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Review of the Book: Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). Manual K-3

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Recommended Citation

Kandel-Cisco, Brooke, "Review of the Book: Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). Manual K-3" (2008). *Scholarship and Professional Work – Education*. Paper 81.

http://digitalcommons.butler.edu/coe_papers/81

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Reviewed by Melanie L. Shores, Ph.D., The University of Alabama at Birmingham, Assistant Professor of Human Studies. Interests include measurement, program evaluation, mathematics education, and gender issues.

Pianta, Robert C.; La Paro, Karen M. & Hamre, Bridget K. (2008). *Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). Manual K-3*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

Pages: 109 Price: \$49.95 ISBN: 978-1-55766-942-1

Research has suggested that teachers make the difference in whether students realize their academic potential or fail to achieve academically (see e.g., Darling-Hammond, 2000; Sanders, Wright & Horn, 1997). The *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) act has highlighted the important role of teachers in students' academic success by mandating the presence of "highly qualified teachers" in U.S. classrooms. While NCLB's focus on the credentials of teachers may be one element in improving the quality of public education in the U.S., numerous scholars have questioned whether the law's definition of a highly qualified teacher is appropriately comprehensive (see e.g., Cochran-Smith, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Apple, 2007). The *Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Manual K-3* offers an alternative approach to improving students' academic and social development by focusing on what teachers do in classrooms.

The CLASS is an observation instrument that was created to assess the classroom quality of preschool through third-grade classrooms. CLASS has been used in numerous large-scale studies, all of which are detailed in the manual, that provide evidence that classrooms with higher scores on the CLASS have students who make greater academic and social progress during the school year.

The *CLASS Manual K-3* was written to provide background information on the development of the instrument and to explain procedures for using the CLASS in K-3 classrooms. The audience for the manual includes teachers, administrators, researchers, evaluators, and consultants. The CLASS assesses the quality of classrooms by examining teacher interactions with students across three domains: emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support. The manual successfully explains the theoretical and research rationale for the inclusion of these domains and does so in language that is accessible both to seasoned researchers and elementary classroom practitioners alike.

Following this introduction to the instrument, the manual provides specific information regarding use of the CLASS. This section covers diverse scenarios in which the instrument could be used (live or recorded classrooms, classrooms with one or two teachers, etc.) and presents the specific procedures necessary for using the instrument, especially focusing on coding each dimension during classroom observations. A strength of this section is the inclusion of specific examples of teacher behaviors that are indicative of the three dimensions and that aid the observer in accurately coding teacher interactions.

Although the CLASS manual adequately explains the procedures for using the instrument, there is one area of concern with the use of the instrument by school personnel. Because the observer using the CLASS must make high inference conclusions regarding the extent to which the dimensions are characteristic of the classroom, maintaining objectivity throughout an observation may be difficult. This issue may be especially problematic when the CLASS is used by school administrators or teachers to observe teaching colleagues. Preconceived notions of the teacher's ability to teach or the behavior of the students within that teacher's class could color an observer's coding on the CLASS and skew, either positively or negatively, the results. For this reason, the manual's authors highlight the importance of extensive training focused on the use of the instrument. The extent to which school districts would be willing to dedicate resources to widespread training, however, is unknown.

Even though the use of the CLASS by school personnel presents this concern, the CLASS and its accompanying manual offer classroom educators many benefits. In a time when teachers may feel increasing pressure to focus only on relaying critical content information to students, this observation system acknowledges the importance of teacher interactions in the classroom, especially for young children. Rather than focusing on educational outputs, such as students' test scores, the manual explains how observations using the CLASS can provide teachers with meaningful information regarding classroom-level inputs. In other words, results from observations with the CLASS allow teachers to see their areas of strength as well as pinpointing specific teacher behaviors that need to be changed or modified in order to improve classroom practice and positively influence the academic and social development of elementary students.

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Reviewed by Brooke Kandel-Cisco, Research assistant & doctoral student, Texas A&M University. Her research focuses on literacy instruction with second language learners, the professional development of teachers who work with English language learners, and appropriate instructional practices for bilingual/ESL classrooms.

Serravallo, Jennifer & Goldberg, Gravity (2007) *Conferring with Readers: Supporting Each Student's Growth and Independence*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Pages: 224 Price: \$23.00 ISBN: 978-0-325-01101-1

There is much good sense to be found in the new book, *Conferring with Readers*, by Jennifer Serravallo & Gravity Goldberg. It reads as a detailed, almost step-by-step guide for elementary school teachers on how to improve the "independent reading" practices of students in a classroom.

The authors are former elementary school teachers who currently work as staff developers with the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project at Columbia University, working closely with Lucy Calkins, among others. In this role, the authors move from school to school, coaching teachers on how to conduct readers' workshops, based on a model developed by Lucy Calkins, and also influenced by that of Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell. *Conferring with Readers* serves as a veritable handbook for the part of readers' workshop that focuses on independent reading.

Each chapter presents a theoretical or practical aspect of conferring with readers in a readers' workshop. For example, one chapter discusses the layout for a classroom that lends itself to readers' workshop. Key to this setup is a large classroom library with minutely leveled books, to better facilitate matching each student with a "just right" book. The authors suggest it is possible to level books according to any of several recommended leveling guides, but throughout the book, the book levels published by Fountas & Pinnell are used as examples.

Conferring with Readers represents an important contribution to the literature. The greatest resource in the book is the wealth of sensitive and powerful suggestions the authors make for assessing the reading abilities and progress of students, ranging from pulling students aside, one by one, in order to conduct a running record as developed by Marie Clay, to other forms of assessment that are less intrusive to the on-going independent reading of students in the classroom. There is no doubt that assessing students when they are reading silently is a difficult task. In fact, in schools where I have taught, teachers felt pressure, and ultimately decided to eliminate silent reading from the classroom schedule altogether, perhaps for precisely this reason. Silent reading can also be squeezed from the schedule by encroaching "content standards," and the often difficult task of insisting that students use silent reading time for silently reading. Work in other literacy forms, such as on grammar, writing, and read alouds, predominate in many middle childhood classrooms. Serravallo & Goldberg strongly defend the importance of leading independent reading sessions in the classroom, and show how it is possible to guide readers toward independence and greater comprehension. Reading assessment tools and imaginative ways of tracking evidence, along with rubrics for evaluation, are the primary tools offered in this book, which may allow teachers to reach this goal.

Serravallo & Goldberg advocate several forms of intervention, before or during a sustained silent reading period in the classroom, to help students improve their reading abilities. First, the authors present a method of conferencing with individual students, where teachers closely observe a student reading, and then stop the reader and offer compliments and suggestions. In this model, the teacher keeps detailed notes about each student and often refers to past conferences. The teacher checks in on how the particular skill taught during the previous conference has been used by the reader, and requests a demonstration by the student. Then, she offers several new strategies for improving reading comprehension.