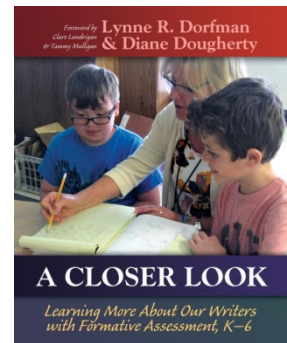


## A Closer Look: Learning About Our Writers with Formative Assessment

By Lynne Dorfman & Diane Dougherty



Sound assessment plays a vital role in showing and in detailing progress students are making toward reasonable goals. In addition, it helps educators monitor and adjust instruction in their classrooms. Formative assessment can focus on students' needs, providing instant feedback and allowing teachers to customize or differentiate instruction on a day-to-day basis.

In *A Closer Look: Learning About Our Writers with Formative Assessment*, we invite you to join us in K-6 classrooms as we work with students and teachers to provide feedback, focus on specific areas of improvement, set goals, and practice reflection. In our first chapter, we define what we mean by formative assessment, and we demonstrate how writing workshop is a natural fit for formative assessment practices. We spend some time examining tools that help us learn about our students. Interest surveys, writing inventories, and letters or e-mails from caretakers provide valuable insight into our students' experiences.

Checklists and rubrics for the three types of writing are provided for classroom use. Myriad checklists for conferring and record-keeping help teachers document what they see and hear in conferences in order to make informed instructional decisions. We decided to add a chapter on anchor charts because they are so important in daily instruction. Anchor charts help teachers document students' thinking, making it permanent, visible, and useful. At a glance, teachers can assess who is contributing, what key ideas are represented or missing, and who uses the chart in workshop during independent writing. The following anchor chart was developed by Brenda Krupp's third graders at Franconia Elementary School.

### **What Do Writers Do When They Get Stuck?**

- Abandon this piece for now and start a new piece.
- Wait until the next day to work on this piece again.
- Return to your plan or prewriting and revise.

- Take a bathroom break so you can walk through the hall and get your mind thinking.
- Read other pieces in your writer’s notebook to find ideas.
- Use your notebook to study craft moves that might help you.
- Meditate—breathe in and out—until you are relaxed.
- Sketch it out, draw pictures, or use a story board.
- Write about something that makes you happy.
- Write about something that makes you sad.
- Talk to a classmate or two about your problem to get help.
- Return to some mentor texts to get a new idea to write about.
- Ask yourself questions: *Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?*
- Close your eyes and think.

We devote several chapters to conferring with student writers. Roving conferences, small and whole group conferences, and one-on-one conferences are highlighted. A chapter on peer conferences focuses on helping students recognize that they are writers together. Everyone’s a teacher in a writing community. Giving students guidance and multiple opportunities to confer will lessen the burden on the teacher. All students have the chance to engage in conferences to gain instant feedback. Each conferring chapter contains several examples of conferences in action that are accessible through QR codes. We talk about these conferences in the running text; however, it is so much better to be able to view them as well.

We firmly believe in the power of self-assessment and reflection for both teachers and students. Glimpses into students’ attempts at reflection such as “What’s sticking with me?” and “Are you a writer?” as well as goal setting conferences in kindergarten, also accessible on QR Codes, provide many ways to get started. Our final chapter gives suggestions as quick and easy tips that can be used throughout the school year such as 3-2-1, admit slips, leader/learner charts, and exit slips. Students can enjoy “tweeting” as a way to reflect. Pose a reflection question on the whiteboard and challenge your students to respond to it in 140 characters or less. Teachers can collect the tweets to take notes on how students handle the reflection question that was posed. Some examples of questions follow:

- What worked well for you today?
- What new goal can you set for yourself based on the work you accomplished here?
- What is one important thing you learned about opinion writing?
- Did you make good choices during your writing time today? Explain.

Another special feature of the book is the inclusion of the voices of classroom teachers, coaches, and principals as they reflect on their experiences with formative assessment in writing workshop. These vignettes are scattered throughout the book and also online at Stenhouse Publishers. The appendices, too, appear both in the book and online for classroom use.

How we handle assessment is a reflection of our beliefs and values. When we give our students a voice in the assessment process through ongoing dialogue in writerly discussions and conferences, we discover what they need to be successful writers. That knowledge will help us design and differentiate instruction. You can begin by making a list of the ways you are currently assessing your students' writing and their needs and what methods are most effective for you and your students. Then add to the list what you might do differently after reading our book. *A Closer Look* can guide you to make and record valuable observations every day. Students must be able to see themselves as real writers, not just students who are writing for a teacher and a grade. Formative assessment practices will give your students a chance to see themselves as the writers they are!

Diane Dougherty is an independent literacy consultant with 32 years of teaching experience. She has presented at state and national conferences and is a fellow of the National Writing Project and the PA Writing & Literature Project. Diane is the co-author of *Grammar Matters: lessons, Tips, and Conversations Using Mentor Texts, K-6* and *A Closer Look: Learning More About Our Writers with Formative Assessment, K-6*, both Stenhouse publications.

Lynne Dorfman is an adjunct professor at Arcadia University and a co-director of the PA Writing & Literature Project. Presently, she is an independent literacy consultant and is co-writing a new book with Stacey Shubitz, *Welcome to Writing Workshop*. Lynne has co-authored three books about mentor texts with Rose Cappelli. She can't wait to receive her own copy of *A Closer Look* this September. Lynne and Diane's sessions at KSRA, CRA, WSRA, and local reading councils will highlight their new book.