

Challenges in Assessing Student's Reading

Educators face many challenges when attempting to assess students' reading abilities. The *Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System* provides solutions to meet the many challenges that educators face in assessing students' reading abilities.

Is the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System a standardized test?

Yes it is a standardized assessment. The administration, coding, scoring and interpretation are standardized procedures in order to obtain reliable results. We do expect that once the teacher gets the standardized results they will review the data so that they can make good instructional decisions, since good teacher decisions based on data are essential.

Is the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System an authentic assessment?

You cannot get closer to authentic assessment with the Benchmark Assessment System. The student reads several books, thinks and talks about them and writes about reading. This is not only a valid assessment of the competencies you want to measure, but is a good use of teacher and student time!

How can we assure that the teachers are conducting the assessment in a standardized manner?

The precise steps of the assessment are described in the Assessment Guide. The book introduction is standardized and printed on the cover of the book as well as the Recording Form. Also the tools to support the administration such as the F&P Calculator and the Assessment at a Glance and Coding and Scoring at a Glance help the teacher learn the steps and internalize them. Further, the professional development DVD provides clear examples to be used in the training of teachers to learn the precise steps in an assessment conference.

How does the assessment support teachers' ability to conduct the assessment conference with students whose first language is not English?

You will notice in the Assessment Guide that we have provided specific support to teachers to help them understand how language differences should be noticed in the administration of the assessment. We have also described the implications of a standardized test and the interpretation of it by providing case studies of English language learners in the Assessment Guide.

Does the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System help upper grade teachers learn about the reading process?

You will find that the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System is the perfect starting point for helping upper grade teachers observe and code the reading behaviors of the student. Then they can talk about the effective and ineffective behaviors and how the text may be appropriate or inappropriate to support new learning. With numerous assessments, you will find the teachers become much more knowledgeable and interested in what they are learning about the reading process and begin to understand the importance of differentiated instruction



Some teachers feel that the assessment is an accountability measure for them. Do you agree?

As teachers, we need to seek information about our students and also seek information that informs us as to how our teaching is impacting their learning. At the beginning of the year the assessment gives information about the starting points of the learners. As the school year progresses it becomes a tool for measuring the growth of the students and the effectiveness of your teaching. The series of assessments conducted over several years will reflect the success of the school in bringing each child forward in their literacy outcomes.

How does the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System contribute to a teacher's knowledge of students and how they develop as readers?

You will find that the comprehensive assessment and the variety of tools and options provided are rich resources for helping teachers learn how to systematically examine a student's strengths and needs and begin to think about the important link between assessment and instruction. You will find detailed information for teachers to analyze the behaviors of the student and link it to specific instructional goals in the Assessment Guide as well as a Guide for Noticing Reading Behaviors. This document is a learning tool in itself as it focuses the teacher's attention on critical reading behaviors. The Continuum of Literacy Learning: A Guide to Teaching is the foundation for instruction, as the teacher will be able to make a direct link from the data gathered to the specific behaviors to notice, teach and support in every instructional context related to literacy. The Professional Development DVD is another rich resource as it is designed to help teachers conduct efficient and effective assessments and learn how to interpret the results and connect their understandings to instruction. The Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment is designed to help teachers collect reliable evidence of student competencies and reading levels so they can begin the teaching where the learners are, bringing each reader forward in their competencies. No other assessment has been directly linked to the Fountas and Pinnell levels to date, so teachers will also have a reliable and valid assessment to link to guided reading lessons or other small group instruction.

How do you know where to start the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System so as to make the administration as time efficient as possible?

We provide several options for teachers to save time. We provide a Where to Start Word Test for teachers who have no other information on the student's previous reading. We also provide several charts that help teachers look at the texts students are reading and determine a good starting point.

How can the information from one teacher be passed on to other teachers so as to follow the students' literacy growth across the years?

You will find a variety of tools in the Assessment to support the documentation of a student's growth over time. The Data Management CD-ROM provides several options for reports on an individual or the whole class in table or graph format. The Student folder also provides a longitudinal graph for teachers to record progress each year. The folder is designed to allow the teacher to pass it to the teacher in the next grade and is designed to hold the assessment information on one student across 9 years.