

LEAD FOR LITERACY MEMO

Providing guidance for leaders dedicated to children's literacy development, birth to age 9

COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT: MAKING SENSE OF TEST TYPE AND PURPOSE

The Issue: Within an assessment battery, different types of testing tools are needed, with each tool serving a clear and specific purpose. Yet there is much confusion about the intended and appropriate use of assessments; some types of assessments are overused while others are not used at all.

A Primer on Assessment Type

Diagnostic Assessments

How should I focus my daily instruction?

- Gather in-depth information about children's instructional needs
- Provide immediate feedback on instruction (e.g., end-of-unit tests, running records)

Screening Assessments

Are children meeting benchmarks?

- Determine which children are at risk for difficulties in particular literacy components
- Provide information on how children are performing relative to same-aged peers using a valid, external benchmark
(Find examples at www.rti4success.org)

Progress Monitoring Assessments

Are children responding to instruction?

- Determine if instruction is helping children make adequate progress or if they need more intensive interventions
- Provide a reference point for children's performance outside of day-to-day activities
(Find examples at www.rti4success.org)

Outcome Assessments

Are we delivering quality instruction?

- Gauge achievement levels for the site's overall population and for particular groups (e.g., children growing up in low-income or non-English-speaking homes)
- Determine effectiveness of the site's program(s) (e.g., the state test)

What Are Some Common Pitfalls That Impede Impact?

Common Pitfalls	What We're Learning
1. Using one assessment for many different purposes.	1. Often publishers claim that one test can provide multiple types of information. In reality, most tests can serve one purpose well.
2. <i>Not</i> using screening or progress monitoring assessments as part of the assessment battery, and instead relying on diagnostics.	2. To understand literacy risk, settings need measures that have an external benchmark, especially for screening and progress monitoring. Diagnostic assessments (even those from a formal kit) do not provide a valid and reliable external benchmark.
3. Thinking standardized assessments are inauthentic or too removed from instruction to be useful.	3. While the tasks may seem disconnected or silly, standardized literacy assessments give clear indications of risks and often reveal problems that may not be apparent from day-to-day interactions alone.

The Bottom Line:

A comprehensive assessment approach uses —

- measures of literacy skills and knowledge (Memo 6)
- a combination of assessment types

For More on This...

Much of the guidance provided in this memo is drawn from *Making Assessment Matter: Using Test Results to Differentiate Reading Instruction* by N. Lesaux & S. Marietta.

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