



Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts

Volume 35

Issue 2 November/December 1994

Article 7

12-1-1994

Professional Materials

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Recommended Citation

Dobbie, B. (1994). Professional Materials. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 35 (2). Retrieved from https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol35/iss2/7

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Professional Materials

Portfolio and Performance Assessment: Helping Students Evaluate Their Progress as Readers and Writers. Written by Roger Farr and Bruce Tone. Harcourt Brace and Company, 6277 Sea Harbor Drive, Orlando Florida 32887. 1994. ISBN: 0-15-500485-9. 338 pp. US\$26.75

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For years, teachers have been admonished not to "teach to the test," advice which has been difficult to follow because of pressures to document student achievement. As political and educational decision makers demand greater accountability, tests increasingly influence how and what students are taught. Since escaping the influence of tests is unlikely, developing good tests — instruments that assess authentic outcomes of instruction — has become more important. Classroom teachers wishing to develop authentic assessments will find *Portfolio and Performance Assessment* by Roger Farr and Bruce Tone to be a practical guidebook.

Farr and Tone believe that portfolios and performance assessments are best viewed as important parts of an overall assessment program that also includes norm-referenced and criterion-referenced tests. No single assessment can provide adequate information to every legitimate audience (decision makers, parents, teachers, and students). The authors view portfolios as wonderful tools for developing student self-assessment, with the additional benefit of helping teachers set

meaningful instructional goals. The use of working portfolios, as opposed to show portfolios, is strongly encouraged. Performance writing assessments, which typically ask students to respond in writing to a preselected text, provide information most useful to teachers and parents. Because the task is uniform, standards for student performance can be more reliably set, an especially helpful feature for teachers who must assign grades.

Portfolio and Performance Assessment is primarily a "how to" book for teachers who would like to use portfolios and/or performance assessments. The book does not need to be read cover to cover; extensive cross-referencing and a useful repetition of key points allow the reader to choose only those sections of interest. Helpful features include meaningful headings, teacher tips and checklists, student samples, and reproducible record forms, letters, and announcements. The authors are very practical in orientation. They make no extravagant claims for authentic assessments; instead they prepare the teacher for both the pitfalls and the promise of portfolio and performance assessment.