

Alternative Diagnostic Testing Using
An Informal Reading Inventory

Honors 499 Project
Dawn M. Crafton
April 22, 1992

Dr. J. Williams Advisor

SpColl
Thesis
LD
2489
.24
1992
.C73

Alternative Diagnostic Testing Using An Informal Reading Inventory

The instructional reading levels of new students have often been difficult for teachers to determine. In the past the majority of teachers have relied more on the previous teachers' recommendations for placement than on the usual time consuming diagnostic testing. It has always been difficult for teachers to make time for diagnostic testing in the elementary classroom. With the demand for more instructional time in the classroom, teachers find themselves trying to keep up from the beginning. Teachers also find themselves without the materials necessary to perform diagnostic testing in the first place. This is especially true of the first-year teacher. After four or more years of study as an undergraduate, many first-year teachers find themselves in the classroom without any idea where to begin. This is a problem I am seeking to eliminate.

Most people agree that reading is one of the most important skills and processes we use as individuals. Having realized this, I have attempted to create a series of diagnostic activities that can be used at the beginning of the year so that a teacher may monitor the progress of his or her students. The idea for such a project came to me during my involvement in Ed Reading 430 in which I administered the Burns and Roe Informal Reading Inventory (IRI) to two students in the Muncie Community School Corporation. The IRI has merit in the

elementary classroom. The test attempts to determine the approximate reading level of each student. The IRI consists of graded word lists for sight word recognition, oral and silent (graded) reading passages, and listening (graded) passages. The graded reading passages are used to examine comprehension abilities. Although the purposes for using an IRI are sound, I found the diagnostic process to be quite mundane and even boring for my students. The testing procedure had no meaning for them that they perceived. I also felt it lacked a true purpose that would inspire the students to do their best. I also felt it was very time consuming and found myself thinking that a teacher could not possibly have enough time to administer this test to every student in the first few weeks of school.

To solve the problem, I decided to use the same expert material found in the Burns and Roe Informal Reading Inventory and adapt it to fit the needs (time efficiency, ease of operation, etc.) of the average classroom teacher. Using the same word lists and graded passages, I adapted them into flashcards and games that students could manipulate while the teacher looked on or participated with the students.

In doing my research for the basis of such an adaptation, I found that the use of games and manipulatives in instruction is quite common. "Most teachers, especially reading teachers, have used games to motivate students and reinforce basic skills." (Canney, 10) As students we are also taught that children learn by

doing. It is also true for most experienced teachers to realize that children are more likely to learn if they are actively involved. (Thompson, 5) I speculate then that by using games, students will be more motivated to complete the demanding tasks at hand. If constructed properly, games and manipulatives will help to avoid any unnecessary frustration.

To adapt the graded word lists, I simply typed them into a Macintosh computer and enlarged them to 72 point type. I then printed them onto flash cards and grouped them together by level. They were held together by a bull-ring which allowed the student to manipulate them one at a time. The student may read as fast or as slowly as he or she chooses. The teacher simply sits by with a copy of the lists and marks any errors the student may make. The situation is non-threatening to the students, so they should be able to put forth their best effort.

For the graded passages I decided to involve the students in an activity that provided a real purpose or meaning for them. The reading of the passages and then the answering of the questions can be an extremely slow and sometimes uncomfortable process. To alleviate these conditions, I created a gameboard for use during the oral and silent reading of passages as well as for the listening passages. The students simply read or listen to a selection and answer a question. The game takes place when, after each question, the student rolls a die and moves forward.

Rewarding children for doing their best is something I believe in. While developing this project I came up with rewards for each color of the gameboard. I realize that this could be costly for the teacher, but so far the benefits far outweigh the costs. I have chosen simple inexpensive rewards for the different color levels. Some of the rewards include stickers, pencils, popcorn tickets (to be redeemed later), and certificates of merit, as well as positive notes or phone calls to the student's home. The students participate in the game not knowing what exactly their prize is. This provides for anticipation and concentrated efforts for the students to do their best. While the student plays the game, the teacher stands by to introduce each passage and to ask and record the questions and responses. The teacher may also test more than one student by using a different form of the test. The teacher must be organized and comfortable with the situation. This will allow the teacher to complete the diagnosis of the class more quickly and will give the game more excitement. The teacher must be aware of the behavior of the children while testing. If a child is reaching frustration and is having difficulty answering the questions, it is important that the other students not make fun of or humiliate the near-frustrated student in any way. The success for diagnosing more than one student varies from class to class since it may not be suitable for all teachers and students.

The gameboard also provides a little competition for the student to get to the end of the board. I was somewhat concerned about allowing competition to

become a part of the game itself. I found, however, that students will truly attempt to perform at their best if the competition is non-threatening and the student is allowed to succeed. This also makes the diagnostic process more exciting for all involved.

Record keeping is very important for diagnostic testing. To help alleviate problems of time limitations and the need for large amounts of paper, I have laminated each form of the test, and assembled each into a three ring binder. I have also included an erasable marker so that each page may be reused by each student.

The teacher must keep a "Summary of Quantitative Analysis" for each student. In order to do this, the teacher keeps the summary form for each student with her. He or she then gives one of the tests and uses the laminated forms to record the responses. After the student completes the test, the teacher must evaluate the results and record them on the student's summary form. This continues until all parts of the test are given and the Quantitative Analysis form is completed.

Talking about this and doing this are two different things. I found that my predictions were at least partially correct, however. The time it took to administer the IRI was cut drastically. On the word lists alone, I was able to test five second grade students in about 20 minutes. The time for the graded passages was also less, but not as dramatically so. Because I had nothing with which to

compare my results, I am unable to decide if the students performed better or higher with this form of testing compared to the traditional test procedures. Some of the students tested with the manipulatives showed a higher instructional level than their current placement indicates, while one student tested lower than his current placement. I did find it more difficult to administer the test to more than two students at a time.

In the appendix there is a summary of quantitative analysis for three students. At the time of testing all three children were in the same ability reading group. All were reading in the first semester book of the second grade basal series. The testing took place in March, over a period of three days.

From the results of the testing, each student tested at a different instructional level. Student A appears to have an instructional level of fourth grade. Student B appears to have an instructional level of third grade. This student has since been placed in another, more challenging ability group. The third student, C, appears to have an instructional level of first grade. Although he is in the second grade basal reader, I find that he becomes frustrated easily during reading instruction. With these results it is now up to the teacher to decide what to do next and what is best for the child. The teacher can concentrate on the child's strengths to help with the weaknesses. At least now she knows where to start.

I recommend individual testing for the most part, especially in the lower

grades. In the intermediate grades the students are more mature and are able to wait longer if necessary. The best thing about this alternative game approach is that the IRI keeps moving. The mundane, boring reading and reciting are shown to be more exciting and meaningful. I have learned a great deal about diagnostic testing throughout this project. I find it very important to diagnose for myself the specific level where children should be instructed in reading, rather than to use only someone else's recommendations. This project has opened new doors for me in the world of diagnostic testing. I hope other teachers can find a way, as I have, to determine the true reading levels of their students in a time efficient, exciting, and purposeful manner.

Appendix

Figure 2-4

SUMMARY OF QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

STUDENT'S NAME A GRADE PLACEMENT _____

ADMINISTRATOR Dawn Crafton DATE _____

① FORMS USED: Oral Passages, Form A Silent Passages, Form B Listening Comprehension, Form C ^⑦ RATE OF READING: High Average Low

⑥ PERFORMANCE LEVELS BASED ON READING PASSAGES: Independent 3 Instructional 4 Frustration 5 Listening Comprehension 5

② PERFORMANCE LEVELS BASED ON GRADED WORD LISTS: Placement 2 Independent 1 Instructional 2 Frustration 3

③ TYPES OF MISCUSES IN CONTEXT

	Mispronunciation	Substitution	Insertion	Omission	Reversal	Repetition	Refusal to Pronounce	Row Totals
Total								
Meaning changed								
Self-Corrected								

⑤ SUMMARY TABLE OF PERCENTAGES

Level	Word Recognition	Oral Comprehension	Silent Comprehension	Average Comprehension	Listening Comprehension
PP					
P					
1	100	100	100	100	100
2	100	100	87.5	93	100
3	99	90	90	90	90
4	95	80	80	80	90
5	97	70	60	57.5	90
6					40
7					
8					
9					
10					
11					
12					

④ COMPREHENSION SKILL ANALYSIS CHART

Skill	Number of Questions	Number of Errors	Percent of Errors	
Main idea	5/4	1/1	20/35	22%
Detail	10/8	1/1	10/35	11%
Sequence	6/5	1/1	16/20	18%
Cause and effect	7/7	2/0	2/10	24%
Inference	10/7	1/0	10/10	10%
Vocabulary	7/4	3/0	25/10	28%

Figure 2-4

SUMMARY OF QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

STUDENT'S NAME B GRADE PLACEMENT _____

ADMINISTRATOR Dawn Crafton DATE _____

① FORMS USED: Oral Passages, Form A Silent Passages, Form B Listening Comprehension, Form C ^⑦ RATE OF READING: High _____ Average Low _____

⑥ PERFORMANCE LEVELS BASED ON READING PASSAGES: Independent 2 Instructional 3 Frustration 5 Listening Comprehension 4

② PERFORMANCE LEVELS BASED ON GRADED WORD LISTS: Placement 3 Independent 2 Instructional 3 Frustration 4

③ TYPES OF MISQUES IN CONTEXT

	Mispronunciation	Substitution	Insertion	Omission	Reversal	Repetition	Refusal to Pronounce	Row Totals
Total								
Meaning changed								
Self-Corrected								

⑤ SUMMARY TABLE OF PERCENTAGES

Level	Word Recognition	Oral Comprehension	Silent Comprehension	Average Comprehension	Listening Comprehension
PP					
P					
1	100	100	100	100	100
2	100	87.5	100	93	100
3	95	80	90	85	90
4	99	30	40	45	90
5					75
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
11					
12					

④ COMPREHENSION SKILL ANALYSIS CHART

Skill	Number of Questions	Number of Errors	Percent of Errors	
Main idea	3/3	0/0	0%	0%
Detail	6/7	3/3	50/42	40%
Sequence	4/3	2/1	50/35	42%
Cause and effect	4/5	1/2	25/40	33%
Inference	6/6	3/3	50/50	50%
Vocabulary	3/5	0/3	0/60	30%

Figure 2-4

SUMMARY OF QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

STUDENT'S NAME C GRADE PLACEMENT _____

ADMINISTRATOR Dawn Crafton DATE _____

- ① FORMS USED: Oral Passages, Form A Silent Passages, Form AB Listening Comprehension, Form B ⑦ RATE OF READING: High _____ Average _____ Low
- ⑥ PERFORMANCE LEVELS BASED ON READING PASSAGES: Independent P Instructional 1 Frustration 2 Listening Comprehension 2
- ② PERFORMANCE LEVELS BASED ON GRADED WORD LISTS: Placement 2 Independent PP Instructional 2 Frustration 3

③ TYPES OF MISCS IN CONTEXT

	Mispronunciation	Substitution	Insertion	Omission	Reversal	Repetition	Refusal to Pronounce	Row Totals
Total								
Meaning changed								
Self-Corrected								

⑤ SUMMARY TABLE OF PERCENTAGES

Level	Word Recognition	Oral Comprehension	Silent Comprehension	Average Comprehension	Listening Comprehension
PP					
P	<u>99</u>	<u>87.5</u>	<u>87.5</u>	<u>81</u>	<u>90.5</u>
1	<u>95</u>	<u>87.5</u>	<u>87.5</u>	<u>87.5</u>	<u>90</u>
2	<u>85</u>	<u>75</u>	<u>37.5</u>	<u>50</u>	<u>70</u>
3					<u>50</u>
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
11					
12					

④ COMPREHENSION SKILL ANALYSIS CHART

Skill	Number of Questions	Number of Errors	Percent of Errors	
Main idea	<u>4/3</u>	<u>2/2</u>	<u>50/100</u>	<u>50%</u>
Detail	<u>8/7</u>	<u>3/4</u>	<u>37/57</u>	<u>65%</u>
Sequence	<u>6/3</u>	<u>1/2</u>	<u>16/16</u>	<u>60%</u>
Cause and effect	<u>5/4</u>	<u>3/2</u>	<u>66/50</u>	<u>85%</u>
Inference	<u>6/5</u>	<u>4/4</u>	<u>66/80</u>	<u>73%</u>
Vocabulary	<u>3/2</u>	<u>1/2</u>	<u>33/10</u>	<u>10%</u>

References

Canney, George F. "Making Games More Relevant for Reading", The Reading Teacher. October 1978.

Spiegel, Dixie Lee. "Decoding and Comprehension Games and Manipulatives", The Reading Teacher, Vol. 44, No. 3, November, 1990.

Taylor, Frank D. and Alfred A. Artuso, et. al. Individualized Reading Instruction: games and activities. Colorado: Love Publishing Company, 1972.

Thompson, Richard A. Energizers for Reading Instruction. New York: Parker Publishing, 1973.