Revisioning Assessment in ELA

A Critical Community of Teachers for Equitable Assessment Practices

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Background

Rationale

English teachers in the US have become increasingly concerned about attending to issues of inclusion and antiracism as a mechanism for addressing persistent societal inequities. Discussions about centering social justice in secondary classrooms are commonplace at conferences, and the embrace of resources like Muhammad's *Cultivating Genius* (2020) suggests teachers' interest in developing culturally competent pedagogies. Despite these encouraging trends, equity lenses have still been more readily applied to topics such as text selection and discussion facilitation than to classroom-based ELA assessment.

This gap is exacerbated by the fact that most popular assessment literature has been authored by people from dominant groups (cf., Wormeli, 2018), with little focus on how marginalized identities influence student experience. When the literature takes an equity turn, it focuses on a handful of topics, most often the pernicious effects of standardized testing and traditional grading (Feldman, 2019). As important as such topics are, they provide limited insights about aligning daily assessment with curriculum, materials, and instruction. Finally, the assessment literature tends to be generically focused, despite an acknowledgment in many fields, including literacy, of the importance of disciplinary norms in making academic achievement accessible to all learners (Hinchman & O'Brien, 2019). Resources are rare that link ELA-specific assessment to social and racial equity in practitioner-friendly ways (for an exception, see Randall, Poe, & Slomp, 2021).

Purpose

The community of practice described here attempted to understand and address this gap in the literature. Its principal investigators, both literacy teacher educators, served as co-facilitators but also positioned themselves as co-learners. Other participants included K-12 teacher volunteers from the facilitators' network of colleagues, former students, and/or placement hosts. The community held that sustained collaborative inquiry could generate new knowledge to support members' practice as well as inform the field.

Research Questions

- How can English language arts teachers re-vision their assessment practices to be more equitable?
- How do English language arts teachers reflect and improve upon their instruction and assessment practice when engaged with a critical community of practice?

Theoretical Perspectives

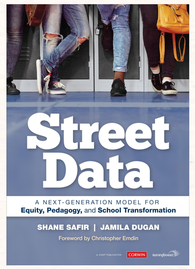
- Practitioner Inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009)
- Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1998)
- Criticality (Muhammad, 2020)

Methods

Participants

Thirteen teachers consented to participate in the group and the study, representing 11 urban, suburban, and rural school districts across New York state. Participants' teaching experience ranged from 0 to 27 years.

Data Sources



- Session plans
- Slide decks
- Handouts
- Readings
- Facilitators' field notes
- Email correspondence among community members
- Saved Zoom chat
- Members' online journals

Analysis

As is common with practitioner inquiry, data analysis took place iteratively, on multiple levels. Facilitators reviewed and identified patterns in field notes and journals from previous sessions as they planned the next one. Participants identified themes when working with online summary documents. More summative analysis took place during and immediately following the July retreat, using analytic memos and visual data representations recommended by Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Because of the collaborative nature of the meaning-making, practices such as member checking and consideration of discrepant evidence were seamlessly built into the process.

Preliminary Findings

1. *Street Data* framework's insistence upon centering of marginalized voices
2. Data reflecting a veering toward discussions of instruction, not assessment
3. Identifying methods of collecting street data allows participants to interrogate their assessment practice

Next Steps

01. Complete second data cycle during the 24-25 school year
02. Engage in semi-structured interviews with participants
03. Continue with concurrent analysis; identify resulting themes
04. Share findings with ELA community at NCTE, LRA.

References

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NCTE National Council of Teachers of English

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