

The Self-Assessing Reader

Given the significant role that tests play, the term self-assessing reader might conjure up notions of readers as test takers, perhaps employing some of the strategies used to excel at selecting an answer from multiple choices or generating a favorably scored response. Indeed, test-taking ability, as instantiated in the notion of a savvy test-wise student, entails the notion of a self-assessing reader, but in a fashion that is limited. We prefer to view the self-assessing reader as a person who employs a range of strategies and practices as they engage in various literate activities—in ways that are purposeful and strategic—bordering almost on the idea of a reflective (thoughtful) or reflexive (turning the assessment lens inward to become self-evaluative) reader. This includes drawing on multiple forms of awareness, judgemental abilities, and attitudes as they formulate and initiate appropriate engagements, and applying criteria selectively as they continue to examine and judge plans, efforts, and progress.

The development of a self-assessing reader has precursors on a number of fronts that occurred simultaneously or operated somewhat in the shadows. They included some of the major waves of the development in the field, including:

- Learning to learn and metacognition, with its focus on the student-strategic development (e.g., Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Brown, 1987; Flavell, 1977);
- Reading, writing, and media working together via projects, etc. (e.g., Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2006; Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988);
- The opportunities for students to examine their reading, writing and other developments across time, such as via portfolios (e.g., Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991; Tierney & Clark, 1998);
- Constructivist and qualitative research and the notion of responsive evaluation—involving a commitment to participatory and reciprocal learning (e.g., Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lather, 1986; Tierney, 1998; 2009);
- Critical theoretical developments, especially those tied to reading oneself and critical reflexivity (e.g., Freire, 1970/1995);
- The emergence of a developmental orientation that emphasized students' development of sustainable, independent, and transferable strategies, or a self-improving system (e.g., Clay, 1998; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Goodman, 1996; Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 2005).

At the same time, self-assessment is not a new concept, as it has roots in our everyday lives (spiritual, physical, professional) in conjunction with undertaking periodical review, setting performance goals and targets and representing the self in these endeavors or in the search for new pursuits. On a regular basis many of us engage in reflections on our lives—our health needs, exercise regimen, economic circumstances or daily accounting for our schedules and commitments. We, both Rob and David together and separately, have championed the idea that, “The only reason that I as a teacher or mentor have a right to assess you today is so that you can do it for yourself tomorrow.”

For those of us who are educators, forms of self-assessment may be pervasive in our lives as we contemplate our professional plans including our teaching activities and learning goals for our students. If one of our goals is to improve students’ own decisionmaking, we are likely to be focused upon helping our students assess themselves. On one level, we are operating with the class in a fashion somewhat akin to a conductor overseeing an orchestra, ensemble or free-flowing jazz group. On another level, we are trying to advance the discerning decision-making of each student—perhaps leading from behind or to the side with probes of learners’ interests and purposes as we seek to advance the proprietorship of the self-assessor. Explicitly or implicitly we are involved in conversations about the criteria students might use to examine their efforts, consider their accomplishments and discuss directions for their pursuits. If our goal is student-led decision-making, we may operate with the view that the self-assessment is more important than the products or outcomes and that the person involved in the self-assessment should take ownership of their efforts, including exploring the criteria and lens to support the self-reflective enterprise.

Our approach is not different to developing forms of meta-awarenesses and heuristics. Indeed, the context of reading is not unlike the formulation of a learning contracts approach or an approach to strategy enlistment—akin to what Marie Clay (1978) referred to a self-improving system. Our approach is more akin to the kinds of discussions that Peter Johnston (2004) has so powerfully depicted in his book, *Choice Words*, or what Debra Crouch and Brian Cambourne (2020) detail in their discussions of learning conditions, or those discussions of project-based learning advocates in the Reggio Emilia context (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998).

The espoused notion of the self-assessing reader is tied to a view of reading that is reader-centered and diverse versus one driven by a standardized curriculum and teaching/learning for the test (see Side Comment III.6a.1). The notion of a self-assessing

reader goes beyond reading and writing themselves, affording forms of self-teaching devices. Readers should be involved in becoming discerning decision-makers as they enlist a range of developing criteria to review both what they have done and what they should further pursue. They are involved in judging their efforts rather than comparing or competing with others. Self-assessing reading positions assessment as a key element in learning itself. It shifts from an assessment “of” readers to an assessment “by,” “with,” and “for” readers. At a minimum, it entails reading oneself and being continuously engaged in a form of formative research of reading’s meaning making strategies that one might employ, checking on and comparing understandings. As self-assessing readers engage with text, they do so planfully—considering the questions and purposes they might pursue as they actively contemplate what they are gleaning. This involves pausing to reflect upon their progress, ongoing questions, approaches, understandings, and uses of the text. It might also go further exploring their worlds through a combination of reading and observation and project pursuits. It might involve exploring one’s likes and dislikes as a reader, differences in interpretation and themes or the nature of arguments—the evidence, claims, warrants (e.g., Murphy, Greene, Firetto, Hendrick, Li & Montalbano, 2018; Reznitskaya, & Wilkinson, 2018; Sheehy, 2002; Wilkinson, Soter, & Murphy, 2010).

Side Comment III.6a.1

Despite developments across various nations that have heightened the use of tests for accountability and high stakes decision-making, challenges to the domination of traditional testing have occurred under the banners of authentic assessment and approaches to testing focused on student self-assessment. Indeed, in conjunction with the shift to constructivist notions of reading and research, a key feature of assessment shifted to recognizing that the learner is a key stakeholder, and that her own assessments of her goals, achievement, needs, processes, etc. are of value.

For many students, self-assessment begins with their becoming aware and being encouraged to develop and apply a repertoire of reading and research strategies to the texts that they enlist. This includes strategies related to pre-reading (e.g., thinking about what they know, making predictions, and self-questioning), reading (e.g., connecting ideas, visualizing, cross-checking ideas further, questioning, and predicting), and post-reading (e.g., making intertextual links, and contemplating relevance). In the context of projects, these strategies might extend to engaging in a needs assessment and the research of circumstances, as well as

project planning, gathering resources, collaborations and consultations with others, implementation, and follow up (e.g., Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2006; Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988). Portfolios, knowledge maps, peer-to-peer conferencing, rubric discussions and other activities support the self-assessing reader. Such approaches engage learners in planning ahead at what they might do and looking back at what they have done enroute to contemplating their progress and being thoughtful about next steps.

Self-assessment is consultative and collaborative amidst supporters and stakeholders who are more constructive than judgemental. To some extent, self-assessments offer a time for engaging in relationship-building and forging partnerships. Self-assessing readers are never alone; they have the authors and peers with whom they might share their pursuits. Plus, they might be in parallel play with classmates who are also engaged in a form of critical reflexivity with themselves. They are engaged in an enterprise done with others—sometimes as a team pursuing a collaborative project or perhaps even as they are pursuing something by themselves. Regardless, they are involved in various collaborations, both incidental and ongoing, for problem-solving or for feedback. As a group member they might be involved in team planning and occasional troubleshooting with their peers. As an individual they might be using others as sounding boards or for advice. Others can provide advice as a reader wrestles with reading or seeks input of one form or another or as a means to compare and contrast efforts, understandings and approach. Others can provide an alternative lens for thinking about matters or confirm or complement a reader's conclusions. Regardless, others are integral to one's self-assessments of pursuits, as readers' input for each other may be influential as they are engaged in their own. A self-assessing reader is learning to learn in the company of others—seeking and offering input.

It is key to afford students opportunities to be engaged in conversations with themselves and others about their reading, with the goal of students becoming decisionmakers and self-directed learners (based on their enlistment of a repertoire of criteria for doing so). Fellow learners should be considered as consultants, rather than competitors. The approach is ongoing and formative as readers look back and forth with what they have done or pursue next. Self-assessing readers will take ownership of their development and are apt to be able to relish their progress for themselves and with their peers and families. Readers are not just the subject of the assessment; they are the assessors and partners in the educational enterprise for formative purposes.

References

- Bransford, J. D., Brown, A. L., & Cocking, R. R. (Eds.) (2000). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience and schooling*. Washington, DC: National Research Council and National Academy Press.
- Brown, A. (1987). Metacognition, executive control, self-regulation and other more mysterious mechanisms. In F. E. Weinert & R. H. Kluwe (Eds.), *Metacognition, motivation and understanding* (pp. 65–116). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Carter, M. (1992) Self-assessment using writing portfolios. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University.
- Clay, M. (1978). *Reading: The patterning of complex behavior*. London: Heinemann.
- Clay, M. (1998). *By different paths to common outcomes*. York, ME: Stenhouse.
- Crouch, D. & Cambourne, B. (2020). *Made for learning; how the conditions of learning guide teaching decisions*. Katamah, NY: Richard C. Owens Publisher.
- Crumpler, T. (1996). Exploring a culture of assessment with ninth grade students: Convergences of meaning within dramas of assessment. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University.
- Education Queensland (2000A). *Literate futures; Report of the literacy review for Queensland state schools*. Brisbane, Qld, AUS: The State of Queensland, Department of Education. <https://education.qld.gov.au>
- Education Queensland (2000b). *New Basics; Curriculum organizer*. Brisbane, Qld, AUS: The State of Queensland, Department of Education. <https://education.qld.gov.au>
- Edwards, C. P., Gandini, L., & Forman, G. E. (1993). *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education*. Norwood, N.J: Ablex.
- Fenner, L. (1995) *Student portfolios: a view from inside the classroom*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University.
- Flavell, J. (1977). *Cognitive development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Fountas, I. C., & Pinnell, G. S. (1996). *Guided reading: Good first teaching for all children*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Freire, P. (1995). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (20th anniversary ed.). New York: Continuum.
- González, N., Moll, L. C., & Amanti, C. (2005). *Funds of knowledge: Theorizing practice in households, communities, and classrooms*. Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates. doi: 10.4324/9781410613462.

- Goodman, Y. M. (1996). Revaluating readers while readers revalue themselves: Retrospective miscue analysis. *The Reading Teacher*, 49(8), 600–609.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1989). *Fourth generation evaluation*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Harste, J. C., Short, K. G., & Burke, C. L. (1988). *Creating classrooms for authors: The reading-writing connection*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Johnston, P. H. (2004). *Choice Words: How our language affects children's learning*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- Lather, P. (1986). Research as praxis. *Harvard Educational Review*, 56(3), 257–277.
- Murphy, K. P., Greene, J. A., Firetto, C. M., Hendrick, B. D., Li Mengyi, & Montalbano, C. (2018). Quality Talk: Developing Students' Discourse to Promote High-level Comprehension. *American Educational Research Journal*, 55(5), 1113–1160. DOI: 10.3102/0002831218771303
- Reznitskaya, A. & Wilkinson, I. A. G. (2018). Truth matters: Teaching young students to search for the most reasonable answer. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 99(4), 33–38.
- Sheehy, M. (2002). Illuminating constructivism: Structure, discourse, and subjectivity in a middle school classroom. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 37(3), 278–308.
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/rrq.131/epdf>
- Short, K. G., Harste, J. C., & Burke, C. L. (1996). *Creating classrooms for authors and inquirers* (2nd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Tierney, R. J., Clark, C. (with L. Fenner, R.J. Herter, C. Staunton Simpson, & B. Wiser). (1998). Portfolios: Assumptions, tensions, and possibilities. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 33(4), 474–486.
- Tierney, R. J., & Readence, J. E. (2005). *Reading strategies and practices: A compendium* (6th ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Tierney, R. J., Carter, M. A., & Desai, L. E. (1991). *Portfolio assessment in the reading-writing classroom*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers.
- Wilkinson, I. A. G., Soter, A. O., & Murphy, P. K. (2010). Developing a model of Quality Talk about literary text. In M. G. McKeown & L. Kucan (Eds.), *Bringing reading research to life* (pp. 142–169). New York: Guilford Press.