

Turning Points

TRANSFORMING MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Understanding Learning
*Assessment in the
Turning Points School*





Understanding Learning
*Assessment in the
Turning Points School*

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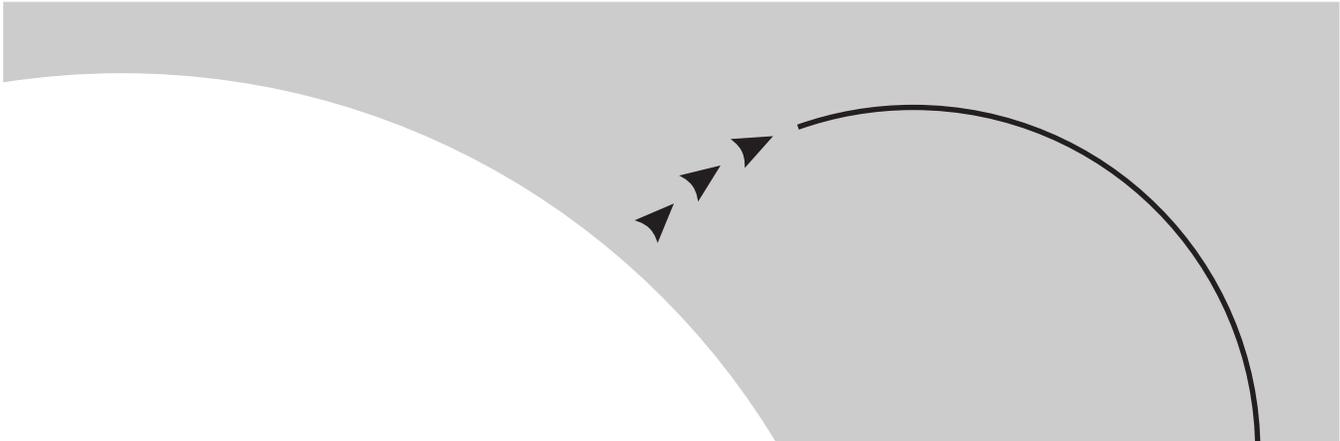


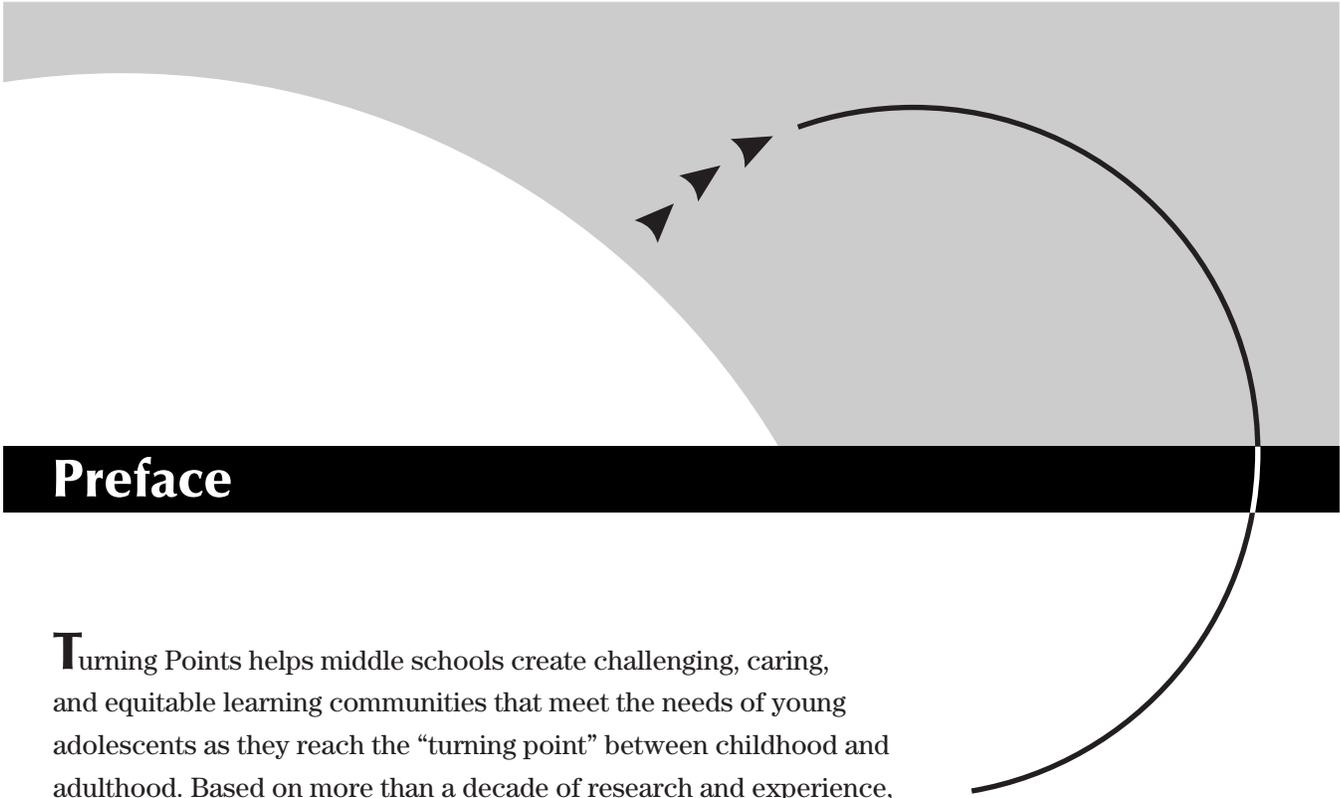
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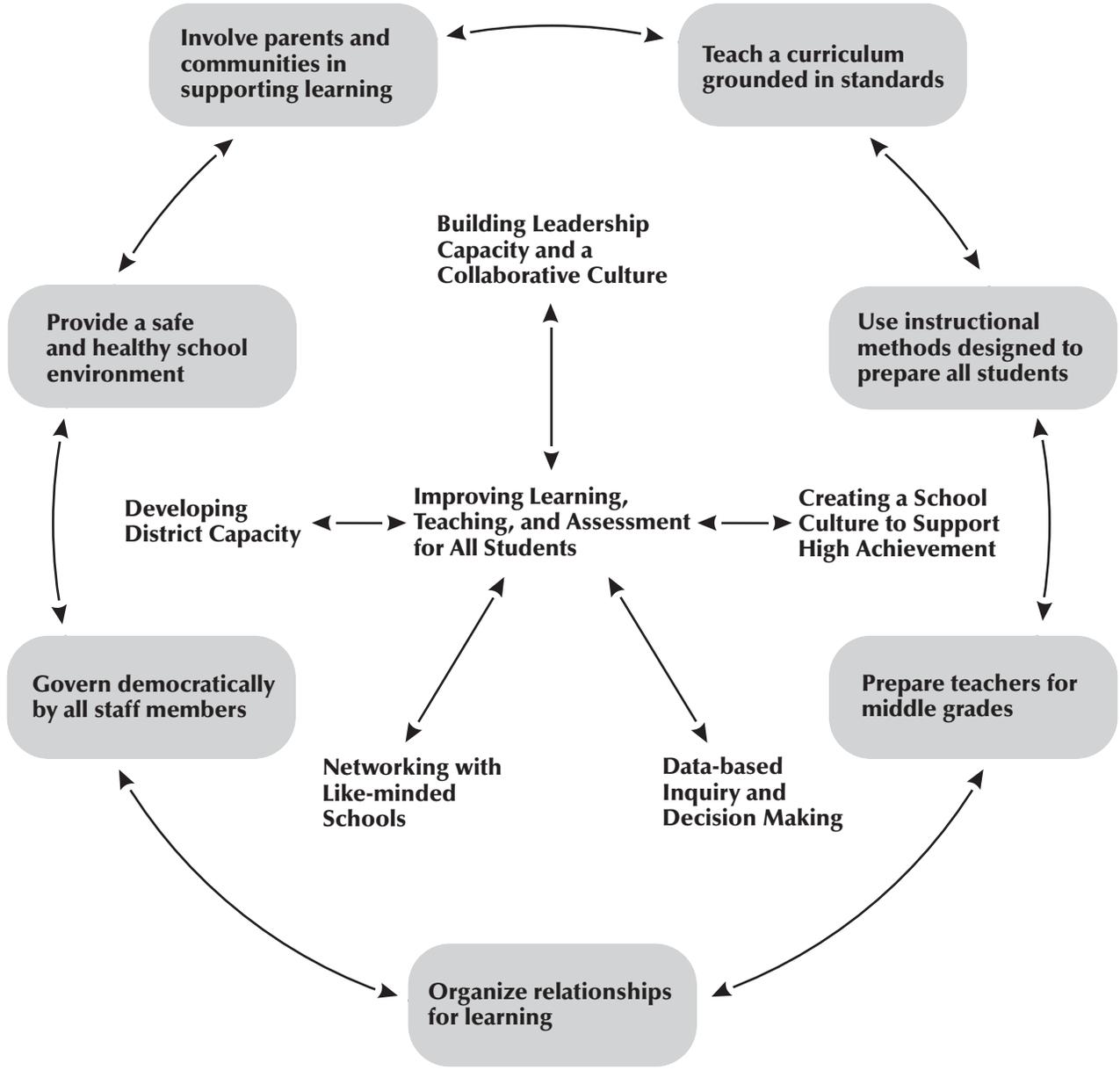
Preface

Turning Points helps middle schools create challenging, caring, and equitable learning communities that meet the needs of young adolescents as they reach the “turning point” between childhood and adulthood. Based on more than a decade of research and experience, this comprehensive school reform model focuses on improving student learning through teacher collaboration and data-based inquiry. Turning Points provides member schools with intensive on-site coaching and professional development.

The Turning Points design recognizes that schools must provide the building blocks for adolescent development and preparation for life. Turning Points schools focus on developing students’ intellectual capacities while providing opportunities for experiences that meet their emotional and interpersonal needs.

This guide provides a framework for thinking about classroom assessment in the middle grades, and a set of strategies for action. Like the other Turning Points guides, it aims to distill the best thinking and research on a critical facet of the design, offer useful tools, and point the way to other resources.

Turning Points Design Principles and Practices



Turning Points Principles*

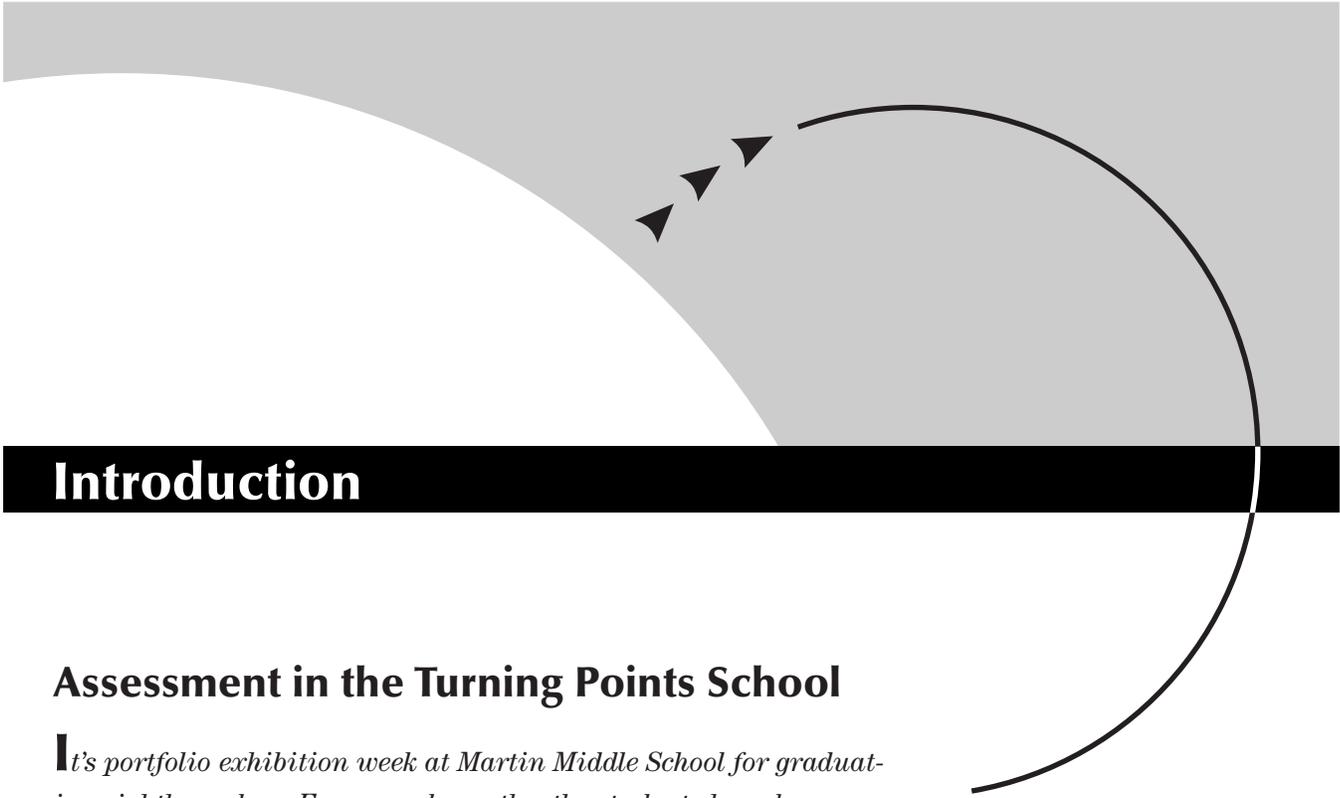
- Teach a curriculum grounded in rigorous, public academic standards, relevant to the concerns of adolescents and based on how students learn best
- Use instructional methods designed to prepare all students to achieve high standards and become lifelong learners
- Staff middle grade schools with teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents, and engage teachers in ongoing professional development
- Organize relationships for learning to create a climate of intellectual development and a caring community of shared educational purpose
- Govern democratically through direct or representative participation by all school staff members, the adults who know students best
- Provide a safe and healthy school environment as part of improving academic performance and developing caring and ethical citizens
- Involve parents and communities in supporting student learning and healthy development

Six practices translate these principles into action in each school and throughout a network of Turning Points schools in a district. Within each area of practice, teacher teams, a school leadership team, and faculty committees engage in collaborative work.

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The Six Turning Points Practices

- **Improving Learning, Teaching, and Assessment for All Students:** working collaboratively to set high standards, close the achievement gap among students, develop curriculum that promotes habits of mind and intellectual inquiry, utilize a wide range of instructional strategies and approaches, emphasize the teaching of literacy and numeracy
- **Building Leadership Capacity and a Professional Collaborative Culture:** creating a democratic school community, fostering skills and practices of strong leadership, establishing regular common planning time, embedding professional development in the daily life of the school
- **Data-based Inquiry and Decision Making:** setting a vision based on the Turning Points principles, collecting and analyzing multiple sources of data to help improve areas that most impact learning, teaching, and assessment, setting annual measurable goals
- **Creating a School Culture to Support High Achievement and Personal Development:** creating structures that promote a culture of high-quality learning and teaching, establishing small learning communities, eliminating tracking, lowering student-teacher ratios, building parent and community partnerships
- **Networking with Like-minded Schools:** participating in network meetings, summer institutes, and forums; visiting other Turning Points schools
- **Developing District Capacity to Support School Change:** building district capacity through collaboration



Introduction

Assessment in the Turning Points School

It's portfolio exhibition week at Martin Middle School for graduating eighth graders. For several months, the students have been working with their teachers preparing to present final portfolios of their work and reflections on their learning to audiences of parents, peers, high school faculty, and community members. The exhibitions are intended to demonstrate that each student has met the achievement standards defined by the school in mathematics, science, humanities, and writing, and that each student can articulate how the school's Habits of Mind¹ have informed her work. They also highlight what students have learned about self-assessment and reflection. The eighth graders are nervous but have been well prepared by three years of assessment practices that have involved them in developing criteria for major assignments, setting goals and reflecting on progress, creating portfolios, and presenting work to parents and others.

Walk through the halls and peek into the classrooms in which the exhibitions are going on. You will see and hear evidence of confident, capable learners.

■

A girl twirls her braids and stands up to write out the steps she took in solving an algebraic equation.

1. Habits of Mind are ways of thinking and being expressed in goal statements. See p. 21 for a detailed description.

■
A boy responds to a question about his strengths in writing saying, “I think I’m best at opinion essays...when I feel strongly about the issue.”

■
A very shy boy has trouble at first speaking loudly enough to be heard, but he gains confidence as the audience “oohs” and “aahs” over the PowerPoint slides of his science experiment monitoring air quality in his neighborhood.

To have every student arrive at such a place of success in learning requires persistent, thoughtful effort on the part of a school’s leadership and faculty. It takes an approach to assessment that is closely linked to teaching and learning. It does not happen overnight or in rapid response to test scores and mandates. Rather, it requires the growth of a school culture that promotes meaningful and challenging learning.

RECLAIMING A BROADER VISION OF ASSESSMENT

In fully implemented Turning Points schools, teachers develop ongoing, culminating, and graduation assessments, and use the results of these assessments to guide their daily instruction and their larger revisions of curriculum.

Assessment allows teachers and students to know how they are doing—what they are learning, what needs reteaching, and how to revise. The root of the word “assess” means “to sit beside,” and that is a useful image to keep in mind in understanding the teacher’s role as assessor. The teacher sits beside a student as she works on a challenging problem, asking questions, offering feedback.

Assessment often entails a final or culminating event, such as a science experiment, a performance, a final essay, a unit test, or a portfolio review. It is also an ongoing activity that takes many forms—journal reflections, written feedback on drafts, quizzes, peer feedback, writing conferences. The process of assessment happens daily and in every class. A teacher asks a question and notices that only three students know the answer. A student confers with his friend about an approach to solving a problem. A teacher team keeps track of which students complete homework and compares the quality of the work that is done. All of these examples are powerful modes of assessment that should be made explicit to students and used to inform what happens in classes.

In fully implemented Turning Points schools, teachers develop ongoing, culminating, and graduation assessments, and use the results of

these assessments to guide their daily instruction and their larger revisions of curriculum. Every activity or assignment teachers create is connected to the learning goals and standards of the curriculum. Students have the opportunity to express what they know and are able to do in a variety of ways. They are assigned rich and engaging work that demonstrates their understanding of important ideas. The work students are asked to do is closely aligned with the school's academic standards and expectations.

How is this approach to assessment different from what has always been done in schools? First, assessment informs instruction. This ongoing approach to assessment makes explicit use of all of the ways teachers receive information about what their students are learning. Next, in this approach, teachers pay close attention to the information they receive and they use it to make adjustments in curriculum and instruction. Finally, assessment for learning is not an endpoint but an ongoing cycle. Traditional assessment practices have focused on ranking and sorting students—you knew the material and passed the test, or you didn't. This paradigm of assessment as testing is still dominant in our culture, as seen in the current emphasis on high-stakes tests, and it is a strong deterrent to educational equity.

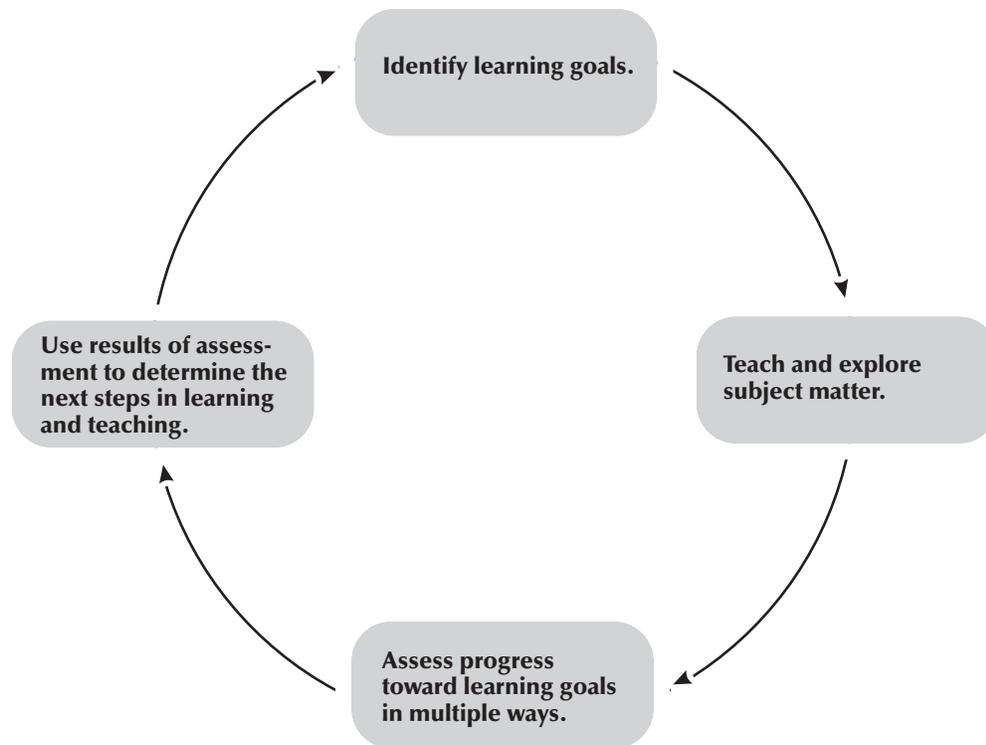
In our view, assessment and standardized tests are too often seen as interchangeable. Turning Points understands assessment much more broadly. Standardized tests are only one piece of the puzzle. When they are relied on too exclusively, they have a detrimental effect on individual students and on school culture and curriculum.

As Carl Glickman writes, “Most people would agree with the need for students to be literate and to master other basic skills. While that can be done through test preparation, citizens of a democracy need a deeper and more comprehensive education that nurtures their capacity to apply and contribute their knowledge in broader, more creative and more independent ways” (Glickman, 2004). Turning Points believes that adopting this broad vision for assessment is critical to ensure educational equity and excellence.

Turning Points understands assessment much more broadly. Standardized tests are only one piece of the puzzle.

Classroom Assessment Is a Cycle of Teaching and Learning

TEACHER AND STUDENT...



All students, including English Language Learners and students with special needs, must have the opportunity to use their minds well – to think creatively and deeply, apply skills to interesting problems, and learn important content.

All students, including English Language Learners and students with special needs, must have the opportunity to use their minds well—to think creatively and deeply, apply skills to interesting problems, and learn important content. If we focus too narrowly on standardized tests, we effectively narrow the curriculum and hold many students back from rich and engaging learning.

Effective assessment practices help teachers to know each learner's particular strengths and needs, shape their daily instructional practice, and offer students keys to successful learning. Assessment for learning depends on a classroom and school culture of safety, respect, and challenge. By establishing guidelines for how teachers and students should treat one another, give each other feedback, and collaborate, powerful learning can flourish.

TWO VIEWS OF ASSESSMENT

Assessment as Testing

- Seen as an endpoint
- One chance and one form
- Used to make judgments: ranking, sorting, passing, failing
- Takes place in a quiet room; students work alone
- Keeps test items secret

Assessment as Learning

- Seen as an ongoing cycle
- Multiple forms, drafts, revisions
- Used to inform teaching and learning—provide ongoing feedback
- Uses different modes—from a quiet room to a noisy workshop; students often collaborate
- Involves students in developing criteria, assessing themselves and peers, and keeping track of progress

USING CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT TO SUPPORT STUDENT LEARNING

Turning Points encourages schools and teachers to focus deeply on how to help students create a vision of excellence for themselves and acquire the tools to achieve it. In his book *An Ethic of Excellence* (2003), Ron Berger talks about helping students develop a vision of quality work. “The most important assessment that goes on in a school isn’t done *to* students but goes on *inside* students. Every student walks around the school with a picture of what is acceptable, what is good enough. Each time he works on something he looks at it and assesses it. Is this good enough? Do I feel comfortable handing this in? Does it meet my standards? Changing assessment *at this level* should be the most important assessment goal of every school” (p. 103).

The capacity to self-assess and make decisions about one’s learning is crucial to this process. Chris Tovani describes a pivotal moment in her teaching: “One day a struggling tenth grader named Dan changes my teaching forever. In a rather irritated voice he says, ‘I’m sick and tired of you telling the class that it’s our job to know when we know and know when we don’t know. You’re the teacher. Aren’t you the

“The most important assessment that goes on in a school isn’t done *to* students but goes on *inside* students.” (Ron Berger)

While annual tests can provide a useful yardstick to verify school quality, they do not provide teachers with useful information to adjust their curriculum and instruction in an ongoing way.

one who is supposed to know when we understand something and when we don't?" (2000, p. 35). Her astonishment at his response leads her to the realization that she must explicitly teach her students to self-assess, to monitor their own comprehension of what they are reading. A similar transformation of assessment practice must occur more broadly in many schools and classrooms if students are to become independent learners and thinkers.

Such a transformation is only made possible by supporting every teacher's assessment practice. In the current climate of testing, one cannot blame teachers for feeling that the most important assessment is out of their control. And yet, this is a misperception.

Almost all of the assessment events that take place in students' lives happen at the behest of their teachers. Teachers spend as much as one-third of their professional time on assessment-related activities. They make new decisions every few minutes about how to interact with their students. Most decisions are informed by some kind of classroom assessment of student achievement. . . . [Classroom assessments] are most closely aligned with day-to-day instruction and are most influential in terms of their contribution to student success. *Without question, as a teacher, you control the assessment systems that determine your school's effectiveness.* (emphasis in original) (Stiggins, 2001, p. 24).

In his article "Assessment Crisis: The Absence of Assessment *FOR* Learning" (2002), Richard Stiggins makes a compelling case for redirecting the national focus away from standardized testing as the sole assessment priority. He argues that while annual tests can provide a useful yardstick to verify school quality (as long as the tests are sound), they do not provide teachers with useful information to adjust their curriculum and instruction in an ongoing way. Such tests, by creating an atmosphere of "high stakes" challenge and anxiety, also do little to motivate student learning. While some students will respond to the increased pressure with greater effort and more learning, many will not. "These students will see both the new high standards and the demand for higher test scores as unattainable for them, and they will *give up in hopelessness*" (p. 760). The painful irony is that this is the very group of students we are most trying to reach with our "No Child Left Behind" reforms.

What are schools and teachers to do? The tests are not going away, and if we are not careful, we will lose many students. Part of the good news presented by Stiggins and other researchers is that by focusing on effective, classroom-based assessment practices—assessment *for* learning—schools can greatly increase student achievement on external tests. Researchers Black and Wiliam analyzed more than 20 studies of classroom assessment innovations and their impact on achievement. They found that student gains on standardized achievement tests were more strongly correlated with assessment innovations than with most other educational interventions. In a compelling example, they explain that if the positive effect of assessment innovations on mathematics had been applied to the entire country, it would have raised the United States from the middle of the pack of 41 countries to the top 5 in an international comparative study of mathematics performance (Black and Wiliam, 1998).

Teachers have enormous power to improve student learning by focusing on these three areas (Stiggins, 2002, p. 763):

- Increase the quality of classroom assessments (in terms of the information they provide about student learning).
- Provide students with frequent feedback (useful and constructive rather than judgmental or punitive).
- Involve students deeply in assessment (through keeping track of progress, reflecting on what they are learning, and communicating their learning with others).

What is the student's role in assessment? What will the classroom where students play an active role in assessing their own learning look like? If students learn and deeply internalize assessment strategies, they will have the tools to do well on the big test and the final project. Students should be included in every step of the assessment process—reviewing, discussing, and giving input into criteria and assignments. Information about assessment and achievement should be frequently shared with families, and students should participate in this communication. Students need ample opportunity to make decisions about their learning and how they will be assessed. For every student's voice to be heard, close attention must be paid to creating a classroom culture of safety and respect.

Students should be included in every step of the assessment process — reviewing, discussing, and giving input into criteria and assignments.

EXAMPLES OF STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT:

- Students choose the form and media for a presentation of learning, and help develop the criteria for its assessment.
- Students select the work they will include in portfolios to show their growth in learning, and write accompanying self-reflections.
- Students use criteria to give peers effective feedback on their work.

This guide will outline effective assessment practices at two levels—the classroom and the school. Classroom assessment is given the most thorough treatment because it is only through the teacher’s assessment of each student that learning can be improved. Our hope is that this guide will help teachers build on their current assessment practice, identifying concrete ways they can strengthen assessment for learning in their classrooms.

The power and effectiveness of classroom assessment is enhanced when effective practices are applied consistently throughout a school. In addition, common school-wide assessments, particularly in literacy and math, provide teachers with valuable information to rate students’ progress across grade levels and classrooms, thereby helping them gauge the success of the whole school.

The following chart outlines six teacher assessment practices that will be developed in the next chapter:

ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING: SIX TEACHER PRACTICES

Practice	What it means	What it looks like
<p>1 Creating a classroom culture for assessment</p>	<p>Establish a tone of safety and respect.</p> <p>Examine beliefs about learning and assessment.</p> <p>Read and discuss student-work exemplars.</p>	<p>Protocols or structured guidelines for critique are in use.</p> <p>An eighth-grade math teacher leads a probing discussion of “math anxiety” in September.</p> <p>Before beginning their first project, a seventh-grade social studies class looks at work done by last year’s class—an historical newspaper, a videotaped monologue, an editorial. The teacher tells them, “You’ll do just as good work—or better!”</p>
<p>2 Defining clear expectations and learning goals</p>	<p>Be clear about what you want students to know and be able to do as a result of your teaching.</p> <p>Select the most important areas of focus.</p> <p>Be explicit with students about your goals; involve them in developing goals and criteria.</p>	<p>Students examine a range of writing samples, including student writing from past years and professional writing. Together they develop criteria for What Makes Good Writing?</p> <p>Teachers on an eighth-grade team create a rubric (scoring guide) for a final project on the Scientific Revolution. They share a draft with students and revise it to improve the clarity.</p>
<p>3 Creating classroom assessments</p>	<p>Determine how you will know if students have met learning goals.</p> <p>Select the best form of assessment for your goals: essay, performance/exhibition, product, selected response, observation.</p> <p>Be sure that the work you ask students to do is compelling and connects to prior learning.</p>	<p>Students conduct a statistical analysis of the incidence of asthma in the community.</p> <p>Students produce a report on the town’s water use and water quality that is distributed to the town government and its citizens.</p> <p>Students solve a set of math problems and explain how you derive the answers.</p> <p>Students design an experiment to test the effect of certain nutrients on plants.</p> <p>Students write an opinion essay on the Iraq War.</p>

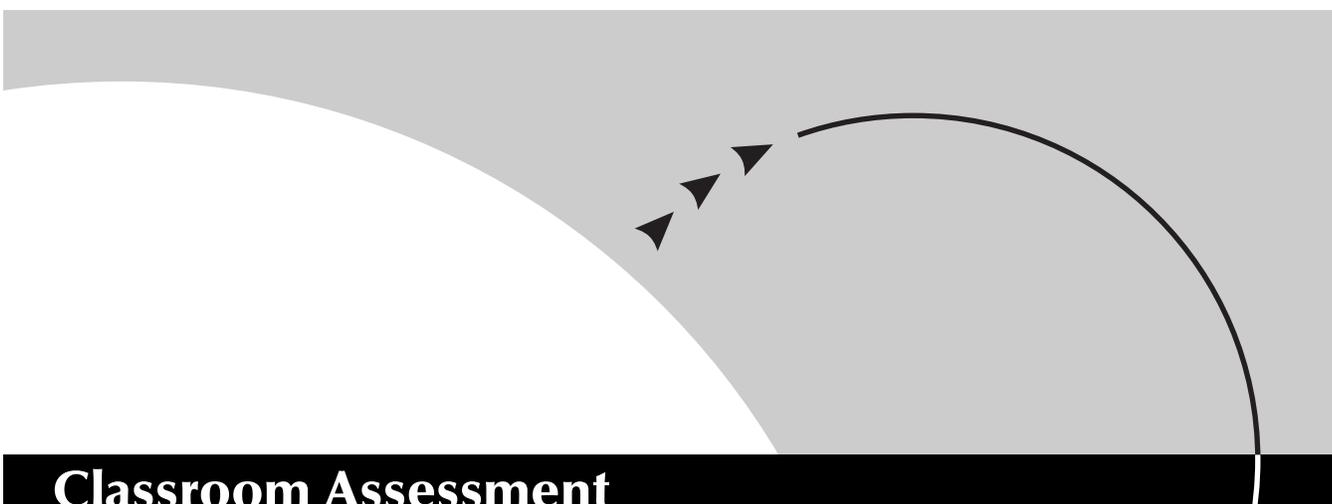
ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING: SIX TEACHER PRACTICES (CONTINUED)

Practice	What it means	What it looks like
<p>4 Teacher modeling</p>	<p>Demonstrate for students how to do good work and what good work looks like.</p> <p>Give them time to practice as you guide them.</p> <p>Offer frequent, clear feedback and teach students to use the feedback in revising their work.</p>	<p>Students are taught guidelines for peer critique and are expected to give each other feedback on every major assignment.</p> <p>While students are working on revising their essays, a teacher holds mini-conferences to give targeted feedback.</p>
<p>5 Metacognition and Self-assessment</p>	<p>Teach students to use strategies for assessing their learning—applying thinking strategies, using reflective writing and graphic organizers.</p>	<p>After an important math test, students are asked to analyze which types of problems they got wrong, and are given the chance to take another test.</p>
<p>6 Communicating about student learning and achievement</p>	<p>Present summary or cumulative information about student learning and achievement.</p> <p>Involve students as much as possible in preparing and presenting the information.</p> <p>Invite meaningful audiences for presentations of student learning. Public sharing validates learning, creates challenge and purpose, and places learning at the center of community.</p>	<p>Exhibitions: Students must complete and publicly defend a specific project or performance.</p> <p>Students present a gallery of work and answer questions about the work and what they learned from it.</p> <p>Student-led parent conferences focus on student portfolios.</p> <p>Report cards are narrative or competency-based.</p>

The next chapter will provide the reader with strategies for developing an effective classroom assessment process. Each section describes a different practice—a way of creating the structures and supports to establish assessment for learning. While it may seem daunting to think about adopting all of the classroom practices outlined, it is possible to take simple beginning steps that can have a significant impact on learning. Each teacher and teacher team must develop a realistic course of action based on their own experience and the needs of their students.

The chapter on the school's role in assessment discusses how a school-wide strategy can reinforce and expand the reach of individual classrooms. It is only when coherence and consistency exists in a school that powerful learning will occur for every student.

We hope that the guide will launch you on a multiple-year journey of study, investigation, and improved practice. As with all of the Turning Points guides, it points to areas for further study, reading, and discussion.



Classroom Assessment

Overview: A Look at One Teacher's Assessment Practice

Before Julie Craven, a seventh- and eighth-grade humanities teacher at King Open School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, begins to plan a curriculum unit, she thinks about her overarching goals for her students. “I want them to have confidence in themselves as learners, in their ability to think; to get in the habit of asking themselves, ‘Do I get this?’; to communicate in a variety of ways; to solve problems.” She strives to create a curriculum that will give her students experience doing hard things that have meaning—and to provide all the support they need to succeed. Continuously assessing their learning is thus an integral part of her teaching.

From the beginning of the year, Julie works to establish a classroom culture of respect, responsibility, and productivity. Students learn to share their work for feedback, and to give feedback in a constructive way. They learn to take risks and try on ideas that may seem new or strange. This culture creates the opportunity for the students to do increasingly sophisticated work.

One example of what this looks like in action is a Women’s History Oratory Project—part of a yearlong study of American history focused on justice in American society. It grew out of a project taught by her colleagues at a school in San Francisco where Julie began teaching, and has evolved over the years into its current form.

From the beginning of the year, Julie works to establish a classroom culture of respect, responsibility, and productivity. Students learn to share their work for feedback, and to give feedback in a constructive way.

WOMEN'S HISTORY ORATORY PROJECT

Helping Students Understand the Goals and Expectations

On the first day, Julie hands out the assignment sheet and students take turns reading it aloud:

Women do not have a traditional place in the history books. There are a few “famous” women who are worked in, but for the most part, the ways that women influence history do not earn them places in textbooks. Women have not been presidents or generals or industrial giants in this country’s history. They have changed history in different ways, through relentless organizing, through conversations that influenced the men who were allowed to lead, through speeches and writings and art that provoked their peers but have not endured the test of time.

In this spirit, we will spend most of our time studying women’s history doing an oratory project. You will research one “famous” woman in American history. We will provide you with a list, or you may choose a woman not on the list, as long as she is approved by us. Then you will bring this woman alive, using one of the options below to teach the class about her place in shaping our nation. Your goal is to connect her life with our theme this year: “Justice in American Society.”



How has this woman worked to promote a just society?



What ideals was she fighting for?



What forces was she fighting against?



How successful was she?



What are the reasons for her success?



What can we learn from her life as we try to be responsible citizens?

You will need to research facts, yes. But more importantly, you will need to uncover the spirit and voice of this woman and the stories that illustrate who she is. Then you will need to be creative in how you bring that spirit’s voice to us.

PRESENTATION OPTIONS

(ALL MUST BE PRESENTED WITHOUT A SCRIPT!)

1

Monologue: Speak in the first person, as this woman. Create a situation for the monologue and then bring her to life.

2

Dialogue: Working with one other person, create a dialogue in which this character comes to life—a talk-show format, a conversation between friends, or something else. You may both research the same person and then one of you be her and the other be a second, “neutral” person. Or you can research two different women and then create an imaginary dialogue between them.

3

Poem: Bring this woman alive through an original poem or rap. You may do this alone or with a partner.

Assessment means understanding how well students are “getting it” at every step, not just at the final performance. So, as the students read through the assignment, Julie stops them and asks them to underline important vocabulary. “What does ‘oratory’ mean?” “Why do you think I put the word ‘famous’ in quotes?” Slowing down in this way, she helps them monitor their comprehension of the assignment and ensure that they understand what she is asking them to do.

Giving Students a Model of the Final Product and Developing Criteria

The next step is to give students a model of the end product—to create a mental picture of where they are going. Some students naturally grasp the big picture and are capable of thinking through a long-term goal. Others struggle with this task. Julie wants to make sure everyone understands where he or she is headed. She shows them a video of a past year’s student oratory. As they watch the video, students jot down phrases in response to the question, “What makes this a good oratory?” From the discussion that follows, the class generates a list of working criteria. Julie then uses this list to create a rubric. (See appendix 1 for the rubric and other materials.)

Assessment means understanding how well students are “getting it” at every step, not just at the final performance.

Ongoing Assessment: Monitoring Understanding and Guiding Work

For the next several weeks, as students do research, prepare drafts of their oratories and practice for the final performance, a series of shorter assignments breaks the big task into smaller, more manageable steps. Again, Julie wants to assess whether students are finding the information that they need; she also wants to make sure that they are engaging in the kind of critical thinking that will bring their subject alive. She monitors their note taking during research time, and teaches mini-lessons on how to skim, how to choose what is important, and how to evaluate and compare sources. These lessons are tailored to individual students' needs. Using a checklist form, Julie helps students keep track of their research and identify gaps.

For the next several weeks, as students do research, prepare drafts of their oratories and practice for the final performance, a series of shorter assignments breaks the big task into smaller, more manageable steps.

Short writing assignments, such as “List the three most important things you have learned and why they’re important,” help students to analyze the information they are uncovering. This gives them valuable practice in the kind of analysis they will need to do in their final writing. It also helps Julie to assess who is doing (and understanding) what. As she skims these papers, she can quickly see who needs extra help in focusing their research and thinking.

Before students begin writing their scripts, Julie wants to make sure they are prepared, so she has devised several activities to help them focus. The students follow the steps in a detailed “planning sheet” to remind them of what they have found in their research that is interesting. A series of writing prompts and questions guides students through a process of sifting through their research, synthesizing it, and organizing their ideas. For example, the first set of questions relates to the woman’s early life: “Write down two important facts you know about your woman’s childhood. Why are these facts important to her life? How did they shape who she is? Write down a true story you know about your woman’s childhood.”

To help her assess how students are doing with the goal of bringing the spirit of the woman alive, Julie also has them engage in a series of short drama activities. These activities help the students empathize with their character and prepare for their oral performance. They include a party in which students mingle in character as their women and “freeze frames,” where they imagine their women in joy or despair and freeze in a position.

Feedback and Revision

Before they begin to draft their speech, students envision who their character will be speaking to and why. Once they have created the imagined situation and audience, they write their first draft.

During the writing process, there are other steps designed to assess and support struggling students before final work is presented.

First, there is a peer edit in which students review their work using the working criteria. Then Julie collects drafts and assesses them using the final criteria so students have a clear sense of where their work falls short and what they need to work on before they receive a final grade.

Julie also wants to make sure that students understand the criteria fully and know how to revise their writing. So she types up a sampling of students' work and puts it on overheads for class critique. She selects work she considers strong from several students and guides the class in identifying strengths and making suggestions for revision. Rather than asking students to revise the entire draft, Julie asks them to revise smaller sections, working on the introduction first. As a final step before performance, students read their scripts out loud to peers, which helps them to both revise the writing and prepare for their oral speeches.

Reflections

Many teachers and schools are practicing assessment in effective and diverse ways. This vignette illustrates how assessment is infused throughout a long-term curriculum project. It touches many of the most important aspects of effective assessment and frames the rest of our discussion of how to implement classroom assessment practices. Here are a few key points to consider:



The Women's History Oratory Project models the six assessment practices discussed later in this chapter, from Defining Clear Expectations and Learning Goals (*everyone* will successfully complete the project) to Creating Classroom Assessments (the project requires critical thinking and creativity—it is meaningful and demanding) to Communicating about Student Learning and Achievement (there is a public performance of each student's speech).

In general, the best curriculum projects are “homegrown.” If you are having trouble imagining this project in your classroom, think instead about how you might use the assessment strategies modeled here.

■ The project was taught in a particular context. It came late in the school year, was linked to a yearlong theme of “Justice in American Society,” and was successful, in part, because of the school and classroom culture that was already well established. (Imagine for a moment the challenge, in many contexts, of asking middle-school boys to research and “become” a female historical figure.) In general, the best curriculum projects are “homegrown.” If you are having trouble imagining this project in your classroom, think instead about how you might use the assessment strategies modeled here. What long-term project or sequence of assignments would have the most power in your curriculum?

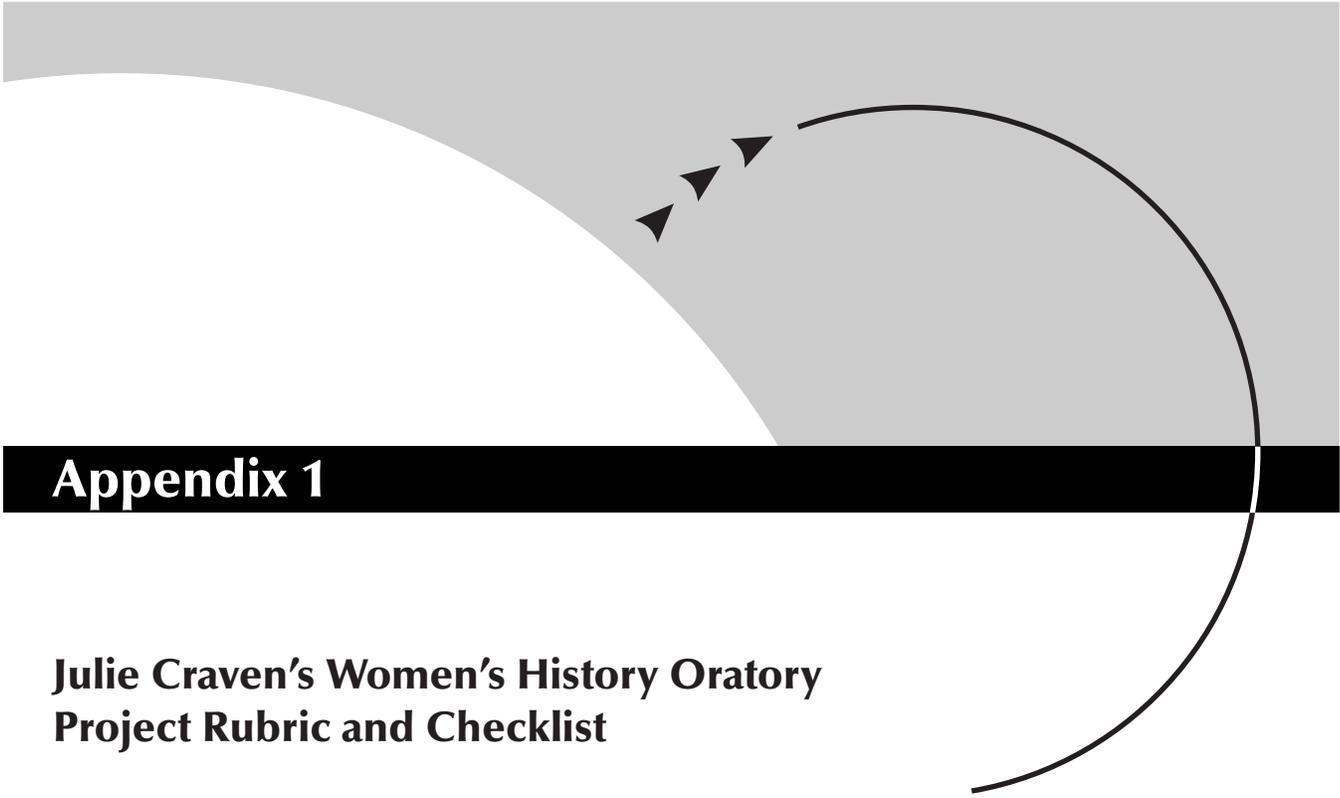
■ The project illustrates two significant aspects of classroom assessment: ongoing and culminating. In this example, the culminating assessment is the final speech performed for an audience. Ongoing assessment included all the steps that led to this performance—class discussions, notes, preliminary drafts, practice sessions, drama activities, etc.

Creating a Classroom Culture for Assessment

What is classroom culture? Do we know it when we see it and feel it? Though the concept is broad, it is possible to talk about classroom culture in concrete ways. Fundamental to a classroom culture that supports excellence and equity are the structures that create an atmosphere of safety and respect. *Protocols*, or guidelines for feedback and discussion, are one way to ensure that all students’ voices and ideas are valued and respected. In a very practical way, a classroom culture is a product of all of the learning activities planned by the teacher and carried out by students and teacher. Teachers can lay the groundwork for strong classroom-based assessment by setting the tone and creating the structures that will allow it to develop.

To create a strong classroom culture for assessment, teachers must closely examine their own beliefs about learning and assessment, and help students to do the same. For example, a prevalent belief about assessment in American society is that anxiety is valuable as a motivator. Some students do respond to pressure and anxiety by preparing well and succeeding. But many do not, and after

Fundamental to a classroom culture that supports excellence and equity are the structures that create an atmosphere of safety and respect.



Appendix 1

Julie Craven's Women's History Oratory Project Rubric and Checklist

WOMAN'S HISTORY ORATORY: EVALUATION

Student: _____ Date: _____ Teacher: Julie Craven

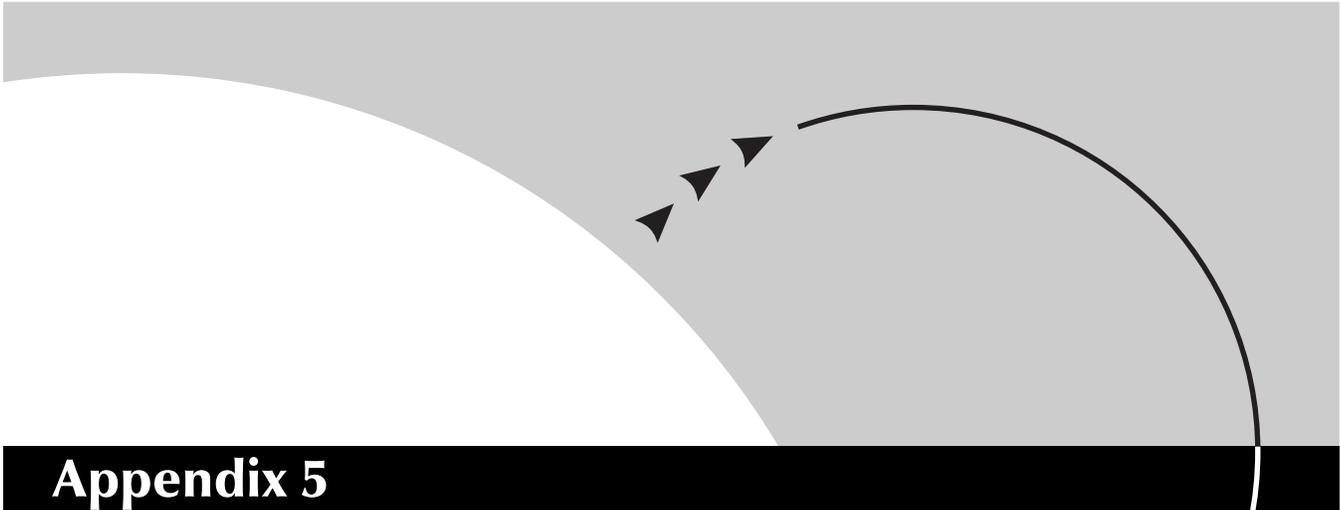
Content	Presentation
<p>To be CAPABLE, an oratory must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> be in the first person ("I"); <input type="checkbox"/> be in some context; <input type="checkbox"/> give a sense of the time period in which the woman lived and when major events happened in her life; <input type="checkbox"/> give a basic sense of what she is famous for (key accomplishment); <input type="checkbox"/> give some personal perspective; <input type="checkbox"/> be organized so an audience can understand the information presented. 	<p>To be CAPABLE, an oratory must have these characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> eye contact; <input type="checkbox"/> voice variation (not monotone); <input type="checkbox"/> loud and clear enough to be heard; <input type="checkbox"/> appropriate posture and gestures (not a statue); <input type="checkbox"/> generally in character; <input type="checkbox"/> generally memorized, and poised (can have a few prompts).
<p>To be VERY PROFICIENT, an oratory must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> meet the criteria of a capable oratory; <input type="checkbox"/> be in a context appropriate for the woman (and context made clear); <input type="checkbox"/> give a purpose to the information presented; <input type="checkbox"/> give a sense of the significance of the woman's accomplishments; <input type="checkbox"/> give a sense of the spirit and personality of the woman by reflecting on facts and events; <input type="checkbox"/> use specific details to bring the woman to life; <input type="checkbox"/> cover major biographical information about the woman; <input type="checkbox"/> give a sense of the woman's goals and what it took to achieve those goals (struggles, inspirations, strategies . . .). 	<p>To be VERY PROFICIENT, an oratory must have these characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> volume, pace to fit into speech; <input type="checkbox"/> eye contact, gestures that fit speech (interacts some with whomever should); <input type="checkbox"/> presentation matches what is being said and personality; <input type="checkbox"/> familiarity with what is being said, needs few prompts.
<p>To GO BEYOND, an oratory must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> meet the criteria of a very proficient oratory; <input type="checkbox"/> integrate at least one quote from the woman into the speech; <input type="checkbox"/> give a sense of the society in which the woman lived and how she felt about it; <input type="checkbox"/> choose and organize events carefully and present them in a way that supports intended purpose; <input type="checkbox"/> be presented with a cohesive, consistent voice so the class believes that the woman herself is talking to her intended audience; <input type="checkbox"/> explain key words/terms so their meaning/significance is clear to the class. 	<p>To GO BEYOND, an oratory must have these characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> presentation matches purposes; <input type="checkbox"/> sounds very natural; <input type="checkbox"/> makes audience feel like woman was here (feels, sounds real).
Overall:	
Comments:	

CHECKLIST: IDENTIFYING GAPS IN YOUR RESEARCH

Read through your notes, highlighting the sections that you feel capture the spirit of the woman that you have been researching. You should look for details (either facts or descriptions) that illustrate in some way the identity of your woman. Next, complete this checklist using the highlighted sections of your notes.

YES NO

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Includes at least one quote. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Name, author, and page number of each source is cited. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Notes what this woman is famous for and how she is remembered. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Includes information (facts) about what she did, prizes she won, etc. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Information chosen to give a sense of this woman's personality; shows what she was like as an individual. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Illustrates how she helped promote a civil society. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Includes her goals (What was she hoping to achieve?). |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Includes her reasons (Why did she decide to do what she did?). |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Cites obstacles she had to overcome to attain these goals (What made success difficult for her? What was she fighting against?). |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Places the woman in her historical context. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Gives evidence that this woman contributed positively to a civil society. |



Appendix 5

The Vertical Slice Protocol: Sampling Student Work

The “Vertical Slice” is a technique developed in the Bush Educational Leaders Program at the University of Minnesota in which you capture and analyze all “ordinary student work” (data) produced by a broad sample of students during a narrow time period or vertical slice. This may involve all work done during a period ranging from one day up to a week—worksheets, artwork, notes, drafts, homework, and even discussion and classroom interaction captured on audio- or videotape. This data would later be analyzed in a team or cluster meeting. If used for baseline sampling, the process will be repeated at intervals to make comparisons and determine changes in performance, impact of teaching, and implications for teaching and learning.

STEPS IN THE PROTOCOL*

Preplanning: The facilitator may be responsible for all the preplanning procedures, or the group may divide up the tasks.

1. Decide on the purpose of the slice

The cluster or grade team decides on the purpose of the slice. If used for baseline sampling, the purpose would be to get an impression of

*Adapted from Cushman, K. (1996). Looking collaboratively at student work: An essential toolkit. *Horace*, 13(2). This version was published first in the *Turning Points Guide to Data-based Inquiry and Decision Making*. For other protocols to look at samples of student work see the *Turning Points Guide for Looking at Student Work*.

the students' current level of performance, skill development, and knowledge.

2. Agree on a guiding question

In conducting baseline sampling, a suitable question might be, "What does the work reveal about the current literacy level and needs of the students in this grade?" What is the range of different types of work that we see? What is the depth of thinking required by the work?

3. Decide on a sampling strategy

The sample is distributed across the range of groups in the school or grade.

4. Identify methods of data collection for the slice

Decide on the range of student work to be collected—will you collect only written work done in class, or will you include artwork, photos, audio and videotapes, and student notes?

5. Decide on the duration of the slice

Decide on the length of time from which the work will be drawn. While you may look at work from a whole week, you should consider resources and logistics. For the purpose of baseline sampling, one to two days may be adequate.

6. Arrange the logistics

The cluster or grade-level team decides who will collect the data and prepare it for the group to analyze. This step includes collecting, removing names, organizing, and copying the work.

STEPS IN DISCUSSION:

7. Facilitate the discussion

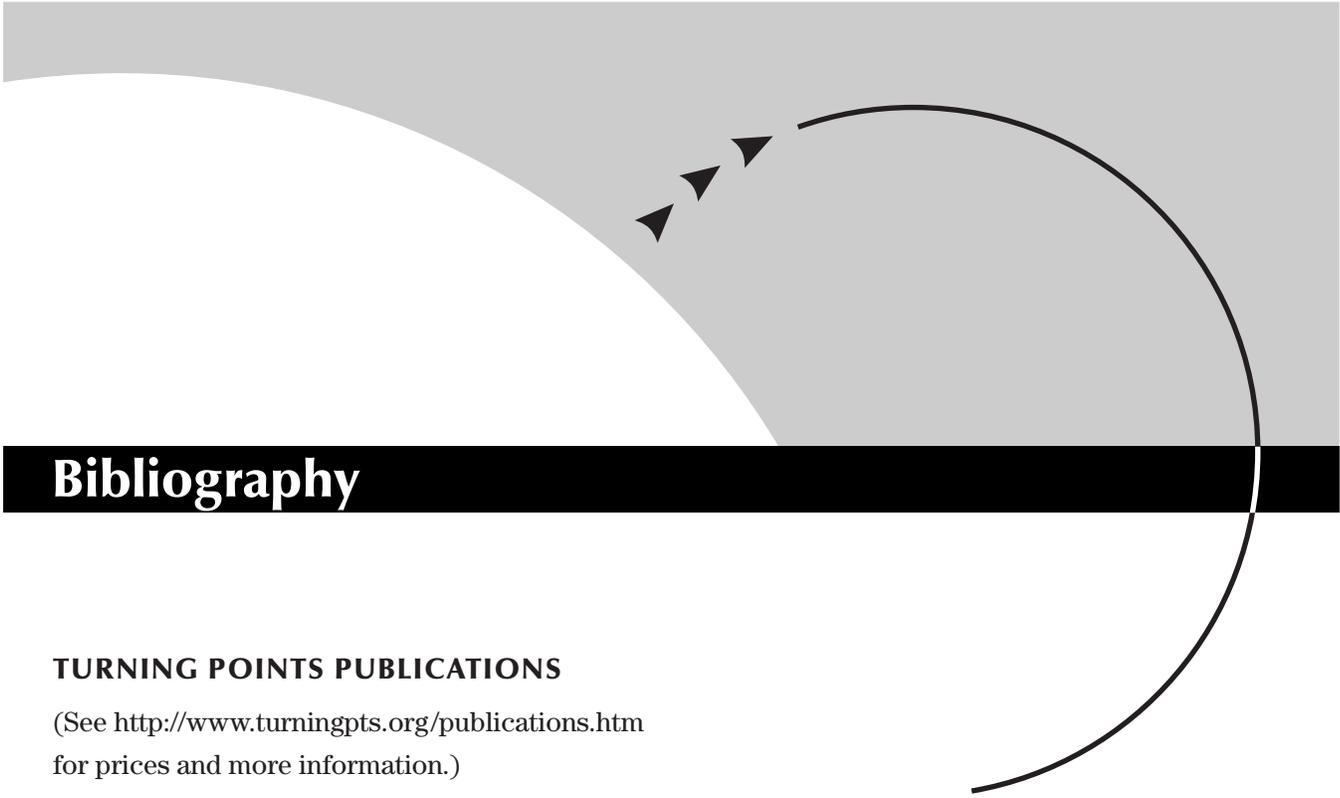
The facilitator reviews all the established norms for the group and restates the guiding question to open up the discussion.

8. Analyze the data

The facilitator describes the methods used for collecting the data and the sample. Then the group engages in analyzing the data. Patterns in the quality of teacher assignments and student work are identified, and strategies are developed to strengthen both.

9. Record the data

A record of findings is kept for comparison with future "slices."



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TURNING POINTS PUBLICATIONS

(See <http://www.turningpts.org/publications.htm> for prices and more information.)

Newsletter

Conversations: This Turning Points newsletter, targeting best middle grades practices, was published from 2000–2004. Each issue offers discussion, examples, and tools related to a single important topic in Turning Points reform.

Guides:

At the Turning Point: The Young Adolescent Learner

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