



# BOOK REVIEW: CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT: WHAT TEACHERS NEED TO KNOW

REVIEWED BY BARBARA WOOD, HAMPTON (VA) CITY SCHOOLS

*As NATD members we often provide professional development to teachers to enhance their knowledge of and interest in assessment. The author of this book review is Barbara Wood, a teacher at Smith Elementary School in Hampton, Virginia. She is a member of Hampton City Schools' Instructional Leader Program, a research-based professional development model that provides training and support to identified classroom teachers who, in turn, support their colleagues within their school. These individuals go beyond the role of the traditional "Building Test Coordinator" who have the responsibility of distributing, collecting and counting test materials. Rather, their focus is on enhancing practices through a better understanding of assessment, analyzing/interpreting results for instructional improvement, and developing/implementing comprehensive school improvement plans with research-based instructional strategies to further heighten performance of our students. This program is strongly supported by Dr. Billy Canada (Superintendent), Dr. Rebecca Lett (Assistant Superintendent) and principals (such as Ms. Jan Corbett, Principal at Smith Elementary). Barbara offers NATD members this book review from her perspective as a classroom teacher serving as an Assessment Instructional Leader.*

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With the current Zeitgeist of accountability in the field of education comes more emphasis on the classroom teacher and classroom assessment.

When I was in college working on my teaching certification, I took a class on assessment called Tests and Measurement. I found the class to be interesting, but it was one of those classes that I didn't think much about as I began teaching. After all, as a second grade teacher, all of the tests were given, the grades recorded, and then the grades were averaged at the end of each grading period for report cards. Second graders took the ITBS. Teachers were given data showing where individual students were weak, but what you did with that information was up to you. In fact, you might say that what you did with assessment in your classroom was up to you.

Today, the passive unattached attitude towards assessment by the classroom teacher can no longer afford to exist. The classroom teacher of today is realizing that assessment is a vital part of teaching. This is the case even at the earliest grade levels. I, too, have come a long way since those first days of

teaching second grade. Presently I am a classroom teacher who also serves as an Assessment Instructional Leader in my elementary school in Hampton, Virginia. It is within this capacity that I help communicate information about Virginia's Standards of Learning (SOL) Assessment Program to the teachers in our school. I also assist in analyzing and disaggregating test data. I assist with developing and implementing a comprehensive School Improvement Plan (SIP) that establishes goals and objectives along with action plans for implementation of research-based instructional strategies to further enhance the performance of our students.

One of the resources that has been provided to each of the classroom teachers serving as Assessment Instructional Leaders is the second edition of W. James Popham's of *Classroom Assessment: What Teachers Need to Know* (1999). Popham has created a tremendous resource full of information that the classroom teachers of today need to know about assessment, that he fits

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into 15 chapters.

Popham's book covers an array of topics as shown in the chapter titles:

- Why Do Teachers Need to Know About Assessment
- Reliability
- Validity; Absence of Bias
- Deciding What to Assess and How to Assess It
- Selected-Response Tests
- Constructed-Response Tests
- Performance Assessment
- Portfolio Assessment
- Affective Assessment
- Improving Teacher-Developed Assessments
- Instructionally-Oriented Assessments
- Making Sense Out of Standardized Test Scores
- Appropriate and Inappropriate Test-Preparation Practices and Evaluating Teaching and Grading Students.

Early in the reading, Popham sets the stage by explaining the difference between "tests" (what we have a zillion of) and "assessment" (a broader descriptor to include the traditional paper-and-pencil tests, but also including many more types of measurement procedures). His book, while reader friendly, takes the teacher into a deeper understanding of how assessment, when used and formatted properly, lets teachers become more effective decision-makers in the education of their students.

As a classroom teacher, I feel that one of the strengths of this book is that it deals with all types of assessment. Many of the teachers I know are consumed with formatting their test to

"look" like the Virginia SOL. While this has good purpose, if we become so obsessed with the multiple choice format there is the risk that teachers and students will miss the opportunity to assess in a variety of ways. Popham spends several chapters addressing different test formats and looking at other types of assessments. He discusses each format thoroughly giving pros and cons, and he includes instructions on how to construct the best test questions possible. Each chapter also has a new section entitled "Parent Talk" that offers questions a parent might ask and how a teacher may respond. The "Self Check and Ponder Time" items at the end of each chapter are excellent discussion starters for a group of teachers who might wish to use the book in a study group on classroom assessment.

What are some particular highlights of this book? Chapter 11 addresses improving teacher-developed assessments. Within this chapter, Popham provides the classroom teacher with several procedures to improve the assessments they develop. Many teachers have probably not thought about the fact that tests can be edited and improved. Popham shares specific ways to improve tests through the use of judgmentally based improvement and empirical methods. Chapter 12 is new in this second edition. In this chapter Popham focuses on two assessment-based strategies for instructional improvement, one which he feels teachers are familiar with and a second one that he introduces

and gives the most attention to because he feels few teachers understand it. This chapter is about how assessment can help teaching. Also of note is Chapter 14. Despite being placed late in the book, it deals with a topic that is very important for today's classroom teacher: appropriate and inappropriate test-preparation practices. With the arrival of high-stakes testing, we as teachers must deal with how we are handling the stresses that these tests bring to both teachers and students. Popham introduces standards for teachers to keep in mind as they prepare their students for these high-stakes tests. He also cautions about the dangers that exist if we do not heed these standards.

Overall, as a classroom teacher, I have found Popham's book to be a valuable resource. Popham states the theme for his book is that "classroom assessment should help teachers make better educational decisions." To be a good decision-maker one must have the knowledge needed to make the appropriate decision. Popham has fulfilled the intent of this theme through this information-rich resource he has developed for teachers. What this teacher feels most noteworthy is that the author conveys a strong belief in the ability of teachers to continually assess their own knowledge and understanding of what is best for students and to grow and change when that is needed. I recommend this book not only to

classroom teachers, but also to