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Rona R. Flippo
Georgia State University

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DIAGNOSTIC PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT: A TOOL FOR THE KINDERGARTEN AND PRIMARY GRADE TEACHER

Rona R. Flippo

GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY, ATLANTA, GEORGIA

Most elementary educators agree that assessment is a necessary preparation for instructional planning. Teachers can use one of several standardized instruments or an informal reading inventory to assess the abilities of their reading students. A problem occurs for the teacher of non-readers or the teacher of beginning readers. These students cannot be assessed with instruments requiring reading ability. They need to be evaluated with instruments that sample their ability to perform with psycho-motor, auditory, oral, and visual skill areas. These areas are the foundation of beginning reading instruction and should be measured and evaluated prior to instructional planning for each kindergarten and primary school child.

One possibility for teachers of this level is the use of a teacher-made, performance-based assessment kit. The teacher can zero in on the skills that are vital to beginning reading instruction. By selecting the skills and planning for the measurement and evaluation of them, the teacher will be able to tailor the instructional program effectively, basing it on the outcomes of each assessment. The teacher then adds the techniques of performance measurement and observation. Periodic observations following the initial pre-assessment can provide a continuous check on the student's development and an opportunity to modify instruction as indicated.

Description of Kit

Criteria for a performance-based assessment kit:

1. A grouping of pre-literacy (Powell et al 1976) or reading readiness skills should be selected from a reliable source. These skills can come

from state or county curriculum guides or current reading textbooks. Attention should be given to skills from the psycho-motor, auditory, oral, and visual domains.

2. A minimum number of performance skill items should be matched to each skill selected. The performance skill items must be based on sound criteria.

3. An assessment checklist should be developed which lists each performance skill to be observed and evaluated. There should be enough copies of the checklist to assess each child in a class.

4. A place should be designated on the checklist to note how many times out of a given number of tries the student was able to perform the skill, to allow for notes taken during observation and to record future observations.

5. Detailed instructions on the criteria for passing or failing each performance skill should be noted in written form.

6. Folders or envelopes containing the necessary materials and/or information to measure each performance skill should be well organized and sequenced to follow the checklist.

Application in the Classroom

Once the performance-based assessment kit is developed, the teacher can organize the instructional materials he or she has available and the teaching strategies to provide practice. In this way, one can individualize the program to meet each beginner's needs while fitting one's own instructional resources.

The organization of these materials and strategies could also help the teacher identify materials needed for purchase from the classroom budget. A group of primary teachers using the same assessment kit might pool their existing materials and budgeted monies to purchase materials that complement the performance skills of the kit.

Application for Pre-Service Education

The development of a performance-based assessment kit can be a valuable pre-service activity for early childhood and elementary education majors. Students would need to study various reading readiness skills lists to develop a skills inventory for their kit. They should be able to justify and defend their skills inventory. Once developed, thought would have to be given as to how to assess these skills. Suitable materials would need to be gathered or developed for use with the kit.

It would be necessary to devote attention to techniques of measurement and observation, organization and evaluation. Preservice teachers could be assigned the task of organizing a simulated pre-reading program of instruction for students based on their findings of their performance-based assessment kit. The development of this kit would be a teaching tool in preservice education that could later be useful and directly applicable to the student's teaching assignment.

Example of Checklist for Assessment Kit

A checklist from an actual performance-based assessment kit has been included to illustrate how such a kit could be organized.

Performance-based Assessment Checklist

SKILL	YES	NO	NOTES
Left or right hand orientation?			
1. Vocabulary development			
2. Put puzzle together			
3. Recognizing differences:			
a. visual			
b. auditory			
4. Recognizing similarities:			
a. visual			
5. Association among objects			
6. Knows colors			
7. Can match colors			
8. Drawing a person			
9. Can name body parts			
10. Body perception			

SKILL	YES	NO	NOTES
11. Can imitate body movements			
12. Can follow directions--Auditory			
13. Knows personal information			
14. Recognizes his/her first name			
15. Gross motor coordination			
a. throwing a bean bag			
b. catching a bean bag			
c. walk on tape			
d. hop up and down in a circle			
16. Cuts with scissors on a line			
17. Can trace pattern with finger			
18. Can tell a story			
19. Can match shapes			
20. Bead Stringing			
21. Rote Counting			
a. one to five			
b. one to ten			
c. more than 10			
22. Recognizes numbers			
23. Recognizes letters			
24. Match letters			
25. Stays with task until complete			