How to Align Literacy Instruction, Assessment, and Standards

And Achieve Results You NEVER Dreamed Possible

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Foreword by Yvonne S. Freeman
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CHAPTER NINE

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Informing Your Instruction

Looking Closely at Student Work

Consider examining student work closely to learn about your students.
What is the students’ understanding
  ■ about print?
  ■ about genres of writing?
  ■ about the content and craft of writing?
  ■ about communicating thoughts and feelings with the world?
  ■ about the print/sound code?
  ■ about writing conventions?

Consider examining student work closely to learn about yourself.
  ■ What are your students learning because of your instruction?
  ■ What can you learn about the effectiveness of your instruction by examining student work?

Her name is Aleison, an energetic second grader with hair that bounces around her chin line as she looks at me imploringly with her big, round eyes.

“But I want to go to the bathroom!” she exclaims.

“I know that Aleison, but the only reason I am saying no is because you’ve already gone, and besides, you are so smart and your reading journal is blank for today. You haven’t written yet.” It is the second week of September, and the children are still settling into the routine of reading workshop.

Aleison looks at her blank paper and then up at me again. “I was going to write about this book, Spaghetti. I had a connection.”

“Great Aleison, I am glad you had a connection to your book, Spaghetti. What were you going to write?”
“About how it reminds me of when my aunt makes psghetti and we all eat it, like in the story the girl goes to her friends house and eats psghetti.”

“Great! Then why don’t you write, and at sharing time you can share your great connection.” I wait a bit to see if she picks up her pencil. Aleison waits a bit and doesn’t get started. I hope to get her motivated. I tell her, “When you share, we will all get to see how smart you are! I already know how smart you are. Can you start?”

“Really?” she asks me.

“Really,” I respond. Later, at the end of the workshop, Aleison was very proud to share her connection. She had written not one page, but two. She beamed as she held up her book to show everyone the length of her writing.

**Know Your Students Well**

Some students are reluctant to get started with their reading, writing, partner discussions, or other work within the workshops. I am sure that you have experienced days when you wonder, “Just what will I do with the children?” These are tough days in any classroom. On some days, the children are a little hard to motivate. On other days, they seem to forget the routines and rituals of your classroom workshops. All teachers have been there; all teachers know that feeling. On some days, it feels like a fog of inactivity or low energy has enveloped the classroom. I have also had days when I wasn’t sure what to do in order to meet the needs of an individual child who wasn’t learning as rapidly as I had hoped. The answer to times like these, or to help students individually, comes from knowing your students well.

Knowing the children well takes careful planning. I knew what to tell Aleison to get her going because I had been watching her reading and writing behavior over several days. I had listened to her read, discussed books with her, and carefully examined her writing. I knew how to direct her because I knew her abilities, strengths, and needs. I had a plan for her instruction.

Christy, Aleison’s teacher, and I had been meeting regularly to look at her students’ work. Together, we were conferring with the children during reading workshop and noting reading behaviors—including fluency and their ability to retell, work habits, and their writing about reading. Christy was keeping notes on large three-by-four inch labels, which she would later place in her assessment binder under a tab with each child’s name. The note is for writing down things you observe when working with children for just a few minutes, one on one; it is not a diagnostic tool. See Figure 9.1 for an example of a reading workshop note-taking label. Paying close attention to the children taught Christy and me two important things: We learned about the children and their educational needs, and we learned
about our own teaching, identifying the areas that we needed to improve as teachers.

Standards-Based Assessment

In Chapter 3 I discussed standards-based assessments. The types of assessments we rely upon at LRS are simple, effective measures that tell us what our children know, understand, and are able to do. These assessments are embedded into our instruction and classroom routines; they offer the power of a guiding north star. If we watch our children closely and keep notes on their learning, abilities, and needs, we have a north star shining brightly to mark our way throughout the school year. If we fail to capture all of the information right in front of us, we can start to feel lost and our instruction will not have the impact that it could, because it may not be tailored to the needs of the students. Our instruction can also dangerously slip into complacency and lose rigor. To avoid feeling lost or losing rigor in our workshops, we need to reflect daily upon our instruction and the children’s learning.

Making Assessments Meaningful

If our assessments fit our purpose of instruction, there will not be a mismatch between the information we need to plan effective instruction and the information the school or district needs to assess the overall program at the school (Keefe and Jenkins, 2002). For example, if we want to measure the ability of a child to write an engaging beginning, we examine several pieces of writing by that child and score the work using a rubric aligned to the standards and program expectations. This can provide the teacher with the information she needs, and the principal the information she needs, without having to administer a separate assessment that teachers feel wastes their precious instructional time.
The Relationship Between Instruction, Collaboration, and Learning

Let’s look again at the relationship between instruction, assessment, and standards that I highlighted in Chapter 3. There I discussed the connections between these three elements. I explained how looking at student work with colleagues can develop our capacity to learn from the children and thus improve our instruction and better meet the children’s needs.

Now that we have explored the relationship between students’ standards-based performances, effective instruction, and purposeful assessment to inform our instruction, it is time to look at how gathering together as professionals and collaboratively examining student work can affect our learning as teachers, therefore improving student learning. This is the interdependence between classroom interactions—assessment, instruction, and student performance (the bottom portion of Figure 9.2)—and reflective planning interactions—collaboration, teacher learning, and student learning (the top portion of Figure 9.2). As you can see, these parts are

FIGURE 9.2  Interdependence of a Standards-Based Program
interdependent. Our learning as teachers affects our instruction, student learning, and their subsequent performances. When we reflect collaboratively about student work, we discover ways to improve our instruction, the students’ abilities, and their learning.

We Learn as Teachers When We Work Together

Think of the importance of teacher collaboration in terms of Aleison. Aleison left first grade meeting the performance standard: reading level I books independently that have been previewed for the student. When the teacher previews a book with a student, she tells the child the title of the book and what it is about. She also may introduce difficult words (New Standards Primary Literacy Committee, 1999). It is now September, and her independent level is no longer level I; she is actually reading independently at a level G. We use reading levels as described by Fountas and Pinnell in *Matching Books to Readers* (1999). In her just right book bag, she has an assortment of levels to choose from, but Christy and I noticed that when Aleison was trying to read from the level I books, she was easily distracted, played with her pencil sharpener and crayons, and repeatedly got up to go to her desk (she had chosen a work spot in another part of the classroom). Thinking that her book was the wrong level and was therefore causing too much frustration for Aleison during the forty-minute reading portion of the workshop, I sat down and listened to Aleison read from her book bag. I took a running record on her reading of *Spaghetti* by Annette Smith (2001), a leveled text. I wanted to make sure she had a choice of just right books in her bag. I found that the book was at her frustration level.

When Christy and I discussed my observations, Christy changed a few books in Aleison’s just right book bag. The next day Aleison was able to attend a bit longer to her reading task, because she was not as frustrated with her books. Christy’s observations confirmed this change. She also noticed that on the days Aleison had written in her response journal, she was mostly making connections to the text by looking at pictures—this was another big clue that Aleison needed a change of books in her just right book bag. She was not using the text to make connections.

Together Christy and I looked closely at our notes, Aleison’s reading abilities, and her writing, and made a determination that our instruction was partly to blame for Aleison’s lack of focus. We needed to make adjustments for Aleison in order for her to be successful and to learn.

The interaction between the classroom level and the reflective planning level might seem obvious, but I cannot say how many times a frustrated teacher has walked through my door, hands in her hair over a child she is worried about. “I don’t know what to do with this child; I’ve tried everything!” is often what I hear. And then we begin, together, examining what the child knows and is able to do, and what impact past instruction has had on the child’s learning. We then plan the next steps for instruction. It is validating to look at student work samples and past running records and
see evidence of our instruction. When I have been extremely worried about a child and taken the time to reflect carefully, I have always seen my hard work reflected in the student’s work. I usually also see areas that I need to teach the child, and I can use this information in order to plan. It is exactly this process that I learn from. I learn my strengths and weaknesses as a teacher, and I learn what the best next instructional step would be for the child.

**Data Analysis as an Assessment of our Program**

By reflecting on the evidence of student learning daily, during and after instruction, you are actively involved in data analysis. I remember when the LRS team was first working on increasing student achievement at the school. We were working with an external evaluator who encouraged us to “analyze the data” and implored all of us to “analyze data extensively at staff meetings.” The problem with this recommendation was that we had been very active in analyzing data; it was just that our data was not what most school systems traditionally bring to the table to examine. Routinely we convened in grade-level meetings, in collaboration team meetings (a core group of individuals examining professional development issues), and as an entire staff to look at instructional reading levels and student writing samples.

We would unpack student samples for two reasons. First, we wanted to see what our children knew and understood, and we wanted to identify our next steps for instruction. Second, we wanted to see our growth as teachers and learners.

The student samples changed over time. The reading levels were higher, and the writing samples improved. These assessments were authentic because the work we collected focused on real performances and student mastery over a field of knowledge (Keefe and Jenkins, 2002).

These types of observations and this process of analyzing student writing provide incredible amounts of information about the progress of individual students as well as groups of students. The notes and student writing samples collected are invaluable because they provide deep insights into what children know, what they are able to do, and how they construct knowledge (Owocki and Goodman, 2002).

**Two Goals for Assessment**

At Lee Richmond School we have two overarching goals for our assessment—to learn about our children and about ourselves as teachers.

**Learn About the Children**

Overall, our reason for assessing children at LRS is to make changes in our instruction. Through coaching and collaborative relationships, we routinely
ask ourselves if our instruction is making a difference, and if we believe it is, how do we know? We reflect on our instruction, practices, routines, and values. The goal of our reflection is student learning. We want to provide children with an education that will give them the tools to be lifelong readers and writers and choose any path in life they may wish.

The first part of our emphasis on assessment is to know the children. Knowing our students is comprised of two parts:

1. gathering information about them as learners
2. gathering this information through appropriate and authentic assessments

Know and Understand Student Ability and Student Learning
Questions like the following may facilitate your understanding of your students:

- What are the child’s strengths and abilities as a reader?
- What are the child’s strengths and abilities as a writer?
- What are the child’s strengths and abilities in conversation?
- What are the child’s strengths and abilities as a classroom community member?
- What are the child’s work habits, likes, dislikes, dreams, and desires?
- Is your instruction making a difference?
- How do you know?
- What next steps for instruction have you identified for each child?
- How do you know these instructional next steps are correct?
- What learning goals has the child set for himself?
- How did you facilitate the child’s goal setting?
- How will you help the child to be self-reliant as a reader? As a writer?
- How will you support the child in making good choices as a member of your classroom?

Plan and Implement Appropriate Assessments
Appropriate assessments provide information that the teacher can use to plan instruction, conferences, and differentiation of lessons. These assessments are valuable because they provide information about all students’ needs, including the language needs and progress of the English learners. At LRS these assessments include running records, student writing samples, anecdotal notes, lists of books read, student portfolios, and reflective conversations with teacher and other students.

Running records A running record is a tool for recording a child’s exact reading responses, coding the responses, and analyzing the reading behaviors a child makes (Fountas and Pinnell, 1996). The best resource for doing a running record is An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement by Marie Clay (1993). This resource provides step-by-step instructions to
complete a running record and analyze the student responses. At LRS we use running records to record student progress monthly.

**Student writing samples** Teachers keep working portfolios in order to maintain an ongoing examination of student writing. These samples can be in

- pages from response logs
- pages from writer’s notebooks
- drafts of writing projects
- poetry
- completed pieces in different genres

**Anecdotal notes** Teachers keep ongoing anecdotal note sheets. For reading, most teachers at LRS keep the notes on large labels that they later stick into their assessment binders. These are binders where teachers keep their running records for each child, the lesson plans from their guided reading, and their anecdotal notes from reading and writing workshops.

**Lists of books read** Teachers may keep a list of books that students compile. These lists provide insight into what selections children make and what their reading habits are. We use these lists to note student interest, stamina, and habits in reading.

**Types of Assessment Involving Student Choice and Reflection**

**Student portfolios** In Angela’s fourth-grade classroom, the working portfolios are kept in a large bin near the cluster of desks for each group of students. They are able to access their work in progress and examine recently completed writing at any time. Teachers can use working portfolios or performance portfolios to keep artifacts of student learning and achievement (Owocki and Goodman, 2002).

Portfolios don’t have to be fancy—any sturdy folder or file that students can access easily does the job. The work is put in the portfolio as evidence of learning. It may be something a student is particularly proud of or work that shows progress over time. Working portfolios may be the artifacts that the teacher insists on keeping (remember, we need a system to collect work to inform our instruction).

Portfolios are particularly important when showing the progress of English learners. Standardized tests don’t typically show the real abilities of English learners, but portfolios show evidence of a student’s language abilities and growth over time (Freeman and Freeman, 1998).

**Reflective conversations with teacher and other students** Students can learn to reflect on their work through guided conversations. Experiences that affirm students’ sense of accomplishment and provide them opportunities to reflect upon progress in their work lead to powerful learning (Hebert, 2001).

This is the type of reflective conversation that Joseph was involved in during a writer’s celebration in Dawn’s room. At the beginning of the
celebration Dawn explained that each child was to reflect upon what he learned as a writer in this nonfiction study, and then show a page of his work that was particularly meaningful. When it was his turn, Joseph pulled out a blue note and read the lines shown in Figure 9.3.

**Learn About Ourselves as Teachers**

It is a cold, blustery day in February, and the staff are slowly making their way to room 54, the portable classroom at the far end of the school. Inside, Sue is waiting for everyone; she is the host for the meeting that day. Her room is cozy and inviting, and there is a collective sigh of relief and

**FIGURE 9.3** Joseph’s Note

```
I learn that you have to think more
and it's not just writing facts down on a piece of paper you have to do nonfiction conventions and add every day. The hardest thing for me was a map the easiest was a list. And in nonfiction it's not made up it's true facts. And I learn it's fun and exiting to write and read.
```
engagement as we settle in for our work together on this early-release day teacher meeting. The staff gathers in groups to examine samples of student writing. Our goal this day is to unpack student writing for a glimpse of overall student growth at the school. We do this by choosing a genre of work, laying the student work on the table next to the standards, and then discussing each component of the standard, looking for evidence in the students’ writing that the children are developing competence toward the overall standard as well as each component of the standard. By doing this we are looking at a slice of learning at the school. We get an overall feel of instruction and achievement. On this particular day, we look at kindergarten, second grade, third grade, and fifth grade.

Breanna is in first grade. The four first-grade teachers have a copy of Breanna’s piece and the notes that Angela, Breanna’s teacher, provided. Breanna writes about playing games at her cousin’s house.

One day I went to my cosans house to play with them I played there play sashom 64. I did one of my sisters and I beeted her I played race cars It was fun then I playd another race car and after that I playd crash banie coot and we got to have a snak it was a cookie it was good and we had punch with the cookies my sister “said” to go crazy and I did. I was so crazy I bumped my head on the door. She thought that it was funny I didont I said you go crazy and she did my mom came in the room and she “said” what are erth are you doing and we “said” uhm nothing. then my cosan came in she screamd becoase my siser mest her room up she thath [thought] I did.

Angela’s note-taking sheet included the following information: the unit of study, the component of the standard taught, notes on Breanna’s strengths, and a focus for her in conferring. See Figure 9.4. At the bottom of the note-taking sheet, the team listed the strengths they saw in Breanna’s writing in relation to the standards and some suggestions for instruction.

- The team noted her strengths: Breanna can stick to one event and describe the event in details, and tell characters’ thoughts and feelings.
- The team also saw areas for improvement: Breanna needs help punctuating sentences with periods. She uses capital letters to create sentences, but does not use periods. She is beginning to understand how to use quotation marks, but only puts the quotation marks around the word said.

When we look at student work in this manner, we use the following pieces of information:

- the student writing piece
- the student learning record
- the teacher’s plan for the unit of study, including anchor minilessons
Assessing Student Work for Adult Learning—Four Structures

We have four structures in place at LRS to assess student work and guide the improvement of instruction. These structures focus on our learning as teachers. We learn a great deal about what our children know by participating in these collaborative learning opportunities, but the main goal is to assess our own understandings and improve our instruction. We assess student work within four structures:

1. Examining work as a school team. (This is what we did when we looked at Breanna’s piece.)
2. Evaluating writing across a grade level.
3. Scoring student work with a rubric.
4. Analyzing running record scores.

**Evaluating Writing Across a Grade Level**

In addition to examining work as a school team, we evaluate student work routinely by grade level. At a grade-level meeting, each team member brings a piece of student writing. Usually I have previously specified by e-mail what type of work they need to bring. For example, I might write, “We are examining student learning today in nonfiction writing. Please bring to the meeting your most recent samples of nonfiction writing for three students—your most accomplished writer, a writer you consider to be learning at an acceptable rate, and a learner who is struggling.”

Sometimes we also look at the work of the grade level above and the grade level below to see student growth and evidence of our instruction. This work gives the team a concept of what the developing abilities are of the children who will be coming to them, and of the children they sent on to the next grade level. By having these discussions, the teaching team is able to widen their perspective and understanding of student need, ability, and learning. As professionals we focus on both student learning and on our own learning. These are the keys to a high-performing, collaborative team (Dufour and Eaker, 1998). We examine the student performances carefully, in specific ways, to uncover the effectiveness of our instruction individually as teachers and to develop our understanding as an organization focused on learning and growing together (McDonald, 2002).

**Protocol for Examining Student Work**

We have a specific method, or protocol, for examining student work when we unpack it to see student growth in relation to standards. As a grade-level team, we gather at a table covered with a large piece of butcher paper so that everyone can see what will be written and share in the experience of unpacking the student work as we share our thoughts about student learning and effective instruction. A grid is laid out on this paper, much like the table in Figure 9.5. Across the top of the grid the components of the standard are written. Our next step is to read the piece out loud and discuss together whether or not a student shows evidence of the component of the standard.

This is the protocol for unpacking student work in review:

- The team gathers around a table in order to work collaboratively.
- Write the analysis grid on a large sheet of paper—large enough for all involved to be able to see.
- Distribute copies of the piece to the team.
- One person reads the piece aloud.
The team discusses the student’s work in relation to the components listed at the top of the grid.
- The group discusses how the student demonstrated understanding.
- The group identifies the next steps for instruction.

Second-Grade Writing
Dawn, Billy, Christy, and Suzanne, the second-grade team, analyzed Joseph’s piece, titled “Sick Sister,” in relation to the performance standard for narrative writing. This analysis was based on the components of the New Standards writing standard for second grade (New Standards Primary Literacy Committee, 1999). You can see in the commentary in Figure 9.5 that overall the team felt that Joseph demonstrated competence in each area of the standard expectations for narrative writing. Figure 9.6 is Joseph’s final draft of a memoir he wrote in the spring. The unit of study focus was Learning to use literary language in our writing.

Fifth-Grade Writing
Linda, Doug, and Dorothy, the fifth-grade team, analyzed a piece written by a student in Linda’s class. Kyle wrote his piece, titled “At the Beach” (Figure 9.7), when Linda was teaching a unit of study on memoir. In this unit, Linda emphasized two areas that her students were struggling with:
- adding sensory details to make their writing richer and more interesting
- maintaining focus of the piece in the middle so as not to lose the reader

When the team looked at Kyle’s piece, they evaluated his writing to see if he had learned some of the writing techniques that Linda had focused on in this memoir study, and evaluated his understanding of writing development. This team also sat down at a table with a large piece of butcher paper draped in front of all of them. They wrote out the components of the standard across the top of the grid, and then carefully looked at Kyle’s piece in comparison to the components of the standard. The components are the expectations of student narrative writing in fifth grade. Notice what comments the team made (Figure 9.8) and how they provided exact quotes from Kyle’s piece to back up their thinking. The team also made recommendations for the next instructional steps for Kyle; these are listed at the bottom of the form.

Understanding Our Students and Ourselves
By looking closely at student work in comparison to the standard, the teachers were able to reflect on the students’ learning as well as the effectiveness of their own instruction. As teachers, we need to look carefully at our student work in order to realize how much our students are learning. At LRS we look at student work in this formal way three or four times throughout the year. This formal process has helped us become effective...
FIGURE 9.5 Standards Analysis Sheet: Unpacking Joseph’s Piece

Student Performance—Narrative Writing Analysis Sheet

Standard Performance: By the end of the year, second-grade students will produce a narrative or autobiographical account

Second-grade students will write a memoir in which they are able to control the following components:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student name</th>
<th>Incorporates some literary language.</th>
<th>Does not simply tell an account of events, but ties the events together.</th>
<th>Focuses on one event, and leaves out extraneous details.</th>
<th>Develops internal events as well as external events. The child tells not only what happens to a character, but also what the character thinks and feels.</th>
<th>Uses dialogue effectively.</th>
<th>Creates a believable world by introducing characters and using specific details about characters, setting, characters’ feelings and actions.</th>
<th>Provides some sense of closure.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Carlos’ piece titled “Sick Sister”</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td>“one nice day in the morning”</td>
<td>“At that moment,”</td>
<td>“Shining through the darkness of the night.”</td>
<td>Joseph uses transitional words and phrases: “The next day” “That night” “A few minutes later”</td>
<td>Joseph gives very precise details of one event.</td>
<td>Only uses dialogue in one place. “Where are we going?” “to the hospital,” he sighed. While Joseph’s use of dialogue is not extensive, it is effective.</td>
<td>“the next day my sister came home. My mom said they took her in a big room, but I didn’t care I was just glad that my sister was okay. I sat there for the longest moment hugging her.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Reading and Writing Grade by Grade: Primary Literacy Standards for Kindergarten Through Third Grade (New Standards Primary Literacy Committee, NCEE, 1999).
and efficient at examining student work on a daily basis, even in the middle of the workshops. This skill helps us plan more effective minilessons and guide our share time within the workshops to highlight students who have tried to extend themselves in writing, reading, and language.

Even if you don’t work with the New Standards performance standards, you can create your own based on the content standards for your district-adopted curriculum. Think of the performance you want students to complete, and then describe it precisely and succinctly. These descriptions become the components that you can list on a blank grid to conduct a formal, collaborative conversation studying student work. (See Figure 9.9

FIGURE 9.6 Joseph’s Piece “Sick Sister”

Joseph Carlos 5-15-03
Sick Sister
One nice day in the
morning my sister became
sick, the next day me
and my mom discerred she
got sick. So we gave her
some jivos, and made her
she got napes. That night
I herd my dad say come
on lets go, I wondered where
we where going. So I got
in the car. I ased my
dad. ‘Where are we going?
To the hospitl’ he sighted.
At that moment I froze, I
sat ther almost motionless,
what was going to happen
to my sister. I felt the
terrible well up in my eyes,
my hart lept in my chest.
I was wored like a cat
infront of a canteen, so we
came to a building,
we walked thru the
dors with bright lights
shining throug the darkness
of the night we came
to a uniform cooler place.
for a blank student work unpacking sheet.) This process will help you grow in your ability to understand and see your students’ needs. It also will help you become more precise in your minilessons. When you know and understand what your children can do, it is easier to plan instruction that fits their needs.

This evaluation process can train you to be reflective about your instruction and overall program. Focus on questions like the following:

- Examine student work to understand what students know and are able to do. Based on these student understandings, what are the next steps for instruction?
What changes need to be made in the classroom environment to improve instruction? To improve the support for learning?

How is instruction differentiated for the specific needs of the children?

How does examining the work of your students develop your learning as a teacher?

How does examining the work of your students help you evaluate your teaching?

How does examining the work of your students help you evaluate your program?
Scoring Student Writing

At LRS we are reluctant to give a score that evaluates and eventually hinders student growth. Our students struggle with many issues in their lives, including stability, love, hunger, and hope. The last thing our students need is for their teacher to dash their hopes at school. You may be the only person who is holding their lives together by providing a nurturing environment and appropriate, rigorous expectations. The children need to know that you believe in them. Because of these issues, our use of rubrics to score...
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**FIGURE 9.8 Standards Analysis Sheet: Unpacking Kyle's Piece**

**Student Performance—Narrative Writing Analysis Sheet**

Standard Performance: By the end of the year, fifth-grade students will produce a narrative or autobiographical account

Fifth-grade students will write a memoir in which they are able to control the following components:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student name</th>
<th>Engages the reader</th>
<th>Creates a natural sequence of events</th>
<th>Focuses on one event and leaves out extraneous details</th>
<th>Develops a character, shows motivation for characters actions and feelings. Has the character solve a problem.</th>
<th>Provides pacing in the story. The action speeds up and slows down.</th>
<th>Uses dialogue effectively.</th>
<th>Creates a believable world by introducing characters through precise detail.</th>
<th>Develops the plot, or event. Tells about the actions and emotions of the main character through details.</th>
<th>Adds reflective comments.</th>
<th>Provides some sense of closure.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kyle Garcia, “The Beach”</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Begins with a setting. Has sensory details. Includes character motivation.</td>
<td>Yes Establishes setting and conflict (cannot swim, sand is hot). Has a strong character point of view regarding ocean.</td>
<td>Yes Somewhat The event is about his trip to the ocean. He adds in extraneous detail near the end. Instructional focus: Teach Kyle how to describe events that are meaningful.</td>
<td>Yes Wanted to jump into the water, but didn’t know how to swim. Explains what occurred and how his mom helped him.</td>
<td>No The pacing is off in the middle because he doesn’t explain the event. Instructional focus: Help Kyle work on pacing, good use of details.</td>
<td>No Only has one or two things said aloud by the character. Instructional focus: Help Kyle add more depth and description of the events.</td>
<td>Yes Adds internal thoughts and dialogue with his mother.</td>
<td>Somewhat “How could I have forgotten all that stuff?” “All I wanted to do was dive in the water.”</td>
<td>Yes Describes the sunset. Told the reader what he wanted (reflective comment)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Performance Standards, Volume 1 (NCEE, 1997).
FIGURE 9.9  Blank Student Work Unpacking Sheet

Analysis Sheet—Student Performance: ____________________________


Grade: Student will ____________________________

List the components of your standards in each numbered box

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name</th>
<th>#1</th>
<th>#2</th>
<th>#3</th>
<th>#4</th>
<th>#5</th>
<th>#6</th>
<th>#7</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

Next Instructional Steps:

student work at LRS is to provide children with information about how to improve their writing, not just to evaluate or to punish the children for something they may not know how to do.

When you use rubrics with students, your aim should be to learn as much as possible about the children’s abilities. If you are not seeing success in student writing, consider adjusting your teaching in order to better support students. Look at the piece by Cristian (Figure 9.10), an English learner in third grade. He wrote this piece after being in Kathy’s classroom only a short while. Kathy’s classroom was Cristian’s first experience learning to write in a writing workshop. When he joined the class, he would often ask

FIGURE 9.10 Cristian’s Piece “My Puppy Got Lost”

One day my puppy got lost. He got lost because he found a hole in our door at night and he scraped. My stamay was hurting and

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Kathy for a prompt for his notebook; he was accustomed to writing on a preselected topic. Eventually Cristian became used to expressing his ideas in writing. Cristian and Kathy were both very proud of his piece.

Cristian had learned a lot about writing and controlling the craft of a narrative. Kathy stated that she saw a lot of growth in Cristian’s writing; he had learned to add character feelings and thoughts to his work. It is also important to notice the vocabulary Cristian uses in his piece. He is at the early intermediate level of English fluency and is beginning to write words like *stomach* and *conversation*.
This piece is a wonderful example of his English acquisition development, his development in understanding the craft of writing, and how effective third-grade writers write. Some of the mix-up in the events in the middle is due to Cristian’s language development. Kathy understood this, and when she conferred with him on his writing, she modeled for him how she wanted third graders to write, and how language looks and sounds when written. She could tailor his instruction right to his level.

When comparing his piece to the rubric (Figure 9.11), we can see that Cristian demonstrates understanding of many indicators under rating three. Using a rubric can be a double-edged sword. We want students to
know what is expected of good writers, but we don’t want to punish them or discourage them for their language development. It is important to recognize English learners’ distinct needs when scoring their work with a rubric designed for mainstream students (Beaumont, Valenzuela, and Trumble, 2002). The most effective way to score the work is with the students, discussing each point with them and letting them see where they place on a developmental continuum. This is exactly the information that is helpful for parents; merely assigning a score or a grade is uninformative and can be damaging to the self-reliance, determination, and hope children have. I advocate the use of rubrics to inform children precisely where they
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 4      | • Engages the reader through specific detail in the first paragraph.  
      | • Creates a natural sequence of events throughout the piece.  
      | • Has a well-developed beginning, middle, and end.  
      | • Focuses on one topic. The focus of the piece is small and includes details to make the reader feel the piece is real.  
      | • Does not include extraneous details.  
      | • Provides pacing of the action throughout the piece.  
      | • Character is fully developed. Shows character actions, feelings, and motivations throughout the piece. Character solves a problem.  
      | • Uses dialogue effectively.  
      | • Creates a believable world by introducing characters with precise detail or word choice.  
      | • Develops the plot or event by telling about the actions and emotions of the main character with details.  
      | • Adds reflective comments throughout the piece.  
      | • Provides a sense of closure. |
| 3      | • Engages the reader with only the first two sentences.  
      | • Creates a natural sequence of events in the beginning. The sequence of events becomes choppy in the middle.  
      | • Focuses on one topic, but the piece loses focus in the middle.  
      | • Includes some extraneous details.  
      | • Provides some pacing of the action in parts of the piece.  
      | • Character is partially developed. Shows character actions, feelings, and motivations in parts of the piece, but not throughout.  
      | • Uses dialogue effectively part of the time, but not throughout the piece.  
      | • Creates a believable world through detail in the beginning. Characters are not described with precise detail or word choice.  
      | • Partially develops the plot or event by telling about the actions and emotions of the main character with details.  
      | • Adds reflective comments, but comments are not throughout the piece.  
      | • Provides a sense of closure. |
| 2      | • Attempts an engaging beginning, “One day.”  
      | • Does not create a natural sequence of events, but does have a sequence.  
      | • Does not have a logical beginning, middle, or end.  
      | • Does not focus on one topic.  
      | • Does not have enough details to make it seem real.  
      | • Includes a lot of extraneous details.  
      | • Has no pacing of the action throughout the piece.  
      | • Character is not developed.  
      | • Has dialogue, but some dialogue is not effective.  
      | • Does not create a believable world throughout the piece.  
      | • Does not have character description.  
      | • Does not have reflective comments. |
| 1      | • Has a beginning.  
      | • Has no sequence of events.  
      | • Is not focused on one event, or the event is not well-developed.  
      | • Has no dialogue.  
      | • Does not create a believable world.  
      | • Does not develop the plot.  
      | • Has no beginning, middle, or end. |
| 0      | • No response. |
are in relation to all of the descriptors, but not as a score. Thinking of assessment this way should also help us grow as teachers.

**Rubrics That Grow with the Class**

One way to develop an appropriate rubric that nurtures children while they develop their writing and language skills is to create a rubric that grows with student understanding. Doug does this with his fifth and sixth graders in order to give them a sense of expectation while developing their capabilities to reflect on their own work. In Chapter 8, I discussed how to develop a unit of study that builds upon past and previous units. When planning for a unit of study, I emphasized thinking small and focusing on only two components of a standard at a time in order to teach precisely and not overwhelm students. It is defeating to students to use a rubric with all expectations listed early in the year, because the teacher has not yet exposed the children to all of the ideas or taught the skills and craft of writing explicitly in minilessons. It seems hardly useful to evaluate students’ writing, or have students evaluate their own writing, on all the rubric indicators when those points have not been taught. A rubric indicator is a succinct statement of what should be in a piece of writing.

To provide a more satisfying experience, Doug designed organic rubrics. Organic rubrics grow as the students learn and develop their writing abilities. When Doug introduces a new idea to the class and feels they are ready to use the craft or skill in their writing, he adds it to the growing rubric as an expectation. See Doug’s narrative writing rubric for September in Figure 9.12.

**FIGURE 9.12  Doug’s Organic Rubric, Phase 1**

| 3 | • My narrative is interesting. I have effectively used an action-packed beginning (dramatic statement).  
• My narrative is focused. I have used the “funneling” strategy to give my paper focus.  
• My narrative has a powerful ending.  
• My draft was taken from my notebook in an organized and thoughtful way.  
• I have made three or more revisions to my draft. |
|---|---|
| 2 | • My narrative is interesting. I have attempted an action-packed beginning (dramatic statement).  
• My narrative is mostly focused. I have tried the “funneling” strategy.  
• My narrative has an ending.  
• My draft was taken from my notebook in an organized way.  
• I have made two revisions to my draft. |
| 1 | • I have not used an action-packed beginning.  
• My narrative has no focus.  
• My narrative has no ending.  
• I just copied an entry from my notebook for my draft.  
• I did not revise my draft. I just copied my draft. |
In November he added indicators to score point 3. The rubric then looked like Figure 9.13.

When you develop a rubric with the class, the tool seems more useful to the children because they developed it with you. The best rubrics for students are in “kid language,” like Doug’s. When writing a rubric for or with children, make sure that most of the indicators start with a verb. Here are some sample “kid-language” rubric indicators.

My piece

- has an engaging beginning
- is easy to read
- makes sense when I read it out loud
- has details in the middle that describe how things look or sound

Using a Rubric to Gather Information About Our Teaching

Rubrics have lots of potential to inform our teaching. When a student scores a four on a four-point rubric, it is important to stop and reflect on why the student received that score and what it means for our teaching. It is also important to reflect on those same questions when a student does...
not score well on a rubric. As teachers, we need to think about what we can change in order to support the child’s learning.

If you choose to use a rubric to assess students, maintain an appropriate focus:

■ What is your goal for using the rubric?
■ How will the rubric help the child learn to reflect on her progress?
■ How will you use the rubric to inform parents about writing expectations in your class?
■ How will the rubric inform your teaching and help you modify your instruction as necessary?
■ How will the rubric help or hinder assessing the writing of English learners?

Focusing on Success for English Learners

When scoring or evaluating the writing of English learners, it is extremely important to understand the language acquisition level of the child and how children acquire language. Otherwise, children may be marked down for syntax and vocabulary use when they are actually performing at an expected level (Beaumont, Valenzuela, and Trumble, 2002). At LRS we use the same rubric for scoring the writing of both English learners and mainstream students, but when evaluating the work of an English learner, first we score the content (the craft and writing strategies). Then we look at the piece and reflect on the child’s language acquisition development. By looking closely at student work in this way, we discover how much of the craft and content of writing the children are learning, and we learn about their language development progress.

Yasmin wrote the piece “The Day My Aunt Lupita Died” (Figure 9.14) when she was in second grade. Yasmin was at an early intermediate fluency level in English. The student work analysis sheet for second grade (Figure 9.15) lists the indicators for narrative writing across the top. Yasmin has learned a lot about the craft and content of a memoir. Her piece shows she is still growing in her fluency and writing abilities. It is important to first look at Yasmin’s work “top down” because concentrating on the surface areas of spelling and punctuation does little to teach Yasmin how to create a successful piece of writing (Gibbons, 1991). When examining Yasmin’s language abilities, it is most informative to notice what she can do as a writer in English, and then guide her language development through continued immersion in the language and literature during the day and provide instruction specific to her needs.

Pauline Gibbons developed a writing analysis sheet (in Learning to Learn in a Second Language, 1991) in order for teachers to develop an understanding of a student’s language development needs. According to
The following language features help us understand how a student controls language:

- **Vocabulary**
  - Is the vocabulary used appropriate to the text type?
  - Is there variety in word choice (precise words are substituted for overused words)?

- **Sentence structure and grammar**
  - Does the student use correct tense, subject-verb agreement, word order, prepositions?
  - Does the student use a variety of sentences, from simple to complex?

- **Text cohesion**
  - Are connective words used to link ideas together?
  - Are the connective words correctly used?
  - Is the use of pronouns clear?

### Evaluating Spelling and Conventions

As you may notice, spelling and conventions are not addressed in the analysis sheets or rubrics presented. That is because the focus of these analysis sheets is to improve our abilities as teachers to teach writing effectively. Conventions and spelling are important and are part of writing instruction; however, writing conventions are distinctly different from writing content. Separate rubrics or evaluation tools should be used for conventions. Any of
Second-grade students will write a memoir in which they are able to control the following components:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student name</th>
<th>Incorporates some literary language.</th>
<th>Does not simply tell an account of events, but ties the events together.</th>
<th>Focuses on one topic and leaves out extraneous details.</th>
<th>Develops internal events as well as external events. The child tells not only what happens to a character, but also what the character thinks and feels.</th>
<th>Uses dialogue effectively.</th>
<th>Creates a believable world by introducing characters and using specific details about characters, setting, characters' feelings and actions.</th>
<th>Provides some sense of closure.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yasmin's piece “The Day My Aunt Lupita Died”</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Examples: “A sad time in my life was when my Aunt Lupita died. I was six years old when this happened.”</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yasmin tells the story in chronological order. Remarkably, she tells it through the events and her feelings, not events only.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Describes how her aunt looked, how she died and how the baby died too. Does not include events not related to this story.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the New Standards publications from NCEE provide excellent direction for evaluating student progress in writing conventions and spelling.

Coaching Each Other

As we developed skills in looking at student work, we became increasingly interested in working as a team to teach each other. In 2003, the team decided on four components that were integral to our continued development as a school and as teacher leaders in literacy. The team decided to focus on the following areas for collaboration during the next school year.

1. Examining the quality of our units of study. Specifically, the teams decided to bring lesson plans for units of study, with accompanying student work, to meetings to discuss these questions:

   ■ What were the objectives of the unit (components of the standard)?
   ■ What does the student work look like?
   ■ Analyze the student work from what was taught. Is there evidence of instruction in the work?
   ■ If yes, what exactly can the students do as evidence?
     ■ What are the next steps for instruction?
     ■ What are the students ready for?
     ■ How can we stretch their learning?
   ■ If no, what exactly is lacking?
   ■ Where might the instruction have not been clear?
   ■ What parts of the unit were difficult to teach?
   ■ What additional resources are needed?

2. Collecting a precise slice of instruction. Specifically, a teacher will describe exactly how he developed a minilesson within a unit of study, citing resources, professional texts used for learning (of the teacher), and the student texts or literature used. The grade team will ask the teacher:

   ■ How did you structure your lesson?
   ■ What did you hope to achieve with your instruction?
   ■ What did you actually get? (What was the student learning? How do you know?)

3. Rotating observations. Specifically, the team decided that throughout the year teachers could ask to be observed by other teachers on staff. Their goal for the observations was to work collaboratively as part of our focused walks. (Focused walks are organized visits to classrooms. We go into classrooms as teams of teachers, administrators, and coaches looking for specific items as evidence of change and effectiveness in our programs.) The team decided in 2003 that our focused walks would change to rotating observations where staff members
would help other staff members see evidence of instruction, student growth, and teacher growth and learning. The objectives for rotating observations are:

- To be fed professionally (we “feed” each other for renewal of energy).
- To provide feedback.
- To narrow our focus when observing in order to be precise in our assessment and instruction.
- To know the issues, face them, and lay them out for discussion.
- To become more comfortable with observers.
- To increase videotaping as a learning tool.

4. Teacher-leader coaching. Specifically, the team decided to formally coach one another. While Kristina, the literacy coach; Kim, the learning director; and I had been coaching the staff over three years, coaching had become a cultural norm in the school, and the need and desire for coaching had outgrown what the three of us could provide. Therefore, the team decided that they would begin to coach each other more often. The goals of the coaching would include:

- Defining what the teacher wants to be coached on.
- Organizing release schedules for teachers to visit classrooms during instruction.
- Having the coach watch the minilessons and analyze student work collaboratively with the teacher in follow-up meetings after school.
- Helping the teacher articulate student learning goals in specific terms.

The coach might focus on the following questions:

- What do you want the children to learn?
- Is that the right next instructional step?
- Is everything (instruction and classroom support) working toward your objective?
- Do you think you got the kids to your objective?
- What do you feel worked really well in your workshop today?

Additional information regarding the coaching model for professional development is available online. Please visit http://www.heinemann.com/akhavan.

**Our Learning Equals Student Learning**

By meeting in support groups, we define our own professional development around assessment of student work and instruction; we form support for our own learning. The types of structures the Lee Richmond teachers decided to put in place will help us assess our program overall and our day-
to-day instruction. We support this intense work at LRS by an intense focus on professional development. As I mentioned in the first chapter, our school is blessed to be part of a district that values the professional development of teachers by pouring resources, both monetary and personnel, into the support of professional development across the district. At LRS, we enhance this focus with structures for adult learning, beginning with the assessment of our instruction and growing from the collaborative coaching relationships.
Thank you for sampling this resource.

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