

III The Continuous Assessment – Teaching Loop

Assessment and Record-keeping

Assessment, while key to effective instruction, can be a risk when valuable time for learning gets usurped by an overzealous attention to assessing growth. Because we believe students learn in the acts of reading, writing, and talking, the best assessment of their growth happens closest to these actions. Teachers who listen closely as students talk about their writing gain an understanding of their students' skills: assessment happens moment to moment. In addition to daily on-going observations, it helps to step back and take a slower look at a collection of a student's work over time.

Our goal in TQW is to incorporate assessment without letting the process sink the program of instruction. Still the challenge exists: How do I keep track of all I observe? That's where record keeping comes in.

The week before our son Robert left for camp, we started packing. Everything he needed would fit into our large green duffel bag. But where was the darn thing? We searched everywhere: the attic and basement storage rooms, the mud room closet downstairs, and Robert's bedroom closet upstairs (he had used it last). After four days of searching I (JoAnn) finally found it, folded and hidden under a pile of sweaters on the top shelf of the living room closet. During my search I had stopped to think, "where would I put a duffel bag if I were putting it away today?" That thought had led me to the living room closet. But it wasn't until my third visit that I dug deep enough to find it. Through it all, I lamented the inefficiency of our home organization system.

As a writing teacher you have a similar need to organize and retrieve information about your students and your teaching. Instead of a duffel bag, you might store the remnants of conversations with students or notes on a series of lessons you taught in October. When readily available, these records save precious time and put at your fingertips the information you need to make good instructional decisions.

You'll want to make your record-keeping simple. You can create a comprehensive system to record just about anything under the sun. But if the system is too complicated, you won't keep up with it. If you find a way to take quick and easy notes as you work, the system will practically run itself. Most of the forms included here can be carried on a clipboard as you work with students. Once you complete a sheet, file it in a three-ring binder. Before long you'll have what you need to take a longer, slower look at the year and your student's process.

Record-keeping systems vary from teacher to teacher. Only you know exactly what information you need, when you need it, and where you're most likely to reach for it. With that in mind we've offered you a variety of forms to choose from. We hope some will fit your purpose as written. If not, a little tweak should make the difference. We offer one important caution: *Do not plan to use more than a small handful of these.* A good system should be like invisible netting that keeps everything in place without calling attention to itself.