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ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENTS

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Assessment. Evaluation. Measurement. Grading. When you isolate the words, you sense how intimidating they are, how dispassionate and impersonal they sound—the objective calculation of weight and size and length and breadth and fat content, the adding and subtracting and measuring and weighing that somehow determines quality, value, worth. In education these are the words that report student achievement, determine student advancement, and demonstrate teacher *accountability* (another word to invoke fear and trembling). This issue of *LJM* offers alternative views of assessment.

The first three articles describe ways of learning from and interacting with students that change our perspective on classroom evaluation. John Smolens reverses the assessment process by letting his students evaluate and comment on his work-in-progress as a way of progressing on their own; Mary Dekker demonstrates how teachers learn what students really know in a whole language classroom without the imposition of assessment devices; Cheryl Forbes reads her students the way she reads established authors and lets them know what she gleans from them as authors, not merely as students.

The next three articles discuss the kind of assessment that demonstrates accountability. Diane Hamstra explains the development of a portfolio assessment system in her school that becomes “a reflective process of awareness for both students and teachers;” Ray Lawson explains the advantages of self-assessment and performance-based assessment over objective tests of information in high school English classes; Denise Schnitzer shares with us her school system’s development of portfolios in both writing and reading as a means of assessing student learning.

The concluding article in this issue consists of four powerful statements about attempts to assess the future accountability of pre-service teachers in English language arts. Ellen Brinkley, Marilyn Wilson, Constance Weaver, and Sheila Fitzgerald offer the texts of their testimony before a state Senate committee promulgating pre-service teacher certification tests. They demonstrate that, in the face of relentless insistence on assessment and accountability, talented and experienced teachers are still the most reliable resources in the uphill struggle for meaningful and imaginative assessment of student abilities.

The Editors