

COMPLEMENTARY RESOURCE

A CRITIQUE OF “READING ASSESSMENT TO PROMOTE EQUITABLE LEARNING”

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Book review of Elish-Piper, L., Matthews, M. W., & Risko, V. (2022). *Reading assessment to promote equitable learning: An empowering approach for grades K-5*. The Guilford Press.

Introduction

Assessment is indeed a hot topic in the world of education today as it provides a projection into the future of education and holds schools accountable for what is being taught and whether students have learned it. Because assessments can give educators the data they need to guide academic decisions, it is a useful and necessary tool for helping educators to meet the needs of all students and guide the next steps for instruction and intervention. Additionally, assessments can help educators gain background knowledge about their students including measuring motivation, strengths, and weaknesses that ultimately helps to foster meaningful learning in the classroom. Assessment must be meaningful, accurate, and equitable for all students in order for the results to give an accurate representation of students' abilities.

The book *Reading Assessment to Promote Equitable Learning: An empowering approach for grades K-5* (2022) by Laurie Elish-Piper, Mona Matthews, and Victoria Risko, supports an authentic and equitable approach to assessment. This book review provides an evaluation of the text and a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the assessments included in the book. This critique aims to inform the reader about an authentic and equitable approach to assessment in the early literacy classroom and how this foundation for assessment can help educators better understand their students and meet their needs. The article will allow the reader to gain new insight on what components can be used in the current classroom to ensure that students are receiving quality assessments. Significant for all 21st century educators, it provides a framework for what components of assessment are helpful for gaining valuable knowledge about students that is meaningful, authentic, equitable and has the potential to help educators best meet the individual needs of all students.

Key Concepts and Structure

The nine chapters in the book open with discussion and guiding questions related to the topic of the chapter, including topics such as: equitable assessments, student interest and engagement, and the integration of diverse perspectives. Throughout the chapter the author introduces types of meaningful, quality, equitable assessments that teachers can use in their

classroom. Then, the author lines out the procedures for using an assessment and describes how to collect and analyze the data. Each chapter concludes with how the information from the assessment can be implemented using real-world examples and includes how the information from the assessment can benefit students, teachers, and parents. Recommended assessments are embedded at the end of each chapter but can also be found in the appendix in the book. There are 28 assessments in the book, some of which are formative and some that are informative. Elish-Piper et al. (2022) believe that reading assessments should offer more than just information about what students know; rather assessment must account for students' personal, social, and cultural influences. This is why reading assessments must be equitable.

Reading Assessment to Promote Equitable Learning (Elish-Piper et al., 2022) discusses the importance of implementing quality equitable assessments in the classroom. They recommend assessments that make “your students feel valued because they see evidence of their histories, identities, funds of knowledge, and lived experiences in how reading is taught and assessed in the classroom” (p. 17). The book contains examples of assessments that can be replicated, used or copied for use in the classroom, centered around four elements of a more authentic and equitable approach to reading assessment.

First, the assessments are equitable for all students. Second, the assessment cycle in this book is much more beneficial than a traditional approach of assessment to both students and educators in the classroom. Third, the assessments in this book consider many other aspects of learning that are critical to student success and help connect learning to the real-world. Throughout the book, there are four principles that guide a more authentic and equitable approach to reading assessment that measures the whole child. These four principles include:

- Principle One: Reading assessment must ensure the visibility of teachers and students in the assessment process.
- Principle Two: Reading assessment must occur through an equity mindset.
- Principle Three: Reading assessment must be embedded in daily instructional and learning activities.
- Principle Four: Reading assessment must account for reading complexity.

Each principle is unique in that all four work together to ensure that every child can reach their full potential because they see the whole child and all assessments are equitable.

Equitable Assessment

Reading assessment must occur with an equity mindset. The assessments in this book are made to be fair and impartial for all kids. Equitable means that any child, no matter their race, gender, background, or real-world experiences, can be successful. Elish-Piper et al., (2022) claim that “Standardized tests are products of the dominant, White middle-class culture and reflect that culture, while disadvantaged students are not always socialized within that culture. Therefore, these tests are inherently biased for many of the students who attend our schools” (Elish-Piper et al., 2022, p. 7). However, with improved assessments there comes the challenge of trying to utilize the assessments in this book when districts often already have assessments in place that must be used. For example, schools and districts may be tied to mandated assessments and may not have the capacity to incorporate new forms of assessment such as the ones recommended in

the book. Therefore, they suggest using the assessments in their book alongside current assessments (i.e., high stakes tests, formal classroom assessments, and benchmark testing) to support what is already being done in schools. The authors urge educators to share findings from their recommended assessments with other education professionals that you work with so that they can implement it in their classroom and see the benefit of the results. The assessments would be valuable to the school and possibly influence instruction in other content areas. Often the assessments in this book do not take long and can be done through teacher-student conferencing, as an observation, or as a tool to intervene and re-teach as the assessment is being conducted.

Principle Two states that reading assessment must occur with an equity mindset. An equity mindset is fundamental to designing reading assessment. This means that teachers must select assessments that promote positive teacher-student relationships. They must embrace students as active partners and build on students' strengths. Reading assessment must account for reading complexity. Because it is imperative that students are challenged and given opportunities to think at a higher level, the assessments in this book go beyond multiple choice and true or false and instead offer opportunity for higher level questioning, open ended answers, and short answer responses. The assessments in this book are rigorous for students. Assessments such as, Student Self-Assessment, Goal Setting, and Portfolios, require students to think with a growth mindset, set goals for themselves, and determine what steps they will take themselves to improve their understanding. This gives students autonomy over their learning.

The Whole Child

Reading assessment must ensure the visibility of teachers and students in the assessment process. The assessments in this book focus on students' cultural differences to provide opportunities for students to share and bring their lives into the classroom which in return will help families to feel valued, seen, and heard. Assessments that focus on the whole child such as, The Blob Tree, Think Alouds, and What Can You Show Us, allow students to share and bring their own lives into the classroom. Elish-Piper et.al. (2022) state that building relationships with parents is critical for getting them to be supportive and willing to be involved. Assessments and strategies included in their book, such as Initial Parent Conversations, Initial Student Conversations, Celebrating Identities with Students and Their Families, and I am Who I Am as a Reader, help to include important factors including cultural background, language, family customs, and motivation. However, this type of assessment strategy can be considered a challenge for educators who have a difficult time engaging parents in schoolwork, perhaps because they are single parents and may have limited time to participate due to jobs or other scheduling conflicts. Student-teacher led conferences help teachers to know students personally and academically on a deeper level through teacher-student conferencing. The assessments described in this book are presented in multiple forms. These forms include observation, interviews, and conferences and which may better represent and account for the whole child.

Elish-Piper et.al. (2022) recommend that reading assessment be embedded in daily instructional and learning activities. The assessments in this book consider many other aspects of learning that are critical to student success and help connect students' learning to the real-world.

Real-world connections are essential because they give students relevance and significance to what they are learning. What students learn in school must be present and used in their everyday life. Including students' personal lives with content and lessons offered in school can make the learning more personable to students. The assessments in the book have value because they connect with students personally and engage with their everyday life and are culturally relevant.

Conclusion

This review of *Reading Assessment to Promote Equitable Learning* (Elish-Piper et al., 2022) aims to inform early childhood literacy educators about an authentic and equitable approach to assessment in the early literacy classroom grades K-5. Because assessment should be a useful and necessary tool for helping educators to meet the needs of all students and help guide next steps for instruction and intervention, this book provides a foundation for culturally relevant assessment that may be a useful resource for teachers to better understand and to meet the needs of their students with an equity mindset.

Literature Cited

Elish-Piper, L., Matthews, M. W., & Risko, V. (2022). *Reading assessment to promote equitable learning: An empowering approach for grades K-5*. The Guilford Press.