

Chapter 12: Assessment of Student Progress

Assessment procedures are changing as educators seek ways to measure student progress in reading that reflect current authentic views of the reading process. More than ever before, assessment is merging with instruction as teachers continuously observe students, interact with them, and analyze their strengths and weaknesses.

Although teachers may sometimes use formal assessment techniques, they are more likely to evaluate young children's progress through authentic assessment procedures. As students engage in learning experiences, the teacher collects and analyzes data to determine appropriate instructional strategies to scaffold and support the development of emergent literacy.

Formal assessment consists of standardized tests that are administered, scored, and interpreted according to designated procedures. Norm-referenced tests compare students with other students across the nation on the basis of standard scores. Most schools require that achievement tests be administered annually to measure the progress students have made in overall academic achievement. Most traditional standardized tests measure mastery by requiring students to answer multiple-choice questions. Test developers are seeking ways to include more authentic tasks on standardized tests, but progress has been slow.

The teacher can use criterion-referenced tests to determine how well a student has mastered a specific skill. Skill mastery, however, does not always indicate whether or not the student can apply the skill to actual reading situations.

Alternative assessment can take many forms, and teachers can learn much about their students by using observation strategies. Daily observation, or "kidwatching," is a key to effective assessment, and teachers can record their observations in a variety of ways, including anecdotal records and checklists and rating scales. Rubrics make students aware of expectations by giving specific criteria for scoring their work, and teachers gain insight into students' reading abilities through shadowing, conferences, interviews, and retelling. Portfolios are useful for keeping samples of student work, and self-appraisal helps students evaluate their own accomplishments.

Informal tests over specific areas, including teacher-made tests on content or skills, provide information about student mastery of specific detail. Cloze procedures and maze procedures enable teachers to determine whether a text is too easy or too difficult for students, and teachers can use multimedia and computers in various ways to assess students' knowledge. The informal reading inventory, reading miscue inventory, and running record are similar forms for informal measures that help the teacher identify students' strengths and weaknesses.

The following chart summarizes the purposes and characteristics of alternative and formal assessment:

Alternative Assessment

- Gives teacher useful day-to-day information about student progress
- Informs teacher about planning instruction to meet students' needs
- Identifies individual strengths and weaknesses
- Occurs continuously
- Uses classroom-based materials and procedures

Formal Assessment

- Compares students with other students across the nation
- Provides accountability for school systems
- Gives scores that can be interpreted statistically
- Occurs once or twice a year
- Uses standardized materials and procedures

The teacher's most useful assessment tool is day-to-day observation. Informal tests may be used to reinforce or supplement such observation, whereas standardized tests are usually given only as mandated by the school system.