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# Preface

## ORIGINS OF THE BOOK

The origins of this book are in the chance request made to a university laboratory school by a local school district. In 1999, Margaret Heritage, who at that time was principal of the Corinne A. Seeds University Elementary School (UES) at UCLA, was contacted by the administrators of a local school district. The administrators wanted to get a copy of the classroom assessments that UES used for identifying students who were struggling with learning to read. The staff at the school thought this was an excellent query but had to regretfully inform the district that they had no such set of materials for this vital purpose. However, Margaret and the UES teachers had for some time been considering issues of assessment and interventions for struggling readers and used the request from the school district to join forces with UCLA faculty and research staff, including Alison Bailey, to develop such materials.

Margaret had begun her career as a teacher in an elementary school where the population was 95 percent language minority students. She immediately developed a strong (and indeed necessary) interest in language development. This interest expanded to reading development, which has been a central focus of her work for many years, and has ranged from teaching young children to read to teaching teachers about reading development. Alison started her research career studying verbal input to young children as an undergraduate linguistics major. Her work in graduate school continued the focus on language development in social interaction but added the study of minority language development and literacy to the mix. Her research at UCLA has moved her work squarely into the applied realm where she has worked with teachers in various settings to understand the intersection of language and literacy and how best to assess their development for instruction.

Early on in our collaboration in these domains, a critical decision was made—take what teachers already know about assisting struggling readers and place it into a comprehensive, research-based framework for systematic formative assessment and instruction. The formative assessment approach we created was not only later subjected to a research study, but from its inception was grounded in research. A mantra we adopted then and that you will encounter throughout this book, is that all our work be “rooted in practice” to make it useful, and also “evidence-based” to be responsive to what good research can teach us.

The concerns of the district teachers and administrators and those of us at UES were primarily about the type and quality of assessments that were available to teachers to help them identify children at-risk of reading failure. Their concerns were confirmed by the National Research Council (NRC), which concluded from a review of assessment practices with preschool and kindergarten children that:

The array of instruments currently used . . . are time-consuming and costly to administer. . . Such measures need to be refined, extended and, as appropriate, combined into screening batteries that are maximally informative and efficient. (National Research Council, 1998)

In response to this problem, the goal of our practitioner-researcher collaboration was to develop a comprehensive and manageable assessment system that could provide teachers with diagnostic information about the development of both oral language and literacy skills, along with clear procedures for instructional intervention in the classroom with children as early as kindergarten. The result of this collaboration was the Literacy Development Checklist (LDC) and accompanying manual of in-class assessment and intervention suggestions (University Elementary School, 2001).

As Chapter 1 will outline, much impetus for this book came from our development and study of how teachers were using the LDC along with other available tools to gather information and apply it during instructional decision making. We were able put the combination of research and practice that had informed the LDC to use with various summer institutes at UES. Founded as a laboratory elementary school in 1882, UES now serves as a major catalyst for research on education and child development at UCLA, as well as a teacher training site for local public school districts.

Over the years, one of the book contributors and a former UES assistant principal, Norma Silva, has sent the teachers of her new school to the UES institutes to learn from the approaches that combine research and practice. Her current school is the Para Los Niños Charter Elementary School (PLN).

The PLN school is part of the larger community-based organization of Para Los Niños, which was originally founded to serve children in the “Skid Row” area of downtown Los Angeles. The PLN school mission is to develop literacy skills in Spanish while teaching academic English through the content areas of mathematics, science, and social studies. Teachers are trained in creating educational environments that provide experiences that promote language and conceptual knowledge. Founded in 2002, the school now educates 350 students from kindergarten through fifth grade. The PLN teachers who helped with the creation of the practice chapters describe the formative assessment strategies they use on a daily basis to help them formulate evidence of academic language and reading development throughout the curriculum. Other teachers also provided us with the impetus for this book by sharing their own formative assessment practices with us. These teachers teach at various schools, predominantly in Southern California, most with linguistically and ethnically diverse populations of students.

## WHO CAN USE THIS BOOK?

Elementary school teachers, both new and experienced, should find the descriptions of others’ practices immediately applicable and, we hope, inspiring for further ideas about their own formative assessment. If used as part of a pre-service program, the book can readily integrate the content of courses on language development and reading methods with assessment practices in these areas. In the professional development context, the book can be used to refresh or update in-service teacher content knowledge, as well as provide professional development directors and principals a combined course of study in the areas of language, literacy, and formative assessment.

The teachers of English language learners (ELL students) will undoubtedly find the example practices in this book especially helpful. The fact that ELL students are now a part of many mainstream classrooms due to recent educational policies (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001) makes every teacher and administrator responsible for these students’ academic success. The English language learner emphasis is consequently a natural one. Throughout this book we recognize the special issues of language learning and reading for ELL students. However, language and literacy issues presented in this book are salient for *all* students—all students, whether native English speakers or not, may have issues with language in academic contexts as well as struggles with learning to read.

We also see another important purpose for this book. Administrators like Norma Silva find themselves supporting new teachers in their use of

reading strategies and methods of assessment each and every year. The comprehensive model that integrates formative reading and academic language assessment for instruction in accessible ways from the practitioner's point of view will be invaluable for administrators who need to offer ongoing training and guidance to novice teachers.

## OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

Chapter 1 outlines the approach we have adopted—that of real-life stories from classroom teachers using formative assessment for literacy instruction. In this chapter, we also describe in more detail our work with the LDC, as well as our vision for formative assessment in the current educational assessment arena.

Chapter 2 presents the ideas underlying the model of formative reading and academic language assessment for instruction. In our view, content knowledge cannot be separated from the linguistic means by which it is understood (Christie, 1985; Schleppegrell & Achugar, 2003). We therefore suggest that teacher domain knowledge and knowledge of academic language are of equal importance, and indeed that academic language should be part of the domain knowledge of a teacher (Heritage, Silva, & Pierce, 2007). Teachers need to invoke both knowledge components simultaneously, and consequently, the approach we have designed explicitly requires teachers to plan for both types of knowledge for their assessment and instruction in reading. While the model can be applied in broad educational settings, it is particularly relevant to assessing and instructing English language learners because of the prominence of language in this model. This chapter includes information about the crucial components of the model, including academic language, teacher domain knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and assessment.

In Chapter 3, we join with Mouna Mana, a graduate student of education at UCLA, to provide greater detail about the different kinds of formative assessment. We then introduce the comprehensive model that integrates teacher knowledge bases (e.g., domain knowledge of reading and academic language) with skills needed for implementing formative assessment procedures. In this chapter, we answer the following questions:

- What is formative assessment?
- What do experts have to say about it?
- Why would a teacher use formative assessment?
- How is the model of formative assessment of reading and academic language effectively used within frameworks for assessment and instruction?

Chapters 4 and 5 present the model as it applies to the areas of listening comprehension, oral language, and reading comprehension. The following key questions are addressed using examples of formative assessment being used in K–5 classrooms:

- What constitutes the domain knowledge needed by teachers in these areas?
- What should teachers look for as evidence of progression along developmental continua in these areas?
- How is the formative assessment model implemented to support development in these areas?

Specifically, Chapter 4 with principal Norma Silva, and teachers Gabriela Cardenas and Olivia Lozano of PLN, presents the formative assessment model as it applies to the areas of listening comprehension and speaking skills. This chapter includes the description of the stages of development required for successful listening and speaking abilities (e.g., vocabulary, syntax, event representation, narrative and expository genres, social and academic language, and world knowledge).

Chapter 5 with Barbara Jones, a researcher at the Center for the Study of Evaluation at UCLA, presents the model as it applies to the area of reading comprehension. This chapter includes the stages of reading development in areas such as fluency, word recognition, decoding, academic vocabulary knowledge, and comprehension.

Chapter 6 extends the promise of the model to also include examples of sixth grade English language arts instruction. Specifically, in this chapter we focus on (1) writing in so much as it informs us about student reading comprehension as reading and writing become increasingly interwoven across the curriculum and (2) the implications of the assessment model for English language arts as this content area evolves by the end of the later elementary grades to include more literary uses of language (e.g., creative writing).

In Chapter 7, we conclude the book by looking at the challenges of implementing the formative assessment model schoolwide, particularly in the area of professional development. We make recommendations for how best to prepare teachers to use assessment for instruction, particularly how the formative assessment model can be initiated and sustained by a principal or others in instructional leadership roles.

There are of course often concerns for time and compliance with assessment regulations, which we also hope to dispel with this book. While the standards movement and, more specifically, the No Child Left Behind Act adopted traditional, large-scale, summative assessments for accountability purposes, there can still be a role for formative assessment in the classroom. We, of course, look forward to the day when formative assessment can play

an expanded role in the nation's accountability system, but until then, we have chosen to focus on perhaps an even more fundamental challenge to the successful adoption of formative assessment—that of a well-trained faculty. This book was written to do its part in helping to overcome this challenge. Formative assessment implemented effectively needs to be supported by high-quality, ongoing professional development. We hope that the stories told in this book can directly contribute to your knowledge of and enthusiasm for formative assessment for literacy learning.

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