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TIPS FROM STEVE

Focus on Assessment & Evaluation - Part 3

As assessment mania has blown across the United States, some teachers are using assessment tools solely because the state, district, or principal has told them to do it. The problem is that they do not have a clear schema (the big organizational idea) of what that instrument will do for their pedagogy. An example of this is in the area of writing when some teachers use rubrics or inventories without clearly understanding what the ultimate result is or how they will translate the information into instruction.
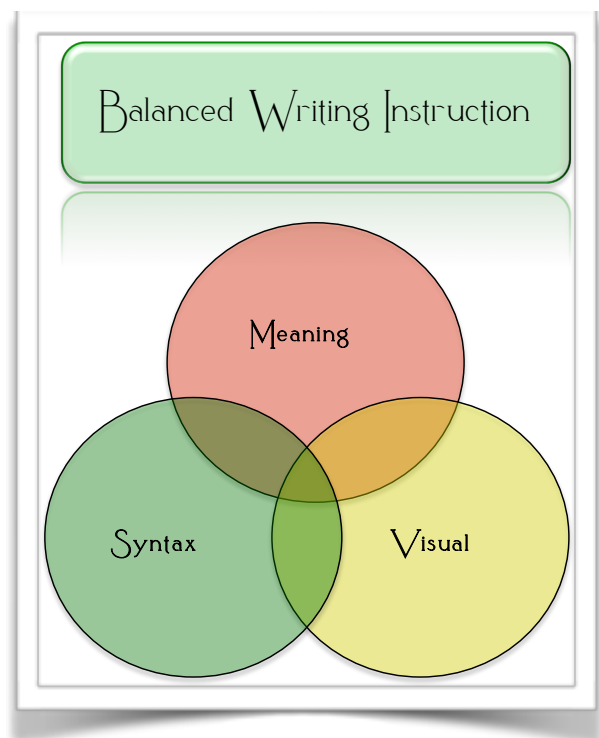
Part 3 of 3

Focus On...

Assessment & Evaluation

Balanced Writing Instruction

chema

essment mania has blown across the United States, some teachers are using assessment tools solely because the state, district, or principal has told them to do it. The problem is that they do not have a clear schema (the big organizational idea) of what that instrument will do for their pedagogy. An example of this is in the area of writing where some teachers use rubrics or inventories without clearly understanding what the ultimate result is or how they will translate the information into instruction. I have found it of great benefit to look at schema (shown at the side) before giving writing assessment tools. This figure is based on Clay's work (1993) on what teachers assess in reading instruction. Since there is a direct correlation between children's strengths and

Visual – drawing what we want to write about

is given through focus lessons to help improve sentence.

Balanced Writing Instruction

Meaning

Syntax

Visual

weaknesses in reading and writing, we should be using the parallel schema to look for the patterns of the learner. This tool distinctly illustrates that when we teach writing, we should look at <u>a balance of making meaning, using syntax, and evidencing graphophonic</u> indicators. Total emphasis on just making meaning for an extended amount of time can lead to a writer who can write a wonderful story, but no one would read it due to the bad spelling, text layout, or grammatical errors. On the other side, overemphasis on graphophonics can lead to a child who can write letter-perfect sentences that are void of meaning and voice. We must look at the key of yearly emphasis on the balance of strategies that keep the writer equalized and moving toward fluency. Plainly, all teachers in the school must have the same schema in mind so that each grade level directly supports, prepares, and moves the child along the path to fluency and competency in a balanced format. The issue here is not <u>professional freedom</u> for the teacher, but an <u>educational right for children</u>. In my own son's elementary education, I have observed the effect of an inconsistent program. You may have outstanding teachers, but if they are not on the same path as their colleagues, it is confusing for the child and does not build long-term scaffolds for sustained rigorous learning. Consequently, if strategies are put in place during one year but not followed through the next year, the learner may abandon the patterns of learning of the previous year due to lack of congruity, interpreting that these learnings are not of significance.   I have also observed this with intervention services such as Reading Recovery. This research-sound pullout program can have severe limitations if there is not a congruent classroom model that the child returns to and receives similar support and prompting. Alignment of

services, grade levels, and instruction is of essential importance so that children make and maintain ample gains from year to year.

In addition, assessment cannot stand by itself. There must be instructional strategies that match the assessment tool. Once you discover what a child needs, teachers must have the instructional strategies to help the child advance. That is why it is vitally important that we retain staff development that presents teachers the effective, instructional strategies that match the assessment before we introduce the assessment tool. Once teachers see HOW to teach, then they are ready for HOW to assess. If the assessment tool does not match the instructional format, then it becomes simply a tool that turns into a summative evaluation. For example, on the next page is an assessment instrument specifically designed for Writing Workshop. It is in this way that we come to an agreement about what is important to teach and when it is appropriate in each child's learning cycle.

Let me illustrate how the writing inventories should be used. If teachers have Writing Workshop up and running in his/her room, he/she needs to have an ongoing assessment that helps him/her determine whole group and small group teaching. In the last few years, there has been an overemphasis on what Writing Workshop is without the balance of assessment that should be integrated and used to facilitate it. In a classroom of thirty-two students, a teacher should try to take one student's writing a day and use this inventory. They should pull rough drafts (raw data) from students that were self-edited or self-revised. They want these raw samples because the minute a child works with another student or the teacher, it is
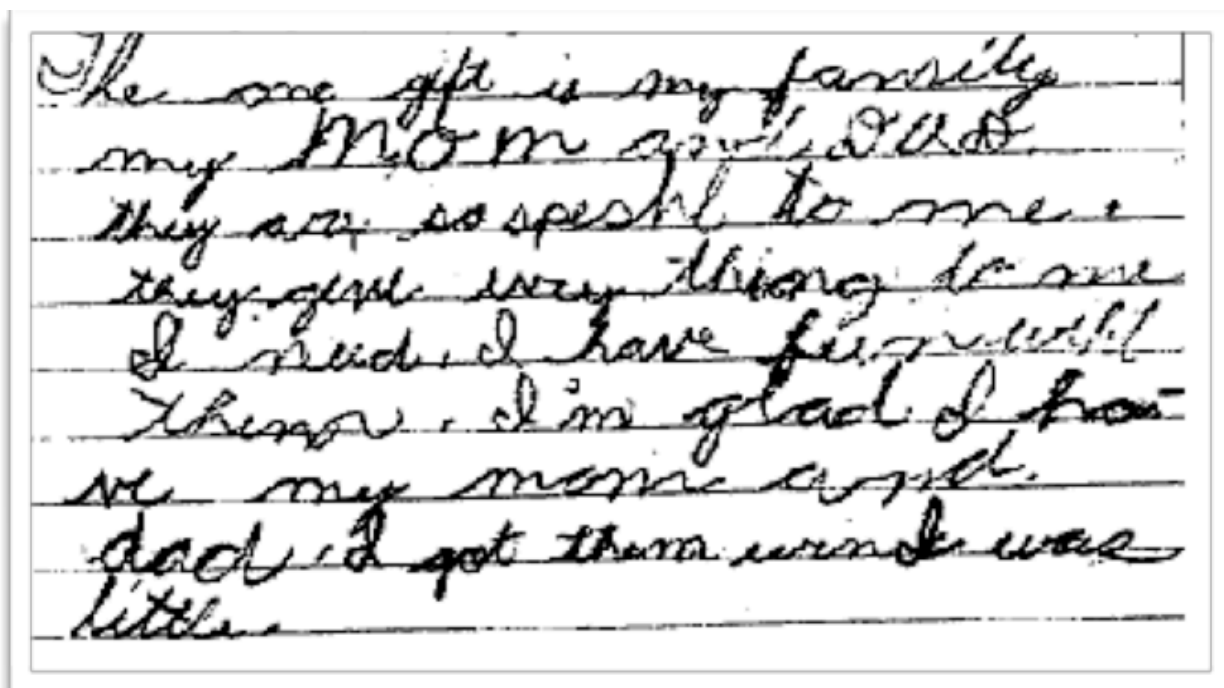
Early Writing Observation Form

Name:_____ Date of Birth:_____

Starting   Date of Entry   Language   Special
Date: _____   at School:_____   Classification:_____   Programs_____

	1st Observed	2nd Observed	3rd Observed	Anecdotals
Meaning				
Writes 9-12 sentence story				
Uses beginning, middle, & end				
Developing "voice"				
Uses a prewrite				
Uses sequence				
Uses prior knowledge				
Writing has flow				
Graphophonic/Visual				
Uses medial vowel holders				
Uses onset & rime				
Uses closed vowel				
Uses opened vowel				
Uses silent E				
Uses C'le				
Uses controlled 'r'				
Uses plurals (s, es)				
Uses contractions				
200 high frequency words				
Syntax				
Uses capitals at beginning				
Uses periods at end				
Writes complete sentences				
Starts sentence in a variety of ways				
Punctuates tag and quote correctly				
Noun/verb agreement				
Uses rich & interesting langauge				
Uses basic editing				

no longer his/her work and the teacher will not get an accurate picture of what the child can do independently. Raw data (writing untouched by others) is a more accurate sample of where the child is in his/her writing progression.

   As we look at the writing sample, we must first decide which inventory the child is on. In the writing sample below, we have a sample taken from a free write. While the child clearly possesses some of the qualities of a transitional writer, he still needs to shore up some of the early writing strategies. As the teacher looks at the writing and observes the noted behaviors, date the inventory under first observed and leave blank any skills or strategies not observed from the sample. Use the anecdotal column to add additional information, questions, observations, or confusions you want to continue to solve by looking at additional writing samples. While this is only the first observation using this inventory, some patterns begin to emerge.

Early Writing Observation Form

Name:_____ Date of Birth:_____

Starting   Date of Entry   Language   Special
Date: _____   at School:_____   Classification:_____   Programs_____

	1st Observed	2nd Observed	3rd Observed	Anecdotals
Meaning				
Writes 3–6 sentence story	9/10			
Uses beginning & end	9/10			
Developing "voice"	9/10			
Uses a prewrite				
Uses sequence				9/10 - no seq. needed
Uses prior knowledge	9/10			
Uses basic revision				
Graphophonic/Visual				
Uses medial vowel holders	9/10			
Uses closed vowel	9/10			
Uses opened vowel	9/10			
Uses silent E				
Uses onset & rime				
Uses word endings (s ed ing er est)	9/10			
Uses plurals (s, es)				
Uses contractions	9/10			9/10 - I'm only
200 high frequency words	9/10			
Syntax				
Uses periods at end	9/10			
Uses capitals at beginning	9/10			
Writes complete sentences	9/10			9/10 - 4 of 6
Uses other punctuation (! ?)				
Uses commas				Just in date
Uses quotation marks				
Noun/verb agreement	9/10			
Uses rich & interesting language				
Uses basic editing				

If the inventory is used only once during a grading period, this begins to look like a standardized test. Analyzing one student's writing a day would ensure we are using this tool on a regular basis to guide our instruction. That is why we must evaluate students' raw data every fifteen to twenty days. Coupled with daily observations of the writer we can begin to get a more accurate profile of the child and have more of their targeted instructional needs met. This will also help teachers teach at what Vygotsky (1978) calls "the zone of proximal development" ("…the distance between the actual developmental levels as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers." pg. 86).

Look at the next student sample. This is a writing sample taken approximately thirteen days after the first. The child had a prewrite that consisted of clustering before the drafting. As we look at this piece of writing, we will fill in any of the reoccurring behaviors that were seen in the first example under the column that reads 2nd observed. If the behaviors are recognized for the first time, fill in the column under first observed. As you can see in the inventory, we are now seeing patterns of this writer that will guide our instructional decision-making. As we look at the child's strengths, his instructional needs become clearer. It is what a child **can do** that leads us to his needs.

Early Writing Observation Form

Name:_____ Date of Birth:_____

Starting   Date of Entry   Language   Special
Date: _____   at School:_____   Classification:_____   Programs_____

	1st Observed	2nd Observed	3rd Observed	Anecdotals
Meaning				
Writes 3–6 sentence story	9/10	9/29		
Uses beginning & end	9/10			9/29 - ending weak
Developing "voice"	9/10	9/29		
Uses a prewrite	9/29			9/29 - cluster
Uses sequence				9/10 - no seq. needed
Uses prior knowledge	9/10	9/29		
Uses basic revision				
Graphophonic/Visual				
Uses medial vowel holders	9/10	9/29		
Uses closed vowel	9/10	9/29		
Uses opened vowel	9/10	9/29		
Uses silent E	9/29			
Uses onset & rime	9/10	9/29		
Uses word endings (s ed ing er est)				
Uses plurals (s, es)	9/29			9/29 - s only
Uses contractions	9/10			9/10 - I'm only
200 high frequency words	9/10	9/29		
Syntax				
Uses periods at end	9/10	9/29		
Uses capitals at beginning	9/10	9/29		
Writes complete sentences	9/10	9/29		9/10 - 4 of 6
Uses other punctuation (! ?)				
Uses commas	9/29			Just in date
Uses quotation marks				
Noun/verb agreement	9/10	9/29		
Uses rich & interesting language				
Uses basic editing	9/29			

Finally, the Grouping Sheet shows how this data can be directly linked to flexible grouping. In this example, the teacher can look at the child's instructional needs and begin to write their name in two or three instructional groups. As other children's names are placed on this sheet, the teacher can then pull the group when there are four to six children that have that common need. It is in this way that groups will be homogeneous and flexible. This grouping sheet can also be used to inform whole group instruction (as well as standards, and curriculum guides). As you can see, many children need the skill of periods at the end of the sentence. Rather than pulling children into small groups, this would become a focus lesson

GROUPING SHEET	
SKILL/STRATEGY: Rich & Interesting Language Spencer Cynthia Noble Jose	Skill/Strategy: Onset & Rime Debbie Liz Wendy
SKILL/STRATEGY: Period at end Mary Ann Stephanie Judy Nick Tom Yassior Enrique Mohammad Cynthia Nobel	Skill/Strategy: Prewriting Spencer Mary Ann Tom Liz Wendy
SKILL/STRATEGY: Noun/Verb Agreement Judy Mohammad Yassior	Skill/Strategy: Plurals Enrique Ana Noble Mohammad Pat
SKILL/STRATEGY: _____	Skill/Strategy: _____

(mini-lesson) for the entire classroom. It is this way that whole group lessons are being informed by assessment, not the teacher manual that predetermines a sequence of lessons for all students. As you look at the grouping sheet, also notice that some children need help with using onset and rime in their spelling. Rather

than doing this instruction during writing workshop, this should be conducted during word work. Writing should be one of the main sources that inform my word work instruction.

Assessment results should be used during child study team meetings to see the patterns that have been documented over time. With the longitudinal record, we can begin to see if the child has instructional deficits or possible learning disabilities. We need to make sure that as we discuss children with needs, we are using more than one type of data. Standardized testing is not enough. It doesn't give a clear, in-depth view of the child on a daily basis.   It is ONE snapshot that can be affected by many factors. When we use multiple source and cross-reference them, we can begin to more clearly match the interventions with the child's needs.

Assessment tools should also help teachers begin to have some standard in their grading procedures. I have seen examples when a teacher gives a "self-esteem" grade in writing because a child is trying hard. The following year, the teacher may give a much lower grade because they are looking at the child in relation to a standard. Parents then blame the second teacher, accusing the teacher of not liking their child or being too hard. It is this kind of situation that undermines the credibility of the school. Schools can use formative assessment to help bring about standardization in the grading procedure. For example, the writing inventory can be benchmarked for grading. We would expect a child in the first semester of first grade to have completed most of the emergent inventory in order to receive a *"C"*. The early inventory would need to be completed by the end of second grade to receive a *"C"*. The transitional inventory should be completed by the end of fourth grade for the child to receive a *"C"*.   Through this

benchmarking teachers can begin to help guide their grading more objectively and communicate with parents what the predetermined grading procedure. This type of conversation can do two things:

- Raise the level of expectation for the teacher
- Take the mystery out of grading for parents so they know the standard before the grade is given.

Many times I have teachers react to this conversation. "Won't this hurt the child's self-esteem if you do this?" they ask! My response is that parents need to be told the truth about their child's progress or lack of progress. I wonder if we don't sometimes lull parents into a false sense of security about their child's progress by not having these factual conversations. It is our professional responsibility to report where the child is to our parents. In order to not run into conflict, standardizing the grading procedure throughout the school is of major importance.

One final concern and comment… If a baby is sick, just weighing him does not heal him. You have to have the medicine, food, exercise, and love that the youngster needs to get well. This is the case with assessment. If a child is academically challenged, just giving him/her more assessments for the sake of evaluating him/her into oblivion will not help. We need to make sure that there is a focus on the instructional strategies, the appropriate learning environment, and love and support that help the child achieve. It is a tragedy that politicians all across the United States are preaching accountability while never addressing the staff development needs, materials, and student/teacher ratio that help educators meet children's needs so that kids can learn. Merely raising standards as a way to fix education is like putting a Band-Aid on cancer.

Questions for Discussion

- *Is assessment driving instruction in your school/district or is it merely for reporting purposes? How can assessment drive and set a pace for instruction?*

- *Are we over assessing students? Which assessment tools are giving us the same information?*

- *What is the ratio of assessment to instruction?*

- *Are all teachers using the some similar evaluation tools so that assessment information can be communicated throughout the grade levels?*

- *How are assessment tools being <u>accurately</u> used to inform parents?*

- *Which of the seven principles of assessment are already established in your school/district? How can you begin to put the other principles in place?*

- *How is assessment data being managed from year to year? How is it being maintained and stored?*

- *How much alignment has been done between assessment and instruction? Do the assessment tools match the instructional strategies and formats that are being used throughout the school?*

- *Is there consistent, articulated grading criteria that all teachers use in your school? Would this be something that would help in the reporting to parents and help teachers support each other from year to year?*

- *How is assessment being used for child study team meetings to help match student with appropriate intervention programs?*

Activities for Meetings

- *Gather all the assessment tools in your school or district that are currently being used in one area. Consider:*
  - *Are teachers assessing the same types of skills/strategies? Are any of the tools redundant?*
- *Is the tool consistent throughout the grade levels?*
- *Is the information being passed on **and** used from year to year?*
- *Is whole group instruction the main mode of instruction at your school? List the obstacles that stand in teachers' way in implementing small group and independent practice. Next, list possible solutions to these problems. Finally, timeline what can be implemented.*
- *Consider setting grading criteria for reading and writing in your school. Your school could use the writing inventories in this article as a way to begin this process. In addition, look at your leveled books that are used for guided reading. Benchmark what levels should be covered at each grade level in order to receive a satisfactory grade. Have teachers substantiate their grades based upon these benchmarks in order that uniformity is reach in the grading procedures. Review these benchmarks on a yearly basis to see if you need to raise the benchmarks. Consider how PLCs can help you with this review of assessment and student evidence*

Support Services Discussions

- *What ongoing staff development needs to occur in order for teachers to use the desired assessment tools?*

- *What organizational structures need to be put in place so that assessment tools can be passed on each year?*

- *How can the assessment tools be incorporated in child study team meetings for children who may need intervention services?*