Approaches to Reading Difficulties

Reading Assessment Analysis

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Abstract

School based reading assessment is implemented in Australian schools in order to help young children to identify their reading standards and help children at-risk to make progress to get over their difficulties at any level in their school. The content, mode and the assessment method in these kinds of reading assessment helps improve English oral language skills. There are various kinds of school based reading assessments that are used in Australian schools. These are as follows: Burt Word Reading Test, Improve – Education Services Australia, NEALE, Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS), Progressive Achievement Tests in Reading 4th Edition - PAT-R, South Australian Spelling Test, STAR (Supplementary Test of Achievement in Reading), Sutherland Phonological Awareness Test - Revised (SPAT-R), Tests of Reading Comprehension (TORCH), WARP - The Wheldall Assessment of Reading Passages, YARC York Assessment of Reading and Comprehension. Depending on the performance of an individual child or a group of children, the objectives of the teaching methods are often changed or revised in order to implement and improve the outcome of learning abilities in the formative years of a child's life.

Stated below are the details of the few of the reading assessment tools that are found in various Australian schools that assess different areas of linguistic abilities and thereby identifying the strengths and weaknesses in a child and providing interventions in the fields required accordingly.

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Reading Assessment Analysis

School based reading assessment is implemented in Australian schools in order to help young children to identify their reading standards and help children at-risk to make progress to get over their difficulties at any level in their school. The content, mode and the assessment method in these kinds of reading assessment helps improve English oral language skills. There are various kinds of school based reading assessments that are used in Australian schools. These are as follows: Burt Word Reading Test, Improve – Education Services Australia, NEALE, Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS), Progressive Achievement Tests in Reading 4th Edition - PAT-R, South Australian Spelling Test, STAR (Supplementary Test of Achievement in Reading), Sutherland Phonological Awareness Test - Revised (SPAT-R), Tests of Reading Comprehension (TORCH), WARP - The Wheldall Assessment of Reading Passages, YARC York Assessment of Reading and Comprehension. Depending on the performance of an individual child or a group of children, the objectives of the teaching methods are often changed or revised in order to implement and improve the outcome of learning abilities in the formative years of a child's life.

Stated below are the details of the few of the reading assessment tools that are found in various Australian schools that assess different areas of linguistic abilities and thereby identifying the strengths and weaknesses in a child and providing interventions in the fields required accordingly.

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1. Sutherland Phonological Awareness Test – Revised (SPAT-R)

Sutherland Phonological Awareness Test – Revised also known as SPAT-R in short is an assessment test developed by Dr. Roslyn Neilson. This test this test assesses a student's phonological awareness skills at the level of phonemes. Phonology is the sound pattern constraints that make up words in a particular language. Phonological awareness is the knowledge of sound inventory that are arranged according to phonological constraints in a language. These sounds are then attached to the letters or alphabets which are the basis for learning to read. Therefore, if the children are taught phonics at a very early age, it becomes easier for reading in a particular language. Along with the learning of phonics, vocabulary needs to be learnt too, which can then lead to the comprehension of a text. The elements that are assessed through this test are syllable counting, rhyme detection and production, CVC segmentation and blending, onset identification, final phoneme identification, onset deletion, deletion of final consonant, deletion of internal consonant, non-word reading and non-word spelling.

Commented [A2]: The technical terms are very well explained

Auditory tests are conducted for syllable counting, rhyme detection and production, CVC segmentation and blending, onset identification, final phoneme identification, onset deletion, deletion of final consonant, deletion of internal consonant,requiring no reading or writing response from the child. For non-word reading the child is asked to read a word list and for non-word spelling the child is asked to write non-words by listening to it.

Sutherland Phonological Awareness Test is assessed at four grade levels : Kinder-garden, Grade 1, Grade 2, Grade 3, in a group or individually.The test is calculated in percentile with reference to the year of schooling of the child. 25th percentile is taken as the cut off for all the

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evaluations. 25 to 75 percentile range is taken as the average for each year of schooling. If a child scores 25th percentile or above, then the child is a normal reader or comprehender. But if it is below average score, then the child is taken to be at risk and a poor comprehender.

Sutherland Phonological Awareness – Revised Test (SPAT-R) identifies learners who are having difficulties with phonological awareness, provides normed data, expressed in percentiles, contains two forms for pre- and post-intervention assessment. This assessment is sensitive to the development of phonological awareness skills at the very early stage. It identifies students who are at risk at a very early age before it can affect a child's later reading and comprehension. Teaching methods and strategies are implemented accordingly to monitor the progress of the child towards a particular goal. This reflects the outcome of the teaching methods and learning outcome.

2. Tests of Reading Comprehension (TORCH)

Reading comprehension is a process by which a reader comprehends the given text using conceptual knowledge and information given in the passage. Comprehension cannot be achieved without decoding the text. For decoding a text can only be done if the child has enough vocabulary, fluent in word recognition, inferencing skill and phonological awareness. Tests of Reading Comprehension or TORCH are an Australian-normed test that assesses and interprets students' performance in reading comprehension skills. TORCH sets an objective for the school reading curriculum. It estimates a student's reading abilities as well as comprehension skills which in turn provides information that can be used to set objectives in a classroom and planning effective teaching methods that can bring about development and improvement in reading

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comprehension. TORCH is a method by which the strengths and weaknesses in an individual are assessed by monitoring student's reading achievement once at the commencement of the academic year and then at the termination of the academic year; thereby intervening in the areas required for improvement. TORCH comprises of 12 sets of reading tests of fictional and non-fictional text which comprises of two hundred to thousand words each. These texts are of varying difficulties depending on the year of schooling of the child. In each of the tests the child has to analyze the text item by item in order to LOCATE, INTERPRET and USE. The child has to read the entire passage and then produce what he/she has comprehended in an answer sheet by filling in the gaps. Letter identification and development of concept in a child through reading is assessed. It provides a descriptive analysis of the child's level of reading comprehension. By analyzing the comprehension level of the children, a teacher can build objectives, strategies and methods of teaching such as: read and retell, guided silent reading, using Cloze for understanding.

Commented [A3]: Process has been explained with minutest details presented

Tests of Reading Comprehension also called TORCH is administered by school teachers to children aged three to ten, in a group or individually for 30 to 45 minutes in order to detect a child's comprehension as well as inferencing skills in order to understand inside text and out text knowledge to comprehend a passage.

The questions in the comprehension passage prompt the student to think and use information from outside the given passage, thereby establishing the inferencing skill of the child. As in the case of vocabulary test, the child has to use a synonym of a given word, and this he can only do by using conceptual or encyclopedic knowledge. Therefore, both textual comprehension and deductive reasoning are assessed by tests of reading comprehension. Therefore, testing with TORCH helps in identifying the comprehension level of the student and thereby modifying

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teaching methods accordingly to bring progress among children in a class. All the texts and the test items are of similar scale, therefore if helps the teacher to compare the level of comprehension among students and track the reading comprehension progress over time using similar standard materials. By assessing the reading standard at the commencement of the academic year and at the termination of the academic year, the difficulty level of reading passages is introduced in a class. One limitation to this assessment is that it does not evaluate the oral skills like fluency in a language because the tests involve silent reading on the part of the children.

3. Progressive Achievement Tests in Reading – PAT-R

The Australian Council of Educational Research developed another reading comprehension test known as the Progressive Achievement Tests in Reading or PAT-R in order to assess a student's word recognition skills, vocabulary and reading comprehension ability. It measures the literal and inferential knowledge in order to decode a given passage. This in turn helps the teachers to amend the teaching methods used in order to obtain better result in a class.

PAT-R can be taken both online as well as on paper. The tests consist of fictional and non-fictional passages which the students have read and answer questions that follows. The pattern is multiple choice questions testing vocabulary as well as reading comprehension. There are also nine spelling lists which are tested orally by the teacher. PAT-R can be taken by children aged 2-10 for spellings, 3-10 for vocabulary and reading comprehension by 2-10 years old. The time limit for each tests being 25 minutes for vocabulary, 10 minutes for spelling test and 30-40 minutes for reading comprehension. PAT-R can be used over a period of time to track the

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improvement of the student's vocabulary, inferencing skills and spelling. It tracks a student's literacy progress over a period of time. The teacher can thereby plan her teaching programs and change her objectives accordingly to meet the desired goal.

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The PAT-R scoring can be obtained either by ACER scoring or Hand scoring. The answer sheets of the PAT-R reading tests can be sent to ACER to automatically obtain results and reports. This is called ACER scoring. Hand scoring is when the scores of the PAT-R tests are received manually from the school. Percentile rank is the rank of the student in relation to norm scale. It helps individual children to know their level of reading comprehension. The percentile score is then divided into 9 categories which are called stanine score. This is useful for grouping children of the same intelligence quotient. The average stanine score is 4.5 to 6. Children below are score are at-risk in reading comprehension and immediate precaution is needed.

PAT-R, 4th edition assessment tool "is a major revision of Australian best-selling test of achievement in reading. The PAT reading Fourth Edition, is a thoroughly researched and normed test for measuring and tracking student achievement in reading comprehension, word knowledge and spelling" (Australian Council for Education, 2011). PAT-R assessment tool (1) addresses major areas of vocabulary and comprehension, and (2) is sensitive to text complexity. PAT-R assessment tool is sensitive and appropriate for individuals of differing cultures and needs. During item and reading prompt development, "the authors have attempted to maintain a balance of male and female characters and to provide material that is culturally varied" (Fugate, 2003).

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4. Sutherland Phonological Awareness test – Revised (SPAT-R)

Phonological awareness is defined as the knowledge of sound inventory that is used in one's own language and the one to one mapping of sound with the letter. At a very early age, precaution needs to be taken for children who have learning disabilities or are poor comprehenders. Sutherland Phonological Awareness Test – Revised (SPAT-R) is one such test that assesses a child's phonological awareness skills. This assessment is sensitive to the development of phonological awareness skills at the very early stage as it identifies children who are at risk before it can affect a child's later reading and comprehension.

Commented [A5]: Starting a section with a definition is a good academic practice

Phonological awareness tests provide a causal link in reading and spelling acquisition. SPAT-R assesses a child on elements such as syllable counting, rhyme detection and production, CVC segmentation and blending, onset identification, final phoneme identification, onset deletion, deletion of final consonant, deletion of internal consonant, non-word reading and non-word spelling. Aural tests are conducted for syllable counting, rhyme detection and production, CVC segmentation and blending, onset identification, final phoneme identification, onset deletion, deletion of final consonant, deletion of internal consonant requiring no reading or writing response from the child. For non-word reading the child is asked to read a word list and for non-word spelling the child is asked to write non-words by listening to it. There are two forms, either of which can be used for the testing: Form A and Form B. Form A comes in sand, buff or yellow paper; and Form B comes in pink paper. The stimulus sheet contains picture for rhyme detection, drums for syllable counting, boxes for phoneme counting and blank space for writing non-word spelling.

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Hamish is a student of Grade 1, aged 6, who took the Sutherland Phonological Awareness Test - Revised (SPAT-R). He scored a top notch in syllable detection (hel-i-cop-ter), rhyme detection (dive, teeth, five), rhyme production (cap, tap, nap), CVC segmentation (mug as m-u-g), first phoneme or onset identification (sh in shark), last consonant or final phoneme identification (ch in watch)but was unable to score in CVC blends, boundary consonant deletion and internal consonant deletion. He showed poor performance in non-word reading and non-word spelling tests. His letter knowledge was good, but there were several reversals of /d/ with /b/ (probably because these are mirror alphabets) and showed difficulties in CC and VV cluster (he could still be said to retain the letter naming stage since his spellings were mostly phonetic in nature). He was able to repeat non-words correctly when asked to do so but was unable to write it down in the right sequence resulting in reversals in consonants mostly. The scoring in SPAT-R is done by percentile ranking and then by pointing it in the graph for visual presentation. The percentile ranking is calculated as the raw score of the child against his year of schooling. Each year of schooling has different average percentile scores. For the first year of schooling, the percentile scoring average was 25 to 75. Hamish scored a total of 77 percentile rank which was slightly above the average ranking for the first year of schooling. Therefore, this child was not at-risk level and needs no such immediate interventions or precautions as such though he needs to develop his spellings according to the orthography and improve his knowledge in phonological constraints.

There is a clear linkage between phonological awareness and reading comprehension as better phonological awareness can lead to faster acquisition of reading skills (Gough and Hillinger , 1980; Mattingly, 1972). Testing phonological awareness allows the invigilator to understand if the child will become a poor or a normal reader in the long term. Ehri, 1981;

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Morais, 1991; Morais, Alegria& Content, 1987 studied that learning to reading in itself leads to better awareness of phonology. They studied those illiterate Portuguese adults who were not exposed to reading from the very childhood performed poorly on phonological awareness tasks than those illiterates who were exposed to reading only in their childhood and later became illiterate. This was also found in Chinese. American children who were exposed to phonemic awareness prior schooling performed better than Germans who were not exposed to it. This proves that phoneme awareness is directly linked to literacy exposure.

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Limitations with SPAT-R are few. Often children are unable to separate consonant blends therefore when they were asked to say play without 'p' or flight without 'f' they would generally reply /ay/ or /ait/. At a very small age, children tend to realize blends as one sound which refines over time. Therefore, if a child cannot separate blend at an early age, it does not mean he would not be able to do it later. Children who do not possess alphabetic knowledge show poor phonemic awareness at an early age (Johnston, Anderson and Holligan, 1996). If SPAT-R is assessed at that stage and the child is unable to segmentation or blending tasks, it does not mean the child is at risk. Again, if the test is taken in a group, a child may not feel comfortable answering and reply 'don't know'. Time constraints are also often a problem for the child since enough time might not be given to him for phoneme realization at times.

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Reference

Commented [A7]: Starting references in a fresh page is a good practice

Australian Council for Education. (2011). Progressive achievement tests in reading (4th ed.) - PAT-R revised 2008. Retrieved on November 7, 2011 from 3 Collaborative Center for Literacy Development.

Ehri, L. C., &Wilce, L. S. (1980).The influence of orthography on readers' conceptualisation of the phonemic structure of words.Applied Psycholinguistics, 1, 371–385.

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Gough, P. B., &Hillinger, M. L. (1980).Learning to read: an unnatural act. Bulletin of the Orton Society, 30, 179–196.Johnston, R., Anderson, M., &Holligan, C. (1996). Knowledge of the alphabet and explicit awareness of phonemes in pre-readers: the nature of the relationship. Reading and Writing, 8, 217–234.

Neilson, Roslyn (2009). Sutherland Phonological Awareness Test – Revised (SPAT-R). University of Wollongong.

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Marking Rubrics

Criterion	Levels of achievement		
	Exemplary	Good	Poor
Writing style and presentation are clear			
• Introduction	Introductory statement clearly indicates the main purpose of the contribution and suggests the plan of organization, so the reader can anticipate the text that will follow.	Introductory statement indicates the main purpose of the contribution in general terms, so the reader has some idea of what will follow.	The introduction does not give an overview of the contribution so the readers are not sure what to expect as they read the text.
• Main Body	Main body of contribution makes connected points that clearly build the argument so the text flows from introduction to conclusion in a logical manner, thereby helping the reader to follow the thinking behind the text.	The main body presents a number of points that allow the reader to understand the argument, but lapses in the writing may force the reader to make some connections between the parts.	The text is not well structured so the reader must stop reading at times to try to makes sense of the text.
• Conclusion	The main point of the contribution is clearly indicated and reinforced so the reader can clearly remember it.	The main point of the contribution is indicated, but may be stated in an unconvincing manner.	The concluding section does not reinforce or revisit the main point so the reader is unsure about it and likely to misinterpret or forget it.
• Written expression	Sentences and paragraphs are well structured and clear so the reader can focus on what is written. Each paragraph has a topic sentence that indicates the subject matter.	Minor lapses in sentence structure, such as run-on sentences and unnecessarily complex sentence structures, force the reader to pause and reflect on the meaning of the text. Paragraphs present a complete argument, but may not flow so well.	Many sentences are poorly structured so the reader must stop often to reflect on the meaning of the text. Many paragraphs lack topic sentences or have poor flow so the main points and linkages among explanatory text are not clear.

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• Grammar, punctuation and spelling	Grammar, spelling and punctuation are flawless, which allows the reader to focus on the message.	Some minor errors in grammar, spelling and/or punctuation detract from the quality of the text, but do not impair the communication.	Many errors in grammar, spelling and/or punctuation make reading the text difficult and communication is impaired.
Concepts and arguments are well developed			
• Accuracy	All information is accurately reported using appropriate terminology so the information is reliable.	The information is largely accurate but imprecise language could lead a reader to misinterpret aspects of the text.	Although the gist of the information is correct, there are problems with the interpretation of it. A reader can be misled by the text.
• Relevance	Connections between the contribution and the main topic of the discussion are clearly indicated.	Connections between the contribution and the main topic of the discussion are indicated or implied, but the reader needs to pause to clarify those connections.	Although the text is relevant, this is not clearly indicated, so the reader must guess how the text relates to the main topic.
• Significance	The reason why the contribution is important to the overall discussion is clearly described and discussed so the reader takes the contribution seriously.	The reason why the contribution is important is touched on but not elucidated, so the reader must make some interpretations about the author's view of the contribution's significance.	The contribution may include significant material but this is not indicated, so the reader must guess it.
• Clarity	The main points and new technical terms are clearly described and/or explained so the reader is left with no ambiguity about what was written.	Although the text is clear to informed audiences, unexplained points may leave room for alternative interpretations of the text.	Key points and new technical terms are not explained so the reader is confused.
• Independence	The contribution is completely self-contained so the reader does not have to read other contributions or published materials to understand what was written about.	The text is sufficiently clear that the reader can understand the main point without further reading, but some parts of the text are not clear without consulting earlier contributions or other sources of information.	The text is written in a manner that presumes considerable prior knowledge, so the reader must have a thorough knowledge of what has been written about the subject in order to understand the main point of the contribution.
Contribution is responsive to another contribution	The writer links ideas submitted by others to their own contribution in a manner that substantially strengthens the group's efforts to resolve the main problem. This	The writer makes references to earlier works that are a starting point for new ideas but, apart from the reference to the earlier work, not much information is incorporated	The text mentions other contributions but neither explains the reference nor substantially adds to it, so there is no clear benefit to

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	linkage can include elaboration of what was previously written, a critique or questioning of it, demonstration of linkages among two or more earlier contributions, and/or utilization of an earlier contribution as a foundation to build your own.		the resolution of the main problem from citing the earlier contribution.
Text is supported by references			
• Sources indicated	All information and ideas that are not commonly know are supported with references to sources, so the reader has confidence that the information is not based on hearsay or the writer's opinion or assumptions alone.	Most sources are indicated, but in only a few cases the sources are not given or are ambiguous, so the reader has to check some of the sources.	Sources are cited for some specific parts of the contribution, but no references are supplied for information and ideas that are clearly not the author's, so the reader has no idea of the validity and authority of the information.
• Relevant references	Information, concepts and opinions are supported with references to published literature, especially primary (original) sources of information, rather than review articles or textbooks. This allows the reader to independently review the cited sources. More than one reference is cited to support key points, which adds strength and authority to the argument.	One or a few references are used to support the text. Thus the contribution is supported but this may be an idiosyncratic source. Some general references to textbooks are made that could have been replaced by primary references which are more thorough and authoritative.	Information comes from Web sites or other sources that have no recognized authority, so the validity or strength of the source is unknown.
• Citation style	References cited appropriately in the text, and the correct format is used in the text when citing information, so the reader clearly knows which information is attributable to which source.	Minor lapses in citation format do not prevent the reader from finding the sources in the reference list at the end of the contribution.	Citation format incorrect or poorly placed in the text, so citations distract from reading.
• Bibliographic information	The reference list contains complete bibliographic information (author's name(s), publication date, title, source, date web page accessed), so a reader can easily find the references for their own research.	Bibliographic information largely complete, but some information missing so the reader may have difficulty finding some references. Most sources can still be easily checked.	Not all references are listed, information in the reference list is incorrect, or important information is missing from the reference list, so the reader is unable to find the same sources of information and the

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	The authority of sources can be evaluated by checking them.		authority of sources is almost entirely unknown.

Comments: The text is well written in terms of English usage. Minute gap areas can be identified in punctuation errors that makes the reader pause and develop a meaning for the sentence and manage the flow of the work, which though has been very well explained but slight clarity issues if avoided would be better.

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