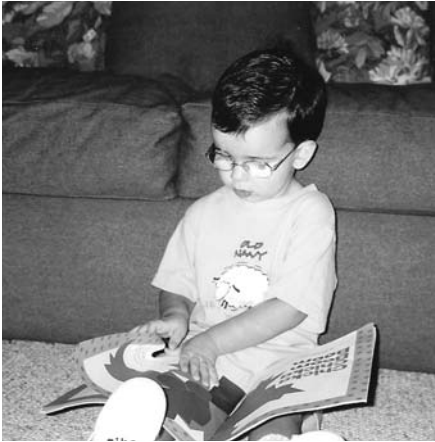


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## Chapter 8 Monitoring Reading Behavior



In order for formative assessment to be embedded in practice, it is vital that teachers have children's learning as their priority, not their teaching or the opinions of outside parties. This is easy to say, but less easy to implement.

Shirley Clark (2003, 2)

In order to be truly effective in teaching and in our ability to move students along in their literacy development, our classroom assessment and instruction must be closely related. The more instructional connections we can make for ourselves as teachers and for the students we teach, the more of an impact we have on the learning that occurs for our students. Chapter 7 looked at writing instruction and its connection to reading. In particular, it focused on how teachers can impact literacy through evaluating student work samples using the Early Literacy Continuum for Writing (Matteson and Freeman 2005). Chapter 8 takes an in-depth look at a reading continuum that similarly impacts literacy development. Like the Early Literacy Continuum for Writing, the Early Literacy Continuum for Reading focuses on a child's oral language development as well as his or her

ability to attend to detail. The Early Literacy Continuum for Reading helps teachers evaluate these areas as it applies to the concept of playing at reading as emphasized in this book.

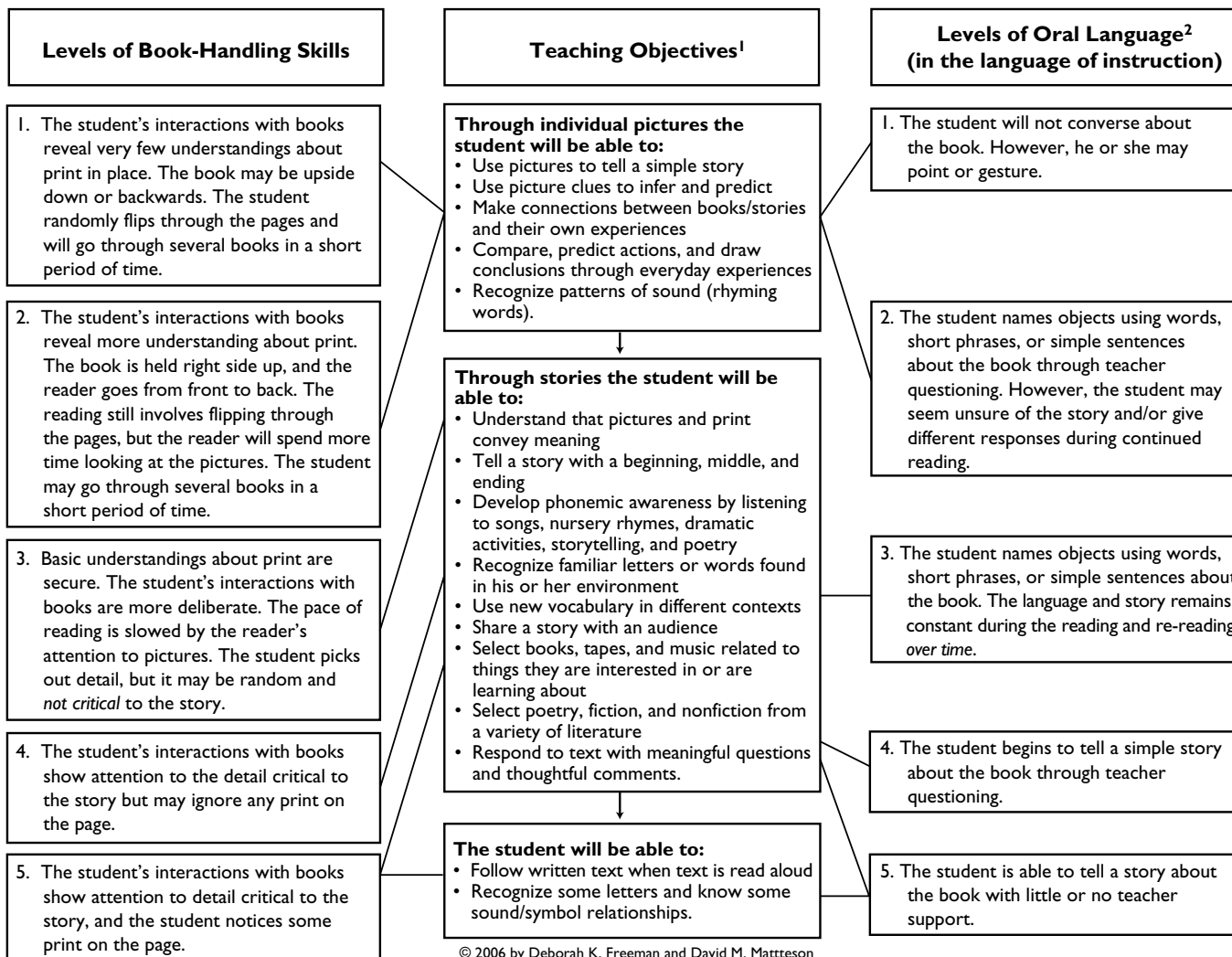
### **THE EARLY LITERACY CONTINUUM FOR READING**

The Early Literacy Continuum for Reading is very similar to the Early Literacy Continuum for Writing discussed in Chapter 7. It, too, consists of three distinct sections. Just like the writing continuum, the two outer sections of the reading continuum focus on students' oral language and students' work. The Level of Oral Language sections are the most similar in both continuums. Just as in the writing continuum, the oral language section of the Early Literacy Continuum for Reading deals with a student's ability to tell a story. Both continuums contain oral language sections that consist of five boxes that represent five different developmental levels. These levels of oral language represent a range of ability for telling stories from not communicating and/or gesturing to listing words or using short phrases about individual pictures to telling a story that is complete, with many of the elements of narrative text.

The reading continuum focuses on book-handling skills or print concepts as the basis of student work in reading.

The student's work section is where differences exist between the two continuums. The writing continuum focuses on the drawing of pictures as the basis for student work in writing, whereas the reading continuum focuses on book-handling skills or print concepts as the basis of student work in reading. The Levels of Book Handling Skills section of the reading continuum looks at a child's ability to handle books or at his or her understandings of print concepts. Like the writing continuum, this section of the reading continuum encompasses five different developmental levels. These levels of book-handling skills in the reading continuum range from randomly flipping

## Early Literacy Continuum for Reading



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<sup>1</sup>Objectives taken from Aurora Public Schools Preschool Continuum.

<sup>2</sup>In ELL/ESL and bilingual classrooms, the teacher evaluates the student's performance in the language of instruction. For example, in a Spanish bilingual classroom, the language of instruction is Spanish. In any ELL/ESL classroom, the language of instruction is English.

Figure 8.1: The Early Literacy Continuum for Reading as adapted by Aurora Public Schools

pages to paying more deliberate attention to pictures to focusing on aspects of pictures and words that are critical to the telling of a story.

The third section of the Early Literacy Continuum for Reading is where the teaching objectives can be found. This section is very similar to the Teaching Objectives section in the writing continuum. Like the writing continuum, the Teaching Objectives section of the reading continuum consists of three separate boxes in the middle of the continuum, where any district goals, state goals, and/or emergent characteristics can be placed. A school organizes their goals in one of the three boxes in the Teaching Objectives section. The goals that have a strong *conversational* component go into the first box. The goals that have a strong *print awareness* component go into the second box, and those goals that emphasize *print* go into the last box. The teacher uses these objectives to plan for teaching that responds to each child's developmental level in the Oral Language and Book-Handling Skills sections of the continuum. It could very well be that teachers will find many of the same objectives in both continuums. Both continuums have *strong* connections among all three sections—oral language, book-handling skills or student work, and teaching objectives. The lines that link the boxes within the continuum represent these connections. The reading continuum in Figure 8.1 was adapted by Aurora Public School's Early Childhood Program in Aurora, Colorado in order to align their beginning reading instruction to their beginning writing instruction. They adapted the Early Literacy Continuum for Writing in 2004 (Matteson and Freeman 2005). A generic reading continuum is shown in the appendix.

Unlike writing, reading seems more difficult to assess because there isn't a concrete product to evaluate. When Kaylee's teacher wanted to evaluate Kaylee's oral language and attention to detail in writing, she

## Monitoring Reading Behavior

could assess her picture. The teacher could also assess Kaylee's oral language because the teacher talked with Kaylee about her picture and recorded her message. But how do we evaluate a young child's ability to play at reading? If attention to detail and telling a story are important beginning reading behaviors, what do we assess? What's the concrete evidence of a student's attention to detail and oral language development when it applies to reading? Let's look as a teacher uses the Early Literacy Continuum for Reading to assess one of her student's reading behaviors as he reads with her in the classroom library.

### THE CONTINUUM IN ACTION

Sergio, a four year old, is in the classroom library. The teacher notices him flipping through several books, not attending to any particular aspects of the books. She has seen him do this on his many trips to the classroom library. The teacher decides to assess his beginning reading skills. She pulls a book off the bookshelf where she keeps picture books that she uses to assess what her students know about books and what they know about telling stories through using pictures. The books on this shelf contain clear but detailed pictures that carry strong storylines or strong beginnings, middles, and endings. The settings and characters in these stories offer wonderful opportunities for students to use description and dialogue as they look at the pictures and tell the stories housed within them. These stories also contain familiar messages or themes that support a student's ability to tell the story. The book the teacher has chosen to assess Sergio is entitled *Kiss Good Night* by Amy Hest (2001). The theme of *Kiss Good Night* is nighttime fears. The teacher has used this book before with other students and feels that Sergio will relate to it easily. In short, the teacher thinks *Kiss Good Night* will present good opportunities for her to gain information

Figure 8.2: Assessment book used for Sergio

not only about Sergio's book-handling skills but also about his ability to tell a story. The following is the dialogue between Sergio and his teacher as she assesses his oral language and book-handling skills. There are notes throughout the dialogue explaining the teacher's thinking or actions during the assessment.

As Sergio's teacher approaches him in the classroom library, she sits next to him so that as the assessment is conducted they will both view the book from the same perspective. Without showing Sergio the book, the teacher starts the assessment by saying: *I've got this wonderful book that I want you to see. Do you think you can tell me the story that's in this book?* Sergio smiles and says nothing.

The teacher gives the book to Sergio with the spine facing him and says: *Before you start, can you show me the cover of the book?* Sergio takes the book and places the book on the table with the cover facing up, but upside down. He points to the front cover but leaves the book upside down.

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The teacher waits a moment to see if Sergio will turn the book around, then asks: *Can you point to the title?* Sergio still says nothing, but points to the title, which is still upside down.

Notes: The teacher doesn't react too quickly to the book being upside down. She wants to see what Sergio will do. She decides to continue with the assessment without turning the book to see what will occur as he works with the book further.

The teacher asks: *What do think the book is called?*

Sergio says quietly, ***The Bears.***

The teacher continues: *What do you think the book is going to be about?*

Sergio says, *Bears.*

Because he gave so little information, the teacher asks: *Anything else?* Sergio says nothing.

The teacher says: *Open the book and show me where the story begins.* Sergio opens the book (still upside down) to the first page.

The teacher says: *Take a look at all the pictures in the book by yourself and think about the story.* Sergio flips through the first few pages (all upside down).

Notes: As Sergio is flipping through the pictures upside down, the teacher looks at the Early Literacy Reading Continuum to see where Sergio might be. At this point in the assessment the teacher thinks that Sergio is on Level 1 of the continuum's section on book-handling skills because he hasn't turned the book right side up. However, the

teacher decides to continue to see what other book-handling skills he might exhibit. She does this because she knows that many times assessment situations do not reflect what normally happens when children are working independently.

After Sergio flips through the book the teacher turns the book around and says: *Go back to the beginning of the book and tell me the story you have in your head.* Sergio turns to the first page, which shows a nervous little bear looking out his window at a strong wind blowing leaves off a tree, and says nothing.

The teacher waits a moment to see if Sergio will use the picture to make a prediction about the story, then prompts: *Tell me about this picture.*

Sergio says quietly, ***The wind blow.***

Again the teacher waits to see what Sergio will do and then prompts: *Let's keep reading. Why don't you turn to the next page?* Sergio turns the page, looks at the picture of the mother bear putting the little bear to bed as the storm continues outside the window, and says nothing.

Again, the teacher prompts further: *Tell me about this picture.*

Sergio whispers, ***Shhhh.***

Sergio sits quietly. The teacher suggests: *Turn the page and keep telling the story.* The picture on this page shows the mother bear tightly tucking the little bear into his bed as he holds onto one of his stuffed animals. Sergio looks at the picture. He still says nothing.

The teacher waits a moment to see if Sergio will volunteer anything on his own, then she says:

*Tell me about this picture.*

## Monitoring Reading Behavior

Sergio says quietly, *Nigh', nigh'*.

Notes: The teacher looks at the continuum again and sees that Sergio can attend to the pictures, but only with much prompting. Realizing that Sergio will need encouragement to talk about each picture, she decides that she will end the assessment. Before she ends, however, she wants to assess one more piece of information—what Sergio understands about the role of print. Although the emphasis of instruction indicated by the lower levels on the reading continuum is on talking about pictures and telling stories, the teacher wants to know early on what her students understand about print. The teacher understands that she can't wait until students reach those higher levels on the reading continuum to support them in that area.

To determine what Sergio knows about print, the teacher asks: *Where do you think it says **Nigh', nigh'**?* Sergio points to the picture of Mrs. Bear putting Sam to bed.

Again, Sergio sits quietly and does not turn the page. The teacher says: *You have worked really hard today. Why don't you take a break at the snack table?*

Notes: In reflecting on Sergio's assessment, the teacher thinks that Sergio has more skills than he is exhibiting. She is concerned that he kept the book upside down throughout most of their interaction. However, when she has seen him read in the classroom library the books he has been reading have usually been right side up. The teacher decides that because he did not correct the position of the book during the assessment that Sergio is on a Level 1 in his book-handling skills. She knows that this lower score may not represent what he usually does in reading, but she knows he needs to under-

stand that books should be right side up *every* time he reads. She will teach him to always hold the book right side up when reading and will reassess him shortly.

In assessing his level of oral language or ability to tell a story, the teacher is also concerned that Sergio needed much prompting during the assessment. She has placed Sergio on Level 2 because she had to continually question or prompt him. This behavior on Sergio's part seems to indicate that he is unsure in his understanding that he can tell the story of the text through pictures. She would like to see him react more to the pictures and talk freely about what he is seeing in those pictures. The teacher thinks that having a reading partner may help him in that area. After the assessment the teacher fills out her monitoring notes on Sergio, as shown in Figure 8.3.

|   |
|---|
| <p>Name: <i>Sergio</i>      Date: <i>10/01</i><br/> Center: <i>Classroom Library</i></p> <p>Activity: <i>Assessment—Kiss Good Night</i><br/> Last Assessed: <i>N/A—New student</i><br/> Book Handling Score: <i>1</i><br/> Oral Language Score: <i>2</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Notes</p> <p>Strengths: <i>Identified front of book and title; was able to talk about pictures with much prompting</i></p> <p>Next Steps: <i>Needs to keep book right side up; needs more opportunities to talk about pictures—pair him up to read with a partner; needs to start acknowledging print</i></p> |
|---|

Figure 8.3: The monitoring notes from Sergio's playing at reading assessment

## ASSESSING DIFFERENT LEVELS OF LEARNERS

Teacher monitoring and recording of beginning reading behavior is an important aspect in teaching. In an effort to develop these practices, monitoring and recording need to be easy to manage, easy to access, and easily understood by anyone. Sergio's assessment and monitoring notes are wonderful examples of how this teacher is working to meet these three assessment monitoring and recording criteria. Let's consider the vignettes of children playing at reading contained in Chapters 4 and 5 and what the recording of their beginning reading behavior could look like written down. Even though Danessa in Chapter 4 was not in a classroom, we can consider her oral language and book-handling skills as an example of how to score a child using the reading continuum. Danessa is an excellent example of a student who would score at Level 4 in her book-handling skills. She moved through the story page by page and paid attention to the details within the illustrations that helped her tell the story with meaning. To move her on in her development as a reader, Danessa's teacher needs to do more to support her in making a transition from the pictures to print. Danessa needs to attend to the print in both the title and the text more as she continues to play at reading.

In thinking about Danessa's oral language development as it relates to reading, her score would be at the highest level—Level 5. As she read, Danessa displayed good intonation, a memory for text, and problem-solving skills. Not only did Danessa's father allow her to read the book, he kept silent as she worked to recall some of the meaning of the text. Because Danessa is skillful at playing at reading, she was allowed to work through making meaning of the pictures. As we teach, we need to see if our teaching has been effective.

Building independence is an important aspect in developing a reader.

Building independence is an important aspect in developing a reader. The last level of the continuum is a level of independence for these beginning readers. A desirable outcome for children at this level would be for them to transfer this knowledge to other areas in the classroom or to other genres while continuing to practice reading. Because a student is proficient at playing at reading with one genre doesn't mean he or she will be proficient at another. An excellent next teaching point for Danessa would be to have her begin to work with expository texts. Monitoring notes for Danessa might look like the example in Figure 8.4.

|  |
|--|
| Name: <i>Danessa</i> Date: <i>10/01</i><br>Center: <i>Classroom Library</i>  |
| Activity: <i>Where's Arthur's Gerbil?</i><br>Last Assessed: <i>N/A</i><br>Book Handling Score: <i>4</i><br>Oral Language Score: <i>5</i>   |
| Notes  |
| Strengths: <i>Very independent—moved through it page by page; told the story with meaning; displayed good intonation, a memory for text, and problem-solving skills</i><br>Next Steps: <i>Begin work with expository texts</i> |

Figure 8.4: Monitoring notes with assessment scores for Danessa

Let's look closely at Danny in Chapter 5 and how he would have scored on the continuum for reading had the teacher used his reading of *The Best Book of Sharks*, an expository text, as an assessment. Danny's book-handling skills definitely place him at Level 4 on the reading continuum. He spent time carefully looking over each page,

## Monitoring Reading Behavior

|  |                   |
|--|-------------------|
| Name: <i>Danny</i>   | Date: <i>1/17</i> |
| Center: <i>Classroom Library</i>   |                   |
| Activity: <i>assessment—The Best Book of Sharks</i>  |                   |
| Last Assessed: <i>10/22—Narrative Text</i>   |                   |
| Book Handling Score: <i>4</i>  |                   |
| Oral Language Score: <i>2</i>  |                   |
| <b>Notes</b>   |                   |
| <i>Strengths: Used <u>Sharks</u> as title, understands title page contains title, carefully searched the pictures; handled the book confidently to tell a consistent story; started talking about worms on page 14/15 but quickly got back to shark topic; used description; Used some key vocabulary—fins, sharp teeth; used basic sentence structure of informational text—began many sentences with Sharks...</i> |                   |
| <i>Next Steps: How to use Table of Contents; needs to understand that many pictures on a page have commonalities—sticking to the topic; attend to more of the print within the text</i>  |                   |

Figure 8.5: Monitoring notes with assessment scores for Danny

indicating that he was searching the pictures. He handled the book confidently and worked at attending to the critical detail within the pictures to tell a consistent story. He was also attending to the print of the title. However, Danny also needs to be more consistent and attend to some of the print within the story. “Attending to more of the print within the story” would be his next learning step and support his advancement to Level 5 on the reading continuum.

In looking over his oral language development as it relates to reading expository texts, Danny would be at Level 2. At times Danny seemed unsure about how to handle this expository text, as evidenced by his switching between the elements of the expository and narrative genres. Many times a student's score may be lower as they work to understand and incorporate new genres into their reading ability. For Danny, a good teaching point would be to focus on the elements of expository texts, such as knowing how a Table of Contents page works or keeping to the topic. Danny's monitoring notes might look something like those in Figure 8.5 if *The Best Book of Sharks* was used as an assessment.

### **MAKING LEARNING DECISIONS**

When the Early Literacy Continuum for Writing is used in conjunction with the Early Literacy Continuum for Reading, not only will teachers make stronger reading and writing connections for their students, they will also make better learning decisions as well. Aurora Public School's Early Childhood Education Program is working toward making better learning decisions for their youngest learners. For the past few years the program coordinators have been closely monitoring their students' oral language and attention to detail through use of the Early Literacy Continuum for Writing. Now they are collecting the same type of information through the Early Literacy Continuum for Reading. Chapter 9 looks at the reading data they have collected in their first year of using the Early Literacy Continuum for Reading.