DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 233 380 CS 207 797

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TITLE Assessing Children's Speaking, Listening, and Writing Skills. The Talking and Writing Series, K-12: Successful Classroom Practices.
INSTITUTION Dingle Associates, Inc., Washington, D.C.
SPONS AGENCY Department of Education, Washington, DC. Basic Skills Improvement Program.
PUB DATE 83
CONTRACT 300-81-0400
NOTE 41p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Research; *Communication Skills; *Educational Assessment; Elementary Education; *Evaluation Methods; Listening Skills; Speech Skills; Teacher Role; Testing Problems; *Test Selection; *Test Use; *Writing Evaluation
IDENTIFIERS *Theory Practice Relationship

ABSTRACT

Prepared as part of a series applying recent research in oral and written communication to classroom practice, this booklet reviews a number of concepts and issues important to communication assessment. The first section of the booklet discusses several issues related to assessing communication at both district and classroom levels. Issues discussed include the availability of assessment instruments, conflicts in definitions, concerns about curriculum, demands placed on teacher time, and mismatches between classroom instruction and standardized tests. The second section answers a number of questions teachers ask before they decide how they will assess student progress, while the third briefly discusses several factors that play an important role in the student-teacher relationship. The fourth examines the role of assessment in developing communication competence and reviews assessment techniques. Writing assessment methods covered include holistic scoring, analytical scoring, T-unit analysis. primary trait scoring, and informal assessment. A copy of a teacher-made rating scale for assessing oral communication is also presented. Examples of student work are included throughout the booklet. (FL)

Assessing Children's Speaking, Listening, and Writing Skills

By Linda Reed

The Talking and Writing Series, K-12: Successful Classroom Practices

The purpose of this series is to provide information to assist teachers and curriculum planners at all grade levels in improving communication skills across the major disciplines.

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1983

Developed pursuant to Contract No. 300-81-0400 by Dingle Associates, Inc.

This project is funded by the United States Department of Education under Title II of the National Basic Skills Improvement Act, Public Law 95-561.

PREFACE

During the past decade, teachers, education administrators and researchers, and the general public have become increasingly concerned about students' ability to communicate. This broad public concern for improvement in education led to the enactment of Title II, Basic Skills Improvement Act, Public Law 95-561. The Basic Skills legislation encourages Federal, State, and local education agencies to utilize " . . . all available resources for elementary and secondary education to improve instruction so that all children are able to master the basic skills of reading, mathematics, and effective communication, both written and oral." Section 209 of the act specifically authorizes the Secretary of Education to collect and analyze information about the results of activities carried out under Title II. Thus, improved instruction in the basic communication skills—speaking, listening, and writing—has become the focus of programs and research projects throughout the country.

The booklets in this series, *The Talking and Writing Series, K-12: Successful Classroom Practices*, provide information to assist teachers and curriculum planners at all grade levels to improve communication skills across all major disciplines. Developed under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education, the 12 booklets apply recent research in oral and written communication instruction to classroom practice. They contain descriptions of teaching practices; summaries and analyses of pertinent theories and research findings; practical suggestions for teachers; and lists of references and resources. Also included is a booklet on inservice training which suggests how the series can be used in professional development programs.

The booklets were developed through the efforts of an Editorial Advisory Committee comprised of 14 professionals in both the academic and research areas of written and oral communication education. The group worked with the sponsoring agency, the Department of Education's Basic Skills Improvement Program, and Dingle Associates, Inc., a professional services firm.

The committee members, in consultation with the Department of Education staff, chose issues and developed topics. Ten of the 14 committee members authored papers. The committee reviewed the papers and provided additional expertise in preparing the final booklets, which were edited and designed by Dingle Associates.

We are grateful to the committee members, advisors, and all others who contributed their expertise to the project. The committee members were:

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It is hoped that the booklets in this series will be valuable to classroom and administrative professionals in developing or restructuring their communication skills programs. They may also be useful to community and parent groups in their dialogue with members of the educational system. The ultimate benefit of this project, however, will be realized in our children's enhanced ability to communicate, both orally and in written language.

Sherwood R. Simons
Project Officer

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ASSESSING CHILDREN'S SPEAKING, LISTENING, AND WRITING SKILLS

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INTRODUCTION

It's 4 p.m., and Marlene Harris, a teacher at Kimbark Elementary School, is making her way very slowly through traffic to her southside Chicago apartment after a long week—and only a few surprises—in her fifth-grade classroom. The week was not normal, because next week is testing week, but that isn't all that made it hectic. Cedric's mother finally returned her call about a conference to discuss Cedric's sudden reluctance to talk in the classroom. A new transfer student appeared in the doorway this morning—the teacher received an almost empty record file on him yesterday. Doreen, on the way to school Wednesday morning, saw a dog get hit by a car and the teacher found it difficult trying to help her sort out her feelings and fears. Judy had helped, though, when she started to talk about how her canary died. No, not too many surprises. With luck, next week will bring no surprises at all.

What happened in Marlene Harris' classroom during the week was not unusual. She is the kind of teacher that stays on top of events in her classroom. She does not want to wait very long before helping Cedric with his problem, because his silence is having an effect on his schoolwork and on the work of his two closest friends. Cedric even refuses to play with them at recess. Harris' plan is to try to get Cedric to start a journal. He can share it with her or with other children as much or as little as he likes.

And the new child. If only some of his other teachers had added comments about the child's strengths and weaknesses to the reports in the file. Some samples of his writing would have helped, too. As it is, it will take Harris much longer to discover his needs and to find out how he can contribute to the growth of other children in the class. The fact that the child will undergo testing may help to shed some light on the situation, but the teacher will have to look well beyond those test scores to see how he will fit in her class.

It seems as if every semester a child watches a dog or cat die, hit by a car as it dashes out into a busy street. Growing up in Chicago is an education in itself. As sad as it is, it might be good timing for Doreen. The teacher has been nudging Doreen along in her writing, trying to encourage her to write about things that mean a lot to her, but Doreen has long since learned that the important thing is to try to please the teacher. Maybe this accident will help her make the leap into writing that grows out of her own need to express herself instead of her need to please the teacher. Her willingness to talk to Judy about it is a good starting point.

All of the children seem slightly on edge because of the impending tests. After 8 months with them, though, Harris feels good about the students' readiness. With the exception of the new student, whose ability is unknown, the students in the class should test out at about the level the teacher has mentally assigned them.

Like most teachers, Harris spends much of her day diagnosing the needs of individual children and making slight adjustments in instruction based on her perception of those needs. To find out those needs, she seeks as much input as possible—the children's talk among themselves and with the teacher, their experiences at home and going to and from school, their writing, results of large-and small-group discussions, information from parents, and results of tests, from quizzes to major criterion-referenced tests to norm-referenced standardized tests.

This booklet reviews a number of concepts and issues that are important considerations in the approach toward assessment that Harris uses, concepts and issues that are important regardless of the specific, classroom evaluation techniques. The booklet also describes how a teacher might use several techniques to assess the communication competence of children—techniques that apply equally well at both the elementary and secondary levels.

A LOOK AT THE ISSUES

Teachers have raised a number of issues related to assessing oral communication and written communication, both at the classroom level and at the district, State, and national levels. Some of these issues are described on the following pages. Like most educators, we can describe the issues, but find it difficult to offer viable solutions that address the many concerns of classroom teachers. Teachers, themselves, are, instead, the source of the solutions. Like Marlene Harris, the individual classroom teacher will adjust instruction based on his or her own priorities, the needs of students involved, and the teacher's perceptions of what works.

Among the issues discussed in this booklet are those involving the availability of assessment instruments, conflicts in definitions, concerns about curriculum, demands placed on teacher time, and mismatches between classroom instruction and standardized tests.

Speaking and Listening

Assessment of speaking and listening skills is more difficult to discuss than assessment of writing skills because we know so much less about speaking and listening as a curriculum area. Most children begin school already knowing how to use language skillfully, so the goal of classroom instruction has been to give them opportunities to practice their skills and expand them through performing. For example, students' listening skills have been sharpened by having them give feedback on information that they receive from teachers, peers, stories read aloud in class, and by having them answer questions.

Teachers have increasingly been told that their responsibility for oral communication instruction goes beyond having children perform and respond to teacher questions. In 1978, Congress enacted the Basic Skills Improvement Act—Title II—which broadened the definition of the basic skills to include "communication, both oral and written." A growing number of States now

require that oral communication be made a part of the elementary school curriculum. Speech courses have long been a part of the secondary school curriculum. Although, as Barbara Lieb-Brilhart points out, they are usually taken by students who are self-assured and confident of their ability to perform orally (1982), rather than by the many students who need to improve skills so that they will be able to function effectively when they leave high school.

Although many school districts now require explicit instruction in speaking and listening, they have not been able to answer many of the questions that educators face in this field—just what is oral communication? What is the best curriculum? And how can speaking and listening skills be assessed?

Educators and researchers have not been able to agree on the definition of communication competence. However, Larson and his colleagues, in a study of the literature (1978), found that certain notions were common to all or most of the definitions developed by leaders in speech communication education. Larson's group developed a definition incorporating those major concepts: "We have chosen to define communication competence as the ability to demonstrate knowledge of the communicative behavior socially appropriate in a given situation . . . . " (p. 24). This definition is common to most definitions in these aspects:

Ability to demonstrate	This implies a performing function, a set of skills that the individual demonstrates and that can be examined.
Knowledge	Communication competence is influenced by a person's linguistic capability.
Communicative behavior	The definition is restricted to behavior that is related to communication.
Socially appropriate	The communication is subject to socially prescribed rules. Communication behavior that is appropriate at home may not be appropriate in the principal's office, just as communication behavior that is appropriate in America may not be appropriate in the Far East. Competence, then, is to some extent determined by degree of adherence to cultural norms.
In a given situation	The communicator must take into account all of the elements of the context in which the communication occurs.

Although speech communication educators agree that teaching speaking and listening skills should be an integral part of the school curriculum, they do *not* agree on how children should be taught communication competence. Brown and his colleagues (1979), through a review of the communication education literature and classroom observations, identified five major approaches to instruction in oral communication:

1. *The Component Skills Approach*—the teacher focuses attention on mastery of clusters of specific skills.

2. *The Communication Activities Approach*—students experience a variety of oral communication activities that prepare them to engage in situations found in everyday life.

3. *The Participant Network Approach*—students receive systematic instruction in interpersonal, small-group, public, and mass communication.

4. *The Referential Communication Games Approach*—students engage in activities that build the speaker's ability to describe an object—a referent—so that a listener will be able to identify the object.

5. *The Functional Communication Approach*—instruction focuses on developing a wide range of communication skills and behaviors in five areas—feeling, informing, controlling, imagining, and ritualizing.

Other booklets in this series describe the elements of communication competence and approaches to instruction in more detail. (See *Oral Communication in the Elementary Classroom*, by Barbara Wood, and *Oral Communication Instruction in Middle and High School Classes*, by Philip Gray. In *Talking and Writing: Building Communication Competence*, Donald Rubin and Kenneth Kantor offer a perspective on how communication competence develops.)

Regardless of the instructional approach that teachers use in developing children's communication competence, formal assessment procedures are difficult to establish. Informal procedures, like those Marlene Harris uses, have been used in classrooms as long as there have been teachers. She encourages children to talk to her and each other, and she listens closely and watches how they listen to and respond to one another. She has them work in small groups and assesses both the manner in which they solve problems and the actual solutions. She asks children questions and encourages them to ask questions of her and their peers. She encourages children to perform and to evaluate themselves, while asking other children to offer suggestions.

Most formal communication competence tests present problems to school districts. Although speaking and listening are inseparable acts (for example, even if I am speaking aloud alone in the middle of a field, I am listening to myself), most tests of communication skills separate speaking from listening. Tests of listening are usually multiple-choice, paper-and-pencil tests of literal comprehension (Brown, Backlund, Gurry, and Jandt, 1979; Larson, Backlund, Redmond, and Barbour, 1978; Lundsteen, 1979; and Rubin, Daly, McCroskey, and Mead, in preparation). Although many tests of speaking ability involve speaker performance, test and rater reliability and time and equipment needs present serious obstacles for teachers and administrators (Brown, 1982; Rubin et al., in preparation).

Choosing a test for assessing communication competence can be a confusing experience. First, if a school district has established its own goals and developed an instructional program to match those goals, it is unlikely that the district will be able to find a published test that measures the skills students have been taught (Rubin et al., in preparation). In addition, there is a wide range of skills that is assessed by published tests. Some tests measure students' attitudes about communications, some measure communication apprehension, and many test the student's ability to recognize Standard English in a written passage (Brown, 1982; Rubin et al., in preparation).

State education agencies and school districts nationally are making attempts to solve the problems inherent in tests of speaking and listening ability. These improvements, however, are very slow in coming, and may be even slower in reaching the classroom teacher. Teachers who have a mandate to include speaking and listening instruction in the curriculum are justifiably concerned about teaching skills that even the "experts" find difficult to assess.

Writing

One of the original "3 R's," writing has always been an explicit part of the school curriculum. In most classrooms, teachers have students learn about the conventions of writing in an established sequence, from learning to write their names and the names of familiar objects to writing short sentences, to putting sentences together in paragraph form to, finally, constructing themes and essays. It is believed that if children master the mechanics and have opportunities to apply that knowledge through writing assignments, they will become reasonably good writers.

The fact is that most students do learn to write—they "write" grocery lists, letters, checks, postcards—but few use writing as a means of learning, of stretching the mind, just as only a few of us leave school as avid readers. Some children who started school eager to learn discovered that writing meant punishment—"I will not throw spitballs. I will not throw spitballs. I will not throw spitballs . . . . " Many discovered that teachers cared more about periods and commas, and spelling and awkward sentences than about how children felt or the messages that they tried to convey.

Over the past decade, a group of educators and researchers have urged that schools take a new look at writing instruction. They suggest that teachers view writing as a series of processes, and that they encourage children to

do so. Learning how to write, they suggest, must be experienced in a classroom environment that encourages risk-taking and that builds on young children's extensive knowledge of language. The teacher's role is as a warm, accepting respondent who creates a trusting relationship with each child. In the early stages of writing—prewriting and drafting—children concentrate on working through their ideas and feelings about a topic. Only in the later stages— revising and editing—do they become concerned with organization, structure, and mechanics. Most important, children write as often as possible.

What does this mean for the teacher? It may mean looking for additional opportunities to have children write in the classroom, being careful that time is not taken away from other subjects. It may mean finding ways to ensure that children will still be able to score well on the year-end standardized test that will focus on their mechanical skills. It will surely mean finding creative ways to give children feedback on all of the additional writing that they will do.

DEALING WITH THE ISSUES—A CAREFUL BALANCING ACT

Teachers have long been aware of the issues surrounding assessment of writing instruction and, to a lesser degree, of the many issues involved in assessing children's speaking and listening abilities. Every teacher has had to come to grips with his or her own beliefs about instruction in these areas and with how those beliefs match the priorities of the principal, district administrators, parents, and others who influence their classroom decisions.

Teachers like Marlene Harris must ask—and answer—a number of questions before they finally decide how they will assess the progress of students.

- *What methods of assessment match the goals that I have set for my instructional program? What are the most effective means of measuring the objectives that I have established?* Each year, teachers are faced with planning an entire, year-long educational program for the children entering their classes. The previous year's program may form the foundation for this plan, but the new group of children will have different strengths and needs and new combinations of backgrounds, experiences, and attitudes toward school.

First, the teacher must identify the goals for the instructional program as a whole and for each subject within the program, and then develop measurable objectives that reflect the goals. These goals and objectives will match the teacher's own priorities and experience and will also take into account all external factors that influence the teacher's planning (more about these external forces later).

Planning for instruction involves major decisions and often must be done in cooperation with teachers at other grade levels. At the elementary level, for example, the teacher must decide whether reading and mathematics will be the major focus of the curriculum, with writing, social studies, art, and other subjects being worked into the curriculum two or three times a week. Or, the teacher might decide on an integrated curriculum, with some attention to each subject worked into daily activities.

Decisions made by teachers at the secondary level are more narrow in focus but are just as detailed. For example, a science teacher must decide not only what concepts to teach in what order, but also how much time to give to each, how to structure the classroom, what techniques to use to encourage student participation, whether there might be ways to do integrated projects with teachers in other subject areas, and what additional outside resources might be available to the class.

Questions of classroom management, time management, how to help children with special needs, efficient handling of the paper load generated by students and by the school administration, and how to maintain appropriate levels of communication with parents and other caretakers are important at all levels.

Teachers must make many specific decisions regarding instruction in writing, speaking, and listening. For example, do they want children to write once a day, once a week, or as the opportunity arises? Will a specific time be set aside for writing, or will children be encouraged to write whenever they feel the desire or need to do so? Will children be encouraged to view writing as a process, with the development of ideas the goal in the early stages and attention to details important in the later stages? Or will children be asked to spend a specific period writing and then hand in a polished piece for grading. The period can range from 15 minutes for a piece for which the topic is assigned to a month for special projects.

The choices made by the teacher will determine the assessment techniques and the classroom organization strategies that will be used. This is especially true in speaking and listening instruction. Will the children be encouraged to do assignments individually, or will they be encouraged to talk with classmates and perhaps to solve problems in small groups? Will oral communication instruction be accomplished as an integral part of all of the subject areas, or will a specific time be set aside each day or week for instruction. Will children be asked to perform periodically in front of classmates (show and tell, oral book reports, speeches, dramatic improvisations)? Or will they be asked to work together to solve problems related to situations that they are likely to encounter in and out of school? Might a combination of approaches be best? Will the focus be on individual performance or small-group work?

The decisions that the teacher makes regarding these questions and many others will determine the methods of assessment he or she will select. Marlene Harris, for example, has clearly defined the approaches that she will use in the classroom, and she has developed specific means of assessing achievement of her goals:

> Harris has had a great deal of practice in setting goals and objectives. The most important lesson she has learned is flexibility, not only because the priorities of school officials change from year to year, but also because she changes. She is a far different person from the novice who entered her first classroom 10 years ago. She even recognizes the differences in

her teaching since the last inservice program, when she had a third encounter with the concept of teachers as writers. The children, of course, demand that she be flexible.

Her major classroom goal is to help the children recognize the relationships among things—to give them experiences that will allow them to draw on their knowledge of a variety of subject areas. She learned long ago, from another teacher, that integrating the subjects allows her to give far more attention to all of them than trying to teach them separately. Harris' assessment techniques are also flexible. Her overall strategy is to listen to the children, to talk with them, to ask them questions, to encourage as much communication as possible. This gives her day-to-day information about whether they are grasping what she is trying to teach them. This strategy helped her especially in the case of the Korean twins she taught several years ago.

When the twins walked into her classroom, she turned them over to several other students. They were to be special assistants to the teacher to help the twins with things, like where to go for lunch, what the bells mean, where to return workbooks at the end of the day. But they were also to help the twins with their language, and they were to report each day to other students in the class about something they had learned about the twins' language. It was a fascinating experiment, and the twins, who were 10 years old, taught the class a great deal. Most important, Harris discovered that they were very bright and that, given the opportunity to use their own language to read and write, they progressed at normal rates. It was a hectic year but a rewarding one.

Harris also knows that the success of the students, many of whom are from minority families, will depend to a great extent on their ability to use language appropriate to the situation. Using the family dialect is appropriate at home and with friends, but students will not have opportunities to become executives in major corporations if they do not understand that they will need to use standard spoken English during interviews. So Harris gives the children many chances to use language in a variety of settings, and she gives individual children help with specific skills when they need it. When they have been practicing a specific skill, she has them speak and write, using situations that will let them practice. Then she asks them to evaluate their own success and to seek feedback from peers. For these situations, Harris has developed a variety of rating forms.

So that children will be able to keep track of their own growth, Harris has created a file of portfolios. Each portfolio has samples of the child's writing (Harris has finally decided that one sample a week is enough; during the first 2 years, the files became bulky and unmanageable for children to work with, so the system was self-defeating), tapes and transcripts of the child's speaking, and samples of projects they have done that have integrated several subject areas. Some students decide to keep personal journals in the file, so that Harris can respond to their entries.

The children in Harris' class *will* have to take standardized tests, an inevitable fact that she has long since accepted. Now, however, she has developed a strategy that pleases her and that will allow the children to achieve a measure of success when they take such tests. She teaches children to deal with such tests by giving them similar tests at frequent intervals. Her tests cover material that the children have focused on. She asks them what they feel they should be tested on and how they feel the test should be structured. They help determine how long they should have to complete the test and what the criteria for success should be. It has proven to be another useful technique for informal diagnosis—just talking about what should be on the test gives Harris a great deal of information about what the children have learned. Surprisingly, they move from being skeptical and unsure of themselves to being fairly sophisticated test creators—and takers—by the year's end.

- *What do I know that I have to do; that is, what are the constraints placed on me by groups or persons outside the classroom? Given those demands, what alternatives do I have*? Teachers do not develop in a vacuum goals for students, instructional programs to meet those goals, and assessment strategies. There are always the needs of students and factors beyond their own priorities that must be taken into account. And these factors usually fall outside the control of the teacher. For example, the principal, superintendent, or even the State Education Agency may have identified goals that narrow the range of choices that the teacher has in designing the instructional program and the plan for assessing the program.

Textbook publishers also influence teachers' planning in schools where particular texts or series have been adopted. And the community's preferences concerning language and literature always influence curriculum planning.

Although there are many ways in which the teacher can feel constrained, resourceful teachers turn constraints into opportunities. For example,

— **Your principal requires that you have your students write a theme once a month and that the grade for that theme be entered in the grade book. At the junior high level, he feels that that is enough "essay" writing.**

Fortunately, your principal has not regulated the way in which you should go about developing the process for those once-a-month essays. So, you can start at the beginning of the month, encouraging students to begin to think about a topic, to jot down ideas, to read and to talk about their ideas, to share thoughts with one another. A month is a generous amount of time considering the amount of time that we usually give students to write. Students can write and talk with the teacher or peers about the first draft by the beginning of the second week, can try a second draft by the beginning of the third week, after they have had time to mull things

over. (Some may have decided on a different twist or a new topic altogether.) They will have the third week and part of the fourth week for more revision and for editing. You as the teacher have the option of developing a rating scale and having students rate each other's papers and suggesting a rating for your consideration, or of rating the papers yourself.

— **The school superintendent is dissatisfied with the knowledge of grammar displayed by the district's students at all levels. She has mandated the teaching of grammar and has insisted that scores on tests of mechanical skills dramatically increase when the next round of standardized tests is given.**

We know how Marlene Harris would react to this challenge. Her students would decide what they needed to know and would construct tests that gave them opportunities to practice skills in those areas. Guided by the teacher, they would use the skills in writing and speaking activities and would gain confidence in the ability to demonstrate their knowledge in a timed-testing situation.

Another possibility would be to give students the responsibility for serving as editors of their peers' papers. The goal would not be to rewrite another student's paper, but to suggest places where improvement could be made. Together, the students could identify specific problems, such as sentence fragments, problems with subject-verb agreement, and so on. Sample sentences could be drawn from (anonymous) students' writing for analysis by the entire class.

• *What do I want to know about students' progress and how often will I need some measure of their growth*? As teachers, we are responsible for ensuring that students learn what we teach them. We have always had a sufficient variety of methods for determining whether students have mastered the details and the concepts. Children are tested regularly—quizzes, chapter tests, mid-semester exams, and finals—their homework is graded, and they are subjected to standardized tests, usually once a year.

Most teachers, however, are uncomfortable with simply testing students, recording grades, and waiting until the next test to see if students have corrected any problems that they might have. At least this is true in reading and mathematics. After-school classes, small-group attention, and help from special educators are available to children who are high-risk learners.

But children who have difficulty learning how to write, who are reluctant speakers, who have poor listening skills, and who are unable to organize their thoughts—let alone speak them or put them on paper—have seldom received such individual, specialized attention. Children learning English as a second language or who are under pressure to master the standard dialect of English must compete for attention with 27 or more children each year throughout

their school careers. Teachers are aware of these children and their needs, but they have been given no training and little or no assistance in how to deal with such children.

As they develop plans for assessing the students' progress, teachers usually rely on two different categories of assessment procedures. The first is *formative* evaluation. This takes place in the classroom on a daily basis and is designed so that necessary adjustments can be made in the instructional program. These adjustments are made so that the needs of individual children will be addressed and the goals of the instructional program will be met. Formative evaluation includes such informal procedures as classroom observation and conferencing, and such formal procedures as quizzes, tests, and assessment of written work and oral performances.

The second category is *summative* evaluation. Such assessment is done at the end of an instruction period to determine what has been learned and to what degree the instructional program has been successful. Year-end standardized tests are a good example, as are the grades on students' report cards.

During the primary grades, ongoing diagnosis and adjustment of instruction for individual children is an integral part of the system that most teachers use in assessing children's progress. Daily or weekly diagnosis and appropriate adjustment of the instructional approach for individuals decrease as children move through the intermediate grades, and virtually disappear by the time students reach high school.

Also, as children grow older, the techniques used to judge their progress are increasingly related to paper-and-pencil activities. Paper-and-pencil tests can be useful for assessing many skills. However, it is important that teachers look beyond the convenience of such measures to the fact that many educational goals cannot be assessed through using tests that ask children to fill in the blank, decide whether a statement is true or false, make a choice among four items, or underline the incorrect word in a sentence.

In writing instruction, for example, such tests will not give the teacher information in several important areas:

- **Do students understand that effective communication must be purposeful and must be directed at an audience?**
- **Can students who are able to answer the items accurately on a paper-and-pencil test apply the same principles and rules in their own writing when they are appropriate?**
- **Are students able to develop an idea, organize thoughts, and put those thoughts on paper?**
- **Do students believe that writing can be an effective means of learning about, communicating with, and controlling the world around them?**

Similar questions can be asked about using such tests to measure growth in speaking and listening abilities.

- *What can I do effectively, given the limitations on my time and other instructional responsibilities? What adjustments must I make if I adopt a particular method or group of methods?* For a teacher who asks children to write a "theme" or "essay" once a week, it may be difficult to imagine creating a classroom environment that encourages them to write as often as they feel the need or desire to do so. And encouraging a classroom of young children to ask questions and to solve problems in small groups daily might be out of the question for a teacher who believes that children will learn best from a teacher who maintains control. Questions involving assessment—grading 150 pieces of writing a week instead of 30, and moving from group to group to listen to as many children as possible daily—seem almost unanswerable.

The key is planning. Several guidelines might apply for teachers who desire to take a look at their current instructional programs with an eye toward improving or changing approaches.

1. Your approach may be fine. After looking at the instructional program and analyzing your priorities and those of the principal and parents, you might decide that what you are doing is right for the students.

2. If you decide that you would like to make some changes, develop a plan for moving gradually to your chosen approach. For example, if your children write an essay once a week and you agree that they should write every day, start implementing your plan by having them write twice a week and move gradually toward the goal, exploring as you progress a variety of techniques for giving feedback to the children. Another possibility is to explore ways to expand writing activities in subject areas such as mathematics and science.

3. Get the support of the principal and other teachers. You may be able to plan some inservice days that will help you with planning and implementing strategy. If you can interest teachers, you might develop a support team that could be critical to the success of the plan.

4. Examine your use of time. How much time is actually spent giving direct instruction to students or having them interact with each other in constructive learning situations? Do you spend much time giving instructions, passing out papers, disciplining individual children, erasing the blackboard? You might ask another teacher or a parent

to observe you and keep a record of your various activities over several days. It is possible that you will be able to identify large chunks of time that are used inefficiently and that could be devoted instead to constructive interaction with students. Have students help you develop improved classroom management techniques (Anderson, 1982).

5. Think about the possibility of training students to assist in evaluating their own communication and their peers'. Time spent to train them now will be time saved for you later. Many of the references at the end of this booklet offer suggestions for how you can do this, as do several booklets in this series.

- *How do I want to communicate with my students and their parents about the progress students are making and about the instructional program?* All teachers are familiar with and use the standard, long-accepted methods for reporting student progress—grades on papers and tests, report cards, parent/teacher conferences, and announcements of results on standardized tests to individual parents and to the local media. Several additional techniques can prove effective for teachers.

Communicate with parents early in the year. Let them know what your expectations for students are and how you plan to assess their progress. Let parents know how they can help you. For example, if a child has experienced a death in the family, the parents should let you know right away, so that you will understand any changes in the child's behavior.

Marlene Harris' talk with Cedric's mother proved very enlightening. His parents had announced their divorce plans to their children. The other children in the family were talking about it, trying to change their parents' minds. But Cedric had clammed up at home, as well as in school.

Student/teacher conferences can be an effective means of assessing students' progress at any point in a project. Such conferences can be planned for 5 minutes weekly, or you can conduct short conferences with children daily, spending 1 or 2 minutes on an assignment, a special concern of the child's, or a question or suggestion of yours. If possible, every child in the class should have 1 or 2 minutes of private time with you daily.

Portfolios of written work, oral performances (tapes or transcripts), and work in other subject areas are useful for assessing children's ongoing progress and for developing children's interest in their own progress. Portfolios allow children to assess their work based on how far they have come since September or December, rather than how they compare to other classmates.

MAKING THE IMPLICIT EXPLICIT

Before discussing specific assessment techniques for oral and written communication, I would like to discuss briefly several factors that I believe play an important role in the kind of relationship that develops between a teacher and students. Factors are present in the relationship that will determine how a teacher views his or her role and whether students view the teacher as an evaluator or a key actor in their communicative environment.

- *It is very important that teachers view themselves as having real choices.* If there is a mandate to use paper-and-pencil tests to assess students' writing ability, the teacher need not feel that all other possibilities are eliminated. The teacher can structure instruction and the classroom environment in a way that several additional approaches to assessment can be used. Those procedures can be selected to complement the information that the teacher gets from the results of paper-and-pencil tests.

- *The kind of assessment strategy that the teacher uses will always depend on the purpose that is to be achieved in the speaking or writing activities.* For example, if a child has been asked to develop a strategy to persuade other children to sponsor her participation in a bike-a-thon, the best evaluators of her performance will be the other children. The ultimate evaluation, of course, would be if she actually did participate and if a number of children actually did sponsor her. The children could offer her feedback about why they were or were not convinced.

The teacher may want to assess a student's progress during the developmental stages of a piece of writing or of an oral activity, rather than review the piece for the first time when the student delivers the "final" product. To accomplish this, the teacher might use frequent, short conferences.

- *A major role that the teacher plays in the classroom is that of a respondent to students.* This is true in a large-group discussion as well as in an individual student/teacher conference. How the teacher responds to a student's speaking and writing and the degree to which a teacher really listens to and offers feedback to students will have a direct influence on how those students learn.

- *Although children need to have feedback whenever they speak or write, it is not necessary that they be evaluated every time they engage in a classroom activity involving speaking or writing.* When students are evaluated, they can be evaluated by peers as well as by teachers, and they should have frequent opportunities to evaluate themselves in an explicit manner. Very young children need not be evaluated at all. As they grow older, children can be given the opportunity to select the pieces of writing or the oral activity for which they will receive a grade.

- *Children must be given many opportunities to interact with peers and the teacher individually and in large-group and small-group activities.* The

classroom environment must encourage a great deal of talking that is purposeful and meaningful. Such a class will also stimulate lots of writing, with children doing writing projects individually and together and editing each other's work. At the secondary level, brainstorming and discussion should be the norm in any class where students are expected to write. Such opportunities for peer interaction give teachers valuable information about students' growth.

A classroom environment that encourages interaction will be especially helpful for students who are learning English as a second language and for students who speak a dialect other than standard English. Such interactions will help them strengthen their knowledge of the standard dialect and will develop their ability to use it appropriately.

- *The teacher must understand that communication—whether through speaking or writing—is a high-risk activity for young children or teenagers asked to expose ideas or feelings before an audience.* Children who are comfortable speaking in front of others or putting their thoughts down on paper are still nervous about command performances. Children who have experienced writing as a form of punishment, have difficulty writing out their thoughts, are reticent speakers, are handicapped in some physical way, speak English as a second language, or speak a dialect different from that of most classmates and the teacher, may be devastated by an order to perform. Teachers must become aware of these individual concerns and make allowances for them. Some help is in the literature. For example, Phillip Lopate has discussed how he helps young students begin to write in a noisy classroom environment (1978), and James McCroskey (1977a, 1977b) has written about ways in which the teacher can help the reticent child.

The bottom line is that the teacher must build a classroom environment in which children know that it is all right to take risks and to express themselves freely. They must have a trusting relationship with the teacher. Trust will not develop if children view the teacher solely as an evaluator of their work. Rather than learning to take risks—and in the process, growing—they will learn to play it safe by giving the teacher what they believe he or she wants.

THE ROLE OF ASSESSMENT IN DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

As mentioned, evaluating children's communication competence—both oral and written—serves an important instructional function. Whether formal or informal, the results of assessment give the teacher feedback on the effectiveness of the instructional program and information about where adjustments need to be made. This continual fine-tuning of the educational program is essential if the needs of all the children are to be met.

That teachers need to attend to children's strengths and identify and correct their weaknesses is important if children are to grow. To develop the

ability to perform effectively in a variety of situations, children need frequent classroom opportunities to try out skills and to expand their knowledge of what does, and what does not, constitute effective communication.

Giving children opportunities to expand knowledge and to build communication competence requires an environment that invites them to fail, and to fail until they succeed. If children are to experiment in this way, they must feel free to take risks and to express themselves freely. They will not expose themselves to possible failure if they do not feel secure in their relationships with peers and the teacher. And children who view the teacher as an evaluator will be unlikely to take many risks.

However, children will accept feedback readily from a trusted adult, one who responds in a constructive way to their efforts to communicate effectively. Feedback must be given in concrete terms and should be related to children's use of language in ways that help them expand their knowledge of communication strategies available to them in a variety of contexts.

Most important, as children develop a trusting relationship with the teacher, they will be less anxious about situations in which the teacher does assume the role of evaluator.

Another important source of feedback is the children's peers. Peer evaluation should be used widely in the classroom. Self-evaluation is also important in the learning experience. A child should not only be able to identify and implement strategies appropriate for a given situation, but should also be able to evaulate his or her effectiveness in handling the situation.

The following is a description of another visit to Marlene Harris' classroom. We have learned that she believes in integrating the content areas so that children will understand relationships among various facets of their lives—home, school, community. Here is an example of how she does that and has her students share responsibility for evaluating their responses.

> In November, Harris' fifth-grade class had studied the heart and the human body's circulatory system as part of a unit on biology. Their field trip to the Museum of Science and Industry at the end of the unit had given them an opportunity to expand their understanding of the heart and other parts of the body.
>
> One day in early March, she welcomed the class back from lunch and then called out four names—Martin, Sondra, Donna, and Robert. She asked that they get together while the rest of the class was involved in free reading to develop a presentation on the circulatory system—
>
> > How does the heart work? How does blood move through the body? Why is the heart important? How can we keep our hearts healthy?
>
> "After you make your presentation, we will allow the rest of the class to see if they remember any details that will add to what you have said, and then we will look at the chart we sent off for. Then we will ask you as a group to talk together and tell us how you think you did."

Although Martin, Sondra, Donna, and Robert groaned when their names were called, the class as a whole was not surprised. The teacher does this to them all the time. When she asked why they thought she had picked this particular day to make an assignment about the heart, one student made a good guess. The day before, the newspaper had reported that a young mother of two children had been told that the government had finally agreed to pay for her to be given a new heart.

A couple of points should be noted about the group that the teacher picked. Sondra is a reticent student who still, after 6 months with Harris, cannot speak in front of class. But she is a great artist and will enjoy helping to do the graphics for the presentation. The teacher has not insisted that all four children speak during the presentation. Sondra surprised Harris by explaining to the class that the red lines were arteries and the blue lines were veins; no small achievement for Sondra. Martin, on the other hand, loves to talk, and so does Donna. But Martin speaks quickly and is difficult to understand. Because they both like to talk, Martin and Donna decide to take turns, which has the effect of slowing Martin down a bit.

Creating a context for assessment

Mostly, children need to learn in an atomosphere that is free of formal evaluation and that offers continuing feedback on results of their communication. The contexts in which students are called on to perform can range from very formal situations (for example, giving a speech or writing an essay on a specific topic in a specified length of time) to very informal situations (for example, communicating with a peer about a movie or keeping a daily journal). Students need to be evaluated at both ends of the continuum, and at many points along it, if they are to be aware of the wide variety of situations in which they will need to use effective communication.

Creating a variety of contexts in which students are required to perform also calls for developing specific criteria for each context. The oral or written language used to persuade a stranger to make a donation to a community improvement project is very different from language used to help a new student in class understand the various rules and routines. I was impressed recently when my daughter, a ninth-grader, came home and described a "dirty trick" that her English teacher had played on the class that morning:

She came into the class and said she didn't have our tests graded because her house had caught fire last night. She talked about how frightened she was when she discovered the fire and told us how some of her furniture was damaged by smoke. Then she told us that our tests were in the room where the fire started and had been destroyed.

"Are you going to make us take the test again?" Two students blurted out almost the same question.

"I could do that or I could give everyone who took the test an A and just grade the tests for those of you who have to make it up."

"No fair!" came cries from the two or three who had been absent the day before.

"This has been very interesting"—my daughter's teacher, again. She went on to tell her class that she was making up the story about the fire—there had been no fire and the tests were safe. But she was amazed that not one student had responded with some feeling of sympathy for what she had experienced the night before.

The students seemed to feel ashamed, of course, but she apparently allowed that for only a moment. They discussed why the students had responded as they did, the appropriateness of what she had done to them, and what other responses from the students might have been appropriate.

Their assignment for the next day was to develop a farfetched story and to tell it to the class, trying to convince them that it is true. Stories would be judged by the class for "believability" on a scale from 1-10.

Assessment instruments for speaking and listening

The rating scale is the primary assessment instrument used by classroom teachers to evaluate students' speaking ability. The scale lists criteria that will be used to judge a student's performance in a particular context. The criteria can be teacher developed or student/teacher developed. The teacher may assign numerical ratings for the criteria (1-5) or may simply place a check mark to show that the criterion has been met. Students listening to the performance can be asked to use the rating scale, too. This is an opportunity for them to exercise listening skills and an opportunity for the performing student or students to receive specific feedback from peers. Rating scales can assess the content and effectiveness of the communication, as well as the student's delivery and language.

Marlene Harris has developed a rating scale that her students use when they are asked to rate their own group presentations. Martin, Sondra, Donna, and Robert used it to evaluate their presentation on circulation.

GROUP SELF-RATING SCALE

Planning for the presentation	**Circle One**	
Did we talk about the purpose for the presentation and what we knew about our audience?	**Yes**	**No**
Did we decide what tasks had to be done to get ready for the presentaton and who would do them?	**Yes**	**No**
Did we talk about how the presentation would be structured and who would do each part?	**Yes**	**No**
Did everyone have a chance to contribute information?	**Yes**	**No**
Did we remember as much information as we thought we should have remembered?	**Yes**	**No**
Did we use our time effectively?	**Yes**	**No**
Doing the presentation		
Was the presentation well-organized?	**Yes**	**No**
Did the division of responsibilities we decided on work well?	**Yes**	**No**
Did we work well as a group, moving smoothly from one part of the presentation to another?	**Yes**	**No**
Was our delivery good? (Did we speak clearly and slowly? Did we speak loud enough? Did we keep eye contact?)	**Yes**	**No**

Donald Rubin (Holdzkom et al., 1982) has suggested that teachers should have several additional strategies for assessing children's speaking ability:

> For example, groups involved in problemsolving discussions can be evaluated with respect to their efficiency: the tim e elapsed and the accuracy of their solution. Dyads engaged in referential or descriptive communication can also be evaluated in terms of communication accuracy . . . . A storyteller might be evaluated according to relatively concrete criteria which indicate consistency between an original story and a subsequent retelling. (p. 143)

Listening skills are generally assessed by having children listen to a short passage and then respond to several questions about its content. One difficulty with this is that it is hard to find a passage that contains information that is totally new to the child. For many passages, it is possible that the child would know the answers to the questions without being exposed to the material. So, the teacher cannot be certain that the child has listened and understood the passage (Lundsteen, 1979).

Teachers who offer children many opportunities to interact in the class and to perform individually and in small groups will increase students' opportunities to improve listening skills. Having peers rate classmates' performances, as my ninth-grader's teacher did, or having them be responsible for offering additional information, as Marlene Harris did, are examples of situations in which children must listen carefully, relate what they hear to their own experience, and offer a relevant response.

Some tests of listening skills ask children to respond behaviorally. Such a test might give children instructions and ask them to act them out, or it might ask children to draw an object based on a description of the object done by another student.

Assessment strategies for writing

The most familiar form of testing the writing ability of groups of children has been the paper-and-pencil test, usually the fill-in-the-blank or multiple-choice variety. These tests, which can be formulated by teachers or commercially developed, measure students' skills in specific areas, such as their knowledge of rules of grammar and usage, mechanics, sentence structure, and syntax. The results of tests that are developed by the teacher and that reflect instruction that children have received may provide useful information to the teacher, so that future instruction can be adjusted. But such tests are only *indirect* measures of students' ability to write.

Direct measures of writing ability involve assessing actual samples of student writing. Teachers who teach writing have students write prose—whether it is a paragraph or 10 pages—on some regular basis. The prose is graded by the teacher, usually for content and for attention to conventions of language. Because of pressures on teachers' time, many students are asked to write an extended piece of prose only once in a long while, and the teacher does not see the piece until it is handed in as a finished product.

Throughout this booklet, we have been advocating informal assessment procedures that create opportunities for the teacher to interact with students daily. These interactions allow the teacher to assess the student's progress continually and to contribute to it by making necessary adjustments in the instructional program. Teachers who create warm accepting environments in which children are encouraged to write as often as they feel the need or desire to do so will be in the best position to assess the growth of students in writing. In such an environment, children will be free to make errors in writing; for young children, these errors reflect learning in progress.

The following letter, written by Laura, who was 7 years old at the time, demonstrates that she knows a great deal about language, despite her self-acknowledged spelling difficulties:

Laura

Dear arin I mite not of speld.
your name rite but I.
fergot how too spel it.
because I am in st. lowis now.
and I have made a lot of.
frens I am vary sarry that.
I haveint rote too you.
but I haveint had the time.
I hope you are haveing fun.
saye hy too soesinand.
tary it is vary nise hea
and vary fun oh Im.
sarry I fergot atem well
good bix Love Laura

XOXOXOXOXO
XOXOXOXOXO
XOXOXOXOXO
XOXOXOXOXO
XOXOXOXOXO
XOXOXOXOXO
XOXOXOXOXO
XOXOXOXOXO

Every year, Laura's teachers have spoken with her parents about her difficulties in spelling. However, her problems remain, as the following work reveals. But these examples demonstrate Laura's growth. She has come a long way, which, incidentally, would have been apparent if the schools that she has attended had maintained portfolios of significant examples of her writing.

In the example below, Laura decided to advertise her new availability as a babysitter. The rule was that she had to be 11 before she could start babysitting:

(ruff draft)

Nead a babysitter?

Well you have one now.
My name is Laura I'm 11
and I love babies and older
Children such as 1-7.

The babies must be 2 mounths
and up

Pleas take this into
consideration.

Phone - 986-8013
Address 8396 W. Woodard Dr. 80227

Sined

Laura Reed

Laura was reminded that she couldn't babysit unless her mother was home.

(revision)

Need a babysitter?

Well you have one now.
My name is Laura
and I am 11 years old.
I love babies up to 2 mounts
and or up. I also like children
up to 1-7. Please take this
into consideration.
Untill 9 on weeknights. Untill 12 on
Friday & Saturday. My mother has to
be home while I babsit!
Phone - 986-8013
Address - 8396 W. Woodard Dr. 80227

Signed

LAURA REED

Finally, Laura was asked if more parents might be convinced that she could handle all the details involved in babysitting if she paid very close attention to all the details in her writing. She—not so very patiently—tried one more time:

Need a babysitter?

Well you have one now!
My name is Laura Reed
and I am 11 years old.
I love babies up to 2
months and or up. I also
like children upto 1-7
Please take this into
consideration.
Until 9 on weeknights. Until
12 Saturdays and Fridays.
My mom has to be home
when I babysit!
Phone.- 986-8013
Add.- 8396 W. Woodard Dr. 80227
signed
Laura Reed

Laura's dad made 15 copies of her advertisement, and she delivered it to parents in the neighborhood.

Direct measures of writing ability. These measures help the teacher assess students' ability to:

- achieve a purpose in relation to a specific audience;
- use language and style appropriate to a specific situation;
- organize and implement a set of ideas related to a topic; and
- approach a topic in a creative, interesting manner.

Four kinds of direct measures of writing ability are available to teachers:

- **Holistic scoring.** In holistic scoring, raters review a writing sample to arrive at an overall judgment. Although they may be influenced by the components of style, grammar, usage, and mechanics, raters do not pay specific attention to these components. Each paper is read by at least two raters, and then the two ratings are combined or averaged. For teachers who would like to know more about the holistic method of scoring writing samples, several references have been included in the bibliography at the back of this booklet (Cooper, 1977; Myers, 1980; Diederich, 1974).

- **Analytical scoring.** If you wish to assess the student's ability to work with one or more specific conventions of writing (for example, syntax, punctuation, organization, or sentence structure), you might be interested in learning about the analytical method. The factor or factors selected for assessment are isolated and scored individually by raters (Spandel and Stiggins, 1980).

- **T-Unit analysis.** T-units are independent clauses and any subordinate clauses or phrases that accompany them. Hunt (1977) has shown that the length of the T-unit used by children increases as they grow older and become more skilled as writers. He argues that analysis of T-units can give teachers valuable information about the level of complexity of children's language.

- **Primary Trait scoring.** Primary trait scoring assesses the student's ability to fulfill an assignment. The student is given a writing task and is judged according to the degree to which he or she is able to meet the requirements of the task. The scoring method was developed by consultants for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for use in scoring student responses to items in their national writing assessments.

Of these four assessment procedures, I feel that the primary trait scoring system holds the greatest promise for meeting classroom teachers' needs. Because of this belief, I would like to treat it in some greater depth in the next few pages.

Primary trait scoring system. This system focuses on a specific characteristic of a student's writing. The student is given a specific assignment, such as playing a role, and is assessed on the ability to fulfill the assignment, in this case adopting and maintaining a role. Adopting the role is the *primary* trait in the assessment procedure. *Secondary* traits may also be assessed. These are traits that the teacher feels are important to the effectiveness of the paper, but they are not as critical as the primary trait.

When the primary trait scoring system is used to score a paper, the objective of the reader—whether it is another student or the teacher—is to determine to what degree the primary trait is present in the paper. A mystery story, for example, is *primarily* effective if it keeps the reader in suspense, so the reader must determine to what extent the story had that effect.

For teachers, the first step in developing an assignment that will be scored using the primary trait scoring system is to identify the primary trait to be assessed. The next step is to develop a scoring guide for that specific assignment. The NAEP used the following scoring guide for assessing "letters to a principal on solving a problem in school":

A paper receives a score of	**If:**
1	Respondents do not identify a problem or give no evidence that the problem can be solved or is worth solving.
2	Respondents identify a problem and either tell how to solve it *or* tell how the school would be improved if it were solved.
3	Respondents identify a problem, explain how to solve the problem, and tell how the school would be improved if the problem were solved.
4	Respondents include the elements of a "3" paper. In addition, the elements are expanded and presented in a systematic structure that reflects the steps necessary to solve the problem (Mullis, 1974).

After the teacher has decided on the definition of the primary trait, the ratings should move smoothly and quickly (Lloyd-Jones, 1977; Klaus et al., 1982).

My ninth-grader's teacher recently assigned students the task of writing

a paper in which they were to tell the story of Cinderella from the stepmother's viewpoint. The teacher did not use the primary trait scoring system for assessment, but she easily could have. I would like to suggest ways in which that might have been possible.

First, in this case, the selection of the primary trait was inherent in the assignment—papers that were turned in had to make the reader believe that the character who was telling the story was the stepmother. A possible scoring guide might have been as follows:

A paper receives a score of	If:
1	Respondents do not assume the role of the stepmother with any consistency.
2	Respondents assume the role of the stepmother, stepping out of it occasionally, and basically give the facts of the story.
3	Respondents consistently tell the story from the viewpoint of the stepmother, show sparks of creativity in using language, and give some life to the character and the story.
4	Respondents include the elements of a "3" paper but make the stepmother character come alive, so that the reader is drawn into the story. Touches of humor and expansion of the facts may be included.

Here are two papers which might be assessed using this scale. The first is the paper of a student enrolled in the ninth-grade class mentioned.

> Once upon a time in a land far away there lived my stepdaughter, Cinderella. She was a troublesome creature with an obscene fascination with mice. Because of this, she was roomed in the attic. I refused to have mice in my poor departed husband's home! She was constantly getting into trouble, so I kept her busy with housework.
>
> One day we received an invitation to a ball at the palace (we being my two daughters and myself). I didn't even consider allowing Cinderella to come along. Surely she would trip on the carpet and make a fool of herself and us in front of the king and prince. She did ask to be allowed to go so I told her that if she could get her daily work done, she could.

The day arrived and with it a flurry of activity. Cinderella had tons of work and in addition to her daily chores, she had to help my wonderful daughters dress. When the carriage arrived we were walking out the door when down came that troublesome girl dressed in my beloved daughters' clothes. My girls tore her dress to rags and we walked out with a regal tilt to our heads.

At the ball, my girls were introduced to their majesties. The prince seemed to perk up just when he caught a glimpse of them coming up, after all those ugly girls with big hands and feet. Then a plain girl in a white flowing dress was introduced and the prince danced with her all evening. At exactly midnight, she ran from the palace and a rumor went around that she lost her slipper.

The next day, the Grand Duke came around with the slipper. I followed Cinderella to her room and locked her in, or else she would have made us all look extremely foolish. She doesn't take care of her appearance and certainly doesn't even attempt to have nice clothes.

Well, after greeting the Grand Duke, both my girls tried on the slipper. Neither of my daughters' feet fit the slipper, so we let the Grand Duke out. Suddenly, Cinderella ran down the stairs. She tried the slipper on. It fit.

She and the Prince were married and she hasn't visited once. The neighbors all said that it was a marriage made in heaven, and that they'll live happily ever after. I hope not. She doesn't deserve it, the ungrateful troublemaker.

In this paper, the student has achieved a fairly consistent image and an interesting twist on the image that Cinderella brings to mind for all of us. The stepmother is always in character, and there are touches of humor throughout the paper (for example, the stepmother's perception that the prince perked up when he caught a glimpse of her two daughters). The only trouble the student seemed to have was in the starting sentence, where she was determined to use the words, "Once upon a time in a land far away." The paper is probably a "4" paper.

This next paper was not written as a result of the same teacher's assignment.

Many years ago I married a man who had a daughter named Cinderella. My two daughters went with me to live at their house. We didn't like Cinderella and I wanted only the best for my girls, so I made Cinderella stay in the kitchen and do all the housework.

One day we got an invitation to the ball. The prince needed to find a

wife. We were all so excited! I knew he would pick one of my girls. Cinderella wanted to go and I said she could if she got all her housework done but I didn't mean it.

On the day of the ball I gave Cinderella lots of extra work to do, but just as we opened the door to go she appeared on the stairs all dressed up. My daughters tore apart her dress and she ran out the door.

We went on to the ball and Cinderella cried in the garden. Her fairy godmother appeared and fixed her dress and sent her off to the ball.

At the ball we didn't recognize the beautiful girl in white. The prince wasn't even polite to my daughters. He just danced with her all night. At midnight she suddenly ran out the door and disappeared, except that she lost a slipper on the stairs as she fled.

The next morning the whole kingdom was in a dither. A messenger from the king came to the door and wanted to see my daughters. I locked Cinderella in her room.

My daughters tried and tried to get their feet into the slipper, but it was impossible. The messenger started to leave and suddenly there was Cinderella. Those mice again!

Her foot fit! And the prince married her and carried her off to live happily ever after. At least she's out of my hair. Now all I have to do is find a housekeeper.

The student has made an admirable attempt to keep in character. There are a few slips however—her knowledge of the fairy godmother, knowing that the kingdom was in a dither, how Cinderella lost her slipper. These are places where the student has slipped into the role of the omniscient narrator. The touch of humor at the end of the story is promising, and this student handled the beginning of the story in a more appropriate way than the other student. The paper is probably a "2" paper, but if this were the first draft, the teacher or peer editors could probably suggest ways in which the student could greatly improve the story.

Teachers who decide that they would like to use the primary trait scoring system will find help in a set of books developed by the National Assessment of Educational Progress in cooperation with CEMREL, Inc., a regional educational laboratory. *Composing Childhood Experience* and *Composing Adolescent Experience* (Klaus et al., 1982) offer teacher-evaluated examples of student writing and suggest ways to incorporate the method into assessment at the classroom level.

Informal assessment of writing skills

Just as teachers have daily opportunities to assess development of children's speaking and listening skills, they, too, have continuing opportunities to

assess progress in writing abilities. Because development of writing ability is an individualistic phenomenon, the teacher must find time frequently during class to work with each child and to have children work with each other. This is particularly important for students who are learning English as a second language.

An effective way to stay informed of children's progress and to assist them in their development is through individual conferences. Student/teacher conferences do not have to be long, and they can take place at any time during the various stages of the writing process. Following is an example from Marlene Harris' class of how conferencing might be combined with helping a student experience the writing process:

> Harris kept an eye on Doreen throughout the day that Doreen had seen the dog die. Doreen seemed to feel okay about her conversation with Judy. At the end of the day, the teacher stopped Doreen and told her she was sorry that she had had such a sad experience and that she might want to talk with her Dad and brother that night to see if anything like that had ever happened to them.
>
> Doreen came to school the next day and immediately told the teacher that she had talked to a neighbor downstairs. The neighbor told her that her dog had been hit by a car on the same street, and she wished that cars would be made to go slower on that street. The teacher suggested that Doreen talk with several other children in her small group that day and see if they think that they might be able to do something about it.
>
> When the children talked that afternoon, they decided to start a petition to get the mayor of Chicago to change the speed limit. They developed the wording for the petition and confidently showed the passage to the teacher. She congratulated them on their idea and said that it would be interesting to find out if there was a way to get the city to make a change like that.
>
> The teacher suggested that the children write a letter to the city's bureau of traffic and transportation to ask them for advice. Doreen drafted the letter and the other children helped her revise and edit it. The teacher reviewed it and offered several suggestions, two of which the children agreed with.
>
> The children mailed the letter and waited for a response. It came 2 weeks later, with a kindly description of how complicated it would be to change the speed limit. Doreen headed a full-class discussion about whether they should get signatures on a petition anyway and send the petition directly to the mayor. The children decided that they should.
>
> Two weeks later, the children had over 200 signatures on the petition.

Again, Doreen drafted a letter, this time to the mayor. The children took the teacher's suggestions much more seriously this time.

The letter from the mayor's office took 4 weeks to reach the children. The mayor, too, said that changing the speed limit would be difficult to do. But she offered an alternative. Because children walk to school along that street, she had several signs placed that told traffic to slow down when school children were walking to and from school. The children cheered and decided to write a letter to thank the mayor.

Doreen's efforts were not the result of a specific writing assignment. Instead, they grew out of a need to understand her own feelings and to find out if she could have some control over the world around her. She gained confidence from the involvement of other children. Marlene Harris held at least six conferences with the children, none of which lasted more than 2 or 3 minutes. And Doreen and the other children went through all of the stages of the writing process—prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing—with continuing input from the teacher and other children. In addition, planning together, getting people to sign the petition, and discussing and resolving differences broadened their oral communication abilities.

Self-evaluation, where students assume responsibility for assessing their own writing and for deciding which pieces of writing they will share with the teacher and peers, can promote organization skills, self-reliance, independence, and creativity. Students can evaluate their various drafts as well as the final product, using teacher- and student-developed questions as a guide. Beaven (1977) suggests the following list of questions as a guide for students:

1. How much time did you spend on this paper?
2. (After the first evaluation) What did you try to improve, or experiment with, on this paper? How successful were you? If you have questions about what you were trying to do, what are they?
3. What are the strengths of your paper? Place a squiggly line beside those passages you feel are very good.
4. What are the weaknesses, if any, of your paper? Place an X beside passages you would like your teacher to correct or revise. Place an X over any punctuation, spelling, usage, etc., where you need help or clarification.
5. What one thing will you do to improve your next piece of writing? Or what kind of experimentation in writing would you like to try? If you would like some information related to what you want to do, write down your questions.

6. (Optional) What grade would you give yourself on this composition? Justify it. (p. 143)

Peer evaluation can involve just two students who read each other's writing or small groups of students, like those who worked with Doreen, who meet periodically to serve as a support group, offer suggestions on various drafts, and edit each other's work. Peter Elbow has developed what he calls the "center of gravity" response (1973), which is intended for formative response and feedback and can be used successfully by students to respond to one another's writing.

The "center of gravity" response asks the reader to go through four steps after reading a piece: 1) First, tell very quickly what you found to be the main points, main feelings, or centers of gravity; 2) summarize it into a single sentence; 3) choose one word from the writing which best summarizes it; and 4) choose a word that is not in the writing that best summarizes it. Students working with each other using this procedure will rapidly discover whether their writing is having the intended effect on the audience.

Beaven has also suggested a set of guidelines that can be used by peer editors working in a group:

1. Identify the best section of the composition and describe what makes it effective.

2. Identify a sentence, a group of sentences, or a paragraph that needs revision, and revise it as a group, writing the final version on the back of the paper.

3. Identify one (or two) things the writer can do to improve his or her next piece of writing. Write these goals on the first page at the top.

4. (After the first evaluation, the following question should come first.) What were the goals the writer was working on? Were they reached? If not, identify those passages that need improvement and as a group revise those sections, writing final versions on the back of the paper. If revisions are necessary, set up the same goals for the next paper and delete question 3 (1977, p. 149).

Many teachers may feel that the two procedures suggested above may not be appropriate for their students. They will, however, give teachers a point of departure, so that they can develop procedures that meet the needs of their own students. Most important, students will need careful guidance from the teacher before they routinely evaluate one another's work. Peer evaluation can be very effective if it is planned for carefully, because it gives students

an opportunity to focus attention away from their teacher and to see how their writing affects members of their peer group.

A FINAL NOTE

Effectively assessing communication competence—children's ability to write, speak, and listen in ways that are appropriate to particular situations—depends on the role that the teacher is willing to play in class. If children are to expand abilities to speak and write for different purposes and for a variety of audiences, teachers must give them frequent opportunities to practice skills in an environment that invites them to take risks and that encourages them to accept failure as part of the process of learning and growing. Such an environment gives the teacher many opportunities for informal assessment of children's skills in a wide variety of situations.

This booklet has primarily focused on the importance of informal assessment procedures rather than on specific formal procedures for assessing students' growth in speaking, listening, and writing skills. This is largely because formal assessment instruments in the areas of oral and written communication have not kept pace with the instructional needs and practices in today's classrooms. Some procedures, such as the primary trait scoring system, hold a great deal of promise, but their development has been slow.

Teachers may find themselves in a critical position over the next few years. It is not often that they have opportunities to influence the makers of tests. Right now, however, if higher authorities are going to mandate curriculum development, particularly in oral communication, teachers must demand that those authorities assume the responsibility for developing instruments that accurately assess the abilities of students, and that reflect classroom instruction. Moreover, the involvement of teachers, themselves, is vital to the usefulness of those tests for assessing communication competence.

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