NCTE Position Statement

A statement on an education issue approved by the NCTE Board of Directors or the NCTE Executive Committee

Formative Assessment That
Truly Informs Instruction

Approved by the NCTE Executive Committee

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Effective teachers are constantly engaged in the process of formative assessment: offering one more bit of explanation from the front of the room when students' heads tilt and brows furrow, asking a student to re-read a paragraph (this time aloud, maybe) when he shrugs at a question in a conference, handing a student her soon-to-be new favorite book based on the dozens of conversations about the kinds of stories she likes and doesn't over the course of the year. These acts of decision making, informed by student response to purposeful or intuitive prompts, are the threads out of which skill, knowledge, and understanding are woven collaboratively by teachers and students.

Formative assessment is the lived, daily embodiment of a teacher's desire to refine practice based on a keener understanding of current levels of student performance, undergirded by the teacher's knowledge of possible paths of student development within the discipline and of pedagogies that support such development.

Formative assessment can look more structured, too, with teachers beginning a class period with a discussion of a short list of general misunderstandings garnered from a recent quiz, grouping students with varied activities based on the writing they did the class period before, or pairing students to read each other's drafts with a prepared list of questions and prompts. In whatever shape it takes, formative assessment is the lived, daily embodiment of a teacher's desire to refine practice based on a keener understanding of current levels of student performance, undergirded by the teacher's knowledge of possible paths of student development within the discipline and of pedagogies that support such development. At its essence, true formative assessment is assessment that is informing—to teachers, students, and families.

Well over a decade into federal education policy that endows significant consequences to single tests of student achievement too late in the academic year to lead to any action, teachers might be pleased that the term "formative assessment" is appearing in the broader discourse among test makers and publishers of educational materials. Teachers are very aware that frequent, in-process checks for understanding are what allow them to teach better and improve student achievement, an awareness that has been supported by extensive research into formative assessment since the 1960s. However, applying the term "formative assessment" to those commercial products or tools that are sought out, purchased, or imposed by those least involved in the daily work of classroom learning raises serious concerns: *Unless a formative assessment tool functions demonstrably as a lever for meaningful teacher and student decision making, it is being marketed under erroneous pretenses.* While well-designed tools or assessment strategies are a key component to authentic formative assessment, if they are not what teachers consider the right tools for the immediate task at hand, they are frustrating and counterproductive.

The sections that follow offer first a broad discussion of the many and varied purposes of assessment, followed by an explanation of what formative assessment *is* and *is not*, highlighting the central importance of teacher decision making in the process of assessment that informs instruction and improves student learning. At the end, readers will find a checklist for decision makers considering the best ways to incorporate formative assessment into the learning cycle of students in their schools.

Not All Formative Assessment Is Created Equal

Teachers and schools assess students in a variety of ways for a variety of reasons—from the broad categories of sorting, ranking, and judging to the more nuanced purposes of determining specific levels of student understanding, restructuring curricula to meet student needs, and differentiating instruction among students. In the recent past, educators have made a strong distinction between *summative assessment* (generally seen as a final evaluative judgment) and *formative assessment* (generally seen as ongoing assessment to improve teaching and learning). However, in today's assessment environment this distinction may be a false one; in fact, many believe the difference between the two terms has more to do with how the data that is generated from assessments is actually used (Gallagher). For example, formative assessments that are really mini-summative assessments, designed in large part to improve performance on summative assessments, are quite different from formative assessments that "occur at or near the point of instruction, allowing teachers and students to make the right decisions about teaching and learning at the right time for the right reasons" (Gallagher 82). Johnston (1997) offers a useful distinction between these two types of assessment when he suggests that questions or assessments can be interpreted either as genuine requests for information *or* as assertions of control. Teacher-created classroom assessments designed to inform instruction are much more likely to function as real requests for information that can change instruction and improve learning; "mini-summative" assessments, because of the

external imposition and distance from in-the-moment decision making, serve as a means of control (of teachers, students, and curriculum). Thus, while many recently released commercial products advertised as formative assessment suggest that their main use is to prepare students for summative assessment, most educators recognize formative assessment as "a systematic process to continually gather evidence about student learning" (Heritage, 141). This kind of authentic formative assessment, teachers contend, is rooted in instructional activity and is connected directly to the teaching and learning occurring at that moment (Pinchot & Brandt).

Over 30 years of research suggest formative assessment is a vital curricular component, proven to be highly effective in increasing student learning (Black & Wiliam 1998). Cizek distilled this research, identifying 10 elements across the studies that researchers have noted as important features (Cizek 8).

Formative assessment:
1. Requires students to take responsibility for their own learning.
2. Communicates clear, specific learning goals.
3. Focuses on goals that represent valuable educational outcomes with applicability beyond the learning context.
4. Identifies the student's current knowledge/skills and the necessary steps for reaching the desired goals.
5. Requires development of plans for attaining the desired goals.
6. Encourages students to self-monitor progress toward the learning goals.
7. Provides examples of learning goals including, when relevant, the specific grading criteria or rubrics that will be used to evaluate the student's work.
8. Provides frequent assessment, including peer and student self-assessment and assessment embedded within learning activities.
9. Includes feedback that is non-evaluative, specific, timely, and related to the learning goals, and that provides opportunities for the student to revise and improve work products and deepen understandings.
10. Promotes metacognition and reflection by students on their work.

Heritage further categorizes formative assessments into three types that all contribute to the learning cycle:
- "on-the-fly" (those that happen during a lesson),
- "planned-for-interaction" (those decided before instruction), and
- "curriculum-embedded" (embedded in the curriculum and used to gather data at significant points during the learning process).

At the center of all this research is one underlying idea: Formative assessment is a constantly occurring process, a verb, a series of events in action, not a single tool or a static noun. In order for formative assessment to have an impact on instruction and student learning, teachers must be involved every step of the way and have the flexibility to make decisions throughout the assessment process. Teachers are "the primary agents, not passive consumers, of assessment information. It is their ongoing, formative assessments that primarily influence students' learning" (Joint Task Force on Assessment, Standard 2).

Formative Assessment as Stance
In order for teachers to be successful assessors, they must develop an "assessment literacy" (Gallagher & Turley): a deep understanding of why they assess, when they assess, and how they assess in ways that positively impact student learning. In addition, successful teacher assessors view assessment through an inquiry lens, using varying assessments to learn from and with their students in order to adjust classroom practices accordingly. Together these two qualities—a deep knowledge of assessment and an inquiry approach to assessment—create a particular stance toward assessment.

When teachers who hold this stance as knowledgeable inquirers are given the autonomy to make decisions about the assessment practices that will provide meaningful information in their own classrooms, formative assessment can indeed be powerful and productive, especially those assessments that are planned, designed, implemented, and studied by the classroom teacher (Stephens & Story). The most meaningful of these assessments provide information the teacher can use to better understand her students and to then support them in taking the next steps in their learning. The best formative assessments are not focused exclusively on externally mandated learning outcomes but also on timely information that teachers can use to determine a student's current understanding and the areas that are nearly within the student's reach (Vygotsky).

As knowledgeable inquirers, teachers are able to choose among a variety of tools and strategies that best suit the context of their own classrooms. Analogous to the work of ethnographers or teacher researchers, teachers use meaningful formative assessment to study students in action and the artifacts of their learning in order to better understand.

Tools and Strategies of Formative Assessment

As teachers conduct their assessment work from this stance of knowledgeable inquirers, they have many strategies and tools from which to choose. Successful teacher assessors carefully select or create the right assessment at the right time in order to inform instruction and support the learner, thoughtfully administering the assessment with the least disruption to the ongoing learning in the classroom (Serafini). These assessments might be grouped into four types—Observations, Conversations, Student Self-Evaluations, and Artifacts of Learning—briefly described below. Further examples of teacher-based formative assessments can be accessed from this document's Annotated Bibliography and on NCTE's website: http://www.ncte.org/assessment.

Observations

Careful observation is the foundation of a teacher's assessment work. Teachers who observe students engaged in language use and learning come to know their students' strengths and challenges and are then able to plan supportive classroom learning experiences. Learning to observe closely, to see beyond assumptions and predictions, is central to development of a formative assessment stance. Observations take many forms:

- **Field Notes:** Teachers record (in journals, on computer, or on sticky notes) descriptions of classroom interactions, avoiding judgment and interpretation until later. Some teachers scribble notes during class, some wait until the end of the day, and others videotape and then later take notes, based on viewing particular segments.
- **Running Records and Miscue Analysis:** Teachers take quick notes about student reading while listening to their oral reading and to their retelling of what has been read.
- **Checklists and Observation Guides:** Teachers gather information about pre-selected learning behaviors or interactions by marking tallies on a chart or keeping a record of examples of specific student actions (such as the types of questions being asked or the particular strategies being used).

Conversations

Based on questions they have about student learning, teachers may specifically ask students for further information by conducting surveys, interviews, or conferences. These may take a broad-brush look at general assessment information or a targeted look at specific aspects of learning. Among the conversational tools teachers use for assessment are these:

- **Surveys:** Written or oral surveys can be helpful in gathering general information about reading or writing preferences or attitudes toward classroom literacy experiences. Data on surveys may show general trends in a class or for a group of students across time. Ideally, teachers would use this information to plan more focused follow-up assessments or observations.
- **Interviews:** Conducted one-on-one, interviews often provide a more targeted look at assessment. Teachers may work with open-ended questions, such as "When you are reading and you come to something you don't know, what do you do?" (Burke) or "What would you like to do better as a writer?" or other questions based on specific questions they have about student learning.

- **Conferences:** In reading and writing conferences, teachers invite students to share specific information about their intentions, processes, and/or products in order to help both teacher and student better understand the student's learning and identify next steps. Teachers often talk with students about the processes they use to select a topic for a writing piece, or the writing strategies they learned in a recent writing project. Through reading conferences, teachers learn why a student chose to abandon a particular book or what a student is working to understand in a current reading selection.

Student Self-Evaluations

An important component of formative assessment, student self-evaluations are deliberate efforts to elicit student perspectives on their own learning. Students may reflect on progress toward a goal, on processes used for reading or writing, on new goals, or on lingering questions. Self-evaluations encourage students to monitor their own learning and learning needs and serve as an additional source of information on student learning. Student self-evaluations can take many forms:

- **Exit Slips:** In order to gather information about current understandings and/or current questions, teachers invite students to complete a quick "exit slip" as they leave the room or at the end of a lesson.
- **Rubrics and Checklists:** Using pre-determined or student-generated lists of quality indicators, students assess their own work and use the information to revise or to plan future learning experiences.
- **Process Reflections:** Students write reflections that highlight the process they used to create particular artifacts or understandings and lessons they learned that will influence the way they approach similar work in the future.
- **Student-Led Conferences:** Conversations between student/parent, student/teacher, or among student/ parent/teacher are designed to allow the student to highlight significant areas of growth and to set goals for future learning.

Artifacts of Learning

Working alone or, preferably, with others, teachers review data about individual students or groups of students for the purpose of planning future learning experiences. For example, teachers may:

- **Collect** a variety of sources of information on a single learner (case study) in order to identify patterns of understanding across the data set. Data may include samples of student work, notes based on classroom observations, input from other adults including parents, as well as standardized assessment data.
- **Review** a class set of work samples or observations in order to group students for further instruction or to plan learning experiences for the entire group.
- **Look back** at a variety of points along a student's learning journey over the school year or over several years in order to see patterns of growth and to identify important next steps.

Analysis

Regardless of the tools and strategies used to gather information about learning, teacher assessors engage in ongoing analysis of the information available. As those working most closely with students as they engage in learning, classroom teachers constantly make decisions based on their analysis of the information available at any given moment. Formative assessment allows teachers to then immediately match instruction to students' needs.

As teachers refine their powers of observation *and* their skill in analyzing, they become better able to see what students are learning and to plan for future learning experiences. In addition to this "in-the-midst" analysis, teachers also protect time to engage in more thoughtful analysis by capturing information about learning that can be reviewed and studied over time. During this focused analysis, teachers review the information available and ask themselves and one another three key questions: "What do you see?"; "What do you make of it?"; "What will you do about it?" (Boudett, City, & Murnane).

As school decision makers are poised to select new assessments, we urge them to choose a path that supports a formative assessment stance. Teachers deserve protected time and quality support as they learn to observe closely and analyze deeply; students deserve a classroom context that allows teachers to do this. Over time, this professional development raises the quality of teaching and, in turn, the level of student learning. The more teachers can see and understand what students are doing, the better they can support those students in their learning.

Beyond that, decision makers can critically analyze what authentic formative assessment is and is not. Keeping in mind the following chart, teachers and administrators together can choose and create tools and strategies that will truly inform practice, support students, and improve learning.

Formative Assessments DO	Formative Assessments DO NOT
Highlight the needs of each student	View all students as being, or needing to be, at the same place in their learning
Provide immediately useful feedback to students and teachers	Provide feedback weeks or months after the assessment
Occur as a planned and intentional part of the learning in a classroom	Always occur at the same time for each student
Focus on progress or growth	Focus solely on a number, score, or level
Support goal setting within the classroom curriculum	Occur outside of authentic learning experiences
Answer questions the teacher has about students' learning	Have parameters that limit teacher involvement
Reflect the goals and intentions of the teachers *and* the students	Look like mini-versions of pre-determined summative assessments
Rely on teacher expertise and interpretation	Rely on outsiders to score and analyze results
Occur in the context of classroom life	Interrupt or intrude upon classroom life
Focus on responsibility and care	Focus on accountability
Inform immediate next steps	Focus on external mandates
Allow teachers and students to better understand the learning process in general and the learning process for these students in particular	Exclude teachers and students from assessing through the whole learning process
Encourage students to assume greater responsibility for monitoring and supporting their own learning.	Exclude students from the assessment process
Consider multiple kinds of information, based in a variety of tools or strategies	Focus on a single piece of information

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Vygotsky, L. (1986/1934). *Thought and language.* Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Annotated Bibliography

Research/Theory of Formative Assessment

Afflerbach, P. (Ed.). (2010). *Essential readings on assessment.* Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

This book in IRA's Essential Readings series is a collection of research-based and peer-reviewed articles that have appeared in past IRA publications. Well-respected authors address various reading assessment topics such as the role of teachers, a historical view of reading assessment, the importance of formative assessment, and the consequences of assessment. Each article is followed by questions for reflection. Afflerbach discusses the importance of assessing the affective aspects of reading development as well as the cognitive, and notes that there is a decided lack of alignment between what we know about the reading process and how we assess it. (NOTE: This review was originally published in *Talking Points.*)

AFL. *Position Paper on Assessment for Learning from the Third International Conference on Assessment for Learning*. Retrieved September 20, 2013, from http://www.fairtest.org/position-paper-assessment-learning

This short position paper, developed by an international committee of assessment scholars, criticizes how recent developments in educational policy have led to "misunderstanding" and "distortion" of the original ideas behind formative assessment. In order to clarify, they talk about *assessment for learning*, which they define as "part of everyday practice by students, teachers, and peers that seeks, reflects upon, and responds to information from dialogue, demonstration, and observation in ways that enhance ongoing learning.*"*

Andrade, H., & Cizek, G. J. (Eds.). (2010). *Handbook of formative assessment*. New York: Routledge.

A collection of essays by leading international assessment scholars, this book is divided into three major sections: (1) foundations of formative assessment, (2) formative assessment methods and practice, including concrete information on latest advances in techniques and technologies, and (3) challenges and future directions. The various essays offer a thorough review of research into formative assessment, lively discussion of distinctions in that research and resulting definitions, and studies into practical applications.

Cizek, G. J. (2010). An introduction to formative assessment: History, characteristics, and challenges. In H. Andrade & G. Cizek (Eds.), *Handbook of formative assessment* **(pp. 3–17). New York: Routledge.**

This thoughtful essay introduces the reader to the formative assessment movement. Cizek summarizes roots of the movement, focusing on the work of Bloom and Scriven; identifies ten characteristics of formative assessment as distilled from a number of research studies; and suggests challenges for those who want to implement formative assessment. A very useful essay for those seeking to understand the history of research into the concept of formative assessment.

Gallagher, C. W. (2008) *Kairos* **and informative assessment: Rethinking the formative/summative distinction in Nebraska.** *Theory Into Practice***,** *48***, 81–88.**

Gallagher explains Nebraska's now-defunct approach to assessment, one that gave great autonomy to teachers and honored local, context-ful assessments. In the article he rethinks traditional distinctions between formative and summative assessments, suggesting that the distinction between the terms should be about how the information is *used,* rather than simply the *form* of the assessment.

Genishi, C., & Dyson, A. H. (2009). Assessing children's language and literacy: Dilemmas in time. In C. Genishi & A. H. Dyson, *Children, language, and literacy: Diverse learners in diverse times***. New York: Teachers College Press.**

This chapter from a larger work examining the tensions between childhood language and developmental diversity in a context of increasing standardization takes the view of early childhood teachers not as technicians or test administrators, but as decision makers, using their highly situated knowledge of students gathered through careful observation to help students learn more. In addition to a theoretical overview, Genishi and Dyson offer portraits of early childhood teachers who tell, in their own words, how they assess their students in nonstandardized ways.

Hattie, J. (2008). *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement.* **New York: Routledge.**

Hattie's extensive meta-analysis of effect sizes of various approaches to teaching and learning identifies feedback and knowing when students are or are not progressing, key components of a formative assessment system, as two of the most powerful tools teachers have to improve learning.

Joint Task Force on Assessment of the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English. (2010). *Standards for the assessment of reading and writing* **(Rev. ed.). Urbana, IL: NCTE and Newark, DE: IRA.**

Building from thirty years of research reflecting the field's growing understanding of language, learning, and the notions of literacy, this document provides a set of standards to guide decisions about assessment in reading and writing. The standards stress teacher agency, the primacy of assessment as a tool to improve teaching and learning, and the constant need to consider the effects of assessment on students. In addition to the standards themselves, the document offers illustrative case studies and a glossary of key assessment terminology.

McMillan, J. H. (Ed.). (2007). *Formative classroom assessment***. New York: Teachers College Press.**

In his very important first chapter of this review of formative assessment, McMillan differentiates between *formative assessments*, which are always embedded in instruction in order to improve instruction and student engagement, and *benchmark assessments*, which, while often named as formative by the commercial testing market, do not provide the level of detail necessary to improve teaching and learning. Other authors in the collection are some of the big names in assessment: Richard Stiggins, Dylan Wiliam, Gregory Cizek, and others who write about the research base of formative assessment, the implications for high-stakes testing and large-scale assessment, and specific strategies for classrooms.

Shepard, L. A. (2000). The role of assessment in a learning culture. *Educational Researcher, 29.7,* **4–14.**

In providing a historical overview of assessment's relationship to traditions of teaching and learning, the author argues for the need for assessment to change both form and function in order to "create a learning culture where students and teachers would have a shared expectation that finding out what makes sense and what doesn't is a joint and worthwhile project, essential to taking the next steps in learning" (10). She offers as components of such a culture: dynamic, ongoing assessment, investigation of prior knowledge, feedback, explicit criteria, and self-assessment.

Wiliam, D. (2010). An integrative summary of the research literature and implications for a new theory of formative assessment. In H. Andrade & G. Cizek (Eds.), *Handbook of Formative Assessment* **(pp. 18–40). New York: Routledge.**

Wiliam's essay offers meta-analyses of studies surrounding formative assessment as well as a meticulously researched discussion of various definitions of formative assessment. He then suggests new definitions and directions for formative assessment that focus on "the extent to which evidence of learner achievement is used to inform decisions about teaching and learning." Useful essay for those seeking exposure to scholarly studies on formative assessment.

<u>Practical Applications</u>

Boudett, K., City, E., & Murnane, R. (Eds.). (2013). *Data wise: A step-by-step guide to using assessment results to improve teaching and learning* **(2nd ed.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.**

Although the title may suggest that this is a book about using summative assessment data, the process outlined by the authors is more about helping teachers develop assessment literacy by learning to observe closely the "learning-in-action" in their classrooms and to use thoughtful review of observations as well as student samples to inform practice *and* teacher learning. One of the most significant contributions of the book is the expanded definition of "data" beyond traditional use of standardized test data to include classroom assessments of learning as well as teacher assessments *for* learning. The companion text, (Boudett, K., & Steele, J. (Eds.). (2007). *Data wise in action: Stories of schools using data to improve teaching and learning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press), provides detailed examples of how teachers, schools, and districts have reorganized themselves to support more generative use of broader assessment information.

Collier, L. (2013). Finding and using evidence of student learning. *The Council Chronicle* **(September), 6–9. Urbana, IL: NCTE.**

This brief and teacher-accessible article discusses several approaches and rationales for formative assessments being used by teachers in primary and secondary contexts. The first of these, "exit slips," allows teachers to gain "personalized, 'just in time'" information about student progress and allows teachers to identify select students to follow up with and to determine if whole class reinstruction is necessary. Similarly, writing samples and "literacy letters" allows teachers to "spot individual and group patterns" of learning within the classroom. Use of smartboards and quizzes, too, are highlighted as key ways of determining individual and class-wide progress. Finally, this article explains how teachers might collaborate across classes to look at student formative assessment data to make determinations about next steps.

Filkins, S. (2012). *Beyond standardized truth: Improving teaching and learning through inquiry-based reading assessment.* **Urbana, IL: NCTE.**

Filkins takes us into classrooms of secondary teachers in various disciplines as they learn strategies for inquiring into their students' reading. The book is filled with examples of in-forming assessments that help teachers create meaningful instruction and is refreshingly honest in both its portrayal of the complexity of this work and the need for teachers, schools, and districts to find ways to support inquiry-based assessment. This book is part of NCTE's Principles in Practice imprint, based in the IRA-NCTE *Standards for the Assessment of Reading and Writing*.

Filkins, S. (2013). Rethinking adolescent reading assessment: From accountability to care. *English Journal,* **103.1, 48–53.**

In this article based in his own experience as teacher and literacy leader, Filkins argues for a change in our stance on assessment, suggesting that "when we assess out of care, we engage ourselves and our students in the challenging work of taking an inquiry stance, actively seeking to learn more about what they can do and addressing their needs directly, as best we can, in authentic contexts for literacy and learning." Truly formative assessment, he suggests, must be *in*forming for the teacher and *trans*forming for the student.

Fisher, D., and Frey, N. (2007). *Checking for understanding*. **Alexandria, VA: ASCD.**

This very readable book explains how the strategy of checking for understanding can become part of every classroom. Fisher and Frey offer concrete and engaging classroom examples for using oral language, questions, writing, projects and performances, and tests to truly determine what students know and adjust instruction accordingly for all learners.

Frey, N., & Fisher, D. (2013). A formative assessment system for writing improvement. *English Journal, 103.1,* **66–71.**

The authors offer practical means for acting on information gathered about student writers by suggesting the use of error analysis sheets to look for patterns on drafts-in-process to focus instruction for whole class needs, small group needs, and individual needs.

Gallagher, C. W., & Turley, E. D. (2012). *Our better judgment: Teacher leadership for writing assessment.* **Urbana, IL: NCTE.**

Gallagher and Turley focus on writing assessment at the secondary level, offering portraits of teachers who have created thoughtful and meaningful assessments designed to help improve student writing. Through these portraits, they demonstrate that in order to stop being treated "as targets of assessment rather than agents of it," teachers must build their own expertise in assessment. Throughout the book, they offer a number of concrete ideas of how teachers might take on this role. This book is part of NCTE's Principles in Practice imprint, based in the IRA-NCTE *Standards for the Assessment of Reading and Writing*.

Heritage, M. (2007). Formative assessment: What do teachers need to know and do? *Phi Delta Kappan*, **89(2). Retrieved from http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/k_v89/k0710her.htm.**

In this article Heritage defines formative assessment as often implemented in the classroom as part of a learning cycle: on-the-fly, planned-for, and curriculum-embedded. She suggests that four core elements comprise formative assessment and that teachers need to have a clear understanding of them. She also suggests that teachers need specific knowledge and skills in order to use formative assessment successfully.

Landrigan, C., & Mulligan, T. (2013). *Assessment in perspective: Focusing on the readers behind the numbers*. **Portland, ME: Stenhouse.**

This book takes a close look at assessment that focuses on children. While acknowledging the amount of pressure current mandates are putting on teachers, Landrigan and Mulligan put things in perspective so that teachers can focus on the authentic, daily assessments that improve instruction. The authors argue that a single number does not tell the whole story of a child's literacy and that empowering students to take a role in their assessment is critical. This book shares strategies for using information to help teachers understand each child's strengths and needs. The book acknowledges that the teacher decision making is what matters most in a classroom when it comes to assessment.

Murphy, S., & Smith, M. A. (2013). Assessment challenges in the common core era. *English Journal, 103.1,* **104–110.**

Building on the work of Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam, the authors argue for the value of a portfolio-based assessment system in providing formative and summative assessment information about student writers/writing. They point to key features of portfolios as sites of formative assessment, namely their embedded nature in the teaching and learning context, their involvement of the student in metacognitive reflection on both product and process, and the wealth of information they generate that can guide instructional decision making.

Overmeyer, M. (2009). *What student writing teaches us: Formative assessment in the writing workshop*. **Portland, ME: Stenhouse.**

Overmeyer includes sections that clarify the distinction between formative and summative assessment, noting the central role of teacher observation in the formative assessment process. Overmeyer highlights his belief that formative assessment involves teachers deliberately developing and/or changing their teaching plans based on their observations of students and their writing. Chapter three is specifically focused on the ways that teachers provide feedback to students and how this feedback functions as a type of formative assessment.

Pinchok, N., & Brandt, W. C. (2009). *Connecting formative assessment research to practice: An introductory guide for educators.* **Washington, DC: Learning Point Associates.**

This Research to Practice Brief was published to increase the knowledge and "build the capacity" of local and state school staff and leaders to implement effective formative assessments. The authors define formative assessment, review commonly used school-based assessments, and delineate the formative assessment process. The brief also provides suggestions for involving district- and state-level leaders in formative assessment practices.

Serafini, F. (2000/2001). Three paradigms of assessment: Measurement, procedure, and inquiry. *The Reading Teacher, 54.4,* **384–393.**

The author argues that as curriculum has developed from a series of facts to be memorized, to activities to be completed, to knowledge to be constructed through inquiry, so has assessment shifted from an act of measurement to a process of teacher and student inquiry. He envisions teachers as active creators of knowledge about their students and offers practical suggestions for supporting teachers in this work, including providing time and support for shifting the purposes and audiences for assessment.

Serafini, F. (2010). *Classroom reading assessments: More efficient ways to view and evaluate your readers.* **Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.**

Serafini describes assessments as "windows" through which teachers observe their students, acknowledging that there are many windows to choose from and all of them are limited in terms of what they allow us to see and understand. The power of these assessment "windows," in a context of inquiry, is that they help to make us better observers of students. The book is clearly organized with a wealth of practical examples and includes explanations of the research support for the practices he advocates. Chapter 2 provides an in-depth look at the processes and lenses teachers use as they *generate* assessment information about their students. Throughout the book, Serafini highlights the central role of the classroom teacher in the assessment process.

Shagoury, R., & Power, B. (2012). *Living the questions: A guide for teacher-researchers* **(2nd ed.)***.* **Portland, ME: Stenhouse.**

Learning to use observations and careful study of student artifacts of learning is critical to being able to use assessment to inform instruction. Shagoury and Power provide detailed examples of the ways teachers generate and collect information about their students. The focus is on learning to look closely at students engaged in the learning process and at the work they create, in order to build a more complex understanding of what students are learning and working at understanding. Although the primary purpose of the book is to support teacher-researchers, the stances and strategies are useful for teachers who do not see themselves as researchers, but who view assessment through an inquiry stance.

Stephens, D. (2013). *Reading assessment: Artful teachers, successful students***. Urbana, IL: NCTE.**

Edited by Diane Stephens, this book offers portraits of elementary classroom teachers and literacy coaches as they use a variety of formative assessments to improve reading practices of young students. As these literacy professionals show how and why they use multiple assessments, we watch them take control of their own classrooms as they use the results of those assessments to determine meaningful instruction for young readers. This book is part of NCTE's Principles in Practice imprint, based in the IRA-NCTE *Standards for the Assessment of Reading and Writing*.

Tomlinson, C. (Dec. 2007/Jan. 2008). Learning to love assessment. *Educational Leadership***, 65.4, 8–13.**

In this brief and highly readable article, Tomlinson outlines the progression of her thinking about classroom assessment. In explaining each new critical insight, she helps teachers understand how reflecting on their practice can lead to more sophisticated understanding of the teacher-learning process and the central role of "informative" assessment in that process. Tomlinson stresses the value of adopting an "assessment as learning" stance—a stance that supports teacher learning as well as student learning.

Tovani, C. (2011). *So what do they really know? Assessment that informs teaching and learning.* **Stenhouse.**

Tovani provides an in-depth look at the ways she assesses students in her classroom and what she has learned along the way about the assessment process. She divides assessment into two categories: formative assessment that is designed to help her shape and adjust her teaching and summative assessment that is to determine what students have learned and where students are "ranked" on a particular skill. The specific classroom examples and forms highlight the ways she gathers, organizes, reflects on, and uses this important data in order to plan for instruction.

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