What is NCTE Saying about Assessment?

“Assessments should aid learning, not merely audit it. Assessment for accountability purposes is necessary, but assessments are most valuable when they are locally constructed, provide immediate and useful feedback, and involve students in meaningful activities.”
- 2014 NCTE Education Policy Platform

At the request of the NCTE Executive Committee, the Rapid Response Assessment Task Force was created in the summer of 2014 to address the growing cacophony around assessment. Comprised of NCTE members at the forefront of innovative thinking about assessment, the task force is gearing up to share its perspectives far and wide.

**NCTE positions on assessment issues**

Current NCTE statements identify characteristics of quality assessment, approaches to avoid, and ways to promote effective assessment. Four important statements, for example, address machine scoring, inside and out-of-school factors that affect assessment, support for effective kinds of assessment, and assessments that work to improve teaching and learning.

**Machine scoring is ill advised because**

- Writing is a human activity
- Such scoring limits the kinds of writing that can be evaluated
- It’s a mismatch between learning and assessment
- It simplifies what’s assessed as we are trying to raise achievement
- It cannot actually score what the standards promote

**Factors both outside school and inside school affect assessment. As outside-of-school factors are addressed, we’ll see new ways to improve.**

- Poverty
- Traumatic events, both acute and chronic: e.g., death in the family and circumstances on the day of testing
- Community supports for literacy
- The need for better data, e.g., documenting the relationship between students’ vocabulary and access to books

**Policy Recommendations from the latest Squire Office briefing: “How Standardized Tests Shape— and Limit— Student Learning”**

Standardized tests have powerful and often negative effects on student learning, but their negative effects can be reduced by measures such as these:

- Employ multiple assessments of student achievement so that standardized tests are administered alongside broader, more comprehensive measures of student learning.
- Represent standardized tests to students as one type of assessment among several and help students understand how this type of assessment functions.
- Ensure that the standardized tests being used are valid and reliable for the populations of students being tested.
- Provide special accommodations such as allowing extra time, dictation, and translators for English language learners and other students with special needs.
Other forms of assessment support learning and articulate with other schools or systems; they are comparative and contextual. Some types include

- Study groups
- Walk-throughs
- School data teams
- External peer review
- Sampling with large range reference (like NAEP)

Because educators learn how students are doing on site—observing one another, studying student work samples together, and co-designing formative assessment—educators need more support for collaborative planning time and continuing, focused professional development.

- Evidence reveals the dearth of collaborative planning time.
- Collaboration is the most useful activity for teachers as they prepare to implement standards.

Who constitutes the NCTE Assessment Rapid Response Task Force?

Kathleen Yancey (Chair) Florida State University, FL
Scott Filkins, Champaign School District, IL
Elizabeth Jaeger, University of Arizona, AZ
Peggy O’Neill, Loyola University, Baltimore, MD
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Lisa Scherff, Estero High School, Estero, FL

What is NCTE Going to Do about Assessment?

1. The Assessment Rapid Response Team is poised and ready to get their knowledge about assessment into the public conversation. If you see a media opportunity that warrants response, send a note to Jenna Fournel <jfournel@ncte.org>, NCTE Communications and Alliance Strategist.
2. Through publications and events in the months ahead, NCTE will shine a light on the work of NCTE on assessment and the work members continue to do on this important topic.
3. Policy Briefs from the Squire Office will compile the latest research findings on assessment in an easily digestible format that you can share with your community. The brief in November’s Council Chronicle addresses the shortcomings of current assessment practices. http://bit.ly/1t1EiYn
4. With various coalitions and the 29 stakeholders who are part of the National Center for Literacy Education, we will consider specific recommendations and actions to influence policy makers. Assessment issues will influence the NCTE 2015 Education Policy platform.