

Assessing Reading Growth With Running Records

“Yet a funny thing happens on the way to those final assessments: day-to-day learning takes place. I am certain that, in education, evaluation needs to pay more attention to the systematic observation of learners who are on their way to those final assessments.”

(Clay, 1987, p. 1)

Step-by-step assessment of children’s learning can be the stitch in time that makes the difference for young readers. As I watch my students day to day and throughout the year, they reveal their understanding in words and performances. By documenting facts that accumulate and strengths that emerge, I can integrate what I learn to create a complete picture of each child’s level of competence as the year progresses. Reflecting on this knowledge, I can direct my teaching to give appropriate support in a timely way—to plan lessons to reteach, reinforce, or extend learning. I can adjust the sequence of instruction to take advantage of teachable moments that increase the children’s motivation and the likelihood that they will be successful learners.

The methods and purpose of such ongoing, classroom-based assessment differ notably from the external, standardized tests schools traditionally depend on to confirm literacy growth. Those tests yield information for curriculum development. They identify strengths and weaknesses in a district’s program when grade and school scores are compared to regional, state, and national norms. They also identify where a child stands in comparison to other students and generate reference points for a child’s academic growth in core curricular areas over an extended period of time. However, when such norm-referenced scores are used to examine an indi-

vidual learner's achievement, supporting or contradicting evidence based on day-to-day classroom assessment should be provided. But why wait until traditional standardized tests indicate that children have gotten lost in their literacy development when immediate assessments can reveal a need for intervention?

Teachers have always watched their students' development, but have not always trusted the reliability of their observations. This lack of confidence is gradually dissipating as systematic observation becomes a more acceptable method of assessment, particularly in early childhood education (Barr, Craig, Fisette, & Syverson, 1999; Clay, 1993; "Primary Language Record," 1989). Teachers are now using a variety of formalized classroom observational practices to gather evidence of achievement as children go about the business of learning in the comfort of a classroom setting. Consistent guidelines and routines ensure detailed analysis of literacy growth across settings. Effective tools, systematically applied in the assessment process, are integral to the overall validity of information classroom teachers can gather. Running records (RR) are one such tool.

What Are Running Records?

In *An Observational Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* (1993), Marie Clay presents the running record, a method she developed for determining a child's reading competence at a given moment in time with a specific level and type of book. To create a running record, the teacher sits with the child and uses specific shorthand, or codes, to record detailed information while the child reads aloud. The resulting record provides the teacher with a playback of an entire oral reading episode, including the smallest details on the reader's attitude, demeanor, accuracy, and understanding. With the record in hand, the teacher can analyze behaviors, responses, competencies, initiatives taken, and understanding of the specific content and task. Because these codes are standardized, they are consistent across settings and among teachers.

The teacher uses the running record to calculate scores, analyze errors, and document strategies the child uses to successfully decode words and construct meaning. The notations, although in shorthand, are detailed enough to provide a multi-layered account of the child's performance in oral reading, comprehension of main idea and details, and ability to interpret and draw logical conclusions when reading different kinds of books (i.e., story, informational, poetry).

Comprehensive Rubric for Story Retellings

Name _____ Date _____

Story _____ Rdg. Level: ____ Ind. ____ Instr. ____ Frus. ____

Comprehension Elements	Score of 1	Score of 2	Score of 3	Score of 4
Story Grammar <input style="width: 50px; height: 50px; margin: 10px auto;" type="checkbox"/>	Even with prompting, reader is unable to state or confuses elements of story grammar.	With prompting, the reader includes most of the elements of story grammar ([]characters, []setting, []problem, []event sequence, []resolution).	Without prompting, reader includes most of the elements of story grammar ([]characters, []setting, []problem, []event sequence, []resolution).	Without prompting, reader includes all elements of story grammar ([]characters, []setting, []problem, []event sequence, []resolution).
Details <input style="width: 50px; height: 50px; margin: 10px auto;" type="checkbox"/>	Even with prompting, reader does not include accurate details or gives inaccurate details.	With prompting, reader includes some accurate details.	Without prompting, reader laces retelling with some significant & accurate details.	Without prompting, reader laces retelling with all significant & accurate details and some minor ones in a subordinate way.
Inferences, Predictions, & Conclusions <input style="width: 50px; height: 50px; margin: 10px auto;" type="checkbox"/>	Even with prompting, reader does not convey understanding of or confuses story inferences, predictions, and/or conclusions.	With prompting, reader conveys understanding of story inferences, predictions, and/or conclusions.	Without prompting, reader explains inferences, predictions, and/or conclusions drawn; however, they are weak or minimal.	Without prompting, reader explains critical inferences, predictions, and/or conclusions drawn.
Connections to Reader's Life & Other Texts <input style="width: 50px; height: 50px; margin: 10px auto;" type="checkbox"/>	Even with prompting, reader is unable to make or confuses connections with other texts and/or life experiences.	With prompting, reader makes connections with other texts and/or life experiences.	Without prompting, reader explains connections with other texts and/or life experiences that vaguely relate to this text.	Without prompting, reader explains connections with other texts and/or life experiences that closely relate to this text.
Type of Fictional Selection (specific genre) <input style="width: 50px; height: 50px; margin: 10px auto;" type="checkbox"/>	Even with prompting, reader is unable to identify type of fictional selection (i.e., fairy tale, fantasy, mystery, historical fiction).	With excessive prompting, reader identifies type of fictional selection (i.e., fairy tale, fantasy, mystery, historical fiction.).	With limited prompting, reader identifies type of fictional selection he read (i.e., fairy tale, fantasy, mystery, historical fiction).	With limited prompting, reader identifies type of fictional selection he read (i.e., fairy tale, fantasy, mystery, historical fiction).

Comments _____

Outlines for Narrative Readings

Name _____ Date _____

NARRATIVE—COMPLETE STORY	NARRATIVE—SECTION OF TEXT
Identify genre: _____ _____	Identify genre: _____ _____
Somebody (Character(s)): _____ _____	Story grammar revealed thus far: _____ _____
Where (Setting—place): _____ _____	Relationship of event to whole: _____ _____
When (Setting—time): _____ _____	Description of event: _____ _____
Wanted (Problem): _____ _____	Analysis of event: _____ _____
But (Order of Events): 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____	Character traits revealed: _____ _____
So (Solution): _____ _____	Predictions for next part: _____ _____
Reactions: _____ _____	Connections made: _____ _____
Connections made: _____ _____	