

## Chapter 7: Reflecting on Progress: Helping Students Grow as Learners and People

▶ Chapter 7A: How Will I Know If My Students Are Making Progress?

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Instructional Leadership

Frequently Asked Questions

# Chapter 7A: How Will I Know If My Students Are Making Progress?

Classrooms and schools are *full* of evidence of how students are progressing toward standards, from daily exit tickets to year-end standardized tests and everything in between. There are a variety of ways for teachers, schools, and districts to make sense of this data, but no matter the approach, the goal is the same: to track progress, identify students at risk, pinpoint areas of instruction in need of improvement, and strategize solutions. Often teachers, led by school leaders, begin the school year by reviewing student data. They look at standardized test scores from the previous year or base-line test scores from the beginning of the year. Then they clump students into differentiated groups based on these scores.

Though this kind of data work has its place in schools, when we talk about using data to inform instruction in our curriculum, this approach is not exactly what we are talking about. Instead, we are focused on offering teachers opportunities throughout the year to look at evidence of student progress—from formative ongoing assessments gathered daily to summative mid- and end of unit assessments in the Module Lessons and benchmark and cycle assessments in the K–2 Reading Foundations Skills Block (Skills Block).

Evidence of student progress comes from a variety of sources, and all of it can be used to target instruction to best meet students' needs. But so much evidence can sometimes feel overwhelming. How should you collect it, and what should you do with it? How can you help students understand and track their progress so that they can become leaders of their own learning?

▷ How can you help students understand and track their progress so that they can become leaders of their own learning?

In this chapter, we will start out in Chapter 7A exploring the various sources of evidence of student progress in the curriculum. There is potentially a lot to gather, and we'll help you focus on the key evidence and some steps you can take to make sense of it. In Chapter 7B, we will look at how to turn that evidence into systematically collected data that will help you make instructional decisions to best support your students.

And finally, in Chapter 7C we will turn our attention to an outcome for students for which it's difficult to collect data: habits of character. In Chapter 1, we introduced EL Education's Dimensions of Student Achievement. This seminal document (see Figure 1.2 for reference) captures our commitment to a definition of student achievement that goes beyond mastery of knowledge and skills to also include high-quality student work and character. We will explore how the curriculum is designed to help students make progress in this area as well.

## ► What's the Difference between Evidence and Usable Data?

Students' daily work from the learning activities in every component of our curriculum produces a great deal of direct and indirect evidence. Direct evidence is actual student work that reveals students' knowledge and skills (e.g., end of unit assessments). Indirect evidence is teacher perceptions of student performance (e.g., observation checklists). In the pages that follow, we will show you examples of direct and indirect evidence. Both are critical to assessing student progress.

When it comes to data, we use the term differently than you may be used to: We use it when referring to an organized subset of evidence that is systematically collected so that it can be used for analysis. To be considered data in this case, evidence must meet three criteria:

1. It must be systematically collected (e.g., you collect and score each student's work, versus "I feel like students are starting to get it").
2. It must be organized to aid its analysis (e.g., you create a spreadsheet to record all scores, versus a pile of completed assessments that are not organized in any way).
3. It must be based on a valid and reliable assessment.

Paul Bambrick-Santoyo, the author of *Data Driven Instruction: A Practical Guide to Improve Instruction* (2010), remarks that "if assessments define the ultimate goals, analysis identifies the strategy and tactics to get there." Helping all students meet the standards that form the foundation of assessments means we have to continually analyze student work and create effective action plans to change the outcome of students' learning. Using students' daily work as an important measure of their learning gives you an up-close-and-personal view of what enables a student's success. Using the analogy of watching a swim meet, Bambrick-Santoyo underscores the importance of seeing student learning in action, rather than just perusing their scores.

*"Imagine a swimmer and her coach. The swimmer is a hard worker in practice, but when she goes to her first competition she finishes in third place. If the coach skips the meet and only reads the results in the newspaper, his advice will probably be that his student should focus on swimming faster. Had the coach actually gone to the pool, however, he would have seen that his swimmer was actually the fastest in the pool, and that her slow time was the result of her being the last racer off the starting blocks" (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2010, p. 41).*

The swim meet analogy illuminates an important point about analyzing student work. In this illustration, the coach analyzes the swimmer's performance in one type of race and creates an action plan—focus on the start—to improve her performance. Similarly, in the classroom, teachers frequently focus on one student's work and offer that student feedback in an effort to improve his or her performance the next time around. Gathering and analyzing the daily work of students in this way is the bread and butter of a teacher's job.

An essential next step is turning this evidence into data, which gives you the opportunity to analyze a collection of student work and organize it into data sets that may suggest bigger shifts in instruction for you, your grade-level team, or specialists who are assisting you with particular students or classes. To illustrate how evidence can become usable data, let's peek into a first-grade classroom in the Snapshot that follows.

### Collecting Evidence

Mr. Bashir is a little nervous about teaching his first-graders about the sun, moon, and stars. In particular, he wonders whether his young students have the comprehension skills to make meaning of the complex texts in the second unit of Module 2. Unit 1 felt manageable. Students were able to access familiar narrative books and think, talk, and write about how the sun, moon, and stars inspire authors. But Unit 2 has been much more challenging. Students began with close read-alouds of informational texts to build their background knowledge about patterns of the sun, moon, and stars. Not only were the texts themselves challenging, but students were also expected to take notes and talk about their reading using evidence from the text.

In Lesson 6 of Unit 2, students used their notes from earlier lessons in which they read about (through read-aloud), thought about, and talked about complex text to prepare for their first Science Talk. Since Mr. Bashir has reviewed all of the unit assessments and he knows that the End of Unit 2 Assessment is a Science Talk, he decides that this is a perfect opportunity to gather some evidence of student progress (the Ongoing Assessment section of the lesson also offers this as a suggestion). He collects student notes and uses a Speaking and Listening Checklist aligned to Common Core State Standards (CCSS) to analyze his students' needs (see Figure 7.1).

The learning target for the Science Talk is "I can participate in a Science Talk about what makes day and night on earth using information from my notes as evidence." As a class, they determined that to meet this learning target, students would need to use their notes and should ask at least one question of a peer. After the Science Talk, Mr. Bashir asks students to reflect using Fist to Five to show their progress toward the learning target, with a fist representing no progress toward the target and a five representing that they had met the target. Most students raise four or five fingers. When Mr. Bashir asks why, students report that they shared their notes, listened to each other, and everyone shared. These were the exact steps that the class had determined would lead to success on the learning target, but Mr. Bashir is not certain that every student participated fully in the Science Talk.

### Turning Evidence into Usable Data

When his students go to physical education class, Mr. Bashir decides to analyze his notes on the Speaking and Listening Checklist. He sees that 21 of 25 students did a great job taking turns and working in groups (CCSS SL.1.1: *Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about Grade 1 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups*; CCSS SL.1.1a: *Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions*). However, when Mr. Bashir looks more closely at the Speaking and Listening Checklist, he notices that 14 of 25 students struggled with CCSS SL.1.1b: *Build on others' talk in conversations by responding to the comments of others through multiple exchanges*. Almost all of his students with speech and language Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals, as well as his English language learners (ELLs), struggled in this area.

Mr. Bashir also notices that almost all of his students (20 of 25) were proficient with regard to CCSS SL.1.4: *Describe people, places, things, and events with relevant details, expressing ideas and feelings clearly*. A few students did not clearly describe the patterns observed in the sky and instead either agreed with other students or had basic descriptions like "the sun is in the sky." A few of these students receive ELL support, so in addition to making his own instructional adjustments, he plans to talk to the English as a second language teacher to see if she can put additional supports in place.

Reflecting on this data leads Mr. Bashir to formulate two important adjustments to

his instruction for succeeding lessons (leading up to another Science Talk in Lesson 8). First, he regroups his students, taking into consideration those who struggled with CCSS SL.1.1b. He decides that rather than working in triads, he will have students start off in pairs that will then join another pair to become a group of four for the Science Talk. He pairs two ELLs with similar language proficiency together, for example, because he knows that they work well together and are more inclined to share and discuss when they work together first. When they form a group of four, he will put this pair with another pair of ELLs with greater language proficiency. Based on past experience, Mr. Bashir also knows that giving partners an opportunity to discuss content first will encourage greater engagement when they are in groups of four for the Science Talk.

Figure 7.1: Mr. Bashir's Speaking and Listening Checklist

Module 2 Unit 2: Science Talk				
B-Beginning		D-Developing		A-Advanced
	SL 1.1: Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 1 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.	SL 1.1b: Build on others' talk in conversations by responding to the comments of others through multiple exchanges. Examples: I agree because... That makes me think...	SL 1.4: Describe people, places, things, and events with relevant details, expressing ideas and feelings clearly.	Teacher comments
Student Name	SL 1.1a: Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions. Examples: listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion.	SL 1.1b: Build on others' talk in conversations by responding to the comments of others through multiple exchanges. Examples: I agree because... That makes me think...	SL 1.4: Describe people, places, things, and events with relevant details, expressing ideas and feelings clearly.	Teacher comments
1	P	D - doesn't give new info	P	more sentence stems
2	A - supports answers with text evidence	P	P - uses description	usually leads conversation
3	P	P	P	refers to convo cues
4	D - sometimes speaks over	B	D - push for relevant details	use prompt 1-1
5	A - redirects others to topic	A - uses scientific language	A	uses variety of convo. cues
6	P	P - asks others "what do you think?"	P	
7	P	P	P	uses "I agree" and "I disagree"
8	P	D - only replies "yes", "no", "maybe"	P	Does not build/sign on topic
9	P	D	P/D - sometimes not relevant	*
10	B - consider talking chips	B - visual cues	B - visual cues	model of more practice
11	P	D - replies "I don't know"	D	initial connection but does not continue topic
12	D - sometimes refuses to participate	D	P - when prompted	*

\* same next steps  
○ ELL student

Second, Mr. Bashir decides to reteach how to use Conversation Cues<sup>1</sup>. Before lesson 8, he decides that he will model the Science Talk protocol a second time, this time with an emphasis on asking follow-up questions beginning with Conversation Cue question stems that the students have used previously. He identifies two Conversation Cues that students should definitely use during the Science Talk and that he thinks will best lay the foundation for them to be able to build on each other's ideas:

- » "So, do you mean \_\_\_\_?" (Goal 1 Conversation Cue: Help all students talk and be understood; specifically "clarify")
- » "S/he said \_\_\_\_" (Goal 2 Conversation Cue: Help students listen carefully to one another and seek to understand; specifically "paraphrase").

Mr. Bashir now feels confident that he has solid strategies to support more students to reach the learning targets of the lesson.

## ► There's So Much Evidence to Collect: What Should I Focus On?

When you collect evidence of students' thinking, talking, and writing, you are gathering information about what students know and can do. Looking at student work individually or with a teammate can guide minor course corrections for the daily journey of teaching.

There are many sources of evidence you will gather as you teach the curriculum. But the reality is that you probably won't have time for a careful analysis of all of it. Of course, you can and should focus on the summative assessments in the curriculum as a key source of evidence for further analysis, but beyond that it is up to you (hopefully in collaboration with your administrators, instructional coaches, and teaching teams) which of the ongoing/formative assessments to focus on more closely. Not every note-catcher, for example, will require analysis; however, those that ask students to demonstrate skills they have struggled with in the past, especially if they will be featured on an upcoming summative assessment, may be worth a closer look.

<sup>1</sup> For more information on Conversation Cues, see Chapter 2C.

We will spend some time in this section exploring all of the sources of evidence in the curriculum so that you have a better feel for what to expect<sup>2</sup>. And then in Chapter 7B, we'll explore more about what it means to turn this evidence into systematically collected data that is organized in such a way that aids analysis and is most useful to you. Because the key sources of evidence are a bit different at different grade levels, we have divided the evidence into Grades K–2 and Grades 3–5.

## **Sources of Evidence in the Grades K–2 Reading Foundations Skills Block**

The Skills Block uses three primary forms of evidence: benchmark assessments, cycle assessments, and daily assessments (snapshots and exit tickets). These assessments are designed to help you first identify what microphase<sup>3</sup> of reading and spelling development a student is in so that you can target instruction, and then to help you monitor students' progress as they learn new skills through whole and small group instruction.

### **Benchmark Assessments**

This collection of assessments includes Letter Name and Sound Identification, Phonological Awareness, Spelling, Decoding, and Fluency. The beginning-of-year administration helps you determine a student's microphase so that you can use this information to form differentiated small groups based on similar student strengths and needs. Ongoing administration (middle and end of year) helps you follow student progress through the phases so that you can continue to provide the most targeted instruction.

### **Cycle Assessments**

Administered more frequently than benchmarks (approximately once per cycle starting in kindergarten Module 4 through Grade 1 and two or three times per cycle in Grade 2), cycle assessments are directly tied to what has been taught up to a given point in a module. These materials can also be differentiated based on student need. For example, if a small group of students in Grade 2 is mostly working in the late Partial Alphabetic microphase (below grade level), the cycle assessment materials can be differentiated to include measurement of letter sound recognition and spelling of CVC (consonant/vowel/consonant) words rather than more advanced words.

### **Daily Assessments**

In Grades K–1, daily assessments are called “snapshot assessments,” and in Grade 2 the daily assessment is in the form of an exit ticket. Each allows you to quickly check on mastery of daily learning targets.

## **Sources of Evidence in the K–2 Content-Based Literacy Curriculum**

In the Module Lessons, formative assessment opportunities are explicitly identified in the Ongoing Assessment section of each lesson. Within the lesson, this section is adjacent to the Learning Target section so that you can easily see how progress toward learning targets will be assessed throughout the lesson. Though you will not formally assess students in the Labs, you may wish to use the assessment checklists from the Module Lessons, particularly the Speaking and Listening Checklist, to help you observe and keep track of student progress as they work in the Labs.

What follows are examples of summative and formative assessments in the K–2 content-based literacy curriculum (Module Lessons plus K–2 Labs [Labs]). This is not an exhaustive list, but it includes some of the more frequently occurring sources of evidence.

<sup>2</sup> See Table 2.5 in Chapter 2 for more information about the assessment system for the K–5 curriculum.

<sup>3</sup> For more information about the phases and microphases of reading and spelling development and the structure of the Skills Block overall, see Chapter 4.

## K–2 Summative Assessments

### END OF UNIT ASSESSMENTS

In Grades K–2, unit assessments occur once per unit. The format of the assessments varies and may include a written response, a completed graphic organizer, or a selected response. These assessments are on-demand, designed to give you an understanding of each student’s knowledge and skills at that point in time. The end of unit assessments are designed so that students experience them as part of a typical lesson, rather than as a “test”; however, they are different from many other classroom experiences in that students must complete the work on their own, without peer collaboration.

### ON-DEMAND WRITING

One end of unit assessment per module includes an on-demand writing task. Every module has an anchor writing standard—narrative, informative/explanatory, or opinion—and the end of unit writing task will assess this writing standard. As a summative assessment, these writing tasks are independent and on demand, with the exception of certain kindergarten standards, which call for students to write “with support.” Sometimes, but not always, this on-demand writing task serves as a draft for the scaffolded performance task.

### ★ Test-Drive Summative Assessments before Teaching the Lessons Leading Up to Them

The summative assessments in the curriculum are designed to assess students’ progress toward standards. And the ongoing formative assessments that happen in every lesson offer you important evidence of how students are doing leading up to those summative assessments. Therefore, it will be an important part of your planning process within the content-based literacy curriculum to look ahead to the end of unit assessments (Grades K–2) and the mid-unit and end of unit assessments (Grades 3–5) and take them for a test drive.

Doing the assessment yourself will allow you to identify the obstacles your students may encounter when they are given the task. During this step, be sure you know which standards are being assessed and how each question pushes you to demonstrate your knowledge and skills with reference to the specific standard. Connecting the dots between the standards, the assessment, and the flow of lessons leading up to it will guide you as you look for evidence of student progress in ongoing formative assessments.

## K–2 Formative/Ongoing Assessments

### ASSESSMENT CHECKLISTS

As we described in Chapter 1, the Characteristics of Primary Learners, which emphasize play, stories, and the arts, guided the design of our K–2 curriculum. When students play, sing, draw, and dramatize stories, they are learning. But how can these activities provide evidence of progress toward standards?

One way for teachers to gather evidence is through assessment checklists (see Figure 7.1 in the Snapshot from Mr. Bashir’s first-grade classroom). In fact, in the primary grades, assessment checklists are required because some standards are *only* assessed through teacher observation; therefore, they are both formative and summative. You will use the following checklists throughout each module:

- » Reading Literature Checklist
- » Reading Informational Text Checklist

- » Opinion Writing Checklist
- » Informative Writing Checklist
- » Narrative Writing Checklist
- » Speaking and Listening Checklist
- » Language Checklist

#### TEXT-DEPENDENT QUESTIONS

In the primary grades, students' answers to text-dependent questions are most often assessed using the Reading Literature Checklist or Reading Informational Text Checklist because answers are given orally. In Grades 1 and 2, however, lessons and unit assessments begin to include selected response (multiple choice) or short constructed responses to text-dependent questions. Text-dependent questions will be a part of most lessons when text is read to or with students, most often during close read-alouds.

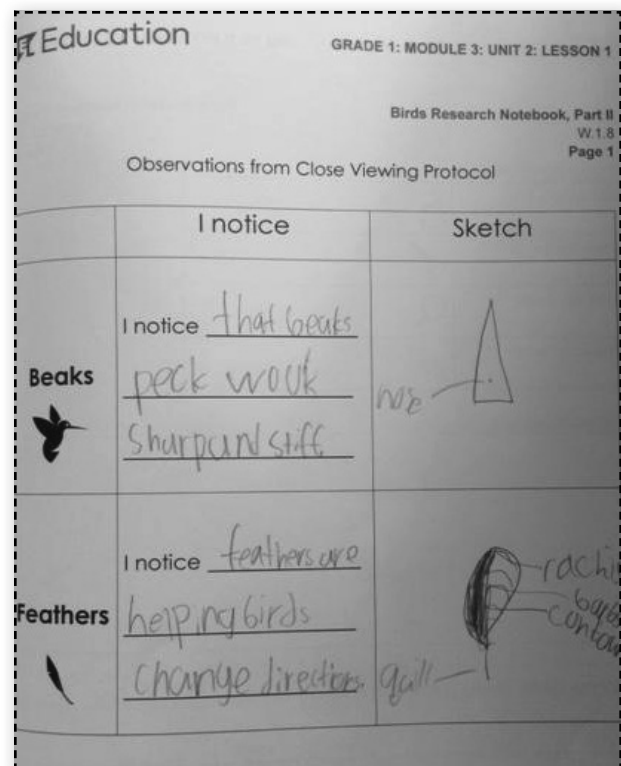
#### WRITING ROUTINES

In the K–2 curriculum, writing routines, such as research notebooks, journals, note-catchers, and graphic organizers, are repeated multiple times throughout a unit. For example, in kindergarten Module 2, students keep a weather journal in which they describe the day's weather, identify the type of clothing that would be most appropriate to wear, and write and draw about suitable activities based on the day's weather. Across Grades K–2, students keep research notebooks during Module 3. Each of these routines allows students to capture their thinking, record information, and synthesize their learning. They offer a rich source of evidence about their progress. (Note: At this age level, writing routines may also include sketching.)

### Sources of Evidence in the 3–5 Content-Based Literacy Curriculum

In the Module Lessons, formative assessment opportunities are explicitly identified in the Ongoing Assessment section of each lesson. Within the lesson, this section is adjacent to the Learning Target section so that you can easily see how progress toward learning targets will be assessed throughout the lesson. Though you will not formally assess students in the ALL Block, students will continue to work toward the same learning targets as in the Module Lessons. You may wish to use the assessment checklists from the Module Lessons to help you observe and keep track of student progress as they work in the ALL Block.

What follows are examples of summative and formative assessments in the 3–5 content-based literacy curriculum (Module Lessons plus the Additional Language and Literacy [ALL] Block). This is not an exhaustive list, but it includes some of the more frequently occurring sources of evidence.



*The use of research notebooks is a writing routine that allows students to capture their thinking, record information, and synthesize their learning.*