

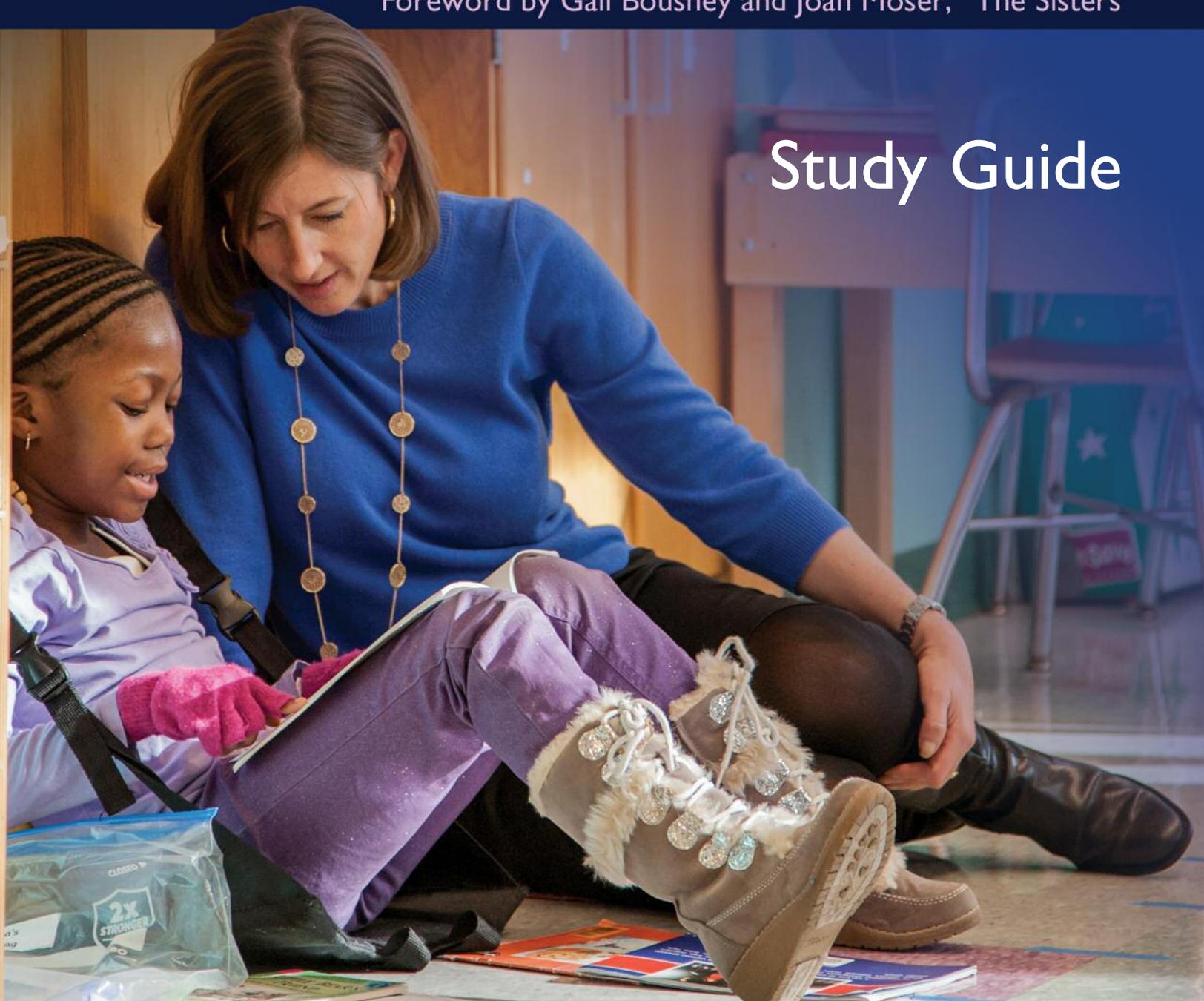
# ASSESSMENT *in* PERSPECTIVE

Focusing on the Reader Behind the Numbers

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Foreword by Gail Boushey and Joan Moser, “The Sisters”

## Study Guide



Assessment is an integral part of instruction. For the past decade, the focus on assessment—particularly via high-stakes mandated tests—has shifted away from the classroom and left teachers feeling as if they are drowning in data. Assessment is, and needs to again become, much more than a number.

*Assessment in Perspective* is about moving beyond the numbers and using assessment to find the stories they tell. This book helps teachers sort through the myriad of available assessments and use each to understand different facets of their readers. It discusses how to use a range of assessment types—from reading conference notes and student work to running records and state tests—together to uncover the strengths and weaknesses of a reader. The authors share a framework for thinking about the purpose, method, and types of different assessments. They also address the questions they ask when choosing or analyzing assessments:

- What type of tool do we need: diagnostic, formative, or summative; formal or informal; quantitative or qualitative?
- How do we use multiple assessments together to provide an in-depth picture of a reader?
- When and how are we giving the assessment?
- Do we want to be able to compare our readers to a standard score, or do we need to diagnose a reader's needs?
- Which area of reading does this tool assess?
- How can we use the information from assessments to inform our instruction?
- What information does a particular assessment tell us, and what doesn't it tell us?
- What additional information do we need about a reader to understand his or her learning needs?

The book emphasizes the importance of triangulating data by using varied sources, both formal and informal, and across multiple intervals. It explains the power of looking at different types of assessments side-by-side with displays to find patterns or inconsistencies. What's more, students are included as valuable sources of data. Letting students in on the process of assessment is key to helping them set goals, monitor their own progress, and celebrate growth. When assessment is viewed in this way, instruction can meet high standards and still be developmentally appropriate.

The Common Core State Standards are one of the biggest changes in our nation's history in terms of education and assessment. Tammy and Clare remind us that although the Common Core is telling us—as teachers—what we need to teach our kids, it also suggests that we need to be the ones to orchestrate how we will teach and assess the standards. *Assessment in Perspective* offers strategies to navigate the assessment process with students in classrooms, within and across grade levels.

The following are suggestions to help groups of educators read, discuss, and extend the ideas from *Assessment in Perspective* into classrooms. These ideas will come to life as teachers are given opportunities to put them into practice with their own students. With that in mind, we have developed discussion questions, pulled provocative quotes, and provided examples of student assessments from each chapter that will enable participants to reflect on the text as well as the reading lives of their students. We also encourage groups to try out some new practices in their classrooms using specific professional development suggestions that are designed to foster collaboration and spark new thinking.

## Chapter 1: Moving Beyond the Numbers

### Questions for Group Discussions

- What constitutes data for you?
- How do you define assessment?
- How has assessment helped you find the stories of your readers?

### Quotes to Ponder

*“Assessment is the thinking teacher’s mind work. It is the intelligence that guides our every moment as a teacher.”*

—Lucy Calkins (page 2)

*“There is no such thing as the perfect lesson, the perfect day in school, or the perfect teacher. For teachers and students alike, the goal is not perfection but the persistence in the pursuit of understanding important things.”*

—Tomlinson and McTighe (page 3)

### The Stories We Carry

*What Constitutes Data?* (page 5)

*Using Observations to Dig Deeper* (pages 5–6)

### Professional Development Idea

- \* Think and talk with your colleagues about the students in your room. What are the stories you carry? Are there students you want to think about as you read this book?

## Chapter 2: Why Assessment? Why Now?

### Questions for Group Discussions

- What are your beliefs about assessment?
- What are your guiding principles about teaching and learning?
- What are two or three things you know for sure?

### Quotes to Ponder

*Assessment needs to be the vehicle that moves us beyond defining our readers as a number.* (page 9)

*Purposeful instruction is based on assessment.* (page 9)

*No matter what standards or curriculum we are asked to teach, we always think about how to create a developmental approach to teaching those high standards.* (page 11)

*We think it is more important now than it has ever been for us to balance knowing our beliefs with being open to learning about new methods in assessment and the practice of teaching reading.* (page 12)

### The Stories We Carry

*What Data Are Valued in Our Schools? The Story of a First-Grade Team* (page 16)

*When the Numbers Don't Add Up* (pages 16–17)

- What did you notice? What did you wonder?
- What connections could you make?

### Professional Development Idea

\* Ask yourself, “What beliefs about assessment data do I want to hold myself accountable to?” These are the beliefs you want to make sure are in the forefront of your mind when you are choosing assessments, analyzing assessment data, and planning instruction. Following is a list of some of our favorite books to use when we are thinking about our beliefs around assessment:

- *What Really Matters to Struggling Readers, Third Edition* by Richard Allington

- (Pearson, 2011)
- *What Really Matters in Response to Intervention* by Richard Allington (Pearson, 2008)
  - *Knowing Literacy: Constructive Literacy Assessment* by Peter Johnston (Stenhouse, 1997)
  - *Data Wise: A Step-by-Step Guide to Using Assessment Results to Improve Teaching and Learning* by Kathryn Parker Boudett, Elizabeth A. City, and Richard J. Murnane (Harvard Education Press, 2005)

Following are some prompts we have used to begin these types of conversations:

- I think common assessments among schools are . . .
- I think the move toward data-based decision making in education has . . .
- I think that teachers working collaboratively to analyze assessments and plan instruction is . . .
- When it comes to assessing our students, I believe . . .

## Chapter 3: Assessment Literacy

### Questions for Group Discussions

- What areas of reading do your assessments measure?
- What is the purpose of assessing?
- What method of assessing will be most helpful at this point in time?
- What type of data do you need?

### Quotes to Ponder

*“Assessment literacy is defined as an understanding of the principles of sound assessment and is present when a person possesses the assessment-related knowledge necessary to interpret and use the information.”*

—W. James Popham (page 20)

*Our informal assessments are designed by us to provide authentic information about how our readers are performing in the classroom. Formal assessments provide data on our students that are valid, reli-*

*able, and can be used to compare students.* (page 24)

*The concept of “literacy literacy” has really helped us become better teachers of reading. As we learn more about an assessment, we begin to ask more questions of ourselves as teachers of reading.* (page 37)

## The Stories We Carry

*What Does the Assessment Really Tell Me?* (pages 43–44)

- What did you notice? What did you wonder?
- How did taking the time to look at the assessment data build assessment literacy?

## Professional Development Idea

- \* Review Figure 3.4, “Taking a Look at Some Elementary Reading Assessments” (pages 30–31). How would you categorize the assessments you use?
- \* Read “Voices from the Classroom: Building Assessment Literacy” (pages 32–33). Choose one common assessment that you use. How would you categorize the assessment? It might be helpful to review the Assessment Literacy breakdown in Figure 3.1 (page 21).
- \* Learn more about assessment literacy. What are the different categories of assessments used to assess a student’s understanding of literacy? Is there an assessment category you are required to give that you don’t know much about? Read and talk with colleagues to learn more about it.
- \* Are there data that you are collecting but not using? Think more about the types of information these data can provide and how you could use them to understand your students and to plan instruction.

## Chapter 4: Triangulating Assessment

### Questions for Group Discussions

- How can you create and use data displays that help you notice patterns and trends?
- What is the best way to display the assessment data you already have?
- What note-taking systems are you currently using that could also be displays?

### Quotes to Ponder

*Triangulating data is defined as using multiple sources of data to illuminate, confirm, or dispute what you learned from an initial analysis of one piece of data. (page 47)*

*By definition, when we triangulate, we never define a reader by a number. (page 48)*

*Triangulating is a cyclical process—analyzing, questioning, assessing, analyzing, questioning, assessing—with the teacher in control of the process. (page 48)*

*The most powerful part of a display is the process of thinking through how you will create it; creating the display is really part of triangulating the data. (page 52)*

### The Stories We Carry

*Using a Display to Triangulate Data on a Student (pages 68–70)*

- What did you notice? What did you wonder?
- What connections could you make?
- How did the display help identify next steps for the child?

## Professional Development Ideas

- \* Read pages 64–65. Ask yourself the following questions:
  - What do I need to teach?
  - Who are my students of concern?
  - Which students are scoring above benchmark?
  - Who do I need additional information about?
- \* Read “Voices from the Classroom: Triangulating Assessments” (pages 49–50). Analyze one of your own assessments and list your questions.
- \* Read “Voices from the Classroom: Creating Displays” (pages 66–67). Create a data display of the results from one of your assessments. What type of display (bar graph, stem-and-leaf graph, line graph, or data wall) will make the most sense for your purpose? How does this display help you jump-start the assessment process? It may be helpful to review Figure 4.4, “Horizontal Bar Graph” (page 53), and Figure 4.5, “Stem-and-Leaf Graph” (page 54).
- \* Make a display of one student’s data to help you notice patterns and trends. How does this display help you identify next steps for this student?
- \* Work with colleagues at your grade level or on your own to create a display of the results of one of your common assessments. What do you notice? What questions do you have? How does this display help you jump-start the assessment process?

## Chapter 5: Assessing Authentically, Every Day

### Questions for Group Discussions

- How can you create structures to support assessing as you teach?
- How can you structure your lessons to help you collect assessment data as you teach?
- Which systems will help you record and house your observational notes about students?
- How can you share information about students who are receiving reading instruction from multiple teachers?

## Quotes to Ponder

*Assessment cannot be separated from instruction. It is not an “add-on”; it is what we do every day as teachers.* (page 72)

*“Effective teaching calls for a third kind of assessment designed to record how the child works on tasks and to inform teaching as it occurs.”*

—Marie Clay (page 73)

*Peter Johnston’s work reminds us “that the most educationally significant assessment takes place in the classrooms, moment to moment, among teachers and students.”* (page 73)

## The Stories We Carry

*Using Assessment to Adjust Our Teaching to the Student’s Needs* (pages 94–98)

- What did you notice? What did you wonder?
- How do the multiple pieces of data help identify next steps for the child?

## Professional Development Ideas

- \* Try out an assessment stance as you are teaching in the classroom. Write notes about your students as you teach whole-class, small-group, and one-on-one lessons. Use the Conferring Notes form (page 126) or the Messy Sheet (page 129) to record important information. What information do you find yourself writing down? What additional assessment information do you need in order to plan instruction?
- \* Take a moment to watch students as they are working and notice what they do independently. What do they do when they are confused? What happens when they get distracted? Record your observations so that you can use this information to design future lessons.
- \* What structures do you use for planning lessons? Review Figure 5.1, “Lesson Planning Form” (page 76). How might such an organizer support your planning process?
- \* How do you record reading behaviors that you observe? Try using Figure 5.2, “Strategy Inventory” (page 78).
- \* Set up or revise your organizational system for collecting classroom assessment data. What system will you use for organizing your notes so that they are easily accessible? What types of note-taking forms work best for you? You may want to try taking notes on the computer—is this more effective? It may be helpful to review “Systems for

Housing Our Notes” (pages 82–83).

- \* How can you share information about students who are receiving reading instruction from multiple teachers? Meet as a group and create a note-taking system together. Try the system for a few weeks and then make a plan to revise it as needed.
- \* Collect multiple pieces of data for one reader who is at-risk. Use the multiple pieces of data to adjust instructional goals to meet the student’s needs.

## Chapter 6: The Student’s Role in Assessment

### Questions for Group Discussions

- How are we creating a culture that supports the use of data in a dynamic learning framework? It may be helpful to review Figure 6.1, “Dynamic-Learning Beliefs and Fixed-Performance Beliefs” (page 102).
- How can you create more opportunities for your students to provide feedback to you about how their learning is going?
- What are some strategies for sharing the purposes of an assessment and assessment results with your students?
- How can your students collect and analyze their own data and use data displays to monitor their progress?

### Quotes to Ponder

*Our readers need to know that we are listening, watching, and expecting them to grow, learn, make errors, set goals, and reflect on the entire process. (page 103)*

*If we want our students to value our feedback and view it as constructive rather than evaluative, then it must be tied clearly to their stated learning goals. (page 105)*

*What message do we send when we hang “Quiet: Testing in Progress” signs around the school, ask students to get extra sleep for the test, or cancel homework the week of these tests? Are we giving more value to formal assessments? (page 107)*

*Our readers need to know that no one has the right to define them as a number and that they are the most important force behind their own growth.* (page 119)

## The Stories We Carry

*Assessment and the Growth Mind-Set* (pages 120–121)

- What did you notice? What did you wonder?
- Why do you think it is important to engage students in conversations about their learning?

## Professional Development Ideas

- \* As a team, review Figure 6.1, “Dynamic-Learning Beliefs and Fixed-Performance Beliefs” (page 102). What are your thoughts about these two different belief systems? What are your students’ thoughts? How do your beliefs influence your work with students?
- \* As a faculty, discuss the students’ role in the learning process. Read professional literature and share ideas about what motivates students as well as which strategies help students become active, engaged learners. Here are a few of our favorite resources on this topic:
  - “Are You Scaffolding or Rescuing?” by Terry Thompson (*Choice Literacy* article, 2010)
  - *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us* by Daniel Pink (Riverhead, 2009)
  - “Seven Rules of Engagement: What’s Most Important to Know About Motivation to Read” by Linda B. Gambrell (*The Reading Teacher* article, 2011)
  - *Teaching Reading in Small Groups: Differentiated Instruction for Building Strategic, Independent Readers* (particularly Chapters 2 and 3) by Jennifer Serravallo (Heinemann, 2010)
- \* How can you use reading notebooks and book logs to help students reflect on their work and identify learning goals? Review Figure 5.8, “Kelly’s Notebook Entry” (page 87).
- \* Reread the exchange between Tammy and Ben on page 100. If students understand the *how* and *why* behind assessments, they can approach them with a sense of purpose, inquiry, and understanding. Before administering an assessment, tell a student why he or she is being assessed. Explain how you will use the assessment data to help you and

the student identify learning goals. After the assessment is complete, share the results (when appropriate). Use this time to help students set instructional goals and to develop an action plan to meet these goals.

- \* As you plan your instruction for the upcoming month, think about how students will reflect on their own thinking processes. How will you help your students talk, write, or draw about what they have learned? It might be helpful to reread the “Assessment Literacy” section (pages 105–112).
- \* Ask your students to reflect on how they are feeling about the assessment process. What do they think are the purposes of the assessments you are giving? How are the assessments affecting the work they do every day? What assessment data do they feel best represent their learning?