

Linking Literacy Assessment and the Curriculum in the Malian School

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1. Some background.

When the IEQ/Mali team gathered at the University of Pittsburgh in the spring of 1996, we initially set out to establish the abilities of children common to the convergent methodology school and the French-medium school as a step toward developing a literacy testing instrument. We realized, however, that the convergent methodology school (CM-school) was at a disadvantage because it did not, according to the CM document available to us, have a set of elaborated performance objectives with matching comparable abilities (testable abilities) like those already produced for the French-medium school. Without such objectives, it was clearly unfeasible to propose an assessment instrument. We agreed that we needed to propose such objectives. This broadened the scope of our work; it added an extra step to the process which would lead to the production of test items; it also required that we project objectives that had not been articulated.

We "operationalized the literacy objectives" of the CM-school, so that we could link these objectives or abilities to appropriate testing instruments. We elaborated a set of performance goals for students of these schools that were linked to the broad overall objectives of the methodology. We felt that this was something that should have already been produced for the CM-school. The strategy we adopted was to test each one of the objectives we proposed with regard to its suitability to the philosophy and norms of the CM. Further, we decided to offer a plethora of objectives with eventual counterpart test items, some of which could be eliminated if need be during the period when the test was being piloted. We hoped that the multitude of items would also provide ideas for future test items and would constitute a resource for new ideas to eventually incorporate into the curriculum.

We reached consensus that there is an ongoing cyclical relationship between literacy exams and the curriculum. This relationship has frequently been cited in education literature. Elements and strategies included in a test or other assessment metric can eventually have an impact on the curriculum. This was another reason for providing as rich and varied a set of test items as we could given our resources. We were able to foresee an ongoing process that would, over time, contribute to an upgrading and an elaboration of the CM-curriculum.

We also drafted an introductory document about the curriculum and on how to integrate the objectives, abilities, curriculum and test. We drafted and later evaluated broad spectrum of potential test items in Bamanankan.

The performance objectives and their comparable abilities were organized in tables according to whether they fell within the oral, writing, or reading components of the curriculum for the first or second grade, as shown in the following set of tables:

<i>objectifs gānāraux</i>	<i>objectifs spācifiques</i>	<i>compātences</i>
1 āre annāe		
oral 1 construction de la comprāhension	comprendre globalement un texte de 300 mots prāsentā oralement	→ dire oralement l'idāe gānārale d'un texte ātudiā en classe aprās deux auditions alternāes du texte de 300 mots avec la lecture de la consigne. → rāpondre aux questions sur un texte Ā l'ācoute → āxecuter un ordre ācrit

Linking Literacy Assessment and the Curriculum in the Malian School

<p>oral 2 construction de l'oral</p>	<p>produire un discours oral</p>	<p>→ produire un discours oral sur un dialogue dājĀ ātudiā en classe Ā partir d'images. → Ā base d'un texte oral rāsumer un texte oralement Tester la capacité de l'enfant de raconter une histoire (échantillon de langage) utiliser une image de leur texte; une série de dessins et raconter une histoire à partir de cette image ou ces images noter: quantité d'idées exprimées: est-ce qu'il a inclus les grandes idées? Synthèse des idées? organisation du discours: introduction, texte, conclusion, etc. choix de vocabulaire: il a des bons noms? Complexité de syntaxe: il parle en mots ou en phrases?</p>
<p>ācrit 1 construction de l'ācrit</p>	<p>produire un discours ācrit</p>	<p>→ crāer et ācrire des mots Ā partir de groupes de lettres mālangās → produire et ācrire un discours ācrit sur un dialogue ou un conte dājĀ ātudiā en classe en prāsentant des images → au dāpart de dessins reprāsentant des objets, ācrire les noms de ces objets</p>
<p>ācrit 2</p>	<p>reconstituer et compléter par ācrit un texte redigā Ā partir de la <i>māmoire de la classe</i></p>	<p>→ construire des phrases sāmantiquement et syntaxiquement correctes Ā partir de 3 Ā cinq mots isolās → reconstituer un texte dont plusieurs mots ont ātā āffacās en choisissant parmi des mots prāsentās Ā c^otā</p>
<p>prālecture 1 initier l'enfant Ā la lecture par le contexte de la phrase ("lecture dācouverte")</p>		<p>→ repārer parmi des mots ācrits celui qui est ānoncā par le ma^itre - discrimination des mots: les sons et syllabes/lettres du dābut du mot, du milieu du mot et de la fin du mot → identifier des mots par la lecture parmi un groupe de mots</p>
<p>lecture 1 continuer l'initiation de l'enfant Ā la lecture dācouverte</p>		<p>→ repārer des mots et des phrases que l'enfant conna^it dans un texte (choisir un texte)¹ → ayant soulignā les ālāments connus, l'enfant repasse par le m^eme texte pour essayer de dācouvrir et deviner par le contexte les sens des mots et des phrases inconnus → choisir parmi une sārie de mots ou de phrases prāsentās par ācrit ceux qui correspondent Ā des dessins.</p>
2 āme annāe		
<p>oral → construction de la comprāhension de l'oral et de l'ācrit</p>	<p>comprendre globalement un texte de 400 mots prāsentā oralement</p>	<p>→ dire l'idāe centrale aprās l'audition d'un texte de 400 mots et rāpondre aux questions posāes sur le contenu du texte</p>
<p>ācrit → construction de l'ācrit</p>	<p>rediger un discours ācrit</p>	<p>→ Ā base d'une bande dessināe, rādiger un discours ācrit original, cohārent, et comprāhensible → au dāpart des dessins reprāsentant un conte ou autre texte, ācrire des phrases qui dācrivent les images → ācrire deux phrases tirāes d'un texte familier, dictāes par un camarade de classe (Ā corriger globalement)</p>

¹Voir la page 29 du rapport intitulā "La pādagogie convergente Ā l'ācole fondamentale".

Linking Literacy Assessment and the Curriculum in the Malian School

<div style="border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; padding: 2px;">lecture</div> → acquisition de la lecture fonctionnelle	réaliser un travail à partir de consignes écrites	→ réaliser une tâche écrite à partir de consignes écrites: par exemple citer les noms de 3 de tes camarades de classe ou encore; tu veux faire du théâtre; il faut écrire les noms des matériels que tu vas chercher
		→ lire un texte dont certains mots sont amputés d'une lettre → pouvoir interpréter et donner du sens à des mots ou à un écrit
sensibilisation grammaticale pour la lecture		→ Reconnaître des différences ayant un rôle grammaticale entre des mots et des phrases pour faciliter la lecture (sans jargonisme)
<div style="border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; padding: 2px;">lecture</div> acquisition de la lecture rapide	lire globalement un texte de plus de 200 mots	→ vérifier si des phrases présentées par écrit sont vraies ou fausses selon le texte lu en 3 minutes puis recouvert par un rideau. Les idées à vérifier doivent provenir du début du milieu et de la fin du texte → repérer par exemple tous les animaux d'un conte dans trois minutes et les encercler

Proposed test items were also classified according to which of these three components they fell into, and which year (1st or 2nd grade) they should be used for. This began with the integration of the more general overall objectives that had been provided by the CM document with the specific performance objectives and the specific abilities for each performance objective, as is apparent in the above tables.

The next task was to link specific test items to these various elements during the evening so that test items could then be integrated into the table. Once this process was complete, it was apparent which abilities for testing had appropriate items and which ones did not. Gaps were filled and items created for those without them.

We were also concerned over the lack of pedagogical materials available to the schools. The CM is one that allows children to become researchers - to use documents creatively and to discover things and then report back to the class. Without small school libraries and resource areas, this kind of creative, individualistic research is impossible. Also, if the only writing the children ever see and can decode is that of their teacher or their fellow students, then they are not truly literate.²

At every point in objective elaboration, we targeted the abilities of the Malian child learning in his or her maternal language. It is misleading to say that children learn French in the classic school, and learn Bamanankan in the CM school. Nothing could be further from the truth; saying it in this way influences educators in the wrong direction. Children are in fact "learning" French in the classic school, but they have already acquired and mastered Bamanankan prior to coming to the CM school, and are ready to "learn" the objectives of the curriculum *in* Bamanankan.³

2. Purpose.

The exercise that the IEQ/Mali team carried out in Pittsburgh to propose a national language medium literacy assessment metric was surprisingly productive in that we hope that its outcome will also have a far reaching impact on the curriculum of the CM-schools. The performance objectives and their related competencies which we proposed represent only the beginning steps in curriculum development. These are crucial elements, key to a curriculum, that simply did not exist. The curriculum was

²I referred the team to my Malian colleague Kassim KONE, who is an anthropologist specializing in Malian literature and oral traditions. KONE has access to an incredible wealth of written material relating to Mali and its culture. He would be a great resource person for brainstorming with the team to discover ways of enriching the curriculum, etc., whether it be here or in Mali (he is in the United States now).

³Perhaps this sounds too obvious, but the point needs to be made since in many documents the two processes are mistakenly equated as the French-learning or teaching school and the Bamanankan learning or teaching school.

Linking Literacy Assessment and the Curriculum in the Malian School

inadequate, and no steps had been taken to assure the provision of adequate teaching materials. The important relation between testing instruments and the operational objectives and other elements of a curriculum is critical. The inadequacies of the curriculum became apparent when we set about developing the test.

In the present paper I attempt to describe what would be the optimal relationship between testing instruments and the curriculum, and to propose a mechanism that will, in the long term, result in the ongoing upgrading of the reformed Malian school. The format of this discussion takes into account the "symbiotic" relationship between the curriculum and testing instruments, and proposes a mechanism by which they can continue to feed into one another. The paper stresses the importance of addressing some of the inequities that exist between French-medium schools and CM-schools. These inequities must be addressed in a very positive way, not in an attempt to replicate the French-medium school, but rather in an effort to develop an appropriate system adapted to the needs and abilities of the Malian child and responding to Mali's human resource needs.

This paper further attempts to broaden the discussion of assessment in the context of the CM-school. We propose an assessment framework for which traditional 'on-demand' literacy testing items of the kind we have already proposed constitute only one of a broad range of assessment instruments.

The items that we proposed for the literacy exam are a step in the right direction, but there remains a great deal of work to further elaborate and perfect the test, and to place the test within a larger comprehensive system of continuous and ongoing assessment. A great deal could be done to enrich the test, to elaborate more test items, and to make them more culturally appropriate. Strategies with regard to visual aids, standardization of instructions, and so on, might also be looked at in the future.

A testing and evaluation system must be aligned with the curriculum. Here we propose a system of 'authentic assessment' and stress the role that classroom-based assessment can play in the pursuit of upgrading the system. It is hoped that the system can document authentic instances of students' reading and writing, can represent learning and progress over time, can include multiple modes of documenting student ability, and can provide meaningful opportunities for students to develop ownership of their own learning and evaluation. The rich and dynamic CM-school lends itself to this kind of assessment. For these reasons assessment should be continuous and ongoing and should be beneficial to the various parties to the education system. In the past, the testing system of the French-medium classical school, what I refer to below as the "French-learning school", has not been assessed by any of these criteria, and has in fact benefited none of the parties to the system.

2.1. Assessment for What Purpose?

There can be no doubt that standardized, *on-demand* literacy tests do have their place in an education system when accountability is necessary to demonstrate for external purposes that resources invested are producing a return. Nevertheless, assessment at that level does not necessarily provide for the ongoing improvement of the system. Assessment should provide results that are beneficial to all parties and that result in a progressive reform and upgrading. A broad spectrum of assessment instruments becomes necessary that can be carried out for system-internal purposes at the school and the regional level. Teachers, students, and parents need friendly feedback at a very basic and local level from internal sources that can furnish this kind of contribution. There are any number of purposes for literacy assessment and there needs to be a broad range of assessment tools. For this reason we suggest that our literacy testing instruments need to be part of a larger system of assessment.

3. The French-Learning School and its Assessment System

The fact that the CM-schools lacked a set of elaborated performance objectives with matching competencies can be seen as evidence of the double standard which may apply to national language versus French language schools in francophone Africa. Mali is the only country we know of in francophone Africa that has considered the possibility of developing national language testing instruments. In an environment where national languages are seen as a potential threat to the hegemony

Linking Literacy Assessment and the Curriculum in the Malian School

of the French language, there are innumerable examples of this kind of treatment. Frequently the explanation is that the African language is simply not equipped for, or not capable of performing the function which the French language is so suited for. While it is not the purpose of this discussion to elaborate the inequities of the French-medium education system, they have nevertheless resulted in a perpetual, almost institutionalized, inequality between the two different kinds of school.⁴ The experimental school has been obliged to cede power to the French-medium school due to this inequality, whereas in reality, the experimental school is potentially a much more powerful tool for the empowerment of Malian people. Areas of inequality and inequity include:

- Exam and accountability
- Curriculum
- Teaching Materials
- Textbooks
- Objectives and Competencies

Though all of these areas do not fall within the scope of the present paper, they constitute areas that must be dealt with in ongoing reform of the Malian education system.

Sadly, the lack of curricula for the Malian language schools has historically resulted in a blind admiration of the French-medium curriculum. The latter is then indiscriminately translated for use in the national language schools, without the understanding that the child can accomplish far more in the maternal language than is possible in the language-learning curriculum typical of the French-medium school. The approach taken by the IEQ/Mali team addresses some of these inequities in a very positive way, not in an attempt to replicate the French-medium school, but rather in an effort to develop an appropriate system, adapted to the needs and abilities of the Malian child.

Given the uniqueness of the CM-school and its curriculum, the relation between curriculum and assessment takes on supreme importance. The continued use of the classical French-medium exam is a mistake. "Appropriateness" is a key concept at the heart of Mali's educational reform movement and it should come into play in all aspects of educational reform.

A one-shot, sink-or-swim assessment environment as is typical of the French-learning system is the antithesis of the ideal, whether in the child's own or a foreign language, for it entails the use of testing mechanisms that are not part of the child's school environment, by definition. A national, standardized exam is foreign and unfair. Such an exam does not serve the interests of the various partners to the school system. It has historically served only to perpetuate the selective elitism of the French-medium education system. The result has been a foreign-language speaking elite.

Literacy testing in the broadest sense of the term entails evaluation and analysis of a broad spectrum of aspects of the child's knowledge of the school language. This spectrum of knowledge does not necessarily lend or reduce itself to being testable by quantitative methods resulting in number scores. Quantitative methods of assessment have been one of the trademarks of the classic French-medium school as practiced in *francophone* Africa and have contributed to the frighteningly low schooling rates in those countries. These methods also result in teaching towards assessment, where the curriculum is sacrificed for the sake of preparing pupils for an exam. Another hallmark has been the evaluation of a teacher based on how many of his pupils succeed in the various exams - the plethora of exams which offer a multitude of opportunities to drop out of the system. These effects have been even further exacerbated in the so-called *experimental* schools where the poor Malian language medium teacher has no choice but to teach to the exam since the exam has never been in any other language than in French.

In such a standardized testing system, the "backwash effect", or the relation between school and the test (involving the exam influencing teaching), has been unidirectional in the French-medium school,

⁴We raise these issues here because of their significance to a discussion of educational reform. Assessment cannot be isolated as a target of reform but must instead be seen as a piece of a larger picture.

Linking Literacy Assessment and the Curriculum in the Malian School

resulting in a static system that does not evaluate the complete panoply of literacy aspects, but rather focuses narrowly on superficial or picky details that characterize the French language.

Elsewhere, when a child acquires initial literacy in his or her maternal language, the literacy spectrum entails not simply linguistic or grammatical detail but humane, cultural knowledge, and also knowledge of the language reflecting the various levels of linguistics: the purely linguistic level, the psycholinguistic level, and the sociolinguistic level. The unidirectional French-language system focuses on the only level it is capable of offering to the African child: the linguistic level. As should have been recognized tens of decades ago, the potential for the French-language school to do more than that should never have been expected - it is not surprising that it has never satisfied Africans at any higher level. Success or failure in an education system based on how many accents of the orthography have been mastered is a crime - the dictée system, cornerstone of the French education system, is the killer that can destroy the future of even the most brilliant child. The dictée is the only subject for which a child's score is most often negative. Other elements of the evaluation, like the explication de texte, can also stifle a child's desire to read and to learn. Many elements of the French-medium curriculum encourage conscious learning and rote memorization of materials that are basically foreign to the child and to his or her nonschool environment, rather than a natural acquisition of literacy. It would more appropriately be labeled a French-teaching school, since many of the goals of a normal curriculum in which a child acquires literacy in a language already spoken, are obligatorily sacrificed for the sake of teaching the child a foreign language. This becomes the primordial aim of the curriculum, at the expense of all other aspects of literacy and a child's academic and cognitive development. The curriculum can therefore be little more than a foreign language curriculum; assessment can measure nothing more than the superficial foreign language skills - speaking, reading, writing, mastery of the grammar. The French-learning school, through its track record, has demonstrated its capacity for minimal foreign language literacy for an elite minority of the population, and nothing more. The French-learning school has been unable to contribute to the development of the country. The French-learning school is the cause of the *dependence* which has reigned since *independence* throughout 'francophone' Africa.

Standardized tests are poor diagnostic tools. Because they record only final answers, report only numerical scores, and are mass-administered, they do not provide information about how children tackle different tasks or what abilities they rely on in their problem solving. This promotes a view of children as having deficits that need to be remediated rather than as having individual differences, approaches to learning, and strengths that can be supported and developed. It also fails to provide enough information about areas of difficulty to inform instructional strategies for addressing them. Standardized tests do not reflect or capture the diversity of students' backgrounds and experiences. Because the tests often contain assumptions and facts that are grounded in the context of the dominant culture - and fail to include relevant forms of knowledge from other cultures - the tests place students from nondominant cultures at a disadvantage in demonstrating what they know and can do.⁵

The injustice of using the same foreign language metric to test the children coming out of the experimental schools as is used to test classic French-learning students cannot be overemphasized. In the same way that the entire school system must be rethought and reformed, so too must the entire basis for student evaluation be rethought. The French exam in its traditional form serves only to deselect Malian children from the school system. The curriculum for a Malian-language CM-school can not be a translation of the curriculum of the classic French-learning school; similarly, tests for the two systems can not simply be translations from one linguistic medium to another.

4. Continuous and Ongoing Literacy Assessment: Why and How Should a Child be Tested?

⁵Darling-Hammond, Linda, Jacqueline Ancess and Beverly Falk. 1995. *Authentic assessment in action: studies of schools and students at work*. New York: Teachers College Press, p. 7.

Linking Literacy Assessment and the Curriculum in the Malian School

The CM-school entails a learner-centered approach. The reformed Malian school is designed to serve the needs of:

- The Malian child
- The child's parents
- The family's community
- The needs of Mali in human resources

Literacy assessment should be accumulative and ongoing, multi-faceted and multi-purpose, serving the interests of all parties to the education process at the various levels of the system. Continuous assessment must also involve a spectrum of evaluation tools, both formal and nonformal, traditional and nontraditional.

In the CM-school, the child must have the right to fully develop both literacies - maternal language (L1) and second language (L2). A great deal of research has shown that unless the child can develop all cognitive and academic aspects of first language literacy, then the optimal conditions for maximal transfer of those literacy skills acquired in L1 to L2 is not possible.⁶ Both languages must be equitably honored by the assessment strategy which is adopted, each in its turn, each in its own way. Developing an evaluation metric forces choice, removes ambiguity, and obliges the developers to be aware of the shortcomings of their curriculum. Evaluation should be seen as a dynamic process involving an ongoing interaction between the assessment metric and the school and its curriculum. In such a setting, "Backwash" in both directions, i.e. the process of reciprocal interaction between assessment system and curriculum, does not have to be seen as negative - it can encourage the longterm improvement of the system.⁷

In 1990 when I was involved in the testing of Malian first and second grade experimental school children for Bamanankan literacy, we learned very quickly why it is so important for the assessment metric to be appropriate. Children can only be tested with tools and in subject areas that they have experienced. For example, we learned very quickly that children could not be tested using our computer-generated testing instruments since they had never been exposed to the printed word in Bamanankan. The only writing that they could read was that of their teacher on the blackboard.

5. The *authentic literacy testing movement*.

Evaluators and appraisers of children's developing literacy in North America are today enthusiastically embracing a methodology known as "authentic assessment". "The aim of authentic assessment is to assess many different kinds of literacy abilities in contexts that closely resemble the actual situations in which those abilities are used."⁸ The emphasis is placed on application and production, rather than mere recognition or reproduction of correct answers. One of the main reasons that this movement came about in North America is that standardized testing does not tap many of the skills and abilities that students need to develop in order to be successful in later life and schooling. Test

⁶Cummins, James. 1985. "The construct of language proficiency in bilingual education". in James E. Alatis and John J. Staczek, eds., pp. 209-231. On page 214 he writes: "... it has been hypothesized that the cognitive/academic aspects of L1 and L2 are interdependent and that the development of proficiency in L2 is partially a function of the level of L1 proficiency at the time when intensive exposure to L2 begins. ... In other words, previous learning of literacy-related functions of language (in L1) will predict future learning of these functions (in L2)." On page 218 he adds this reformulation of what is known as the "interdependence hypothesis": "To the extent that instruction in L_x is effective in promoting cognitive/academic proficiency in L_x, transfer of this proficiency to L_y will occur provided there is adequate exposure to L_y (either in school or environment) and adequate motivation to learn L_y."

⁷Davies, Alan. 1990. Principles of language testing. Padstow, Cornwall: Basil Blackwell.

⁸Hiebert, Elfrieda, Sheila W. Valencia and Peter P. Afflerbach. 1994. "Definitions and perspectives". p. 9, of Valencia, et al.

Linking Literacy Assessment and the Curriculum in the Malian School

takers are in a passive, reactive role, rather than having their capacity to structure tasks, produce ideas, and solve problems tested.⁹

Adoption of an authentic literacy testing model provides ongoing opportunities to revise the goals and desired outcomes of schooling. According to this methodology, it is the goals that we have for our children and the desired outcomes of the schooling process that must take precedence over the creation of measures (evaluation metric). "Standardized tests have not evolved along with our increased knowledge of how children learn - they have remained static, stagnating. The net result has been a narrowing of curricula and fragmentation of teaching and learning".¹⁰ "Without clear definition of goals, however, assessment will be ambiguous in both nature and purpose, and its use may be misguided. From diverse efforts has emerged a consensus with regard to the goals and standards of language arts. The focus should be on making meaning, including aesthetic and efferent responses - of different kinds of texts in a variety of contexts."¹¹

The CM-school is an *authentic* kind of school designed to link the school world to the outside world, in the same sense that *authentic* is used to describe the assessment system proposed here. The appropriateness of this match between the two is captured below:

The term authentic assessment is especially appropriate to signify assessment activities that represent literacy behavior of the community and workplace, and that reflect the actual learning and instructional activities of the classroom and out-of-school worlds. Another term used in this regard, performance assessment, through which students are required to demonstrate their level of competence or knowledge by creating a product or a response. The use of the term began in assessment of content areas such as science, in which students have problems to solve, some of them hands-on. Similarly, new methods of writing assessment require performance - the writing of compositions - which is quite different from standardized writing tests in which students are required to recognize features of existing writing. In reading assessment, students have always been asked to read texts, but performance assessment uses longer passages and often requires students to write ideas rather than to select the best of several responses.¹²

One of the goals of authentic assessment is to encourage the student to ask how he or she is doing, and to provide a mechanism for producing a satisfactory answer for the student. The deepest possible kind of assessment is needed. Assessment is *authentic* when it take into account the child's real work over time, not just the tokens of that work or the grades on a few hours of formal testing. The goal is embedding that assessment, as the teaching before it, in powerful but familiar intellectual contexts that are comprehensible to the child. "For teaching they have combined and interweaved the imperatives both of the disciplines they address and the heads and hearts of the students."¹³ It requires a commitment to involve the student and his or her family in this effort; no secrets, no trick questions, no confidential files. "The means and standards of assessment are everyone's property, not some sort of technical mystery to be implicitly trusted by families."¹⁴ The francophone African school has always had the power to operate

⁹Darling-Hammond, Linda, Jacqueline Ancess and Beverly Falk. 1995. *Authentic assessment in action: studies of schools and students at work*. New York: Teachers College Press, pp. 3-5.

¹⁰Linn, R.S. 1985. "Standards or expectations: the role of testing (summary). in *Proceedings of a National Forum on Education Reform*, pp. 88-95. New York: College Board.

¹¹Hiebert, Elfrieda, Sheila W. Valencia and Peter P. Afflerbach, p. 10.

¹²Hiebert, Elfrieda, Sheila W. Valencia and Peter P. Afflerbach, p. 11.

¹³Darling-Hammond, Linda, Jacqueline Ancess and Beverly Falk. 1995. *Authentic assessment in action: studies of schools and students at work*. New York: Teachers College Press, p. viii.

¹⁴Ibid, p. viii.

Linking Literacy Assessment and the Curriculum in the Malian School

without this family trust, and therefore without the support and control that parents offer when involved in a school system. Authentic assessment reconnects learning, teaching, and assessment in powerful ways that raise all sorts of central questions about education - the goal of assessment is to help every child in the system.

Authentic assessment is performance based and supports changes in the curriculum, in teaching, and in school organization - it is embedded in and supported by these aspects of school life. In some ways authentic assessment is personal and individualized and entails a deeper engagement with subject matter since learning is assessed in rigorous and holistic ways.¹⁵

Part of the growing movement to establish means for more authentic assessment of student learning, these three high schools are developing ways to focus students' energies on challenging, performance-oriented tasks that require analysis, integration of knowledge, and invention - as well as highly developed written and oral expression - rather than focusing merely on recall and recognition of facts. These strategies are called "authentic" because they require that students demonstrate what they can do in the same ways that workers do in out-of-school settings: by performing tasks that are complex and that require production of solutions or products. Rather than taking multiple choice tests in which students react to ideas or identify facts, these students engage in science experiments, conduct social science research, write essays and papers, read and interpret literature, and solve mathematical problems in real-world contexts.¹⁶

6. Authentic Assessment Procedures

In a more traditional assessment format, the procedures used are predominantly "on-demand" assessment tasks, with a standard set of directions and a time limit for completion. This more traditional format constitutes one end of the spectrum of assessment procedures used in authentic and performance assessment. The fact that the tasks are performed "on-demand" does not necessarily mean however that they have to be identical to the traditional format, and in fact in spite of their form, the details of these tests can be quite untraditional. At the opposite end of the spectrum are the less traditional procedures, relying on ongoing collections of students' work and artifacts.

One important tool of the latter category is the student *portfolio*, which uses the work students produce naturally in daily classroom activities as evidence of students' capabilities. With portfolios, the duration of the assessment is longer, the procedures less standard, and the product less predictable than with on-demand tasks. The terms classroom- or teacher-based assessment also have been used to describe this general type of assessment procedure.¹⁷

Thus we are dealing with a continuum ranging from the more traditional on-demand procedures to the less traditional classroom-based procedures, and a combination of the two at various points along the continuum. In authentic assessment, emphasis is placed on creation and production, rather than on simple recognition or multiple choice.

There is also a continuum of different types of student products that can be used in authentic assessment. This ranges from relatively simple student-constructed responses -

¹⁵Ibid, p. viii.

¹⁶Ibid, p. 2.

¹⁷Calfee, R.C., and Hiebert, E.H. 1988. "The teacher's role in using assessment to improve learning." In C.V. Bunderson, ed., *Assessment in the service of learning*, pp. 45-61. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service, as cited in Hiebert, Elfrieda, Sheila W. Valencia and Peter P. Afflerbach. 1994. "Definitions and perspectives". p. 12 of Valencia, et al, 1994.

Linking Literacy Assessment and the Curriculum in the Malian School

"fill in the blanks," for example - to much more complex, comprehensive bodies of work collected over time - such as portfolios or research projects. So at one end of this response-format continuum we find short-answer responses (single words or simple sentences) and short paragraphs; these represent a change from asking students to recognize a correct response to asking them to produce their own response.

Further along the continuum are more extended responses (essays, longer writing samples) that often require students to spend several days engaged in planning and carrying out the task. Other types of extended assessment include projects, demonstrations, and experiments, which may require a presentation. According to Resnick and Resnick (1992), projects that represent work done over longer periods than is typically the case with the artifacts in portfolios or the tasks that characterize on-demand assessment should be used as one of the indicators of student accomplishment.

... Collections of student-authored books or videotapes of plays written and produced by a class exemplify the kinds of projects that happen in classrooms around the world and that could become part of the assessment of students' learning.¹⁸

Given the creative, learner-based philosophy so critical to the convergent methodology, it becomes clear that authentic and performance assessment are extremely well adapted for use in this system. In fact, the more one learns about authentic assessment, the more it becomes unimaginable to conceive of any other assessment mechanism as appropriate for the ongoing assessment of the convergent methodology school.

7. The Assessment Portfolio.

A child's portfolio constitutes a combination of the results of both collaborative learning and of performance projects. The portfolio may be evaluated by a committee made up of teachers of different subjects and from different grade levels, an outside examiner, and a student peer, depending upon the purpose of the evaluation.

At the other end of the response-format continuum are portfolios, which are collections of artifacts of students' learning experiences assembled over time (Valencia, 1990). These artifacts represent students' performances in the worlds of classroom and home. One of the distinguishing characteristics of portfolios is student involvement. Most proponents of portfolio assessment suggest that students should play a key role in assembling their portfolios and in evaluating their own work and progress over time. A second characteristic is that portfolios permit evaluation and reflection of both the processes and products of learning because they include early drafts of student work and evidence of learning in its beginning stages. Finally, assessment of work collected over time shifts the focus from a snapshot of student capabilities at a particular moment to an emphasis on growth and progress.¹⁹

Much of the assessment that goes on at the classroom levels and that becomes integrated into a student's portfolio represents simply a gathering in one place all of the materials that most teachers are already mentally gathering for their students. In other words, the portfolio should not be viewed as

¹⁸Hiebert, Elfrieda, Sheila W. Valencia and Peter P. Afflerbach. 1994. "Definitions and perspectives". p. 13 of Valencia, et al, 1994.

¹⁹Ibid, p. 14.

Linking Literacy Assessment and the Curriculum in the Malian School

something entailing a complete retraining of teachers; quite the contrary. The portfolio is simply a vehicle allowing more of what teacher and student know about a student to become part of the materials involved in assessing that student's progress.

Some schools use what is known as a *Primary Language Record*, an assessment tool initially developed in England, to document how and what their young students are reading, writing, and speaking about in the authentic contexts in which they live and learn. Rather than administering standardized multiple choice tests that are several steps removed from actual literacy activities, these teachers watch their students at work and

- Evaluate the children's oral reading
- Evaluate the children's writing samples
- Evaluate the children's conversations
- Hold conferences with parents and students about their literacy development inside and outside school
- Confer with one another about how to best serve student needs over time.²⁰

At the Bronx New School in New York, students keep portfolios during grades K through 6 that include samples and other records of their work in all subject areas, along with teacher observations and reading logs. Teachers keep running records of oral reading and miscue analyses that evaluate their students' reading strategies. Narrative reports to parents supplement these assessment tools, providing rich descriptions of what students are doing and how they are progressing. These assessments enable teachers to evaluate progress, design useful learning opportunities, and involve parents, other teachers, and the students themselves in assessing and supporting their growth and development.²¹

8. Authentic Assessment and the Assessment Needs of the Convergent Methodology System.

There is a need to recognize different types of assessments, various geographic regions, and the levels at which the information gained from the assessments is used and reported. Assessment has a variety of constituencies and a variety of audiences; those developing an assessment metric must be constantly aware of the various constituencies, their needs, and the use to which the results of the assessment will be put.

Who is the audience for whom information is being gathered?

What age and how many students are involved?

What are the literacy goals targeted by the convergent methodology system?

A system of assessment must address the needs of the various partners to the schooling process. There need to be components of the system that serve different purposes and different levels. Traditionally, evaluation in the French-medium school has served only for external purposes of accountability based on large-scale assessment. The rationale of these exams and the details of the results have not been available to the various partners of the system; nor have the results been put to use in improving the curriculum, improving teacher training, and so on. Below are presented the various levels for which assessment must be carried out (as indicated in Valencia, Hiebert & Afflerbach, 1994):

1. The level of the classroom: How information is gathered during instruction and used for assessment and decision-making that contribute to student learning. This is the most immediate level of assessment, and one the teacher needs to be equipped to carry out continuously. At this level,

²⁰Darling-Hammond, Linda, Jacqueline Ancess and Beverly Falk. 1995. *Authentic assessment in action: studies of schools and students at work*. New York: Teachers College Press, p. 2.

²¹Ibid, pp. 2-3.

Linking Literacy Assessment and the Curriculum in the Malian School

accountability issues are not involved, and the results are purely for internal purposes and not for reporting to other audiences.

2. **Assessment that is carried out for reporting to other audiences:** ongoing classroom assessments designed to yield information that can be used for programmatic and systemwide student evaluation

3. **Large-scale assessment:** Large numbers of students take new types of literacy tests or engage in literacy tasks in a fairly standard situation. This level has implications for classroom, school, and district personnel, and also for state/national assessment and curriculum leaders; the form of a new large-scale assessment will influence curricula and instruction. Experiences of implementing and conducting these projects serve as a guide to administrators and classroom teachers as they struggle with their own assessment development, evaluation, scoring, and reporting of information.

There are many challenges facing those responsible for developing an equitable, useful, and informative assessment system. The first challenge described here is that of the tension between assessments that support instruction and those that inform policymakers. This points to the need to have diverse testing instruments.

... As Cole (1988) asserts, teachers need information about specific children so that interaction, instruction, and experiences can be adapted accordingly, while policymakers are concerned with the accomplishments of groups of children. ... needs of both groups cannot necessarily be filled by precisely the same instruments.²²

The challenge of having too many open-ended assessment instruments is represented in the next passage:

... how best to capture students' interpretations and responses to text. When the task is exclusively one of responding to existing interpretations, as is the case with standardized silent reading tests, students' ability to generate their own ideas is not valued or measured. Total reliance on open-ended formats, however, may not be the answer because of the demands on written expression of such tasks (Garcia and Pearson, 1991).²³

Finally, the challenge of assessing both the collaborative and the individual accomplishments of students is addressed in the next passage:

... issue of collaboration versus individual performance presents still another challenge. In the typical testing context, children work by themselves. Collaboration among children is regarded as contaminating the results - or, as it is conveyed to children, cheating. In most real-world contexts, however, interpretations of text are discussed and negotiated - a newspaper editorial or report is debated among a group of friends. ...²⁴

9. Conclusion.

Authentic assessment is not simply linked to the curriculum. In some sense the assessment system we are proposing can be seen as constituting a part of the curriculum. Assessment must be part of a chain of ongoing improvement, upgrading the curriculum, and valuing the role played by parents, children, and teachers. Seen in this light, assessment should above all be instructionally useful, rather than an external element that never really comes back and helps the system. Authentic assessment involves exhibitions of real performance and not artificial testing approaches. Assessment instruments are finely

²²Hiebert, Elfrieda, Sheila W. Valencia and Peter P. Afflerbach. 1994. "Definitions and perspectives". p. 13 of Valencia, et al, 1994.

²³Ibid, p. 16.

²⁴Ibid, p. 16.

Linking Literacy Assessment and the Curriculum in the Malian School

embedded in the curriculum and thus indistinguishable from instruction. Authentic assessment provides students with a genuine rather than a contrived learning experience. Together, both teacher and student discover the abilities of the student. Such strategies allow much richer evaluations of students and their capabilities, but also support and transform the processes of teaching and learning.²⁵

²⁵Darling-Hammond, Linda, Jacqueline Ancess and Beverly Falk. 1995. *Authentic assessment in action: studies of schools and students at work*. New York: Teachers College Press, p. 2.

²⁵Ibid, pp. 4.

Linking Literacy Assessment and the Curriculum in the Malian School

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