

ASSESSMENT

Assessment of emergent literacy: Storybook reading

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Early childhood plays a crucial role in human development. The learning that takes place during this period is very complex and, in recent years, educators and researchers alike (e.g., Meisels, 1989) have protested the inappropriateness of turning paper and pencil, multiple choice tests, or other test screening devices into high-stakes decision tools for young children. Nonetheless, as professionals we need to make informed assessments that provide help for children and guidance to their parents, teachers, and other help providers. In emergent literacy, such research-based assessments have begun to be available.

Educators and researchers have learned a great deal about how children become readers and writers long before schooling begins and, as a result, alternative ways of assessing children's learning and development have surfaced. This column will describe one assessment instrument—the Classification Scheme for Emergent Reading of Favorite Storybooks (Sulzby, 1985, 1988)—that began as a research tool describing children's attempts to read emergently. This instrument can be used to track the development of individuals or groups of children over time. Hence it has evolved into a tool for helping teachers understand development—a day-to-day assessment instrument.

As the field of assessment is changing, this storybook classification scheme has begun to be used for accountability purposes. Its most important use, however, is as a tool through which teachers may further develop their abilities to use knowledge about

children's performance in day-to-day teaching; thus it is a teacher development instrument. This emergent literacy instrument, along with a number of others, should be used to replace or supplement traditional reading readiness tests.

Theoretical basis

The storybook classification scheme is based upon a number of theoretical premises (Sulzby, 1985, 1988; Sulzby & Teale, 1987). First, it assumes that children become literate long before they are reading from print and that such emergent literacy can be observed through children's everyday explorations with print. Second, it assumes that emergent literacy is based upon social interactions with important people, such as parents and teachers, and with literary products of people, such as children's storybooks. Third, it assumes that children are acquiring both oral and written language simultaneously and interrelatedly and that children are constantly figuring out the oral and written language relationships used in their particular culture. Finally, it assumes that children emergently acquire all of the aspects of conventional literacy and that they reorganize these aspects into a coordinated, flexible, integrated system which enables them to figure out print independently.

The instrument

The Sulzby storybook classification scheme was designed to be used with favorite storybooks, books that children request parents read to them

again and again and those in which children often correct their parents' misreadings or omissions. It was particularly designed for the books that children begin to "read" emergently—long before they are reading from print. The instrument consists of a set of descriptions of 11 subcategories, the highest of which is reading independently from print. Figure 1 shows the major categories and subcategories in tree structure format.

Elicitation techniques

Books. For use in classrooms, books should be selected from storybooks with characters and plots that children respond to enthusiastically over repeated rereadings. (The scheme can be used with some other genres, but not with very brief nonstorybooks—particularly pattern books, such as *Brown Bear, Brown Bear*, which children memorize verbatim.) An indication that such a book has been chosen is that children chime in during the teacher's readings and choose the book to "read" themselves during choice time. Alternatively, the instrument can be used after "planting" several books in the classroom and requesting multiple readings (3-5). Notice these elicitation techniques assume that students have experiences in a print-rich and literacy-rich classroom. If the classroom environment does not typically include many opportunities to read emergently, we will be only assessing children's home literacy backgrounds.

Reading requests. For formal assessment, an adult arranges for a quiet spot away from distractions and asks the child to "Read your book to me." For

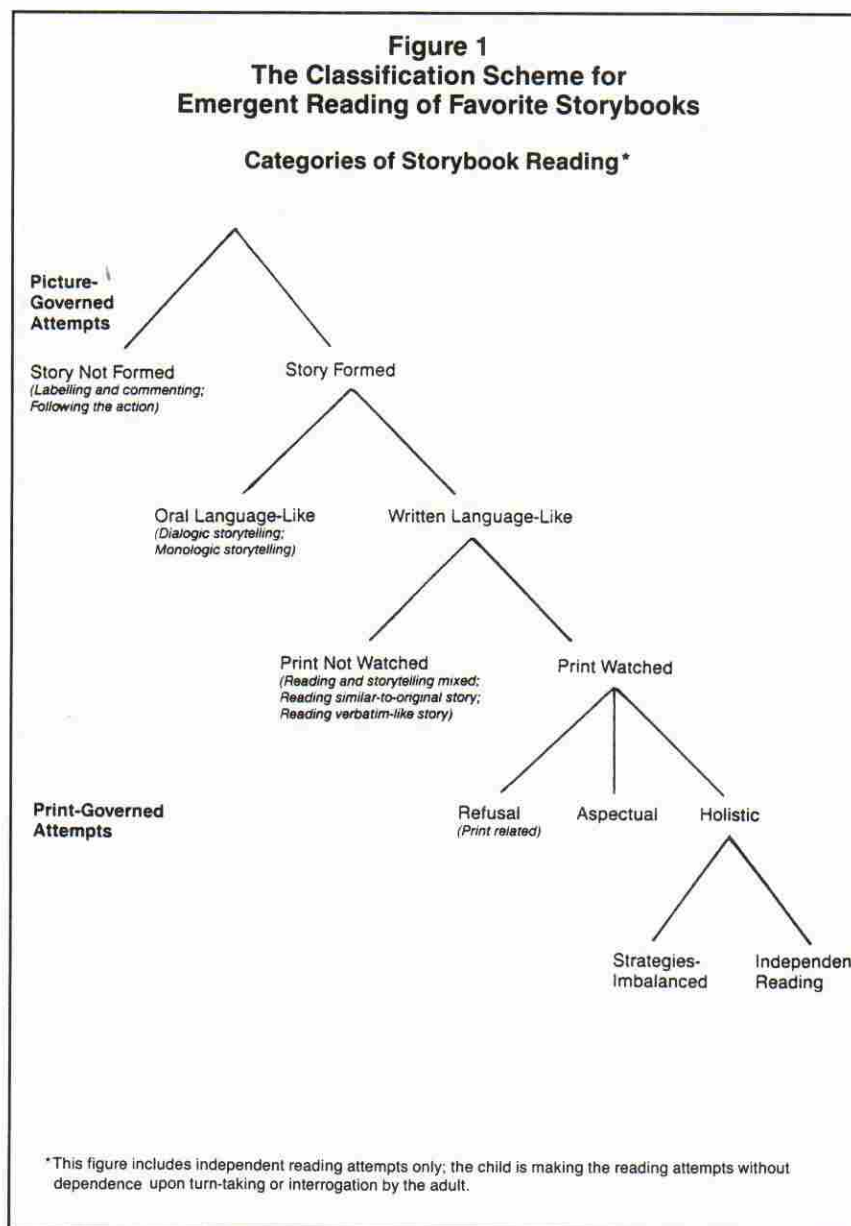
informal assessment in the classroom, the adult eavesdrops while a child reads to another child or group of children. If the child does not read immediately or says, "I can't read," the adult uses appropriate prompts, such as, "It doesn't have to be like grown-up reading—just do it your own way." If the child still hesitates, the adult suggests that they read together, begins reading, and pauses for the child to complete sentences or phrases. After a few pages of interactive reading, the adult again urges the child to read: "It's your turn now. Read to me."

The child should hold the book and turn the pages. The adult listens attentively and appreciatively, focusing upon the story being shared rather than on the reading performance.

Recordkeeping. Recordkeeping will vary according to the purpose for the assessment, the experience of the teacher or researcher, and the linguistic and literacy backgrounds of the children. The most careful and laborious recordkeeping would involve taperecording the child, transcribing the taperecordings, and then having two judges independently rate the child and compare ratings. This is typically done for research purposes or during teacher inservice training.

Two intermediate levels of recordkeeping have been used by classroom teachers. The full 11-point scheme and an abbreviated 5-point version (Sulzby & Barnhart, 1990) have both been used by making on-the-spot judgments of the child's reading behaviors. Eventually, teachers get so acquainted with the scheme that they make running record notes using the subcategory labels, for example, "Keshun—CFS—verbatim-like, 6/3/90," which translates as "Keshun read *Caps for Sale* in language fitting the subcategory 'reading verbatim-like story' on June 3, 1990."

Figure 2 contains the simplified version of the Sulzby classification scheme, which can be used or adapted for local purposes. Daycare, preschool, and kindergarten teachers will find the most use for the simplified version. This scheme also comprises part of the basis for judging children's emergent writing and reading from their writing (Sulzby, 1989; Sulzby,



Barnhart, & Hieshima, 1989). However, first-grade teachers will want to focus on the upper ends of the original version, because it enables them to assess how close a child is to becoming a conventional reader.

Authenticity and trustworthiness

The classification scheme described in this column was taken directly from reading behaviors that children show in their homes. Children who are read to regularly typically begin to read

emergently; this has been tested with middle- and low-income children, both from Anglo and Hispanic backgrounds (Sulzby & Teale, 1987). The classification scheme is a direct measure of emergent reading and of initial conventional reading. It can be extended into the early conventional period by using other assessment strategies such as informal reading inventories, the Reading Miscue Inventory, and running records.

Our research with the scheme shows that two independent raters can use the scheme reliably. Disagreements are

Figure 2
Simplified version of the
Sulzby storybook reading classification scheme

Broad Categories	Brief Explanation of Categories
1. Attending to Pictures, Not Forming Stories	The child is "reading" by looking at the storybook's pictures. The child's speech is <i>just</i> about the picture in view; the child is not "weaving a story" across the pages. (Subcategories are "labelling and commenting" and "following the action.")
2. Attending to Pictures, Forming ORAL Stories	The child is "reading" by looking at the storybook's pictures. The child's speech weaves a story across the pages but the wording and the intonation are like that of someone telling a story, either like a conversation about the pictures or like a fully recited story, in which the listener can see the pictures (and often <i>must</i> see them to understand the child's story). (Subcategories are "dialogic storytelling" and "monologic storytelling.")
3. Attending to Pictures, Reading and Storytelling mixed	This category for the simplified version was originally the first subcategory of (4). It fits between (2) and (4) and is easier to understand if it is treated separately. The child is "reading" by looking at the storybook's pictures. The child's speech fluctuates between sounding like a storyteller, with oral intonation, and sounding like a reader, with reading intonation. To fit this category, the majority of the reading attempt must show fluctuations between storytelling and reading.
4. Attending to Pictures, Forming WRITTEN Stories	The child is "reading" by looking at the storybook's pictures. The child's speech sounds as if the child is reading, both in the wording and intonation. The listener does not need to look at the pictures (or rarely does) in order to understand the story. If the listener closes his/her eyes, most of the time he or she would think the child is reading from print. (Subcategories are "reading similar-to-original story," and "reading verbatim-like story.")
5. Attending to Print	There are four subcategories of attending to print. Only the <i>final</i> one is what is typically called "real reading." In the others the child is exploring the print by such strategies as refusing to read based on print-related reasons, or using only some of the aspects of print. (Subcategories are "refusing to read based on print awareness," "reading aspectually," "reading with strategies imbalanced," and "reading independently" or "conventional reading.")

not random or erratic but usually involve fine-grained interpretations of a child's behavior. Children's performances are not static, not at hard and fast stages, yet they have quite a bit of stability. The scheme enables teachers to have *language* to use to describe children's performance and *multiple assessments over time* to use to interpret progress. Finally, teachers have been able to have children keep records of the books which they have read, often with their reactions to the books, and use these records along with the teacher's ratings on the classification scheme as part of a portfolio assessment.

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Assessment is a column dealing with all forms of the measurement and evaluation of children's literacy abilities. Send questions, comments, or suggestions about the column to **Sheila Valencia, University of Washington, 122 Miller Hall DQ-12, Seattle, WA 98195, USA.**