



Record Keeping

Between the Ideal and the Real World of Teaching

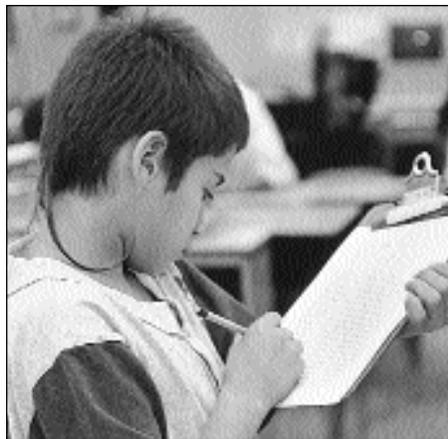
Ideas for the Classroom from the NCTE Elementary Section
Donna Maxim and Cora Lee Five, Co-Editors

Classroom Practices That Monitor and Inform Learning

by Donna Maxim and
Cora Lee Five, co-editors

In this issue of *School Talk*, we discuss the importance of good record keeping, the variety of forms that record keeping can take, the effect of record keeping on our teaching and on student learning, and some ideas for sharing record-keeping responsibilities between teachers and students. We are fortunate to have as guest author Timothy O'Keefe, who shares his expertise about record keeping in his classroom. Jane Hansen also relates classroom stories that demonstrate some good record-keeping practices developed by students to show their progress as learners.

Effective, continuous record keeping lies at the heart of our best teaching and learning. It enables us to plan, to organize, and to create the best learning environment for each child. Record keeping is an effective tool for tracking contributions made by individual students in our classroom, for assessing students, for informing students and parents about growth over time, and for setting goals—by both students and teachers. Keeping track of our students with classroom observations and systematic notes yields



information that cannot possibly be gleaned from a traditional checklist, report card, or standardized test.

Information from classroom record keeping may be shared with parents throughout the year so that they too can see specific examples of student progress. The sharing of information from anecdotal notes, field notes, or other forms of record keeping enables teachers and administrators to assess student progress on a larger scale—within a district, for example.

Teachers create their own record-keeping systems to fit the environment in which they teach, their beliefs about teaching and learning, and their time constraints. The system may be different in every classroom. Classroom record keeping might include:

- individual student reading lists and/or writing records
- individual student proofreading or editing lists
- individual portfolios
- student self-evaluations
- teacher's notes on the status of the class
- teacher/student conference anecdotal records
- notes on teacher/student/parent conferences
- individual student journal entries about the student's learning process
- checklists
- letters by students about their growth as learners
- narrative reports by teachers and students
- report cards
- student observations and anecdotal records—"kid watching"
- home reading records
- tape recordings of oral reading
- running records
- oral responses (retelling stories, sequencing, and summarizing)
- oral reading to determine strategies used by individual students
- reading-response journals
- writing notebooks

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- folders to collect work in progress
- teacher notebooks for teacher reflection
- student artifacts

We feel it is important for teachers and students to share the responsibility for record keeping. What are the kinds of information that students can record daily? Our students are responsible for recording the titles of the books they read at school, as well as the date, the author, a rating according to the difficulty of the text, the genre, and a list of reading strategies they use. They record information about the books they've read at home, too, including the title, author, amount of time spent reading, and responses to each book. Students also record the titles of their pieces of writing, the audience, the genre, the date started, and the date published. They keep a list of skills they use to proofread and/or edit their pieces. They use journals across the curriculum to record their thought processes as well as their discoveries about themselves as learners. Students' record keeping assures that they are active participants in the assessment of their learning.

The importance of what teachers and students can learn from their record keeping is clearly demonstrated in both Jane's and Timothy's stories.

Conclusion

As teachers, we need to become as good as we possibly can in making observations and in recording them in order to get to know the individuals in our classes. Using these observations and records, we can then build on the strengths of the children, deal effectively with their needs, and extend their learning. We can create classrooms that value individuals, the classroom community, and the learning environment. ▼

Student Record Keeping

by Jane Hansen, University of New Hampshire

Students can shoulder the responsibility for providing evidence of their growth as readers and writers. They can keep authentic evidence rather than abstract numbers or letters (report cards) to represent what they are learning. This kind of accountability shows students, teachers, parents, and administrators what individual students can do in various areas.

Denise, a first-grade student, became a fluent writer. Her strings of letters became so long she couldn't read them. "I need to make spaces!" she announced in frustration.

She proceeded to do so, and she added her new writing to her folder in the file cabinet along with a note explaining what she had accomplished (see Figure 1).



Figure 1

With each accomplishment they document in a folder, children can include their goal for what they will try next in order to grow further as a writer or a reader. Denise, for example, wants to write longer pieces of writing, and proceeds to do so (see Figure 2).

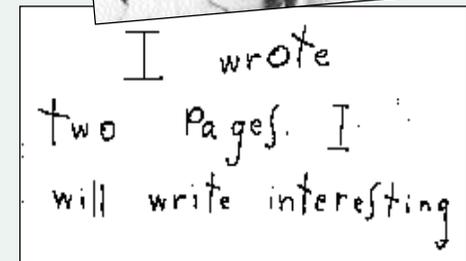


Figure 2

Next she wants to write something that is more interesting. When she read her two pages to the class, they had asked her only two questions, and this bothered her. A few weeks later, when Denise wrote a song she loved, she sang it to the class, and their applause convinced her that she had written something interesting. She then put her song in her folder along with a note.

This record-keeping system is not simply a task the students can do. The act of doing it tends to keep many students more focused than they might be if the task belonged to the teacher alone.

Older students, such as Jolita, who created the reading-writing chart shown in Figure 3, also keep folders of their work. Their work, along with notes of explanation, goals, and successive examples, can be accompanied by a key to capture, at a glance, what they have learned (see Figures 4, 5, and 6). ▼

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Examples of Student Records

My Reading and Writing

**First Quarter
Fall 1996
Jolita**

W2		R4	R7	
W1	W5	W3	R6	
R1	R2	R3	R5	W4
Poetry	History	Hist. Fiction	Fiction	Pers. Narr

Figure 3

Books I've Read and Writing I've Composed

Key

R1	<u>Hand in Hand</u> : Lee Bennett Hopkins Ill: Peter Fiore	9/15
	<u>An American History Through Poetry</u>	
R2	<u>Orphan Train Rider</u> : One Boy's True Story Andrea Warren	9/20
R3	<u>A Family Apart</u> Joan Lowery Nixon	9/25
R4	<u>Pink & Say</u> Patricia Polacco	9/26
R5	<u>Philip Hall likes me. I reckon maybe</u> Bette Greene	10/5
R6	<u>Cousins</u> Virginia Hamilton	10/10
W1	My Trip to Gettysburg	9/20
W2	The Food on the Train	9/23
W3	Twin Girls at Gettysburg	10/10
R7	<u>Kiss the Dust</u> Elizabeth Laird	10/15
W4	My Cousin	10/25
W5		

Figure 4

Reading/Writing Connections

9/20 I used four lines from "The Gettysburg Address" (p. 63, Hopkins) in my poem (W1)

9/25 Books 2 & 3 are on the same topic. I never heard of Orphan Trains before!

10/10 I used ideas/ways to write from Greene and Nixon in W3. I used questions to end chapters like Nixon sometimes did. I used months for chapters like Greene did.

10/27

Figure 5



**List of Reading-Writing Proficiencies
My dates and book/writing**

1.	Paragraphs for new speakers	W3	10/10
2.	Commas in a series	W2	9/23
3.	Connections between books	R2	9/25
		R3	
4.	Use graphic feature to locate information	W1	9/20
5.	Understand that one book may elicit a variety of responses	R3	9/25
6.	Listen and respond thoughtfully to others	9/14	Class Share. Doug's writing. (see journal)
7.	Choose a form appropriate to the purpose for writing		
8.			

Figure 6

The Habit of Kidwatching

by Timothy O'Keefe, Center for Inquiry, Richland District #2, Columbia, SC

Quality versus Quantity

For me, record keeping is a constantly evolving process. Strategies that seem to work well in some years don't seem to capture the essence of what I'm looking for in succeeding years. When I first began to take anecdotal notes, my mission was to capture as much information as possible. By spring I had huge files for every child and piles of often disjointed anecdotal notes, audiotapes, and videotapes.

Looking back at this stage in my teaching, I suppose that simply amassing the data became an end in itself. Because I had collected and examined so much data, it seemed that I understood children better. However, now that I've streamlined my system, I find that looking deeply into fewer interactions and samples makes much more sense; I can use this information to make better curricular decisions for individuals, small groups, and the whole class.

Most of the record keeping that I do may be referred to as *kidwatching*, a term coined by Yetta Goodman (1978). Put simply, kidwatching includes direct, intentional, and systematic observations by teachers. Carolyn Burke clarified and extended the idea by casting kidwatching as *learning to see what's there* and using that information to make a better classroom (1991). After considering these ideas and reflecting on my own classroom practices, I believe these qualities best reflect the power and potential of kidwatching:

It is the continuous, systematic look at how children learn. It is taking what we know about students and

turning that knowledge into effective instructional invitations. It is reporting to students and parents about authentic learning. It is valuing the contributions each child makes within the learning community that is our classroom. It is helping children realize who is an expert at what and who they can turn to when they need assistance. It is giving voice to students who might otherwise be silent. It is getting to know each child in as many different contexts as possible—to know each child as a person unique in all the world. It is the fuel for our desire to know more about the learning process as well as the continuous refinement of our craft as teachers. Kidwatching is not something apart from the curriculum but rather what holds it together and pushes it forward into new and often unexplored territory (O'Keefe 1996).

While I take anecdotal notes across the curriculum, for this discussion I will focus mainly on the type of data I collect for language arts.

The Clipboard

My LA clipboard from this school year contains lists of published pieces from our writers' workshop, including the dates that pieces were published. This is kept on a single-page roster so I can quickly scan to get a feel for who publishes and how often. For example:

Alison

Runaway Misty 9/19
Trip to The Beach 10/1
When I Got Lost 10/15
The Magic Pumpkin 11/7
Our Trip to The Fair 11/14
Unicorns 11/21

I keep separate process notes about workshop. At several times during workshop I simply stop and record a sentence or two from what I see and hear.

Kathy — Writing a *Jumanji* sequel with Caitlin. Lots of quality discussion (thoughtful questions, nice connections to literature).

Sarah — Reader in an author's circle. Not attending much to suggestions. Wants to discuss her own writing more than the author's.

On more specific writing assignments, such as literature response, I use the rosters to create rubrics for mechanics (for example, capitalization, handwriting, punctuation, and spelling), as well as a column for listing spelling approximations, and a space for notes.

Story: *Tony's Hard Work Day*

DeSean

Caps + ✓

HW +

Punct. + ✓

Spelling +

Sp. Approx. inching = itching
family = family

Comments: spontaneous, some humorous comments, neat, good rhetorical questions, carefully done.

During uninterrupted reading time, I also record comments about what I observe and hear, including the books that students select, their level of difficulty, and other observations.

Hanah

Selection: *The Magic Schoolbus: On the Ocean Floor*

Difficulty: medium

Notes: quiet, intense, sits by herself, rarely looks up, moved from a group that was a little loud for her

In addition to using rosters for collecting information, I devote one page in the clipboard to each child. These individual sheets may contain some of the same kinds of notes I've already mentioned, but with more extensive descriptions and interpretations. From the pieces that children publish for the class, I record

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comments, ideas, and direct quotes. I also make detailed notes about participation in literature study, attitudes and behaviors toward whole-group activities (e.g., pen pals, shared literature responses), and my *coaching* notes from individual reading samples.

Coaching

Coaching is perhaps the most significant teaching and evaluation tool I use in reading. I arrange for lots of time for independent reading. Some students read chapter books from home or the library, others select from my personal collection, still others may choose to read stories from the basal reader which I use as a class anthology, from children's magazines, or from the newspaper. In my coaching notes I record the date, the title of the book, the level of difficulty of that text for that particular child, and notes about the reading process. I try to record as many miscues as possible and to indicate whether or not these are self-corrected (SC). After recording a miscue (e.g., *appreciate* for *accept*) I note if there seems to be a major change in the meaning (MC), a subtle meaning change (SC), or if the meaning of the piece is still intact (NMC). If the syntax of the sentence is altered, I note that as well (SYNT). I describe specific behaviors such as, "points to words with left index," or, "skips over text in parentheses." In general, I've adapted the Reading Miscue Inventory (Goodman, Watson, and Burke 1987) to my teaching and record-keeping style.

After I record notes on a three- to four-minute reading sample, the student and I chat informally about the piece. This often gives me a little better insight about the child's understanding and appreciation of the selection. I'll often ask about strategies ("What do you do when you come to a word that you don't know?") or about a specific troubling word or passage



and will set goals for themselves such as, "I need to be more careful about choosing a book," or "I need to put more excitement in my voice."

Making Kidwatching a Habit

How much are we really informed about reading strategies from an 87% on a comprehension test? Sitting with a child and watching and listening carefully may be the best thing we can do to get to know our students as readers.

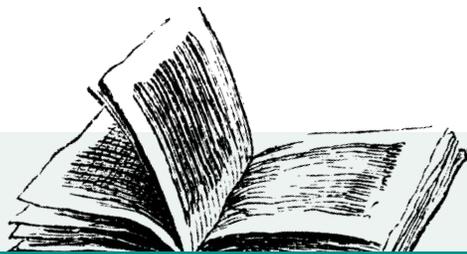
from the text. Then I usually give some advice to the young readers. This advice grows out of what I have come to know about each reader and my understanding of what strategic readers do. For some, my advice might be to simply select a broader range of reading material and to move on from selecting the same books over and over. I offer more specific advice to others.

Admittedly, much of the information I collect this way is subjective. Deciding whether or not a book is difficult or easy for a child to read is a judgment call. Similarly, coding a miscue as a subtle change in meaning or no meaning change is partly speculation. But every interaction brings with it all previous interactions, and lots of practice has given me confidence in most of my judgments. I do not need to be correct all of the time to get a pretty good idea of what is going on and to make sound recommendations and plan effective strategy lessons.

From time to time children will listen to a tape of themselves reading. I'll often follow with an open-ended question like, "What did you notice about yourself as a reader?" Most often the children are very perceptive

It is difficult to go into much detail here about a topic as broad as record keeping. Each teacher must find his or her own way, but reinventing the wheel is a waste of time and energy. Discussions with colleagues, reading about the Reading Miscue Inventory (Goodman, Watson, and Burke 1987) and Retrospective Miscue Analysis (Goodman 1992) can all help in the process. To someone who is thinking about anecdotal record keeping for the first time, my advice would be to write something, even a single sentence, every day about every child. Your own insightful comments are so much more valid than simply recording scores and letter grades and will assist you in making more meaningful evaluations, in creating instructional invitations, and in reporting progress.

Some things about kidwatching are as elusive to define as friendship. In a simple and fundamental way, getting to know children deeply is synonymous with kidwatching. What can a B+ or an S in reading really tell us about how a child reads? How much are we really informed about reading strategies from an 87% on a comprehension test? Sitting with a child and watching and listening carefully may be the best thing we can do to get to know our students as readers. A blank sheet of paper and a pen may be our greatest tools for recording what we come to know. Kidwatching is not for the faint of heart. It requires commitment, risk taking, and valuing the good in each child. However, kidwatching is its own reward. ▼



Resource Bibliography

For this bibliography we have collected professional resources that highlight classroom practices and/or a variety of record-keeping formats. All the works cited in this issue of *School Talk* are also listed here.

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Next Issue: The February issue of *School Talk* will focus on integrating reading and writing in the content areas.