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Editorial

Engaging Teachers in Assessment of Their Students' Narrative Writing: The Role of Subject Matter Knowledge

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This paper contains selected results from a study of an inservice program designed to enhance elementary teachers' competencies with narrative writing assessment. Representing a collaboration of teachers and researchers, our program, Writing What You Read, engaged teachers and their young writers in substantive assessments of texts—whether a published author's, their own, or a peer's—in order to guide their growth in narrative criticism and composition. The need to support a classroom focus on assessment is widely recognized (Atwell, 1987; Calabrese, 1993; Calkins, 1986, 1991; Camp, 1992; Freedman, 1991; Glazer, Brown, Fantauzzo, Nugent, & Searfoss, 1993; Graves, 1983; Murphy & Smith, 1991, 1993;

Strzepek & Figgins, 1993; Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991; Wolf, 1993; Wolf, Bixby, Glenn, & Gardner, 1991; Yancey, 1992). In the past two decades, the ways in which teachers teach and assess writing have shifted from a focus on final products to an emphasis on writing as a process, and from a view of writing as a skill to understanding of composition as the purposeful orchestration of literary devices within specific genres to make meaning. Viewing the social construction of meaning through writing as dependent on the writer's goals and particular genres, new frameworks in language arts stress the integration of reading with writing (Dyson & Freedman, 1991; Sulzby, 1991) and the need for explicit instruction in text structure (Paris, Wasik, & Turner, 1991; Pearson & Fielding, 1991). In this context, assessment plays the critical role of a reader's "analytic response to text" (Wolf, 1991, 1993; Wolf & Gearhart, 1993a, 1993b). Guiding the growth of young writers within—or stretching beyond—the rules and regularities of textual features and forms, teachers' commendations and recommendations provide students with a perspective that helps support their planning and revision.

In designing *Writing What You Read* (WWYR), we began by purposefully upsetting the applecart of traditional notions about writing assessment, where convention is more important than communication, and generalized praise takes precedence over critical evaluation. We also wanted to align the teaching and the assessment of writing, rather than artificially distancing them by teaching writing as a process and then testing that process through a timed product (Camp & Levine, 1991). We focused on three domains we believed critical to competencies with interpretive writing assessment. First, teachers need considerable *understandings of text*—of genre, of technical vocabulary, and of ways of analyzing text through discussion and further reading. Second, they need understandings of *children's development of text*—the unique ways that children approach the interpretation and composition of text (Daiute, 1993). Finally, teachers need guidance and experience in *classroom assessment practices*—responding to a child's writing in helpful ways. We worked from an assumption long based in research on teachers' knowledge and beliefs (Borko & Putnam, in press; Grossman, 1990; National Center for Research on Teacher Education, 1991; Shulman, 1987) that what teachers know about subject matter directly affects their pedagogy. If teachers are well-versed in the substantive structures and subtle nuances of specific curricular content, their pedagogy has the potential for a meaningful integration of curriculum, instruction, and assessment that will weave in what they know about a topic, what they know about how children grow in understanding that topic, and what they know about teaching that topic. Drawn from our comprehensive report (Gearhart, Wolf, Burkey, & Whittaker, in press), this article addresses teachers' content knowledge of narrative and its role in teachers' methods of narrative assessment.

PROJECT CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Located in an upper-middle-class suburban neighborhood in the Silicon Valley, the site for our project was an elementary school that served as a longitudinal research site for the national Apple Classrooms of Tomorrow[SM] project from 1986 through 1993. The availability of computer support contributed to Suburban School's interest in students' writing and to the need for appropriate methods of writing assessment. (Suburban School is a pseudonym.)

We began with a focus on portfolio assessment (Baker, Gearhart, Herman, Tierney, & Whittaker, 1991), but our early findings regarding the evolution and impact of portfolio use provided evidence that the teachers' subject matter knowledge was limiting potential impact (Gearhart, Herman, Baker, & Whittaker, 1992; Gearhart, Wolf, Burkey, & Whittaker, in press; Herman, Gearhart, & Baker, 1993). For example, teachers constructed a set of school-wide criteria to guide writing assessment that made no reference to genre, emphasizing mechanics and generalized features of writing content. Teachers' assignment plans and assessment practices tended to reflect these criteria. Thus teachers' plans for narrative assignments emphasized content that included a "beginning, middle, and end," "who, what, when, where format," and language that contained "use of details," "good usage of adjectives," "descriptive words," and "action words." Teachers' feedback to students focused largely on mechanics, local changes in content, or quite ambiguous issues: What are you good at now? In what areas would you like to improve? Despite teachers' emerging awareness that portfolio assessment required the construction of criteria or standards for good writing, the criteria were limited to global understandings of writing that went unchallenged in the school community and provided limited capacity for guiding the growth of young writers.

To address teachers' tendencies to blur the distinctions among writing genres, we made the decision to focus not on the assessment of portfolio collections but on the assessment of specific genre. A focus on genre could build the teachers' capacities to assess writing and provide a framework for the building of assessable portfolios down the road. We began with narrative.

Writing What You Read: Intervention Goals and Methods

Domains of Knowledge and Practice
While our workshop series addressed the three domains of teacher knowledge and practice outlined previously, we focus our description here on enhancement of teachers' knowledge of narrative and teachers' competencies with methods of narrative assessment.

Narrative knowledge refers both to the content of the discipline and to the ways in which the content is used in analytic conversations about literary texts. For *narrative content*, we emphasized an understanding of the components of narrative: genre, theme, character, setting, plot, style, tone, and point of view. We placed particular emphasis on the role of genre in determining character, structuring plot, and shaping other components into a recognizable form (Fowler, 1982; Lukens, 1990; Wolf & Heath, 1992). We also stressed the technical language that represents narrative content—the components and the vocabulary associated with each. Technical vocabulary for "plot," for example, includes "climax," "episode," "flashback," and "foreshadowing," just to name a few. For the ways that narrative content is used in *analytic conversations*, we engaged teachers in discussions to explore the purposeful ways in which authors craft their writing, how the background knowledge and personal life experience of the reader interacts with the text to give it meaning (Rosenblatt, 1978), how readings of the text at hand are supported by other texts (other pieces of literature as well as literary criticism), and how the characteristics and functions of narrative components are interwoven within a piece of text. Thus, learning ways to discuss literature was a key feature of our work with teachers, and we viewed it as essential to teachers' development as "assessors" of children's writing. Just as tradebook texts can be held up for discussion, so too can children's narratives be analyzed for accomplishments and needed improvement. Teachers' growing skill with literary conversation around professional texts can thus support their interpretations of their students' narratives. Conversely, close study of children's developing concepts of narrative can provide impetus for seeking out published passages, characters, settings, styles, and themes for example and inspiration.

Understandings of narrative was one springboard for integrating assessment tools with curricular possibilities and instructional techniques. To build teachers' *competencies with methods of narrative assessment*, we engaged teachers in assessment of children's narrative writing in the same ways that they critically responded to literature. Equipped with the "tools of the literary trade"—an understanding of genre influences, the technical vocabulary, and the orchestration of the narrative components within a text—we encouraged teachers to offer their students explicit guidance for their writing. To meet this goal, we introduced a *narrative feedback form* for written commentary and a *narrative rubric* for judging the effectiveness of students' narratives, and we provided repeated opportunities for their use with their children's writing samples. At each session, teachers scored and commented independently and then shared their efforts in extended group discussions of their interpretations of the writing and their views of the students' needs for guidance. These forms evolved over several sessions as

we evolved as a community in our understandings of the goals of narrative assessment and the utility of the artifacts we were designing to support assessment.

The *narrative feedback form* and the *narrative rubric* are fully described in earlier reports (Wolf & Gearhart, 1993a; 1993b). The *narrative feedback form* (Figure 1) is designed to strengthen teacher–student conferences, providing space for constructive comments in the narrative areas of theme, character, setting, plot, and communication, as well as issues generic to all writing—convention and writing process. In using the form, teachers limit themselves to only two comments—a commendation and a recommendation, which they can place in any of the categories. The object of the form is to choose specific points of criticism to be applied to the child's next draft or piece.

The WWYR *narrative rubric* (Figure 2) is a classroom tool that differs from many other narrative rubrics in its focus on the interplay of genre with children's development in writing. First, it contains five evaluative scales that match the narrative components found on the feedback form. To highlight the critical nature of *orchestration* in the writing process, the language of each scale reveals how the components work together. For example, level four of theme reads: "Beginning revelation of theme on both explicit and implicit levels through the more subtle things characters say and do ("He put his arm around the dog and held him close. 'You're my best pal,' he whispered.")." Theme is inseparable from character and careful communication, as the author purposefully selects specific words to deliver a message about friendship. It is in the orchestration of narrative components and in the interplay of authorial choices that a text succeeds, not in isolated rules and regulations.

Second, each category is headed by horizontal dual dimensions, designed to demonstrate the range of complexity in narrative. The dual dimensions are not linear sequences, but continua whose definitions depend on subgenre choice; for example, themes move between explicit and sometimes didactic statements to implicit revelations. Third, each category contains a 6-level evaluative scale designed to match generalized understandings of children's writing development. To discourage unproductive focus on the meaning of a "4" or a "2," we eliminated numerical scores. The six-level scales work in tandem with the dimensions, permitting adjustments to individual subgenres of narrative, for certain scale points are more applicable to particular subgenres than others. For example, in students' written fables, scores for Character may range between the second and fourth points, depending on the direct or more subtle hints the writer offers. Younger writers may focus more on the action between characters, while older writers may provide initial insights into the intentions behind the action.

Figure 1. The *Writing What You Read* narrative feedback form.

Workshop Content and Sequence

Early workshops in 1992 placed a greater emphasis on knowledge of narrative and on understanding children as writers, and, over time, the focus shifted toward the design, refinement, and practice of specific methods of narrative assessment. This paper focuses on our approach to enhancement of teachers' knowledge of narrative and its impact on classroom assessment practice. In May 1992 and January 1993, we worked with the teachers to design an "assessable" narrative curriculum—careful selections of genres to be taught within and across grade levels. We worked to build the teachers' knowledge of specific genres of narrative (e.g., myth, fairy tale) and, through extensive exploration of specific texts, to guide teachers in the establishment of criteria for assessment. To this end, we reshaped the narrative feedback form into a teacher planning form entitled "Writing a good (genre) means:". (The impetus for this adaptation emerged from one teacher's—Lena's—use of the form for her students' planning.) By 1993, teachers had organized themselves in grade-level teams, selected two narrative genres to teach, and made commitments to implement the WWYR assessment tools. Workshops focused exclusively on guided practice with scoring, written commentary, and teacher–student conferencing.

The structure of all the workshops was quite similar: three half-day sessions were specifically designed for grade-level teams K–2, 3–4, and 5–6 teachers using grade-appropriate literature and writing samples. Each workshop was supported by comprehensive handouts that reinforced key ideas through text and graphics and included recommended further readings. The fourth half-day session was reserved for a meeting with the teachers' steering committee to review key workshop points and plan for the next session.

METHOD

Data Collection

Data collection required a triangulation of qualitative and quantitativ methods. Questionnaires, interviews, and workshop assignments from a participating teachers provided us evidence of teachers' understandings an practices. Other methods deepened our portraits of selected cases: class room observation, analyses of classroom artifacts (e.g., teachers' commen on students' papers), and extended interviews with case study teachers.

Data Analyses

Most of our data are qualitative codings of teachers' responses to question naires and interviews, as well as teachers' comments on children's writin Many of our data sets are small, and represent few cases that fit ar

Narrative Rubric

Theme — *Heart of the Story*

explicit ↔ implicit
didactic ↔ revealing

- Not present or not developed through other narrative elements
- Meaning centered in a series of list-like statements ("I like my mom. And I like my dad. And I like my...") or in the coherence of the action itself ("He blew up the plane. Pow!")
- Beginning statement of theme—often explicit and didactic ("The mean witch chased the children and she shouldn't have done that.")
- Beginning revelation of theme on both explicit and implicit levels through the more subtle things characters say and do ("He put his arm around the dog and held him close.")
- Beginning use of secondary themes, but not often tied to overarching theme; main theme increasingly revealed through discovery rather than delivery ("You can't do that to my sister", Lou cried, moving to shield Tasha with her body.)
- Overarching theme multi-layered and complex; secondary themes integrally related to primary theme or themes

Character

flat ↔ round
static ↔ dynamic

- One or two flat, static characters with little relationship between characters; either objective (action speaks for itself) or first person (author as "I") point of view
- Some rounding, usually in physical description; relationship between characters is action-driven; objective point of view is common
- Continued rounding in physical description, particularly stereotypical features ("wart on the end of her nose"); beginning rounding in feeling, often through straightforward vocabulary ("She was sad, glad, mad.")
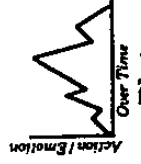- Beginning insights into the motivation and intention that drives the feeling and the action of main characters often through limited omniscient point of view; beginning dynamic features (of change and growth)
- Further rounding (in feeling and motivation); dynamic features appear in the central characters and in the relationships between characters; move to omniscient point of view (getting into the minds of characters)
- Round, dynamic major characters through rich description of affect, intention, and motivation; growth occurs as a result of complex interactions between characters; most characters contribute to the development of the narrative; purposeful choice of point of view

Setting

backdrop ↔ essential
simple ↔ multi-functional

- Backdrop setting with little or no indication of time and place ("There was a little girl. She liked candy.")
- Skeletal indication of time and place often held in past time ("once there was..."); little relationship to other narrative elements
- Beginning relationship between setting and other narrative elements (futuristic setting to accommodate aliens and spaceship); beginning functions of setting (often stereotypical imagery—forest as scary place)
- Setting becomes more essential to the development of the story in explicit ways; characters may remark on the setting or the time and place may be integral to the plot
- Setting may serve more than one function and the relationship between functions is more implicit and symbolic—for example, setting may be linked symbolically to character mood ("She hid in the grass, clutching the sharp, dry spikes, waiting.")
- Setting fully integrated with the characters, action, and theme of the story; role of setting is multifunctional—setting mood, revealing character and conflict, serving as metaphor

Plot — *Action / Emotion, Over Time*

simple ↔ complex
static ↔ conflict

- One or two events with little or no conflict ("Once there was a cat. The cat liked milk.")
- Beginning sequence of events, but occasional out-of-sync occurrences; events without problem or problem without resolution
- Single, linear episode with clear beginning, middle, and end. ("Once upon a time there were two friends named Frog and Toad. One sunny day when they were tree climbing, Frog got stuck. He was scared. So Toad helped him down. Toad was a good friend.")
- Plot increases in complexity with more than one episode; episodes contain four critical elements of problem, emotional response, action, outcome; beginning relationship between episodes
- Stronger relationship between episodes (with the resolution in one leading to a problem in the next); beginning manipulation of the sequence through foreshadowing, and subplots
- Overarching problem and resolution supported by multiple, episodes; rich variety of techniques (building suspense, foreshadowing, flashbacks, denouement) to manipulate sequence

Communication

context-bound ↔ reader-considerate
literal ↔ symbolic
(audience awareness, self, text)

- Writing bound to context ("You have to be there) and often dependent on drawing and talk to clarify the meaning; minimal style and tone
- Beginning awareness of reader considerations; straightforward style and tone focused on getting the information out; first attempts at dialogue begin
- Writer begins to make use of explanations and transitions ("because" and "so"); literal style centers on description ("sunny day"); tone explicit
- Increased information and explanation for the reader (linking ideas as well as episodes); words more carefully selected to suit the narrative's purpose (particularly through increased use of detail in imagery)
- Some experimentation with symbolism (particularly figurative language) which shows reader consideration on both explicit and implicit levels; style shows increasing variety (alliteration, word play, rhythm...etc.) and tone is more implicit
- Careful crafting of choices in story structure as well as vocabulary demonstrate considerate orchestration of all the available resources; judicious experimentation with variety of stylistic forms which are of the symbolic in nature and illuminate the other narrative elements

Figure 2. The *Writing What You Read* narrative rubric.

particular category, but our confidence in the validity of our results derives from several sources. First, whenever possible, we utilized the same schemes across data sets. For example, to document teachers' uses of the technical language appropriate to narrative analysis, we applied a scheme that characterized the appropriateness of terms for narrative (narrative-specific vs. genre general vs. genre confused) to responses from questionnaires and interviews over two years. Second, all data were entered *verbatim* in tables to permit us to move text easily from one category to another, to examine consistencies and inconsistencies in codings, and to facilitate selection of illustrative quotes. Third, most data were coded by at least two researchers. Finally, we opted to use teachers rather than comments as the unit of analysis. Agreement among us on the coding of any given statement (e.g., a teacher's description of the goals of a writing assignment) was more difficult than our agreement that a given teacher had ever expressed a particular view, or represented narrative with a particular construct. Thus, we report findings for teachers—how many teachers expressed a certain view or represented narrative in a certain way?

We adopted three strategies for analysis. First, we considered a dataset from all of those responding to a given questionnaire or interview as evidence of the school community's capacity to engage in narrative assessment at that time. Second, for those teachers responding to similar instruments on more than one occasion, we looked for evidence of individual growth (or lack of growth) over time. Third, we constructed case studies that enrich and supplement findings from the entire staff. The case studies are reported in full in Gearhart, Wolf, Burkey, & Whittaker (in press).

RESULTS

The results selected for this article are organized sequentially, to show the ways that teachers' understandings of narrative evolved and impacted their assessment practices over time. Thus, we report data collected immediately prior to our intervention, from Year One, and from Year Two; each section contains evidence of teacher knowledge and teacher practice.

Intervention Context: Findings Prior to WWYR Workshops
Prior to the WWYR workshops, teachers rarely characterized narrative writing with a technical language that captured its heart or its complexity. When asked to describe the characteristics of a "good story" and a "weak story" for our preworkshop questionnaire, only 5 of 13 teachers made use of narrative language, and only 2 of these 5 saw narrative as a genre with specific features (e.g., "character with conflict—episode or incident—with some sort of resolution"). The remaining 3 teachers simply mentioned isolated elements ("builds on a theme" or "follows the plot"). In lieu of narrative-specific language, most teachers (12/13) used "genre-general" terms that applied rather globally to the characteristics of "good writing": Organization ("beginning, middle, and end," "fairly clear order"), Content ("lots of details," "related ideas"); and Style ("description words," "adjectives to make writing more colorful"). Three teachers included language appropriate only to a genre different from narrative—for example, a very good story "provides enough information for the given topic."

Within the Suburban community, this initial weakness in understandings of narrative helped explain teachers' disinclination to engage in substantive assessment of narrative content. Many of the primary teachers' assessments amounted to unequivocal praise. For example, one of the case-study teachers, Lena, responded to our initial questionnaire by saying, "*Anything* the children write, I consider a 'very good' one. Any first attempts children make with the written word receive praise and positive reinforcement." When we asked, "What makes the story a weak one?" Lena responded, "N/A." Lena's vision of assessment was linked to motivation; she wanted her children to write, so she viewed her role as an uncritical advocate. Another primary teacher, Bert, told us he offered little in the way of feedback suggesting, "It's okay to write without being analytical about it." On the other hand, the middle and upper grade teachers felt their children were already motivated to write. They did not see themselves as cheerleaders, but as critics, yet their criticism focused on convention—correcting misspellings and adding punctuation. One case study teacher, Christina used a checklist of 20 questions including, "Are apostrophes/hyphens used correctly?" and "Are adverbs correctly used?" The few questions related to content focused on the simple inclusion of components rather than the craft of orchestrating them together: "Does the story have a plot?" and "Is there a setting?" The teachers' lack of knowledge concerning the complexity of narrative contributed to feedback that barely scratched the surface of what children need to understand in order to be make meaning through narrative.

Year One WWYR Workshops
Year One workshops emphasized writing as a process, the specific components of narrative, and the integration of these ideas into specific assessment tools. Midway through these workshops, we asked teachers to describe their narrative assignments using an assignment description form that reflected WWYR goals. The responses revealed a shift within the Suburban community to include narrative-specific language. However, the continued use of genre-general terms and occasional juxtapositions of terms within an otherwise narrative-specific description suggested that some teachers were appropriating WWYR terms to prior understandings

in ways that were superficially narrative specific, while inherently genre general: "Bunnies were tied to season themes of spring and Easter." "Communication lesson—it's important to plan your story before you begin." "Students were told to [tell] it 'like a story' with a beginning, middle, and an end." However, towards the end of the Year One workshops there was more growth. Of the seven teachers who responded to both the January preworkshop and May, 1992 surveys, four used narrative-specific language for the first time in May, and two more provided far more detail. For example, Marilyn described a "good story" in her classroom in January as having "conflict, climax, resolution, character, and setting," while, in May, her students were to "use the elements of a tall tale to tell about a hero and how something came to be, describing an individual, a hero, bigger than life, using humor and exaggeration, with some geographical and historical basis."

At the end of our first year, when asked if they perceived change in their understandings of narrative, all teachers reported growth. Most teachers (12 of 15) focused on their understandings of the narrative components. Others commented that they understood better how narrative differs from other genres (e.g., exposition) (2), how narrative subgenres differ (e.g., folk tale vs. historical fiction) (2), or how interpretation and composing of narrative are linked (3). The explicitness of most responses was evidence that most teachers were genuinely sharing their perceptions. Teachers mentioned specific elements ("I have a greater understanding of the difference between plot and theme"), described change ("I wasn't clear on the...types of writing—so came to understand elements of a narrative story"), or demonstrated specific applications of their understandings ("I can divide it up more distinctly into [elements] and am able to explain it that way to students.") Some teachers also shared continued confusions: Plot and theme appeared difficult for some primary teachers to explain to their students, communication was difficult for one teacher to understand, and another teacher remained uncertain of genre distinctions ("What makes this a narrative?").

Teachers' understandings of narrative constructs impacted the extent of their growth in literary exchange and written assessment. Certainly there was evidence of overall growth: "I can bring in more detail—the story elements—when discussing a piece of literature, and I'm more focused on what to look for in literature and the student writing." When teachers understood the analytic constructs presented in workshops, their methods of engaging children in literary analysis benefited from acquisition of a technical vocabulary to represent children's insights: "I give things names—'foreshadowing,' etc.: 'How did you know the wolf was mean? What words gave you a clue?' " Where there was uncertainty in understanding of narrative, they were challenged: "Trying to explain plot to my

kids is often difficult." Similarly, teachers' written comments reflected their knowledge of narrative. Although implementation of specific WWYR assessment tools was not widespread in Year One, many reported a shift away from a mechanics focus toward responses to content ("less redlining") (10 of 15), and an effort to provide either oral or written narrative-specific comments (9). Some teachers had experimented with the narrative feedback form and found its structure very useful ("help focus on one or two things"). Examples of their new methods of commentary were heartening: "Pre example—'Great Story!' 'Super Writing!' Post example—'I like the name of your character. Can you tell me more about him—where does he live, how does he feel?' " However, many teachers continued to share their uncertain understandings of some components of the WWYR rubric and feedback form.

Year Two WWYR Workshops

With a gap of seven months between the June 1992 and the January 1993 workshop, we distributed a "catch-up" questionnaire and observed classrooms just prior to beginning Year Two work. Our findings revealed that weaknesses in teachers' understandings of narrative continued to impact their methods of narrative assessment. There were still tendencies to mark papers for mechanics ("trouble with sentence structure") or fairly surface level content (repetitious text crossed out). Substantive comments were typically genre general: "Good, with beginning/middle/end." "Good flow." Among the few teachers who were experimenting with the feedback form, two entered some comments in the narrative component boxes that were essentially genre general (Character: "You told me a lot about your characters."; Setting: "Tell me what it looks like."; Plot: "What happened after _____?"; Theme: "Good descriptive words."). The rubric was little used. Three teachers reported use as a guide to the design of instruction and assessment for specific narrative assignments; no teacher was using it to score students' narratives.

Our Year Two workshops had four goals: (a) the design of a schoolwide framework for narrative curriculum and assessment, (b) the building of expertise with WWYR scoring and with (c) written commentary on the narrative feedback form, and (d) the implementation of each of these in classroom practice. We report impact results for each.

The Collaborative Design of Grade-Level Narrative Units

Although we recognize that teachers' Year Two assignment descriptions were composed with the support of the narrative component labels on the feedback form, the teachers' plans did appear to provide evidence of selective growth in knowledge of narrative. Each of the plans showed appropriate genre-specific descriptions of the components of character,

setting, plot, and theme, and revealed growing understandings of how the components help shape one another. For example, the fourth-grade teachers stressed the role of setting in fantasy: "Integral setting. Action, character, and theme are influenced by the time and place. Will tend to be realistic, then fantasy, then back again." Their comments revealed an understanding that fantasy stories are often bounded by realistic frames. In describing their plans for teaching a myth, the sixth-grade teachers wrote about plot: "Follows a logical sequence leading the reader to the answer of a universal question, or—helping them to see the theme." In planning a fairy tale unit, the third-grade teachers showed that the rather stereotypical features of characters drive home the theme of how "good triumphs over evil." Communication, however, was more problematic. The primary teams ignored the component—either leaving this circle blank or removing it from the form. The intermediate and upper-grade teachers used it, but their language was less genre-specific. For example, in the third-grade fairy tale plan, the teachers wrote, "explanations simple and clear, use of dialogue, use of details to help reader form images," comments applicable to almost any genre and not specific to the fairy tale.

In their work together to design the narrative units, the teachers also showed a selective pattern of growth in their engagement in literary conversation. Because the teachers planned in teams, they were using each other as resources, shifting away from isolated exploration to collaborative conversation about text. All of the teachers discussed ways that trade books support the study of selected genres. For example, the first-grade teachers read many *Frog and Toad* (Lobel) stories to point out the patterns of friendship across texts. The third-grade teachers read fairy tales and decided: "Students will listen to and read a variety of fairy tales. Class will compare 'Elements of a Good Fairy Tale' chart to each story." In exploring their selected genres, however, only two teachers referred to a recommended resource (Lukens, 1990)—a book which explores the distinctive features of the different subgenre of narrative. Despite our discussions of Lukens (and other resources) in workshops, most teachers restricted their forays into narrative analysis to what they could garner from the tradebooks.

Scoring

Following the introduction and collaborative refinement of the WWYR rubric in Year One, we were ready to undertake systematic practice with scoring and commentary in Year Two. To examine consensus in scoring, we collected the teachers' independent scores prior to group discussion. Given the experience of many teachers with Year One pilot scoring, the results across Year Two sessions revealed considerable agreement even from the outset (Tables 1 & 2) and thus the benefits of collegial discussions of student work. While the range of scores decreased over time toward an acceptable plus or minus one, the early discrepancies were often the result of divergent ratings by just one teacher. Two exceptions to this pattern were the primary teachers' difficulties with theme and the upper teachers' difficulties with communication (shaded entries). These exceptions reflect patterns in teachers' content knowledge as well as possible weaknesses in these dimensions of the rubric.

Commentary

In workshops, teachers practiced responding to children's narratives on the narrative feedback form. Table 3 contains the scheme for coding these comments. We asked three questions regarding the relation of a teacher's comment to the child's text. First, was the comment *appropriate to narrative*, rather than "genre general" in content? Second, was the comment *linked to the child's text*, either through a quote or a close summary? Third, was the comment focused on a *significant aspect of the subgenre* or child's story versus an insignificant detail in the text?

All teachers demonstrated the capacity in at least one workshop to provide a comment *appropriate to the child's narrative*, and most (11 of 15) provided such a comment in every workshop. One example of a Commendation was: "Wonderful descriptions of the dragon's cave. You made it easy to picture where the prince was." A Recommendation example was: "In order to strengthen the theme, I would have liked to see Nicky notice that his mitten was gone and worry about finding it." Evidence of the Suburban faculty's growing knowledge of narrative, the teachers who differed from this pattern were the two kindergarten teachers who did not teach narrative, the long-term substitute, and a new staff member.

There was little change in teachers' links to the child's text, but growth was evident in the significance of comments, and both sets of results revealed the role of narrative knowledge in substantive commentary. Thus, most teachers (13 of 15) provided in each workshop at least one *link to the child's text*, either through a quote or a close summary—for example, " 'Just before he was going to cast the spell, Foran threw his golden dagger across the scorching desert at Rectar by reflex.' Was a good way to show the reader how quick-minded your characters are." The teachers who did not were a kindergarten teacher, a long-term substitute, and a fourth-grade teacher who acknowledged difficulty understanding WWYR. A pattern showing the greatest impact, many teachers (9 of 15) shifted over time from insignificant comments focusing on a minor detail to *significant commentary* addressing central aspects of narrative or the child's growth as a narrative writer. Only two teachers concluded the workshop series using only comments judged insignificant.

TABLE 1. Range of Teachers' Ratings by Story and Session (Year Two)

	Teachers			Writing *What You Read* Scales				
Story	Session	N	Grades	Theme	Character	Setting	Plot	Communication
Dragon Fight	1	9[a]	K–3	1–4	2–5	2–4	2–3[a]	2.5–4
True Three Little Pigs	1	6[b]	4–6	3–5	1–3.5[b]	2–4[b]	3–4.5[b]	3–6[b]
Mitten	2	8[a]	K–3	2–4[a]	1–1.5[a]	1.5–3	3	1–2[a]
Quest	2	7	3–6	3–5	2–4	3–5	4–5	4–6
Frog n' Toad	3	4	K–1	2.5–4	2	2–3	3	2
Owl & Eagle	3	3[a]	1–2	2–3[a]	2	2	2–3	2–3[a]
Tattercoat Keller	3	2	3	2–3	1–2	2	2.5–3.5	2
Humorous Horrors	3	2	4	2–3	1–2	4	3–4	4–4.5
British Attack	3	2	5	3–4	3–4	4	4	2–4
Five headed Snake	3	2	6	3–4	3–4	2	4–4.5	3–5

[a] One first-grade teacher close to retirement omitted these ratings.
[b] A fourth-grade teacher rated only Theme and omitted all other ratings for this story.

TABLE 2. Outliers: Number of Teachers Whose Ratings Differed From a Central Range of 1.0

	Teachers			Writing *What You Read* Scales					Consistent Outliers
Story	Session	N	Grades	Theme	Character	Setting	Plot	Communication	
Dragon Fight	1	9[a]	K–3	no consensus		1	1	0	1[a] Close to retirement[a]
True Three Little Pigs	1	6[b]	4–6	1[a]	1[b]	1[b]	1[b]	2[b]	Scored higher[c]
Mitten	2	8[a]	K–3	1[a]	0[a]	1	0	0*	Scored lower[d]
Quest	2	7	3–6	1	1	1	0	1	New staff
Frog n' Toad	3	4	K–1	1[a]	0	0	0	0[a]	Kindergarten
Owl & Eagle	3	3[a]	1–2	0[a]	0	0	0	0[a]	
Tattercoat Keller	3	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	
Humorous Horrors	3	2	4	0	0	0	0	0	
British Attack	3	2	5	0	0	0	0	2	
Five headed Snake	3	2	6	0	0	0	0	2	

[a] One first-grade teacher close to retirement often omitted certain ratings. Every entry noted "a" represents that same teacher.
[b] A fourth-grade teacher rated only Theme and omitted all other ratings for this story.
[c] This teacher was impressed by a quality of writing she did not typically find in her own classroom.
[d] This teacher revealed beliefs about children's in capabilities in interviews and questionnaires.

Table 3. Scheme for Coding Teachers' Comments on Children's Narratives

Appropriateness to narrative

ValSpec: Praise that pinpoints a particular aspect of the child's story (*Wonderful description of the dragon's cave. You made it easy to picture where the prince was.*)

ValGen: Praise that is global in nature (*This is nicely developed.*)

None: No commendation

GuiSpec: Guidance that offers a particular direction regarding what the child is to think about or to do (*In order to strengthen the theme, I would have liked to see Nicky notice that his mitten was gone and worry about finding it.*)

GuiGen: Guidance that is global in nature, often a generalized request to simply "add more." (*I would like you to be more specific about being an adventurer.*)

None: No recommendation

Links to the Child's Text

Link: Comment could only be applied to this story (summary or direct quote) (*Just before he was going to cast the spell Foran threw his golden dagger across the scorching desert at Rectar by reflex. Was a good way to show the reader how quick-minded your characters are.*)

NLink: Comment could be applied to ANY story (*You included more than one episode in your story and tied it altogether (Good transition). Outcome (conclusion) needs to be expanded further*)

Significance of the Comment

Sig: Comment that is significant to the component, genre, particular story, or child's development (*Why did Kazihiko change the daughter into a pin? How did this event add to the story?*)

Insig: Comment that focuses on a minor detail *or* is relatively subgenre inappropriate. For example, congratulating a child on a happy ending may be appropriate for a fairy tale, but not for a fable.

Classroom Practice

Practicing hypothetical comments in the leisurely workshop atmosphere was one thing, but learning how to make constructive comments within the bustle of actual classroom life was quite another. Lena was one primary teacher who felt that she was bringing her growing knowledge of narrative to her students: "I understand how the genre is specific for each specific character, setting, plot, and theme...Once you get it through *your* thick skull, then there are ways that you can pass that information on" (June, 1993). Christina had also grown, engaging with her upper grade students in the kinds of classroom assessment practices we advocated.

At the end of writing, [the students and I] discuss what the focus was, reflect on whole process. I do four per assignment. The student and I take turns reading their piece and commenting. Going through the piece is mostly limited to instructional goals...genre characteristics, literary tools. I learn how they feel about it and I get more insight because I find out their thinking

process—how they thought of things, how they worked through descriptions, etc. I also can ask them questions that help them think about clarifying items for the reader. (Christina, March, 1993)

In her conferences, Christina engaged in literary conversations with student authors, listening to their reasoning and offering advice to help them meet their own purposes. Her advice focused on specific genre characteristics and literary tools that linked her instruction to her assessment. Christina's approach to written feedback was similar—offering her children an articulate analysis of their writing by pointing out their accomplishments and asking specific questions to guide improvement of their piece.

Assessment practices like these are not easy to achieve. Their development requires knowledge of narrative and a belief that teachers' interpretive responses to narrative can provide helpful guidance. Peter, an upper grade teacher new to the school in Year Two, demonstrated little growth and considerable resistance to WWYR practices. On the one hand, he struggled with the concepts of narrative, describing his involvement in the workshops as "more intellectual than I had ever been before." On the other hand, he questioned the value of the struggle. He perceived assessment not as a learning event but as undue pressure on students. As he explained, "[W]hen I'd come out and tell the kids, 'You should do this. You should do that,'...[I was] really violating the creativity that the child had in it. And they just turned off to it. It wasn't a real exchange." Thus, although Peter's workshop comments did grow somewhat in specificity, linking, and significance, in the classroom he did not use the feedback form to offer comments to his students, nor did he advocate its use by students as a planning form.

Across the Suburban community, the greatest impact of the WWYR assessment artifacts was to *scaffold teachers' understandings of narrative.* For example, the narrative feedback form was in wide use for teacher planning (15 of 15), and the contents of the plans were often drawn from the rubric (15) ("I steal vocabulary"). Teachers reported that the feedback form and the rubric helped them establish narrative-specific expectations (10): "the form keeps me focused"; "I refer to it to plan a story assignment." Some teachers communicated their assignment expectations to students on the form: "I used it on the overhead, prewriting, setting the criteria: " 'These are the 5 things, this is what I'm looking for.' "; "We would discuss the...legend, what would the characters be like, and so on...how it would fit under each of those different headings." Some teachers had children use the form for their own planning: "The form gives them some way to organize their thoughts."

Thus, the repetition of both word and symbol across the WWYR assessment tools supported the emergence of a common knowledge base of

narrative across grade levels. Direct implementation of WWYR assessment tools, however, was not typical. While the content of both marginal and oral comments was often drawn from the assignment plan (which itself was derived from the form and the rubric), the feedback form was rarely used as the context for written comments. Although teachers attempted to comply with our request to try its use, most adopted other contexts and strategies for commentary. Adaptations included responding to a sampling of children each day ("I would select two kids randomly and do a narrative feedback on paper"), responding as a written reminder of the points to raise in a later conference ("I would use it as my comment sheet and then go over it with them"), modeling commentary ("I would use it on an overhead to show them the types of comments and what I was looking for"), peer commentary ("they filled it out for each other's stories, which was interesting"), and responding to the student's plan ("so it kind of becomes an ongoing communication sheet").

Like the feedback form, the *narrative rubric* was in frequent use as a resource for the design of developmentally-and genre-appropriate assignments, yet was almost never used for scoring students' competence with narrative. Finding the task of comprehensive scoring somewhat daunting, one teacher commented, "The narrative rubric wasn't for the faint of heart." Nevertheless, as a support for the teachers' understandings of narrative, the lists within each component box served as resources for designing content criteria for children's narratives. The developmental continuum underlying the discrete points on each scale served as a representation of growth and change ("it's really cemented in my mind—the continuum"). For many teachers, the rubric represented the heart of *Writing What You Read,* even if scoring with it did not fit their goals for narrative assessment.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

While all the teachers in our study were able to see productive possibilities for action and change in their methods of narrative assessment, teachers' growth was most typically marked by only partial alignment with the assumptions and practices of the *Writing What You Read* framework. With earnest effort to understand what we did and did not accomplish, we interpreted the patterns of our impact through the lenses of the teachers' "existing knowledge, beliefs, and practices" (Borko & Putnam, in press) which created distortions as well as transformations of our intervention model.

...[W]henever teachers set out to adopt a new curriculum or instructional technique, they learn about and use the innovation through the lenses of

their existing knowledge, beliefs, and practices.... [T]eachers'...overarching conceptions of the subject and how it is best taught and learned may conflict with the assumptions underlying new instructional practices they are being asked to adopt. (Borko & Putnam, in press)

In our study, patterns of change in teachers' content knowledge of narrative impacted teachers' evolving assessment practices. We found that an intervention focused on narrative content supported teachers' efforts with substantive assessment, but impact was greater in the workshop context than in the classroom. In the workshops, most teachers demonstrated a capacity to understand and utilize both the WWYR rubric and the feedback form effectively. In the classroom, teachers rarely used the narrative feedback form for written commentary or the narrative rubric for scoring. However, in place of direct transport of our assessment methods into the classroom, impact was evident in two arenas. First, teachers reported greater comfort with analytic discussions of tradebooks and students' narratives. Second, teachers found the rubric and the feedback form invaluable as resources for designing assignments, establishing criteria, and assessing students' narratives, even if the assessments were simplifications of the rubric's components or scale definitions. We regarded appropriation of the WWYR rubric to the integrated planning of assignments and assessments as a very positive outcome of our work. Additional research is needed to reveal more clearly the bases for teachers' transformations of an 'expert's' assessment artifacts. Teachers' workloads and their beliefs about the very *need* for comprehensive assessment are likely factors (Gearhart, Herman, & Wolf, in press).

Patterns in our impact data underscored the role of subject matter knowledge. On the one hand, teachers new to the school and teachers unenthusiastic about the "intellectual" nature of our enterprise had greater difficulty. On the other hand, within the entire school community, theme and communication were considered difficult to understand by many teachers. Teachers' confusions about theme and communication are quite understandable considering that these are often more difficult to analyze and to integrate successfully within a narrative. Theme is at the heart of response, and its interpretation is often highly personalized and dependent on individual background knowledge and experience. While characters can be named, settings described, and plots laid out in structures that note the sequential nature of episodes and the rising and falling action, theme is harder to categorize. Themes are often multiple and subtle, revealed through the narrative but often not directly stated. Communication is equally hard to pin down. While certain devices (alliteration, consonance, and metaphor) can be named, how they work to deliver the meaning is part of the magic of narrative. All too often that

"magic" eluded teachers who persisted in a view of narrative as a set of differentiable writing skills.

The findings reported here have implications for the content of the rubric, for our inservice methods, and for our expectations of teachers in the classroom. Regarding the rubric, our teachers—as well as a group of outside raters (Gearhart, Herman, & Wolf, in press)—were challenged by theme, communication, and plot, and we will therefore revisit the content of these dimensions. The inservice approach would be strengthened by an even greater emphasis on narrative—more opportunities for literary analysis of children's literature and for composition and revision of teachers' own narratives (Ransdell, 1993). Finally, our teachers have shown us that, as classroom professionals, they should be supported in their inventive appropriation and adaptations of any "expert's" assessments. Thus, our work has enhanced our own understandings of the processes of teacher change and the contexts that foster and constrain growth in understanding. Our methods represent an approach to assessment that, like the art of writing itself, is a process shaped by individual authors and purposes.

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