

## Reports based solely on standardized test scores portray a limited view of the literacy accomplishments of American students.

an assessment approach that will serve a variety of purposes. Moffett and Wagner make two particularly significant points. First, the dilemma arises because "a lot of evaluation is needed, a number of parties and purposes must be served, and yet evaluation can destroy the very learning it is supposed to facilitate" (p. 498). (One solution is to embed evaluation in ongoing instructional procedures, along the lines suggested above, rather than casting it as a discrete item on the day's agenda.) Second, guiding students to reveal their thinking and learning is important: "Ordinarily students don't do enough to provide the evaluator something to see" (p. 499). By this statement, the authors do not refer to routine marks on a worksheet but to the "constant producing and receiving of discourse [where] the teacher is freed from emceeing to circulate and observe" (p. 499). Moffett and Wagner's text demonstrates what is possible, at both conceptual and practical levels.

Part of the burden for enhancing teachers' assessment skills lies with schools of education. Attention to assessment is superficial, if not completely lacking, in current preservice and inservice programs. As a result, many teachers lack confidence in their ability to assess student progress. In their preparation programs, teachers should be provided with a range of approaches that place testing in a proper balance with observation, interviewing, and per-

formance samples. Those who assume roles in administration, research, and evaluation also need experiences to familiarize them with a broader array of assessment techniques. For example, research and evaluation should include the qualitative as well as the traditional quantitative methods (Ragin 1987). For the moment, it is at the school level that teachers' assessment techniques need to be honed. We need to create a professional environment in which teachers can draw on one another's expertise through regular interaction around the goals of the school's literacy program.

### Let's Tell the Good News About Reading and Writing

William D. Corbett

We never know how high we are  
Till we are called to rise  
And then, if we are true to plan  
Our statures touch the skies.  
—Emily Dickinson

Elementary school children read and write better than they ever did. Yet this accomplishment is one of our best-kept secrets. Educators are keeping the secret only in part with the 20 percent who do.

How often have you heard people (with selective memories) say that children today cannot read or write the way we used to? Have you fed into this rumor by failing actively to disprove this misconception?

In the media, bad news of any kind transcends good news largely because it is dramatic and photographable. Have you ever counted the number of bad-news items reported on the nightly news telecast? Bad news is in the range of 75 percent, with neutral or good news fighting for the remaining 25 percent. Good news about education is practically nonexistent.

Let me respectfully suggest just a few ways that principals can highlight the good news.

Whenever possible, hear each child, in grades 1-4 at least, read a few pages to you. Give each child an on-the-spot encouraging written analysis. You will enjoy this effort, will find it valuable in your monitoring efforts, and above all, will let children know that you appreciate good reading. Ask them to read the same story to their parents or parent that evening.

When hearing children read, always set up four chairs in the corridor. Two are for the readers, and the third is for you. The fourth is for any school visitor: the superintendent, a parent, or the UPS delivery person. Each must spend a few minutes hearing a child read—because it is important to the child. Encourage visitors to spread the good news about children's reading.

Good news about student writing is desperately needed because it is often maligned in the media. Ask teachers to send sets of compositions to you regularly. Read them and comment on them. Send interesting papers to the superintendent. Post creative writing papers on the walls of the central office conference room. Place others on the walls of your local bank. Don't overlook your city hall, your supermarket, or the local pizza parlor. Citizens will be amazed at the children's skills and thoughts, teachers will enjoy proper recognition of their efforts, and, above all, children will learn that good reading and writing are important.

The beautiful thing about children is that they don't know that they can't do marvelous things in reading and writing. With enlightened instruction, every day they are doing them. Their statures touch the skies.

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### The Role of Assessment in Decision Making

Classroom teachers work directly with students to attain the goals of schooling, but individuals outside the classroom also make decisions that influence student achievement. Evidence based on teacher assessments can prove useful at all levels of decision making. At the school level, teacher judgments can serve as the nexus for joining practitioner teams (including the principal and resource teachers) more coherently than at present (Fraatz 1987). Student portfolios pro-

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