

NOTES TO ACCOMPANY MODULE 4: ASSESSMENT FOR INDIVIDUALIZATION

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Key Principles of Assessment

Important Language and Literacy Domains to Assess

As has been mentioned earlier, children’s “mistakes,” “errors,” or as some prefer to call them, “unconventional” performances during early attempts at reading and writing, can be very informative in determining how a child is progressing on his/her way to becoming a conventional reader and writer (Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982). Included in the broad areas of assessment such as print knowledge, early reading and writing, and comprehension, children’s unconventional literacy performances may also be observed and assessed in the following areas:

- Knowledge of the functions of various print objects or “artifacts” such as the names and uses of telephone books, the TV guide, newspapers, magazines, menus, religious material and other common print media.
- Recognition of the distinction between acts of “reading,” “writing,” and “drawing” and the various forms of print objects used in each event.
- Understanding of “space” as an indicator of printed word boundaries.
- The ability to read “environmental print” (signs, logos, labels) by focusing on the print as opposed to other aspects such as color, shape, or other non-print identifying marks.
- The ability to identify various forms of writing or printing (including different orthographies) as distinguished from sequences of numbers, random scribbles or logos which communicate a specific message such as “No Smoking,” “Walk/Don’t Walk,” or “Men/Women.”
- The use of “book language” while relating a story from a wordless or picture storybook.

In most of the above areas, it is possible to distinguish developmental phases (all of which overlap, of course) which indicate growth toward conventional knowledge. Instruments and ways to measure growth in these areas will be discussed in a later section.

Child Assessment Information

Performance assessments

In addition to the more well-known literacy assessments for young children such as Marie Clay’s *Concepts about Print Test* and its Spanish version *Conceptos del Texto Impreso* (Escamilla, Andrade, Basurto, Ruiz, & Clay, 1996), other measures have been developed to represent more closely what children know about print. These instruments or procedures can be categorized as *dynamic*, *diagnostic*, *developmental*, *clinical*, or *advocacy-oriented* (Reyes, Scribner, & Scribner, 1999) assessments since they are meant to provide developmental “snapshots” along the literacy trajectory of individual children

toward conventional reading and writing. Also called “clean tests” (Day & Day, 1986), since they more directly measure the skill in question, all are administered individually, have flexible directions for administration and can be adapted to most languages or scripts. The following list of measures for emergent literacy is not exhaustive, but all of the instruments mentioned are research-based and reliable for the skills measured.

The Functions of Print Test (FPT) was first described in 1988 by Maria Weiss and Renae Hagan in an article in *The Reading Teacher*, vol. 41, pages 574-578. Designed to be administered to children between the ages of 4-7, the test involves showing the children 10 different types of print materials (3 objects at a time) which occur in the child’s surrounding home or neighborhood environment such as a phonebook, menu, dictionary, etc. and asking two questions: (a) “Show me the _____,” and (b) “Why do people read _____?” Originally, given to 110 kindergartners, the *FPT* provides information about the child’s awareness of what kinds of print might be in the home environment, or the types of outings that the child may have experienced where some type of print item (grocery list, menu) was integral. In addition to identifying the print object, the procedures also allows the child to demonstrate awareness or knowledge of how that item is used in everyday interactions.

The **Written Language Awareness Test (WLA)** also known for one of its components as the **Mow-Motorcycle Test** was developed by Nancy Taylor, Marsha Evans & Irene Blum in 1976; however, the most detailed discussion of its application appeared in 1986 in the *Reading Research Quarterly*, vol. 2, pages 132-149 in an article by Taylor, Blum, & Logsdon. The four component test includes subtests of (a) recognizing individual words in a spoken sentence (aural word boundaries); (b) matching spoken words to their printed equivalents; (c) a metalinguistic interview about written conventions (directionality, written word boundaries, etc); and (d) an cloze exercise where the child supplies the last word in a written sentence which is underlined (“She ate pancakes with milk”) as a cue to aid prediction. The most widely used component of the *WLA* in research, however, has been the spoken word/print matching where the child is shown eight pairs of words, each pair on a sentence strip (one above the other separated by a line), such as “rhinoceros/rye,” “germ/geranium,” “obliterate/ob,” and “try/triangular.” For each word pair, the examiner says, “One of these words is ____ and the other is _____. Which one is _____?” According to the authors, “the task taps the child’s understanding of a basic relationship between speech and print; the speech stream is mapped onto printed symbols, and the length of the spoken word is a cue to the length of the printed word.”

The **Environmental Print Task (EPT)** is a component of battery of measures developed by Goodman, Marek and [name] to assess the emergent literacy knowledge of children in five domains specified as the “roots of literacy” (Goodman, 1986): (a) knowledge of environmental print, (b) knowledge of print in connected text (i.e., storybook reading), (c) knowledge of the forms and functions of writing, (d) knowledge of the metalanguage of reading and writing (e.g., word, sentence, syllable, letter) and (e) knowledge of print or speech as an object of reflection. The *EPT* ideally is accomplished in four phases. The first phase is taking the child on a “literacy walk” (Orellana et al) to a grocery store, for example, and asking the child to identify different products by their labels in their normal context. The second phase is taking those same objects and mounting the labels (with full color) on two-dimensional paper or card stock and asking the child to identify the object again. In phase three, the child is asked to identify the same label printed in black and white and with all identifiable pictures or logos removed. In the fourth and final phase the child is asked to identify the label again written in plain manuscript letters. By gradually removing the contextual aspects of words used as labels, it is possible to identify the types of cues that young children use in recognizing familiar signs, labels or logos.

Repeated Storybook Reading Task. A way to tap into children’s understanding of the connected discourse in storybooks is by monitoring the types of questions and comments that children make over repeated readings of the same book. Yaden (1988, 1989, 1993) has developed a classification system for

categorizing children's comments and questions through studies which show that children's first comments and inquiries about books are querying about descriptions of characters in or features of illustrations. This focus upon illustrations while never disappearing entirely is slowly replaced by questions about the meaning of the story itself or the reasons for characters' actions within the story. Over further readings, children gradually begin to pick out words and phrases which they want defined (e.g., "What does 'he was cross' mean?"). Finally, children begin to focus on the print directly, usually as it occurs in illustrations first. They also begin to ask about page numbers, punctuation, "illustrated letters" and other *salient* print features. Additionally, two questions, in particular, seem to foreshadow the appearance of independent reading and often occur in the following sequence: (a) "What does that word say (pointing to a word on the page)" and (b) "Where does it say _____?" These questions indicate that the child is undergoing the complicated task of figuring out just how spoken language maps onto the written word.

Word and Sentence Reading Tasks with Pictures. Two tasks taken from the research of Emilia Ferreiro and colleagues (Vernon & Ferreiro, 1999) are particularly useful in determining when children are making the complicated transition from believing that the pictures of books are what is "read" to the knowledge that it is the print itself, which directs the reader and the reading act. The *word-reading task* consists of presenting the child with half a dozen pictures or so of different familiar items/persons with a one-word label written below in either cursive or manuscript. The child is then asked three questions: (a) Is there something to read here? (b) Where? and (c) Will you read what is written? The *sentence reading task* is similar in that the child is presented with four or five picture cards (increasing in the number of elements pictured) with either a one or two line sentence below describing the scene (e.g., from Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982, pp. 55-56; picture: a duck, static on a lagoon with the text "the duck swims"; picture: several elements such as boy rowing in a boat, plants and animals with the text "Raul rows on the river"). The authors describe three levels of children's increasing understanding of text and accompanying pictures from the tasks: (a) Text and picture not differentiated, (b) the text is a label for the picture, and (c) properties of the text (number of words, length of line) provide clues to predictions based upon the pictures. In summary, these tasks give an indication of how sophisticated children's understanding is of the reading act itself and the role which text plays when juxtaposed with pictures as in a picture storybook.

The Emergent Literacy Scales (ELS) is one of the few measures indexing the presence of written language prosody when young children read "emergently" or retell a narrative. Initially developed and described by Elizabeth Sulzby in 1985, the *Scales* have been refined, updated and adapted particularly for classroom usage (Gutman & Sulzby, 1999; Kaderavek & Sulzby, 1999; Lomangino, Nicholson, & Sulzby, 1999). The basic procedure involves having a child "read" a favorite storybook and determining from the discourse whether the child is (a) labeling the pictures, (b) using storytelling intonation and prosody, (c) rendering a memorized version of the text, or (d) actually attempting to track print while reading. The *ELS* has been validated with children in a variety of settings and languages and is still the only measure available to early literacy researchers that provides an index in the early stages of children's acquisition of the register of written or "academic" language, and their understanding that books use different syntax, vocabulary and text structure than oral language.

According to its developers (Paris & Paris, 2003) ***The Narrative Comprehension Assessment (NCA)*** is the first structured procedure for measuring comprehension in pre-reading children, which actually uses various literacy rubrics to render a numerical comprehension score. The entire task consists of three parts: (a) Picture walk, (b) retelling, and (c) prompted comprehension. To begin the assessment, the child is given a closed picture storybook and asked to look through it, after which the child is encouraged to "read" the story to the examiner. This phase of the procedure is to detect knowledge of book handling skills, print conventions and engagement with the story. In the second part of the *NCA*, the child is asked to do a retelling with the book closed or taken by the examiner. The third portion of the *NCA* consists of

the examiner and the child going through the book once more with the adult asking five literal and five inferential comprehension questions about the story structure (i.e., characters, setting, episodes, etc) and overall storyline and plot. For each item in the *NCA* segments, a scoring system from 0-2 is used with 2 indicating the highest level of achievement or accurate performance. Complete guidelines for scoring, description of the rubrics and validity data can be found in the *Reading Research Quarterly*, vol. 38, pages 36-77.

Adult/Child Interactive Reading Inventory (ACIRI). According to its developer, the *ACIRI* “is an observational tool for assessing joint reading behaviors of both adults and children” (DeBruin-Parecki, 1999) that provides a systematic observational scheme which can be scored easily either during or after viewing adult-child storybook reading behavior. The observational instrument consists of a list of storybook reading behaviors arranged in two columns (Adult Behavior; Child Behavior) and divided into three general areas: (a) Enhancing Attention to Text, (b) Promoting Interactive Reading and Supporting Comprehension, and (c) Using Literacy Strategies. There are four behaviors listed under each area and they are rated 0-3, depending upon the frequency of which they are observed. For example, when observing adult behavior in the “Using Literacy Strategies” category, the observer rates on the 4-point scale whether the reader (a) identifies visual cues related to story reading (i.e., pictures, repetitive words), (b) solicits predictions, (c) asks child to recall information from the story, and (d) elaborates on child’s ideas. Similarly, the complimentary child behaviors which can be rated simultaneously are (a) child responds to parent and or identifies visual cues related to the story, (b) child is able to guess what will happen next based upon picture cues, (c) child is able to recall information from story, and (d) child spontaneously offers ideas about story (DeBruin-Parecki, 1999, p. 24). DeBruin-Parecki (2001) has recommended that the actual scoring be done after the examiner or teacher leaves the home and that the numerical scores should be used for program evaluation purposes only and not as a means of evaluating individual parents.

Norm-referenced tests

Along with the *TERA-III*, two other early literacy assessment measures have been systematically normed with larger numbers of children and can be used either for diagnostic or program evaluation purposes.

Teacher Rating of Oral Language and Literacy (TROLL). Designed specifically along the guidelines of the New Standards Project (Tucker & Coding, 1998), the *TROLL* battery developed by David Dickinson (Dickinson, McCabe, & Sprague, 2001) is comprised of three subscales: (a) language use, (b) reading, and (c) writing. This Lickert-style rating tool has been designed for early childhood teachers to, first of all, assess children’s conversational ability with adults and peers, propensity to use rhyme, use new and varied vocabulary and to demonstrate curiosity about things around him/her. The second subscale is aimed at indexing the child’s attentiveness in group storybook reading, independent book behavior, and ability to recognize a few sight words as well as understanding of stories that are read-aloud. Finally, the writing subscale is meant to provide information on the child’s development toward using conventional graphic forms, ability to write his/her name or other’s names and some simple words and whether or not the child attempts to produce larger segments of text (songs, poems, etc.). Having been used in several large studies with Head Start children in the New England area (Dickinson, 2001), the *TROLL* requires no special training, can be administered quickly (5-10 minutes) and has been given to over 900 children, correlating highly with both the *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test* and other measures of phonemic awareness (Dickinson & Chaney, 1997). The complete test has been reprinted in Dickinson, McCabe, & Sprague, 2001, or is available through The Educational Development Center, 55 Chapel St., Newton, MA 02458.

One of the first early literacy assessment measures to be developed was the *Language Awareness in Reading Readiness Test (LARR)* (Downing, Schaefer, & Ayers, 1980, 1993). This 19-item measure is the only current emergent literacy assessment, which is designed to be used with groups of children (no more than four per group) four-to five-years of age. For administration, each child is given a test booklet with a sequence of four pictures per page with the first eight pages containing black and white sketches of persons involved in a variety of reading, writing and drawing situations. In each case, the child is to circle with a pencil which person is either reading or writing. The last 11 items assess a variety of concepts such as the differences between letters and numbers, directionality, capitalization, punctuation and different metalinguistic terms (e.g., sentence, “first” letter, “last” word). Like the *TROLL* battery, the *LARR* can be used for either individual diagnostic purposes or program evaluation. It is currently commercially available from NFER-NELSON Publishing Company, Ltd., Darville House, 2 Oxford Road East, Windsor, Berkshire, SL4 1DF, UK.

Assessment considerations for English Language Learners¹

Research findings regarding formal assessment:

- English Language Learners (ELL) require more time to take assessments in the second language.
- To interpret the results from a test written in English, it is important to know the proficiency in the primary language when assessing in the second language.
- Instructional or referral decisions should be made on assessments in both languages.

Preparation for assessment:

- Accept and value the bilingual student and the home language.
- Study the linguistic and cultural background of the children (e.g., child-rearing practices, behaviors with adults, learning strategies).
- Recognize the differences between home and school cultures.
- Be patient with and support the cultural transitions, which children are undergoing.

Sources of informal assessment:

- Conversations with children in both the primary and second language.
- Interviews with other teachers, parents and caregivers.
- Observe the use of the first and second languages during the child’s play.

¹ Material in this section adapted or drawn from the following sources: Stephanakis, E. H. (1998). *Whose judgment counts: Assessing bilingual children, K-3*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann; Reyes, P., Scribner, R. & Scribner, A. P. (1999). *Lessons from high-performing Hispanic schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Doing the assessment:

- Probe for the learning strengths.
- Question the students as they are learning.
- “Give” language to the student to see if they can use it.
- Focus on assessing the child rather than completing the instrument.
- Observe and reflect on the child’s behavior over time.
- Use translators as necessary.

Create environments for language learning:

- Organize the physical space so children have access to materials and collaborative situations.
- Use symbols, cues and posters to help communicate what direction the children are to follow.
- Provide stable routines in the daily structure.

Recognize that teaching and learning are social events:

- Learning is based upon building relationships. The quality of the assessment is often dependent on the quality of the adult/child relationship (Yaden, Madrigal & Tam, 2003).
- Language learning is best learned in highly social situation (observe children’s language interactions with one another).
- Base a substantial amount of the content of the curriculum on children’s interests.

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