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## **Using Thought-Bubble Pictures to Assess Students' Feelings About Reading**

## **Reading is a Lifelong Skill**

We live in a world full of print, and students who enjoy reading are at a definite advantage. (Zambo, 2006, p. 798). Additionally, I maintain that people, who enjoy reading, develop a lifelong passion for reading. As a child, my husband read anything from cereal boxes to encyclopedias. While a student at Cathedral Latin High School, formerly located in Washington, D.C., my husband received an excellent education, which furthered his love of reading. To this day, some forty-plus years later, he reads at least three books a week.

My husband, like Alex, the young student mentioned in the article, *Using Thought-Bubble Pictures to Assess Students' Feelings about Reading*, “see themselves as competent readers and understand that reading is important beyond the classroom and will be used throughout their lives.” (Zambo, 2006, p. 798). Some students may not enjoy reading, and actually do all that they can to avoid it. A student’s avoidance of reading may be due to a lack of self-confidence. A student’s lack of self-confidence may be the reason that they are not motivated to read. In the classroom, part of a teacher’s responsibility is to develop a student’s reading skills. If a student, however, lacks the confidence and motivation needed to read, the teacher is left in quite a dilemma. The teacher’s goal is to develop a student’s reading skills; however, what method can be used to assess a student’s emotions and perceptions about reading?

## **Teachers Can Use Thought-Bubble Pictures to Assess Students' Feelings About Reading**

Rick Stiggins, author of *An Introduction to Student-Involved Assessment For Learning*, believes that assessing a student’s disposition is critical, and that those students who have experienced failure or lack self-confidence “place little value in learning.” (Stiggins, 2008, p. 228). Stiggins reveals that there is a direct correlation between lack of motivation and “failure in

the classroom.” (Stiggins, 2008, p. 228). *Using Thought-Bubble Pictures to Assess Students’ Feelings about Reading*, provides a method which will help assess how students feel about reading. The Thought-Bubble Method will assist a teacher in determining if a student’s lack of motivation to read is due a low self-esteem. The student may feel as if they are “not a good reader and never will be.” (Zambo, 2006, p. 798).

The Thought-Bubble Method uses drawings to “gauge students” perceptions and feelings about reading.” (Zambo, 2006, p. 798). If you have ever browsed the comic section in a newspaper, you should already be familiar what a thought-bubble looks like. These are the bubbles placed over the heads of people in a cartoon. You will notice when you read the comics that these bubbles express words or ideas which the cartoon characters are supposedly speaking or thinking. Researchers have used thought bubbles to “help children express their ideas about abstract concepts and emotions.” (Zambo, 2006, p. 799). The use of “thought bubbles make the ideas about what goes on in the mind visible and concrete.” (Zambo, 2006, p. 799). The same comic or cartoon style expression of ideas or words can be adapted for use in the classroom. In reading comprehension, the Thought-Bubble Method helps a teacher assess what a student is feeling or thinking.

### **What About Reliability and Validity in Assessment For Learning?**

For data collection purposes, the Thought-Bubble Method (when used to assess what a student is feeling or thinking), incorporates two important components of Stiggins’ Assessment For Learning. These two components are reliability and validity. (Stiggins, 2008, p. 228). Zambo mentions in her article, that to establish reliability she has at least “two other raters independently score a random sample drawing.” (Zambo, 2006, p. 799). Zambo further cites

that, “To establish the validity of the thought bubbles, I always use them in conjunction with other data sources.” (Zambo, 2006, p. 799). The other data sources used by Zambo to establish validity include: observation of the student’s body language, long-term interaction with the student, and patterns of interaction with the student.

### **Putting Thought-Bubble Picture Assessment into Action**

- “Use a coding system that scores the face, the bubble and overall drawing”
- “Rank each face from +1 for a positive/happy, 0 for neutral, and -1 for negative/sad.”
- “Look for clues in these features, such as tears or smiles.”
- The coding system is used to analyze both the face and message bubble completed by the student.
- In analyzing the message in the bubble, “scores can range from +1 for positive/happy ideas contained in the bubble, 0 for neutral ideas, and -1 for negative/sad ideas.”
- Look for clues such as “a crumpled book,” “question marks,” and “words (negative or positive).”

(Zambo, 2006, pp. 800-801).

### **How I Could Take This Method One Step Further**

I believe that this method of assessment could be modified to assess note-taking skills. I would use a concept web which incorporates the use of comic/cartoon figures with bubbles. The student would complete the concept web part of the graphic organizer when actually taking notes. Upon completion of the note-taking activity, I would then ask the students to reflect and provide me an understanding of the topics they had taken notes on. I would ask

them to honestly look at their notes, use the comic/cartoon figure and bubble next to each topic, and draw what it is that they had written using their own information listed on the concept web. This would help the students reflect on what they had written, and provide me a basis for reviewing their understanding of what they had taken note on. I believe this would be a creative and interactive manner for students to provide me a self-reflection, and indication of their level of learning and understanding. I will design an example of my idea as part of my final project on Note-Taking Strategies and Assessments.

### **So, What Do I Think About Using**

#### **Thought-Bubble Pictures as Part of Assessment For Learning?**

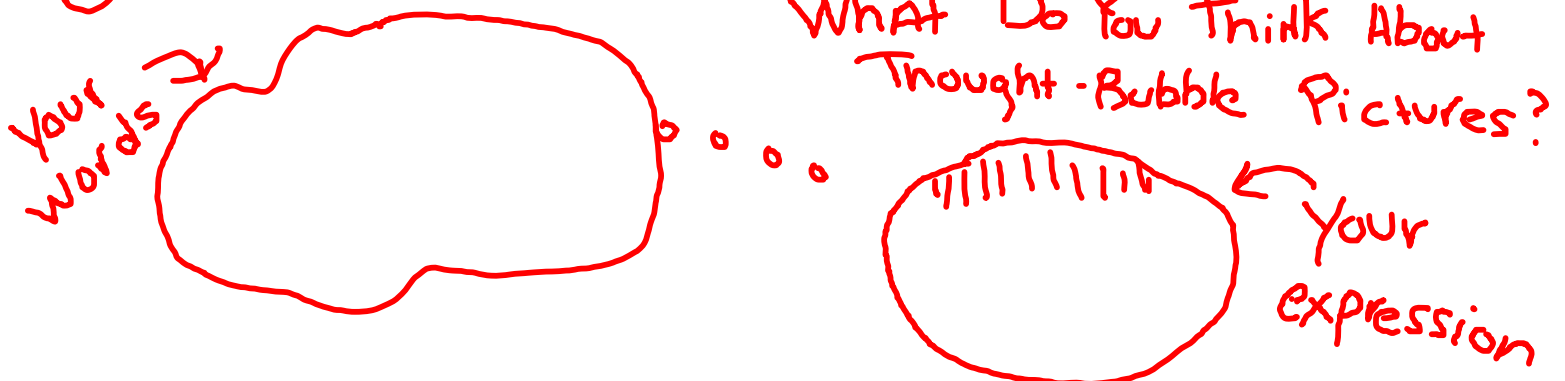
When I first read this article, I was somewhat intimidated with the scoring method, and have to read the instructions several times before I understood how this method really worked. My brain was still working under the assumption that a score of a -1 was a “bad score.” I said to myself, “How could I ever even think about giving a student a score of -1 on a drawing which expresses their personal feelings?” I then, was able to relate this method of assessment back to an important factor of assessments which Stiggins points out. The critical difference between of Assessment of Learning and Assessment For Learning lies in how we use the results of an assessment. Stiggins cites that “we assess dispositions in the hope of finding positive, productive attitudes, values, sense of academic self, or interest in particular topics so that we can take advantage of these—build on them—to promote greater achievement.” (Stiggins, 2008, p. 221). The positive attitude Stiggins conveys in his statement, is also expressed by Zambo. She cites, “Thought bubbles can be used with other assessments to find out how students feel about reading and themselves as readers.” “As teachers we need to recognize the importance of how students perceive reading and the

emotions that they feel.” (Zambo, 2006, p. 802). I value the opinions of both Stiggins and Zambo. I support Zambo’s method of assessment, and understand that a score of -1 is actually a result which reflects the student’s need for support and understanding. In the role of education, the Thought-Bubble Method is a valuable tool. A teacher can use this method of assessment to learn more about the student, and help the student learn more about their self. Through guidance, support and proper instruction, the teacher can assist the student in building their self-confidence in reading, finding a motivation for reading, and ultimately acquiring a skill which will last a lifetime—becoming a “competent reader!” (Zambo, 2006, p. 798).

I used a program I own called, Bamboo Fun to create this thought-bubble cartoon. Computer technology, such as this program, is a fun way to show self-expression. This pen & tablet program can easily be incorporated into the learning process when creating thought-bubble pictures.



# YOUR TURN TO HAVE FUN!



References:

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Zambo, D. (2006). Using thought-bubble pictures to assess students' feelings about reading. *The Reading Teacher*, 798-803.

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