

*The development and evaluation of  
school-wide literacy assessment system:  
A progress report from Year 2 of a 5  
year study*

📖 Participants:

- ⇒ Deanna Birdyshaw, CIERA-U of Michigan
- ⇒ P. David Pearson, Lisa Sensale, Sapna Vyas,  
and Carolyn Jaynes, CIERA-MSU

# Organization for the Session

- 📖 Overview, Context, Assessment System: pdp
- 📖 Perspectives of the participants
  - ⇒ Teachers: Deanna
  - ⇒ Parents and Students: Lisa
  - ⇒ Policy Makers (principals, district administrators, and school board): Sapna
  - ⇒ Examining our roles and our discourse: Lisa
  - ⇒ Postscript: Carolyn
- 📖 Cancelled: response by the principals, Pam and Cathy
- 📖 Questions/Comments

## Context: The Site

- 📖 Rural, predominantly white, lower SES (free and reduced lunch = 50%) community.
- 📖 Joined forces with CIERA to build an assessment system to monitor student progress and instruction
- 📖 Approvals all the way up the line
- 📖 The strategy:
  - ➔ Monthly meetings with a planning group of teachers and
  - ➔ Monthly meetings with the staff as a whole.
  - ➔ 1998-99 goals: Build a school-wide writing system
  - ➔ 1999-00 goals: Build spelling and phonics assessments
  - ➔ 2000-01 goals: Fine tune spelling assessment; start reading assessment

## Context: Design

📖 Annually collect data on the views/uses of all participants so that we can evaluate the impact of any changes we make on the use and consequences of the assessment system and its components.

### 📖 Data sources

- ⇒ Interviews with key participants (teachers, administrators, board members, citizens, parents, students)
- ⇒ Meeting notes, including video and audio tapes
- ⇒ Classroom observations (teachers and focus students)
- ⇒ Artifact and document analysis

## Context: Assessment System

- 📖 A system is a deliberate, consensual, negotiated, articulated group of assessments built with criteria of purpose and audience playing the most salient roles
- 📖 To be distinguished from various sorts of “collections”
  - ⇒ Every teacher chooses his or her own tool box
  - ⇒ School-wide tools, but unarticulated decision-making processes.

## Context: Assessment Systems

Client	Decisions to be Made Questions to be answered.	Assessment Tools
students	How am I doing? What shall I do next?	[Portfolio entries (self-evaluated) and/or feedback from benchmark tasks.]
teachers	Have the kids met my learning goals? How did my teaching go? How can I help Amy? Should Amy enter X?	->[Portfolio entries and Benchmark tasks] ->curriculum-embedded tests ->Informal diagnostic tools ->An array of converging evidence
parents	How is my child doing? Compared to the average bear?	->Portfolios/work samples ->Normed test of some sort
administrators	How effective is our program? How are our teachers doing?	[Aggregated data of some sort (portfolios, norm-referenced tests) ]
policy makers	How well are schools meeting public expectations?	[Trends, over time, on some aggregated data (nrt would do just fine) ]
taxpayers	How well is our money being spent?	[Trends, over time, on some aggregated data (nrt would do just fine) ]

## Context: Assessment Systems

- 1. Are all of the important dimensions of the domain assessed?
- 2. Are the clients of the system getting the information they need to answer the questions they want answered?
- 3. Are clients making apt decisions-- decisions that meet students' curricular needs ? (consequential validity)

# Important contextual changes in year 2

## 📖 New superintendent

- ⇒ Recall that we were brought in under the aegis of the old superintendent

## 📖 New teachers

- ⇒ Need for additional training

## 📖 New policy initiatives

- ⇒ MLPP gets introduced into the state milieu
- ⇒ Many teachers begin training in LIFT



# Student and Parent Views of an Assessment System

## Parents

- ⇒ Information received and wanted
- ⇒ Points of reference and quality of information received
- ⇒ Communication with child and understanding of child's values and awareness
- ⇒ Consequences and other points

## Students

- ⇒ Feelings toward reading and qualities of a successful reader
- ⇒ Feelings toward writing and qualities of a successful writer and writing
- ⇒ Qualities of self-improvement
- ⇒ Communication with others

## Comparisons

# Information Parents Receive

## Communication Tools and Events

- ⇒ Parent-teacher conferences
- ⇒ Report cards

## Classroom Tools

- ⇒ Student work

## Own Tools

- ⇒ Reading to others
- ⇒ Assignments

# Information Parents Would Like to Receive

📖 Criterion-referenced information

⇒ Is my child on grade level?

📖 “How we can help. What is his progress, I mean for his age group, is he reading on a level that he should be reading at? Is he below the level he should be reading at, is he above the level he should be reading at?”(KH)

# Points of Reference

📖 Class, school, and state

⇒ Moderate Interest

📖 Grade level

⇒ All parents want to know how well children are meeting teacher and school's expectations

📖 Norm reference

⇒ When they were young...

# Quality of Information Received

## 📖 Other parents

- ⇒ Satisfied according to half interviewed

## 📖 Dissatisfaction

### ⇒ Communication Tools

- ⇒ “I think that every area they need to be better informed. You know we meet with the teachers twice a year for conferences and we get their report cards, which is a little x ‘working on’ or ‘improved’ or ‘needs improvement’ or whatever. And that doesn’t always tell the whole story and um this a long time between conferences and a lot can happen. So you know you sit at home and think, ‘Okay is my kid doing all right?’ ... You know what it would be nice to see is ‘This is what we’re reading, you know this is the level that you’re child’s at’ ...” (2H)

# Communication with Child

📖 Parents talk to their children

📖 Means of Communication

- ⇒ Notes from teacher
- ⇒ Report Cards
- ⇒ School Work

📖 Information shared

- ⇒ Qualitative

# Perception of Child's Values and Qualities of Self- Improvement

📖 What testing and grade information do children value?

- ⇒ Qualitative
- ⇒ Quantitative

Qualitative  
Quantitative  
Procedural  
Mechanical  
Other

📖 Personal Reference Points

- ⇒ Self
- ⇒ Other

# Consequences

## 📖 Helping the Child

- ⇒ Academic Action
- ⇒ Double-Check
- ⇒ Punishment



# Other Points

## 📖 Classroom Tools

⇒ Informational texts

## 📖 Communication Tools

⇒ More communication with researchers

⇒ More frequent feedback from teachers

# Student Feelings Toward Reading

📖 We like reading for...

- ⇒ Instruction
- ⇒ Enjoyment

📖 When I have to read out loud...

- ⇒ "It makes me feel [like] I'm the only one on the stage and I'm reading to an audience. It's pretty cool." (2H)

# Qualities of a Successful Reader

## Quantitative descriptors

- ⇒ Someone is a good reader if “They know a lot of words and they don't have to stop and think about the word they just keep right on past it.” (4L)

Qualitative  
Quantitative  
Procedural  
Mechanical  
Other

## Qualitative and procedural descriptors

- ⇒ “Cause we read really good and she does like, she sees every word and she does it when we're doing news.” (KH)

# Feelings Towards Writing

📖 We like writing...

- ⇒ About topics we like
- ⇒ Because we can use our imagination

📖 But...

- ⇒ "You've gotta make the letters straight and stuff." (1L)

# Qualities of a Successful Writer

## What younger students think

⇒ "I look at her writing sometimes and I think it's good...I like the pictures that she draws and it was pretty colors." (KH)

## What older students think

⇒ "Cause she writes a lot of stories and she reads em to us. She adds good details to it." (3L)

# Qualities of Successful Writing

📖 What younger and lower achieving students think

⇒ "I didn't know how to spell Furby but I spelled it in my head." (2L)

📖 What older students think

⇒ "...on my grade it says 2.5 and everybody in the class got 2.5..really good." (4H)

# Qualities of Self-Improvement

## 📖 Personal reference points

### ⇒ Reading

» “I read spaces...spaces between the words.”  
(KL)

### ⇒ Writing

» “Cause I didn't write a lot in second grade  
and we do in third.”(3L)

# Communication with Others

## 📖 Teacher

⇒ Classroom tools

## 📖 Parent

⇒ Classroom tools

⇒ Communication tools and events



# Parent and Student Comparisons

## 📖 Communication tools

### ⇒ Parents

» Conferences, report cards, student work

### ⇒ Students

» Classroom work

## 📖 Points of Reference

### ⇒ Parents

» Grade level

### ⇒ Students

» Personal reference point (self)

## Yr 1 and Yr 2 Comparisons

- 📖 Virtually no changes were observed between Years 1 and 2 in the responses of parents and students to our interview protocols.....
- 📖 Of course, of all the clients of the assessment system, these groups would be the least likely to reveal change early in the process.

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# Year 2: Policymakers' Perceptions of Assessment

Sapna Vyas  
Michigan State University

# Three Levels of Policymakers

📖 School principals

📖 *Central administrators*

📖 **Board members**

# Outline of Presentation

- 📖 Information sources that they currently receive and would like to see
- 📖 Their perceptions of who bears the consequences of assessment
- 📖 Reference points that they employ

# Information Sources – School Principals

- 📖 School principals refer to a variety of classroom and external assessments
- 📖 Would like to establish a school-wide spelling program
- 📖 Point to benchmarks as a possible solution

## *Information Sources – Central Administrators*

- 📖 Central administrators also refer to a variety of classroom and external assessments*
- 📖 Point to shortcomings in existing use of assessment tools*
- 📖 Express satisfaction with 1<sup>st</sup> year writing prompt*

# Information Sources – Board Members

- 📖 Board members move beyond mentioning classroom and school wide assessments
- 📖 Make references to the usefulness of staff reports
- 📖 Want to know about students' home experiences



## Who do they think bears the consequences of assessment?

- 📖 School principals talk about a “common language” in the school
- 📖 Make references to the individual learner
- 📖 Acknowledge how viewing assessment results can be stressful for teachers

## *Who do they think bears the consequences of assessment?*

📖 *Make references to individual learner*

📖 *Mention the importance of having specific intentions*

# **Who do they think bears the consequences of assessment?**

- 📖 Board members express concern over the academic well-being of the individual learner**
- 📖 Express some disillusionment at the program level**
- 📖 Make references to measuring effectiveness of teachers**

# What Reference Points do Policy Makers Employ?

- 📖 School principals focus on curriculum standards
- 📖 *Central administrators focus on district to district comparisons*
- 📖 **Board members focus on student and district level comparisons**

## Teachers: Common Themes

- 📖 Want assessment to inform instruction
- 📖 Want to incorporate student self-assessment
- 📖 Want a continuum of grade-level expectations
- 📖 Want consistency within grade-levels
- 📖 Want assessment data that can be effectively shared with parents
- 📖 Want to assess how students use literacy outside of school

# Literacy Assessments: What's in Place

📖 Writing :Assessment prompt with rubric describing grade level benchmarks

📖 Reading

- ⇒ Observational Survey
- ⇒ Running Records using Developmental Reading Assessment as benchmarks
- ⇒ Jerry Johns *Basic Reading Inventory*

# Literacy Assessments: What's in Progress

## 📖 Spelling

- ⇒ Developmental Analysis of spelling stages using *Word Journeys* (Kathy Ganske)
- ⇒ Grade level spelling lists based on phonological features, high utility words, and content words
- ⇒ End of year benchmark spelling assessment

# Literacy Assessment: What is Needed

## 📖 Writing

⇒ Knowledge base to inform instructional decisions

## 📖 Reading

⇒ Measures of comprehension and higher order thinking

## 📖 Spelling

⇒ Assessment of how spelling is applied in writing



# Additional Assessments Needed

📖 Oral language/Speaking

📖 Listening

📖 Home Literacy Experiences

## Impact of Writing Prompt

Aligns curriculum across district programs.

“I think that the writing assessment is a good link between the buildings and I think that has been missing. I think the middle school is glad to be on board. They really want to be involved.”

2nd Grade Teacher

## Impact of Writing Prompt

Provides meaningful data to share with parents.

During conferences, “I saw a lot of teachers taking out the actual written piece and telling the parent about the prompt and the rubric and the scoring and letting them know that this was the next type of thing that needed to be added to their child’s writing.”

Special Education Teacher

# Impact of Writing Prompt

Provides a developmental continuum for student performance.

“The introduction of the writing prompt changed my classroom. I think it has made everyone aware of where these children should be and where they are in relationship to their classmates, which is really a big, I mean a huge difference. It really tells teachers exactly where they need to go with writing.”

2nd Grade Teacher

# Impact of Writing Prompt

Informs instructional decisions.

“I’ve always wanted my students to be neat and use sentences and punctuation. I asked them to write a lot but I haven’t done as much with beginning, middle, and ending. I think some of the things in the writing prompt that we’re supposed to be looking for have helped me to be aware of how to help my students with writing.”

1st Grade Teacher

## Impact of Writing Prompt

Involves students in self-assessment.

“I think I use a rubric a lot more than I used to. And I’ve tried to have the kids help me develop rubrics, which has been beneficial. I think it’s helped them understand a little bit more what we’re looking for in writing pieces. I’ve seen that reflected in some of their writing pieces, especially their most recent prompts and I’m anxious to go through and assess them.”

4th Grade CORE Teacher

## Impact of Assessment System Project

“We have a cohesive plan for reading and writing. We have an assessment program. I mean something that we can use. We have a universal language. So not only can we talk to parents but we can talk to each other. And when we talk to parents, it really doesn't matter which teacher talks. There's similarities in the information that we are giving. So parents can also see changes over time without it just being a whole different ballgame that we're talking about.”

Special Education Teacher

## Role of CORE Team

- 📖 Communication
- 📖 Prepare materials, do legwork, maximize use of the staff's time
- 📖 Anticipate possible controversies and work out solutions
- 📖 Keep up motivation for project



The CORE team “does a lot of planning for when we get together so it can be productive in the least amount of time. I know that their hours are a lot greater than ours. And it is so that we can work efficiently. We couldn’t do it without them. We all would have burned out a long time ago.

Special Education Teacher

“If it had just been you, David, Lisa, and Sapna coming in as the experts, and we all sat back and listened, it would be like the old professional development. ‘The experts came in, they talked at us, we saved the handouts or threw them away, and then we did our own thing.’ But the fact that there are staff members involved and that the team goes at its own speed-the speed of the school instead of the speed of the researchers, I think has made it a valuable experience. That there is a group that plans and thinks through and talks and hashes out and then comes up with something to do makes it a useful professional development experience.”

2nd Grade CORE Teacher

I appreciate the idea of the staff taking ownership. I kind of apply that in our church now because there are changes we want to make as we are moving into our new building. And not everybody is there yet. I said to my husband, Here's how it is in CIERA. We have wonderful plans, but we have to sit back and say, "Are they going to want it for themselves rather than handing out an edict that says 'Ye Shall.'" I have seen this year just how people's ideas can change with the right approach. They will not do it because it is best practice; they have to understand what best practice means for them.

2nd Grade CORE Teacher

Lisa

## Changing Discourses

**Question:** How can we characterize teacher engagement across two professional development meetings that are about a year apart?

### **Data Sources:**

- ⇒ Tape I: Articulating a plan for a writing assessment 11/10/98
- ⇒ Tape II: Building a conceptual framework for spelling 10/12/99

# Methods

📖 Compare patterns of participation across two tapes.

📖 Take various “cuts” through the data.

- ⇒ Look at individual roles and turn taking.
- ⇒ Note instances of repetition.
- ⇒ Mark transition points and phases of conversation.

# Findings

📖 Teacher patterns of engagement differ from the 1998 meeting to the 1999 meeting.

⇒ Attributing ownership

# Ownership

## Segment from 98' meeting

1 Researcher: "Well, let's talk about 2 what we could do this next time 3 that would be-that would move us 4 ahead on our over-all agenda. 5 Remember our goal is to build 6 within the next two years, an 7 assessment system, an articulated 8 assessment system, **right?**, that 9 will speak to the needs of all those 10 audiences and especially for you 11 as teachers, give you a sort of 12 clear picture of kids' progress, 13 I'm assuming both in and across 14 grade levels."

## Segment from 99' meeting

1 Teacher: "Do you know the 2 biggest fear is that we do an 3 adequate job with the groundwork 4 and understanding because if we 5 don't do that we'll never make 6 that change."

# Findings

📖 Teacher patterns of engagement differ from the 1998 meeting to the 1999 meeting.

⇒ Attributing ownership

⇒ Repetition of important concepts



# Repetition

Number of Times Concept Defining the Meeting is Mentioned							
Tape I (11/98)				Tape II (10/99)			
"Articulation Across Grade Levels"				"Conceptual Framework"			
Teacher		Researcher		Teacher		Researcher	
8	30%	19	70%	20	63%	12	38%

# Repetition

## Repetition of Concepts: Tape II (10/99)

Who	Statement
Teacher I	“One of the pieces that I wonder about is building the <u>knowledge base</u> [of what] on a effective spelling program would like.”
Teacher II	“Sometimes we make change before we understand the <u>theory</u> and we do the practice first, but we have to somehow make this...”
Teacher III	“I think traditionally, we have a picture of what we think spelling looked like years ago...and I think we need to find new ways to tie <u>tradition</u> to what really works in the school.”
Researcher I	“What [do] we think the nature of this task is in terms of building a <u>knowledge base</u> .”
Researcher II	“It was sort of interesting to me that when we did the writing we sort of assumed the writing assessment would drive a change in the <u>conceptual understanding</u> ...but I hear you saying today...that it needs to go from <u>conceptual foundation</u> before.”
Teacher II	“...So now, rather than providing some kind of assessment first then the <u>understanding</u> , we gotta back track and understand why do we teach spelling and what’s the best way to use it...”

# Findings

📖 Teacher patterns of engagement differ from the 1998 meeting to the 1999 meeting.

- ⇒ Attributing ownership
- ⇒ Repetition of important concepts
- ⇒ Multiple roles

# Multiple Roles

<b>"Probable Breakdowns"</b>			
<b>Tape I (11/98)</b>		<b>Tape II (10/99)</b>	
<b>Initiator</b>	<b>Rescuer</b>	<b>Initiator</b>	<b>Rescuer</b>
Researcher	Researcher	Teacher	Teacher
Researcher	Researcher	Researcher	Teacher
Researcher	Researcher	Teacher	Researcher
		Teacher	Teacher
		Teacher	Researcher
		Everyone	Teacher

# Other Indicators of Engagement

📖 Number of turns taken

📖 Number of back-channels

📖 Number of warranted inferences

## Postscript

- 📖 The spelling assessment and instructional change
- 📖 Developmental focus of the spelling assessment
- 📖 Teacher knowledge and assessment use
- 📖 Changing nature of the core planning group and level of teacher involvement
- 📖 Goal of maintaining breadth and depth

# Relations within the learning community

