

Part 1 – How Do We Evaluate Effectiveness of Instructional Efforts?

Important considerations



As with any intervention, it is important for teachers to assess whether reading fluency practise is improving students' performance. In this section we describe basic procedures for monitoring progress, identify important considerations for assessing effectiveness, and provide examples of what the progress-monitoring practises would look like.

Basic Procedures

The most common, efficient, and reliable way for evaluating reading progress is using curriculum-based measurement procedures that assess performance using oral reading fluency (ORF; see Lembke & Busch, 2004). Teachers simply calculate the number of words read correctly in a minute. When evaluating student performance regularly (i.e. weekly, bi-monthly, monthly) with ORF procedures, teachers should select passages of equal difficulty so that the change in score is a reflection of changing student skill level rather than an artifact of passage difficulty. Researchers have created sets of materials that include passages of roughly equal difficulty; some are freely available and others cost a modest fee.

Even if the materials state that the passages are of equal difficulty, there will be variability from passage to passage. When developing the sets of materials, people use different readability formulae. For this reason, evaluating student performance should be based on trend or pattern of performance across time. With the testing procedure being a one-minute sample of behaviour, the score a student receives on a given assessment is very sensitive to the nature of the passage as well as student motivation (as some have said, "We all have a bad minute from time to time"). When teachers monitor performance more frequently (i.e. weekly), they can be more confident in knowing when a student needs an instructional change to maximise learning. To assist in making timely instructional decisions, we recommend graphing ORF scores. Some teachers may have access to programs that do this but plotting on simple graph paper is equally effective.

Because of the instability of a single ORF assessment, teachers should examine multiple scores, looking for trend in student performance in relation to an established goal line. A valuable approach is to examine student performance using the Three-point Rule. To employ the Three-Point Rule, look at the most recent three data points collected. If the last three points are above the goal line the teacher should (a) continue the intervention or (b) increase the goal (if performance consistently well above goal line). If the last three points are below the goal line, the teacher should modify the intervention so that it fits the student's needs. If the last three points are around the goal line (points may be on, one below, one above, etc.), the teacher should continue the intervention while closely monitoring student performance.



In selecting the difficulty (grade) level of material for progress monitoring, a teacher should consider how far behind a student is compared to his typically achieving (grade-level) peers. For example, a fifth grader reading 30 words per minute is significantly farther behind than another fifth grader reading 90 words per minute. The materials for progress monitoring for the lower performer would be a lower grade-level than the other student.



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The selection of materials is also influenced when evaluating learning trajectories. It is important to focus on two questions about progress: First, is the student progressing and, second, is the student making enough progress?

- Is the student making progress? Assessments using materials that are closer to the student's instructional level will be more sensitive to skill improvement than assessments using material at the student's grade level. Teachers should use instructional-level material for more frequent progress monitoring (i.e. weekly, bi-monthly), as ORFs based on them will provide timely feedback on skill development.
- Is the student making enough progress? Assessments using grade-level materials provide periodic (i.e. monthly) feedback about whether the student's progress is helping her or him catch up to his typically developing peers. These less-frequent assessments provide feedback regarding whether the intervention is intensive enough to significantly alter a student's learning trajectory.



Reference:

Teaching Tutorial 6: Repeated Readings to Promote Fluency

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