

DOMAIN I.

PLANNING AND ORGANIZING READING INSTRUCTION BASED ON ONGOING ASSESSMENT

COMPETENCY 1.0 CONDUCTING ONGOING ASSESSMENT OF READING DEVELOPMENT

Skill 1.1 Principles of assessment

Assessment is the practice of collecting information about children's progress, and evaluation is the process of judging the children's responses to determine how well they are achieving particular goals or demonstrating reading skills.

Assessment and evaluation are intricately connected in the literacy classroom. Assessment is necessary because teachers need ways to determine what students are learning and how they are progressing. In addition, assessment can be a tool which can also help students take ownership of their own learning and become partners in their ongoing development as readers and writers. In this day of public accountability, clear, definite and reliable assessment creates confidence in public education. There are two broad categories of assessment.

Formal assessment is composed of standardized tests and procedures carried out under circumscribed conditions. Formal assessments include state tests, standardized achievement tests, NAEP tests, and the like. **Informal assessment** uses observations and other non-standardized procedures to compile anecdotal and observation data/evidence of children's progress. It includes but is not limited to checklists, observations, and performance tasks.

To be effective, assessment should have the following characteristics:

1. It should be an ongoing process with the teacher making informal or formal assessments on an ongoing basis. The assessment should be a natural part of the instruction and not intrusive.
2. The most effective assessment is integrated into ongoing instruction. Throughout the teaching and learning day, the children's written, spoken and reading contributions to the class or lack thereof need to and can be continually noted.
3. Assessment should reflect the children's actual reading and writing experiences. The children should be able to show that they can read and explain or react to a similar literary or expository work.

4. Assessment needs to be a collaborative and reflective process. Teachers can learn from what the children reveal about their own individual assessments. Children, even as early as grade two, should be supported by their teacher to ask themselves questions continually and routinely to assess their reading. They might ask: “Am I understanding what the author wanted to say?” “What can I do to improve my reading?” “How can I use what I have read to learn more about this topic?” Teachers need to be informed by their own professional observation *and* by children’s comments as teachers assess and customize instruction for children.
5. Quality assessment is multidimensional and may include but not be limited to samples of writings, student retellings, running records, anecdotal teacher observations, self-evaluations, and records of independent reading. From this multidimensional data, the teacher can derive a consistent level of performance and design additional instruction that will enhance the child’s reading performance.
6. Assessment must take into account children’s ages and ethnic/cultural patterns of learning.
7. Assessment should help teach children from their strengths, not their weaknesses. Find out what reading behaviors children demonstrate well and then design instruction to support those behaviors.

Assessment should be part of children’s learning process and not done *to* them, but rather done *with* them.

Formal Assessment

Criterion-referenced are tests where the children are measured against criteria or guidelines which are uniform for all the test takers. Therefore by definition, no special questions, formats or considerations are made for the test taker who is either from a different linguistic/cultural background or is already identified as a struggling reader/writer. On a criterion-referenced test, a child test taker can possibly score 100% because the child may have actually been exposed to all of the concepts taught and mastered them. A child’s score on such a test would indicate which concepts have already been taught and what needs additional review or support to master.

Two criterion-referenced tests that are commonly used to assess children’s reading achievement are the Diagnostic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and the Stanford Achievement Test. DIBELS measures progress in literacy from kindergarten to grade three. It can be downloaded from the Internet free at dibels.uoregon.edu. The Stanford is designed to measure individual children’s achievement in key school subjects. Subtests covering various reading skills are part of this test. Both DIBELS and the Stanford Achievement Test are group-administered.

Degrees of Reading Power (DRP)—This test is targeted to assess how well children understand the meaning of written text in real life situations. This test is supposed to measure the process of children's reading, not the products of reading such as identifying the main idea and author's purpose.

CTPIII—This is a criterion-referenced test which measures verbal and quantitative ability in grades 3-12. It is targeted to help differentiate among the most capable students, i.e., those who rank above the 80th percentile on other standardized tests. This is a test that emphasizes higher order thinking skills and process-related reading comprehension questions.

Norm-referenced tests measure children against one another. Scores on this test are reported in percentiles. Each percentile indicates the percent of the testing population whose scores were lower than or the same as a particular child's score. Percentile is defined as a score on a scale of 100 showing the percentage of a distribution that is equal to it or below it. This type of state standardized norm-referenced test is being used in most districts today in response to the No Child Left Behind Act. While this type of test does not help track the individual reader's progress in ongoing reading development, it does permit comparisons across groups.

There are many more standardized norm-referenced tests to assess children's reading than there are criterion-referenced. In these norm-referenced tests, scores are based on how well a child does compared to others, usually on the local, state and national level. If the norming groups on the tests are reflective of the children being tested (e.g. same spread of minority, low income, gifted students), the results are more trustworthy.

One of the best known norm-referenced tests is the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. It assesses student achievement in various school subjects and has several subtests in reading. Other examples of norm-referenced tests used around the country are the Metropolitan Achievement Tests, the Terra Nova-2, and the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test-4. These are all group tests. An individual test that reading specialists use with students is the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test.

Concepts of Validity, Reliability, and Bias in Testing

Validity is how well a test measures what it is supposed to measure. Teacher-made tests are therefore not generally extremely valid although they may be an appropriate measure for the validity of the concept the teacher wants to assess for children's achievement.

Reliability is the consistency of the test. This is measured by whether the test will indicate the same score for the child who takes it more than once.

Bias in testing occurs when the information within the test or the information required to respond to a multiple choice question or constructed response (essay question on the test) is information that is not available to some test takers who come from a different cultural, ethnic, linguistic, or socio-economic background than do the majority of the test takers. Since they have not had the same prior linguistic, social, or cultural experiences that the majority of test takers have had, these test takers are at a disadvantage in taking the test and, no matter what their actual mastery of the material taught by the teacher, can not address the “biased” questions. Generally other “non-biased” questions are given to them and eventually the biased questions are removed from the examination.

To clarify what might be abstract to the reader about bias, let’s consider an example. On a recent reading test in my school system, the grade four reading comprehension multiple choice asked questions about the well known fairy tale of the Gingerbread Boy. These questions were simple and accessible for most of the children in the class. But two children who were recent new arrivals from the Dominican Republic had learned English there. They were reading on grade four level, but in their Dominican grade school, the story of the Gingerbread Boy was not a major one. Therefore a question about this story on the standardized reading test did demonstrate examiner bias and was not fair to these test takers.

Informal Assessments

A running record of children’s oral reading progress in the early grades K-3 is a pivotal informal assessment. It supports the teacher in deciding whether a book is matched to the child’s stage of reading development. In addition this assessment allows the teacher to analyze a child’s miscues to see which cueing systems and strategies the child uses and to determine which other systems the child might use more effectively. Finally the running record offers a graphic account of a child’s oral reading.

Generally, a teacher should maintain an annotated class notebook with pages set aside for all the children or individual notebooks for each child. One of the benefits of using running records as an informal assessment is that they can be used with any text and can serve as a tool for teaching, rather than an instrument to report on children’s status in class.

Another good point about using running records is that they can be taken repeatedly and frequently by the teacher, so that the educator can truly observe a pattern of errors. This in turn provides the educator with sufficient information to analyze the child’s reading over time. As any mathematician or scientist knows, the more samples of a process you gather over time, the more likely the teacher is to get an accurate picture of the child’s reading needs.

Using the notations which Marie Clay developed and shared in her *An Observation Study of Early Literacy Achievement*, Sharon Taberski details in her book, *On Solid Ground*, how to keep a running record of children's reading. She writes in the child's miscue on the top line of her running record above the text word. Indeed she records all of the child's miscue attempts on the line above the text word. Sharon advises the teacher to make all the miscue notations as the child reads, since this allows the teacher to get additional information about how and why the child makes miscue choices. Additionally, the teacher should note self corrections (coded SC) when the child is monitoring his/her own reading, crosschecks information, and uses additional information.

As part of the informal assessment of primary grade reading, it is important to record the child's word insertions, omissions, requests for help, and attempts to get the word. In informal assessment the rate of accuracy can be estimated by dividing the child's errors by the total words read.

Results of a running record assessment can be used to select the best setting for the child's reading. If a child reads from 95%-100% correct, the child is ready for independent reading. If the child reads from 92% to 97% right, the child is ready for guided reading. Below 92% the child needs a read-aloud or shared reading activity. Note that these percentages are slightly different from those one would use to match books to readers.

One of the increasingly popular and meaningful forms of informal assessment is the compilation of the literacy portfolio. What is particularly compelling about this type of informal portfolio is that artists, television directors, authors, architects and photographers use portfolios in their careers and jobs. This is a most authentic format for documenting children's literacy growth over time. The portfolio is not only a significant professional informal assessment tool for the teacher but also a vehicle and format for the child readers to take ownership of their individual progress over time. It models a way of compiling one's reading and writing products as a lifelong learner, which is the ultimate goal of reading instruction.

Portfolios can include the following categories of materials:

Work Samples include children's story maps, webs, K-W-L charts, pictures, illustrations, storyboards, and writings about the stories which they have read.

Records of independent Reading and Writing include the children's journals, notebooks or logs of books read with the names of the authors, titles of the books, date completed, and pieces related to books completed or in progress.

Checklists and Surveys include checklists designed by the teacher for reading development, writing development, ownership checklists, and general interest surveys.

Self Evaluation Forms are the children's own evaluations of their reading and writing process framed in their own words. They can be simple templates with starting sentences such as: "I am really proud of the way I ...

I feel one of my strengths as a reader is _____

To improve the way I read aloud I need to _____

To improve my reading I should _____

Generally at the beginning of a child's portfolio in grade 3 or above there is a letter to the reader explaining the work that will be found in the portfolio; from fourth grade level up, children write a brief reflection detailing their feelings and judgments about their growth as readers and writers.

When teachers are maintaining the portfolios for mandated school administrative review, district review, or even for their own research, they often prepare portfolio summary sheets. These provide identifying data on the children and then a timeline of the teachers' review of the portfolio contents plus professional comments on the extent to which the portfolio documents are satisfactory and reflect ongoing growth in reading.

Portfolios can be used beneficially for child/teacher and of course parent/teacher conversations to review the child's progress, discuss areas of strength, set future goals, make plans for future learning activities and evaluate what should remain in the portfolio and what needs to be cleared out for new materials.

Rubrics are quantifiable scales in assessment. Holistic scoring involves assessing a child's ability to construct meaning through writing. It uses a scale called a rubric which can range from 0 to 4.

- 0: This indicates the piece can not be scored. It does not respond to the topic or is illegible.
- 1: The writing does respond to the topic but does not cover it accurately.
- 2: This piece of writing does respond to the topic but lacks sufficient details or elaboration.
- 3: This piece fulfills the purpose of the writing assignment and has sufficient development (which refers to details, examples, and elaboration of ideas).
- 4: This response has the most details, best organization, and presents a well expressed reaction to the original writer's piece.

Miscue Analysis is a procedure that allows the teacher a look at the reading process. By definition, the miscue is an oral response different from the text being read. Sometimes miscues are also called unexpected responses or errors. By studying a student's miscues from an oral reading sample, the teacher can determine which cues and strategies the student is correctly using or not using in constructing meaning. Of course, the teacher can customize instruction to meet the needs of this particular student.

Informal Reading Inventories (IRI) are a series of samples of texts prearranged in stages of increasing difficulty. Listening to children read through these inventories, the teacher can pinpoint their skill level and the additional concepts they need to work on.

Group Versus Individual Reading Assessments

In assessment, tests are used for different purposes. They have different dimensions or characteristics whether they are given individually or in a group and whether they are standardized or teacher-made. The chart below shows the relationships of these elements.

	Standardized	Teacher-made
Individual	<p><i>Characteristics</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is uniformly administered <p><i>Uses</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is best for younger children • helps with placement for special services 	<p><i>Characteristics</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has more flexibility <p><i>Uses</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assists teaching decisions • used for diagnostic purposes
Group	<p><i>Characteristics</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is uniformly administered • is time efficient <p><i>Uses</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • permits comparisons across groups • used for policy decisions by administrators 	<p><i>Characteristics</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has high face validity • is time efficient <p><i>Uses</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • informs teach-reteach & enrichment decisions • documents students' learning

Skill 1.2 Assessing reading levels

Determining Students' Independent, Instructional, and Frustration Reading Levels

Instructional reading is generally judged to be at the 95 percent accuracy level, although researcher and educator Sharon Taberski places it between 92 and 97 percent. Taberski tries to enhance the independent reading levels by making sure that readers on the instructional reading levels read a variety of genres and have a range of available and interesting books within a particular genre to read.

Taberski's availability for reading conferences helps her both assess first hand her children's frustration levels and model ongoing teacher/reader book conversations by scheduling child-initiated reading conferences when she personally replenishes their book bags.

To allay children's frustration levels in their reading and to foster their independent reading, the teacher should personally take time out to hear them read aloud and to check for fluency and expression. Children's frustration level can be immeasurably lessened if they are explicitly told by the teacher after they have read aloud that they need to read without pointing and that they should try chunking words into phrases which mimic their natural speech.

Awareness of Text Leveling

The classroom library in the context of the balanced literacy approach to reading instruction is focused on leveled books. These are books which have been leveled with the support of Fountas and Pinnell's *Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Children* and *Matching Books to Readers: Using Leveled Reading in Guided Reading, K-3*.

The books which are leveled according to the designations in these reference books need to be stored in bins or crates with front covers facing out. This makes them much easier for the children to identify. In that way the children can go through the appropriate levels and find those books that they are particularly interested in which are also at the right level for them to read. These are books which the children can read with the right degree of reading accuracy. When young children can see the cover of a book, they are more likely to flip through the book until they can independently identify an appealing book. Then they will read a little bit of the book to see if it's "just right."

"Just right" leveled books—those that children can read on their own—need to be available for them to read during independent reading. The goal is for the more fluent readers to select books on their own. Ultimately the use of leveled books helps the children and the teacher decide which books are appropriate.

Levels are indicated at the right upper corners by blue, yellow, red, and green dot stickers which parallel emergent, early, transitional, and fluent reading stages. They are then kept in containers with other “blue,” “yellow,” “red,” and “green” books.

Another list used to match children with “just right” books includes the Reading Recovery level list. Ultimately, the teacher has to individualize whatever leveling is used in the library to address the individual child’s needs.

Techniques for Assessing Particular Reading Skills

Sharon Taberski recommends that the teacher build in one-on-one time for supporting individual children to consider what makes sense, sounds right, and matches the letters.

She has noted that emergent and early readers tend to focus on meaning without adequate attention to graphophonic cues. She suggests using the following prompts for children who are having problems with graphophonic cues:

Does what you said match the letters?

If the word were what you said ____, what would it have to start with?

Look carefully at the first letters. Then look at the middle letters. Then look at the last letters. What could it be?

If it were ____, what would it end with?

Oral retellings can be used to test comprehension. Children who are retelling a story to be tested for comprehension should be told that that is the purpose when they sit down with the teacher.

When you let the children start the retelling on their own, you can see whether the children need prompts to retell the story. Many times more experienced readers summarize what they have read. This summary usually flows out along with the characters, the problem of the story, and other details.

Other signs that children understand what they are reading when they give an oral retelling include their use of illustrations to support the retelling, references to the exact text in the retelling, emotional reaction to the text, making connections between the text and other stories or experiences they the readers have had, and giving information about the text without your asking for it.

Awareness of the Challenges and Supports in a Text

Illustrations can be key supports for emergent and early readers. You should not only use wordless stories (books which tell their narratives through pictures alone) but also make targeted use of Big Books for read-alouds so that young children become habituated to the use of illustrations as an important component for constructing meaning. You should model for the child how to reference an illustration for help in identifying a word in the text the child does not recognize. Of course, children can also go on a picture walk with you as part of a mini-lesson or guided reading and anticipate the story (narrative) using the pictures alone to construct meaning.

Decodability: Use literature which contains examples of letter sound correspondences you wish to teach. First, read the literature with the children or read it aloud to them. Then take a specific example from the text and have the children reread it as you point out the letter-sound correspondence to the children. Then ask the children to go through the now familiar literature to find other letter-sound correspondences. Once the children have correctly made the letter-sound correspondences, have them share similar correspondences they find in other works of literature.

Cooper (2004) suggests that children can become word detectives so that they can independently and fluently decode on their own. Children should learn the following word detective routines so that they can function as an independent fluent reader who can decode words on their own. First the children should read to the end of a sentence. Then the children should search for word parts which they know. Children should also try to decode the word from the letter sounds. As a last resort, they should ask for help or look up the word in the dictionary.

Assessment of the Reading Development of Individual Students

For young readers who are from ELL backgrounds, even if they have been born in the United States, the use of pictures validates their story authoring and story telling skills and provides them with access and equity to the literary discussion and book talk of their native English speaking peers. These children can also demonstrate their storytelling abilities by drawing sequels or prequels to the story detailed in the illustrations alone. They might even be given the opportunity to share the story aloud in their native language or to comment on the illustrations in their native language.

Since many stories today are recorded in two or even three languages at once, discussing story events or analyzing pictures in a different native language is a beneficial practice which can be accomplished in the 21st century marketplace.