



Reading assessment done right – with Dr. Stephanie Stollar and Kate Winn

Reach All Readers Podcast #238

Anna Geiger: Welcome back to the podcast Stephanie and Kate!

Stephanie Stollar: Thank you, Anna, for having us with you.

Kate Winn: I'm thrilled to be here.

Anna Geiger: So I'm so excited to talk to both of you about your book, *Reading Assessment Done Right*. Before we do that though, can I ask you to reintroduce yourself?

Stephanie Stollar: Sure. I'm Stephanie Stollar. I live in Cincinnati, Ohio, and I have a consulting business where I support educators to learn about the science of reading and MTSS and implement that in their schools.

Kate Winn: And I have been teaching for, this is my 26th year now, in Ontario, Canada. I have experience in many different grades and subjects, but this is my 10th year in kindergarten. And I'm also the host and co-producer of IDA Ontario's podcast, "Reading Road Trip."

I work for OnLit, which is an Ontario organization supporting language curriculum, and I deliver PD for teachers as well.

Anna Geiger: Fabulous. So tell us a little bit about why you wrote your book.

Stephanie Stollar: Well, for me as a school psychologist, it was always challenging to feel like teachers didn't have the same assessment information that I did. And I often also experience that teachers seem to waste time. They don't have time to waste, and they would be wasting time doing assessments that weren't really very valuable for them, that weren't actually answering the questions that they had about their students.

And I also wanted to write this book because I've worked in educator preparation over my career, and there's never been a good book that would support initial teacher preparation or the preparation of reading specialists or even school psychologists with basic introductory practical information about assessment.

So those were my driving reasons. And plus Kate asked me. She had a great idea and I, I had to say yes to it.

Kate Winn: Well, I know when I started learning about the science of reading, I devoured a lot of books and was definitely interested in, you know, reading books and writing books and, and I know there are some topics that are really well covered.

Like Anna, your book is an excellent book. But in terms of like where the niche was, I realized, you know, assessment is really an area that there isn't a lot out there for teachers and there are so many misconceptions. I know how changing assessment impacted my entire practice and I just thought, you know, I'd love to get all that information out there and accessible and this is a great series that we thought our book would be a great fit for.

And then of course when Stephanie agreed to do it, then it was perfect.

Anna Geiger: Yeah, and I think there are, like you said, so many questions about assessment and you have managed to put it together in a pretty compact book. Now it's pretty dense, I would say. There's a lot in there, but you walk us through it very carefully and there's a lot of, I would say, frequently asked questions in the margins that are covered, which is fantastic.

The kinds of things Stephanie, that you know, teachers ask. And Kate, it's wonderful you coming from the perspective of a teacher, especially someone who, like myself, was a balanced literacy teacher at one time and wasn't always doing this kind of assessment.

How has the way you approached assessment for reading changed throughout your career?

Kate Winn: When I got my first English homeroom, because I taught French as a second language for a bit, but my first English homeroom was a grade 4/5 combined class, and when I got in there, there was just a PM benchmark binder, A DRA binder. You're just supposed to follow it and do it. So I don't remember getting any training or being, you know, taught how to use that information or anything like that. It's just, here's what you do and then here are the times of year you have to put your information on your spreadsheets and that sort of thing.

Then I moved down through the grades down to a 3/4, and I was in grade three for several years and then a 2/3, so getting into more of those early years. Again, it was just give your PM benchmarks and compare them to this, I want to say biblical chart, that basically told us what level the students should be at, at what part of each grade. And I don't say biblical lightly because I teach in a Catholic school, but I knew that my grade threes were supposed to get to PM Benchmark 27 by the end of the year. So that was the goal. They had to be at 27. I had absolutely no idea how to get them to 27, what 27 meant with the difference between 26 or 27. But basically that was assessment.

There were less formal things too. Like we would have things like strategy of the month with the beginning of the year, everybody do a prediction pre-assessment, and then we're going to teach prediction all month. And at the end of the month do a prediction post-assessment, sort of non-evidence based assessments as well. But basically that's the kind of stuff I was doing.

And then when I finally got down to kindergarten, again, it was just that PM benchmark, trying to get them on the chart and not even necessarily knowing how or why.

Anna Geiger: Well, and that is one thing a lot of teachers have a hard time letting go of or they're trying to switch to more evidence-based assessment, but their principal wants them to do a leveled literacy assessment to figure out what "level" their students are at.

This is for either one of you, but where do you think that came from exactly and who decided what those levels are? For each grade level where kids are supposed to be, what does that even mean?

Kate Winn: Oh, well, I know that with the charts we were given, often it was just the discretion of the publisher, right?

These were sort of arbitrary levels that they came up with in-house to kind of say, yeah, we think grade three should probably be able to be 25, 26, 27 by the end of the year. And then of course, we have learned since then that those levels don't necessarily mean what we thought they did.

Stephanie Stollar: Yeah. Years ago, I searched up sort of a manual for the DRA and there was some statement in there about how they had gotten together a group of teachers, and it was by consensus that they decided what level students should be attaining at the end of each grade level.

Anna Geiger: So interesting.

Stephanie Stollar: Just sort of made up.

Anna Geiger: Well, yeah, and, but they're so held onto so tightly, I think because you think it's so clear. It feels like, okay, now I have this exact number that I need. So now I know if I've been successful or not, but we know that like the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment, the DRA, running records, et cetera, those things that are intended to find a level for students are not research or evidence-based.

Can you talk to us a little bit more, Kate, about why we need to stop using those types of assessments?

Kate Winn: Sure. Yeah. So as we just mentioned, the first piece that the levels don't mean what, what we thought they did, right. They're not giving us that useful information that we want. They don't predict risk the same way some of the assessments that we advocate for do.

And I think about the work of Dr. Matt Burns and some of his colleagues, in one study in particular, where they looked at one of those running record level systems to see if it accurately predicted reading risk. And Dr. Burns always jokes now that you're better off just flipping a coin because it's only going to be accurate just a little over 50% of the time.

So for the time and the money, because that's another piece, right? Like these assessments can be expensive. They can be really, really lengthy. We're not actually figuring out who's at risk, which is a really important piece of our assessment. They don't follow a scope and sequence as well.

Screeners don't necessarily, except screeners do follow a scope and sequence of essential skills that do need to be gained.

But if we're talking about a phonics scope and sequence, we can get that from diagnostics, which we also recommend and talk about. We have a chapter on each of these types of assessment in the book.

But we know that we can't necessarily say, well this child is at level J. We want to get them to level K next. Well, is it r-controlled vowels? Is it vowel teams? Is it multi-syllabic words? Now there isn't that kind of scope and sequence in the early years, they don't actually even assess reading.

And so that's really what kind of kick-started me into to learning about this in kindergarten because it was just those patterned, predictable text. Once you've taught them what the base of the sentence is,

they can look at the picture and this is the zoo animal for this page, this is the zoo animal on the next page, which we know that guessing based on pictures or just following a pattern isn't even reading. So in those early levels, they aren't useful, and also they're not standardized the same way that we want to see with a lot of the assessments that we use, especially with our screeners.

Because there isn't that timed piece that I think maybe we might talk about later and different things about instructions and the prompts that are allowed and things like that so that we can kind of compare students to benchmarks and get accurate information and get useful information for instruction.

Lots of reasons why we can kind of set those assessments aside and move forward.

Anna Geiger: I appreciate you explaining why the standardization is important, because we can't compare them to benchmarks if everyone's not receiving the same test, administered the same way, with the same items.

So you talked about how one problem with these other assessments is they don't predict risk, and I think some people might say, well, what's the point? Why do I even need my assessment to do that?

Could you go into a little bit more detail about why that's important?

Kate Winn: Yeah, so basically we need to know which students are at risk, and if we're going to talk a little more about screeners later, we can get into that even more.

But we need to know which students are at risk so that we can actually instruct them with what they need to learn and get them back on the right track. Right?

We know that there's a lot of evidence for early intervention, but you don't know that you need to intervene or what you need to intervene on if you're not assessing those skills. That's where a really key part of that initial screening and initial assessment comes in is to see which students, and even which systems, looking more broadly, might be at risk.

Anna Geiger: You talked about how those early benchmark assessments are really not testing early literacy skills at all.

After I became more aware of what I was missing with my balanced literacy approach, I realized that they basically just test to see if kids are good at using three-cueing, because they're giving these leveled books and they're using the picture and the pattern. And now we know that three-cueing is definitely not backed by research at all, so that makes you wonder what the value of those early assessments is at all.

Now of course, as you move further along, they're getting into other skills. But as you said these skills are not predictive of future success. We need to zero in on those specific skills.

Stephanie, could you talk to us about the reading skills that teachers should be assessing, starting in kindergarten, moving up, and why?

Stephanie Stollar: Yeah. So we should be assessing the same essential literacy skills that the research has concluded are essential for students to become readers. So the program of research that culminated in the National Reading Panel Report really laid out those big five essential literacy skills:

phonemic awareness, vocabulary and oral language, the alphabetic principle and basic phonics, text reading fluency, and reading comprehension.

Research converges around the essential nature of those skills. Without those skills, you're not going to be a skilled reader, and there's somewhat of a sequence of teaching and acquiring those skills.

So we wouldn't be focusing on reading comprehension first, that's sort of where everything culminates, and because we know that those are the essential skills that's what we should be focusing on and measuring. There could be other things that, for individual students, we might also investigate, but when we're talking about universal screening, testing of everyone to see who's on track and who needs more support, we can really lean into those five.

We don't need to assess every single grade level standard when we're doing screening. That would be more like an achievement test. So, really leaning into what the research indicates are the essential skills that can provide teachers with guidance about what to assess.

If you think about The Simple View of Reading, that's one of the ways that we framed this in the book is thinking about word recognition, questions that you have about students and assessments that will help you answer those questions and language comprehension questions you have about students and the assessments that'll help you answer them.

Anna Geiger: So why is it important that these assessments are timed? I know with Acadience, these are one-minute measures, I assume with DIBELS as well, and other CBM assessments. Why is that important?

Kate Winn: So when I think about why we need to time them, I think about the idea of the instructional hierarchy.

So the idea that there are phases that you move through when you are learning something new. And this isn't just about reading, so this applies to math, or it could be a skill like knitting or driving, or, in Canada, playing hockey, shooting a puck, those kinds of skills. The analogy works well here, so the idea that when you learn something new, it's that acquisition phase where you're learning to do it and do it accurately. That is the first step. We don't want to like rush people into, you know, timing things and racing and being fast without being accurate. Accuracy is the first priority.

But after accuracy, then there's the fluency building phase, and that's where you get automatic at it, and rate does matter. And you know, like I said, the hockey analogy works well here that you might have the most accurate shot. You can get it exactly where you want in that net. But if you need to stop in the middle of a game to say, okay, left hand here, right hand here, turn my body this way, okay, the puck is gone. The moment is lost, right? So you also have to be automatic with those skills.

And then of course the third, or some say third and fourth, the generalization and adaptation phases are when you are being able to use these skills in different contexts and that sort of thing.

But that fluency phase is so important, and that's why you'll see with almost every screener measure, it's for sound fluency, nonsense word fluency, oral reading fluency.

We are timing this because it's not just about whether you're accurate, you have to be accurate. That's most important thing to start with, but you also have to have that automaticity.

And when we talk about the reading context, we know how much automaticity matters as well for comprehension. A really, really strong correlation between words correct per minute with oral reading fluency and comprehension as well, right? So you might have a student who reads a passage and they

get two lines done in that minute. They're perfect. So their accuracy is going to say one hundred percent, but are they as good a reader as the child that gets, you know, 12 lines down in that minute with one hundred percent accuracy? They're not.

We know that timing is so important and we hear sometimes kind of a pushback on the anxiety piece and that sort of thing. But we also know that we're kind of underestimating educators if we think that we're going to cause anxiety. We're doing something wrong if the way we're giving assessments is causing anxiety, but also there's going to be a heck of a lot more anxiety if kids don't learn how to read.

So the idea of getting them used to the fact that I'm going to set a timer and you're going to do this, and this is just normal and you're doing it a few times a year. Or for some kids if they're being progress monitored, it's going to be more than that. But it's just the idea that this is important, this is going to make you a better reader.

Lots of evidence and research to back that timed piece. Really important.

Anna Geiger: Yeah. The importance of automaticity and measuring for that. And also, it's also great news for teachers that this doesn't take a lot of time that that research shows that just that short measure does let us predict future reading success.

Then for those who might wonder, well, that's not enough time, that's where the diagnostic piece comes in, right? So if students are not meeting benchmarks and we want to figure out what's going on, then we can dive deeper and give a more thorough look, like through a phonics diagnostic assessment, possibly a comprehension one, but that does not have to come initially.

Could you define for us, Stephanie, curriculum-based measures? I've had many people define this for me, but something about the phrase always stops me up. I think I understand it, but for those who maybe don't, could you walk us through what that even means? Curriculum-based measures, CBM, and examples of those?

Stephanie Stollar: Sure. Well, the term curriculum-based measurement describes assessments that are similar to what teachers do in the classroom and what students do in the classroom, so they're very naturalistic. It involves students producing the names of letters, the sounds connected to letters, reading text, answering questions about text. Things that are connected to, in a broad sense, the curriculum, but not a specific curriculum. It's not assessing what is in your published reading series, but the curriculum or the scope of what you expect students to acquire. Going back to those five essential literacy skills, right? We expect students to acquire phonemic awareness and the alphabetic principle and text reading fluency, for example. So it's like sampling from that broader curriculum of what's necessary to become a reader.

The other ways I would define it would be to describe characteristics of curriculum-based measures. They are constructed very specifically for a specific set of purposes. The main idea is we want to be making decisions about students over time, not at a single point in time.

So some assessments that teachers use are sort of like the pre-test and post-test that Kate mentioned earlier. When we're making decisions about early literacy, we want to be able to measure students' performance over time in response to the instruction or intervention that we're providing.

So curriculum-based measures are by definition brief, usually one-minute indicators of those big five essential skill areas. They are standardized. Every student has the same assessment opportunity. They are reliable and valid for the purposes of universal screening and progress monitoring. They are

sensitive to growth over time – beginning, middle, to end of year, that kind of timeframe, but also on a weekly or daily basis. So they're constructed to be not just yes, no questions.

Once you get to a hundred percent, there's nowhere to grow from there. But to be these little increments of learning that are sensitive to and can be observed over time on a weekly or a daily basis. The whole idea is that you're getting close with your assessment to what's actually happening in the classroom.

Other types of academic assessments might be removed from the classroom setting and the tasks that students do in a classroom, especially some of the assessments that are given by school psychologists or other diagnosticians where you're having students do something like, I don't know set up an arrangement of pictures or stack blocks or draw a picture of something and then you're making an inference back to the students' reading performance in the classroom.

Curriculum-based measures are exactly not that. They are connected to the real behaviors that are involved with literacy.

Anna Geiger: Well, thank you. That's the clearest I've heard it explained.

Stephanie Stollar: Well maybe you have some good background knowledge that was developed by other people who answered that question.

Anna Geiger: I don't know. That was really good though. I think it's also helpful to remember that curriculum we're talking about, the broad idea of what's taught versus a program, because those words are sometimes used interchangeably and that can be confusing.

Stephanie Stollar: Yeah. Just for a little history lesson, back in the day when I first started using curriculum-based measures in the late eighties, these tools had been around for 10 or 15 years already. But what we were doing was actually creating materials out of our actual published reading series. Yes. There were no standard sets of oral reading fluency assessments, for example, or no standard set of, of non-words for students to read. We were taking the passage from our Scott Foresman reading series or whatever it was, and cutting and putting on the Xerox machine a little selection that was 150 to 200 words and that's what we would have students read. So it's a real advancement and advantage that we now have freely available tools for doing CBM that are not program specific.

Anna Geiger: So initially they weren't standardized, it was just what teachers had.

Stephanie Stollar: It was just what teachers had. The directions, the scoring rules were still standard, but the materials themselves were not standard and it didn't matter as much because we also didn't have benchmark goals. All we could do was local norms. So you just got the sample of all third graders, they all got the same Scott Foresman passage for a minute, and then you just did your own little micro norm across your third graders. What's the 50th percentile and so on.

Anna Geiger: Okay. Interesting.

Stephanie Stollar: So things have come a long way in, in my short career.

Anna Geiger: Can you talk to us about what validity and reliability mean when it comes to assessment and CBMs in general?

Stephanie Stollar: Yeah, so validity and reliability are part of what people call technical adequacy, like the sort of construction and design behind the tools that make them more worthy of confidence, right? So, we want to make sure that we have reliable assessments that are consistent across time, across assessors, across forms of the, let's say, passage that we would have students read.

Reliability refers to consistency, and it's really important, especially when we're measuring student growth over time that the assessment is reliable. If for some reason there was an easier version of the assessment given at the end of the year or one assessor gave the student three minutes and another one gave the student one minute, we wouldn't be able to compare apples to apples.

And reliability is important for validity, which is the other thing you asked about, which is telling us if the assessment is actually measuring what we think it measures.

There are several aspects to validity, but most importantly we want to make sure that the construct we think we're measuring, if we think we're measuring reading comprehension, there's some evidence that we actually are. If we think we're measuring phonemic awareness, that we're using a tool that has demonstrated validity, it is valid for measuring that construct of phonemic awareness.

And assessments need to be reliable before they can be valid. So the two ways of evaluating assessments work together, and again, this is really important when we're making essential decisions, what some people would call high-stakes decisions about students. When the stakes are high, we want to make sure we have a consistent measure that's actually tapping into the skill that we're concerned about when the stakes are low.

If I'm just informally gathering information to guide my instruction, I don't need to necessarily make sure that I'm using something that's reliable and valid.

But when it comes to early literacy, which I would say is high-stakes, when it comes to making decisions about student progress over time, intensifying support, decisions about eligibility for special education, that's when we need to make sure we're using tools that have established reliability and validity.

Anna Geiger: So a lot of schools are switching more towards computer adaptive tests like MAP, Star, iReady. I know you have a whole article about that, which I'll link to in the show notes, but is there anything you would like to share about those tools? Do you think there's a place for them? Or not? I think schools are using them because they're easy.

But I wonder sometimes if they're really giving useful instructional information, anything you want to share about that?

Stephanie Stollar: Easy for whom is what I would start with. They seem easy for the instructor because they're not involved in giving the assessment; not easy for the student, especially ones who have attention issues or fine motor issues or are not familiar with using a mouse or having to sit through 45 minutes of assessment.

Some of those computer adaptive tests do have good evidence of their ability to be used for universal screening. They do have that predictive validity piece where scores on those tests can actually tell you who's on track and who's not on track.

The problem is those tests are not also helpful for organizing instruction, deciding who needs help, grouping for instruction, and they can't be used for progress monitoring.

My hesitation about them, especially in K-3, is not so much about they can't be used for screening, because some of them can, but you're going to have to have a curriculum-based measure for making those instructionally relevant decisions about grouping and so forth and for progress monitoring. So why have two tools? Why spend the time and money training staff on two different assessments when you can just have CBM that will do both things for you? So there's an efficiency factor in my reluctance to recommend those tools.

I think for students who are on track after third grade, if you still want to do universal screening, you know, using something that is tapping into all of the grade level standards, like a computer adaptive test does, I cannot argue with that. I think that's fine. But for students who are not on track, I think we're going to have to use the CBM assessments instead.

Anna Geiger: So my understanding is that some of these tests actually do purport to help you group your students.

Stephanie Stollar: They almost all claim to.

Anna Geiger: Why are they not good for that?

Stephanie Stollar: Because of the nature of a computer adaptive assessment, the algorithm in the software advances students to more difficult items when they get an item right and sends them back in the sequence to an easier item when they get an item wrong. And so each student has their own path through the assessment. That's a positive factor that these things are sold on.

So that means it's not standardized because each student is not having the same assessment experience, so you can end up with two students who have the same score... The scores are highly manipulated on the backend in a way that's not transparent, and two students with the same score could have had different test items presented to them.

So the kind of thing that seems rational from a teacher's perspective, my two students who scored 312 or whatever it is, they must have the same needs and I'm going to put them in the same group, that's really incorrect. It's just not accurate. So it's very misleading, and teachers spend a lot of time trying to figure out how to make sense of these assessments, and they just don't give that instructionally classroom-relevant information.

Anna Geiger: Yeah, I think that the key thing is that just because they scored the same doesn't mean they had the same score, they didn't have the same items. Or someone might not have even been tested on a particular skill because they tested past it. Right?

Stephanie Stollar: That's right. So they might have tested out of, so to speak, that's the way it gets reported, that the student doesn't need help with, let's say, phonemic awareness, but they actually didn't experience any test items on that skill at all.

Yeah, there's just a lot happening behind the scenes that's not clear and transparent and easy to understand.

I'm just a much bigger fan of directly measuring, asking students to perform the same kinds of things that we're working on with them in the classroom.

Anna Geiger: Yes, and one more thing before we move on. By "behind the scenes," you're just saying what's happening within the computer to calculate the score? Is that what you mean by that?

Stephanie Stollar: Yes, to advance the student through the test items. That's one of the behind the scenes things that's not totally transparent.

And then the manipulation of the score before it's reported to you. So because everybody has different experience with the test items, they have to be equated somehow. And so that process, that mathematical process is not easily understood. All you get is this, score at the end, but interpreting and understanding that score and acting on it is not straightforward at all.

Anna Geiger: Thank you. That's really good to remember because if you've given an Acadience or another... I've given Acadience assessments as a volunteer, and it's very clear you know exactly what was given and what came out. Right? Because a child is producing the answers.

That's the other big thing, I think you probably mentioned that, they actually have to produce the answers versus they can't just guess and by luck get something right. But yeah, it's all in front of you so you know exactly what they've done and where you're at.

Kate, can you walk us through screening, diagnostic, and progress monitoring, and especially what this looks like for you in your kindergarten classroom?

Kate Winn: Sure, so first I'll just explain a little bit about what each one is, and then I'll give you a glimpse into our classroom.

When we're talking about screening with all of these, it's kind of helpful to think about what question does it answer.

So with screening, we're thinking about who needs help, and also even how many, right? We're just looking at, you know, does the whole grade need help? Is there a systems thing we need to look at? Do we need to adjust Tier 1 instruction? So not just who, but also how many students need help.

A good analogy for that is a thermometer at a wellness check. Regardless of symptoms, we're just going to take everyone's temperature, and that's why it's universal screening, it's often called, so we just want to find out who might have a temperature. We don't know why yet. We don't know what we're going to do with that yet, but we just want to figure out who might have a temperature.

And so then the students who may be at risk, they show up below or well below benchmark on screening. And we then next might need a diagnostic assessment. And so if we kind of stick with that medical model for a moment, that's where we might be using x-rays, MRIs, blood work, something maybe a little more a little more time or expense there just to dig in to find out what's going on.

And the question we really want to answer with diagnostic is, what instruction does this child or do these children need next? Because that's the whole point of doing this, is to figure out how are we going to teach them? How are we going to fill the gaps? How are we going to create these successful readers?

So you're screening everybody. You're looking at diagnostic assessments for those students who need them, and then when you are adjusting your instruction, you're targeting instruction to the students who need some extra support.

You want to also use progress monitoring, and that is to help you answer the question, "Is what I'm doing working?" So you've adjusted your instruction, you're doing something special for these particular students, but is what you're doing working? Because if not, you're going to need to look at that and make an adjustment, right? You don't want to keep wasting your time.

And the point of progress monitoring is to check in on your instruction, so there's no point not changing anything. And then, oh, two weeks are up, time to progress monitor, because the point is to see if your instruction's working.

So we've got those three pieces. And when we talk about progress monitoring in the book, we're talking about the type of progress monitoring that aligns with those CBMs with your screener because they're also more informal or, you know, mastery monitoring.

I know a lot of people use, for example, the UFLI Foundations phonics program and they call their little weekly assessment progress monitoring and you are literally monitoring their progress, which is great. It's just a different kind.

So when we really delve into progress monitoring, we're talking about more that, you know, I use Acadience for screening. I'm going to use my Acadience measures for progress monitoring as well. So the way this looks in my kindergarten class would be universal screening. I use Acadience beginning, middle, and end of year for everyone.

And I know in Ontario they've mandated the screening at beginning of year and then middle of year only has to be students who didn't meet benchmark at the beginning. So it's a start. It's something, it's, it's good, but it's not quite good enough because if you don't screen everyone at those three benchmark periods, you could be missing students throughout the year.

For example, Acadience introduces different measures at middle of year, and so you're missing the students who might be struggling with that. And you also don't have the system like the whole grade and whole school kind of level information if you're leaving the stronger students out and that sort of thing. So screen everybody, beginning, middle, end of year.

And then in kindergarten there's often not a lot I need to do diagnostically because if they didn't meet the benchmark for phonemic awareness, I know I'm working on phonemic awareness, if it was correct letter sounds, that's what we're going to keep working on from nonsense word fluency, for example, right? So there's not a lot of back testing or diagnostic necessary.

Sometimes I do use a diagnostic in the sense of a full letter and sound assessment with everybody. It's a two year kindergarten program where I am, so if I had them last year, they were really moving along. And then at the beginning of their second kindergarten year I want to just see, okay, are there any letters like maybe you need to practice your V and your J and your Y a little bit just to make sure you've got those.

So sometimes I might do something like that, but really my screening data pretty much tells me what I need to do. However, if I were teaching grade two, I might have oral reading fluency data, and I don't necessarily know where's that low accuracy score coming from.

So then in my case, I would probably use, you know, the UFLI intervention and placement assessment to see where should my instruction begin? Because that's the point of our diagnostic: where/what do we need to instruct for these students? The Core Phonics Survey, different things like that, you can use them for diagnostic, but then the real meat of this is to change the instruction. So the students who were

below, well below, I figured out where their instruction needs to start or continue and then we get into that. And then as we're doing that, we progress monitor as necessary to make sure it's working.

And so changing that system a few years ago when I first started, it has changed things for me. It's about the kids for sure, but I can actually tell you it's better for teachers. It's really so much easier and it's so empowering, and there's something about seeing that color coding, seeing those numbers go up, especially when you have a student who was below benchmark or well below benchmark, you've got some yellow, you've got some red, and you target their instruction to exactly what they need. Then you progress monitor, you see the numbers going up and those colors changing. It's just so affirming and it just really helps you know that you're doing the right thing to help these students become strong readers.

So that's kind of a glimpse of how that would look in our classroom.

Anna Geiger: Yeah, for anyone who is listening is not familiar with using any of these tools, like with Acadience for example. You can get the testing materials for free online, but if you want to get the reporting, that costs per student. I think it's reasonable, but you would pay to get those charts that have the colors for the different skills, then composite scores.

And Kate's talking about using that chart to see at a glance where your students are at and then as those colors change based on your instruction and checking on your instruction with your progress monitoring, that's very gratifying.

Also, you talked about this being easier for teachers. I think about doing the benchmark assessment or running records, they're extremely time consuming. And then to find out that after all that work, to find out that a child is a level D isn't really all that useful.

So yeah, teachers will love to get their hands on your book because not only do you explain all these things in detail, validity, reliability, all that and the types of assessment, but you also really walk through very clearly how to do this with lots of pictures and diagrams and just very helpful instructions.

I think for someone new to assessment, they might want to read the book twice, but it is a very accessible guide for classroom teachers.

What about if a teacher learns all this and really wants to start doing more evidence-based assessments, but their school is requiring them to do DRA or Fountas and Pinnell. I do hear from teachers that we're trying to move in this direction, but my school still wants me to do something to get a level for every child. Stephanie, what's your thought or recommendation for those teachers?

Stephanie Stollar: Well, we would not ever recommend that teachers are noncompliant. So we recommend that they do what they're asked to do, but also help to educate their administrators who are continuing that kind of requirement.

Engage them in conversation, maybe share a copy of our book with them so that they can have the same sort of background knowledge. Maybe engage in a book study so that you can investigate some of the shortcomings of the current assessments that are being used and what the alternatives are.

And, you know, if teachers really want to take this on, they can use free versions of curriculum-based measures and for a little period of time do both what they're asked to do by their district, but also, trying curriculum-based measures with their own students and then be able to demonstrate and talk about with their administrators the kind of information that those CBMs provide.

You heard that from Kate how apparent and obvious it is for what students need, and the responsiveness, the fact that you can see the learning in front of your very own eyes on a graph. You know that your instruction is hitting the mark with your students and share with your administrators the power that that gives you. And perhaps where you're able to not only duplicate what those old forms of assessment were giving you, but extend that and add the additional components.

It's a process, it's a conversation, but for people who want to take that on, it's something that we describe in the book and provide some supports around.

Anna Geiger: Wonderful. Is there anything else that you'd like to share about assessment or other work that you're doing? You want to start, Kate?

Kate Winn: Sure. I just think we're so grateful for the early feedback we've received about the book, and a lot of the feedback has been that it fills a hole in the market. So we're really hoping that people get something out of this and that it can be helpful for them.

But also, I think, just important to note, Stephanie and I are both really responsive, so this isn't just we want to dump a book in the world and then go on with the rest of our lives. We really hope to engage with people.

We're excited to, you know, visit book clubs and that sort of thing. And we're responsive on social media and all of that, so we're still here. It's not just buy our book and that's it. We really want to engage.

But I just think that assessment has just really changed my practice and most importantly, student achievement, and so I'm just excited to do whatever we can to get more about that out into the world.

Stephanie Stollar: Yeah, I agree. And people can contact me and share their responses about the book and their feedback at stephaniestollar.com. You can learn there about the other books that I've written also related to assessment within the MTSS framework, and I'm really looking forward to creating some resources and supports for the book so it can be used in teacher preparation.

I hope anybody who's working in teacher prep looking for an assessment book will reach out to me and you know, even partner help me with what is needed to make sure that this gets integrated into that initial preparation of teachers. That's a goal that I have

Anna Geiger: That's excellent because I think many of us, probably Kate would agree, didn't really learn what kind of assessments were useful we did not or how to give them in college or graduate school. Excellent.

That's an excellent goal for the book, and I think it's going to be one of the most important books coming out next year.

We're recording this in November, but what's the official release date?

Stephanie Stollar: I think they're still saying January 6th is the release date.

Anna Geiger: Okay, so by the time this airs, the book will be available, but either way it can be pre-ordered. I'm very excited to share this with the world, and thank you so much for coming on to talk about assessment.

Kate Winn: Thanks so much for having us, Anna.

Stephanie Stollar: Yeah, thanks for the opportunity to talk about it. We appreciate it.