

# ASSESSING LITERACY

## 7

In the 1988 version of the Pennsylvania Framework (Lytle & Botel, 1988), this chapter was entitled "Designing Congruent Evaluation." Then as now, it was obvious that schools should use "evaluation which reflects the learning model and the curriculum." Then as now, "this chapter sketches a framework for evaluation, but leaves the development of a specific plan to school faculties and district support staff" (p. 139).

In the time since those words above were written, many changes have occurred in literacy assessment, and a number of controversies have emerged. The idea that the major components of a school district's curriculum (i.e., "the learning model," "the curriculum," and "evaluation" as the authors referred to them then) should be congruent was not a new one in 1988, nor has it ever really been ignored by educators. However, in recent years the concept of congruency among curricular elements has been looked at more closely and given a much more prominent role in schools than it previously had. The preceding chapters in this document essentially have focused on the "learning model" and the "curriculum" (i.e., the goals for literacy instruction) as well as the characteristics of high quality instruction for accomplishing those goals. The focus in this chapter is on the final elements that must be present in a contemporary, congruent curriculum. However as explained in detail below, there is a differentiation between the

terms "assessment" and "evaluation," and the addition of a third component, "reporting," to the group.

This document's earlier chapters are grounded in cognitive learning theory, and so too is this final chapter of the Pennsylvania Literacy Framework. In Figure 1 Herman, Aschbacher, & Winters (1992) list a number of the major principles of cognitive learning, and they briefly describe their implications for literacy assessment. These principles and implications undergird and manifest themselves in a variety of ways throughout the chapter.

*Figure 1*

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## **IMPLICATIONS FOR ASSESSMENT FROM COGNITIVE LEARNING THEORY**

(Adapted from Herman, Aschbacher, & Winters, 1992, p. 19-20.)

**Theory: Knowledge is constructed. Learning is a process of creating personal meaning from new information and prior knowledge.**

**Implications for Assessment:**

- ▶ Encourage divergent thinking, not just one right answer.
- ▶ Encourage multiple modes of expression – role play, explanations.

**Theory: All ages/abilities can think and solve problems. Learning isn't necessarily a linear progression of discrete skills.**

**Implication for Assessment:**

- ▶ Don't make problem solving, critical thinking or discussion of concepts contingent on mastery of routine basic skills.

**Theory: There is great variety in learning styles, attention spans, memory, developmental paces, and intelligences.**

**Implications for Assessment:**

- ▶ Provide choices in assessment tasks.
- ▶ Provide choices in how to show mastery/competence.
- ▶ Don't overuse timed tests.
- ▶ Include concrete experiences.

**Theory: People perform better when they know the goal, see models, know how their performance compares to the standard.**

**Implications for Assessment:**

- ▶ Provide a range of examples of student work; discuss characteristics.
- ▶ Provide students with opportunities for self-evaluation and peer review.
- ▶ Discuss criteria for judging performance.

**Theory: Motivation, effort, and self-esteem affect learning and performance.**

**Implication for Assessment:**

- ▶ Motivate students with real-life assessment tasks and connections to personal experiences.

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The authors of the 1988 Framework called for literacy educators to reform evaluation, and they set forth a number of useful principles for doing so. In the intervening years, many reforms have been implemented in Pennsylvania. New understandings and new assessment procedures, such as the use of portfolios (Valencia, 1990; Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991), that are consistent with those earlier principles have been developed, validated, and placed into wide-spread use. Traditional procedures for testing have been challenged, some eliminated, and some then reinstated with new names (Tierney, 1998). At this writing, a number of the controversies surrounding literacy assessment continue to be heatedly debated by many constituencies. For example, standardized tests have recently assumed an even greater importance in the eyes of the general public, and students' achievement test scores dominate the media. Parents, teachers, administrators, school board members, local, state, and national politicians,

as well as the general public are involved in these sometimes contentious debates (Hoffman, et al., 1999). All of these groups have a legitimate stake in how students are assessed and how the results of assessments are reported and utilized. However the needs, purposes, and uses of assessment information are different for each group (Farr, 1992). In this chapter what is known about literacy assessment is organized in a coherent, useful manner to serve the needs of all constituencies. This is accomplished by building upon the two key characteristics of the PCRIP II document:

- ① the importance of assessment being congruent with other curricular elements and
- ② providing a framework for schools and districts to develop their own assessment systems.

## **CURRICULAR CONGRUENCY**

### **Goals and Standards / Instruction / Assessment / Evaluation / Reporting**

A school district's literacy curriculum can be viewed as consisting of five major components. Specifically, they are:

- ① **Goals and Standards**
- ② **Instruction**
- ③ **Assessment**
- ④ **Evaluation**
- ⑤ **Reporting**

This section of the chapter defines and briefly elaborates upon each of these components. In the final section is provided more detailed information on assessment, evaluation, and reporting in the context of

developing a school district assessment framework. Throughout we emphasize the interrelatedness and thus the need for congruency among all of the curricular components.

It is important to reiterate that while the five curricular elements are discussed somewhat separately, the reality is that they are not discrete entities and must be seen as the overlapping, interacting, and dynamic aspects of all our educational efforts. Together they form a recursive process. Teachers move continuously among the curricular components in a lesson, and any change in one curricular component will have an effect on all the others (Strickland & Strickland, 2000). Efficient and effective literacy education at all levels is facilitated when these components are aligned, that is congruent, with each other. This is true for all instruction, from a program adopted at the district level down to one classroom teacher's mini-lesson.

The **goals and standards** of a literacy program drive and are therefore informed by **instruction**. Together, these first two components comprise what is often referred to as a school district's curriculum. Appropriate **instruction** always addresses the program's **goals and standards**, and it determines the types of **assessment** that are used. Assessment should look like **instruction**, and actually, assessment may occur at any time during the instructional process. The tools and procedures employed to **evaluate** student learning are affected by the **goals and standards** being addressed, the **instructional procedures** that are provided, and the student data collected for **assessment**. The **information reported** to the various stakeholders in literacy education must accurately reflect in a meaningful way and in varying degrees of detail all of the other four curricular components if it is to have authentic value. When this congruency does not exist, however, when one or more of these curricular components is not aligned with the others, the effectiveness of the literacy curriculum is diminished.

Consider the following example. A literacy educator builds a program around having students: ❶ read high quality works of literature; and ❷ write in different genres for authentic purposes. The teacher provides direct instruction in, and practice of, important skills and strategies in the meaningful context of that reading and writing. Collaborative and cooperative learning activities are employed to engage students

in a variety of discussions to address the program's standards for listening and speaking. If a single, commercially available, nationally norm-referenced test requiring students to read short passages and answer multiple-choice questions is used to assess, evaluate, and report on the success of this teacher's literacy instructional efforts, a significant, non-congruent mismatch has occurred in the curricular process. Unfortunately, mismatches such as this one exist far too frequently in today's literacy classrooms. This chapter presents information to assist educators in eliminating literacy curricular mismatches.

### Goals/Standards

Teachers intuitively realize that the instructional goals and standards of the school district's curriculum determine what they will do in their classrooms. In other words, when teachers identify and understand what they are expected to accomplish, then they can choose the appropriate content as well as instructional materials and teaching techniques they believe will result in student learning. Teachers also are able to organize their classrooms in ways that will best help them accomplish their goals. Put another way, when what students should know and be able to do is determined, then and only then, can viable instructional decisions be made and effective and interesting lessons be planned.

### Instruction

The instructional goals and standards of a school's curriculum drive instruction. As teachers teach (i.e., as they engage students with essential content, planned activities, and structured experiences in a dynamic, language-rich environment), they continually make instructional decisions, all of which are aimed at accomplishing their goals and

standards. Although a given lesson may emphasize or focus upon one or two standards, any interesting, rapid-paced, multidimensional lesson will, in fact, address quite a few standards, perhaps across several disciplines. Lessons that are narrowly constructed, attempting to address only one standard, will most likely be quite boring and in the end be counter-productive to learning. Falk (2000) aptly sums up what is important to be taught when she states:

*No longer is it enough for schools simply to educate only for rudimentary skills. Knowledge is exploding at such a rapid pace that it is impossible to teach all there is to know. Schools must now meet the challenge of preparing citizens who can think critically and creatively, who know how to access information where and when it is needed, who can apply knowledge and skills to real situations, who know how to problem pose as well as problem solve, and who are flexible enough to adapt to our fast-paced, continually changing world (p. 27).*

### Assessment

In 1994 a Joint Task Force on Assessment of the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) prepared a document enumerating and explicating the Standards for the Assessment of Reading and Writing. These 11 standards and the rationale and implications for each of them are at the heart of this chapter. Because they are just as true and as important today as when they were first published, the reader will see them reprised again and again from different sources and in different contexts. Figure 2 contains a listing of these standards.

## STANDARDS FOR THE ASSESSMENT

- ▶ The interests of the student are paramount in assessment.
- ▶ The primary purpose of assessment is to improve teaching and learning.
- ▶ Assessment must reflect and allow for critical inquiry into curriculum and instruction.
- ▶ Assessments must recognize and reflect the intellectually and socially complex nature of reading and writing and the important roles of school, home, and society in literacy development.
- ▶ Assessment must be fair and equitable.
- ▶ The consequences of an assessment procedure are the first, and most important consideration in establishing the validity of the assessment.
- ▶ The teacher is the most important agent of assessment.
- ▶ The assessment process should involve multiple perspectives and sources of data.
- ▶ Assessment must be based in the school community.
- ▶ All members of the educational community—students, parents, teachers, administrators, policy makers, and the public—must have a voice in the development, interpretation, and reporting of assessment.
- ▶ Parents must be involved as active, essential participants in the assessment process.

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(IRA/NCTE, 1994)

As stated at the outset, congruency among the final three elements of the curriculum is more complex and thus more important for literacy educators to focus upon than it has ever been in the past. Over the years, teachers have used terms such as "testing," (see Figure 3) "correcting," "marking" and "grading" to describe what they do while assessing student work and learning. However, literacy assessment experts (Hill, Ruptic, & Norwick, 1998; Hoffman, et. al., 1999; Marzano, 2000; Strickland & Strickland, 2000; Weber, 1999) recommend that in their place

three terms: ❶ "assessment" ❷ "evaluation," and ❸ "reporting," be employed to describe these important curricular components. Rather than treating these terms as synonyms, as is often the case, it is preferable to differentiate their meanings in order to clearly examine and understand the complexities of this essential part of the curriculum.

## ASSESSMENT

In this chapter, "assessment" is defined as the systematic collection and synthesis of data to inform instruction and to document student learning and growth. When teachers "assess" students, they gather information over time through a variety of means from a variety of sources. "This daily, ongoing collection of data is often inseparable from instruction" (Hill, Ruptic, & Norwick, 1998, p. 15). Teachers then analyze, synthesize, and interpret that information into a coherent body of knowledge about students' performances, abilities, and learnings in a given educational context. This definition is especially appropriate when teachers use "portfolio assessment" since a portfolio is an organized collection of materials that represents student effort, progress and achievement in relation to a particular set of goals and standards (Valencia, 1990). A bit later in this chapter, there is more detailed information about portfolio assessment.

*Testing is a form of assessment that involves the systematic sampling of behavior under controlled conditions. Testing can provide quick reliable data on student performance that is useful to teachers, administrators, and the public in making decisions. It is, however, only one form of assessment (Hoffman, et al., 1999, p. 248).*

Two other widely used pertinent terms in current use also are consistent with the definition of assessment. "**Formative Assessments**" provide results that "suggest future steps for teaching and learning" (Weber, 1999, p. 26). In other words, such assessments occur before a unit or course of study is completed and are intended to influence the instruction that is yet to come. "**Summative Assessments**" refer to any "evaluation at the end of a unit or lesson to judge a student's skills and knowledge related to the unit of study" (Weber, 1999, p. 28). Essentially, the usefulness of these terms is that they assume an added dimension by expressing when assessment occurs as well as why it occurs.

There are, of course, a number of other reasons for assessing in addition to informing instruction and documenting student learning. For example, teachers may use a variety of assessment tasks to diagnose student strengths and needs, to motivate students, and to communicate learning expectations to their students. Supervisors and administrators may use assessments to provide accountability data, to provide a basis for instructional placement, or to determine program effectiveness (McTigue & Ferrara, 1995). Throughout this chapter, it is emphasized that the different educational constituencies have varying needs and uses for assessment data. However, the most important use of assessments by far, is to assist teachers in making instructional decisions (Hoffman, et. al., p. 247).

Students at all levels of schooling deserve, and should have, the services of highly competent reading teachers. Such teachers are explicitly described in the International Reading Association's (2000a) position statement on Excellent Reading Teachers. Figure 3 contains the succinct yet detailed description of what excellent reading teachers do as they assess student strengths, needs, and literacy progress.

## HOW DO EXCELLENT READING TEACHERS ASSESS STUDENT PROGRESS?

*Excellent reading teachers are familiar with a wide range of assessment techniques, ranging from standardized group achievement tests to informal assessment techniques that they use daily in the classroom. They use the information from standardized group measures as one source of information about children's reading progress, recognizing that standardized group achievement tests can be valid and reliable indicators of group performance but can provide misleading information about individual performance. They are well aware that critical judgments about children's progress must draw from information from a variety of sources, and they do not make critical instructional decisions based on any single measure.*

*Excellent reading teachers are constantly observing children as they go about their daily work. They understand that involving children in self-evaluation has both cognitive and motivational benefits. In the classroom, these teachers use a wide variety of assessment tools, including conferences with students, analyses of samples of children's reading and writing, running records and informal reading inventories, anecdotal records of children's performance, observation checklists, and other similar tools. They are familiar with each child's instructional history and home literacy background. From their observations and the child's own self-evaluations, they draw knowledge of the child's reading development, and they can relate that development to relevant standards. They use this knowledge for planning instruction that is responsive to children's needs.*

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*(International Reading Association , 2000A)*

## EVALUATION

*Evaluation is the process of reflecting upon information gathered during assessment and making judgments about the quality of student learning and performance (Hill, Ruptic, & Norwick, 1998; Hoffman et al. 1999; Marzano, 2000; Strickland & Strickland, 2000; Weber, 1999).*

In other words when teachers "evaluate," they make a "value" judgment about how one or more aspects of student work measure up to the expected standard (Hansen, 1998). Commonly, this is what teachers may refer to as the "marking" or "grading" of student work. In reality, evaluation is a far more complex process than grading, which is defined by Strickland & Strickland (2000) as "the assignment of a numerical score, letter, or percentage to a product" (p. 8). In a literacy classroom, rich with language-centered activities, evaluation requires: ❶ setting criteria by which to evaluate the diverse learning tasks; ❷ examining and reflecting upon the assessment data in light of the established criteria; ❸ making instructional decisions based on the quality of student learning; ❹ engaging students in peer and self-evaluations; and ❺ revising goals and setting new ones (Hill, Ruptic, & Norwick, 1999). The recursive nature of the literacy curriculum is illustrated by these criteria. Each criterion directly connects itself with the goals, instruction, or assessment.

Unlike the teacher-centered act of grading student work, evaluation in today's classrooms involves the teacher continuously working with students in all phases of the process. Students are engaged in setting and applying criteria, and they evaluate their own and their classmates efforts. Hansen (1998) succinctly sums up the importance of student-centered

evaluations when she states, "Evaluation starts with the learners" (p.1). Strickland & Strickland (2000) expand this key principle by explaining that, "The reason for evaluating is to help students understand their own learning—to reflect on what they know or have accomplished—so they can move forward, setting clear goals for future learning" (p.11).

## REPORTING

*Reporting is interpreting and sharing with others the information that was gathered and evaluated to document student learning and growth (Hill, Ruptic, & Norwick, 1998 ; Hoffman et al. 1999; Marzano, 2000; Strickland & Strickland, 2000; Weber, 1999).*

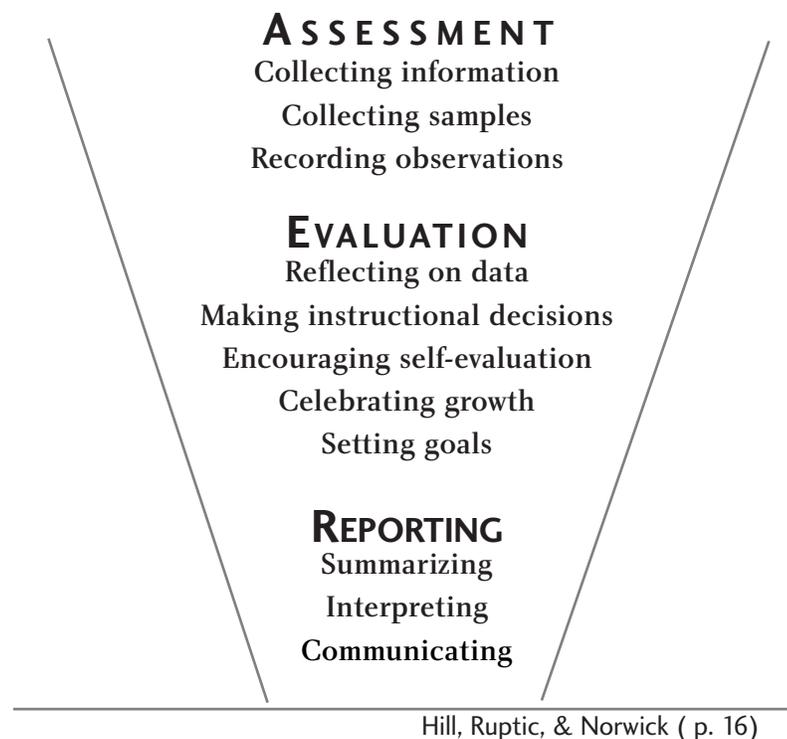
Traditionally in American schools, the report card has been the primary tool for reporting that information about students, and the most significant information on the report card has been the letter or number grades assigned in each of the subject areas. According to Marzano (2000), grades are "the numbers(s) or letter(s) reported at the end of a set period of time as a summary statement of evaluations made of students" (p. 13). He also comments, "Americans have a basic trust in the message that grades convey—so much so that grades have gone without challenge and are, in fact, highly resistant to any challenge" (p. 1). Furthermore, he points out that a critical examination of the research and practices of assigning grades are "so imprecise that they are almost meaningless" (p. 1). This imprecision and meaninglessness is usually overlooked by parents and the general public, however, who seem to understand what grades, such as an "A" or a "B" etc., actually mean. Although a grade of "B" in a subject tells parents virtually nothing about what their

child has or has not studied, what their child has or has not learned, what their child can or cannot do, how their child has or has not progressed, most parents seem capable of attributing substantial meaning to that one letter grade.

It is also obvious to most educators that several weeks of student work and learning cannot adequately be represented by a single letter or number grade. This troubling awareness has occurred at a time when the general public is increasingly concerned with standards and with the need for school districts' to demonstrate their accountability that all students meet those standards. The dilemma is that the need to report specific information is greater now than ever before, and the traditional tools are increasingly incapable of meeting that need (Marzano, 2000). In the next section of this chapter a blueprint is presented for school districts to use in expanding their assessment framework to include a structured and coherent reporting system.

The graphic organizer in Figure 4 is a quick reference for educators to use as they consider their responsibilities during each of these last three recursive stages in a literacy curriculum.

Figure 4



## DEVELOPING A LOCAL FRAMEWORK

In Pennsylvania, school districts are charged with the responsibility of designing local assessments “to determine student attainment of State and local academic standards” (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1999, p. 404). In light of this directive and the Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening that accompany it (pp. 414-424), school districts are re-examining their assessment, evaluation, and reporting practices in an attempt to reconcile effective instructional procedures with an unprecedented demand for accountability in student performance. Tomlinson (2000) describes the widespread concern of educators who often feel they are being torn in opposing directions. Specifically, teachers are admonished to attend to the increasingly diverse instructional needs of their students, while at the same time they are expected to ensure that every student becomes proficient in prescribed subject matter and can demonstrate their competencies on assessments that are not differentiated in form or time constraints. In other words, teachers are expected to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of each student and simultaneously prepare them all to perform equally well on the same tests (Barrentine, 1999).

Once a school district has developed and adopted a coherent curriculum with appropriate and effective instructional practices, then it must construct a differentiated package of instruments and procedures to assess and evaluate student learning. The challenge is to build an assessment package that: ❶ remains as faithful to classroom instruction and learning as possible; ❷ accurately reflects but does not unduly interfere with learning; ❸ informs instruction in meaningful ways; and

❹ provides reliable information to all the stakeholders involved in public education. To design such a package is not an easy task, and it requires collaboration on the part of many groups including students, teachers, parents, community members, administrators, and school board members.

Prior to a school district’s constructing or revising its assessment package, it is essential for the district to carefully consider:

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- ▶ principles of assessment
  - ▶ audiences for assessment information
  - ▶ assessment options
  - ▶ evaluation procedures
  - ▶ how the district might standardize its assessments
  - ▶ how a district can develop a reporting system
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This final section of Chapter 7 will discuss and make suggestions for each of these important issues. We believe that school districts will find the suggestions appropriate and useful as they conceptualize, plan, and implement their own unique literacy assessment framework.

### Principles of Assessment

Developing a complete, valid, and useful school district assessment program requires more than choosing a new test or adopting a commercially packaged procedure. It requires districts to reflect upon the complex nature of literacy development and the principles of assessment that are derived from that complexity (Tierney, 1998). While many assessment authorities have enumerated a variety of principles, we especially recommend those that follow. These following five principles of assessment will enable educators to design an assessment framework that

recognizes the complexities of literacy learning yet still meets the needs of students, teachers, and community stakeholders. If, however, a district's new framework will require teachers, students and/or the community to significantly change their views of assessment, Serafini (2000/2001) strongly recommends that implementation be undertaken slowly and systematically while involving all constituencies.

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**Literacy assessment should explicitly reflect the literacy goals and the experiences that lead to those goals**

(McTighe, 1995).

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This initial principle reiterates the previously emphasized importance of a congruent curriculum. A comprehensive assessment package compares literacy performance with literacy expectations. Explicit literacy goals and practices are the foundation of assessment that is focused and useful. Districts should choose the components of their assessment package carefully because not every reading and writing act is comparable nor do they contain the same variables.

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**Literacy assessment should reflect an understanding that reading and writing are multi-dimensional, integrated, and revealed in performances over time**

(Farr, 1992; McTighe, 1995).

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Many assessment practices are so far removed (either in time or understanding of data) from the classroom that any information derived fails to inform instruction. District educators are in the best position to learn about and design reliable, multi-dimensional performance assessments. State-mandated literacy assessments should be one component of a district's assessment package. Districts have the option, arguably the obligation, to include assessments that reflect student proficiency in accordance with locally established criteria. Unlike traditional paper-and-pencil tests, such assessments are not usually administered in one brief time period. As Tierney (1998) states, "Assessment should be viewed as ongoing and suggestive, rather than fixed or definitive" (p. 385). Long-term literacy engagement and interest requires sustained assessment efforts. An assessment package should contain instruments and procedures that allow the stakeholders to see growth over time.

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**Literacy assessment should reflect effective instructional practices** (Farr, 1992; McTighe, 1995).

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Assessment is not an end in itself. It is the process of collecting data in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the literacy practices being implemented in the classroom. Changes in testing have not kept pace with our knowledge of literacy development. A reliable and valid assessment package must contain accurate reflections of daily literacy performances.

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**Assessment procedures may need to be non-standardized to be fair to the individual** (Tierney, 1998).

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Though many tools within an assessment package will be standardized, there are situations (cultural differences, learning differences, etc.) that will make standardization impossible. As Tierney (1998) so aptly states, "Diversity should be embraced, not slighted" (p. 385). There will always be a tension between a district's need for uniformity and the need for measures that are sensitive to differences. A comprehensive assessment package balances standardized measures and non-standardized assessments.

Effective classroom teaching does not occur by ignoring or removing diversities. The same is true for the design of assessments. Assessing learning within the context of diversity is the goal, and it is essential.

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**Assessment procedures should be child-centered, and they should support student ownership** (Farr, 1992; Tierney, 1998).

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**Literacy assessment practices should be something the classroom teacher does with a learner, rather than**

**something that is done to the learner.** Reciprocal, child-centered assessments not only enable the teacher to design effective instruction, but more importantly, enable the students to self-assess their literacy capabilities. The ultimate goal of literacy instruction and assessment is to develop "habitual self-assessors" (Farr, 1998, p. 31). Performance assessments designed in local districts should inform instruction and support ownership by the student.

The final two principles emphasize the importance of the individual student in the assessment process, and the significance of each child is highlighted in a recently published position statement of the International Reading Association (2000b),

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**Making a difference means making it different: Honoring children's rights to excellent reading instruction.**

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This document identifies and explains the rights of every child to receive effective reading instruction, and it encourages policy makers, parents, and school professionals to refocus educational reform initiatives on these children's rights. The fifth right, which is concerned with assessment states,

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**Children have a right to reading assessment that identifies their strengths as well as their needs and involves them in making decisions about their own learning**

(International Reading Association, 2000b).

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Using tests based on mandated standards to determine which students will graduate or which type of diploma students will receive is particularly detrimental to children from low-income homes or homes in which English is not the first language. High-stakes national or statewide tests are being used this way in some

states, despite the fact that the results rarely provide information that helps teachers decide which specific teaching/learning experiences will foster literacy development. The practice hurts those most in need of enriched educational opportunities. Children deserve classroom assessments that bridge the gap between what they know and are able to do and relevant curriculum standards. Effective assessments are crucial for students who are falling behind. They deserve assessments that map a path toward their continued literacy growth.

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#### **Children deserve classroom assessments that:**

- ▶ are regular extensions of instruction;
- ▶ provide useful feedback based on clear, attainable, worthwhile standards;
- ▶ exemplify quality performances illustrating the standards;
- ▶ position students as partners with teachers in evaluating their progress and setting goals.

Assessments must provide information for instructional decision making as well as for public accountability.

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#### **Appropriate Assessments for Adolescent Readers**

It is appropriate at this point in the chapter, having considered curricular congruency, some principles of assessment, and the importance of the individual student, to focus briefly on the needs of the adolescent reader. For many years early childhood literacy instruction and programs for the early intervention of reading difficulties have occupied the nation's attention while the literacy needs of adolescents have virtually been ignored. Beyond the primary grades, students need to become proficient with expository texts that are dense with information and more difficult, technical vocabulary. At the secondary level, adolescent readers often are expected to learn independently in their content classrooms without the benefit of teaching strategies that foster learning, and they have little or no access to professionals who are trained in the teaching and assessment of literacy. Essentially, once children learn to read and write in the primary grades, it is quite likely that the amount and quality of literacy instruction will decrease or disappear altogether, thus causing a significant mismatch to

occur between what is needed and what is provided. Because of this potential for a serious curricular mismatch, districts should pay particular attention to the instructional and assessment needs required by their older students.

The International Reading Association has taken the initiative to address this omission in the nation's literacy efforts. Their publication, "Adolescent literacy: A position statement" (Moore, et al., 1999), recommends seven principles for supporting adolescents' literacy growth. The third principle states:

*Adolescents deserve assessment that shows them their strengths as well as their needs and guides their teachers to design instruction that will best help them grow as readers (p. 6).*

The principle concludes by stressing that adolescents deserve classroom assessments that have the same characteristics described in "Making a difference means making it different: Honoring children's rights to excellent reading instruction" (International Reading Association, 2000b, p. 7) that is cited above.

### **Audiences for Assessment Information**

On the heels of extensive debates about standards and the characteristics of effective reading and writing instruction, districts are struggling to negotiate assessment packages that provide their many stakeholders with the information deemed necessary for decision-making. The stakeholders in literacy are quite varied, and each group needs different information. Since these groups require differing information at various times in a school year, the result has often been to increase testing in most literacy arenas, i.e., classrooms, intervention programs, etc. While still considering the needs of these

stakeholders, Farr (1992) appropriately reminds us that the primary criterion for using any assessment tool is whether the information obtained helps students read and/or write more effectively. If it does not, then the assessment probably should be discarded.

A number of experts (Paris, et al, 1992; Farr, 1992; and Tierney, 1998) have suggested that there are five audiences that require information from literacy assessments. (See Figure 5, Farr, 1992, p. 29). Prior to considering the information that each audience needs, it is important to define the stakeholders within each audience. The **general public** includes elected officials such as school board members, state legislators, community members, businesses, and the local press. Generally, these are the groups responsible for establishing state and local standards as well as monitoring student progress toward academic standards. **School administrators and staff** are the educators responsible for establishing and overseeing the curriculum and instruction that is being assessed and evaluated. This audience includes college admission counselors, the school district superintendent, assistant superintendents, curriculum directors / coordinators, building principals, guidance counselors, and content area supervisors. **Parents** are the caregivers, those who have the vested interest in whether curriculum and instruction are proving effective for their children. **Teachers** are the professionals and support staff members who are responsible for instruction and the ones who are best situated to use assessment and evaluation data in their day-to-day work with children. **Students** are the stakeholders for whom assessment and evaluation needs to be the most meaningful. Ultimately from grade level to grade level, it is students who should and will be the primary assessors of their own literacy development.

**FIGURE 5. AUDIENCES FOR ASSESSMENT**

*Adapted from Weber, 1999, pp.17-19*

	<b>Students</b>	<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Parents</b>	<b>School Administrators</b>	<b>General Public</b>
<b>Information Needed</b>	To identify personal areas of strength and need	To plan instruction and intervention	To monitor progress of son/daughter	To evaluate the stability of curriculum, methods, and materials being used	To evaluate effectiveness of schools
<b>Type of Information</b>	Performance assessments related to curricular goals and personal interests	Performance assessments related to curricular goals	Performance, criterion, and norm-referenced evaluations related to grade-level goals	Norm-referenced and criterion-referenced evaluations related to curricular goals, district missions, and state standards	Norm-referenced and criterion-referenced evaluations related to state standards
<b>How Often Reported</b>	Daily, or as often as possible	Daily, or as often as possible	Periodically; at least once every six-nine weeks	Periodically; every six-nine weeks; each semester; annually	Annually

## Assessment Options

To construct a comprehensive, informative, literacy assessment package, school districts have four types of instruments or procedures from which to choose. Performance-based measurements, diagnostic instruments, criterion-referenced tests, and norm-referenced tests are all available to provide a wide range of information on the literacy development of students. A thoughtfully selected combination of these options enables a school district to produce a valid profile of the effectiveness of its literacy program. At the same time the district can derive the essential, instructionally useful information about each child's progress, achievement, and instructional strengths and needs. As is indicated in the "Audiences for Assessment" Figure 5, these four categories of instruments and procedures are sufficient for adequately informing all literacy stakeholders. More detailed descriptions of each category of these assessment options are provided below.

### Performance-Based Measurements

Performance-based assessments have received a considerable amount of national attention in recent years. As an alternative to the traditional "paper and pencil tests," they provide numerous avenues for students to creatively demonstrate their newly acquired knowledge, skills, and abilities. Performance assessments require students to do, i.e., to create, perform, and produce. McTigue and Ferrara (1997) provide clarification in Figure 6 by categorizing the assessment formats available to literacy educators. "Selected Response Items" e.g., multiple-choice questions are differentiated from "Constructed-Response Assessments" (e.g., short paragraph answers). A distinction in "Constructed-Response Assessments" is made between "Brief Constructed Responses" and

"Performance-Based Assessments" which are further sub-divided into three types—"Products," "Performances," and "Process-Focused" assessments. Classroom teachers who may tend to always rely on the same types of assessment formats find this Figure especially helpful for diversifying and expanding the repertoire of assessment instruments they employ.

FIGURE 6 FRAMEWORK OF ASSESSMENT APPROACHES AND METHODS *How might we assess student learning in the classroom?*

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Selected Response Items	CONSTRUCTED RESPONSE ASSESSMENTS			
	Brief Constructed Responses	PERFORMANCE	BASED	ASSESSMENTS
			Performances	Process-focussed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Multiple-choice</b></li> <li>• <b>True-false</b></li> <li>• <b>Matching</b></li> <li>• <b>Enhanced choice</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fill in the blank word (s) phrases (s)</li> <li>• Short answer sentence(s) paragraph(s)</li> <li>• Label a diagram</li> <li>• “Show your work”</li> <li>• Visual representation web concept map flow chart graph/table illustration</li> </ul>	<p><b>Products</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• essay</li> <li>• research paper</li> <li>• log/journal</li> <li>• lab report</li> <li>• story/play</li> <li>• poem</li> <li>• portfolio</li> <li>• art exhibit</li> <li>• science project</li> <li>• model</li> <li>• video/audiotape</li> <li>• spreadsheet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• oral presentation</li> <li>• dance/movement</li> <li>• science lab demo</li> <li>• athletic skills performance</li> <li>• dramatic reading</li> <li>• enactment</li> <li>• debate</li> <li>• musical recital</li> <li>• keyboarding</li> <li>• teach-a-lesson</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• oral questioning</li> <li>• observation (“kid watching”)</li> <li>• interview</li> <li>• conference</li> <li>• process description</li> <li>• “think aloud”</li> <li>• learning log</li> </ul>

Marzano (2000) also makes an important distinction between the terms "performance assessment" and "authentic assessment." He points out that

*performance assessments or tasks require students to construct responses and apply knowledge.*

These tasks, however, are quite often a teacher-contrived activity. An **authentic assessment task** is actually a performance assessment that has a direct and obvious "real world" connection. Authentic performance assessments require students to do the things found and valued in the "real world" (p. 96).

The concept of **multiple intelligences**, developed and refined by Gardner (1999), often influences what teachers do as they provide reading and writing instruction. Therefore, it is also possible and arguably necessary to consider these eight ways of knowing (verbal-linguistic, visual-spatial, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic) when assessment tasks are selected. Figure 7 provides a slightly modified and abbreviated version of Weber's (1999) listing of assessment tasks teachers may employ to facilitate students' demonstrating their learning of knowledge and skills using the different intelligences.

**FIGURE 7**      **MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES ASSESSMENT TASKS**

*Adapted from Weber, 1999, pp. 17-19*

<p><b>For verbal-linguistic</b> assessment, students:</p> <p>Read prepared material to class.          Tape record an original speech or mock interview.          Orally interpret a passage.          Debate.          Storytell.          Write creatively – poems, essays, in a journal.          Keep a diary.          Complete verbal exams.          Conduct conferences to exhibit work.          Complete oral or written reports.</p>	<p><b>For visual-spatial</b> assessment, students:</p> <p>Paint and draw.          Create maps and use globes.          Create sculptures.          Role-play on video.          Imagine and illustrate scenarios.          Make models, dioramas, mobiles.          Create posters to defend or refute topic.          Decorate windows.          Design a building.          Create a software program.</p>
<p><b>For logical-mathematical</b> assessment, students:</p> <p>Create symbolic solutions.          Work with graphs and tables.          Solve problems using a calculator.          Teach abstract material to peers.          Create problem worksheets.          Keep schedules.          Solve word problems.          Experiment.          Show cause-and-effect relationships.          Use statistics and numbers creatively.</p>	<p><b>For bodily-kinesthetic</b> assessment, students:</p> <p>Design an outdoors lesson activity.          Create dramas.          Do martial arts.          Use body language and mime.          Invent products.          Do folk or creative dance.          Design learning centers.          Create interactive bulletin boards.          Make presentations.          Use math manipulations.</p>
<p><b>For musical</b> assessment, students:</p> <p>Create a musical video.          Design a musical composition.          Sing solo or in a group.          Incorporate environmental sounds.          Describe instrumental music.          Hum melodies or whistle.          Create songs to aid memory work.          Perform original lyrics.          Integrate music and learning.          Use rhythm and rhyme effectively.</p>	<p><b>For interpersonal</b> assessment, students:</p> <p>Pair-share ideas and solutions.          Interview an expert.          Team-teach a concept.          Prepare student-led conferences.          Involve family and community in work.          Write group response logs.          Create a business proposal.          Design a listserv.          Describe a special-interest group.          Illustrate conflict resolution ideas.</p>
<p><b>For intrapersonal</b> assessment, students:</p> <p>Write personal reflections on a given topic.          Do individual projects.          Write personal stories.          Create a timeline of your life-show achievement/failures.          Write an autobiography.          Illustrate goal-setting strategies.          Complete a self-evaluation on a topic.          Keep a personal response log during reading of text.          Design personal portfolios.          Create a personal scrapbook.</p>	<p><b>For naturalistic</b> assessment, students:</p> <p>Collect data from nature.          Label specimens from natural world.          Organize collections.          Sort natural data, categorize and classify information.          Visit museums.          Communicate with natural historic sites.          Demonstrate research from nature.          List vocabulary used to describe natural data.          Illustrate use of magnifiers, microscopes, and binoculars.          Photograph natural patterns and comparisons.</p>

Figures 6 and 7 are indicative of the large variety of student activities and products that teachers may use for assessing students' literacy development, but a cautionary note is appropriate. As with any new educational initiative, there are concerns about the problems that accompany performance-based assessments. Baker (1998) cites the more prominent ones:

- 
- ▶ Performance assessments are difficult and expensive to develop.
  - ▶ Performance assessments, because they are open-ended, require trained judges to evaluate students' efforts and cost far more than other approaches.
  - ▶ Many teachers are not prepared to teach in the way performance assessments imply.
  - ▶ Many parents believe that performance assessment is a less rigorous method to evaluate students than more familiar multiple-choice tests (p. 3).
- 

Obviously, every thing that occurs or is produced in a literacy classroom could not and should not necessarily be used for assessment. Teachers and students should be critically selective of the items that are assessed and evaluated. Stiggins (1994) suggests that teachers use the following criteria for choosing effective assessment tasks:

- 
- ▶ Does the task match the instructional intention?
  - ▶ Does the task adequately represent the content and skills you expect the student to learn?
  - ▶ Does the task enable students to demonstrate their progress and capabilities?
  - ▶ Does the assessment use authentic, real-world tasks?

- ▶ Does the task lend itself to an interdisciplinary approach?
  - ▶ Can the task be structured to provide measures of several outcomes?
  - ▶ Does the task match an important outcome that reflects complex thinking skills?
  - ▶ Does the task pose an enduring problem type—a type the student is likely to have to repeat?
  - ▶ Is the task fair and free of bias?
  - ▶ Will the task be seen as meaningful by important stakeholders?
  - ▶ Will the task be meaningful and engaging to students so they will be motivated to show their capabilities? (pp. 35-42)
- 

In addition to these criteria, Falk (2000) suggests a number of others that are useful as well:

- 
- ▶ Are differences in cultural and linguistic perspectives appreciated?
  - ▶ Are current understandings of learning and important aspects of the disciplines reflected?
  - ▶ Can accurate generalizations be made about students' proficiencies based on the assessment results?
  - ▶ Are results reliable across raters and consistent in meaning across locales?
  - ▶ Is the information it provides worth its cost and time? (p. 38)
- 

One final, crucially important point must be made about performance assessments. When these assessments are carefully planned and implemented at the building or school district level, they

*must be tied to comprehensive staff development. Teachers must learn how to administer and score the assessments as well as how to make use of the results in a manner that enhances instruction. District administrators must commit the necessary resources; teachers must be willing to give the time required to properly administer and score the assessment. ... Certainly, the rewards are potentially great, but so must be the commitment (B. Wiser in Tierney, et al., 1998, p. 476).*

If an on-going professional development component does not accompany the implementation of performance assessment, the chance for long-range success is extremely small.

### **Portfolio Assessment**

All of the assessments and categories of tests described in this segment of the chapter are best viewed as sources of data about student learning (i.e., information about their literacy knowledge, skills, and abilities). A discussion of portfolio assessment at this point will define its direct connection to and usefulness with performance-based assessment. Individually, any of these assessment sources (performance-based, diagnostic, criterion-referenced, or norm-referenced) provide valuable, albeit incomplete, insights into what students know and can do. Only when a teacher looks at information from all available sources can a valid and reliable evaluation of a student be made. We strongly recommend that individual student portfolios be employed for collecting, organizing and synthesizing available data into a coherent image of how well a student has achieved specific literacy goals or standards. Tierney, et al, (1998) state, "portfolios reposition assessment in a manner that supports and reflects the teaching and learning goals and intentions of teachers and their students. Portfolios involve a movement from summative to formative evaluation and from a product orientation stressing quality control/standards to a learner-centered emphasis stressing student development and teacher decision making" (p. 478).

Although individual classroom teachers may use literacy portfolios in varying ways, a school-wide, or even district-wide implementation is necessary to truly maximize their benefits. In the larger context, Harp (1996) states that one of the first decisions to be made when implementing portfolio assessment is how long the portfolio will be used. "Will the portfolio be kept

only for the current school year and then sent home, or will it span the child's work across several years of school?" He further explains that many schools have found it effective to keep two portfolios, one for each school year and one that moves with the learner from year to year. "Another important consideration is the distinction between reading and writing folders and portfolios. Reading and writing folders are current collections of on-going work. They house pieces under construction, works in progress. Assessment and evaluation portfolios house completed works that are evaluated by the teacher and student. They are a long-term collection of work samples in reading and writing (Harp, 1996, p.136). A vitally important concept identified here, and one that cannot be over emphasized, is that portfolios are collaborative efforts by both the teacher and student.

Earlier a portfolio was defined as an organized collection of materials that represents student effort, progress and achievement in relation to a particular set of goals and standards (Valencia 1990). In the years since PCR II was written, portfolios have been widely adopted and adapted throughout the state and the nation. Every district, school, and teacher who has integrated portfolio assessment into a literacy program has done so from a unique perspective. As Bergeron, Wermuth, & Hammar (1997) state, "portfolios will remain dynamic only when these assessments reflect adaptations to individual classroom needs" (p. 563). Although no one formula for employing portfolios will be appropriate for all teachers, we recommend the Literacy Goals Worksheet in Figure 8 (Moore and Marinak, 2000) to assist in planning lessons and units to make explicitly visible the congruent connections between standards, instructional activities, and assessment data.

FIGURE 8 LITERACY GOALS WORKSHEET

Moore & Marinak, 2000

TEACHER/TEAM/COURSE: \_\_\_\_\_

\*PA ACADEMIC STANDARD CATEGORY: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Standard</b> (What Student Knows/Does)	<b>Instructional Activities</b> (Teach/Facilitate learning)	<b>Indicators for Portfolio</b> (Observable Behaviors/Products)	<b>Teacher Notes/Reflections</b>

\* PENNSYLVANIA ACADEMIC STANDARDS FOR READING, WRITING, SPEAKING AND LISTENING

Essentially, the Literacy Goals Worksheet (LGW) has been developed, used, and modified for the past several years until it enables teachers to make connections among: ❶ what students are expected to know and do; ❷ what plans the teacher has for teaching and facilitating that learning; ❸ what assessment data will be generated by the planned instructional activities; and ❹ the teacher's observations and reflections on the effectiveness of instruction. With the implementation of literacy standards in the schools of Pennsylvania, this latest version of the LGW can be a useful planning tool. It is imperative that the first three columns of the LGW be completed prior to instruction taking place. Rich, varied, and useful assessment data are not collected haphazardly, but in a deliberate and systematic way. Over the years, teachers have asked, "What goes into a portfolio?" The best answer to that recurring question is "Anything, but not everything." In other words, when planned for in advance and directly connected to an academic standard, anything that occurs or is produced in an instructional experience is fair game for inclusion in a portfolio. Everything that is done or produced in that learning experience, however, does not have to be saved or considered necessary for assessment. A portfolio is not just a collection of student work, rather it is a tangible record of student progress and accomplishments over time.

Perhaps the ultimate purpose for using literacy portfolios is to promote student learning through reflection and self-assessment. If portfolio assessment is truly to succeed, the students must have a sense of control and ownership of their portfolios (Au, 1997). Students, as well as teachers, should reflect on and make decisions about the content of their portfolios. A way to facilitate student reflection and decision making,

especially early on in the portfolio development process, is to have students complete "Entry Slips" when selecting pieces of work to include in their portfolios. An entry slip is attached to an item and includes brief statements describing what the piece is, the goal or standard it addresses, and why it was selected for inclusion in the portfolio. Figure 9 includes an example of an entry slip to be completed by the teacher and also one for student use. If an entry has been evaluated in some way, such as with a rubric, the evaluation information is also included. Teachers can explain and model how to use entry slips for students and then collaborate with them as they participate in the process. Tierny, et al., (1998) point out:

*In using portfolios, teachers assume the role of participant-observer as they guide student learning and counsel students in developing their portfolios and reflections (p. 475).*

FIGURE 9: SAMPLE PORTFOLIO ENTRY SLIPS

FOR TEACHER USE

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Goal/Standard: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Type of Product or Assignment: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Reason this was placed in the portfolio: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

---

FOR STUDENT USE

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I want to include this in my portfolio because: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

---

TEACHER COMMENT:

Mitchell, Abernathy, & Gowans (1998) remind us that validity and reliability are crucial attributes of any assessment, and they provide a plan for demonstrating these qualities with portfolios. The steps in their plan include formally describing the: ❶ focus of the portfolio; ❷ procedures for content selection; ❸ guidelines for adding materials and building the portfolio; and ❹ feedback and evaluation procedures (p. 385). Teacher-developed LGW's, address these four steps when they are used with entry slips and teacher conferences that provide feedback. Herman, Aschbacher, & Winters (1992) also describe detailed procedures that can be used to ensure the validity and reliability of a variety of alternative assessment procedures. Tierney, et al., (1998) clearly explain the rationale of why portfolios are both valid and reliable.

*(E)valuations derived from portfolios are never far removed from their origin or source. Portfolios afford an assessment that is grounded in the practices of students and teachers in classroom circumstances leading to a kind of face or systemic validity that supports the connecting of performance to teaching or learning opportunities. That is, portfolios provide a kind of grounded evaluation or primary source assessment of students. The reliability of a portfolio may lie in the verifiability that the portfolio affords and the validity may be tied to the ease with which one can translate portfolio assessments to workable instructional plans for students. In this regard, the portfolio allows a measure of interpretability that traditional assessments do not. Indeed it might be a mistake to view portfolios as overly subjective, somewhat anecdotal, or*

*too loose, for portfolios may serve to make more visible and accessible the reasoning that undergirds assessment decisions and the bases for these decisions (Tierney, et al, 1998, p. 479-480).*

These same authors go on to suggest that, in addition to being primarily a learner-centered assessment process, portfolios are capable of assessing program effectiveness. When contrasted with traditional testing formats, such as multiple-choice items, portfolios are less disruptive to class schedules while providing at least as much, if not more, useful information because they are obviously more sensitive to differences in instruction. However, there are disadvantages to portfolio use. For example, a given student's "ability to develop a portfolio may influence the portfolio and various factors may play a role in the quality of the portfolio developed. In other words, different teachers and different students at different times in different circumstances may have different degrees of success representing their learnings via their portfolios. And we would suspect that such variations are less apt to emerge with traditional assessment" (Tierney, et al., 1998, p. 482).

To sum up, portfolios offer a continual, complex, and comprehensive perspective of student achievement and progress over an extended period of time. The portfolio reflects assessment in an authentic context, illustrates the process by which student work is accomplished, and conveys what is valued. Developing the portfolio is a collaborative and multi-dimensional process in which the student assumes ownership. The process includes designing, assembling, reflecting and assessing by the student with support and feedback from the teacher. Students must be involved in determining the purpose, context, and audience of the portfolio. Their decisions help to guide the design, the content, the

connections with instruction, and how the portfolio is to be used. Students who assume active roles in the portfolio process become participants rather than objects of assessment.

### Diagnostic Literacy Instruments

A school district's assessment package should include a wide variety of diagnostic literacy tools for use when specific aspects of students' reading and/or writing require assessment and evaluation.

*Diagnostic literacy instruments are designed to analyze the strengths and needs of students on process-oriented skills and abilities.*

Commonly, such instruments will focus on word identification, word attack, vocabulary development, comprehension, motivation, and attitude. Often, such diagnostic literacy instruments permit comparisons among several sub-abilities of a given student as well as providing comparisons or profiles of the strengths and needs of a particular group of students or class. Diagnostic literacy instruments include norm-referenced tests, informal reading inventories, observation checklists, and literacy interviews. Also available are standardized instruments that examine student sub-skills or attributes of reading and writing.

Formal, norm-referenced, reading tests are generally comprised of a series of subtests that examine student ability in word identification, word attack, vocabulary, and comprehension, and like all formal tests, they yield grade equivalents, percentile ranks, and standard scores. Informal reading inventories (IRI's) are individually administered tests comprised of collections of word lists and passages that provide grade level performance (instructional, independent, frustration) scores. IRI's are especially helpful for placement testing in reading programs and/or literature-based programs. Many of the recently published IRIs also allow the examiner to informally evaluate important reading strategies such as the activation of background knowledge and the retelling of a selection. Finally, a wide variety of standardized instruments are available to evaluate many important reading or writing attributes or sub-skills. Phonemic awareness, phonics, reading/writing motivation and attitude, reading/writing self-perception, and the use of metacognitive reading strategies can all be assessed through standardized instruments. Many of

these tools and descriptive information on their uses can be found in Barrentine (1999), Harp (1996), and Rhodes (1993).

### Criterion-Referenced Tests

A criterion-referenced test compares a learner's performance to an expected level of mastery in a content area. These measurements are different from norm-referenced tests in that they do not compare a learner to other students. Rather, the students' work is compared to an arbitrarily determined criterion for success, generally reported as a percentage score. Criterion-referenced measures are usually provided as one major component of publisher-created language arts programs.

In reading, English, and/or spelling textbook series, criterion-referenced tests are available to assess the level of skill mastery both before and after a given unit of study. Prior to instruction, criterion-referenced tests pre-assess the proficiency level of students, and this information can be helpful as teachers do less whole class teaching and plan for flexible group instruction. Criterion-referenced information regarding how well students read orally, retell, revise, or summarize, for example, can allow teachers to group heterogeneously or homogeneously depending upon the focus of the lesson. After instruction has occurred, criterion-referenced tests can identify specific skills and/or strategies for re-teaching or intervention for those who do not perform well on these instruments.

### Norm-Referenced Tests

*A norm-referenced, or "standardized," test is the assessment of student performance in relation to the norming group that was used in the standardization process (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 167).*

The size of norming groups used during the standardization of national norm-referenced instruments usually exceeds 300,000 students. These norming groups are then demographically balanced to represent all students in the United States for that norming population (e.g., national, urban, suburban, private schools). In the past, multiple-choice response was the only format used by norm-referenced instruments. More recently, however, a variety of performance-based formats have been incorporated into standardized literacy assessments.

Most school districts use a standardized or norm-referenced test to track students' literacy achievement over time. Such tests are most useful to measure the effectiveness of curriculum from year to year as well as to follow the academic growth of student cohorts. Depending upon when a norm-referenced-instrument is administered, the information may not immediately inform instruction. Results of spring testing, for example, is often not available to principals and teachers until the following fall, but if student scores are resorted by their fall classroom assignments, teachers may still be able to use any specific skill analysis results to plan their mini-lessons.

Currently, the widespread use of norm-referenced and criterion-referenced tests is having an enormous impact on literacy education. Across the nation, state-mandated reading and writing assessments are administered to students at certain grade levels during their schooling experience.

These criterion- and/or norm-referenced tests require students to demonstrate their literacy abilities in ways that vary from state to state and in ways that may not always require authentic reading and writing tasks. Such tests also are usually viewed as a major indicator of the quality of education a student has received. "High-stakes state tests – tests with important consequences for educators and students – have become the accountability tool of choice in many states as policy makers struggle to find ways to increase student achievement levels" (McColskey & McMunn, 2000, p. 115).

These same authors summarize a National Research Council (NRC) publication (Elmore & Rothman, 1999) that articulates the theory behind these high-stakes state tests. "According to this theory, students will learn at higher levels if states:

- 
- ▶ **Define expectations for student performance (by publishing standards documents that provide guidance on what students should know and be able to do);**
  - ▶ **Administer tests that assess the most critical topics, instructional goals, or standards; and**
  - ▶ **Implement consequences for school performance such that low-performing schools are targeted for assistance" ( McColskey & McMunn, 2000, p. 119).**
- 

Teachers often feel compelled to "teach to the test" because of the high-stakes decisions that often follow. But teaching to the test is problematic because it may be in direct conflict with what educators know about how children learn and how to best facilitate that learning. Stiggins (1999) accurately asserts that traditional assessment procedures in this country are based on a behavioral management system of learning, i.e., a system driven by rewards and punishments. He contends that this is a far too simplistic view of how young people learn and, more importantly, how they are motivated to learn.

Among the high-stakes decisions being made are "determining a student's track or program placement, promotion, and graduation; evaluating teachers' and administrators' competence and school quality; and allocating sanctions and rewards" (Falk, 2000, p. 20-21). McColskey and McMunn (2000) recommend that school districts engage teachers in small group discussions about the pros and cons of specific test preparation strategies that have been implemented. They suggest that teachers consider

questions such as, "Are the strategies defensible?" and "How do they positively or negatively affect students?" These discussions should ultimately focus on determining viable modifications and alternatives that will have a more positive impact upon students.

Heubert and Hauser (1999), in the National Research Council (NRC) report of its "Committee on Appropriate Test Use," clearly explicate the problems high stakes tests pose for educators working with students with disabilities and those in the process of learning to use the English language. Federal and state mandates are now requiring that these two populations be included in large-scale assessment programs, but even the Congressionally mandated National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has done little to address the testing needs of these students (Pellegrino, Jones, & Mitchell, 1999). Alper and Mills (2001) explain that "Students with disabilities may (a) take part in the same standard testing procedures as student without disabilities, (b) participate in the same tests as other students with accommodations, or (c) be provided some alternate assessment if they cannot appropriately be tested by the standard testing format" (p. 55). In Figure 10 the Council for Exceptional Children (2000) provides guiding principles for making assessment accommodations.

## FIGURE 10: GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR MAKING ASSESSMENT ACCOMMODATIONS

*Adapted from: Council for Exceptional Children, (2000)  
Making assessment accommodations, pp.17-19.*

**Do not assume that every student with disabilities needs assessment accommodations.** Accommodations used in assessments should parallel accommodations used in instruction.

**Obtain approval by the IEP team.** The IEP team must determine the accommodations.

**Be respectful of the student's cultural and ethnic backgrounds.** When suggesting an accommodation, make sure the student and his or her family are comfortable with it. When working with a student who has limited English proficiency, consideration needs to be given to whether the assessment should be explained to the student in his or her native language or other mode of communication unless it is clearly not feasible to do so.

**Integrate assessment accommodations into classroom instruction.** Never introduce an unfamiliar accommodation to a student during an assessment. Preferably, the student should use the accommodation as part of regular instruction. At the very least, the student should have ample time to learn and practice using the accommodation prior to the assessment.

**Know whether your state and/or district has an approved list of accommodations.** Although the ultimate authority for making decisions about what accommodations are appropriate rests with the student's IEP team, many states and districts have prepared a list of officially approved accommodations.

**Plan early for accommodations.** Begin consideration of assessment accommodations long before the student will use them, so that he or she has sufficient opportunity to learn and feel comfortable.

**Include students in decision making.** Whenever possible, include the student in determining an appropriate accommodation. Find out whether the student perceives a need for the accommodation and whether he or she is willing to use it. If a student does not want to use an accommodation, the student probably will not use it.

**Understand the purpose of the assessment.** Select only those accommodations that do not interfere with the intent of the test. For example, reading a test to a student would not present an unfair advantage unless the test measures reading ability.

**Request only those accommodations that are truly needed.** Too many accommodations may overload the student and prove detrimental. When suggesting more than one accommodation, make sure the accommodations are compatible (e.g., do not interfere with each other or cause an undue burden on the student).

*Adapted from: Council for Exceptional Children, (2000)  
Making assessment accommodations, pp.17-19.*

**Determine if the selected accommodation requires another accommodation.** Some accommodations – such as having a test read aloud – may prove distracting for other students, and therefore also may require a setting accommodation.

**Provide practice opportunities for the student.** Many standardized test formats are very different from teacher-made tests. This may pose problems for students. Teach students test-taking skills, and orient students to the test format and types of questions.

**Remember that accommodations in test-taking won't necessarily eliminate frustration for the student.** Accommodations allow a student to demonstrate what he or she knows and can do. They are provided to meet a student's disability-related needs, not to give anyone an unfair advantage. Thus, accommodations will not in themselves guarantee a good score for a student or reduce test anxiety or other emotional reactions to the testing situation. Accommodations are intended to level the playing field.

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Unfortunately, the participation of students with disabilities and English-language learners places greater demands on the assessment process than our current knowledge and technology can support. Thus, when high-stakes decisions are made, the potentially negative consequences are likely to fall most heavily on these two student groups. However, Castellon-Wellington (2000) found no conclusive evidence that accommodations benefited English-language learners in demonstrating their content knowledge on standardized tests. In their NRC report Heubert & Hauser (1999) call for more research to enable students with disabilities and English-language learners to participate in large-scale assessments in ways that produce valid information. Because of these and a variety of other disparities, the Committee on Appropriate Test Use provides the following recommendation:

*High-stakes decisions such as tracking, promotion, and graduation should not automatically be made on the basis of a single test score but should be buttressed by other relevant information about the student's knowledge and skills, such as grades, teacher recommendations, and extenuating circumstances (Heubert & Hauser, 1999, p. 279).*

The International Reading Association (1999) also has a position paper opposing high stakes literacy testing. That paper concludes on a positive note; however, by providing the following recommendations to teachers:

- ▶ Construct more systematic and rigorous assessments for classrooms, so that external audiences will gain confidence in the measures that are being used and their inherent value to inform decisions.

- ▶ Take responsibility to educate parents, community members, and policy makers about the forms of classroom-based assessment, used in addition to standardized tests, that can improve instruction and benefit students learning to read.
  - ▶ Understand the difference between ethical and unethical practices when teaching to the test. It is ethical to familiarize students with the format of the test so they are familiar with the types of questions and responses required. Spending time on this type of instruction is helpful to all and can be supportive of the regular curriculum. It is not ethical to devote substantial instructional time teaching to the test, and it is not ethical to focus instructional time on particular students who are most likely to raise test scores while ignoring groups unlikely to improve.
  - ▶ Inform parents and the public about tests and their results.
  - ▶ Resist the temptation to take actions to improve test scores that are not based on the idea of teaching students to read better” (International Reading Association, 1999, p. 262).
- 

As the instructional leader of a school, the principal plays a key role in determining assessment policies and practices. Without the leadership and support of the building principal, assessment activities are quite likely to be inconsistent from teacher to teacher and in the long run potentially counter-productive to the ultimate goal of improving instruction and learning. Ramirez (1999, pp. 207-208) cites the responsibilities that building principals and other district administrators should assume in relation to assessment as originally presented in the book *Principals for Our Changing Schools: Knowledge and Skill Base* (Thomson, 1993).

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#### **Principals should be prepared to:**

- ▶ Understand the attributes and applications of sound student assessment;
- ▶ Understand the attributes and applications of a sound school assessment system;
- ▶ Understand issues involving unethical and inappropriate use of assessment information and ways to protect students and staff from misuses;
- ▶ Understand assessment policies and regulations that contribute to the development and sound use of assessments at all levels;

- ▶ Set goals with staff for integrating assessment into instruction and assist teachers in achieving these goals;
- ▶ Evaluate teachers' class assessment competencies and build such evaluations into the supervision process;
- ▶ Plan and present staff development experiences that contribute to the use of sound assessment at all levels;
- ▶ Use assessment results for building-level instructional improvement;
- ▶ Accurately analyze and interpret building-level assessment information;
- ▶ Act on assessment information;
- ▶ Create conditions for the appropriate use of achievement information; and
- ▶ Communicate effectively with members of the school community about assessment results and their relationship to instruction (Thomson, 1993).

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Recommendations for teachers and principals are especially appropriate in light of the results and conclusions of a large number of research studies cited and discussed by Stiggins (1999). He stresses that improved classroom assessments have highly positive effects on the subsequent summative assessments administered to students. In other words, when through professional development activities the quality of assessments used by classroom teachers is improved, the scores on the high stakes tests that students inevitably must take will also rise. To improve classroom assessment, Stiggins (1999) identifies and recommends the use of three tools "to tap an unlimited well-spring of motivation that resides within each learner.

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### These tools are:

- ▶ student-involved classroom assessment,
  - ▶ student-involved record keeping, and
  - ▶ student-involved communication (p. 196).
- 

In essence, these tools: ❶ encourage students to take educational risks with teacher support; ❷ engage students in monitoring their improvement over time; and ❸ have students share their success with others. Such tools are very much in agreement with the previous discussion of portfolio assessment.

### Evaluation Procedures

As stated earlier, "evaluation" is the process of reflecting upon information gathered during assessment and making judgments about the quality of student learning and performance" (Hill, Ruptic, & Norwick, 1998; Hoffman, et. al., 1999; Marzano, 2000; Strickland & Strickland, 2000; Weber, 1999). While all of the assessment options described above put new demands on literacy educators, there are equally complex options and demands involved with the evaluation of student learning. "Evaluating open-ended tasks and drawing valid inferences from both formal and informal data sources require new methods of data analysis and interpretation. Telling where a student 'is at' can no longer be calculated as the percent of problems answered correctly" (Shepard, 2000, p. 50).

Just as it is with assessment, evaluation procedures are integrally connected to and influence the other curricular components. Allington and Johnston (2000) found that exemplary upper elementary level teachers evaluate student work more on personal effort, progress, and improvement than they do on the achievement of specific standards. Characteristically, those teachers who routinely use performance assessments attend

to an individual student's development and goals, provide focused feedback and encourage student self-evaluation. These researchers also found that students in such classrooms work harder than those in rooms where effort and improvement are not weighted heavily in evaluation. This emphasis on and descriptions of student self-evaluation at all grade levels is very prevalent throughout the professional literature on literacy evaluation. In essence, it is widely agreed that leading students to the point where they automatically self-evaluate should be a major goal of schooling (Hansen, 1998, Weber, 1999).

To initiate developing the ability of students to self-evaluate, Hansen (1998) suggests teaching children to address the following questions in relation to their reading and writing:

- 
- ▶ What do I do well?
  - ▶ What is the most recent thing I've learned to do?
  - ▶ What do I want to learn next in order to grow?
  - ▶ What will I do to accomplish this?
  - ▶ What might I use for documentation? (p. 39)
- 

While the first two of these questions are obviously reflective and evaluative, the last three are not. In fact these three questions parallel rather obviously the first three columns in the "Literacy Goals Worksheet" (See Figure 8) that it is recommended that teachers use in their instructional planning ("What student knows/does," "Teach/Facilitate learning," "Observable behaviors/products"). To involve students collaboratively in the overall curricular process insures the highest quality of learning possible for all. Hansen states:

*To create, assign, and do their own assignments is necessary if students are going to evaluate them. ... Unless the purpose is the student's, and the student has designed the task, the student can't evaluate whether the work has accomplished its goal (p. 47).*

There are two procedures increasingly being employed by literacy teachers that are representative of the "new methods of data analysis and interpretation" which Shepard (2000, p.50) is referring to in the quotation above—scoring rubrics and developmental benchmarks.

## Scoring Rubrics

A scoring rubric is the tool many teachers in recent years have adopted for evaluating open-ended tasks and complex performances Succinctly described:

*Rubrics provide a set of ordered categories and accompanying criteria for judging the relative quality of assessment products (Shepard, 2000, p. 50).*

In essence, a rubric is a scoring guide useful in evaluating the quality of student-constructed responses. Rubrics can be used "holistically," i.e. the scorer takes into account all criteria to make one overall judgment, or "analytically," i.e., a score is given for each criterion in the rubric (Popham, 1997). Figure 11 is an example of a teacher-constructed scoring rubric for either an oral or written retelling of a narrative selection.

**FIGURE 11** TEACHER-CONSTRUCTED ORAL/WRITTEN RETELLING SCORING RUBRIC

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Level 4 Exemplary</b>	<b>Level 3 Proficient</b>	<b>Level 2 Satisfactory</b>	<b>Level 1 Developing</b>
<b>Setting</b>	Identifies setting, includes details, and describes significance of setting to story.	Identifies setting, and includes some details.	Identifies setting.	Unable to identify the setting.
<b>Characters</b>	Names characters, and provides descriptive traits. References text for support.	Names characters, and provides some descriptive traits.	Names characters.	Unable to tell the difference between major and minor characters.
<b>Plot</b>	Retells beginning, middle, and end with details and significant elaboration.	Retells beginning, middle, and end in sequence with details.	Retells beginning, middle, and end in sequence with minimal details.	Events not given in proper sequence and very few details provided.
<b>Problem/ Solution</b>	Identifies problem and solution. Gives details, and evaluates the story.	Identifies problem and solution. Gives details.	Identifies problem and solution.	Unable to identify problem and solution.

It is recommended that teachers who are engaging students in self-evaluation should have them also participate in constructing and applying scoring rubrics to their work. Ainsworth and Christinson (1998) and Rickards & Cheek (1999) provide descriptions of how students and teachers can create classroom-based, task-specific rubrics. They also recommend that these rubrics be used to engage students in self-assessment and reflection as well as peer assessment. "Opening up the criteria used to evaluate student work and inviting students to participate in the evaluation process helps students begin to feel a part of the assessment process, rather than as passive recipients of someone else's evaluation" (Serafini, 2000/2001, p. 390).

Baker (1998) recommends the use of general scoring rubrics rather than those that are highly task-specific which can only be used to evaluate one particular piece of student work. She goes on to point out that for elementary teachers and others in multiple-subject classrooms, generalized rubrics are more efficient and ultimately more effective evaluation tools. Popham (1997) concurs with Baker, and he also recommends that: ❶ rubrics should include three to five evaluative criteria; ❷ each criterion should represent a major attribute of the artifact being assessed; and ❸ the rubric should be accompanied by exemplars, anchor papers and/or descriptions of the evaluative criteria. Later in this chapter is a description of how rubrics are appropriate tools for school districts to use in establishing the reliability and validity of their assessment procedures.

### Developmental Literacy Benchmarks

Although rubrics are valuable for evaluating a particular piece of student work, Shepard (2000) cautions that they "are

inappropriate for many moment-to-moment uses of instructional assessments and more generally, in classrooms with young children" (p. 50). In other words, there are innumerable learning occasions and classroom interactions that do not lend themselves to rubric scoring. It is in these daily, seemingly mundane, classroom occurrences that developmental literacy benchmarks are especially helpful to teachers.

A "Developmental Literacy Benchmark" is just one term used to refer to an array of information that describes and evaluates a student's abilities in reading, writing, spoken language, listening, or viewing at a particular stage in the student's literacy development (Ministry of Education and Training, 1991; Griffin, Smith, & Burrill, 1995). Individual descriptions of these developmental stages are arranged, usually in some linear fashion, to provide educators with a view of where students are at a particular time and where they need to be going. Depending upon the writer or teacher using benchmarks, the terms "literacy profile scales" (Griffin, Smith, & Burrill, 1995) or "literacy continua" (Hill, Ruptic, & Norwick, 1998) may also be used. Various versions of benchmarks, profiles, or continua have been developed through careful and extensive observations of young people as they go through the process of becoming literate. Most versions start with the benchmarks children are usually expected to exhibit when they start school and continue through the rather sophisticated literacy behaviors exhibited by young adults. Samples of different benchmark stages are found in Figure 12.

## Reading band A

### Concepts about print

Holds book the right way up. Turns pages from front to back. On request, indicates the beginnings and ends of sentences. Distinguishes between upper- and lower-case letters. Indicates the start and end of a book.

### Reading Strategies

Locates words, lines, spaces, letters. Refers to letters by name. Locates own name and other familiar words in a short text. Identifies known, familiar words in other contexts.

### Responses

Responds to literature (smiles, claps, listens intently). Joins in familiar stories.  
Interests and attitudes  
Shows preference for particular books. Chooses books as a free-time activity.

## Reading band B

### Reading strategies

Takes risks when reading. 'Reads' books with simple, repetitive language patterns. 'Reads' understands and explains own 'writing'. Is aware that print tells a story. Uses pictures for clues to meaning of text. Asks others for help with meaning and pronunciation of words. Consistently reads familiar words and interprets symbols within a text. Predicts words. Matches known clusters of letters to clusters in unknown words. Locates own name and other familiar words in a short text. Uses knowledge of words in the environment when 'reading' and 'writing'. Uses various strategies to follow a line of print. Copies classroom print, labels, signs, etc.

### Responses

Selects own books to 'read'. Describes connections among events in texts. Writes, role-plays and/or draws in response to a story or other form of writing (e.g. poem, message). Creates ending when text is left unfinished. Recounts parts of text in writing, drama or artwork. Retells, using language expressions from reading sources. Retells with approximate sequence.

### Interests and attitudes

Explores a variety of books. Begins to show an interest in specific types of literature. Plays at reading books. Talks about favorite books.

While rubrics are useful for evaluating specific products which exemplify student ability or achievement, benchmarks are a vital tool in making evaluative statements about the literacy behaviors and strategies students use from day to day. Teachers are able to consider and incorporate into their evaluations the myriad of data that in seemingly subtle ways signal students' progress. In other words, benchmarks enable the teacher to evaluate multiple aspects of students' literacy learning in the meaningful classroom contexts where they are developed and refined on a daily basis. Because benchmarks are specific descriptors of literate behaviors, they can usually be integrated with state literacy standards thus providing school districts with an additional tool to demonstrate student achievement of those standards (Hill, Ruptic, & Norwick, 1998).

In addition to providing a visual guide for approximations of what students can and should be expected to do as they become literate, there are also a number of other highly valuable uses for developmental literacy benchmarks.

### **Benchmarks:**

- ▶ recognize and communicate the belief that the students in every classroom possess a wide range of abilities;
- ▶ assist teachers in planning instruction and structuring experiences that facilitate and enhance the desired learning behaviors;
- ▶ can be incorporated into a school district's report card or reporting system to report student progress as well as where a student is in relation to other students in the class and in the district; and
- ▶ enable school districts to examine their literacy curriculum to see if any essential elements need to be added (Ministry of Education and Training, 1991; Griffin,

Smith, & Burrill, 1995; Hill, Ruptic, & Norwick, 1998).

### **Developing Local, Standardized Performance Assessments**

Standardization is "the process, act, or result of establishing criteria for the evaluation of something; specifically, in educational testing, the building of tests to meet established criteria with respect to validity, reliability, curriculum relevancy, etc." (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 242). The process of standardizing certain assessment pieces, however, is not synonymous with choosing a standardized test. Actually, standardization is a way of increasing the reliability and validity of the products, performances, and/or processes that are performance-based.

*Performance-based assessment is the collection of educational artifacts "that call for students to produce a response like that required in the instructional environment, as in portfolios or projects (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 182).*

In other words, performance assessments are samples of student work that reflect daily instructional expectations and effort. When the collection of student performance data is closely aligned to classroom expectations, it is difficult or nearly impossible to tell the difference between instruction and assessment.

According to McTigue & Ferrara (1995), performance-based assessments can take three forms: product, performance, and process-focused (see Figure 6 above). Product Assessments are artifacts such as writing samples, retellings, and running records. Examples of performance assessments include, among other things, oral presentations and debates. Process-focused assessments include

techniques such as the System for Teaching and Assessing Interactively and Reflectively (STAIR), diagnostic teaching, retrospective miscue analysis, and guided reading.

The definitions above denote the relationships that exist between instructing and the establishing of criteria used to evaluate learning. School districts can standardize their performance-based literacy assessments in a number of ways including: ❶ administration of the same performance assessment at set times during instruction or during the school year; ❷ administration of a consistent performance assessment prior to the implementation of a new method, technique, theme, unit, etc.; ❸ application of the same instructional criteria to all students; ❹ application of the same rubric to reading/writing workshop artifacts at or across grade levels; and ❺ administration of the same performance assessment at or across grade levels. The suggestions for standardizing performance assessments that follow include a description of the assessment, i.e., the information and artifacts collected, and the procedures available for evaluating that information.

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### **❶ Administration of the same performance assessment at set times during instruction or during the school year**

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Assessment that is grounded in the curriculum can be standardized by completing oral reading and/or comprehension checks using the same piece of text for a selected group of students or at set times during the school year. For example, students' readiness for grade one guided reading instruction can be assessed by selecting an early grade one level guided reading text and having all kindergarten students read that text at the end of the school year. Choosing appropriate level text for guided reading instruction in grade three (where comprehension is as important as oral reading accuracy) can be ascertained by having students silently read and retell the first chapter of a fiction or non-fiction book.

An oral reading and comprehension check can be evaluated by ❶ taking a running record of oral reading accuracy and ❷ applying a rubric or a checklist to the retelling of text. An example of a typical retelling form appears in Figure 13.

Figure 13

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## ORAL RETELLING FORM FOR FICTION\*\*

Characters:

Setting:

Problem:

Events:

Solution:

\*\*Teacher scribes oral retelling by student.

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The teacher-constructed oral/written retelling scoring rubric found in Figure 11 is useful for evaluating student retellings that are recorded on this retelling form.

Figure 14 contains a sample of a retelling checklist for a non-fiction selection.

Figure 14

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## RETELLING CHECKLIST FOR NON-FICTION\*\*

Main Idea:

Points

Supporting Details:

Points

Vocabulary:

Points

Author's Purpose:

Points

Readers Aids:

Points

\*\*Teacher can assign point values depending upon how the non-fiction is organized. Point ranges can then be determined for advanced, proficient, basic and below basic understanding.

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## ② Administration of a consistent performance assessment prior to the implementation of a new method, technique, theme, or unit

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STAIR: System for Teaching and Assessing Interactively and Reflectively

The STAIR: System for Teaching and Assessing Interactively and Reflectively (Afflerbach, 1993a) is an approach to assessment that was developed for the purpose of recording and using information from teacher observations. Specifically, Afflerbach (1993a) developed the STAIR to help teachers become experts in observing and assessing their students. In addition, STAIR helps teachers address the following frequently posed questions:

- ▶ How can I record the information I gather from observations during reading instruction?
- ▶ How can my instruction reflect what I know about individual students?
- ▶ How do I know I am doing a good job of teaching and assessing my students?
- ▶ How can I develop my assessment voice so that it is heard and valued by different audiences for different purposes?

The STAIR is a series of classroom observations using several templates to guide assessment and instruction. Step one, for example, in the STAIR encourages teachers to:

- ① Formulate a hypothesis about the student,
- ② List sources of information to support the hypothesis, and
- ③ Describe instruction to address the hypothesis.

After completing the instruction described in the first step of STAIR, the remaining steps involve planning further instruction, reflecting on instruction, and updating the hypothesis. Steps two through four (or when the observer decides to discontinue) have the teacher consider the:

- ❶ Context of the Reading
- ❷ Text Being Read
- ❸ Reading Related Task
- ❹ Initial Hypothesis: \_\_\_\_\_refined \_\_\_\_\_upheld  
\_\_\_\_\_abandoned
- ❺ Sources of information
- ❻ Instruction to address the hypothesis

The STAIR gives permanence and structure to the valuable but often fleeting assessment information that is available to classroom teachers on a daily basis. It informs assessment through hypothesis generation, reflection, instruction, and the identification of information sources. STAIR is, however, a time intensive performance process. Afflerbach (1993a) recommends using it selectively and for a brief period of time—perhaps for two to four weeks. It can be most helpful in the weeks prior to a student’s instructional support team (IST) meeting or during the period of time when an IST suggestion is being implemented in the classroom. The performance assessment process of STAIR helps teachers hone their observational skills and is a vehicle to communicate their increased understandings about student literacy.

**The STAIR can be evaluated by:**

- ▶ counting the frequency a behavior occurs,
- ▶ taking a running record of text read,
- ▶ having the student (s) do a retelling of text read,
- ▶ having the student (s) construct a graphic organizer of text read, or
- ▶ applying a rubric to written artifacts.

### **Diagnostic Teaching**

Like the STAIR, diagnostic teaching (Valencia & Wixson, 1991) blends instruction and assessment by permitting teachers to observe the ways in which different factors may be influencing a student’s reading acquisition and/or ability.

According to Valencia & Wixson (1991), diagnostic teaching is hypothesis driven, and it assumes that the teacher is intentionally examining one or more factors that might be inhibiting reading achievement. Diagnostic teaching is a performance process that contains three related tasks:

- ❶ **planning**
- ❷ **executing**
- ❸ **evaluating**

"Planning" for diagnostic teaching involves thinking about the factors that can be manipulated in a reading lesson. This includes reader factors such as knowledge, skills, and motivation as well as the characteristics of the reading context (i.e., the instructional environment, methods, and materials). The "executing" stage follows this planning of a lesson, and may involve reading text in alternative ways, chunking text, trying a new reading method, and/or adjusting the type of scaffolding activity. The thrust of the "evaluating" which follows teaching is to determine the impact of the instruction on student learning, performance, or knowledge. Diagnostic teaching can be evaluated in the same way that the STAIR procedure is.

### **Retrospective Miscue Analysis**

Retrospective Miscue Analysis (RMA), developed by Goodman & Marek (1996), is based on Kenneth Goodman's earlier work in miscue analysis (1969). Miscue analysis is the formal examination and use of oral reading miscues to determine the strengths and needs in the background experiences and language skills of students as they read. Generally speaking, a miscue analysis is conducted by a teacher or reading specialist and the results are used to inform word study and reading strategy instruction.

RMA is a process that engages students in reflecting on their own reading processes by analyzing and discussing their miscues. The developers of this procedure suggest two possible instructional settings for the RMA. The first is a one-on-one conference where the teacher and student listen to an audiotape during which a running record was taken. The second setting is a one-on-one conference immediately following the completion of a running record. There are advantages and disadvantages to both settings. The one-on-one reflection using the audiotape allows the teacher to listen to the reading prior to the conference and plan guiding questions. However, the disadvantage to this setting is that some time has passed since the student completed the reading, and the student may have little memory of the thought processes employed during the reading. The one-on-one conference immediately following reading increases the likelihood that the student will remember the thoughts that were occurring when a particular miscue was made. The disadvantage to this setting is that the teacher has little or no time to reflect on miscue patterns and plan instruction accordingly. The teacher evaluates the RMA by determining the cueing systems (semantic, syntactic, graphophonic) the student is or is not using and then plans mini-lessons based on the student's identified needs. Goodman & Marek (1996) provide a number of specific, helpful examples of teacher-student dialogue in their article.

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### **❸ Application of the same instructional criteria to all students**

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#### **Guided Reading**

Guided reading is small-group instruction and assessment that provides opportunities for children to learn how to problem-solve as

readers as they engage in the reading of an instructionally appropriate book (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). After considering each child's oral reading accuracy, temporary small groups are formed. Guided instruction takes place while using text that represents just a small amount of challenge for the student. The teacher can "listen in" for oral reading accuracy while children whisper read. Text that presents a small amount of challenge allows the teacher to promote the use of multiple-cueing strategies (syntactic, semantic, graphophonic), listen as children self-correct and monitor for meaning, and plan word study mini-lessons. Guided reading allows the teacher to plan for reading instruction based on the continuous assessment of children's ability to make meaning from text. This performance process contains four goals:

- ▶ Assess the child's ability to use all sources of information to construct meaning, including multiple-cueing word study strategies, context clues, re-reading, and asking for help.
- ▶ Assess the child's abilities to use letter, sounds, and word parts to identify unknown words.
- ▶ Assess the child's ability to monitor meaning while reading.
- ▶ Assess the child's ability to self-correct while whisper reading.

Using a consistent instructional criteria to make certain that text is appropriately leveled standardizes the performance assessments taken during guided reading. There are a number of instructional criteria to help teachers determine the instructional appropriateness of the leveled texts used for guided reading. Some, such as the three cited below, involve evaluating only oral reading accuracy. These three criteria below represent very different levels of oral reading accuracy required to match text to reader. Districts should determine the level of oral reading accuracy required for instructional level text and then standardize the levels within and/or across grade levels.

### **Evaluation Criteria for Oral Reading Accuracy**

**90% or above: instructional**

**less than 90%: frustrational (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996)**

**94% or above: independent (text may be too easy)**

**81 -94%: instructional (with scaffolded instruction during guided reading)**

80% or less: frustrational (Marinak & Mazzoni, 1999)

98% or above: independent

90-97%: instructional

less than 90%: frustrational (Leslie and Caldwell, 2001)

The last set of criteria includes oral reading accuracy and a comprehension check which is especially important when doing guided reading with short chapter books.

### Evaluation Criteria for Oral Reading Accuracy and Comprehension

90-97%: instructional for oral reading accuracy and

70% to 89% comprehension (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001)

---

#### ④ Application of the same rubric to reading/writing workshop artifacts at or across grade levels

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Performance tasks are an effective way to assess students during reading and/or writing workshop. Having students respond to text or writing in the same literary genre that has just been read (mystery, comedy, non-fiction) will generate authentic artifacts that can be scored with a rubric. A short list of possible tasks that can be used as performance assessments during reading/writing workshop include:

- ▶ reading response logs
- ▶ summary paragraphs
- ▶ character sketches
- ▶ story maps (fiction)
- ▶ text maps (non-fiction)
- ▶ original fiction story
- ▶ original non-fiction text
- ▶ original persuasive essay
- ▶ original personal narrative

The use of rubric scoring can be standardized in a district by applying the same rubric to a performance task at or across grade levels. Using a generic rubric for reading responses or artifacts from writing workshop allows teachers to apply consistent evaluative criteria at or across grade levels without having to standardize the performance task. In other words, a generic writing rubric could be standardized across a grade level and applied to any original text created during writing workshop. Standardizing the rubric means that students, teachers, and parents are aware of the grade level writing expectations that will be applied consistently for products generated during writing workshop. The Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) Domain-Specific Writing Rubric (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2000b) is a good example of a generic writing rubric that could be applied to all writing workshop products grades 4-12. On the next page is the PSSA Domain-Specific Writing Rubric revised for use in a primary writing workshop.

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#### ⑤ Administration of the same performance assessment at or across grade levels

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To further standardize the evaluation of reading and/or writing artifacts, a district can administer the same prompt at or across grade levels. This standardization could range from all first grade students writing a paragraph describing how a snowman is built to all fifth grade students reading the same two non-fiction articles and composing a "comparison/contrast" description of the two pieces of expository text. These performance tasks would most likely be evaluated with a rubric that is also standardized to the task and/or grade level. Standardizing both the performance assessment and the rubric allows

**FIGURE 15** PENNSYLVANIA ASSESSMENT WRITING DOMAIN SCORING GUIDE (GRADES 1&2)

FOCUS	CONTENT	ORGANIZATION	STYLE	CONVENTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear ideas that the reader understands all about the topic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lots of information and details about the topic</li> <li>• Complete explanations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good beginning with characters and setting</li> <li>• Middle with details</li> <li>• Definite ending</li> <li>• Everything explained in order</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colorful language</li> <li>• Exact words</li> <li>• Variety of sentences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mechanics, spelling, capitalization, punctuation</li> <li>• Complete sentences</li> </ul>

FOCUS	CONTENT	ORGANIZATION	STYLE	CONVENTIONS
<b>4</b> Sharp focus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear ideas that the reader understands all about the topic</li> </ul>	Well developed ideas with much details	Clear organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sentences are varied in type and length</li> <li>• Words are colorful</li> </ul>	Few mistakes
<b>3</b> Satisfactory focus	Satisfactory content: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contains some explanations and details</li> </ul>	Acceptable organization	Some variety with sentence and/or word choice	Some mistakes but reader can understand
<b>2</b> Unclear focus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not stay on topic</li> </ul>	Limited content with few or confused ideas and details	Partially organized	Sentences all the same with limited word choice	Mistakes make it somewhat difficult for reader to understand
<b>1</b> No focus	Unrelated or very little content	Little or no attempt at organization	Little or no sentence or word variety	Many mistakes make it hard for reader to understand

NON-SCOREABLE	OFF-PROMPT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is illegible: i.e., includes so many undecipherable words that no sense can be made of the response</li> <li>• Is incoherent: i.e., words are legible but syntax is so garbled that response makes no sense</li> <li>• Is insufficient; i.e., does not include enough to assess domains adequately</li> <li>• Is a blank paper</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is readable but did not respond to prompt</li> </ul>

teachers and administrators to choose topical anchor papers across a grade level in the same school and within grade levels from year to year.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education, in partnership with the Keystone State Reading Association and the Pennsylvania Association of Federal Program Coordinators, offers technical assistance to districts in the form of two valuable documents. *The Early Childhood Classroom Assessment Framework* (1997) is for teachers and administrators who are designing performance-based assessments in grades pre-K through grade four. *The Classroom Assessment Manual for Grades 4-8* (2001) is helpful when considering assessments for intermediate and middle school learners. Both frameworks contain a menu of literacy assessment suggestions including rubrics, checklists, inventories, and performance assessments for reading and writing.

## DEVELOPING A DISTRICT LITERACY REPORTING SYSTEM

As defined earlier in this chapter, "reporting" is interpreting and sharing with others the information previously gathered and evaluated to document student learning and growth (Hill, Ruptic, & Norwick, 1998; Hoffman et al., 1999; Marzano, 2000; Strickland & Strickland, 2000; Weber, 1999). A previous discussion indicated how "report cards" are a well-entrenched fixture in most American schools, but yet are so imprecise that they may be virtually meaningless. By summarizing the available research on report cards, Afflerbach & Johnston (1993) are able to draw a number of conclusions about their use. They state that report cards are similar across school districts, with the overwhelming majority of

them providing a letter or number grade and a brief comment for each subject (see Figure 16). From a literacy perspective, "reading is separated from the other language arts, and might be broken down into phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension components, with separate grades assigned for each" (Afflerbach, 1993, p. 458). Such a format is incapable of accurately reflecting students' literacy development or achievement.

### Grades

Grade(s): The number(s) or letter(s) reported at the end of a set period of time as a summary statement of evaluations made of students (Marzano, 2000, p. 13).

*Grading is the assignment of a numerical score, letter, or percentage to a product (Strickland & Strickland, 2000, p.8).*

Report cards are usually standardized within a school or school district, thus teachers have little or no flexibility in how they record student information. The times during the school year when report cards are distributed are very significant events because they create anxiety not only for students but for the teachers as well. Report cards are generally viewed as the "voice of the teacher," but in reality teachers have little or no say in their development and often receive little or no training in how to use them. Teachers regularly struggle with how to best express what they know about a student within the narrow confines of the report card that they must use (Afflerbach & Johnston (1993). Azwell and Schmar (1995) posit that reporting practices need to change, and they propose a number of options for school districts to consider.

Despite a long history of criticism by educators, traditional grading practices prevail

in most schools (Marzano, 2000). Given the complexity of the educational issues that must be addressed by schools in the 21st century, especially those surrounding literacy learnings, and at a time when the public requires teachers to be accountable for having students meet academic standards, the report card in its traditional form is certainly not the most useful tool for communicating about student learning. Teachers and school districts have only recently confronted and most are still grappling with the feeling that the traditional report card, with its letter or number grades, does not serve them very well. In reality, there are other, more diverse avenues available for reporting information about student literacy development to the various interested constituencies than simply with a report card.

School districts are better served if they consider developing a thoroughly planned, well-organized "literacy reporting system" consisting of a variety of components, including a report card, that serve different purposes. Rather than attempting to accomplish all reporting tasks on one card that is issued periodically throughout the school year, districts are well advised to reflect upon what their reporting efforts in the language arts are trying to accomplish and then to determine the most effective and efficient methods of doing so.

Throughout this chapter "reporting" has been presented as the last component in the list that forms the recursive curricular process; however, it really should not be viewed as the final step, the endgame as it were. Rather, reporting should be viewed as the complete manifestation of a congruent curriculum. Unlike the other curricular components, reporting has the potential to reflect and represent all of the others. The goals of instruction and the instructional, assessment, and evaluation procedures used to address those goals can and should be evident in the reporting that teachers do. The traditional report card, of course, is quite limited and really cannot accomplish that task by itself. An expanded literacy reporting system using different reporting formats for the various audiences however, does have the potential for doing so.

Just as with the other components in the curriculum, reporting should: ❶ have student learning as its primary focus; and ❷ provide feedback on how appropriate and effective the goals, instruction, assessment, and evaluation procedures are in facilitating that learning. There is some evidence however, that this is not always the case. Citing a study by Frisbie & Waltman

(1992), Guskey (1996) concludes that grading and reporting are not necessary for instruction to occur. He goes on to surmise that if that is true, then the primary purpose of grading and reporting is something other than facilitating teaching or learning. Although this condition may have been true, or at least partially so in the past, it cannot be so in the future. Any educational component as important as communicating what students have learned that does not function as an integral part of the effort to inform and improve the entire curricular process needs to be seriously reconsidered. A school district that develops a broad-based literacy reporting system will, by its very scope and thoroughness, make it a vital part of the curriculum.

Before beginning the actual work of developing a literacy reporting system, a school district should:

- 1 decide who will participate in the development process;
- 2 determine what the procedures and specific tasks will be;
- 3 create a tentative time line for accomplishing each of the tasks; and
- 4 identify who will be responsible for making final decisions.

All constituencies (i.e., teachers, students, parents) administrators, and school board members, should be represented on the "Literacy Reporting System Committee" and all should be actively involved throughout the development process. Faculty and community involvement activities, a year-long pilot study, and follow-up surveys are recommended as major tasks to be completed. Probably the committee's most significant task however, will be the revision of the school district's report

card (Afflerbach, 1993b; Hallmann & Logan, 1993). When a district develops a literacy reporting system, it is not eliminating or reducing the importance of the report card. Rather, the district is refining the report card while expanding and enhancing the context in which it functions.

Moore (1995) suggests that school districts use the following questions to guide their planning and to initiate the process of creating and implementing a reporting system.

- 1 What are the purposes of the school district's literacy reporting system?
- 2 Who are the audiences for the literacy reporting system?
- 3 What are the major components of the literacy reporting system?
- 4 What student literacy information should be reported?
- 5 What are the characteristics of an effective literacy report card?

### What Are the Purposes of the School District's Literacy Reporting System?

In summarizing a number of sources, Marzano (2000) identifies five categories of purposes for reporting.

- 1 **Administrative Purposes:** From a practical and legal standpoint, school districts need to maintain records that verify student promotion, class rank and graduation. Also, these records are needed to facilitate the placement of transfer students in a new school.
- 2 **Feedback About Student Achievement:** This purpose is probably the most obvious, most common, and arguably the most important reason for reporting. Some sources refer to it as the "Information Function" of reporting.
- 3 **Guidance:** Guidance counselors assist students in making decisions about future course work, higher education plans, and career choices using the information they receive.

- ④ **Instructional Planning:** Teachers use information to improve instruction, to identify student strengths and needs and to group for instruction. School districts may also use the data reported in its curriculum planning.
- ⑤ **Motivation:** It is assumed that low grades motivate students to try harder and that high grades motivate them to continue their efforts (Marzano, 2000, p. 14-15).

While Guskey's (1996) list of purposes for reporting is very similar to Marzano's, he delineates one more very important purpose which is to:

- ⑥ **Provide information that students can use for self-evaluation.**

Also, in discussing the "motivation" issue, Guskey (1996) concludes from the available research that while grades may have some value as rewards, they probably have no value as punishments.

### **Who Are the Audiences for the Literacy Reporting System?**

Directly connected to the "purposes for reporting" is the need to create a system comprised of components that have the optimal ability to convey information to the interested audiences. No one format or procedure will serve all purposes well. As school districts consider the various audiences to whom they must report, it cannot be stressed enough that information about students and the formats chosen to convey that information are not the same for all audiences. Since some require different and/or less information than others, the information from each of the sources should be examined for appropriateness with each audience. Earlier in this chapter, Figure 5 (Farr, 1992) identifies the audiences to whom literacy assessment and evaluation information must be reported. Of all the stakeholders who comprise these different audiences, Marzano (2000) unequivocally states that feedback to parents and students is by far the most important.

### **What Are the Major Components of the Literacy Reporting System?**

No one method of reporting serves all purposes or audiences well. School districts, however, have numerous possibilities to choose from in constructing their literacy reporting system. Many of the available choices are commonly employed and may already be in place. For example, most districts already use:

- ▶ Report Cards
- ▶ Parent/Teacher Conferences
- ▶ Teacher/Student Conferences
- ▶ Student Portfolios
- ▶ District Performance Assessments
- ▶ State-mandated Assessments
- ▶ Nationally Norm-referenced Tests

The most important point when including any component in the literacy reporting system is that it should be purposefully chosen, specifically structured, and regularly scheduled to meet a particular audience's need for information.

A number of other useful suggestions that a school district might want to consider including in their system, such as videos, newsletters, and home-response journals, are described in the "Facilitator's Guide" which accompanies the video program, *Reporting Student Progress*, produced by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (1996). More significantly, the format used to present these and other "Strategies for Reporting Student Progress" developed by the Edmunton Public Schools, Edmunton, Alberta, Canada is recommended as the template for a planning tool useful in developing a literacy reporting system. By using the categories "Reporting Strategy," "Time Frame," "Description of Strategy," and "Benefits of Using This Strategy," districts can critically examine potential reporting system components and select those that best meet their needs. Figure 16, on the next page, illustrates the use of the recommended template.

**FIGURE 16. STRATEGIES FOR REPORTING STUDENT PROGRESS**

Reporting Strategy	Time Frame	Description of Strategy	Benefits of Using This Strategy
<b>Home-Response Journals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weekly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three-way communication journal where the child, parent, and teacher regularly hold dialogues with one another</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allows the teacher to provide specific and individual comments about a student's progress</li> <li>• Integrates learning, assessment, and reporting</li> <li>• Encourages student and parent reflection</li> <li>• Provides current written information about the student's progress</li> </ul>
<b>Newsletters</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weekly</li> <li>• Biweekly</li> <li>• Monthly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written communication about curriculum, specific learning tasks, and programming</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informs parents of curriculum expectations</li> <li>• Allows parents to monitor their child's progress in relation to the curriculum</li> <li>• Provides parent education</li> </ul>
<b>Student Self-Reflection</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students reflect on their progress in a written format (e.g., journal writing, writing their own report card)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourages student to take ownership and be self-directed learners</li> <li>• Allows student to identify strengths and weaknesses</li> <li>• Provides the teacher with insights about the student's learning</li> </ul>
<b>Student-Led Conferencing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At least 3 times a year</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent conferences planned and led by student</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focuses on the child</li> <li>• Demonstrates growth through a variety of performances</li> <li>• Gives students a greater role in communicating their growth and progress</li> <li>• Shows process as well as product</li> <li>• Maximizes student and parent involvement</li> <li>• Provides opportunities for parents to observe and provide feedback and input</li> <li>• Fosters student leadership and ownership in the learning, assessment, and reporting processes (students plan their own agendas for the conference)</li> </ul>

*Adapted from Facilitator's Guide to Reporting Student Progress, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development video program (1996) pp. 75, 77.*

## What Student Literacy Information Should be Reported?

There is wide-spread agreement that a "Literacy Report Card" should provide specific, accurate, and diverse information about student learning (Wiggins, 1994; Guskey, 1996). Marzano (2000) states that there are three primary reference points commonly used by teachers in assigning student grades: ❶ a predetermined distribution or norm-referenced approach to grading where students are compared to a pre-determined group, ❷ an established set of objectives or standards (i.e., a criterion-referenced approach to grading) and ❸ the progress of individual students in skills or understanding during the grading period. While teachers may in some way use a combination of these reference points, Marzano states that the criterion-referenced approach is the best one for teachers to use.

Similarly, Guskey (1996) describes three types of learning criteria commonly used in reporting: ❶ product criteria – what students know and are able to do at the end of instruction, ❷ process criteria – the effort and work habits students exhibit during the learning process, and ❸ progress criteria – how far students have come during the learning experience.

Wiggins (1994) recommends that school districts report detailed information that reflects and summarizes student:

- ❶ progress toward exit standards;
- ❷ growth in terms of teacher expectations;
- ❸ strengths and needs;
- ❹ quality and sophistication of work; and
- ❺ habits of mind and work.

He also suggests that districts employ a variety of report card formats, including traditional letter grades, in communicating

this information. Even more importantly, he recommends that the reporting process be done in the context of "anchor papers, performance samples, rubrics, and teacher commentaries so that students and parents can verify the report..." (p. 29).

In Figure 17 Afflerbach (1993b) suggests specific revisions that can be made to the traditional reading report card depending upon the different audiences and purposes for reporting.

**FIGURE 17: READING REPORT CARD REVISIONS FOR ADDRESSING DIFFERENT AUDIENCES AND PURPOSES**

*Afflerbach, 1993, p. 460*

<b>Audience</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Suggested revisions</b>
Parents and students	To provide greater detail on the nature of students' reading development	Checklist of student behaviors; narrative reports of student progress; section for anecdotal records; references to other sources of information
Students	To motivate students	Section acknowledging student effort; section inviting student to set goals in reading
Students	To more effectively involve students in their development as readers	Section that personalizes the report card; allows room for specific references to students' reading choices, challenges, and accomplishments; provides formative feedback; lists expectations for next marking period
Parents	To involve parents; to coordinate school and home efforts	Section that asks parents to work with the school on setting and working towards particular goals; provides specific information on goals, materials, and instruction
Teachers and administrators	To inform fellow teachers and administrators of students' accomplishments in previous or current reading classes	List describing books read by student, classroom projects and activities
Reading teachers	To establish congruence of classroom and remedial reading instruction	Detailed list of student's reading accomplishments and goals; notes on instructional methods and materials
Parents and students	To seek regular feedback to improve the report card	Questions about the usefulness of report card information; requests for suggestions to improve communication

In diversifying their reporting systems, a number of school districts have included one of the available sets of developmental literacy benchmarks described earlier, often right on the report card itself. As indicated above, these descriptions of developmental stages of literacy are the most positive and informative ways of evaluating and reporting students' progress in the language arts. Griffin, Smith, & Burrill (1995) provide national norms for their literacy profiles, and they describe how to make specific suggestions for establishing local normative data.

### **What Are the Characteristics of an Effective Literacy Report Card?**

Throughout this chapter, it has been stressed that different audiences need different information in differing formats to accomplish different purposes. For example, parents need to know how to support their children's learning and literacy development; therefore, conferences and written narratives are most useful for accomplishing this task. Administrators need to record information succinctly on permanent records, and letter grades and checklists are usually the preferred tools. Policy-makers may need data to assist in developing educational regulations, so state or national test results may be appropriate. To reiterate however, the overriding purpose for reporting is to provide feedback about student learning, and the most common procedure for accomplishing this is with a report card (Marzano, 2000). Reporting is about communication. The process of developing a literacy assessment system, and a report card within that system, should focus on improving two-way communication with others. A truly meaningful and dynamic reporting system provides for input from and is useful to all constituencies.

The educational experts who have researched and synthesized the findings about

report cards are very consistent in their recommendations for what an effective literacy report card should do. Some of those important recommendations are briefly described below.

### **The "Literacy Report Card" should:**

- ▶ contain an introductory statement explaining how it fits into the school district's "Literacy Reporting System," the purposes of the report card, the audiences for whom it is intended, and what the desired results are to be
- ▶ be aligned with and reflect the other components in the curriculum
- ▶ allow teachers to be flexible by employing a variety of formats
- ▶ provide helpful information to parents about student strengths and needs
- ▶ provide the opportunity for parents and students to participate in and respond to the reporting process
- ▶ be useful to the student in improving literacy learning
- ▶ be useful to administrators as evidence of the success of the literacy program (Guskey, 1996)

## SUMMARY

In the spring of the year 2000, the Reading Research Quarterly published responses to the question, "How will literacy be assessed in the next millennium?" Four literacy assessment authorities, all of whom are cited elsewhere in this chapter, were invited to respond. Among the common themes these experts discuss are: the continued impact of large-scale, high stakes testing, the possible effects of rapidly changing technological advances, and the future of performance-based assessment. Amid their sometimes less than optimistic predictions, the writers maintain a strong belief in the positive interactions that excellent teachers will always have with their students. Perhaps Robert J. Tierney says it best,

*I see the new millennium as marking a more enduring shift toward learner-centered assessment, encompassing a shift in why assessments are pursued as well as how and who pursues them (Tierney, Moore, Valencia, & Johnston, 2000, p. 244).*

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# *Notes*

