Classroom Reading Assessments

More Efficient Ways to View and Evaluate Your Readers

FRANK SERAFINI

The author and publisher wish to thank those who have generously given permission to reprint borrowed material:

Chapter 4, page 100: The Newbery Medal is administered by the Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the American Library Association, and is used with permission. www.ala.org

Contents

Reproducibles

(Editable Word files available at www.heinemann.com)

Introduction

Weighing the pig won't make it fatter.
Testing our children won't make them smarter.
—ANONYMOUS

If you're reading this book, chances are that you, like me, see the uselessness of standardized tests as a catalyst for improving students' academic achievement, and how these tests are corrosive to the curriculum and education in general. The enormous amounts of time required to administer them, and the narrowing effects they have on teaching and learning, become more evident each year. How is it that schools give up excellent instruction and sacrifice so much to "the testing gods"? The answers go beyond the scope of this book, and involve politics, economics, and the status of teachers in American society, for starters.

As teachers, we will be positioned to decrease the negative effects of standardized tests if we excel at other forms of assessment. In this book, I share these other forms of assessment, namely classroom-based assessments. These assessments are used to inform our practice, enrich instruction, and generate the artifacts and data we need to remind various stakeholders that students' intelligence and capabilities can't be captured in a single test.

What you'll find in this book are the assessment practices that draw upon the knowledge of classroom teachers utilizing a variety of assessment instruments or "windows" to come to know the children in their classrooms as literate human beings. This kind of assessment directly and nimbly supports teachers' next moves as instructors and students' next moves as learners.

Four Principles of Assessment to Live By

During my tenure as a classroom teacher, I learned that it wasn't only the process of generating information through these assessment windows that was important, it was also how I reflected on this information and how I used this information to guide my teaching and instructional decisions. I began to blend ideas on reflective

Classroom-Based Assessments:

1. Must help children learn more effectively
2. Must help teachers teach more effectively
3. Must help teachers articulate their understandings of their students to external audiences
4. Must be efficient so that they interrupt teaching and learning as little as possible

practice with the framework I was using for my classroom-based assessments. This led me to four basic principles for the assessment framework that informs everything in this book (see box on left).

Let me expand on what I mean by these basic principles in more detail.

1. *Assessment must help children learn more effectively.* Any assessment framework that does not help children learn is destined to be more concerned with teacher accountability and the comparison of students rather than with individual student learning and development. The primary goal of any assessment framework should be to improve student learning and willingness to engage in the learning experiences we provide in our classrooms, and to improve students' attitudes toward learning and school.

2. *Assessment must help teachers teach more effectively.* Assessment frameworks should be used to help teachers make better instructional decisions. In order to help children learn, we need to have a more complete understanding of the learners in our charge. We cannot teach children effectively if we don't get to know them as readers and as individuals.

3. *Assessment must help teachers articulate their understandings of learners and learning to external audiences.* As teachers, we need to be able to effectively articulate our understandings of children to ever-widening audiences to help them understand the knowledge teachers have about children's learning and education. We need to be able to talk with parents about all that we know and understand about their children. We need to advocate for the types of assessments that support teaching and learning and help parents and other concerned stakeholders see the potentially negative impact of standardized tests. We also need to be able to support and defend the assessments we use to the external audiences that grow more and more critical of education every year.

4. *Assessment must be efficient.* Our assessments need to interrupt teaching and learning as little as possible without reducing the constructs we are assessing. In other words, we can't reduce reading to something other than making sense of texts if we are going to effectively assess what we need to know about our students as readers.

Many assessment programs, such as Accelerated Reader, Reading 180, and numerous Informal Reading Inventories, often define reading as something other than constructing meaning in transaction with texts. In other words, rather than focusing on whether students are making sense of what they read and constructing meaning in the process, they reduce reading to subskills and constituent parts. These reductive assessments often define reading as literal recall, decoding, reading accuracy, reading rate, or vocabulary knowledge. While all of these skills are important, the assessments we need in the reading workshop should focus on reading as a meaning-making process. We need to know as much as possible about how students make sense of the texts they

are reading and the images they are viewing. Constructing meaning in transaction with texts is the definition of reading I will use as I describe the assessments in this book.

The Teaching Journey Behind These Four Principles

I began to experiment with classroom-based assessment years ago when I started teaching in an inner-city school in Phoenix, Arizona. I read journal articles and professional books about literature response notebooks, portfolios, miscue analysis, retellings, checklists, and reading interviews. I allowed students to collect their work in brightly colored portfolios. I took observational notes on my students during our reading workshop and literature study groups. I learned how to pay attention to what my students were doing. Through the use of various assessment windows, I started to understand my students' strengths, needs, and abilities as readers and writers.

However, I became concerned about various assessment programs being promoted that focused primarily on how to use rubrics to attach *numerical* scores to pieces of work in students' portfolios, how to quickly find a students' reading level, and how to reduce all of the information generated into a single letter grade. This is not what I envisioned classroom-based assessment to be, and I felt that the commercial marketplace—in addition to some well-meaning educators and authors—had compromised a good idea with too much emphasis on slick (and quick) outcomes. I wanted to know how to use these assessment windows to come to know students as individual learners and to better support their literate abilities, rather than to reduce the information I was generating to a single number or letter grade. Grading would come later. These assessments had to widen my understandings, not reduce them. My goal was not to simply fit my students into a box on a report card.

The Neglected R: Reflection

As I taught fourth grade, I got better and better at reading and writing workshop, and along the way I gathered information about my students. Some of this information got tucked in manila folders and sent home to parents, and some of it lived on in my head, vaguely informing my interactions with students, including what I might say in future lessons. But I had the nagging sense that I needed to orchestrate it all with much more intention. The information I gathered had to do something for me and my students. I needed to learn how to use this information to make better instructional decisions and to design more effective lessons and learning experiences in my reading workshop. This led me to investigate the concepts of reflection, reflective practices, and how to assume the role of "teacher as researcher."

Much of my understanding of reflective practice came from the early work of John Dewey. In *How We Think* (1910), Dewey described reflective practice as an "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends." The grounds that support our instructional and curricular decisions are based on the information we generate through the assessment windows we utilize. This seemed to be the connection between assessment and instruction I was looking for.

Reflective practice begins with a perceived uncertainty, a nagging sense of doubt, and it ends with a judgment or an action. These "uncertainties" or doubts do not appear ready-made for the teacher. Rather, they are created or "framed" from the

experiences we encounter in the classroom. In other words, through careful, extended observations we determine the challenges or uncertainties we will need to address and the information we will need to generate to make more informed instructional decisions. To create more effective learning experiences, we need to identify an area of the curriculum to focus on, gather and generate relevant information, and learn how to use this information to make sound instructional decisions. In short, the information we generate must work to inform our instructional practices.

As well, Dewey wrote about the concept of "suspending conclusions," describing this as the ability of teachers to resist the temptation to jump to premature judgments, and to carefully weigh the evidence provided and the possible consequences of their actions before making instructional decisions. In order for this to occur, teachers need to generate enough relevant data to make effective decisions. This is where classroom-based assessment comes in. Reflective practitioners are knowledgeable teachers who generate information, act according to their best judgments, suspend their conclusions, but also understand that knowledge is tentative and open to change when new information comes to light.

For Dewey, the purpose of reflective practice was to change teachers' actions and their processes of arriving at instructional decisions. If reflection did not lead to action, it was simply a waste of time; teachers were simply reflecting for the sake of reflecting and not using their new understandings to improve their teaching practices. In this sense, the value of assessment and reflection is in its *usefulness* to the teacher and the student, not as an isolated mental activity. In other words, if we don't use the information we generate about our students to inform our instruction, we are simply "navel gazing."

Reflective practice is an *active* stance a teacher assumes toward his or her practice. Reflective teachers view the experiences in their classroom as open to inquiry, suspend judgments in order to question why they do what they do, use the information they generate about students to critically examine the learning experiences they create in their classrooms, and make the necessary changes in their instructional practices and learning environments.

How This Book Is Organized

Chapter 1 lays out a theoretical foundation for the assessment framework that I will present throughout the rest of the book. Building upon the basic principles and definitions shared here, I offer readers a tiered theoretical framework for understanding various assessment programs and instruments. Next, I present four considerations for "making a shift" from assessment as measurement to assessment as inquiry, and I close out the chapter with some practical suggestions for making this shift. The inter-chapter, What Does Classroom-Based Assessment Look Like Across the Year?, presents a vignette of a fictitious student to demonstrate how my classroom assessments might work over the course of a school year.

Chapters 2 and 3 present the various data-generating techniques or "windows" that I have used over the years to gather data about my students as readers and writers.

Chapter 4 offers various ways of evaluating the information generated through the assessment windows and addresses the concept and practice of self-evaluation. The inter-chapter, Frequently Asked Questions About Assessment, gives readers more practical suggestions for implementing these assessments.

Chapter 5 addresses how to report our understandings to a variety of audiences, including parents, school administrators, and, if necessary, regional departments of education.

Chapter 6 offers some practical suggestions for dealing with standardized tests. This chapter draws on my personal experiences with these tests and the work of other educators on this subject.

Throughout the book are practical reproducible forms and letters for you to use. Editable Word files of these forms are available on the Heinemann website, www.heinemann.com.

Knowing Our Students, Knowing Ourselves

Anthropologist and social theorist Clyde Kluckhorn wrote, "A human being is in some ways like *all* other human beings, like *some* other human beings, and like *no* other human beings." We use classroom-based assessments to understand both the idiosyncrasies and the commonalities that exist among our students. We generate data that will prove helpful in making the myriad of instructional decisions that must be made each day to be an effective teacher. We reflect on the information generated to improve future lessons and instructional experiences. And we do this while we are involved in the act of teaching and managing a classroom full of children. No easy task to be sure.

We, as teachers, should look for those assessments that can be used without disrupting our teaching and that generate information we believe to be valuable. In our assessment framework, we look for what we value, and we value what we are looking for. It is not about being objective; it is about acknowledging our subjectivities and generating information that is useful and pragmatic given the restraints in which we work. We have to know the students in our rooms in deeper, more significant ways if we expect to be able to teach them more effectively and support their development as readers.

Assessments to Use Before and During Reading

People's minds are changed through observation, not through argument.
—WILL ROGERS

Now let's turn to the classroom assessments that in my opinion are the richest and most efficient in understanding children's literate behaviors. A majority of the assessment windows in this chapter and the next focus on understanding individual readers in the reading workshop, and some will more broadly address characteristics of a literate environment, the connection between reading and writing, levels of classroom engagement, and students' attitudes and dispositions toward reading. This chapter will focus on assessments that occur before and during reading, and the next chapter will zero in on after-reading techniques.

I use the term *windows*, as many other educators have before me, to describe the assessment techniques because the word captures both the idea that a teacher "looks through" at a scene—observes students during actual literacy events—and the idea that any one assessment technique is limited in scope. These assessments are observational frames, designed to hone teachers' powers of observation and make their understandings about students more meaningful and married to subsequent instruction.
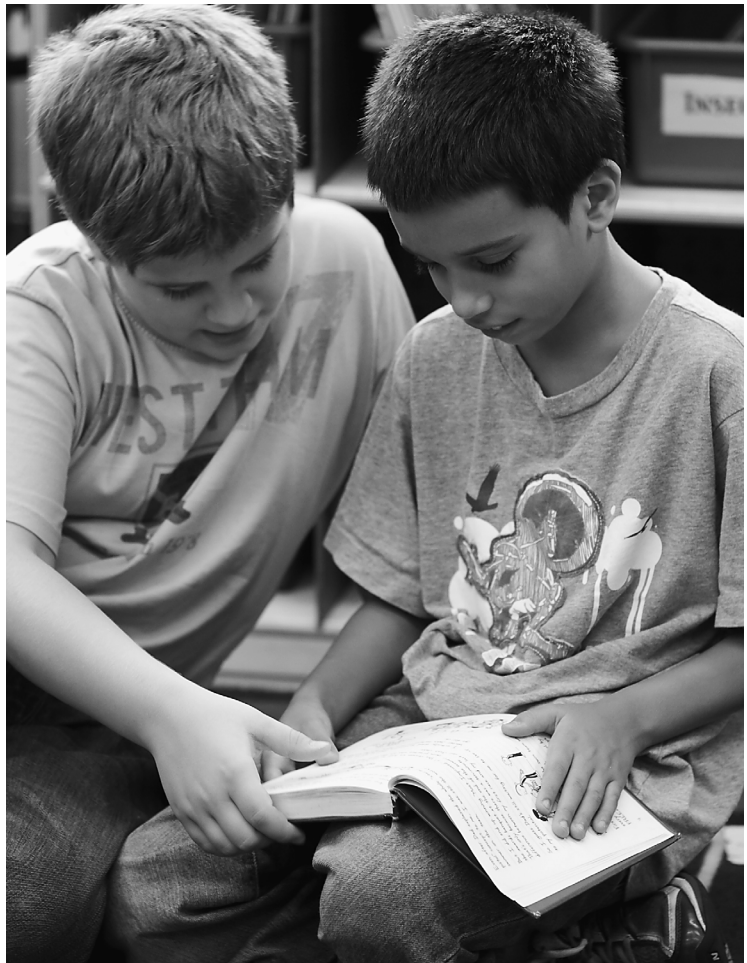
I can't emphasize enough that there is no single assessment that provides access to the complete child. Each assessment window conceals information about a child as much as it reveals. Each window places a "zoom lens" on a different aspect of a child's behaviors, abilities, and dispositions. Only through the use of a *variety* of assessment windows will a more extensive understanding of a child's literate abilities emerge.

When looking through a window, we often find a bit of reflection of ourselves bouncing back. It is the same with these assessment windows. As we generate information about our students, we also generate information about our teaching and ourselves. For example, when we review the artifacts collected in our students' portfolios (treasuries), we can reflect on what we have taught during the year, what received the most attention, and possibly what was missing.

And like the windows of a house, assessments come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Some windows offer us a wide, picture-window-like view and some only a small slice of the scene outside. Let's play with this analogy a bit more. Let's say you are going to buy a new house and you want to get a sense of what it is like, but your realtor is running late and all you can do is walk around the house and look through the windows. No single window allows you to see everything inside the house. However, by walking around and looking through a variety of windows, from a variety of vantage points, you build up an understanding of what the house contains. Eventually, your realtor arrives and opens the door for you to enter the premises, wander around, and get a better sense of what is actually in the house. This works great for home buying. Unfortunately, we cannot open the door and wander around in our students' minds or their experiences. All we can do is look through the assessment windows we create to understand what they are doing, are able to do, and need more support in doing.

I have also purposefully chosen to use the term *generate* rather than the terms *gather* or *collect* to describe the process by which information is produced utilizing these assessment windows. I chose the word *generate* because it describes how teachers actively select, observe, create, and revise the information they use to make instructional decisions. This information does not come to us ready-made; it is generated through the processes and instruments we select and the knowledge base we bring to the observed learning events. Different assessment windows generate different information. In other words, we are only able to see our students through the windows and opportunities we make available. Each window limits our view, and at the same time makes observation and generating information possible. Because of this, we need to be careful about the assessment windows and techniques we select because they determine in part how we come to know our students as readers.

Figure 2.1 illustrates the two-way nature of the assessment windows I am describing and advocating throughout this book. From the left side, we look through the assessment windows to see our students, while at the same time we see our teaching and instruction reflected back to us. On the right side of the diagram, students can use these same sources of information to generate information about their learning, evaluate themselves, learn about themselves as learners, and make decisions about what needs to be worked on and what they do well.

Reflective Assessment

Artifacts

reflection ← Events → reflection

Observer   **Learner**

observation → Discourse ← work
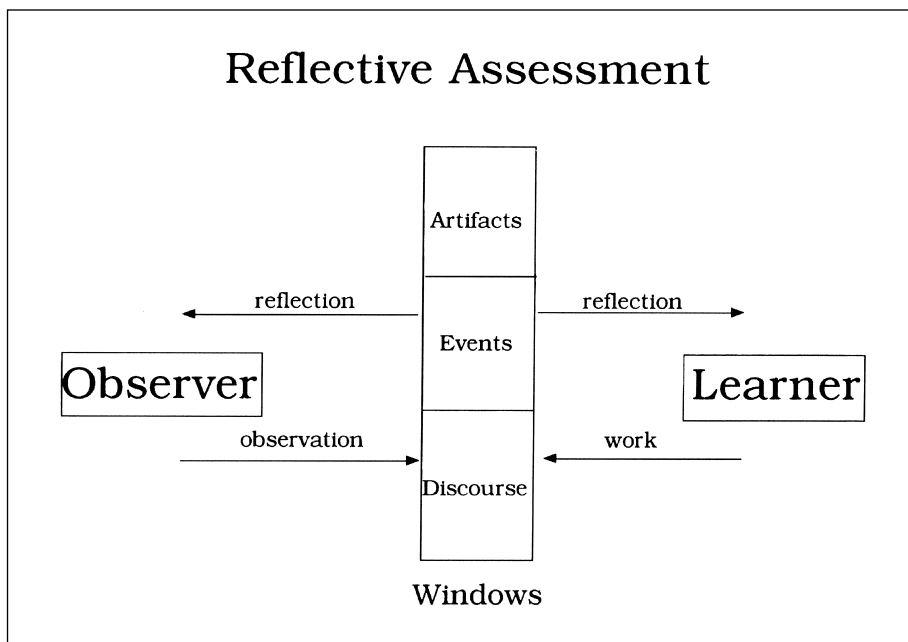
Windows

Sources of Information

In order to understand the variety of assessment windows we might utilize to generate information, we first need to consider the types of information that are available to the classroom teacher. In other words, we need to ask: What will we observe? Where and when will we make our observations? What information is of value? How does this information present itself? Basically, we have available to us the same types of information that qualitative researchers draw upon when conducting research studies. The three main sources of information we may draw upon to understand students' literate abilities are:

1. *Artifacts*: the products students create when they read and respond to what is being read. Anything tangible that can be collected and put in a portfolio is an artifact. For example, literature response notebook entries, charts, response activities, or book reviews are all types of artifacts.

2. *Observations*: the notes we create by watching students engage in literate activities. For example, observations of students' responses during whole-group Read Alouds, notes taken during a literature discussion, general observational notes about students' reading preferences or selection of books, and notes taken when listening to a student read aloud all fall into this category.

3. *Interactions*: the discussions and communications we have with students on a daily basis. Unlike observations, interactions require the teacher to interact with the student, rather than passively observe. This type of information is generated by asking particular questions from an interview protocol, or conducting daily "check-in conferences" with students.

These sources of information are found in a variety of settings and provide the classroom teacher with the information necessary to make more effective decisions regarding instructional approaches, learning experiences, and interventions. For example, we can observe students preparing to read, selecting a book, and choosing to sit in a particular place to read. We can use a particular instrument to observe readers during the act of reading, or we can look at what they create when they have finished reading. Figure 2.2 includes some examples of the types of questions teachers can ask about readers before, during, and after students read a text.

We, as teachers, have available to us a wide variety of information that can be used to provide evidence of a student's reading processes, preferences, and strategies. Each source provides a different type of information that helps us to come to know our students as readers and literate beings. Various assessment windows or data-generating techniques are used to tap into these sources of information, so let's turn to those next.

FIG. 2.2
Sources of Information About Reading

Sources of Information About Reading

Before Reading

❖ What strategies do students use for selecting a text?

❖ How do students approach a text? (Do they skim through it? Read the title page? Look at the end pages and other peritextual information?)

❖ Are students able to state their purposes for reading a particular text?

❖ When and where do students choose to read?

During Reading

❖ Do students demonstrate immediate emotional reactions (laugh, cry, etc.)?

❖ Can students code or mark important passages in the text during reading for further inquiry?

❖ Do students stop and think aloud during their reading? What do the students talk about?

❖ As students read a text, what strategies do they employ? Are they reading fluently, or is the reading choppy? Can they adjust their rate of reading to ensure understanding?

After Reading

❖ Are students able to talk about the text when they are finished? Can they paraphrase or summarize what they have read? Do students draw inferences from the text?

❖ Can students write a response entry in their literature response notebook?

❖ Are students able to answer questions about what they have read?

❖ Can students respond in other ways (write a book review, draw a picture, act out the story) to what they have read?

Efficient Assessment Windows

I have relied upon many different assessment windows over my years of experience as a classroom teacher in order to come to know my students as readers and writers. Some windows generated a wealth of information, while others were not worth the time I spent using them, either because they took too much time away from my instruction, or the information they provided was not very helpful in understanding my students. The windows I share with you in this chapter are the ones that provided the most information with the least amount of interruption to my teaching. In addition, they generated information during actual reading events, not the contrived scenarios that mimic real reading that are part of so many standardized tests. Because of these characteristics, I call them *efficient assessment windows*. Figure 2.3 offers my "Top Ten" list of efficient assessment windows.

Keeping Track of It All

Before I describe each individual assessment window, I want to explain how I keep track of all of this information and how I keep it organized throughout the school year. At the beginning of the year, I take the names of students I have in the class and divide them arbitrarily into five groups. I buy five large three-ring binders and several packets of tab dividers. Each student gets a section in a particular binder, and I give each group of students a name, like "yellow stars" or "blue moons." I use the names to indicate which group I will be collecting reading response notebooks from or having reading conferences with that day. By assigning five groups, I can simply move to the next group on the list and collect the artifacts from those students. This eliminates the potential

---

My Top Ten Efficient Assessment Windows

Used primarily before and during reading:

1. Observational Records
2. Observational Checklists
3. Oral Reading Analyses
4. Think Aloud Protocols

Used primarily after reading (see Chapter 3):

1. Reading Interviews and Conferences
2. Reading Response Notebooks
3. Retellings
4. Reflection Logs
5. Book Reviews
6. Treasuries

FIG. 2.3
My Top Ten Efficient Assessment Windows

confusion of assigning a day to each group, say Monday or Tuesday, because some days we aren't at school, and some days things get too busy for me to collect the required materials. Each group rotates in order so that I can meet with students equally.

In these notebooks, each student's section begins with a student profile, a parent survey, and other general information. The survey I ask parents to fill out is included in my introductory newsletter, where I share with students and parents information about our classroom and myself as a teacher. In the survey (see Figure 2.4), I ask parents to talk about their child and share any concerns they have as the school year begins. The student profile simply contains the contact information and other data provided by my school.

After I file the student profiles and the parent survey forms, I place several sheets of blank paper in each section for organizing my observational records. (I discuss these records later in this chapter.) I will also include in each student section all of the assessment forms that get generated during the course of the school year. This collection of information serves as the basis for my instructional decisions, as well as the information that I will use to report to parents on report cards and during parent-teacher conferences.

The information provided by parents in this survey is not available from any other assessment window. Parents generally know their children better than we do, and it is our responsibility to acknowledge this fact and include parents in our instructional decisions. Involving parents in the life of the classroom and the assessment and evaluation process from the onset of the school year is an important aspect of effective classroom management and instruction.

Let me now describe each one of these assessment windows in greater detail. I will share the forms I use in my classroom and the purposes for which I employ each assessment window.

Observational Records

Observational records are sometimes referred to as *field notes* or *anecdotal records*. They are brief notes that teachers construct based on their observations made during the reading workshop, or any other part of the day. I no longer use the term *anecdotal records* because it suggests that teachers' observations have less status than the external assessments mandated in schools. Besides, an anecdote is a short humorous story or joke. This is not how I want to refer to classroom teachers' assessments and observations. When teachers record their observations, their records are not "anecdotal" or "informal," they are *informed*. In fact, I would suggest that teachers' observations and assessments are more informed than these other "formal" assessments, such as standardized tests.

In the accumulation of these observational records across a variety of settings, patterns of behavior emerge. No single observational record contains enough information to provide teachers with what they need to make effective instructional decisions. It's the across-time aspect that is key.

I keep my observational records in chronological order beginning with the start of the school year. By keeping track of observations across time, I am better able to assess students' growth and development throughout the school year. For this reason, I make certain that observational records always include the date and the context of the observation, in addition to the name of the students being observed.

Parent Information Survey

Dear Parents,

As mentioned in the newsletter, the more I understand about your child the better I will be able to help develop his or her academic abilities. Please take a few moments to fill out this questionnaire so that I will be able to start to get to know your child as soon as possible. If you have any questions, or are concerned about something in particular, please feel free to contact me at school.

Thank you,

Frank Serafini

Name of Child:_____

1. What hobbies or special interests does your child have?

2. What does your child like to read or write at home?

3. What would you like to see developed more this year in your child?

4. What things as a parent do you feel I should know about your child?

FIG. 2.4   *Parent Information Survey*

Each teacher needs to design a system for generating observational records that is simple and easy to manage, and fits within the structures and procedures of her or his classroom. The best system is the one that doesn't get in your way, allows you to generate data on all of your students, and requires little effort to keep these records organized. There are numerous ways to go about the organization of observational records. Some teachers I work with keep class journals where they write on individual pages about each individual student. Other teachers use a laptop computer to organize their observations. I prefer to use computer labels, purchased inexpensively at local office supply stores and large enough to hold a few sentences of information, and place them on several clipboards around the room for easy access. These labels simply peel off, and then I organize them in sections in my three-ring folders for each student. Labels that are approximately two inches by three inches work best for me.

Not only is the best system the one that allows you to be organized and make accurate records, the best system is also the one that ensures that you observe every child across each and every content area and a variety of learning experiences throughout the day. At times, certain children seem to distance themselves from us. Our observational record system should provide ways to comprehensively record notes on all students, in all instructional contexts. We need to ensure that we generate information on all of our students, not just those who readily come to our attention each day.

Each observational record should be as accurate a portrayal of your observations as possible, reserving judgment for a later time and place. I like to explain to teachers that these records should be written as if a parent or a student is looking over your shoulder as you write them. There should be no secrets in these records. This is not a diary of your feelings about how the day went. They are supposed to be unbiased, observational accounts of what you have observed. It is tempting to add judgments to these records, but their purpose is to remind you later of exactly what happened. Our goal is to note students' behaviors and the events that took place, not to pass judgments about what occurred.

The closer to the actual event we can make the recording of our observations the better. If you can record your observations as they are occurring, fantastic, but this is not always possible. If you have to wait until a break in the day, lunchtime, or the end of the day to record your observational notes, that is better than waiting until the end of the week, when all we seem to remember are the best and the worst things that happened.

Another way to generate observational records is to provide visitors to the classroom (for example, parents, administrators, and other teachers) with a clipboard with a notepad on it to jot down any observations they have while visiting the classroom. Other people in our room often focus on different things than we do. This second set of eyes may call to our attention interesting things that we may overlook. It also gives parents a chance to tell you about their own children and about what they observed during their visit.

Finally, to help us make more accurate records of literature discussions and other learning experiences, we may use audio or video recordings to help preserve the events. There are challenges in doing this (for example, finding time to watch these recordings and transcribe them, privacy rights, parental permissions for taping children, access to the necessary equipment, or the intrusion of this equipment in our classroom activities). However, these recording techniques can provide a more comprehensive record of particular classroom events. Still, I would suggest that you not record any events that you are not willing to go back, watch, and analyze. The recording equipment can be such

an intrusion into the reading workshop that if you are going to do this, it is important to extensively utilize the data from these recordings to offset their intrusive nature.

I have included some actual examples of observational records from my intermediate-grade classroom for you to review (see Figure 2.5). I created these records during our reading workshop and organized them sequentially throughout the school year. In general, in the beginning of a new school year, I am looking for different things than I am later on in the year. Through the accumulation of these observational records and the analysis of this information, we are able to use our knowledge to plan our instructional experiences.

Examples of Observational Records

Beginning of the Year Observations

Andrea: Spent almost twenty minutes browsing through the library today looking for a book for independent reading, then got back up to get another book three times during the RW.

Ronnie: Selected a nonfiction book three days this week. Came in early three days this week and shared what he had been reading.

Chandler: Selected *Inkheart* to read. May be too difficult for her—will have to monitor her reader response notebook entries. She seems able to sustain reading for twenty minutes or more each day this week.

Vaughn: Chose a Dr. Seuss book almost every day this week. We talked about choosing more challenging books and decided we will select his next novel to take home together.

Caleb: Spent the entire reading block browsing the library. Did not select a book until near the end of the time period. Talked with him about having something ready to read before the time begins.

Later in the Year Observations

Morgan: During her reading of *Where the Wild Things Are* she seemed to overrely on the graphophonic cue system when reading. She asked me for help when she encountered a new word without trying any of the strategies we have discussed. May use a cloze procedure to see what she does when she can't decode a word.

Casey: Skipped the end pages and other peritextual info when reading *Voices in the Park*. Need to reinforce the lesson on approaching a text and the importance of looking at the book as a whole, skimming.

Sharon: Forgot her reader response notebook three times this week. Homework not getting completed. Struggles to pay attention during each day's lesson. Talking with students during independent reading time.

Adrian: When discussing today's Read Aloud, used appropriate terms for literary elements. Shared his thoughts on symbolism in *The Tunnel*.

FIG. 2.5
Examples of Observational Records

I sometimes use a particular form to record my observations focusing on a particular event. In the example provided in Figure 2.6, I created a form for recording my observations during literature study group discussions. Notice that I created a list of literary elements and included them along the bottom of my form to remind me of the things I should pay attention to.

Benefits and Challenges with Observational Records

Observational records may capture information that other assessments do not. They are flexible across content areas and contexts, they are easily completed, and they provide data across the whole school year. If we use computer labels, they are easy to record and require no special forms, equipment, or procedures.

However, observational records can be hard to create when you are in the act of teaching. They sometimes require teachers to remember what occurred after the event has ended, can be overly biased if not done correctly, and are sometimes difficult to organize across all students and subjects. Once a system for generating these records is in place, however, they are much easier to collect.

FIG. 2.6
Literature Study Group Observation Form

Observational Checklists

Observational checklists are guides constructed *by* teachers, and sometimes *for* teachers, to help them attend to particular events, behaviors, dispositions, and learning experiences in their classrooms. The most effective observational checklists are ones that classroom teachers create for themselves, drawing on standards documents and curriculum outlines to help them attend to things they may not pay attention to on their own. The primary purpose of these guides is to help teachers develop their observational skills and learn to attend to students' learning behaviors, needs, and abilities they may otherwise overlook.

These checklists are dynamic documents that need to evolve as teachers' observational skills and knowledge bases evolve. What novice teachers need to learn to pay attention to may be quite different from what more experienced teachers attend to. To make this point, take a look at one of the first checklists I developed when I began teaching in the intermediate elementary grades (Figure 2.7). Then look at the checklist I recently developed for use in intermediate-grade classes (Figure 2.8). The latter checklist reflects my current understandings of the reading process, strategies children need to be successful, and a more extensive knowledge base concerning reading and reading instruction.

Some checklists are arranged along a continuum according to stages of development, ranging from emergent readers to proficient readers, while others, like those presented in Figures 2.7 and 2.8, list preferred characteristics of readers and allows teachers to make notations for each characteristic. Some checklists are very specific while others seem more general in nature. Whatever the focus, the intention is to help teachers attend to a full menu of their students' literate behaviors.

Benefits and Challenges with Observational Checklists

Checklists are quick snapshots of what is occurring in a student's reading life at a particular time. They can be used to help teachers remember what to pay attention to, and they can be readily shared with parents and other teachers.

However, the information provided on a checklist is minimal. For example, simply checking off the "Likes to Read" column does not explain much about a reader's preferences. One challenge is to not let these checklists become static, unchanging documents. They need to evolve and grow as teachers' knowledge evolves and expands.

Oral Reading Analyses

The three most common forms of oral reading analyses are informal reading inventories, running records, and miscue analysis. After a brief look at informal reading inventories, I will focus on running records and miscue analysis because I believe they provide a more extensive picture of the strategies a reader uses than informal reading inventories.

Informal Reading Inventories

Informal reading inventories (IRIs) are a collection of word lists and leveled passages that are used to provide a quick snapshot of students' reading abilities. They are often used to determine where in a commercial reading series students should begin. IRIs utilize leveled sentences and passages to determine a child's reading level, and they focus primarily on literal recall as a means to assess comprehension. Students are judged as

Observational Guide for Reading and Readers (circa 1989)

Name_____ Semester _____

General Info   ___ chooses different types of books

___ identifies parts of a book

___ reads nonfiction

Reading Strategies   ___ can retell what has been read

___ makes educated predictions

___ uses story for clues

___ takes notes on reading

___ verifies ideas from text

___ recognizes genres

___ makes connections to real life

___ makes connections to other texts

___ recognizes favorite authors

___ summarizes stories

___ shares ideas with others

___ uses word identification strategies

___ monitors comprehension

___ makes corrections orally

___ shows inflection

___ demonstrates smooth, clear oral reading

___ uses picture clues

___ uses context clues

FIG. 2.7 *Observational Guide for Reading and Readers (circa 1989)*

Identifies Elements of Literature	___ setting
	___ theme
	___ mood
	___ symbols
	___ pt of view
	___ moral
	___ symbols
	___ story structures
	___ author's purpose
	___ character
	___ tensions

FIG. 2.7 *Continued*

Observational Guide for Reading and Readers (circa 2009)

General Info

___ is able to choose an appropriate text for independent reading

___ reads daily, chooses to read

___ carries a book each day

___ explores a variety of genres (fiction, nonfiction, poetry, magazines, etc.)

___ is able to sustain reading for an extended period of time

___ uses library frequently

___ uses computers for information

___ uses reference materials for inquiry

Reading Strategies

___ attends to paratextual elements (title, cover, end pages, etc.)

___ recognizes miscues

___ draws inferences from texts

___ understands directionality, concepts of print

___ draws upon prior knowledge

___ makes predictions based on experiences with texts and life

___ does not overrely on decoding strategies

___ exhibits effective sampling of visual information

___ confirms, cross-checks information

___ monitors comprehension and self-corrects when necessary

___ adjusts rate of reading depending on text and purpose

___ is able to visualize when reading

___ can summarize what has been read

___ knows various purposes for reading

___ asks questions when reading

___ notices elements in design and illustrations

___ makes connections to other literary texts

___ uses context clues appropriately

FIG. 2.8 *Observational Guide for Reading and Readers (circa 2009)*

| **Reading Strategies (cont.)** | ___ reads fluently with expression |
| | ___ is able to read most/all high-frequency words |

Response to Reading	___ is able to talk about what has been read
	___ discusses details about text
	___ notices illustrations
	___ can connect with character's actions/motives
	___ reads other connected texts
	___ makes recommendations for other readers
	___ is able to conduct book talks

FIG. 2.8 *Continued*

proficient readers based on their ability to answer literal questions about the details or information provided directly in the text. The challenges with these assessments lie in the fact that reading is the process of constructing meaning in transaction with texts and not simply the ability to recall what was directly stated in the text. In a research study examining a wide range of IRIs, it was determined that more than 95 percent of the questions provided in IRIs are literal recall questions (Applegate, Quinn, and Applegate 2002). Because of the limited way that IRIs assess and define reading as a process of remembering literal details rather than as a thinking process, I have found them to be less useful than running records and miscue analysis.

The Critical Reading Inventory (CRI), created by Applegate, Quinn, and Applegate (2002), offers more promise than traditional informal reading inventories. It goes beyond the extended use of literal questions to include inferential and critical questions that require readers to discuss their interpretations and thinking about what they read. I have not had a chance to fully explore this type of IRI, but in general I have found them to serve as better assessment tools than traditional ones.

Benefits and Challenges with Informal Reading Inventories   Informal reading inventories provide quick snapshots of students' decoding levels and approximate level of reading ability for entry into a core reading series. Once teachers are used to them, they are fairly easy to administer.

However, informal reading inventories focus too much on literal recall and not enough on students' thinking and interpretive abilities. The passages are not authentic reading materials, and the purpose for reading has been taken away from readers. For me, the challenges presented by these IRIs and the limited information they contribute forces me to look elsewhere for better assessment instruments. Still, the CRI, as mentioned, has more merit and potential than the traditional IRIs I have used.

Running Records and Miscue Analysis

Although there are differences between running records developed by Marie Clay and miscue analysis developed by Ken and Yetta Goodman and others, I will consider them both here. I use a blend of both procedures in my classroom because the running records seem easier to administer, but miscue analysis provides a more extensive analysis of students' observable reading behaviors.

Basically, oral reading analyses are used as guides to observe, describe, analyze, and record a student's oral reading processes. Both miscue analysis and running records use their own unique notation system for recording students' oral reading, and both use a specific procedure for analyzing the patterns of behavior observed. I recommend that teachers read *An Observation Survey* by Marie Clay (1993) or the *Reading Miscue Inventory* by Yetta Goodman and her colleagues (1987) for a more complete description of these two procedures. In addition, Sandra Wilde's book *Miscue Analysis Made Easy* (2000), and Ruth Davenport's book *Miscues not Mistakes* (2002), are both wonderful resources for conducting oral reading analyses.

I use oral reading analyses in my classroom to understand the strategies readers utilize and to record students' progress in oral reading during the school year. I conduct an oral reading analysis with every one of my students during the first few weeks of school, and use them continually throughout the year in my intermediate-grade classrooms. In practice, the students who struggle are assessed more frequently than students

who don't, but I also conduct oral reading analyses with proficient readers as they move into new texts, genres, and levels of difficulty.

Now that I am more comfortable with oral reading analysis procedures, I am able to conduct them more efficiently without disrupting my reading workshop. However, when I first began to conduct oral reading analyses, I started by recording students' oral reading into a tape recorder so I could stop and rewind while I analyzed the reading later, when I had more time. Once I became more proficient with the recording process, I was able to sit beside students and conduct an oral reading analysis with any text they were reading and a piece of paper and pen.

Oral reading analyses are used to determine what a reader does with a text, what miscues they make during their reading, and what strategies they drawn upon when they encounter challenges reading. A *miscue* is defined as any time a reader reads aloud something different from what is contained in the written text (such as reading *that* instead of *than*). Reading behaviors are recorded using a notational system that allows the assessor to accurately recall and revisit what the reader did during the reading. All observable behaviors are recorded for analysis.

Note that the only reason for using a common set of notations is so other teachers can share these records. My suggestion is not to get hung up on the various recording notation systems. Running records and miscue analysis procedures use slightly different notations, but the purpose is to record all behaviors for later analysis. If your notation system allows you to recall exactly what a reader did while reading, it is fine. See Figure 2.9 for the notation system I have adapted for my oral reading analyses.

To begin, students select an appropriate text, or the teacher selects one from his or her collection that provides a reasonable amount of both support and challenge for the student. The selection of text is very important for getting an informative assessment of what a student does when text becomes challenging. If the selected text is too easy, students will not get to demonstrate what they do when they come to a word they don't know or when meaning breaks down. If the text is too hard, readers will overrely on word attack or decoding strategies because they have little else to draw on to make sense of the text. I record the genre, title, author, and level before students begin reading. I also make a note about whether the student has read the book before or not.

I have found that having typed versions of some sample texts for students to choose from is a good way to begin conducting oral reading analyses. I type up the words to various picture books of varying levels of difficulty to use for my oral reading analyses, and we each get a copy. This makes it much easier to record on my copy what a student is doing and to keep track of where various behaviors occur.

Once an appropriate text is selected, I ask students to pick it up and do the same things they would do if I wasn't there. Then, I simply record what they do.

To start, I observe what students do before they begin reading, and I make notes concerning their behaviors. Do they read the title and look at the front and back covers, or do they just jump into the text? Do they look at other peritextual elements (for example, the end pages, dedication, book jacket, author blurbs, or other information provided by the publisher)? It's not that they have to spend a great deal of time with these peritextual components, but I am curious as to how they approach a text and how they set expectations and purposes for their reading.

As students begin to read the text, I make checkmarks as they read words correctly so that students don't see me writing things down only when they make a miscue or

FIG. 2.9
Commonly Used Oral Reading Analysis Notations

Commonly Used Oral Reading Analysis Notations

(The word misread by the student is placed over the word found in the text)

✓	= accurate reading
$\dfrac{home}{house}$	= substitution
$\dfrac{—}{house}$	= omission
$\dfrac{home}{—}$	= insertion
$\dfrac{horse \mid here\ sc \mid}{house}$	= self-correction
$\dfrac{home \mid hope\ horse \mid}{house}$	= record attempts
$\dfrac{they\ saw\ the\ horse}{they\ saw\ the\ house} \Big\vert$	= repetition

are challenged by the text. The primary purpose of my notation system is to allow me to remember precisely what a student did during the reading of a text.

During the reading of the text, if a student appeals for help, if they pause for lengthy periods of time, or if they skip parts of the text, I make a note on my recording sheet. I have found that having a typed version of some sample texts is a good way to begin conducting oral reading analyses. I typed up the words to various picture books of varying levels of difficulty to use for my oral reading analyses. This made it much easier to record what a student was doing and to keep track of where various behaviors occurred.

I remain "neutral" during this process, not telling students what a particular word is if they ask for help. If they do make an appeal, I say, "What do you think it is?" or I tell them to try to figure it out themselves, or I ask them, "What can you do when you come to something you don't know or understand?" to try to elicit the reading strategies they know and use. I want readers to try to figure these things out for themselves. However, if students get frustrated and have tried a couple of strategies, I will tell them what a word is, make notes about what happened, and ask them to continue.

The more oral reading analyses you conduct, the easier they become. As you conduct these procedures, try to develop what Yetta Goodman has called a "miscue ear." Learn to listen to readers and recognize the nuanced behaviors and strategies they exhibit. Listen for what students are doing, are trying to do, and are having trouble doing. These oral reading analyses are designed to get you to pay closer attention to what students do when they read, and to understand how they perceive the reading process.

After a child has finished reading a text of at least one hundred words, it is time for the most important aspect of the oral reading assessment: analyzing the patterns of miscues. Miscues are analyzed at the point of the miscue. We don't read further into the text; rather, we analyze what the reader has done up to the point in the text where the miscue occurred. Any self-corrections are analyzed once as a miscue and again as

a self-correction to see what systems students may have drawn upon to self-correct. The miscues are analyzed across the following cueing systems:

1. *Semantic*: the sense made of a text (Does the reading make sense?)

2. *Syntactic*: the grammar or structure of the language system (Does it sound right?)

3. *Graphophonic*: the visual and decoding aspects of written language (Does it look right?)

Of course, the most important aspect of reading is whether readers are making sense of what they are reading. However, we want to discover what readers attend to, the strategies they employ to make sense of text, and how they connect texts to their lives and experiences. I think a couple of examples might help clarify what this looks like. I will present two oral reading analyses generated from two very different readers, and discuss how I analyzed what happened.

The first student read the book *Goodnight Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown. Copyright regulations prevent me from including the entire text here, but in Figure 2.10 I have created a chart based on my original analysis, which is shown in Figure 2.11, to highlight the actual words from the text and the miscues made by the reader.

The second reader read an old story from an anthology entitled *Skunks*. Again, copyright regulations do not allow me to replicate the text, but Figure 2.12 is a table of the miscues made during the reading of *Skunks* (the original analysis appears in Figure 2.13).

Words in Text	Words Read by the Reader
young	your / yarn
how	Who
Whispering	Wiping
Hush	Hoosh
And	(omitted)
Comb	Cub
Brush	Boo
Nobody	Nobby
Whispering	Wiping
noises	Nice

FIG. 2.10
Miscues from Goodnight Moon

FIG. 2.11
Analysis for a Reading of Goodnight Moon *(Reader 1)*
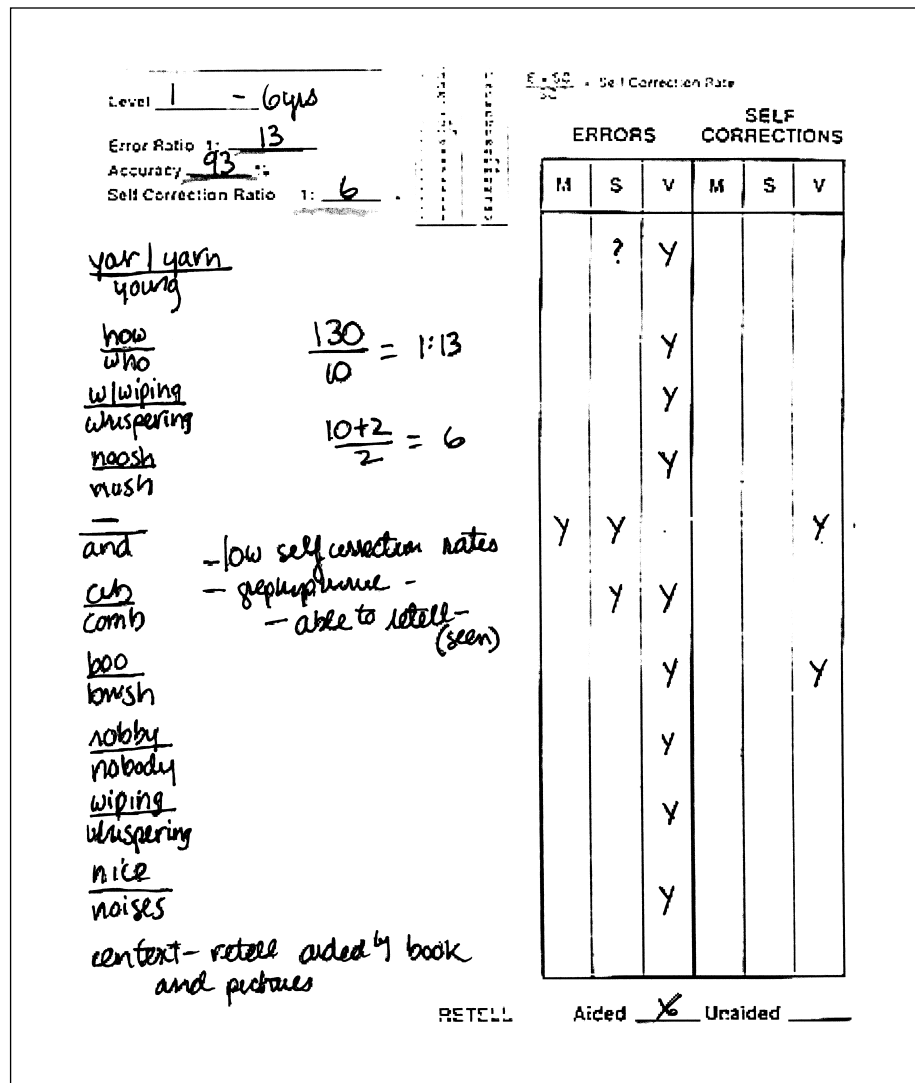
After finishing the preliminary recording of reading behaviors, I used a couple of formulas from both running records and miscue analysis procedures to analyze the data. First, I counted the number of words included in the passage read, and the number of miscues made by the reader. Dividing the number of words in the text by the number of miscues gave me the rate of miscues. For Reader 1, that would be: 130 words divided by 13 miscues = 1:10, or one miscue for every ten words. This is not a bad ratio, but it may have produced challenges with making sense of the text. For Reader 2, the rate of miscues is: 120 words divided by 14 = 1:9, or one miscue for approximately every nine words. These miscue rates can be used to calculate the reading accuracy rate. A rate of one in ten would equal a 90 percent accuracy rate. For Reader 2, it would be slightly lower, at around 88 percent accurate. These rates can also be found by using the conversion charts included in both Clay's and Goodman's texts.

Second, and most important in my opinion, is calculating the rate of self-corrections. This rate refers to how often a miscue is self-corrected. This is an indicator of whether the reader is self-monitoring. For Reader 1, the self-correction ratio is quite low, at 1:6, meaning for every six miscues the reader only corrected one. I would like to see it closer to 1:3 or better. For Reader 2, the self-correction ratio is 6:12, or a 1:2 ratio,

Words in Text	Words Read by the Reader
ready	Really
—	Or
Weather	Winter
Colder	Cold
don't	Do
Frost	forest
Moles	males
Groundhogs	guardhogs
Shelter	shel
Weather	winter
Females	films
As	or
Of	for
don't	do

meaning the reader corrected one of every two miscues. This is a better rate and indicates the reader may be self-monitoring for meaning much better than Reader 1. This may be an indication that Reader 1 is just reading through the text, focusing on word accuracy and not meaning, and Reader 2 is focusing more on making sense of the text and not simply reading words in isolation. These are, of course, very general hypotheses at this point, but these are the things I am looking to find through my oral reading analyses. I would then use some of the other assessment windows described in this chapter to add to the information generated through these oral reading analyses.

As I gained experience conducting and analyzing oral readings over time, I created my own forms for analyzing reading behaviors and strategies. Part 1 (Figure 2.14) focuses on a single oral reading analysis, while Part 2 (Figure 2.15) is a cumulative record of a student's reading strategies and behaviors.

FIG. 2.13
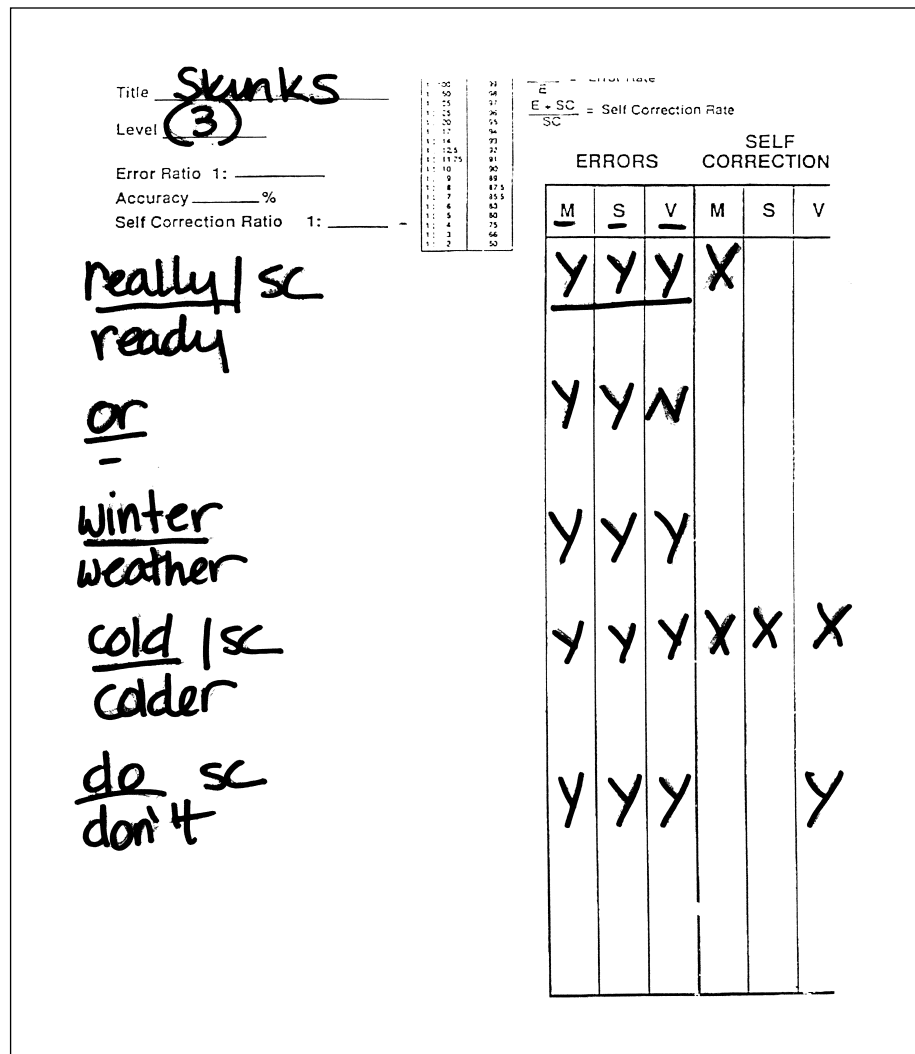*Analysis for a Reading of* Skunks
(Reader 2)

Figure 2.16 shows an example from my classroom. It demonstrates the kinds of information these forms can provide.

As you can see in Figure 2.16, I made notes concerning the miscues that the reader made, my observations about how the reader approached the text, what occurred while she read, the amount of detail in her retelling, and the strategies that I taught as a result of this assessment. The connection between the information generated and the instructional decisions made by the teacher are the key to making assessment effective and efficient.

In addition, I shared with the reader the records of the oral reading analysis I had generated, in a similar fashion to the work being done with *Retrospective Miscue Analysis* by Yetta Goodman and Ann Marek (1996). In this procedure, the teacher and student review the oral reading analysis and talk about what they notice, what they are concerned about, and the strategies the reader is using. Together they plan a course of action to improve the reader's performance and comprehension with subsequent texts.

Oral reading analyses are used to understand how readers attend to visual information, anticipate what is happening in the text as they read, and monitor the meanings they construct as they are reading. Oral reading analyses can only be done with readers who can handle a certain amount of text. This makes them appropriate for use

Oral Reading Analysis Form Part 1

Name _____ Date _____

Book _____

Approximate Book Level _____

Miscue Notes:

Observations:

Retelling:

Strategies Taught:

May be adapted for classroom use. © 2010 by Frank Serafini from *Classroom Reading Assessments* (Heinemann: Portsmouth, NH).

FIG. 2.14 *Oral Reading Analysis Form Part 1*

Oral Reading Analysis Form Part 2

Name _____ Date _____

Reading Strategy Notes:

Rereads:

Skips Words/Returns:

Looks at Pictures:

Makes Predictions:

FIG. 2.15 *Oral Reading Analysis Form Part 2*

Uses Contextual Cues:

Substitutes Words:

Asks for Help:

Recognizes Miscues:

Self-Corrects:

Is Able to Talk About the Text:

FIG. 2.16
Reading Analysis Form 1 Example

Figure 2.16 — Reading Analysis Form 1 Example. Handwritten form with headings: Book (Hickedy Peg), Miscue notes, Observations, Retelling, and Strategies Taught.

in the intermediate and middle grades. Concepts of print, oral comprehension, and other assessments are more appropriate for primary and emergent readers. In the References you will find a list of my favorite resources that will help expand your understandings of oral reading analyses.

Benefits and Challenges with Oral Reading Analyses   Oral reading analyses provide detailed information about the skills and strategies readers use when approaching an authentic text. Because they include a retelling, they focus on readers' decoding skills, as well as their comprehension abilities. By conducting oral reading analyses over time, teachers become more sensitive listeners, who are able to analyze more nuanced aspects of reading. In conjunction with reader response notebooks and Think Alouds, oral reading analyses can provide a thorough understanding of a reader's abilities.

Of course, oral reading analyses take time. Since they are done one-on-one, they may take away from instructional time. Also, selecting an appropriate text is very important. If the text selected is too hard or too easy, the results can be skewed. Using the

procedures simply to arrive at an accuracy rate or reading level undermines the value of these analyses and reduces their effectiveness. The primary purpose of these analyses should be to understand the skills and strategies that readers bring to the act of reading, not simply to find a reading level.

Think Aloud Protocols

There has been quite a bit written about "Think Alouds" in connection with reading comprehension instruction throughout the professional literature. In my book *Lessons in Comprehension* (Serafini 2004), I describe various ways for teachers to think aloud in front of their students to demonstrate comprehension strategies such as summarizing, visualizing, or inferring. However, there has been less written about Think Alouds as an assessment device. Reading researchers have used Think Alouds (or "verbal protocols") as a data-generating technique in their research studies for some time now. In verbal protocol procedures, researchers asked proficient readers to stop during the reading of a text at various points and "think aloud" about what was going on in their heads, what they attended to, and what they did to make sense of the text as they were reading. This procedure can also be adopted for use in the classroom to generate information about what readers think as they read texts.

Think Alouds can be used to help teachers understand the processes that readers employ during the act of reading. This type of information is not directly accessible through observations or interviews, and it can only be inferred from oral reading analyses. Although Think Alouds aren't 100 percent accurate, since the readers are the ones who are reporting what they think they are doing, they are a proven method for understanding readers' internal cognitive processes as they read. We simply can't open their heads and peer in! Think Alouds are an important component of a comprehensive assessment framework when joined with observation, oral reading analyses, and reader response notebooks.

I have used Think Alouds both as a classroom teacher and as a university professor in various research projects. I have also worked with classroom teachers using Think Alouds as assessment windows to understand students' reading processes and strategies. The teachers I worked with showed students how to stop at the end of a page in a picture book and talk into a tape recorder about what they were thinking as they read. It took very little class time away from instruction to have students conduct their individual Think Alouds, and it required very little equipment and class space. One teacher simply set up a desk at the back of the room for students to go and conduct the Think Aloud, giving the recording to the teacher when they were done. The teacher would then listen to the Think Aloud during a prep period or after school to make some notes or transcribe a portion of the recording, and use the information to confer with the reader at a later time.

Think Alouds are a window for generating immediate reactions to texts, and they provide information about what readers are attending to and not attending to while they read. This assessment window can be used with any text, including poetry, nonfiction, fiction, magazines, or online texts. I have found that readers who are in the intermediate grades or older can sit and conduct these assessments independently once they have been shown how to do them.

To help you begin, Figure 2.17 includes the directions that I shared with an intermediate-grade class of students during one of my research studies. They were

Think Aloud Instructions

You have been asked to participate in a research project. This project will use Think Alouds to better understand the things you do when you read. For this project you will be asked to read a picture book selected for you by your teacher.

These books may require you to pay close attention to the written text and the illustrations in order to understand the story. As you are reading the book, please talk clearly into the microphone about the things that are going through your mind as you are reading and looking at the illustrations.

Please begin by reading the title and looking at the front and back covers. Say some things you are thinking about the story before you even open the book.

As you are reading the picture book, please share all of the things you are thinking as you read the story. I want to know all about what comes into your mind when you are reading. There are NO wrong or right answers. I just want to know exactly what is happening in your mind.

Please read the story aloud so I can understand where you are in the book. For EVERY page in the picture book, I want you to say something about what is going through your mind. Please feel free to share anything that is going through your mind as you are reading these books. If you have any questions, ask your teacher to help you.

When you are ready to start, say your FIRST name into the tape recorder and the TITLE of the book you are reading. When you are ready, start the tape and begin reading and thinking aloud. When you have finished, turn the tape off and give the tape to your teacher.

I really hope you enjoy these picture books! Thanks for helping me with this project.

Dr. Serafini

FIG. 2.17 *Think Aloud Instructions*

designed to explain to students what I expected them to do during a Think Aloud, why it was important that we conduct these assessments, and what I would be doing with the information that we generated. Although these instructions were taken from a research project, they can easily be adapted for classroom use.

I read these instructions aloud to a group of students, and I allowed them to ask questions about why we were doing these assessments and how I would be using the information once it was recorded. Before we began conducting the assessments, I let students play around with some tape recorders so this would not get in the way of the Think Alouds. I then demonstrated a Think Aloud in front of the group with a picture book I had selected. It is important to demonstrate Think Aloud procedures and continually monitor how they are proceeding to ensure that students are talking enough during their Think Aloud sessions.

In general, I used "micro-texts": short texts that could be read in a single, short period of time. I used picture books, poems, short essays, fables, and pages from expository texts. With picture books, students used the end of each opening or two-page spread in the book as a signal to say something into the tape recorder. Using some visual marker to signal students to say something at regular intervals is very important. You don't want students going for long stretches without saying anything. You could use a colored sticker placed at regular intervals in the text, or another identifiable marker to signal when to stop and say something. I have found that a visual marker is important to remind students to talk continually about what they are thinking. If students don't talk very much into the recorder you don't get any information worth analyzing.

Another way to prompt students is to ask them specific questions as they read. I offered the guiding questions listed in Figure 2.18 for students to consider as they were reading.

To conduct Think Alouds in a classroom, begin by demonstrating a Think Aloud in front of your students. Then have some students do them in front of the class or in small groups with shared texts. The more comfortable students are with Think Alouds before they do them independently, the more information they will provide.

Next, provide a quiet and isolated space, wherever possible, for readers to record their responses. Let students practice with the recorder and make sure the volume levels and settings are good enough so you can hear students when you get to listen to the recordings. Be sure to check the settings on the recorder from time to time. There is nothing more frustrating than not being able to hear what students are saying.

A good microphone is essential for this work. Sometimes I use my MP3 player to record the information in digital form. This makes it easier to store the information and to listen and analyze it when time is available. There are microphones available for these players from a variety of outlets.

Be sure to explain to students, parents, and administrators what you are doing with the recordings and store them securely. Like observational records, there are no secrets here. If parents would like to listen to these recordings, I am more than happy to make them available for their inspection.

The biggest challenge in conducting Think Alouds is to generate only data that you are willing to analyze. It doesn't do any good to generate Think Aloud data and then neglect to listen to the recordings. My rule of thumb is, "If you aren't going to analyze it, don't bother generating it."

In order to analyze the data from Think Alouds, I begin by simply listening through the recording and jotting down initial impressions of what the reader was doing. I try

Questions for Eliciting Response During Think Alouds

1. What are you noticing so far?

2. What things in the illustrations catch your eye?

3. What is happening in the story so far?

4. What is going on in your mind as you read?

5. What is important in the story so far?

6. What connections to the text or illustrations are you making?

FIG. 2.18   *Questions for Eliciting Response During Think Alouds*

to consider what the reader was paying attention to, and what the reader did if there was a struggle to make sense of the text. For most Think Alouds, this holistic, overall analysis may be enough. If students used a variety of appropriate strategies, attended to significant aspects of the text and illustrations, and constructed viable interpretations, no more may need to be done. If, however, readers struggled with the text and didn't use any strategies to understand the text, further analysis may be warranted.

If further analysis seems warranted, transcribe some portions of the Think Aloud recording to use with the reader as an instructional device. I call this procedure "retrospective Think Alouds." In this process, teachers bring the reader back to the text and use the transcription and notes taken to talk with the reader about what the student did and didn't do in certain portions of the text. Teachers can share strategies that may have been helpful, call students' attention to things they may have missed, and share how a more proficient reader may have approached the text to improve their comprehension.

A specific criteria can be used to evaluate what readers are doing, or teachers can simply take notes on what they hear in the recording and work from there. The most important thing to consider is whether readers are making sense of what they are reading. Sometimes it's that simple. Are readers doing what we have taught them to do? Are they using the strategies we have taught them? Are they monitoring their comprehension as they progress through a text? These are the questions we need to ask ourselves as we listen to these Think Aloud recordings.

In Figures 2.19 through 2.21, I have included some Think Aloud transcripts from my sixth-grade classroom that demonstrate the types of information generated through Think Alouds. These were created in response to David Macauley's picture book *Black and White* (1990). I was able to infer from the recordings a variety of reading processes, dispositions, and stances to reading. The examples demonstrate readers' dispositions, personal and intertextual connections, what they noticed and attended to, and their evaluations of the text.

> They don't address who they are. They just assume at the beginning that you know who they are and in the picture everything is a peach-ish color except the dog and the newspaper. I wonder if that has any meaning to it or anything.
>
> Then the cows, just looks like really up close. Looks like a really big square painting. Black with a lot of blotches and white. I don't know what the deal with the cow is. I still haven't figured that one out yet.

FIG. 2.19
Example of a Reader's Disposition

In this example, the reader shared her willingness to ask questions of the text and to admit that she has not figured everything out during her initial reading. This is very different from readers who try to understand the text and give up when things get difficult. She is thinking about the meaning of the text and using various elements as clues to what the text may mean. She is using a self-questioning strategy and thinking about what she knows and doesn't know.

FIG. 2.20
Example of a Personal Connection

That reminds me of my mom being at the airport and getting stalled for three hours. I wonder what's wrong with their train.

[Student sings, "She'll be coming 'round the mountain when she comes."] My parents have never done that before. It's weird because you only see that stuff on TV and not parents really doing that sometimes.

In this example, the reader is connecting the text to some of his personal experiences. It is important for readers to be able to personalize what they read in order to make sense of the text. Though we are never sure how these connections help us understand a text, not being able to relate a text to anything we have experienced can significantly reduce our comprehension of a text.

FIG. 2.21
Example of an Evaluation

That was kind of a weird book. It was good. It kind of revolved around the newspaper. I guess that's why the title is *Black and White*. The cover just kind of looks like . . . it's not black and white. It's like blues and greens and black and white. Hmm. Pretty good book.

The cover looks kind of weird because it says that it's *Black and White* but I see blue, white, green, pink. And on the back of it, it has a cow. It has a face on it on the black and white but it has pink and brown and looks kind of weird. The tail's connected to the body. It's kind of a weird book with different stories.

In this example, the reader is stepping back and considering the book as a whole, including the peritextual information contained on the covers, end pages, and title page. Evaluating the quality of a book, even if that simply means saying that it is "weird," is an important aspect of reading.

A final note about selecting the texts we use for Think Alouds. It doesn't do any good to have readers read books that aren't challenging. We want to conduct our Think Alouds with texts that force readers to use the strategies they know. For this reason, I sometimes like to use "postmodern" picture books that challenge readers to attend to the text, design elements, and illustrations in order to make sense of the text. Postmodern picture books have nonlinear structures, multiple narratives or narrators, self-referential elements, elements that call attention to a book's existence as a fictional story, and symbolic imagery and references. I have provided an extensive booklist of my favorite postmodern picture books on my website (www.frankserafini.com). These complex texts require readers to draw on a variety of comprehension strategies to make sense of what they are reading, attend to various literary elements, and make numerous connections to things outside the text in order to understand these picture books. Of course, the books can't be *too* challenging, or readers might get frustrated and might not be able to make any sense of what they read. It is a balance between challenge and support, uniqueness and familiarity that provides the best texts for these Think Alouds.

Benefits and Challenges with Think Alouds   Think Alouds can provide information about cognitive processes and reading strategies. By asking students what they are thinking, we are able to focus on comprehension during the act of reading. Think Alouds are important assessments to include because of this focus on comprehension and the fact that they are done *during* reading, not after. Furthermore, the recordings can be used as an instructional tool for discussing reading strategies with our students.

On the other hand, Think Alouds can be complicated to explain, and students may be guessing what we want them to talk about. Younger readers may struggle with sharing internal cognitive processes. These assessments can quickly generate a great deal of recordings that must be analyzed sometime if they are going to be worth the time it takes to make the recordings. Transcribing the recordings can take an extreme amount of time. Again, don't generate data you are unwilling to analyze.

In my opinion, there are no simple rubrics that are effective for analyzing Think Alouds. Utilizing inductive reasoning, teachers are able to get a sense of what students are doing when they read, and are then able to use this data to talk with students about their reading strategies and performances

Purchase this book now
at **heinemann.com**