

Child Study
Assessing a Student's Literacy Practices

Due: October 24, 2005

(note: this is one week later than listed in the syllabus)

3-5 pages

Investigating your students' understandings is an important part of preparing to teach. Although it is not realistic that you will have time once you are a full-time teacher to conduct extensive interviews with each of your students, you will want to have regular conversations with students during which you ask them questions, work with and observe and listen to them closely in order to assess their understandings and abilities. This assignment should help you develop ways to listen to students with an ear toward how they are making sense of and approaching reading, writing and language use. The type of information gained from this sort of listening should play a central role in your decision making and curricular planning as a teacher. Below we have outlined the steps for you to take in order to complete this project.

1. Choose the child: You should have chosen your child for your child study. If you have not done so, this is the first step. You should be observing the child, including her or his literacy practices each time you are in your field placement classroom. Take detailed notes on how, when and where the student is reading, writing and using language in the classroom.
2. Arrange the interview: Arrange with your Classroom Mentor to work with your selected child for a 30 minute session. The interview will go better if you do not interview the child during an activity that she or he will not want to miss, such as recess.
3. Plan and conduct the interview:

For the interview, choose a set of activities that will take about thirty minutes (total) and will give you enough information to describe your student as a reader (and if you choose writer and user of oral language.) While your focus should be on the child as a reader, you may choose to describe his or her writing and language abilities and interests. There are numerous ways to do this. At a minimum, you should use the following ways to assess and describe the child as a reader:

- a) If the child is a reader, choose a book that is comfortable for the child to read. Ask the student to read aloud to you, and devise a way to note the patterns of errors or substitutions. Notice how and whether the child attempts to read unknown words and the strategies the student uses. You might use a modified version of the running record or miscue analysis, although that is completely optional. You may want to use more than one (short) book until you find a book that is neither too difficult nor too easy. Do not use a word or letter list; ask the child to read an engaging piece of literature. (For some ideas about noting the child's knowledge of phonics, look at the Weaver book.) If the child is not yet reading, you might ask him or her to choose and book and tell you the story from the book. (This is sometimes called "pretend reading.") You'll want to note any information you can about what the child understands about reading (e.g., where to start reading, how to turn pages, patterns such as the convention that stories have predictable beginnings, etc.)
- b) Talk with the child about his or her understanding or comprehension of a book or story. This might be a book that you read aloud, or one that the child reads to you.

Look for how the child makes sense of the story. Plan ahead to ask a series of open-ended questions that assess a wide range of comprehension strategies. This is particularly important for older children. For very young children you might begin by asking the child to retell the story. You might want to make sure to ask both literal questions and questions that require the student to make inferences.

- c) Develop a simple interview protocol to talk with the student about her or his reading (and writing) practices in and out of school. You might ask where and when the child reads or writes at home, and with whom. In addition, you might discuss the student's interests in reading both to him/herself, and also reading aloud, writing on his/her own or with others as part of the daily routine at home. (You may want to look at how Willis describes the home context of literacy for her son on pages 40-41.) Take careful notes during the activities and interviews. Again, with younger children you may want to modify this set of questions to ask about how the child uses print rather than formal reading and writing.

3. Analyze your Results: Write a description of the child as a reader (and writer or language user), based on what you learned from the interview. You will want to create a portrait of your child as a reader (and writer) in a holistic sense. Look through your notes carefully and analyze what you have written. Use texts we have read for class to make sense of your findings. Your write-up should include the following parts:

- *Description*: Briefly describe your interview, including how long it took and how the student seemed to feel about it. Give a concise account of the set of activities you used to assess the student as a reader.
- *Reporting and interpretation*: Describe the student as a reader/writer. **Do not give a step-by-step account of the interview.** Instead, discuss the patterns that you observed across all of the activities you did with the child. Back up each claim with specific examples or quotes from your work with the child. For instance, you might write, *While Jill is able to decode one-syllable words, she does not seem to use these same strategies with multi-syllable words and particularly ignores context clues to figure out these words.* Do NOT say, *first I read this book and she didn't know any words, so then I read this other book.* Give specific examples to support the assertion. [*She read the word red without any trouble; however when she came to the word ready, she stumbled, skipped over it, and did not seem to use the context to figure it out.*] Try to integrate the information, rather than describing each activity separately. Give a holistic picture of the child as a reader or literacy learner. Be sure to discuss all that you learn about this child including her interests, her ability to comprehend the text, etc.

4. Implications: Think about what you have learned about this child as a literacy learner. As a teacher, how would you use this information to make decisions about how to teach the student? What strategies would you recommend to his or her teacher to teach to his/her strengths? How could you work with this student individually and in a group to support him/her to continue to grow as a reader or writer? (This section should be about 1 page long.)

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Tips and Reminders

Planning

Choose your materials carefully. Depending on the student, you may choose to use the same or different books for reading aloud and for your discussion about the student's comprehension. These activities will vary depending on the age of the child. For instance, you may ask older children to read a chapter of a book to themselves before you have a conversation with them about the content of the text. Choose a set of activities that will give you enough material to develop an understanding of the child as a reader (writer), but don't plan too much that you overwhelm or tire the child. Vary the activities so that it is enjoyable for both of you. Think carefully about the order in which you will do these activities. Check with your classroom mentor about an appropriate amount of time to work with the student. (This should be 30 minutes in all, but you may want to break it into a few shorter segments.)

For reading aloud, choose a book that is neither too frustrating nor too easy. You may start with a pile of books to find just the right book. Write down all of the books you try with the student and also your rationale for your final choice. You may decide to ask the child to read more than one book, a single book, or simply a chapter or passage from the book, depending on the child and the reading material. Again, be sure to note the reasons for your choices. Very young children might "read" the pictures or books with a single word on each page. Do not use word or letter lists. They won't give you enough information in context.

For comprehension, choose a book for the child to read to you or to read aloud to the child, in which there is plenty to talk about. If the student reads simple books that have content which does not lead to a compelling discussion, you may want to choose a book or chapter to read to her or him. Write a list of **open-ended** questions to assess understanding of the reading material. Do not use standard end of the chapter (textbook) type questions. You may want to start with a question that asks for a personal response, e.g., what do you think about the book? (Notice that this is an open-ended question that elicits a longer response as compared to a question such as, did you like the book, which leads to a yes or no—or a single word—response.) You may want to ask the student to retell the story in his/her own words. Think about various levels of questions. For instance, you may want to start with some concrete questions, such as "what happened next?" and move on to more abstract questions, such as "why do you think..." or "how would you handle this sort of situation?" Use a range of appropriate questions. Be sure to plan a set of questions or topics that will engage the child in a conversation rather than creating a test-like situation. You may want to plan questions to learn about a specific aspect of the child's comprehension. For instance, you may want to know about the child's understanding of sequencing and your questions or activity would address that topic (e.g., give her a set of pictures related to the story to put in order and asking her to talk about the story using the picture.)

For questions about the students' interests and attitude toward reading or literacy, devise a set of open-ended questions that allow you to engage the student in a conversation about reading (and literacy.) Be sure to make these questions concrete enough for a very young child to understand and open-ended so that you can have a discussion.

The interview or set of activities

As you work with the student, look for the strategies the child uses to read and understand the material. Look for evidence and concrete examples of *how* the child reads. Focus on what the child *can* do and build your interview questions on that knowledge. In other words, look at how the child successfully reads and understands the material, in addition to examining what she/he does not know. Think of ways to rephrase questions that don't seem to elicit long or detailed responses or ones that the child doesn't

seem to understand. As the child reads aloud, take systematic notes to record patterns of guessing and errors. Refer to the description of running records attached to this handout and adapt this method so that it is easy and useful for you. You may want to photocopy the selection that the child is reading and take your notes on the copy. Ask the child to read a long enough passage, chapter, or short book so that you can detect both patterns and strategies. Focus on the patterns of error. Do not report on individual examples of words that the student misreads. Likewise, when you choose a book to discuss with the student make sure that it is long enough to elicit conversation.

Analysis

Be as specific as you can. General statements like, “she is an excellent reader” are not useful. Describe and analyze *how* the student reads and understands what she reads or is read to her. Use examples to support your claims. Look for patterns across the different reading activities you do with the student. Do not use static terms like, he is reading on a second grade reading level. Instead use terms that describe this specific child. As you analyze your work with the student, think about what a teacher might want or need to know about this child as a reader in order to plan the next set of lessons or activities.

Criteria from grading rubric:

Reporting and Interpreting: Explanation and analysis of students’ literacy practices in and outside the classroom and strategies for decoding and comprehending the text

*Each strategy or description supported with specific examples based on interviews and observation

*Range of activities used to gather information

*Description of next steps for working with this child are based on findings

*Ability to apply content from courses (readings, classroom activities and discussions)

*Clarity of writing, organization, mechanics