UNDERSTANDING AND USING
READING ASSESSMENT K–12
2nd EDITION
PETER AFFLERBACH
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About the Author

Peter Afflerbach is a professor at the Reading Center in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction of the University of Maryland, College Park. He received his PhD in reading from the University of Albany in 1985. Prior to this, he taught remedial middle school reading and writing in Saratoga Springs, New York; taught high school English in Troy, New York; and was a K–6 Title I reading teacher at Dolgeville Central School in Dolgeville, New York.

Peter’s interests include reading assessment, reading comprehension, and the use of the verbal reporting methodology. His work appears in theoretical and practical journals, including Reading Research Quarterly, Cognition and Instruction, The Elementary School Journal, Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, and The Reading Teacher. Of his most recent books, Peter coedited the Handbook of Reading Research (Vol. 4; Routledge, 2010) and edited Essential Readings on Assessment (International Reading Association [IRA], 2010). He also serves as an associate editor of the journal Metacognition and Learning and a member of the Editorial Advisory Board of Reading Research Quarterly.

Peter served on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 2009 Reading Framework Committee and was part of the Common Core State Standards for English/Language Arts Feedback Group. He was a member of the Joint Task Force on Assessment of the IRA and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), which developed the revised edition of the Standards for the Assessment of Reading and Writing (IRA & NCTE, 2010). Peter is also the chair of IRA’s Issues in Literacy Assessment Committee and was inducted into the Reading Hall of Fame in 2009.

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What do we hope for our students? In what ways can we help foster their reading development? In this book, we examine reading assessment and how understanding and using reading assessment contributes to students’ growth as readers. Helping all students achieve to their potential is challenging work, and doing reading assessment well helps us meet this challenge. A premise of this second edition of *Understanding and Using Reading Assessment, K–12* is that the most consequential and useful reading assessment takes place in classrooms. This assessment is conducted by accomplished teachers through their careful questioning, keen observation, and use of diverse assessment procedures and materials, including reading inventories, portfolios, and performance assessments. Just as we read text to construct meaning, we can, through assessment, read our students to construct a detailed understanding of their strengths and needs.

We know much about reading and literacy: how it develops, how it is nurtured, and how it differs among students. We also know much about reading assessment: We are beneficiaries of a growing body of research and practice that describes how to design, implement, and get the most from our assessments. That we do not always use our robust understandings of reading and reading assessment is troubling. This is due to various economic, social, and political forces that influence the ways and means of reading assessment.

Too often, schools, teachers, and students are under the thumb of high-stakes tests, which provide too thin a measure of all that reading is and dictate the nature of reading and classrooms. In the next decade, it is possible that we will witness a movement away from such tests, and movement toward integrated assessment systems that combine formative and summative reading assessment information. In part, these assessments will be driven by large-scale curricular change movements, such as the Common Core State Standards (Council of Chief State School Officers & National Governors Association [CCSSO & NGA], 2010). These standards are demanding because they require the reading of complex texts and the doing of sophisticated, reading-related tasks. Necessarily, reading assessment will need to provide formative information that helps us guide students through increased reading challenges, and summative information that captures the integrity of both teaching effectiveness and learning outcomes.

This edition of *Understanding and Using Reading Assessment, K–12* includes a new chapter on Response to Intervention (RTI) and early reading assessment. RTI is all around us in elementary reading classrooms, and it presents an opportunity to directly address students’ needs through careful assessment. My belief is that successful reading instruction always revolves around detailed and reliable assessment, and RTI is one example of how assessment and instruction can work together to address
individual students. I use two very different assessments, the Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement (OSEL; Clay, 2002) and the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) Next (Good & Kaminski, 2011) to demonstrate how early reading assessment can vary in form and content and to stress that our early reading assessments shape our vision of what students can do and what they need.

This edition maintains a focus on assessments that are capable of describing and supporting complex acts of student reading, such as those aligned with the Common Core State Standards and the 2009 NAEP reading framework. These assessments, including performance assessment and portfolio assessment, have the promise of combining formative and summative assessments to the benefit of students and teachers. We know how complex reading is, and performance and portfolio assessments offer the opportunity for assessment to capture and describe this complexity.

Since the publication of the first edition of this book in 2007, we have learned more about the nature and power of “the other” in reading: how motivation, engagement, self-efficacy, volition, self-concept, and agency operate in the day-to-day reading of our students. As the evidence base that describes the importance of these other factors builds, our assessments must honor this emerging understanding. Chapter 8 focuses on assessment of “the other” and incorporates recent findings related to factors other than cognitive skills and strategies that can influence reading development, and so should be assessed.

Finally, in this edition, I broaden the idea of what we can do with our reading assessments. I focus on the traditional reporting role of assessment: how it lets us know how students are doing. Also, I stress the need to consider how classroom assessments can be used to support and encourage our student readers, as when our assessments focus on what students can do and provide encouragement for them to continue. I also focus on how reading assessments can be used to help students learn to self-assess and become increasingly independent at gauging their progress across reading tasks. This is one of the hallmarks of the successful reader.

My hope is that this book helps the reader best conceptualize assessment that benefits all students, even as we continue to develop our understandings and uses of reading assessment.

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My colleagues at the University of Maryland, including students and faculty, continue to help shape my thinking about reading assessment and its role in fostering reading development.
The teachers I work with continue to alert me to new ways of thinking about assessment and inspire me with their willingness to stand up for reading assessment that helps students become accomplished readers.

The researchers whose work is cited herein have created a robust and detailed knowledge base that should continue to inform our efforts to improve reading assessment. I especially thank Peter Johnston, who has influenced my thinking about children, learning, and assessment.

Finally, Emma and Rowan, two of my favorite readers, regularly remind me of the importance of reading and knowing what to focus on when we try to assess it.