Applying Reading Profiles in Assessment and Intervention
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A quick review …

Three profiles of reading difficulty are common (Catts et al., 2006; Leach et al., 2003; Kieffer, 2010):

- Specific word recognition difficulties (SWRD; reading problem is specific to word recognition/decoding)
- Specific comprehension difficulties (SCD; reading problem is specific to oral language comprehension)
- Mixed reading difficulties (MRD; problems involve both word recognition and oral comprehension)
- See handout #1
Each profile of reading difficulties:

• Has different intervention needs (e.g., Aaron et al., 2008)
• Has different needs for progress-monitoring (e.g., Spear-Swerling, 2015)
• Tends to benefit from different types of assistive technology (Erickson, 2013)
• May be associated with a variety of underlying causes (e.g., intrinsic learning disabilities, limited exposure to English language/literacy)
• May tend to differ in associated writing/math weaknesses

Children with Specific Word Recognition Difficulties benefit from:

• Highly systematic, explicit, synthetic-phonics interventions
• Inclusion of phonemic awareness intervention with phonics intervention (if PA is weak)
• Applying their developing decoding skills in appropriate texts (instructional level, reasonable match to child’s decoding skills, e.g., decodable texts)

Children with Specific Comprehension Difficulties benefit from:

• Explicit intervention in the area(s) of comprehension in which they are weak (e.g., vocabulary, background knowledge, perspective-taking)
• Inclusion of oral language interventions with reading comprehension interventions (e.g., Clarke et al., 2010)
• Instructional strategies for attention and executive function, if these are a problem (e.g., graphic organizers in reading, teaching organizational strategies for writing and math calculation)
Children with **Mixed Reading Difficulties** benefit from:

- A combination of systematic PA/phonics intervention with intervention involving the specific areas of comprehension in which they are weak
- Opportunities to apply their developing decoding skills in appropriate texts (like students with SWRD)
- Inclusion of oral language interventions with reading comprehension interventions (like students with SCD)
- Strategies for attention and EF, if these areas are relevant

What kinds of assessments are useful for identifying the student’s reading profile?

Identifying the profile of reading difficulty requires the use of measures of component reading and language abilities (as opposed to broad reading comprehension only)
Important component areas to assess:

-- Out-of-context word reading/decoding (accuracy and automaticity)
-- Phonemic awareness (especially for young children or if decoding is weak)
-- Text reading accuracy (oral reading)
-- Text reading rate and prosody
-- Oral vocabulary
-- Listening comprehension (with more in-depth assessment of LC for children with SCD or MRD)

A range of measures can be used as long as:

• They are technically adequate (i.e., reliable/valid)
• They have adequate benchmarks or norms to determine how a child is performing relative to grade/age peers
• See handout #2

Criterion-referenced measures (e.g., Core Phonics Survey, GE Test) and other formative assessments (e.g., knowledge of letter sounds; performance on different types of comprehension tasks) are very helpful for planning intervention.
Some important details about diagnostic assessment of at-risk readers

To evaluate word recognition, use both real words and nonsense words:

• Nonsense words (e.g., *streck, glain*) provide a “pure” measure of decoding, but assessment of real words is important too
• Example 1: if real word reading is average and nonsense word reading is low, child may be relying on memorization of words and failing to develop decoding skills
• Example 2: if nonsense word reading is average and real word reading is low, this may indicate the child is not transferring decoding skills to real words or developing a base of common words that can be read automatically

It is helpful to assess automaticity as well as accuracy of single word reading:

• A student may read individual words accurately but not be automatic
• Common pattern in students with a history of decoding problems who are partially compensated, including some who have had years of phonics interventions
• Also, if a student reads text slowly, it’s important to know if this is due to lack of automaticity in individual word reading vs. other factors (e.g., language)
Assessment of reading fluency:

- Measures of RF may involve silent reading (e.g., WJ SRF) or oral reading (e.g., WIAT ORF)
- If decoding might be an issue for a student, an oral fluency measure is especially important
- Consider accuracy as well as rate of reading
- Also consider prosody (phrasing and expressiveness) of oral reading

Assessment of reading comprehension:

- Common formats for testing comprehension include cloze (fill-in-the-blank), retell, and question-answering formats
- Individual children’s performance can sometimes vary substantially depending on the comprehension measure
- With tests that involve answering questions, it is important to consider whether many questions are passage independent (Keenan & Betjemann, 2006; Keenan et al., 2008)

Assessment of reading comprehension (continued):

- Passage independent questions don’t depend heavily on actual reading of the passage
- Examples: “What does the word glimmer in the story mean?” “How do you think John felt when he lost the prize?”
- Children with SWRD often can do well on passage independent questions and may perform relatively better on Q/A measures than on cloze measures of reading comprehension (Spear-Swerling, 2004)
- Children with SCD may perform relatively better on cloze measures than on Q/A measures, e.g., because of weaknesses in vocabulary and background knowledge
Assessment of reading comprehension (continued):

• Many other test features can impact individual students’ performance on reading comprehension measures (e.g., text length, text genre, whether students can access the text while answering Qs)
• Variability in performance on measures of RC is more likely when decoding is not an issue, i.e., for students with SCD (Keenan & Meenan, 2014)
• Especially for students with SCD, important to use multiple measures of RC in assessment
• For students with decoding problems (i.e., SWRD and MRD), listening comprehension may be a better indicator of actual comprehension abilities (Fletcher et al., 2018)

Assessment of listening comprehension:

• Test formats similar to those for reading comprehension, but examiner does the reading
• Listening comprehension measures can be especially demanding of attention; some children do poorly because they have attentional problems, not true language weaknesses
• Important consideration in students known to have attentional difficulties such as those seen in ADHD and (often) ASD
• Figuring out these distinctions matters because interventions will be different for language difficulties vs. attentional weaknesses

Assessment of listening comprehension (continued):

• To determine whether there is an actual language weakness, consider:
  • Does the child have a history of language delay?
  • Show weaknesses in comprehensive speech/language testing?
  • Have weakness in expressive language?
  • Demonstrate pattern of weakness in academic areas involving broad language (e.g., text composition in writing, math problem solving)?
Case examples
(See breakout cases.)

Destiny, February of Grade 6:

• Read the information about Destiny and look at her WIAT-III, BRI, and DIBELS scores. Also be sure to look at her patterns of errors on the Grade 6 passage for both word accuracy and comprehension (see pdf: Destiny).
• Decide on Destiny’s profile of poor reading.
• Consider the statement in the opening that “math is not seen as a major concern.” Should there be concerns about Destiny’s math achievement? How is her math profile consistent with her reading profile?
• What kind of intervention does Destiny need? In particular, how should her difficulties in reading fluency be addressed?

Marisol, February of Grade 4:

• Read the information about Marisol and look at her WIAT-III, IRI, and Aimsweb data.
• Decide on Marisol’s profile of poor reading.
• Do Marisol’s difficulties in reading mainly reflect English learner issues, or do they seem more consistent with a possible learning disability? Explain.
• Are there additional assessments that would be helpful in clarifying Marisol’s needs, and if so, which ones?
• What kind of intervention does Marisol need?
Zachariah, March of Grade 1:
• Read the information about Zachariah and look at his WJ-IV and BRI scores.
• Then score his performance on the Core Phonics Survey (see pdf, Zachariah).
• Do you think Zachariah has a reading problem? If not, say why not. If so, decide on his profile of reading difficulty and determine the type of intervention Zachariah needs.
• Postscript: Zachariah in Grade 2

Dayonna, January of Grade 1:
• Read the information about Dayonna and look at her WJ-IV, DIBELS Next, and BRI scores.
• Here are Dayonna’s scores on the Core Phonics Survey:
  Long vowel sounds = 100%
  Short vowel sounds = 100%
  CVC words = 100%
  Short vowel words with cons. digraphs = 90%
  Short vowel words with cons. blends = 80%
  Long vowel words = 60%; read some pseudowords
  All other categories < 40%

Dayonna, January of Grade 1:
• Do you think Dayonna has a reading problem? If not, say why not. If so, decide on her profile of reading difficulty and determine the type of intervention she needs.
• Discuss how Dayonna’s patterns of performance in language and reading differ from Zachariah’s.
• Whether or not you think that Dayonna currently requires reading intervention, is there anything in her assessment data that should raise concerns about possible future difficulties in reading? Explain.
Louis, February of Grade 9:

- Read the information about Louis and look at his test scores and other assessment data.
- What is Louis's profile of reading difficulty?
- What is odd about Louis's performance on WIAT Essay Composition? Can you suggest an explanation?
- What does Louis's performance on WIAT ORF from Grade 3 to 9 suggest?
- How is Louis's performance in spelling consistent with his performance in reading?
- Discuss Louis's intervention needs.

Thank you!

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References


