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Practitioner's Guide to Curriculum-Based Evaluation in Reading

Foreword by Matthew K. Burns

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Foreword

Almost every school in the country has a problem-solving team, and research has shown that effective problem-solving teams can improve both student (e.g., improved reading skills, reduced behavioral difficulties, etc.) and systemic (e.g., reduced number of students retained in a grade, fewer students referred for special education, etc.) outcomes (Burns and Symington, 2002). Yet, there continues to be a well-documented deficiency in student reading and math skills in this country. How is that possible? If almost every school in the country is convening a group of skilled professionals on a weekly basis to brainstorm ideas for students who are experiencing difficulties, then why is it that children continue to demonstrate skill deficiencies at an alarming rate?

The answer to the above questions is a complex one that goes well beyond the scope of this book. However, I suggest that three reasons why problem-solving teams have not led to more global positive outcomes are because most school personnel (a) have unfortunate misconceptions about assessment, (b) do not understand problem-analysis, and (c) do not contextualize the interventions within a broader system. I will discuss these below.

Assessment

Assessment is fundamental to effective instruction and intervention. Unfortunately, most teachers and school personnel today hear the word assessment and immediately think of state accountability tests. When education first began in this country, the goal of assessment was to identify the extremely high and low students in order to rank them, and that remained a primary goal for decades (Reschly, 1996). The recent accountability movement brought assessment back to the forefront of educational debates, but the focus was again on determining the haves and have-nots. There certainly is a need to determine who has proficient skill, but that is a summative decision that has little utility for instruction and it is not consistent with the definition of assessment.

A subtle yet important contribution that Harlacher, Sakelaris and Kattelman make in this book is that they define assessment as "the process of gathering information to make decisions", and use that as the framework for the entire book.

Many school-based professionals confuse the term 'testing' with assessment. There are several types of data that can be used within any assessment process, one of which may be standardized norm-referenced tests or data collected to judge student proficiency. What matters most is not the type of test used, but that the data match the purpose for which they are used. There are many high quality measures that may provide excellent summative information, but do little to inform instruction. There are also tools that provide excellent instructional information, but the data lead to inaccurate screening decisions. As the authors point out, assessment should be a dynamic process that is guided by the question being asked. It seems that few school-based professionals truly understand how to select the appropriate data to address the question and often rely on commercially prepared tests because those are mandated by the district in which they work.

Problem Analysis

"Which intervention should I use?" That is by far the most common question that I hear from school-based practitioners. Most problem-solving teams are quite good at identifying a problem and may even collect data to determine if the problem persists. However, very few fully understand the diagnostic assessment process outlined in this book or are able to examine discrete sub-skills that contribute to a problem. As was somewhat famously stated, most problem-solving teams do not solve problems; they admire them (the actual source of that quote is unclear, but most attribute it to Jim Ysseldyke at the University of Minnesota). In my experience, the essential attribute of an effective problem-solving team is that they use data to analyze the problem and to determine the intervention. When the problem is analyzed, which intervention to use becomes quite clear and the likelihood that the intervention will be successful substantially increases.

Contextualized Within Larger System

Imagine an elementary school with 600 students. On average 20% of the students need something more than effective instruction and curriculum (Burns, Appleton, & Stehouwer, 2005). If there were 600 students, then 120 of them would require some level of support beyond quality core instruction. If the problem-solving team met each week, spent 1 hour talking about 2 students (30 minutes each) every week, and they met 32 times throughout the year, then they would have time to discuss 64 students leaving 56 students out and not having time for any follow-up meetings regarding the students that they did discuss. Of course, one solution would be to meet twice as often, but more than likely school personnel cannot conduct the level of analysis that is needed for effective problem-solving to occur at the individual level for 120 students. First, some lower level of analysis has to occur at the classroom and group level. Stated in language commonly used within Multi-Tiered System of

Supports, you cannot have an effective Tier 3 without an effective Tier 2, and you cannot have an effective Tier 2 without strong core instruction (Tier 1).

Most school personnel do not systematically conduct analyses at Tier 2. Instead, all students receive the same intervention under the idea of standard protocol. However, the term standard protocol does not mean that every student receives the same intervention, it simply means that there are a few highly standardized interventions from which to select for specific problems. For example, a student who needs better decoding skills would likely not benefit from an intervention designed to enhance comprehension. A low-level analysis to determine the broad category of the problem can be used to identify the target of the intervention for small-groups of students, for which a standardized intervention could then be delivered.

Curriculum-Based Evaluation

The assessment-to-intervention process described by Harlacher, Sakelaris and Kattelman in this book directly addresses the three points described above. Curriculum-based evaluation (CBE) is not new. In fact, it has its roots in precision teaching, which was developed in the 1960s (Lipsley, 1991), and Deno and Mirkin's (1977) seminal *Data-based program modification: A manual*. Ken Howell's book *Curriculum-based evaluation for special and remedial education: A handbook for deciding what to teach* (Howell & Morehead, 1987) was the first written reference regarding CBE, which later became the 2000 book (Howell & Nolet, 2000) that is commonly cited. CBE was used in practice in Iowa and other locations at which Howell trained school staff before either book was published, but the implementation of CBE has not expanded much beyond those initial efforts in the years since. CBE was not widely implemented in the schools partially because it was perceived as a complex process in which few people were trained. The current book simplifies the process and makes it applicable to decisions throughout a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework. It discusses types of data to be used for specific decisions, lays out a framework with which those data can be analyzed, and details decisions that should be made at Tiers 1 and 2 in addition to Tier 3.

There is more to an effective problem-solving team, or problem-solving process, than problem analysis, but it is the aspect that is most often missing. Moreover, grade-level teams should be engaged in problem-solving procedures for classrooms and groups of students, and the CBE framework outlined here can support that work as well.

Ellis (2005) suggested that educational innovations need to be (a) consistent with theory, (b) supported with research demonstrating its effectiveness, and (c) able to be consistently implemented on a wide-scale basis. CBE is consistent with several theories and the components of CBE have been well researched. More research is needed to examine the CBE Process as a whole, but research efforts have been impeded by the lack of clear conceptualization of CBE. Thus, *Practitioner's Guide to Curriculum-Based Evaluation in Reading* will make consistent implementation

possible and could also increase the likelihood of increased research. I am confident that practitioners will find the procedures easy to implement, especially with the forms and tools that Harlacher, Sakelaris, and Kattelman provide. This book was needed by researchers and practitioners alike, and the authors have filled an important gap with a well-written and useful tool.

University of Minnesota Matthew K. Burns

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Nicole M. Kattelman, M.S. is a licensed school psychologist with over 15 years of experience in education. She received her master's in 1996 in school psychology from California State University, Hayward. She has worked as a school psychologist at both the elementary and secondary levels, and has supported her current school district with the implementation of Multi-Tiered System of Supports. She has presented both nationally and locally on the implementation of Multi-Tiered System of Supports at the secondary level. Nicole currently works as a school psychologist and as a district consultant for Multi-Tiered System of Supports in Washoe County School District in Reno, Nevada.

Chapter 1
Introduction

A group of educators are sitting around a table, discussing a struggling student. They review work samples and pass around test scores. Exasperated faces fill the room. There's is a sense of urgency because the student continues to experience academic failure and also because there are only 30 minutes left before the school day begins. It took weeks to get everyone in the same room and they are all feeling frustrated and are lacking direction.

They talk about the support the student is receiving and who has been working with him (or her). Explanations for poor performance begin to surface:

- "He isn't motivated."
- "She's always late and never listens to directions."
- "She seems to know it one minute and then the next minute, it's gone."
- "There's just something going on with his processing….he takes *forever* to get it."
- "What about his home life? Such a sad story."
- "I had her brother last year. Same. Exact. Issues."
- "She's such a doll, but she just can't seem to get it."
- "It's the parents. Her homework never comes back."
- "How can I meet his needs when I have 30 other students? I'm supposed to focus on one and sacrifice the others?"
- "She's been struggling since kindergarten!"
- "He's had one-to-one support and he's still struggling!"

It did not take long for the conversation to move from vague descriptions of the problem to discussing all the reasons the student, the family, or the life circumstances are preventing academic success. Then a menu of ideas for how to fix the problem is thrown on the table:

- "Maybe she needs medication?"
- "The parents need to do something at home!"
- "I think it's a disability. We should refer the student."
- "I think he needs to be retained. He just isn't getting it and he is emotionally immature."
- "What about one-to-one?"

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- "Has the teacher tried a token economy?"
- "It's almost the end of the year. He'll be sunk in middle school. He needs an Individualized Education Program (IEP)."
- "What about putting him in Mrs. Soandso's classroom? She does so well with these kinds of students."

Medication, home life, a new behavior plan, switching classrooms, a disability—the suggestions are drastic (disability, retention, and IEP), time intensive (token economy, one-to-one, and change classrooms), and focus on changes outside of the school's control (medication, parents' help). The stress of accountability enters the room and ideas for test preparation are discussed. Before they know it, the bell rings, and students are entering the building. They just spent an hour at a table discussing the student and nothing was decided. There is an attempt to gain consensus on a decision as everyone is getting up and heading out the door to their classrooms and offices.

Sounds familiar?

How is it that after knowing, working with, and assessing a student for several years, a school team could still be so uncertain about why a student is struggling and could be so unproductive in an hour-long meeting? Educators put forth lots of effort and dedication to support students, but often do not get the results they want. They spend time in meetings discussing inalterable variables and reviewing data that do not inform instruction. All educators could agree there is not time to spare in education.

The results of sitting through meeting after meeting without generating practical or effective solutions are frustration, burnout, and no change in student performance. This book is about stopping that unproductive process. It provides educators with a problem-solving process called curriculum-based evaluation (CBE) which is a practical, ongoing process that uses assessment to identify missing skills and to inform and evaluate an intervention plan.

1.1 Outline of the Book

This book is divided into three sections (a fourth section contains supplemental material including appendices, a glossary, and topic index):

1. The background of education and conceptual basis for CBE
2. Using CBE to assess reading
3. Making educational decisions within the CBE Process

The first section of the book discusses the current state of education to establish the need for an effective problem-solving process and describes how CBE fits in a school system. We review the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results, which show that over half of students in the fourth and eighth grade are scoring below proficient. Over 90% of fourth- and eighth-grade students

who have disabilities or are English language learners score below proficient on the NAEP (National Center for Educational Statistics 2011a, b). Three practices that can lead to improved outcomes for schools are presented. An overview of the problem-solving model, which facilitates and enables school improvements, is presented (see Greenwood et al. 2008). Schoolwide problem solving is the focus of Chapter 3 and individual problem solving with the CBE Process is the focus of Chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 3 provides the foundation for CBE, through a discussion of educational reform and Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). MTSS is a multi-tiered, schoolwide model of service delivery providing a continuum of evidence-based supports with frequent data-based monitoring for instructional decision making aiming to improve academic and behavioral outcomes (Barnes and Harlacher 2008; Horner et al. 2005; Kansas MTSS, n. d.). The principles behind MTSS are outlined and then details about critical features are provided. MTSS sets the stage for the use of CBE. CBE is used most effectively and efficiently in a collaborative, problem-solving, school culture.

Chapter 4 defines CBE, and discusses the assumptions behind CBE. Learning is viewed as an interaction between the learner, the curriculum, and the environment (which includes instruction). CBE includes consideration and assessment of all those components using low-inference assessments (low-inference means that the gap between the results and interpretation of the results is small; Howell and Nolet 2000).

The second part of the book focuses on the actual implementation of CBE in reading. In Chapter 5, the steps of the CBE Process are detailed. CBE's alignment with the problem-solving model is illustrated and an assessment framework for conducting CBE [review, interview, observation, and testing (RIOT)/instruction, curriculum, environment, learner (ICEL)] is provided (Christ 2008). Chapters 6 to 8 walk through use of reading CBE in daily practice and provide step-by-step directions for using CBE to assess decoding, early literacy, and reading comprehension. Explicit directions, reproducible handouts, and instructional strategies based on the results of the CBE Process are provided. Those chapters guide the CBE Process and result in practical recommendations.

The third part of the book describes how to make educational decisions with CBE. Chapter 9 provides guidelines for progress monitoring, goal-setting, and instructional decision making. Finally, answers to frequently asked questions about CBE are provided in Chapter 10.

This book provides educators with a practical tool that is an extension of the belief that all students can learn, given the right instructional support. CBE facilitates identifying student needs and instructional supports to address them. The CBE Process focuses school teams in a way that increases their efficiency and effectiveness in improving outcomes for all students.

Part I
Background of Education and Curriculum-Based Evaluation