

A COMPARATIVE EVALUATION OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEVELS DETERMINED
BY THE TEXT READING AND COMPREHENSION (TRC) ASSESSMENT AND AN
INFORMAL READING INVENTORY

A Dissertation
by
AMIE BROCK SNOW

Submitted to the Graduate School
at Appalachian State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

December 2014
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program
Reich College of Education

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Abstract

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This study compared the administration of, and results yielded by, two different contextual reading instruments (an informal reading inventory [IRI] and the Text Reading and Comprehension inventory [TRC]). The purpose was to determine which instrument would provide the most valid assessment of children's reading ability. The study targeted the TRC because it recently has become the required reading assessment for primary-grade students (K – 3) in the state of North Carolina. IRI assessments have a long tradition of use for assessing children's reading levels.

A trained team of teachers administered both reading assessments to 196 first-, second-, and third-grade students. A third informal test (word recognition-timed) was administered to a randomly-selected one third of the 196 students. Word recognition-timed (WR-t) served as a neutral measure to which student performance on the IRI and TRC could be compared.

Results showed clear differences between the IRI and the TRC in regard to administration time and student reading level yielded. The TRC assessments took nearly three times as long to administer as the IRI assessments. The student reading levels yielded by the respective assessments were significantly different, with the IRI levels higher and more often in agreement with the neutral measure, WR-t. The data revealed that the TRC systematically underestimated students' reading instructional level, in most cases because testing was terminated prematurely, owing to poor student performance on written comprehension questions.

That the state-mandated TRC took an inordinate amount of time to administer (approximately 1 hour) and tended to underestimate children's reading ability are important findings and cause for concern. Several suggestions for improving the assessment are offered, including (a) eliminating written comprehension questions, (b) administering fewer reading passages, and (c) including reading rate as a factor in determining a student's instructional level.