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Administration and Interpretation of an Informal Reading Inventory to Assess Comprehension

**Background**

**Purpose of the Assessment**

An informal reading inventory is used to assess the oral reading of a student to gain information about the student’s reading fluency and comprehension and how the student applies various strategies for decoding and understanding of the text. This particular testing session assessed the background knowledge of the student, how the student makes predictions, the student’s recall of information and details from the text, and how well the student comprehended what was read based upon answering explicit and implicit questions about the passages read.

**Research and Theoretical Basis for Assessment**

Reading without understanding has no point or purpose, so comprehension is the goal of all reading (Walpole, as cited in Conradi, 2012a). Determining prior knowledge of the student is important because if a student has insufficient background knowledge about a text, he/she will not be able to successfully organize the text into his/her existing schema (Anderson & Pearson, as cited in Conradi, 2012b) and therefore will not be further building knowledge. If a student reads a text but cannot recall details or answer questions related to the text, then the student did not learn or take anything away from the text (Walpole, as cited in Conradi, 2012a).

**Process**

**Rationale for Conducting the Assessment with the Chosen Student**

Zachary, an African-American 2nd grader, was identified by his classroom teacher as a struggling reader. Having previously conducted an assessment of word identification in isolation, I established Zachary’s instructional reading level as primer, so this was the level of the two passages, one narrative and one expository, that I administered from the *Qualitative Reading Inventory-5* (Leslie & Caldwell, 2011) for the informal reading inventory and comprehension assessment, in order to provide his teacher with specific information and instructional recommendations. Since he is reading two levels below his current grade, this information is important so Zachary can receive appropriate interventions to help him progress and improve as a reader.

**The Assessment Session**

Zachary and I sat down at a table near the back of the room to conduct the assessment. I explained to Zachary that he would be reading two passages aloud to me while I took notes, and that I would be asking him some questions before and after each reading. Zachary acknowledged that he understood the directions and was ready, so we began. Zachary read both the narrative and expository passages willingly, but he struggled with some words, and he looked to me to supply him with unknown words, sometimes with no attempts to decode on his own.

**Results**

**Summary of Results**

On the primer-level expository passage “Who Lives Near Lakes?” Zachary scored 9/9 on the concepts questions, showing he had strong prior knowledge and was sufficiently familiar with the topic of the passage. He made a good prediction based upon the concept questions. Zachary recalled 8/18 ideas and details in his retelling, and he answered 5/6 of the post-reading questions correctly, missing one of the four explicit questions and getting both implicit questions correct.

On the primer-level narrative passage “A Night in the City,” Zachary scored 6/12 on the concept questions, showing he had only partial prior knowledge and was somewhat unfamiliar with the topic of the passage. Zachary gave no response when asked to make a prediction about the passage, and he shook his head and shrugged his shoulders when prompted with the information presented in the concept questions. Zachary recalled 5/36 ideas and details in his retelling of the passage, and he answered 5/6 comprehension questions correctly, missing one of the four explicit questions.

**Interpretation of Results**

When Zachary has a high level of prior knowledge about a passage’s topic before reading, he is able to make a logical prediction based upon prereading concept questions. When Zachary has little or inadequate prior knowledge, he was unable to make a prediction, even when prompted with the clues from the concept questions. However, the two questions on which he had no answer or an inaccurate response could have been confusing. One asked “What is a horn?” and there are many possible definitions of that word. The other question asked “What are CDs?” which he may not be familiar with as this is already a somewhat outdated technology in today’s world of mp3 players and online streaming music and video, so I am not certain if or how much his lack of response to these two questions actually affected his comprehension.

On both passages, Zachary recalled less than half of the details, remembering 8/18, or 44%, on the expository passage and 5/36, or 14%, on the narrative passage, and he did not provide any additional details or inferences on either passage. He did remember all of the main ideas on the expository text, and some events and much of the resolution of the narrative passage, showing he somewhat follows the structures of the two types of passages.

On both passages, Zachary answered three out of four explicit questions correctly and two out of two implicit questions correctly, which places both passages at his instructional level and shows good comprehension of the main ideas and his ability to read between the lines of the text and make inferences. Zachary was not able to find the correct answer for the explicit question that he missed on each passage when given the opportunity to go back to the passage.

This shows that Zachary has good comprehension of texts at his instructional reading level, but since he is not recalling the majority of ideas and details from the passages, he needs instruction in comprehension strategies to help him retain these in future reading experiences. Also, since he is instructionally at the primer level but is a second grade student, Zachary needs instruction and practice to improve his fluency and comprehension with more complex texts.

**Conclusions**

**Reactions to the Assessment**

I have administered informal reading inventories before, and they are fairly simple and straightforward assessments from the teacher’s standpoint. I like how the QRI-5 lists recall details so I did not have to write down everything he said, making it easier for me to listen to what he was saying.

**Instructional Recommendations**

Based upon his low scores in the retellings, I would recommend that Zachary receive instruction, modeling, and guided practice with summarizing and visualizing to help him make stronger connections to texts and remember main ideas and details as and after he reads. Graphic organizers would also assist Zachary with the reinforcement and retention of details from what he reads.

Read-alouds and think-alouds with Zachary would be beneficial to model using these and other strategies, help him gain confidence as a reader, and will also help with his fluency issues (Lapp et al, 2008). Zachary needs to spend a lot of time in text with a variety of reading materials.

**References**

Conradi, Kristin (a). (2012). *Assessing* Reading Comprehension: Stepping beyond the QRI. [PowerPoint slides]. ECI 544. Lecture conducted from North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC.

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