

A MAP for Reading Assessment

When commercially available tests didn't match their whole language instructional practices, resource teachers in a Canadian school district developed their own instrument.

TERI BEMBRIDGE

Eight-year-old Jenny sits on a cushion in the library corner of her grade 2 and 3 classroom flipping pages of a colorful book. Around the room at desks and tables, her classmates are busy with books, papers, and pencils. Posters, poems, and child-published materials cover the classroom walls. Into this activity-oriented class walks the resource teacher. The classroom teacher has requested an assessment because Jenny hasn't been reading the same types of books as her classmates or engaging in book discussions, although she participates enthusiastically in other oral activities.

A few years ago, the resource teacher would have whisked Jenny off to a little office. There Jenny would have been tested using some form of a "read-this-paragraph, fill-in-these-blanks, what-does-this-word-say" test created by experts, published by a large corporation, and packaged in bright shiny boxes containing reproducible pages. The classroom teacher and Jenny's parents would have then received a report listing the number of sight words Jenny read; the grade equivalent level in years and months at which Jenny was performing; and

perhaps a listing of phonetic blends she had not yet mastered.

Searching for a Better Instrument

Resource teachers in the St. Vital School Division in Winnipeg, Canada, began to question the purpose, validity, and reliability of an assessment practice that was so different from classroom practice. Our students learn in activity-based, literature-oriented, and child-centered classrooms. Our provincial Language Arts Curriculum promotes integration of subject matter in activity-based settings, and many thematic units have been developed and shared locally. Our graded, multi-age classrooms boast large libraries of carefully selected quality literature. Many of our teachers have spent countless hours voluntarily learning about language and how to help students learn language. Many have studied with specialists like Ken Goodman, Dorothy Watson, Carolyn Burke, and Frank Smith, to name but a few.

As our knowledge about children's language learning grew, so did our frustration. We could hardly be called in to assist in assessment when the methods we were using were so out of

touch with the learning environment of the students. As resource teachers, we had kept up to date with assessment information. We were using Informal Reading Inventories and, in fact, had developed a local inventory.

We decided to purchase an assessment tool in keeping with our instructional methodologies. Through our monthly meetings and with leadership from our consultant and assistant superintendent, we formed a committee to search for a published test that could be administered to individual students in their classrooms. Our ideal test would:

- contain materials similar to those found in classrooms, that is, real books, not reproduced paragraphs written with a controlled vocabulary;
- be observational and interactive but still provide data in the form of scores for comparison and reporting purposes;
- have easy-to-follow procedures that allow for observation of the child's reading behavior by either resource or classroom teachers;
- be diagnostic in order to give us a picture of the child's reading strengths and weaknesses, or suggest when a more in-depth assessment, such as a Miscue Analysis (Goodman et al. 1987), is needed.

Our committee met monthly and



Deanna Mauer

shared readings, experiences, and information about assessment of children's reading. Finally, we realized that a commercial instrument that would meet our criteria and be adaptable to rapidly changing times did not exist. By this time, we'd come to believe enough in our professional knowledge and judgments to create our own assessment package.

Developing Our Own Assessment Tool

Assembled over a five-year period, the Multi-Layered Assessment Package (MAP) is a set of procedures accompanied by suggested books, transcripts, and retelling and recording forms. The books, which are examples of narrative literature typically found in particular grades, are a great convenience, but teachers can implement the procedures using any other book they choose. In this sense, the MAP is a generic, flexible assessment tool.

The title's mention of "layers" acknowledges the complexity of child development, which cannot be measured with pinpoint accuracy. Countless variables about children and their reading must be considered before an evaluation statement and a plan of action can be formulated. One set of layers are the four strands of literacy: reading, speaking, writing, and listening. Currently, the MAP assesses only reading (oral and silent) and listening.

Another set of layers identified by Goodman, Burke, and Watson (1987) are the four cuing systems used when reading: graphophonics, semantics, syntax, and pragmatics. Meaning cannot be separated from grammar like cream from milk. The cuing systems have differing properties but are part of the text and must be assessed in such a manner.

Other layers may include physical

and emotional health, interest in stories, motivation to read, and other variables perceived by teachers as relevant.

Using Our Assessment Package

Using the MAP to assess Jenny's oral reading, the resource teacher today joins her on the cushions, shows her two or three books, and asks her to select one to read aloud. During the reading, the teacher listens to and watches Jenny, noting her reading behaviors on a double-spaced typed transcript copy of the book. After reading, Jenny tells her teacher about the story she just read. Her responses, which may be prompted by the teacher, are written on a retelling form. (To avoid writing while listening, the teacher can tape-record Jenny's reading and retelling.) Before leaving, the teacher shares with Jenny some of his or her observations. For example, Jenny used her finger to follow the print, corrected several of her mistakes, or figured out a troublesome word. Or they might discuss Jenny's interests or perhaps read another book.

Later, the resource teacher analyzes Jenny's reading behaviors and calculates three scores:

1. The *word accuracy* score is a percentage reflecting the number of words the student read correctly. It is important that the words were read in the context of a story and not from a list of words that 3rd graders are supposed to know.

2. The *sentence comprehending* score is a percentage of the number of sentences read by the student that are meaningful within the context of the story. Here the student's changes to the text are analyzed and, if they make sense within the story, are allowed. This score was adapted from Goodman, Watson, and Burke (1987), who examined the roles of the four cuing systems and self-correction in

reading. Determining this score requires professional judgment, yet in training teachers to use the MAP, we've found they've been remarkably consistent in discerning acceptable sentences.

3. The *retelling* score is a percentage of the number of story elements the student can talk about, perhaps with some prompting, after reading. This score reflects comprehension in a much broader manner than does asking a set of predetermined questions. Morrow (1985) originally conceived the retelling form to quantify a child's open-ended responses to a story. The MAP provides a retelling form tailored for each of the suggested books, as well as blank forms for use with other books.

These three scores satisfy our need for accountability and, when accompanied by professional observations, provide us a useful profile of a student from which to develop action plans to enhance the student's reading practices.

The classroom teacher and Jenny's parents then meet with the resource teacher to learn about the nature of Jenny's reading with books typically found in a 2nd-3rd grade classroom. It must be noted that the books are not labeled on the basis of any type of readability formula (Zakaluk and Samuels 1989). They are grouped into levels according to the kinds usually read by students in certain grades in the St. Vital School Division. We selected the books through a lengthy process that included sorting, categorizing, and field-testing. They represent local norms by which we can compare students within our area only.

Next, an action plan is developed to assist Jenny based on strategies consistent with her reading patterns. Many strategies have been collected and shared among our resource teachers for distribution to classroom

teachers and parents.

This type of assessment is quite different from, and we believe more useful than, saying that Jenny is reading at a grade equivalent of 1.8.

Everyone Learning Together

We agree with Chittenden (1991) that assessment must be interactive, open-ended, cumulative, and based on theory that matches the instructional practices in local classrooms. The Multi-Layered Assessment Package is an attempt by resource teachers to create an authentic tool for elementary reading assessment. Using the MAP, everyone is a learner: adults learn about a child's interaction with print, and the child learns about his or her own reading and thinking.

Even though we now have a set of

procedures and materials, the assessment process is not at an end. Our committee continues, with new and returning members, to train teachers to use the package and to revise it as needed. Our present project is assessment of student writing, and a future goal is the development of reading assessment tools using expository texts.

By developing the MAP, we have shown that teachers can be agents of change. Perhaps other local groups of teachers or even commercial firms will continue such efforts so that assessment will be an integral, meaningful part of teaching.

References

Chittenden, E. (1991). "Authentic Assessment, Evaluation, and Documentation." In *Expanding Student Assessment*, edited

- by V. Perrone, pp. 22-31. Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Goodman, K., Y. Goodman, and W. J. Hood, eds. (1989). *The Whole Language Evaluation Book*. Toronto: Irwin Publishing Co.
- Goodman, Y., C. Burke, and D. Watson. (1987). *Reading Miscue Inventory Alternative Procedures*. New York: Richard Owen Publishers Inc.
- Morrow, C. (1985). "Retelling Stories as a Diagnostic Tool." In *Re-examining Reading Diagnosis*, edited by S. Glazer, L. Searfoss, and L. Gentile. Newark, Del.: International Reading Association.
- Zakaluk, B., and S. Samuels, eds. (1989). *Readability: Its Past, Present, and Future*. Newark, Del.: International Reading Association.

Teri Bembridge is Chair, MAP Committee 1991-1992, and a resource teacher at Darwin School, 175 Darwin St., Winnipeg, Manitoba, CANADA R2M 4A9.



HRDP membership includes:

- The *Human Resource Development Handbook: A Practical Guide for Staff Developers*
- *Periodic Resource Modules*
- Video vouchers (see the ASCD video catalog for equivalents)
- Vouchers to attend ASCD Professional Development Institutes
- Personal assistance from experienced staff development specialists
- The *HRDP Newsletter*

For more information, contact
Christine Fuscclero at:



1250 N. Pitt St., ext
Alexandria, VA 22314
1-800-933-ASCD ext. 310

Would you like to create a comprehensive staff development program for your district using ASCD Video-Based Programs, and Professional Development Institutes—and save over \$1000?

ASCD's Staff Development Program can help you save money and still create a quality program for your district. HRDP extends your staff development dollars by sending staff to training, building your video library and receiving frequent updates on training techniques all at a deeply discounted price.

Typical Savings:

A typical video series at ASCD member price*	\$ 965
Registration for 3 PDI's	840

Total \$1805

AS an HRDP member

HRDP membership	\$750
3 vouchers for purchase of ASCD video tapes	0
Registration for 3 PDI's	0

Total \$750

Net savings of over \$1000

Copyright © 1992 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.