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The Urgency of Now

Addressing Assessment Inequities

We live in challenging times. Recently we have faced a global pandemic, increased calls for equity and racial justice, extreme political divisiveness, assaults on the integrity of our democracy, and even questions about what science and facts are. And on top of these challenges, we are in the midst of an assessment craze in education. High-stakes testing and mandated state-level testing reign in schools across the United States, with the assessment of students' reading progress a primary focus. In this book, we use the construct of *invisibility,* feeling unseen and unheard, to describe the repercussions to teachers and their students of this obsession with testing. Teachers find their role in deciding how, when, and for what purposes reading is taught and assessed in their classrooms diminished and feel pressured to march through the curriculum fixated on raising test scores. Students encounter instruction that bears minimal or no evidence of their histories or lived experiences and conclude their teachers do not care about them. Both see themselves as inconsequential—that is, *invisible* to the instruction and the assessment that occurs in their classrooms.

Further, this obsession exacts huge costs on teachers and students (Koretz, 2017). When increased test scores become the marker for students' reading achievement, promotion, and/or placement into special programs, teachers spend inordinate amounts of time preparing their students for these tests, and students spend far too much time taking tests. When their role as instructional decision makers is diminished, teachers come to discount their literacy instructional knowledge and their capability to assess their students' reading ability. As a result, they come to believe that the content they are mandated to assess (and told how to assess) becomes more important and valuable than what is assessed during the formative, in-the-moment, ongoing assessment they do as part of their instruction. Students fare no better. Koretz (2017) recounted multiple stories of students experiencing physical responses, stomachaches, headaches, and the like brought on by anxiety about upcoming tests. No doubt, these costs harm teachers, and students, but there is a more insidious cost paid by too many students who attend U.S. schools.

The Testing Obsession Fuels Existing Inequities in Our Educational Institutions

This obsession with testing exacerbates the systemic and pervasive inequities present in the U.S. educational system. Standardized and mandated testing fuel many of those inequities. First and foremost, standardized tests are products of the dominant, White middle-class culture. This reflection of that culture takes place in subtle ways, such as in the words used, the topics selected to contextualize the questions, and the allusions made. These biases disadvantage students not socialized within a White middle-class culture, specifically students of color and those who are linguistically diverse, culturally diverse, and from underresourced communities (Koretz, 2017). Unfortunately, students of color who attend schools in underresourced communities are more likely to experience standardized and mandated tests scores as the primary measure of students' reading performance (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Koretz, 2017). And such tests typically use a multiple-choice format, which by default requires the assessment of small bits of information, such as knowledge of basic reading skills (International Literacy Association [ILA], 2019a; Shepard, Penul, & Davidson, 2017). Testing bits and pieces of language denies students the enriched curriculum they need to develop the dispositions needed, such as toward collaboration and problem solving; and the skills required for the twenty-first century, such as the ability to read critically and make informed decisions (Brady, 2012). Poor children, children of color, and linguistically and culturally diverse learners disproportionately bear the negative ramifications of these inequities. The irony here is that improving educational equity is often a justification given for employing such testing practices (Koretz, 2017).

Linguistically and culturally diverse learners experience additional ramifications when test scores become the marker for student success. Too often assessment content is prioritized over a curriculum that values their home language. Instead, many linguistically diverse learners receive reading instruction framed by a narrow, Eurocentric view of language based on monolingualism that often dissuades or even requires students not to use their home language at school (ILA, 2019b). Students are thus denied the opportunity to become fully bilingual and further develop their home language's linguistic knowledge (e.g., language structure, word knowledge, how language sounds) needed to leverage their reading growth.

Such inequities begin and are sustained by what Angela Valenzuela (1999) referenced as the process of *subtractive schooling*. Even though she used this term to describe the schooling experiences of Mexican American students in a Texas high school, similar processes are well documented in the schooling of younger students and students of color (Nieto & Bode, 2018), in explanations of critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancisc, 2017), and in the rationale for enacting culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2014). The verb *subtracted* means to strip, to take away. Thus, this is not a passive problem of representation, but an active erasure of the lived experiences of linguistically and culturally diverse learners. What is subtracted is what makes each student unique—their lives outside of the classroom, the interests that motivate their attention, the culture that informs their life's meaning, and the linguistic gifts appropriated from their families. Essentially, what is subtracted, stripped, or taken away is what makes them visible to others.

Not only does this process of subtraction fuel educational inequities and dehumanize learners, it is also bad instructional practice. Marie Clay (2001) helps us understand the substantial and foundational role students' personal and lived experiences play in their reading development. When children arrive at school, they bring already developed systems for processing information. Those most relevant to their reading growth include a grasp of the syntax of the language they speak; the meanings of the words they speak; the rituals and routines that help them make sense of their daily lives; the visual forms of objects, pictures, scenes that populate their world; and the understanding of the structure of stories told by significant people. Clay calls these *working systems* and views these processing systems as an essential foundation upon which more formal reading instruction must be built. Furthermore, children develop these processing systems via interactions with those closest to them—members of their family and community. Thus, subtracting what students learned in the laps and by the sides of others leaves them unmoored, without a foundation—essentially invisible.

In this book, we work to provide an alternative to these assessment practices that lead to teachers and students becoming invisible and that feed existing educational inequities by creating literacy assessments that do just the opposite. Teachers become visible when they, not those outside of their classrooms, determine the how, when, and for what purpose reading is taught and assessed. Students become visible when their teachers honor their dignity and unique histories and backgrounds, and they use those insights as the vital foundation upon which reading instruction and assessment are built. Therefore, we view visibility as an antidote to counteract the educational inequities fed by the current testing practices and the personal costs exacted on teachers and students by the current testing obsession.

To highlight the contrast between the assessments described in this book and those which contribute to the assessment craze, we look at the example of a 1-minute assessment for reading fluency. We chose this assessment because we have observed it in many classrooms. It may be required by your school district or it may be that you use it because you are uncertain about how to choose the best means to assess fluency. Teachers have shared with us that when required to give assessments such as this 1-minute fluency assessment, they feel compelled to have their students participate in drills to increase the number of words their students can read per minute so they will score higher on the test. Moreover, the power of required assessments becomes magnified when their students' performance plays a role in determining their students' placement in special programs or evaluating if they meet, exceed, or do not meet standards. That is a lot of power given to an assessment performed in 1 minute!

Not only does it garner outsized power, this 1-minute fluency assessment takes on a degree of importance that far outweighs the amount of useful information it offers. It provides only a tiny bit of data (how quickly and accurately a student can read a short passage), collected during 1 minute on one day of a school year while using just one text. This assessment does not offer information about the student's ability to comprehend the text, generate inferences, or understand important vocabulary words. Neither does it provide information about the students' phonics knowledge or other foundational skills, nor does it account for students' personal interests or motivation to read. In short, this assessment provides a small piece of what constitutes a very complex reading process, and

as in the case of the 1-minute fluency assessment, leads students to think that the purpose of reading is to do it fast!

Moreover, how many words a student reads in 1 minute even undersamples the ability it purports to assess—a student's ability to read fluently. This 1-minute assessment accounts for only one of three dimensions that comprise reading fluency—rate (how many words a student can read in a minute), while it ignores the other two—accuracy (recognizing and decoding words correctly) and prosody (reading with expression and appropriate phrasing) (Hudson, Lane, & Pullen, 2005). Ignoring the dimensions of accuracy and prosody when assessing reading fluency ignores valuable information related to students' comprehension of the text read (Rasinski, Reutzel, Chard, & Linan-Thompson, 2011).

Further, not only is this 1-minute assessment inadequate in its assessment of reading fluency, but its delivery ensures teachers and students remain detached, invisible. Instead of teachers playing the role of an empowered professional, they perform the assessment as a technician giving it when and in the ways others decide. Students fare no better, for they, too, are invisible in this assessment event. Aside from the confined act of reading the text, students play no part in the assessment. They were not asked to reflect on what a fluent reader does. Nor were they asked to reflect on themselves as fluent readers or consider how their reading fluency had changed over time. Given the inadequacies of this 1-minute fluency assessment, we must wonder, "What do the teacher and student give up when preparing for the test?" and "What is omitted, obscured, or downplayed when teaching in order to prepare students for this test?" These seem like questions worth exploring.

Literacy Assessment as a Catalyst for Making Visible the Capabilities of Teachers *and* Students

Let us return to the construct of *invisibility*. As a teacher, what does it mean to you as a professional to be in **your** classroom with **your** students, yet you feel unseen or unheard by your school or district administrators? What about your students? What does it mean to your students when they feel unseen or unheard by you because they see no evidence of their knowledge, their cultural histories, their diverse languages, their lived experiences, or their reading strengths and needs in the instruction they receive? From a series of studies we conducted, we began to grasp what it means to both teachers and students when they feel invisible within their reading instruction. And we learned the role testing pressures played in the development of those feelings.

Over several years, we conducted a set of studies to learn about teachers, students, and parents' views about the reading instruction and reading experiences that occurred in schools (Bass, Dasinger, Elish-Piper, Matthews, & Risko, 2008). To understand their views, we surveyed 399 teachers, 350 students, and 120 family members and interviewed a subset of each group. We learned firsthand that both teachers and students felt they were inconsequential to the teaching and learning enactments in their classrooms—enactments often based on top-down directives accompanied by mandated testing. Teachers shared concerns about the intransigent force assessment played in their classrooms, a force they considered unrelenting. Teachers lamented about the intrusion of the pressures

of testing on their decisions about what and how they taught. Respondents described the experience as intrusive and one that significantly reduced the power their students wielded over their instructional decisions. Teachers told us that their inability to push back on the demands of standardized and mandated tests disempowered them. Heather, a first-grade teacher, shared comments that typify the disempowerment and exhaustion felt by many teachers across grade levels:

> These first weeks of school are the worse. I have a class full of children [28] whom I have to individually test. Four of the five tests I must give have to be read aloud. I have little time to teach, and I must complete these tests within a given time-period. Please, my students are only six!! I'm beyond stressed and exhausted. I have many valuable ways to assess my young readers that are more useful to me. Why can't I be trusted to use my own assessments? I'm a professional!!!

In fewer than 100 words, Heather's comments capture the essence of what many teachers in our studies shared with us. Like Heather, they complained about how preparing their students for tests and administering tests left *little time to teach.* Like Heather they wondered why they must give tests under strict time constraints, that use decontextualized or contrived texts, and for the effort they received nothing but snapshots of what their students know and can do as readers. And like Heather, they wondered why as professionals *they were not trusted to use the valuable ways they know to assess their readers.* Consequently, many teachers spoke of how the demands wrought by standardized and mandated testing not only left them feeling disempowered and exhausted but extinguished the joy they once experienced from teaching.

Unfortunately, the students' comments revealed they sensed their teachers' lack of joy in teaching. Students described rigid classrooms in which their teachers strayed little from lesson plans that evidenced little awareness of students' knowledge, their cultural histories, their diverse languages, their lived experiences, or their reading strengths and needs. One student shared that he felt his teacher "was on autopilot"—teaching one lesson after another, suggesting their teacher was more concerned about covering than about teaching the material to the students in the class. Many students said their teachers' inability to engage them in lessons led them to believe their teachers did not care enough to take the time to learn about them as individuals. The following comments from Trae, a fifth grader, typify the sentiments expressed by many of the students in our studies:

> When I walk into my language arts class, the teacher doesn't even look at me. I'm not sure he even knows who I am. In fact, I wonder if he saw me outside of class, would he recognize me. When class starts, he stands in front of the room and teaches us from the book—boring!!! It's hard for me to pay attention.

Like Trae, many students felt their teachers did not know or care about them. Many like Trae wondered, if her teacher saw her outside of class, *"would he recognize me?"* Like Trae they felt disconnected from their teachers and the instruction they experienced in their classrooms. And like Trae when students viewed themselves as absent from the instruction, they spoke of being bored and disengaged. As implied in Trae's comments but voiced by many students, they yearned to be seen and heard by their teachers. They wanted their teachers to care enough to seek a close personal relationship with them.

As we analyzed the responses of the teachers and the students, we searched for a word to capture their meaning and that expressed the personal experiences teachers and students reported. We chose the word *invisibility* because it accomplished both. As a concept, invisibility, can be thought of in different ways. First, its literal definition captures the experience of being unseen or unheard. Teachers spoke of district and school administrators who rarely sought their opinions when designing policies that influenced what they taught or how they taught. And students shared that their strengths, needs, or interests were absent from the instruction they received. Second, the word *invisibility* captures the consequence when individuals feel invisible—they feel disempowered and therefore lack the agency to change their circumstances. Teachers spoke of wanting professional development to increase their knowledge of the best ways to assess their students' literacy growth but were told by their administrators that the professional development calendar was set for the year. Teachers complained that even when they possessed knowledge of assessments they viewed as more humane and student-centered, they were stymied in their efforts to use them because of the constraints in time and preparation required for the mandated assessments. Students spoke of becoming bored and disengaged when their interests and needs were absent from the instruction in their classrooms and attributed this absence as a sign their teachers did not care about them as learners. Teachers and students were clear about the antidote to their invisibility in their classrooms. Teachers wanted to be respected as professionals by their district and school administrators, and learners wanted to know that their teachers cared enough to take the time to learn about their interests, backgrounds, and literacy strengths and needs.

As we thought about the ramifications of the testing practices that resulted in many teachers and students feeling invisible and the inequities, such as ignoring student differences and using test scores as markers for promotion, associated with standardized assessments, we knew reading assessment must be grounded in a different paradigm. A paradigm that diverges from those that result in teachers and students being inconsequential within the assessment process, and a paradigm that is more equitable, just, and humane. In this book, we propose a view of reading assessment as a humanizing, empowering process that proceeds through an equity mindset. As a humanizing process, assessment honors the dignity of each student and is guided by the belief that all humans deserve the opportunity to fulfill their human potential. Being able to read provides a necessary tool for fulfilling one's potential (UNESCO, 2020). For teachers this means using assessments that provide an expansive, not a restrictive, look at students' reading potential. For students this means assessments that account for their knowledge, cultural histories, diverse languages, lived experiences, and reading strengths and needs. As an empowering process, assessment becomes an agentive space for both teachers and students. For teachers, this means they hold the assessment reins. Thus, assessment as an empowering process places a high value on teachers' knowledge, their ability to collect and analyze authentic data, and their use of such data to make instructional judgments. For students, this means they become active partners not passive participants during the assessment process. Students engage in self-analysis, reflect on their reading preferences, and become aware of the perspectives they hold of themselves as readers. Finally, the assessment process proceeds through an equity mindset, so teachers use assessments to understand and to provide all students the instruction they need to become fully engaged readers. For teachers, this means they need the support of school and district administrators to acquire

the knowledge of and access to a wide range of reading assessments. For students, this means they receive the instruction they need when they need it and aligned with their strengths and needs, thereby increasing their opportunity for continuous reading growth. These opportunities exist for **all** students regardless of race, ethnicity, gender and gender expression, language, disability, background, or income (Aspen Education and Society Program and the Council of Chief State School Officers (2017).

In the next section, we provide more description of this view of assessment as a humanizing, empowering process that proceeds through an equity mindset. First, we explain why we limit our focus to reading assessments as opposed to literacy assessments broadly writ. Then, we further define this view of assessment by presenting how the assessments we support foreground teachers and students and account for reading's complexity.

The Reading Assessments We Champion

Literacy comprises multiple processes, including reading, writing, listening, and speaking. In this book, however, we focus primarily on the assessment of reading. We chose this focus for three reasons:

1. *Students' scores on reading assessments garner an outsized importance in defining their academic abilities.* Too often, these scores serve as a proxy for a district's, school's, or teacher's success. And they often carry high-stakes implications for students—such as determining whether they progress to the next grade level or will be graduated from high school.

2. *A single score or composite score on a standardized test cannot validly capture the complexity of students' reading.* Consider the complexity implied in Alexander's (2020) description of reading. "Reading is an expansive activity that occurs whenever a person and written language interact" (p. 594). Think about the complexity of the reader and the need to account for not only the reader's grasp and application of reading's cognitive aspects but also the personal, social, and cultural influences that weigh on their reading. Now think about the breadth of the written language in which readers interact. They engage with written language in almost infinite forms—books, digital devices, online, street signs, grocery aisles.

3. Perhaps most important, *standardized tests are products of the dominant, White middle-class culture and reflect that culture, while disadvantaging students not socialized within that culture*—students of color, linguistically and culturally diverse learners, and students from underresourced communities (Koretz, 2017). Therefore, these tests are inherently biased for many of the students who attend our schools. Unfortunately, the ways in which this bias appears, such as in the words used, the topics chosen to contextualize the questions asked, and the structure of the sentences, makes the bias less obvious, and thereby more pernicious (Kim & Zabelina, 2015). That bias leads to such tests being inherently unfair to many students in our schools and, therefore, antithetical to assessment as a humanizing, empowering process that proceeds through an equity mindset. For these reasons, we promote reading assessments that *foreground teachers and students* and assessments that are *attuned to reading's complexity.*

Reading Assessments That Foreground Teachers and Students

We began this chapter by describing the corruption to teaching and learning that results from the emphasis placed on raising test scores and the costs this emphasis exacts on teachers and students. To counter these costs, we promote a more humane and just approach to assessment; one we described as a humanizing, empowering process that proceeds through an equity mindset. This perspective prioritizes formative assessment over summative assessment. Summative assessments, which include standardized tests, end of course tests, and quarterly or benchmark tests, assess the cumulative progress students have made toward learning specific standards or content (International Reading Association, 2013). In contrast, formative assessment is not a specific type of assessment but describes a process interwoven within daily classroom instruction and thus that is part of the instruction. Formative assessment becomes an agentive space for teachers and students. Teachers observe and engage with their students as they apply their literacy knowledge and monitor their students' responses to the instruction. Teachers' presence during instruction enables them to offer timely advice in a manner responsive to the students' actions. Students engage in self-analysis, reflect on their preferences as readers, and attend to the perspectives they hold of themselves as readers. Students, through sustained engagement in the assessment process, become partners in their own learning (International Literacy Association, 2014). Moreover, given the nature of formative assessment, teachers gain more accessible and actionable feedback they can share with their students who then can use this feedback to set personal learning goals and to gain important insights about themselves as readers (International Literacy Association, 2013). Collectively, these features create an assessment process that provides teachers and students with information that is instructionally situated, practical, timely, and sensitive to the nuances of students' actions.

In addition, data gathered during the formative assessment process provide teachers the information they need to create high-quality reading instruction. Teachers need such data to design and implement instruction that enables students to make continuous progress in their reading ability. Essentially, information gained from formative assessments provides teachers a roadmap to follow when they plan, design, and implement reading instruction (International Reading Association, 2013). To illustrate the essential role formative assessment plays in delivering such instruction, we use the analogy of a ship's navigator. Informed by their[1] knowledge and experience, a ship's navigator uses maps and instruments to chart a ship's destination. Once a path is charted, the navigator monitors the ship's progress and stays alert to potential challenges, those expected, such as guiding the ship through a familiar waterway, and those unexpected, such as an approaching unmarked iceberg. Thus, the navigator's success in safely guiding the ship though these challenges and arriving at its destination hinges not only on their background and experience, but on the accuracy of the maps and instruments that inform their decision making.

When using this analogy to describe the role formative assessment plays in providing reading instruction attuned to students' backgrounds, strengths, and needs, the

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[1]We freely use *they* (and *them* and *their*) as a singular pronoun throughout this book to avoid the need for binary and gendered pronouns, except where appropriate in specific examples.

teacher assumes the role of navigator. The assessments serve as the teacher's maps and instruments. And ensuring each student makes continuous progress toward becoming an effective, independent reader serves as the destination (i.e., goal). Like the ship's navigator, the teacher, informed by their knowledge and experience, uses data gathered from assessments to monitor the student's progress toward meeting the goal and stays alert to potential challenges. To monitor their students' progress and to stay alert to challenges that might impede that progress, teachers, like the ship's navigator, assume tremendous responsibilities. At a minimum those responsibilities include being vigilant data collectors, performing probing data analysis, keeping consistent records, and using what they learn from their assessments to inform their instruction. These occur while all along being alert to challenges that might impede student progress—challenges expected, such as those that occur when introducing a student to an unfamiliar text genre, and those unexpected, such as recognizing that a student fails to connect information read at the beginning of a text with information read in subsequent parts of the text. And finally, like the ship's navigator, the teacher's success in guiding their students through these challenges hinges on their knowledge and experience, as well as the accuracy of their assessments (i.e., their maps and instruments). Thus, the teacher, like a ship's navigator, must know where they are going, must know how to get there, must base their plans on their ongoing analysis of the data gathered, and must be willing to adjust their plans as needed.

Reading Assessments That Account for Reading's Complexity

Reading's complexity stems from its cognitive processes as well as the personal, social, and cultural influences that bear on its development. As a cognitive process, the enactment of reading varies by purpose (e.g., reading for pleasure, reading to learn about a topic) and by text (e.g., reading a fictional text for pleasure, reading a procedural text to learn how to do something). Reading's complexity also varies by strategy possession and use (e.g., rereading a portion of a text to solidify its meaning) and by motivation (e.g., reading a text about a topic of interest, versus reading an assigned text about a topic of little interest). This complexity includes not only recognizing what students know and can do but also recognizing their ability to call forth this knowledge when needed. So, a student not only knows that previewing a nonfiction text improves text comprehension but also knows when to apply this strategy. To assess adequately reading's cognitive complexity, teachers need diverse and dynamic ways to collect information, such as observation and interviews, gathered as students read in different contexts, read different types of texts, and read for different purposes. Further, because reading develops across time, teachers must gather information about their students' reading progress throughout the school year as they engage in authentic reading and writing experiences.

In addition, reading's complexity accounts for the influence a student's personal, social, and cultural experiences exact on their interpretations of texts read, their responses to the instruction received, their disposition toward literacy, and the meaning they ascribe to a text's purpose and use. Therefore, these influences must be considered when collecting, analyzing, and interpreting assessment data.

To account for these influences, Penul and Watkins (2019, p. 202) found promise in using a sociocultural model to guide views about teaching and learning and the nature of

the assessments used. By using such models, teachers become intentional in their efforts to create learning experiences that account for their students' personal, social, and cultural experiences. Accordingly, teachers who embrace a sociocultural model of learning expand their assessment focus beyond the students' acquisition of the content that contextualizes the assessments to include what they know about how their students' knowledge, cultural histories, lived experiences, and reading strengths and needs shape their responses to the content. Hence, teachers' assessments must consider how students' identities as members of particular families and communities shape learning outcomes (Penul & Watkins, 2019, p. 202). Moreover, assessments must account for students' perceptions of themselves as agents in their own learning, and teachers must consider how the students' relationships with peers can enhance or detract from their learning outcomes. Further, Penul and Watkins (2019) maintained connecting students' classroom learning and assessment experiences with their experiences outside of school creates a more just and humanistic educational experience, and by doing so, offers students the opportunity to put their best learning foot forward. So how do teachers account for personal, social, and cultural influences during their assessment of student learning? Table 1.1 offers some ideas. It lists each

TABLE 1.1.   Influences, Example Questions, and Sample Assessment Strategies in This Book

Influence	Examples of questions addressed by this influence	Sample assessment strategies
Personal	• What does the student do when out of school? • What interests does the student possess? • Which instructional experiences engage the student? • What makes reading hard for the student? Easy? • What type of assistance does the student need when engaged in literacy activities? • What assistance do other students seek from the student?	*Initial Student Conversation* (2.2) *Conferencing with Care* (3.1) *Student Self-Assessment* (7.3) *Goal Setting* (7.4) *Photo Elicitation Interview* (8.5)
Social	• How does the student describe themselves as a reader? • How do others respond to their classmates' reading behavior, for example, interpretations offered by the student during book discussions? • Whose ideas in the classroom are valued and whose ideas are discounted?	*I Am Who I Am as a Reader* (2.4) *The Blob Tree* (3.3)

Cultural	• What do I know about the communities in which my students live?
	• What objects, activities, routines are common in the students' homes?
	• How is reading used in the students' homes and communities?
	• If students are immigrants:
	   What do I know about their home country or why they left to come to the United States?
	   What family members remain in their home country?
	   How do their families stay in touch with family in their home country?
		Initial Parent Conversation (2.1)
		
		Celebrating Identities with Students and Their Families (2.3)
		
		Literacy Provision Inventory (8.4)

influence, provides sample questions related to each influence, and displays assessments useful in answering such questions. Please note that even though we present each influence separately to emphasize its distinctiveness, in reality they entwine.

To account for students' **personal influences,** literacy instruction and assessment must build on students' backgrounds, strengths, interests, and needs. These inform instruction in substantive, not incidental, ways (Penul & Watkins, 2019). Teachers identify topics students find interesting and relevant to their lives and then uses their questions to guide their learning. So, a teacher learns that students want to decrease litter in their community and uses this concern to initiate a unit of study on the environment. The teacher uses questions generated by students about this issue (e.g., "Why do people throw trash on the ground?") to structure learning events. Questions teachers might ask related to this influence include "What does the student do when out of school?" "What interests does the student possess?" "Which instructional experiences engage the student?" "What makes reading hard for the student? Easy?" "What type of assistance does the student need when engaged in literacy activities and what assistance do other students seek from the student?" Assessment strategies in this book that are useful in addressing these questions include *Initial Student Conversation* (2.2), *Conferencing with Care* (3.1), *Student Self-Assessment* (7.3), *Goal Setting* (7.4), and the *Photo Elicitation Interview* (8.5).

To consider students' **social influences,** literacy instruction and assessment must account for how students view themselves as literacy users and how other students view their peers' literacy behavior. Questions teachers might ask related to this influence include: "How does the student describe themselves as a reader?" "How do others respond to their classmates' reading behavior, for example an interpretation offered during a book discussion?" "Whose ideas in the classroom are valued and whose ideas are discounted?" Assessment strategies useful in addressing these questions include *I Am Who I Am as a Reader* (2.4) and *The Blob Tree* (3.3).

To account for students' **cultural influences,** teachers must learn about their students' families and communities and seek to recognize how these influences shape their students' beliefs and predispositions toward literacy. Questions teachers might ask related to this influence include: "What do I know about the communities in which my students live?" "What objects, activities, and routines are common in their homes?" "How is reading used in the students' homes and communities?" If students are immigrants, they ask questions like "What do I know about their home country or why they left to come to the United States?" "What family members remain in their home country?" "How do their families stay in touch with family and friends in their home country?" Assessment strategies useful in addressing these questions include *Initial Parent Conversation* (2.1), *Celebrating Identities with Students and Their Families* (2.3), and *Literacy Provision Inventory* (8.4).

Assessment must account for reading's complexity. Too often reading assessments limit their range to a partial assessment of students' reading ability, such as assessing basic reading skills (e.g., phonics knowledge) with worksheets, assessing comprehension with prescribed questions, or assessing some but not all dimensions of a multidimensional process (e.g., reading fluency). To assess reading's complexity necessitates that teachers have access to an expanded, not a restrictive, cache of assessment tools. Teachers need that expanded assessment toolbox if all students, not just those socialized within the dominant culture, are to make continuous progress toward becoming effective and engaged readers.

Principles That Guide Our Approach to Reading Assessment

The following principles make explicit the beliefs just outlined in this chapter and that guide our thinking about reading assessment. These beliefs align with our central desire to represent reading assessment as a humanizing, empowering process that proceeds through an equity mindset. Those beliefs bring visibility to teachers and students. Teachers become visible when they, not those outside of their classrooms, determine the how, when, and for what purposes reading is taught and assessed. Students become visible when their teachers believe their students' knowledge, cultural histories, diverse languages, lived experiences, and reading strengths and needs provide the linchpin, the vital foundation, upon which reading instruction and assessment is built. Importantly, we view visibility as an antidote to counteract the personal costs exacted on teachers and students by the current testing obsession.

Each principle offers a distinctive variable to consider when creating, selecting, or conducting reading assessment. However, as a collective, they provide guardrails that keep us from veering away or from selecting literacy assessments that place teachers in the role of technician and treat students as a monolithic group. As guardrails, they offer us explicitly stated parameters to inform our choices of the assessments to include in this book. As guardrails, they offer you an explicated framework to guide your choice of assessments to use in your classroom.

We group our beliefs into four broad principles, with each principle achieving further definition by the central ideas subsumed under it (see Figure 1.1).

Principle One: Reading assessments must occur through an equity lens/mindset *Three components constitute this principle:* • Promotes respectful teacher–student relationships • Embraces students as active partners • Builds on students' strengths	**Principle Two: Reading assessment must ensure the visibility of teachers and students in the assessment process** *Two components constitute this principle* • Is guided by thoughtful teachers • Leverages students' reading histories and lived experiences
Principle Three: Reading assessment must be embedded in daily instructional and learning activities *Two components constitute this principle:* • Is planned along with instruction • Offers timely and thus useful data	**Principle Four: Reading assessment must account for reading's complexity** *Two components constitute this principle:* • Accounts for the whole child • Takes multiple forms and serves multiple functions

Assessment as a humanizing and empowering process that proceeds through an equity mindset

FIGURE 1.1. Principles that guide the selection of assessment methods and processes.

Principle 1: *Reading Assessment Must Occur through an Equity Mindset*

The assessments presented in this book are grounded in the belief that all students deserve to be treated with dignity and to have the chance to fulfill their human potential; learning to read provides substantial support for those efforts. Teachers control the assessment reins, so they choose what to assess, when to assess, and how to assess their students' reading development and performance. Students are empowered because they become active, not passive participants in the assessment process. Teachers who work through an equity mindset see that reading assessment plays an essential role in their efforts to provide each student the instruction needed to fulfill their human potential. To that end, the three central ideas subsumed under Principle 1 include selecting assessments that (1) promote respectful teacher–student relationships, (2) embrace students as active partners, and (3) build on students' strengths (see Figure 1.1).

1. *Promote respectful teacher–student relationships.* A humanizing, empowering assessment process that works to achieve equity necessitates positive teacher–student relationships. We have known for decades from research that positive teacher–student relationships increase students' academic success and satisfaction with school (Gershoff & Aber, 2006). What is less discussed is the unique role such relationships play when conducting reading assessments. Students must trust their teachers if they are to engage in self-analysis, reflect on their preferences as readers, and become aware of the perspectives they hold of themselves as readers. A positive teacher–student relationship supplies the psychological context students need to develop that trust, so they feel comfortable in sharing such personal information (Gershoff & Aber, 2006). Throughout this book the assessments presented support your efforts to promote respectful teacher–student relationships, but we offer additional support with the inclusion of Chapter 3, "Building Trusting Relationships: The Linchpin of Productive and Effective Reading Assessment." Chapter 3 describes the significant role such relationships play when conducting assessment and illustrates how these relationships inform the development and implementation of reading assessments.

2. *Embrace students as active partners.* The assessments in this book engage students to become agents in their own learning and as such they become full partners in the assessment of themselves as readers. To ensure students become agents in their own learning, teachers set as an assessment goal to support their students' efforts to self-assess and to reflect on themselves as readers. Further, teachers and students reverse roles. Instead of playing the typical roles of the teacher talks and the students listen, it is students who talk and the teacher who listens. Throughout this book we support your efforts to embrace students as full partners in the assessment process. We provide additional support with the inclusion of Chapters 4, 5, and 7. Chapter 4, "Using Student Talk to Assess Students' Reading Comprehension," and Chapter 5, "Assessing Readers' Text Comprehension," discuss how making students aware of their reading processes promotes their role as an active assessment partner. The chapters then illustrate how that awareness informs the development and implementation of reading assessments. Chapter 7, "Using Assessment to Support Students' Development of Agency," explains why students must be active partners in their reading assessment and illustrates how that partnership informs the development and implementation of reading assessments.

3. *Build on students' strengths.* The assessments in this book originate from a belief that each student is a unique and competent individual capable of continuous reading growth. Teachers who work from this belief see differences among their students as assets not deficits. Teachers position themselves as keen observers who watch and listen to their students as they engage in reading practices. They build on what students know, and to help them learn what they do not know. Throughout this book the assessments presented support your efforts to build on students' strengths. Chapter 8, "Starting with Student Strengths," provides additional support in those efforts and illustrates how students' strengths inform the development and implementation of reading assessments.

Principle 2: *Reading Assessment Must Ensure the Visibility of Teachers and Students in the Assessment Process*

In this book, we offer a fresh and timely perspective on reading assessment—moving from technical and top-down decision making to thoughtful assessments that engage teachers and students. We promote assessments where teachers become more visible. Teachers are viewed as professional educators who make decisions rather than technicians who conduct assessments for the sake of getting them done. Students are made visible because they serve as the purpose, the north star, in the assessment process. It is all about them—not about the tests, the standards, or the mandates. To that end, the two central ideas subsumed under Principle 2 are that assessments must (1) be guided by thoughtful teachers and (2) leverage students' histories and lived experiences (see Figure 1.1).

1. *Be guided by thoughtful teachers.* To be thoughtful when conducting assessments means to give attention to and be intentional about the literacy assessments one chooses to use in their classroom. Hence, teachers conduct literacy assessment as thoughtful actions embedded in rich teaching and learning opportunities (Dennis, 2017). And importantly, those actions are informed by variables at the core of what makes us human—our identity, our personal relationships, and our life experiences. Throughout this book, we support teachers' efforts to conduct literacy assessments as thoughtful actions. This chapter offers additional support by providing research, an expanded definition of what comprises reading, and principles to inform teachers' selection and use of reading assessments.

2. *Leverage students' histories and lived experiences.* The assessments in this book stem from a belief that students' lives outside of school serve as substantive instead of incidental contributors to how students make sense of their world. Students' sense-making includes but is not limited to preferences for how to learn, the values they hold, and the disposition they possess. For assistance in creating reading instruction students find meaningful, teachers learn about their students' cultural and experiential histories and lived experiences and then use what they learn to leverage their students' reading instruction. Throughout this book we support teachers' efforts to understand the importance of learning about their students' histories and lived experiences. Chapter 2, "Understanding Students' Funds of Identity," offers additional support in those efforts by explaining why it is important for teachers to prioritize learning about their students' histories, identities, and lived experiences. The chapter then illustrates how leveraging students' histories and lived experiences informs the development and use of reading assessment.

Principle 3: *Reading Assessment Must Be Embedded in Daily Instructional and Learning Activities*

Reading assessment must activate and reveal the capabilities of both teachers and their students; a key way to accomplish this is to embed assessment within instruction. Assessment must be at the heart of instruction. Thus, teachers embrace the use of a formative assessment process embedded within daily teaching and learning events that enables teachers to observe their students as they apply reading processes in real time. Such opportunities allow teachers to manage their time efficiently while providing their students in-the-moment support, and when needed, to recast their instruction. To that end, the two central ideas subsumed under Principle 3 are that assessments must (1) be planned along with instruction and (2) offer timely and thus useful data (see Figure 1.1).

1. *Be planned with instruction.* Assessment is not something done at the end of learning but occurs throughout the learning process (International Reading Association, 2013). Therefore, the assessments promoted in this book become part of, not separate from, instruction. As such, teachers plan their assessment as they plan their instruction, and they conduct assessments in the context of their literacy instruction and routines. That planning ensures assessment becomes a forethought not an afterthought, thereby ensuring opportunities exist for data collection. To capitalize on assessments' potential, teachers must create literacy events that make literacy learning visible and audible (Johnston & Costello, 2005). Throughout this book we support teachers' efforts to embed assessment within their instruction, for example we use vignettes situated in classroom settings, called implementation examples, to demonstrate how teachers can use the assessment strategies within their literacy instruction and routines. Chapter 6, "Assessing Constrained Skills within the Big Picture of Reading," offers additional support in those efforts. This chapter discusses the value of assessing constrained reading skills as students engage with authentic text. The chapter then illustrates how the use of authentic text can inform the development and use of reading assessment.

2. *Offer timely and useful data.* The most opportune time to assess students' literacy abilities is when they use reading for authentic purposes. Observing and talking with students in the process of reading offers an immediate context for learning about how students apply what they learned during formal reading instruction. Furthermore, observing students in the process of engaging in reading enables teachers to provide in-the-moment support to students and, if necessary, to alter instruction. Throughout this book, we support teachers' efforts to enact assessments to gain timely and thus useful information, by providing examples of assessments as well as data collection strategies aligned with those assessments. In addition, in each chapter, we complement the detailed descriptions of the assessments with vignettes that demonstrate how to use the assessment strategy during instruction.

Principle 4: *Reading Assessment Must Account for Reading's Complexity*

Reading is a complex process comprised of both cognitive processes and personal, social, and cultural influences. Cookie-cutter one-size-fits all assessment approaches cannot accommodate that complexity. Although we do offer assessments that assess students'

knowledge of skills—for example, Chapter 6, "Assessing Constrained Skills within the Big Picture of Reading"—we balance such assessments with assessments that extend beyond skills and strategies. To that end, the two central ideas subsumed under Principle 4 include selecting assessments that (1) account for the whole child and (2) take multiple forms and that serve multiple functions (see Figure 1.1).

1. *Account for the whole child.* The assessments in this book consider what students know, what they think about what they know, the history of how and where they learned what they know, and their interest in what they know. To support those efforts, reading assessments must extend beyond assessing skill and strategy knowledge; we find support for an expanded range of assessments from the field of developmental science, the study of how humans grow and develop. "Cognition, emotion, and social behavior develop in an integrative, mutually influential way" (Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005, p. 30). Hence, learners cannot and thus do not compartmentalize learning experiences into cognitive, emotional, cultural, and social compartments. Rather, they experience learning holistically, with all their human systems working dynamically and in an integrative fashion (Sroufe et al., 2005). Therefore, students experience reading events in the same way, wherein cognition, emotion, and cultural and social responses interact holistically. To that end, throughout this book the assessments presented support teachers' efforts to extend assessments beyond the assessment of students' knowledge of skills and strategies. In Chapter 7, "Using Assessment to Support Students' Development of Agency," we describe assessment strategies that bolster students' knowledge of self as a literate being. Chapter 2, "Understanding Students' Funds of Identity," describes and demonstrates the use of family and parent interviews to learn about students' family and community as well as their life outside of school.

2. *Take multiple forms and serve multiple functions.* The complexity of the reading process means that no single assessment can provide adequate information about a student's reading ability. In this book, we promote assessments that recognize that students engage in reading differently, such as when they read for different purposes or read in a different context. For an accurate understanding of students as readers, we must account for those differences. Collectively the assessments described in this book come in multiple forms, for example, observations, interviews, and conferences. They also serve different purposes, for example, using interviews to gather information about students' lives outside of school and using observation to determine students' knowledge of basic reading skills. The implementation example that accompanies each assessment strategy supports teachers' efforts to use different forms of assessment and to use assessments for multiple purposes.

Teachers will find support for implementing this approach to assessment in Chapter 9, "Literacy Assessment as Oeuvre: Teachers and Students Building a Visible Body of Work." This concluding chapter presents the concept of *oeuvre,* which describes a substantial body of work that represents an artist's creative expressions. We discuss how a student's *literacy oeuvre* represents their mental and creative efforts in reading through assessments and work products compiled over time. We also explore the notion that teachers who use this approach to assessment build their own body of work, or *teaching oeuvre,*

which makes visible their knowledge and professional growth related to teaching, learning, assessment, literacy, and supporting all of their students over time. This chapter also addresses frequently asked questions about this approach to assessment, including how teachers can get started, how to manage implementation by embedding assessment into daily instructional activities and routines, and how to discuss this approach to assessment with key stakeholders like students, families, administrators, and colleagues.

Why Another Book about Reading Assessment?

Books related to reading assessment abound. So, you may wonder, why add another? Our examination of the multitude of available literacy assessment books laid bare a glaring omission. Although many acknowledge the influence that variables such as a literate identity, student agency, and the role a positive teacher–student relationship play in assessment, we go beyond touting their value. We devote a full chapter to each. As a collective, these topics—along with those covered in the other chapters—create a more humane, just, and empowering approach to literacy assessment.

In Chapters 2–9 we present a total of 28 assessment strategies that you can use to make your students' literacies, identities, interests, goals, skills, strengths, and areas of need visible so you can use that data to plan and deliver meaningful instruction to support all of your students. Figure 1.2 provides a matrix of all the assessment strategies in this book and shows what areas of literacy and learning they each address.

Conclusion

We hope that by reading the chapters in this book, you can begin to see assessment as a tool for teaching, learning, and equity. As you learn how to tweak assessments you may currently use and discover new assessments, you will be able to assume your role as a professional who determines how, when, and for what purposes reading is taught and assessed in your classroom. In turn, your students will feel valued because they see evidence of their histories, identities, funds of knowledge, and lived experiences in how reading is taught and assessed in your classroom. To that end, assessment becomes a humanizing, empowering process that is your partner in achieving equity. As such, assessment, guided by your thoughtful actions, embraces differences and builds on student assets. Most importantly, the reading assessment approach promoted in this book moves teachers and students from invisible no ones to visible someones!

Area of assessment → / Strategy ↓	Comprehension	Vocabulary	Fluency	Word identification	Phonemic awareness	Student interests	Student background and assets	Strategy use and reading behaviors	Metacognition	Student engagement and agency
2.1 *Initial Parent Conversation*						X	X			
2.2 *Initial Student Conversation*						X	X			X
2.3 *Celebrating Identities with Students and Their Families*						X	X			X
2.4 *I Am Who I Am as a Reader*						X	X	X	X	X
3.1 *Conferencing with Care*	X					X	X	X	X	X
3.2 *Conferencing with Retrospective Miscue Analysis*	X	X					X	X	X	X
3.3 *The Blob Tree*						X	X			X
4.1 *Vocabulary Knowledge Assessment*	X	X					X	X		
4.2 *Language Detective*	X							X	X	X
4.3 *T-Chart*	X	X					X	X	X	X
5.1 *Retellings*	X	X						X	X	

Strategy										
5.2 Think-Alouds	X						X	X	X	
5.3 Questioning of Text Comprehension	X						X	X	X	X
5.4 Semantic Word Sorts	X						X			X
6.1 What Can You Show Us?				X	X		X	X	X	X
6.2 Running Records			X	X				X		
6.3 Oral Reading Analysis			X	X				X	X	
6.4 Elkonin Sound Boxes					X					
6.5 Developmental Spelling Assessment				X						
7.1 Teacher Self-Evaluation of Opportunities for Student Agency										X
7.2 Student Agency Questionnaire							X	X	X	X
7.3 Student Self-Assessment						X	X	X	X	X
7.4 Goal Setting					X	X	X	X	X	X
8.1 Kidwatching			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
8.2 Portfolios	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
8.3 Can You Help Me Understand?		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
8.4 Literacy Provision Inventory					X	X	X	X	X	X
8.5 Photo Elicitation Interview		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

FIGURE 1.2. Assessment strategy matrix.