

JENNINGS SPRCC APPLICATION

School Psychology Research Collaboration Conference (SPRCC) Application

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Personal Research Agenda

For the past six years, I have had the incredible opportunity of working as a scientist-practitioner in school psychology while coordinating district wide implementation of tiered instructional reading models. My first experience at district wide execution occurred in West Virginia with rich support from both state level personnel and the Response to Intervention (RtI) literature. The universal screenings, progress monitoring tasks, and increasingly intense tiers of instruction were implemented with a general acceptance that the RtI framework and assessments were appropriate for the targeted student population. Although the assessment validity and utility of certain progress monitoring tools were often challenged, their use in the Appalachian cultural context appeared unquestioned.

Today, as a second year practitioner on a remote island in Southeast Alaska, the distinct cultural context brings into question many elements and assumptions supporting a tiered reading model. My present research agenda is to advance the understanding of culturally responsive RtI assessment in diverse schools. The development and administration of curriculum-based vocabulary measures in September of 2008 to nearly 300 kindergarten, first, and second grade students was the first step toward that end. The vocabulary measures hold true to Deno's seminal definition of curriculum-based measurement (CBM) while also incorporating place-based curriculum terms (Deno, 2003). The place-based vocabulary components are the target words derived from the local culture, history, and geography that are often overlooked in traditional vocabulary measures (e.g., Peabody Picture Vocabulary, Expressive Vocabulary Test), progress monitoring instruments (e.g., DIBELS Word Use Fluency), and mastery measurement assessments found in core reading programs.

Five more specific research questions have emerged from the universal vocabulary screening pilot: 1) What is the most acceptable balance or proportion of place-based terminology relative to the overall population of vocabulary words or concepts?; 2) How do student growth trajectories on CBM vocabulary correlate to global gains on norm-referenced measures of vocabulary and verbal ability?; 3) Does the inclusion of multiple response modalities (i.e., receptive, expressive, gestures) across range of familiarity scoring rubrics engender more equitable assessment instruments for the student population and/or population subgroups?; 4) Do Tier One and Tier Two word lists, as defined by Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002), maintain consistency across cultures (Pearson, Hiebert, & Kamil, 2007)?; and 5) Can procedures for CBM vocabulary measures that include place-based terminology be replicated in other culturally and linguistically diverse school district with relative ease?

A small practitioner-to-student ratio (1:1200) and concomitant administrative support for my direct participation in intervention and research will facilitate success in the aforementioned projects. This ratio and support will also enable the continued development of other research interests including scholarly communication in school psychology, medications in school-age children, and interventions for students with reading disabilities. Ultimately, over the next two years, I hope to transition to a faculty position in school psychology or a state level position involving special education research.

Thank you for consideration of my application.

Sincerely,

R. Lanai Jennings, Ph.D.,
School Psychologist,
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References

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Deno, S. (2003). Developments in curriculum-based measurement. *The Journal of Special Education, 37*, 184-192.

Pearson, P.D., Hiebert, E.H., & Kamil, M.L. (2007). Vocabulary assessment: What we know and what we need to learn. *Reading Research Quarterly, 42*, 282-296.

Culturally Responsive Vocabulary Assessment

Abstract

The intent of the current study is to advance the Response to Intervention research in the area of culturally responsive assessment. A curriculum-based measure (CBM) in vocabulary that incorporates basic concepts and place-based target words will be developed for Kindergarten students for implementation across 3-5 culturally diverse sites. At each site, 100 students will be administered a fall, winter, and spring vocabulary screening. A smaller subset of students at each site will be recruited for validity testing with standard norm-referenced instruments of vocabulary and verbal ability. The smaller subgroup of students will also be administered equivalent forms of the CBM in vocabulary to determine its utility as a progress monitoring instrument. The CBM in vocabulary is presently being piloted with nearly 100 Kindergarten students on an island in Southeast Alaska as both a universal screening tool and as a progress monitoring instrument. The expected outcome of the study is the development of a reliable and valid assessment *process* that can be replicated in any diverse school district that incorporates place-based elements within the Kindergarten curriculum.

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Statement of Problem: Tiered instructional models are predicated on the universal administration of curriculum-based measurements (CBM), which directly inform instruction. In early reading, this collection of assessment tasks ideally corresponds to the components of reading that 1) receive instructional emphasis within a given time period and 2) are most predictive of later reading outcomes. These general elements (i.e., phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary) were outlined in the National Reading Panel (2000), and have since received widespread attention as State and Local Education Agencies adopt or develop assessment systems for Response to Intervention (RtI) implementation.

As Pearson, Hiebert, and Kamil (2007) point out, the prominence of the National Reading Panel's report appropriately re-established the standing of vocabulary as a central feature in classroom reading instruction. In validating vocabulary's critical role, the National Reading Panel also widened a window of rich opportunity for culturally responsive RtI assessment. Vocabulary, to a greater degree than most elements of reading, is inextricably tied to culture, geography, and a student's learning history within a given environment. Word choice, meaning, and multidimensionality are all culturally dependent variables. Culture and geography can therefore substantially influence, if not drive, the overall population of target words supported by a curriculum through formal (e.g., curriculum mapping, textbook adoption practices, themed units, field trips) and informal (e.g., individual parent, teacher, and student interactions) educational processes.

Vocabulary assessments suitable for RtI implementation are relatively rare, as can be evidenced by a review of *Tools* at the National Center on Student Progress Monitoring (NCSPM). Moreover, the instruments that do conform to CBM standards (e.g., DIBELS

Word Use Fluency (WUF)), are not necessarily sensitive to student growth, according to the criteria established by the NCSPM Technical Review Committee. Nor are such instruments typically responsive to the population of words in a curriculum outside of the mainstream American culture.

Purpose: The objective of the current proposal is to develop and validate a culturally responsive vocabulary *assessment process* for kindergarten students, which measures basic concepts and target words derived from the place-based curriculum. The place-based curriculum terms are the target words derived from the local culture, history, and geography that are judged to be valuable for a student's understanding of, and participation in, his or her local community.

Test Development: The assessment process will necessitate the development of a large pool of basic concept test items for universal screening and progress monitoring instrumentation, which could be easily accessed by any school district regardless of its cultural status. Basic concepts comprise a substantial part of the proposed assessment because 1) they include requisite language skills relevant to all kindergarten students; 2) such concepts cannot be assumed mastered by English Language Learners and students with developmental disabilities; and 3) basic concepts are not well sampled in other progress monitoring instruments in vocabulary.

The assessment process will then require the mapping of the total population of place-based vocabulary words in a kindergarten curriculum across 3-5 culturally distinct sites. The mapping will not only generate the population of words for the randomly sampling, but will also determine the units and weighting critical to the overall success of the randomly sampling. Following the mapping, stakeholders (parents, teachers, tribal

education leaders, etc) at each site will be asked to provide formal input on the balance of basic concept terms and place-based terms. After a common balance is agreed upon, construction of individually administered, CBM in vocabulary will commence. The fifteen item assessment is receptive and computer-based. (Results from the fall pilot administration in Southeast Alaska indicate that the average administration time is 3-4 minutes.) The forms at all sites will appear equivalent except with respect to the cultural-based items.

Test Validity: The universal vocabulary screenings will be administered in the fall, winter, and spring to all Kindergarten students in participating sites. A smaller subgroup of participants (approximately 25 at each site), will be recruited for progress monitoring and the initial validity and reliability testing. The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test - Fourth Edition, Bracken Basic Concept Scale – Third Edition, and two verbal ability subtests will be administered to the subgroup in the fall and spring for correlation results. Individually administered surveys will be administered to teachers to determine the ecological validity of the CBMs in vocabulary.

Multi-site Advantage: Because one instrument can in no way account for all place-based vocabulary terms, the development of an empirically-based process is fundamental. Steps to completing the instrumentation (e.g, word selection, picture representation, randomization, procedures) must be clearly delineated so that the outcome is a reliable, valid, and reproducible assessment tool that is sensitive to student growth over time. Such a process could provide culturally distinct school districts with greater access to vocabulary screenings that target mastery over end- of-year curriculum goals, while also advancing the theory and practice of culturally responsive vocabulary assessment.

References

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