AlphaKids & Assessment

Assessment involves collecting information about children's literacy development and making judgements about progress. Assessment forms the basis for planning the guided reading teaching opportunities and learning centre activities.

Careful monitoring at the emergent literacy stage is important because this is where children learn concepts about print such as: written language makes sense; English written language has a pattern of left to right directionality; the written word can be matched with the spoken word; there is a relationship between letters and sounds. Children are learning to monitor their own literacy behaviours, checking to see if what they read matches the meaning, sentence structure, word or letter.

Collecting data

In the first six weeks of school, data can be collected on a range of literacy behaviours:
- analysis of records of reading behaviours
- written language samples, drawing and writing
- concepts of book orientation, and word and letter order
- phonemic awareness (see *Alphakids: Alphabet Books Teacher Resource*)
- letter identification
- retelling a narrative or recounting an experience

The most important information to collect is a record of reading behaviours, which documents how a child reads a particular book. The record is an analysis of a child's reading with their errors or miscues which allows a teacher to examine the reading strategies and the reading behaviours used by a child at a particular point in time.

Records of reading behaviours are taken at least once each month. The record is used to monitor progress and to determine the learning level of a particular text.

A *learning level* of a particular text is the reader's instructional level. A learning text (Johnson 1997) is one where the reader is challenged, the reader self-corrects and there are not enough errors to disrupt the meaning. In a learning text, readers will also demonstrate a good understanding or comprehension of the text.

An error rate of between one in ten and one in twenty (5–10%) is at the edge of what the reader can manage without some assistance.

When a child reads a book at their learning level they read at between 90–95% accuracy. An error rate of up to one in twenty words of text (5%)

indicates that the text may be easy enough to be read independently. This is an *easy* text. A text with an error rate of more than one in ten (10%) is a *hard* text.

Records of reading behaviours allow teachers to match readers to learning texts and establish a baseline for future assessment; move readers from one level of book to another; and report progress to parents. See the appendix for suggestions on how to take a record of reading behaviours.

Taking a record of reading behaviours

Organising data

Assessment data can be organised into baseline data and portfolios of progress for continuous assessment.

Baseline data is a collection of information on what children can do early in the year or term. Later in the year, more information is collected and literacy progress is assessed.

Portfolios of progress are collections of work samples and records of work completed. Children place samples of their work in special folders or 'portfolios' for parents and other teachers to read. The portfolio can include written work, drawings, lists of books read, records of reading behaviours (two or three examples), spelling words learnt, letters identified, and high-frequency words the child knows.

Opportunities for continuous assessment are noted throughout this teacher resource book. These opportunities enable teachers to collect writing samples, observe reading and writing behaviours, and monitor development as children are engaged in a range of activities. They are indicated with this symbol 📂.

Assessment is really the heart of the reading programme because this is where the teacher monitors reading development, enabling them to closely match the child to the learning experience.

A record of reading behaviours is an analysis of oral reading errors or miscues which allows a teacher to examine the child's use of reading strategies and concepts of print. Records of reading behaviours help teachers to monitor the child's progress and determine the learning level of a particular text.

The learning level of a particular text is the reader's instructional level. When a child reads a book at their learning level they read at between 90–95% accuracy. Marie Clay suggests that an error rate of up to one in twenty words (5%) indicates the text is easy and may be read independently. This is an *easy* text. A text read with an error rate of more than one in ten (10%) is a *hard* text. An error rate of between one in ten and one in twenty (5–10%) is at the edge of what the reader can manage with some assistance. This is a *learning* text. (Johnson 1997)

A learning text challenges the child. The child self-corrects and there are not enough errors to disrupt the meaning. In a learning text, children will also demonstrate a good understanding of the text.

Records of reading behaviours allow teachers to:
- match readers to learning texts
- establish a baseline for future assessment
- move readers from one level of book to another
- report progress to parents

Taking a record of reading behaviours

There are two common ways to take records of reading behaviours. A record of reading behaviours can be written on a transcript of the text. Alternatively, when taking running records – developed by Marie Clay (1993) – the teacher simply takes a blank or lined piece of paper and quickly and carefully records a shorthand record of the child's oral reading.

Text	Reader	Running record
Can you see my eyes?	Can you see my e ey	✔ ✔ ✔ ✔ e ey

There are advantages in both approaches. Running records can be done on the run in the classroom without preparation of transcripts.

A record of reading behaviours provides the teacher with a clear record of the words the child read, and can be placed in an assessment portfolio for later analysis and for reporting to parents.

When taking a record of reading behaviours the following notations can be used. (Based on Clay 1993, Kemp 1987, Godman & Burke 1972)

correct	tick the word	✔ ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔ Can you see my eyes?
miscue	write the spoken word above the word in the text	✔ ✔ ✔ *the* ✔ Can you see my eyes?
insertion	insert the spoken word using a ^	✔ ✔ ✔ ✔ *big* ✔ Can you see my ^eyes?
omission	write O above the word left out	✔ ✔ ✔ *O* ✔ Can you see my eyes?
repetition	write R after the word(s) repeated	✔ ✔ ✔ ✔ *R* ✔ Can you see my eyes?
attempt	the word attempted is written above the word	✔ ✔ ✔ ✔ *e ey* Can you see my eyes?
asks for help	write A above the appeal	✔ ✔ ✔ *A* ✔ Can you see my eyes?
told word	write T above the word	✔ ✔ ✔ *T* ✔ Can you see my eyes?
no response	a line is place above the word	✔ ✔ ✔ _ ✔ Can you see my eyes?
self-corrects	write SC after the miscue	✔ ✔ ✔ *the| SC* ✔ Can you see my eyes?

Fruit Salad

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 ✓    ✓       ✓
I   like   apples.
 ✓    ✓       A
I   like   oranges.
 ✓    ✓          ✓
I   like   bananas.
 ✓    ✓   apples T
I   like   pears.
 ✓    ✓   pears SC
I   like   peaches.
 ✓    ✓       ✓
I   like   grapes.
 ✓    ✓    ✓   ____
I   like   fruit   salad.
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What counts as an oral reading error?

- Miscues count as one error.
- Omissions count as one error.
- Insertions count as one error.
- Told words count as one error.
- No response counts as one error.
- A word read inaccurately continually is counted as an error each time.
- A proper noun read inaccurately continually is counted once.
- Words that are pronounced differently in a child's dialect are not counted.
- If a page is omitted, count it as one error and omit the number of words from the total word count.
- If a line is omitted, count each word.
- Self-corrections are not counted as errors.
- Repetitions are not counted as errors.

Error rate should be used cautiously. Some errors appear minor such as reading *the* for *a*. Some errors give more cause for concern than others. For example, which error creates more concern: a child substitutes *fog* for *frog* or substitutes *toad*?

The error rate is calculated by dividing the number of errors into the number of running words in text

Error rate: $\dfrac{RW}{E}$ =1: ☐

For example, 10 errors in a 100-word text gives an error rate of 1:10. In the book *Shopping* there are 105 words in the text. If a reader made 8 errors it would be considered a learning text.

Error rate: $\dfrac{RW}{E} = 1:\square \qquad \dfrac{105}{8} = 1:13$

The following is a simple guide to calculate the percentage of accuracy in reading a text.

Error rate	Accuracy %
1:200	99.5
1:100	99
1:50	98
1:35	97
1:25	96
1:20	95
1:17	94
1:14	93
1:12.5	92
1:11.75	91
1:10	90
1:9	89
1:8	87.5
1:7	85.5
1:6	83
1:5	80
1:4	75
1:3	66
1:2	50

A regular monthly assessment is important in the emergent reading phase because children are learning to integrate the meaning, structural, visual and phonological cues. Teachers can use this information to plan a teaching focus. For example, sometimes children use one cue at the expense of others. They may focus on meaning alone and not attend to the visual print. Sometimes the alphabetic code is a focus and a child may spend a long time sounding out a word *h-ho-ho-rs*, when the picture cue or the sentence structure provides the needed support.

Beginning readers will at times appear to slip back and regress. This is because the child's attention may be split between different demands. Usually these slips or errors are caused by a new awareness of another concept not encountered before. Marie Clay calls this the 'pebble in the pond' effect because the new awareness can cause reorganisation of the knowledge developed to date (Clay 1991).