

Assessing Through Close Observation



Module Focus

Close, systematic observation as a way to assess rapid changes in literacy learning of young children

Definitions

fluent reading: attention to prosodic features of language such as rhythm, expression, phrase boundaries, pace, and intonation

strategic activity: fast brainwork that a learner calls up to solve problems by searching for solutions (e.g., monitors, searches for information, cross checks, discovers new things, repeats to confirm, revises, chooses among alternatives, evaluates responses, makes appropriate links, self-corrects)

running record of text reading: assessment of text reading (designed to be taken as a child reads orally from any text while the teacher uses standard conventions to record exactly what the child says and does)

Tasks of An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement

(Clay, 2002, 2006)

An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement provides a standard and systematic way of capturing early reading and writing behaviors. Teachers administer all six literacy tasks listed below to get detailed knowledge about a child's literacy processing that will inform instructional decisions.

- Letter Identification
- Word Reading Test (reading vocabulary)
- Concepts About Print
- Writing Vocabulary
- Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words
- Running Record of Text Reading

A system for evaluating writing samples of young learners is also included.

Observation Opportunities

Running records of text reading: Teachers find a child's instructional reading level; see evidence of the sources of information the child is using or neglecting (meaning, structure, visual and phonological information); record how the reading sounds (phrasing in fluent reading); observe and analyze how the child checks on himself and solves problems; and monitor reading progress over short periods of time.

Reading activities in the classroom: In individual and group settings, teachers observe children reading familiar books, reading new books, in reading workshop; during guided reading; etc. These opportunities to observe reading behaviors provide evidence of a child's use of strategic activities and phrased and fluent reading, and allow the teacher to compare observational data to monitor progress over time. The teacher can also observe how the child responds to prompts and teaching points.

Writing activities in the classroom: In individual and group settings, teachers observe structured writing experiences, interactive writing sessions, writing workshop, and independent writing activities. In this way, teachers can learn about a child's strengths and challenges in composing messages, writing known words fluently, hearing and recording sounds in words, figuring out new words by connecting to known words, and working with the phonology and orthography of the English language.

Working with words: Teachers observe children as they learn how words work. This may occur when children work with and manipulate magnetic letters.

Conversations: Teachers gather much information by observing children's conversations in a variety of settings including book introductions, follow-up discussions, composing written messages, etc. They learn what children already know, what understandings they took from a text, and how they work on reading and writing tasks.

Key Points for Teachers

To ensure progress in reading and writing, teachers must take time to observe what children are able to do.

Running records of text reading and other Observation Survey tasks are standard and neutral observation tasks that require skilled teachers who have been trained to administer, score, and interpret results in reliable ways. Resources cited below include information about a learning package for teachers who want to learn to administer, analyze, and use running record data to make teaching decisions.

Effective teachers also find opportunities to observe throughout the school day to get rich information about each child's literacy development — and to use that information to plan teaching moves. And children will be the beneficiaries of differentiated instruction based on observation — as they enjoy success in learning to read and write.

Resources

Related Effective Practices Video Modules

Teaching for Transfer: Strategic Activity — *observing to look for evidence of a child's use of strategic activities to solve problems*

Selecting Texts That Are Just Right — *using assessment to select appropriate texts and to support children's successful reading of these texts*

Making It Easy To Learn — *using close observation to make it easy for children to learn*

Phrasing in Fluent Reading — *observing a child's phrasing and fluency when reading text*

Learning About Phonology and Orthography — *observing how a child uses knowledge of letters, words, and sounds when reading and writing text*

Afflerbach, P. (2007). *Understanding and using reading assessment, K-12*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Clay, M. M. (2000). *Running records for classroom teachers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Clay, M. M. (2002, 2006). *An observation survey of early literacy achievement* (2nd ed., rev. 2nd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Clay, M. M. (2007). *An observation survey of early literacy achievement: The DVD* [video companion to print edition]. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Johnston, P. H. (1997). *Knowing literacy: Constructive literacy assessment*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Johnston, P. H. (2000). *Running records: A self-tutoring guide*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Kelly, P. R. (2007). Richard knew so much but still wasn't reading: Using assessment and close observation to find out why. *The Journal of Reading Recovery*, 6(2), 7–16.

Schwartz, R. M. (2005). Decisions, decisions: Responding to primary students during guided reading. *The Reading Teacher*, 58(5), 436–443.

Sensitive Observation of Reading Behavior: Running Record Professional Learning Series [CD/DVD and print materials]. Part One: Learning the Conventions and Basic Scoring Procedures (2008), Part Two: Analysis of Running Records of Text Reading (2009), Part Three: Using Running Records to Make Teaching Decisions (2010). Reading Recovery Council of North America. www.readingrecovery.org

Standards for the assessment of reading and writing, revised edition (2009). International Reading Association and National Council of Teachers of English. <http://www.ncte.org/standards/assessmentstandards>

Early Literacy Intervention: Expanding Expertise and Impact

a Reading Recovery initiative in partnership with the USDE



Professional development resources produced by the Reading Recovery Council of North America

Early Literacy Intervention: Expanding Expertise and Impact is a Reading Recovery initiative in partnership with the U.S. Department of Education. The goal of the initiative is to focus on developing highly effective teachers and resources for schools for improving the reading and writing abilities of students. Funding for the initiative has been provided through an award from the U.S. Department of Education, under award number U215K090094, for the Fund for the Improvement of Education (FIE) Program. The contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government.