplish while reading. In this way, each child learns how to use strategies and conversation to access the metacognitive processes involved in proficient reading. After independent reading, Amy and the children meet as a whole group to share strategies they used while reading and to talk about the way in which a particular strategy helped them make sense of text. Amy listens during whole-group discussion with the intention of using the children's thinking to name and extend their understandings of character traits, the story line, and the varied ways they use the text to make meaning of the story. In this way, Amy demonstrates how to analyze and synthesize the story; this further supports and guides children's thinking during independent reading.

Almost daily, children meet in small groups. Amy forms these groups based on patterns of needs and strengths she has identified in her anecdotal notes. Grouping children ensures that each child receives instruction based on need. Sometimes children meet in book clubs to talk about novels or facts they are learning in their social studies textbook. Other days they meet with Amy to get help on some aspect of the reading process. Amy listens in on the children's conversations, noting things they say or do, questions that need to be discussed, and any misconceptions. The children write in a variety of ways every day, including note-taking, exit slips, freewriting, and writer's notebooks.

Children lucky enough to be in this fifth-grade classroom are immersed in reading and writing and submerged in the real work of readers and writers. They do what needs to be done, singularly and collectively, to become more proficient readers and writers. Every day these children read, write, listen, and talk—not only

to engage in story worlds but also to learn about the world and about themselves. In so doing, they build their capacity and skills for learning about reading and writing.

Data Inform Whole-Group Instruction

Amy uses data gathered from the children in small-group and one-on-one instruction to inform her plans for whole-group instruction. To gather it, she notices, listens, talks, and reflects. Consistent with the SARW, her assessment practices are valid because they “inform instruction and lead to improved teaching and learning” (p. 16). For example, based on observations she made when reading the children’s memoirs, Amy decided to include the word *prompt* in an adverb slot during the morning message. Her decision was based on the children’s needs, which she uncovered when she read their memoirs. Her morning message led the children to carefully explore and learn about the words they wanted to use in their own writing. When asked how, in her third year of teaching, she knew how to use data, Amy explained:

In my college classes, I had professors that instilled the importance of data-driven instruction. I learned the value of using the information students provided to tailor my instruction to fit their needs, while still keeping my focus for instruction. Although learning about it and actually doing it are two different things, I was very fortunate to begin my teaching career in a school that valued instruction driven by data.

At the beginning of the school year, to help the children learn about language from the morning message, Amy read the message aloud each day and then prompted children with questions like, “What do you notice about punctuation? Do you notice any homophones? Do you know another way of spelling the short *o* sound? Can you think of a way to make that sentence sound better? Did you wonder why I underlined that phrase?” Through these kinds of questions, she intentionally led children on a journey into the ways of words, guiding them as they experimented with language and discovered the power of grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Amy explained that through this kind of daily demonstration, “By February, the children ask questions to scaffold one another and often challenge one another to learn in ways I never considered.”

Amy not only learns from observing and recording children’s thinking during whole-group, small-group, and one-on-one instruction, but she also asks children to name their learning through the use of exit slips. After an initial mini-lesson that used what children knew about reading fictional texts, for example, Amy gave them a genre exit slip. On it she asked them to “Explain the difference between fiction and nonfiction” and “Name three types of fiction and give an example of

each.” With these slips, she engaged children in the learning process while also learning about the children’s needs, using this information to guide her plans for a unit on nonfiction. Based on her prior experience, she also knew that for children to learn to write well in the nonfiction genre, she needed to guide them in reading many nonfiction books. By doing this, she gave the children ample time to explore the genre and discover features common to it. About this whole-group assessment strategy, Amy noted:

In our exploration of nonfiction, children noticed that short sentences were common, descriptive language was kept to a minimum, new vocabulary was often bolded or italicized, photographs and graphs were often used, and books often had an index. Using these discoveries, not only did children build a general and specific vision of what was possible in authoring nonfiction, but they had an opportunity to learn interesting information about the world.

To further understand what children have learned, Amy uses rubrics that require them to self-evaluate. She does this because she believes that, in assessing their own work, children uncover their own competencies and needs even as they are reminded about what they have learned. Amy also knows that self-assessment intentionally supports children’s acquisition of and responsibility for a process that puts the child in charge of extending his or her own learning. Amy used this method after the whole-group study of nonfiction (see Figure 28). Rubrics also inform parents about content, strategies, and behaviors that are significant for learning and school success. Self-assessment components of the rubric reveal the child’s view of his or her performance and provide fodder for parent–teacher conferences that often unite the adults in a quest to further the child’s learning.

Amy explains how she constructs whole-group assessments:

I think of three things when designing these whole-group assessments: (a) What I’ve learned about individual children during reading conferences—their strengths and needs, (b) state standards or the information others will hold children accountable for learning, and (c) what my instruction should look/sound like in order to build a strong bridge between what children currently know and what they need to know.

As noted in the SARW, planning to assess by “seeking multiple perspectives and multiple sources of data . . . takes advantage of the depth of understanding that various assessment procedures afford and the dialogue and learning they may produce” (p. 25).

Data Inform Small-Group Instruction

Amy uses data gathered from anecdotal notes taken during one-on-one reading conferences to plan specific small-group instruction or to address topics in small

Figure 28. A nonfiction scoring rubric.

Name _____ # _____
 Due Date _____


<p><u>"Nonfiction" self-writing</u></p> <p>What would I score myself?</p> <p>***Note: If you did not give yourself full credit, change your writing!</p> <p>___/3- Rough draft: revisions and edits are obvious</p> <p>Writing:</p> <p>___/4- content: stays on topic and is fully supported</p> <p>___/4- organization: organized by topics</p> <p>___/3- voice: use of third person and perspective and vocabulary</p> <p>___/4- conventions: proper word endings and plurals, use of apostrophes, correct spelling of "no excuse" words, ending punctuation, beginning capital letters</p> <p>Publishing:</p> <p>___/3- Effectively used at least 2 print features</p> <p>___/2- Effectively used at least 1 graphic feature</p> <p>___/2- Effectively used at least 1 illustration</p> <p>___/2- Effectively used at least 1 organizational feature</p> <p>___/3- Includes 3 subheadings with a paragraph under each</p> <p>___/30- Student comments:</p>	<p>What my teacher scored me:</p> <p>___/3- Rough draft: revisions and edits are obvious</p> <p>Writing:</p> <p>___/4- content: stays on topic and is fully supported</p> <p>___/4- organization: organized by topics</p> <p>___/3- voice: use of third person and perspective and vocabulary</p> <p>___/4- conventions: proper word endings and plurals, use of apostrophes, correct spelling of "no excuse" words, ending punctuation, beginning capital letters</p> <p>Publishing:</p> <p>___/3- Effectively used at least 2 print features</p> <p>___/2- Effectively used at least 1 graphic feature</p> <p>___/2- Effectively used at least 1 illustration</p> <p>___/2- Effectively used at least 1 organizational feature</p> <p>___/3- Includes 3 subheadings with a paragraph under each</p> <p>___/30- Teacher comments:</p>
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groups that she originally explored as a whole class. Early in the year, for example, data from the *Dominie* "Sentence Writing and Spelling Assessment" (DeFord, 2004) revealed that some children in her room needed additional support exploring how letter patterns affect spelling and word meaning. Based on children's writing and one-on-one reading conference data, Amy found that some other children needed to increase their understandings of literal and inferential meanings of words based on the story context and how authors, including themselves, intentionally use words to affect the meanings that readers glean from their texts. In October, Amy's anecdotal note data revealed that still other children needed support to understand

that authors intentionally create visual images of characters and that change in characters' motives and personalities direct the story line or plot. Using these data, Amy developed instructional strategies to implement with the flexible small groups she created.

For example, Amy created a "Word Detectives" form (see Figure 29), based on the Latin word *detectus*, which means "uncover or disclose." She told the children in one small group that each of them would become a word detective by using a portion of their independent reading and writing time to closely investigate word formations, discover ways words are used, and explore how words originated. Using the patterns of children's needs that she had identified early in the year,

Figure 29. Word detective chart.

Word Detective Evidence		
		
Name <u>Stephanie</u>		Weeks of <u>October 17-29</u>
Words Under Investigation: <u>traw</u> lers <u>brew</u> ing <u>cruis</u> ers		
Spelling Pattern Words I thought of that have these patterns	Writing Title of piece-final or in WN Words that have these patterns that I used in my writing	Reading Book & Page Number Words containing these patterns I found in my IR book
Draw	fruit fiction narrative	<u>Swim Suit</u> last olympian P: 5
Drawing	fruits fiction narrative	<u>Saw</u> last olympian P: 230
Crawling	drawing nonfiction self writing	<u>awkwardly</u> last olympian P: 285
blew	few rambling autobiography	<u>awe</u> last olympian P: 338
Cruise	dew where I'm from Poem	<u>few</u> last olympian P: 338
cruising	new where I'm from poem	<u>fruit stand</u> last olympian P: 339

Amy challenged the children to develop their awareness of word construction and increase their wordsmithing capabilities. Similarly, in a small-group demonstration, Amy invited the children to explore the meaning of character in relation to story using *Enemy Pie* (Munson, 2000). For added practice, she asked the students to use their independent reading book to complete a character map and bring it to their next small-group discussion (see Figure 30). By using the open-ended word detective and character map frameworks, Amy gives children concrete scaffolds to reference and use as they deepen and expand their comprehension while reading independently. This helps them develop intellectual habits and reading strategies and supports their growing understandings of words and story worlds. It's clear that in Amy's classroom, assessment practices are responsive to children's changing


Figure 30. Character map.

Name Marcy Text Boris Big Mission

Ron Character Map

What does your character look like?

Black skin
Black hair
Young
Brow eyes



What does he/she act like?

He wants to check out his own books. He will stand up for what he believes in.

How do others react to your character?

For each characteristic:
Mark **D** if you will tell us directly.
Mark **I** if we will learn about a characteristic indirectly.

I The mom smiled at her son.
I Ron says "I have to be somewhere."
D "I've got something important day."
I "Didn't she help me?"
I Mrs. Scott and the desk clerk did not know what to do.

needs and are designed to support learning, generate conversations, and inform the learner, teacher, and parent, rather than evaluating learning as a static end point.

One-on-One Reading Conferences Yield the Best Data

Each time Amy meets with children one on one or in guided reading groups, she takes anecdotal notes to learn about their attitudes toward reading, the genres they're exploring, and their current strategies and struggles. As she explains, "I use my anecdotal notes to help me plan instruction to better meet children's needs. These notes are the best way to find out what children do well, their individual needs, and how to group readers for strategy instruction."

In addition to finding out how well children understand what they read, Amy takes an informal miscue using a "skinny strip" (Stephens, 2005; see Figure 31), on which she numbers the miscues a student makes and marks Y(es), N(o), or P(artial) to indicate whether each miscue in the passage makes sense and whether it is graphically similar. Amy explains:

I was introduced to the skinny strip in one of my graduate-level classes, "Instructional Strategies for Reading." After learning the value of the strip, we practiced on some sample reading assessments. I found that these strips were so beneficial in the reading classroom because they gave a quick overview to the cueing systems students were actively using. I immediately put this instructional tool to use in my reading classroom. By calculating a percentage, I could easily identify cues students needed to focus on, usually semantics. I was also able to speak to parents in a language they were able to understand, giving them a concrete example of how often their child relied on visual cues (looking at letters and sounds) or meaning cues (using the context of the story) to decode words.

One Reader's Story

Aliyan was home-schooled the year before entering the fifth grade. Her parents, concerned about the fact that she read below grade level, hired a tutor, who used the Orton-Gillingham program (www.ortongillingham.com). On August 27, Amy recorded in her anecdotal notes, "Ali seems very timid and self-conscious about her reading." Based on her analysis of Aliyan's oral reading and a Burke reading interview (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 1987), Amy hypothesized that Aliyan seldom used meaning-based strategies when text she read didn't make sense. Instead, she consistently relied on grapho-phonetic or visual cues; most frequently, she tried "breaking the word into smaller parts" or "looking at the first letter to guess the word." Based on her anecdotal notes from the first two weeks of school, Amy also hypothesized that Aliyan was not a confident reader.

Figure 31. Skinny strip based on oral reading of text.

Oral Reading Assessment Form

BENCHMARK 11A The Shoemaker of Cobbler Vale

Student Justice Teacher/Tester _____ Grade 5 School _____ Date 3/20

Pg # 1 *The Shoemaker of Cobbler Vale*

2 A long time ago there lived a kindly old shoemaker. He came from a long line of shoemakers, and he was very proud of his heritage. His name was Master Horn. Master Horn worked morning and night to make the finest shoes in the kingdom. Without even knowing why, people stopped and looked at his colorful shoes. They entered his shop just to talk and found they had to touch his soft shoes. The old shoemaker just smiled. He was a happy man, for he loved his work, and he was quite prosperous.

5 What he didn't tell a soul was that he always made very special shoes. He had a golden wand that an old elf had given him. This wand gave each shoe a special touch to make his shoes fit just the right person. It was magical, indeed!

Now, Master Horn's shop sat outside the beautiful Rosenthal Castle, the home of the king and queen and their handsome son, Prince Faint Heart. At the same time every afternoon, the shoemaker sat on a bench outside his shop to rest and watch the busy castle. He also liked to look at the lady slippers he'd planted next to his front door. He watched and smiled, and observed the town's people very closely.

And there was so very much to see. You see, the king and queen wanted a wife for their son. For many months

Skinny Strip for Analyzing Miscues

Student Name: _____ Date: _____

#	Meaning			Visual			
	Y	P	N	Y	P	N	
1	✓					✓	
2	✓					✓	
3	✓			✓			
4	✓	✓		✓			
5	✓			✓			
6	✓			✓			
7	omission						sc
8	✓			✓			
9	✓			✓			
10	✓			✓			
11	repeated miscue						
12		✓	✓	✓			
13	✓			✓			
14	✓			✓			
15	✓	✓		✓		sc	
16	✓			✓		✓	
17	✓			✓			
18	insertion						
19	✓			✓		✓	
20	✓			✓		sc	
21		✓	✓	✓			
22		✓	✓	✓			
23		✓	✓	✓			
24	✓			✓		sc	
25		✓	✓	✓			
26	✓			✓		✓	
27	omission						
28	✓			✓			
29		✓	✓	✓		sc	
30	✓			✓		✓	

16/30 ✓ for M = 45%
 Stephens, 2005 11/20 ✓ for V = 42%

In the third week of school, Amy met with Aliyan for the second time to learn more about her as a reader. In her reading folder, Aliyan had listed *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* as the only book she had read so far that year. While she did not identify which Wimpy Kid book she had read, most of the books in the series are written at about a 3.5 reading level. The text size is large and the books include picture cartoons. During this reading conference, Amy also learned that Aliyan had difficulty retelling a story and that she did not have many books at home.

Amy knew that to help Aliyan gain confidence as a reader and increase her comprehension she needed to encourage Aliyan to access semantic cues available

in texts (such as using pictures and story context) while simultaneously helping her cross-check visual cues. Amy began to provide one-on-one and small-group instruction on meaning-making strategies (including skip the word and read on; reread; look at the picture and make predictions before, during, and after reading). As the year progressed, Aliyan's excitement about her reading progress showed in such statements as "Look how far I've gotten in this book" and "Let me tell you what's happened now!"

During this same time period, Aliyan expressed a desire to read *The Lightning Thief* (Riordan, 2005), a book written at about the seventh-grade level; it has complex story lines and multiple characters. Her parents offered to read the book aloud with her at home, and with her parents' support, Aliyan was able to participate in lively book club conversations about it with her peers. Through these conversations, Aliyan became engaged in talking about story characters and was soon immersed in the same story worlds that entertained her classmates.

In January, Amy suggested that Aliyan work with a reading interventionist. This would provide Aliyan with additional support and also provide Amy with another teacher's viewpoint. The two teachers could share data and work together to create lessons that would improve Aliyan's reading. The interventionist hypothesized that Aliyan was not yet spontaneously stopping when the text did not make sense. She encouraged her to "stop and think" after every paragraph about what was happening in the story. After a few weeks of practicing this strategy with the interventionist and in the classroom, Aliyan began monitoring her meaning-making as she read and reread when the text seemed confusing. During a March 17 reading conference with Aliyan, Amy noted that, after reading aloud a portion of her independent reading book, *Dog Whisperer: The Rescue* (Edwards, 2009), Aliyan gave a full and strong retelling. Amy's anecdotal notes on May 20 showed that Aliyan scored 90 percent comprehension on a *Dominie* (DeFord, 2004) Level 13 text, which has an equated level of 4.9. Amy was pleased with Aliyan's growth, as was Aliyan, who proudly stated three reasons for her reading success this year: (1) learning to pick a "just right" book, (2) talking about books (stories), and (3) learning to make inferences.

Aliyan's story demonstrates how Amy assessed Aliyan's needs through one-on-one conversations and small-group instruction and focused on those needs to facilitate Aliyan's literacy growth. Amy provides similar help for all of her students. Last year, of the twenty-two children in her class, fifteen readers met or exceeded standardized target goals; of the twenty readers who did not leave her class at any time during literacy instruction, nineteen showed growth on standardized measures. Amy notes that:

like Aliyan, the most significant growth was in children's confidence in their personal ability to talk about stories and strategically make sense of text. Children who believe they have tools to make sense of text confidently try to read increasingly harder books. It's exciting!

Final Words about Assessment

In Amy's classroom, assessment and instruction are integrated—assessment is a natural, ongoing part of classroom life. Amy believes that standardized tests are not the most useful data when trying to make a difference in children's daily learning lives. She prefers classroom-based assessments. As she explains:

Assessments give me insight into what students know and what they still need to work on. [They] are tools to help me assess my own teaching . . . [and] improve my instruction. Assessments are windows into what a child is doing and learning in a classroom setting; therefore, they should yield valuable information that can be used to drive instruction without interrupting the learning environment.

In every classroom, children have a wide variety of strengths and needs. In order to serve each child well, I must consider individual needs and strengths to create instruction that helps them process concepts and grow. This could mean modifying an assessment or changing the format of an assessment for a particular child or group of children. This also means considering the child's experiences and background knowledge when analyzing data from an assessment. Basically, it means being responsive.

I believe that the most useful modes of assessment are those I create and use on a daily basis. These tools help me immediately see children's strengths and needs and keep my instruction focused on children's learning. I feel the pressure from the standardized tests imposed by state and federal lawmakers. Although I understand the need for whole-school accountability, these types of assessment give us little insight on the specific strengths and weaknesses of students. These tests are high-stakes, high-pressure tests that give results based in percentiles and RIT ranges. Very rarely are the results broken down to target specific skills or concepts. Many times, the scores of this type of assessment are given to us after students have already left our classes and are in their next year of schooling. This information is useful but I can't use it to revise my teaching for children.

I believe that I need to always strive to get a complete picture of a child before making judgments. In my college literacy class, we learned about a holistic assessment model [Anthony, Johnson, Mickelson, & Preece, 1991] and that has stuck with me. Holistic assessment involves collecting multiple types of data (process notes, student work, standardized measures, and classroom rubrics) and analyzing all of them, as a whole, to get the full picture of one child. When looking at one child's reading, I use my own observations; informal miscues [Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 1987]; modification using skinny strips [Stephens, 2005]; DeFord's [2004] *Dominie* assessments; and standardized test data from MAP [Northwest Evaluation Association, 2011] and

PASS [Data Recognition Corporation, 2009]. I also use checklists to help me think about children's reading behaviors and stages of reading and inventories, like the Burke reading interview [Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 1987], to help get a picture of a child's beliefs about reading.

Amy understands that assessment practices should inform all stakeholders (students, parents, and the teacher), and she makes sure her students' parents are involved in this process:

I try to include families in their children's assessments at various points of the year. At the beginning of the year, I send home an inventory asking parents to tell me about their child's likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses, and reading and writing habits. I use this information to help me stock my classroom library and get to know the kids. At the end of the year, I ask parents to explore their child's writing portfolios. During this time, children and parents work together to notice areas of growth and strengths and set goals based on what they see. This time usually feels like a grand celebration, even with needs being named. If parents are unavailable, I invite administrators or media specialists to ensure that each child has an adult to help review and celebrate his or her writing accomplishments. I believe that parents and teachers need to have ongoing communication. Narrative progress reports, coupled with a child's work and other assessments, show parents how well I know their child, as well as what can be done at home to assist their child in his or her learning quest. All parents want their children to succeed, but many don't know what to do to help them. Open, regular communication helps children grow in their literacy practices.

Conclusion

When individual readers and writers engage in the real work of reading and writing for the entire 180 days of the school year, they learn that reading and writing are tools they can use to learn about themselves, others, and the world. This work satisfies both child and teacher. Assessment data fuel this work and make it easy to ground instruction in a child's individual and common strengths and needs. When teachers understand standards as tools to help them envision curriculum and instruction, they learn to trust their own data-driven processes that connect responsive, thoughtful instruction to the needs of children. In classrooms like Amy's, teachers use a variety of data and feel a responsibility to use that information to imagine instruction that will help every child achieve his or her dreams. At the end of our time together, Amy offered this quote, which has made a difference in her life as a teacher: "[L]earning and reading are enhanced by teachers who know their students and their curriculum well and who use their knowledge of children to diversify instruction to meet their students' needs" (Calkins, Montgomery, & Santman, 1998, p. 6).

See Figure 32 for a list of assessment tools and instructional methods Amy uses in her classroom.

Figure 32. Classroom teacher Amy Oswalt’s assessment tools and instructional moves.

Assessment Tools

Observation

Listening

Asking questions

Taking anecdotal notes

Exit slips

Dominie “Sentence Writing and Spelling” and “Text Reading”

Student self-evaluation

Skinny strips (version of miscue analysis)

MAP

PASS

Reflection

Informal miscue

Notes on children’s genre selections

Review of children’s writing samples (looking for well-crafted language, spelling, and grammar needs)

Comparison of children’s progress with state standards

Instructional Moves

Customized engagements for children based on data (e.g., morning message).

Developed mini-lessons.

Provided strategy instruction.

Conducted whole-group strategy share to spotlight children’s individual strategies.

Matched children and texts.

Formed flexible small groups based on instructional need.

Customized instruction to teach group.

Arranged supplemental support as needed.

Asked parents to read aloud to child.

Picked texts for read-alouds and classroom library.

Provided time for reading.

Provided access to books.

Provided time for talk about books.

Note

1. South Carolina's ABC Child Care Voucher Program is a voluntary program that helps qualifying families pay for child care so they can work. For information, go to <http://www.childcare.sc.gov>.

Through case studies of individual students and lively portraits of elementary classrooms, editor Diane Stephens and colleagues explore how artful pre-K–5 teachers come to know their students through assessment and use that knowledge to customize reading instruction. Throughout the book, the educators profiled—classroom teachers, reading specialists, and literacy coaches—work together to take personal and professional responsibility for knowing their students and ensuring that every child becomes a successful reader. The teachers detail the assessment tools they use, how they make sense of the data they collect, and how they use that information to inform instruction.

Like the other books in the Literacy Assessment strand of NCTE's Principles in Practice imprint, *Reading Assessment* is based on the IRA–NCTE *Standards for the Assessment of Reading and Writing*, Revised Edition, which outlines the elements of high-quality literacy assessment. These educators show us how putting those standards in action creates the conditions under which readers thrive.

Diane Stephens is the Swearingen Chair of Education at the University of South Carolina, where she conducts research on assessment and decision making, teachers as learners, and the impact of large-scale professional development efforts. She led the smaller scale, three-year-long professional development effort with which the authors of the case studies in this book were involved. This is her second edited book with NCTE; the first, with Jennifer Story, was *Assessment as Inquiry: Learning the Hypothesis-Test Process* (1999).

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