

Sulzby Classification Scheme of Emergent Storybook Reading

Preschool – Kindergarten

Comprehension entails linking what is being learned to what is already known. It is the process of constructing meaning through the dynamic interaction between the reader's existing knowledge, the information suggested by the written language, and the context of the situation in which the learning is taking place.

Reading Comprehension at preschool-kindergarten can be assessed through the *Sulzby Classification Scheme of Emergent Storybook Reading*, developed by Dr. Elizabeth Sulzby. The purpose of the Storybook Assessment is to help teachers understand a child's reading performance in relationship to a continuum of reading development.

The assessment assumes children increasingly develop literate behaviors before conventional reading. Such emergent literacy is observable through their everyday explorations with print. Children acquire oral and written language simultaneously as interrelated experiences.

The *Sulzby Classification Scheme of Emergent Storybook Reading* is one of the milestone tasks contained within the Michigan Literacy Progress Profile. It is used to assess the reading comprehension of children who are pre-conventional readers.

The *Sulzby Classification Scheme of Emergent Storybook Reading* measures the rudimentary forms of written language comprehension. It is an ordinal measure that consists of 11 levels, each with an accompanying rubric. It begins primarily tapping comprehension and the written language register; at higher levels it incorporates children's growing knowledge of letter-sound relationships and word concepts. Its top level is "Conventional Reading" or the point where a running record could validly and reliably measure instructional, independent, and frustration reading levels.

The *Sulzby Classification Scheme of Emergent Storybook Reading* works best when administered within a literacy rich environment that includes multiple readings and discussions of favorite storybooks. This environment needs to include time for the children to self-select storybooks to read individually, in pairs, or in small groups. The teacher, after becoming thoroughly aware of the classification scheme, selects several children to assess during self-selected reading time each day. The teacher either asks an individual to "read me the book" or listens to a child "reading" to another child or group of children. Through this careful "kid watching" in an authentic learning situation, the teacher is able to assess the child's naturally occurring language behavior while storybook reading. This assessment gives valuable information to the teacher to help decide which instructional strategies to use to help the child along their literacy path.

The storybook to be used should be read to the children repeatedly by their classroom teacher, four times during a two-week period. The book should be read for the children's pleasure. The tone of the reading should be of "sharing the book together."

Short discussions after reading should center on understanding the story better. The teacher and children's discussions should become increasingly sophisticated with each reading, beginning with actions of the characters, proceeding to why the characters acted the way they did, to finding the universal truths about the story.

When choosing storybooks for classroom use and the Sulzby Classification Scheme select texts that are appropriate for the task and development level of the child. Comprehension is affected by interest, so choose books that the child will find interesting. The texts selected should be examples of quality writing and contain sufficient context to assess the child's depth of understanding of complex ideas.

Appropriate titles include:

<i>Courduroy</i>	Don Freeman	<i>Three Billy Goats Gruff</i>	Gladone
<i>Peter's Chair</i>	Ezra Jack Keats	<i>Are You My Mother?</i>	P.D. Eastman

Use the following questions to select books for the *Sulzby Classification Scheme of Emergent Storybook Reading*. These questions should guide your thinking and choices, and facilitate discussions with fellow teachers.

Ask the following questions about each book:

1. Do I know this book is one some children "latch onto" and make a favorite?
2. Does the book have characters (more than one) and a plot?
3. Does the book have dialogue and dialogue carriers (he said, she asked)?
4. Does the book have ideal emotional content?
5. Can I read it well? Does it "roll off my tongue" nicely?
6. Are the illustrations attractive and interesting to children?

Most of the books should be narrative stories with characters and plot. Some can be informational texts or other genres such as poetry and drama. The responses of children will vary based on how well children attend to the complexity of the narrative.

Books such as *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* are interesting books and qualify as narratives, but Carle's book has only a protagonist and no other characters. This text may be useful for science units or as an author study on Eric Carle, and is attractive for 3-4 year olds and kindergarteners who have not had many experiences with books. However, it does not meet Sulzby's criteria for use when assessing emergent storybook reading.

When ready to assess you have three options:

- | | |
|----------|---|
| Option 1 | Create the literacy rich environment and make the assessment a natural part of the story book reading experience. |
| Option 2 | Create a situation in the classroom where you are able to listen while a child "reads" to another child or group of children. |

(Option 3) Have a storybook selected for the child to read. Sitting side by side, have the child hold the book and say, "Read me the book."

Tips for eliciting responses:

- Always say, "Read me the book"
- Use plenty of wait time
- Have an encouraging look on your face
- If the child is reading silently, let them finish a page, then say, "Now read so I can hear it."
- If a child initially refuses, prompt with "It doesn't have to be like grown0up reading. Just do it your way."
- If a child still refuses, read a bit of the story, but always return control to the child by saying, "Now it's your turn."
- End with a praise of the story and a thanks for sharing, such as "What a wonderful story. Thank you for sharing it with me." Avoid saying "Good job" or similar phrases which imply judgment.

When done, fill out the Individual Score Sheet.

Let's take a closer look at the *Sulzby Classification Scheme of Emergent Storybook Reading* to find ways of making it easier to understand and use.

First the entire scheme can be divided in two:

The top part is Picture Governed which means only pictures will be used to tell the story. The bottom part is Print Governed which means the print will be watched and meaning will come from the print.

Looking at the top part of the scheme, we can divide it into story not formed, and story formed.

Levels 1 & 2 are fairly self-explanatory.

- Labeling and commenting sounds like disjointed discourse.
- Following the actions involves finger pointing to show action and the child makes many comments that are aside from the story.

Levels 3 & 4 are oral language-like; the child uses natural language.

- Dialogic storytelling sounds like a conversation with you; the child may use voices and the characters may sound like they are talking to each other.
- Monologic storytelling sounds like the child is telling you the whole story without any interaction with you.

Levels 5, 6, & 7 are written language-like; the child uses book talk.

- Reading and storytelling sounds like a mix of natural language and book talk.
- Reading similar-to-original story flows from beginning to end.

- Reading verbatim-like; story has long chunks of story that are verbatim, but includes overgeneralizations and more importantly, self-corrections. These self-corrections distinguish this from level 6.

Looking at the bottom part of the Scheme we can see that these levels involve the print being watched.

Level 8 is refusal based on some aspect of print. The child will refuse and will have a reason for refusing that is based on their knowledge of print.

Level 9 is further divided into levels 9a – comprehension

9b – letter/sound

9c – word

- These levels are delineated by the child's attending to one or two aspects of the reading process.
 - 9a (comprehension) is often indicated by a child pointing to the print while reading.
 - 9b (letter/sound) is often indicated by a child sounding out words.
 - 9c (word) is often indicated by a child reading sight words only

Levels 10 & 11 are characterized by a child taking a more holistic approach to reading.

- At level 10 they are reading with imbalanced strategies; they often over-depend on one strategy to make meaning.
- At level 11 children will be conventionally reading in a flexible and coordinated manner.

When first learning to use the *Sulzby Classification Scheme of Emergent Storybook Reading* it may be helpful to score based on the process of elimination. First, think to yourself, is the child at a level 1 or 2? If not, think to yourself, are they a 9, 10, or 11? Follow the same process, eliminating levels a few at a time until you are able to make a choice between two adjacent levels. Think about the most important features of a level for help in making that determination.

Please remember that children will display behaviors from many levels during any particular reading, but they will be classified by the dominant behaviors.

PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN READING AT
INCREASING LEVELS OF SOPHISTICATION BY AGE

CATEGORIES	AGE				
	2	3	4	5	
Reading Attempts				Nov	May
	N=8	N=12	N=12	N=24	N=24
Governed by Print	0%	17%	25%	21%	42%
Written Language-like Stories	13%	17%	33%	25%	30%
Oral Language-like Stories	25%	17%	17%	21%	21%
Stories Not Formed	13%	17%	8%	17%	0%
Refusals (low level) and/or Dependent Reading	50%	33%	17%	17%	8%

FINDINGS:

1. Judges trained in linguistic analysis can make holistic judgments of the sub-categories of emergent storybook reading as defined in this study with a high degree of agreement.
2. The behaviors described in these studies appear to have stability across storybooks. This indicates that the behaviors are conceptual and not just a stimulus-response pattern to a particular book.
3. The behaviors appear to be developmental in that the patterns differ predictably from 2- to 3- to 4-, and to 5-year old children. Additionally, progress over time was observed with kindergarten children. This indicates that, prior to formal instruction, important development is going on.
4. The development observed in these studies is consistent with the theoretical ideas about general and language development and the findings of other research.

Storybook Reading Collection

<i>A Week of Raccoons</i>	Whelan
<i>Alexander and the Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day</i>	Viorst
<i>Caps for Sale</i>	Slobodkina
<i>Chickens Aren't the Only Ones</i>	Heller
<i>Corduroy</i>	Freeman
<i>Ira Sleeps Over</i>	Waber
<i>It's Too Noisy</i>	Cole
<i>Make Way for Ducklings</i>	McCloskey
<i>Mean Soup</i>	Everitt
<i>Mouse Count</i>	Walsh
<i>Peter's Chair</i>	Keats
<i>Pumpkin, Pumpkin</i>	Titherington
<i>Stellaluna</i>	Cannon
<i>Stone Soup</i>	McGovern
<i>The Big Sneeze</i>	Brown
<i>The Carrot Seed</i>	Krauss
<i>The Little Old Lady Who Was Not Afraid of Anything</i>	Williams
<i>The Napping House</i>	Wood
<i>The Three Billy Goats Gruff</i>	Galdone
<i>The Wolf's Chicken Stew</i>	Kasza
<i>Two Terrible Frights</i>	Aylesworth
<i>Where the Wild Things Are</i>	Sendak
<i>Whistle for Willie</i>	Keats

Salient Feature(s) of Each Level

Level 1

- Commenting and labeling
- Sounds like disjointed discourse

Level 2

- Follows action
- Makes frequent asides

Level 3

- Interactive storytelling
- Sometimes uses voices
- Sometimes the characters sound like they are talking to each other

Level 4

- No interaction
- Picture governed

Level 5

- Uses natural language
- Uses "book talk"

Level 6

- Flows from beginning to end
- Uses "book talk"

Level 7

- Tells story verbatim-like
- Child is aware of which words go with which page, they will often self-correct because of this

Level 8

- Child refuses to read and is aware that their inability to read is related to print

Level 9

- **a** Uses meaning as a fix-up strategy
- **b** Sounds out unknown words
- **c** Reads only known words

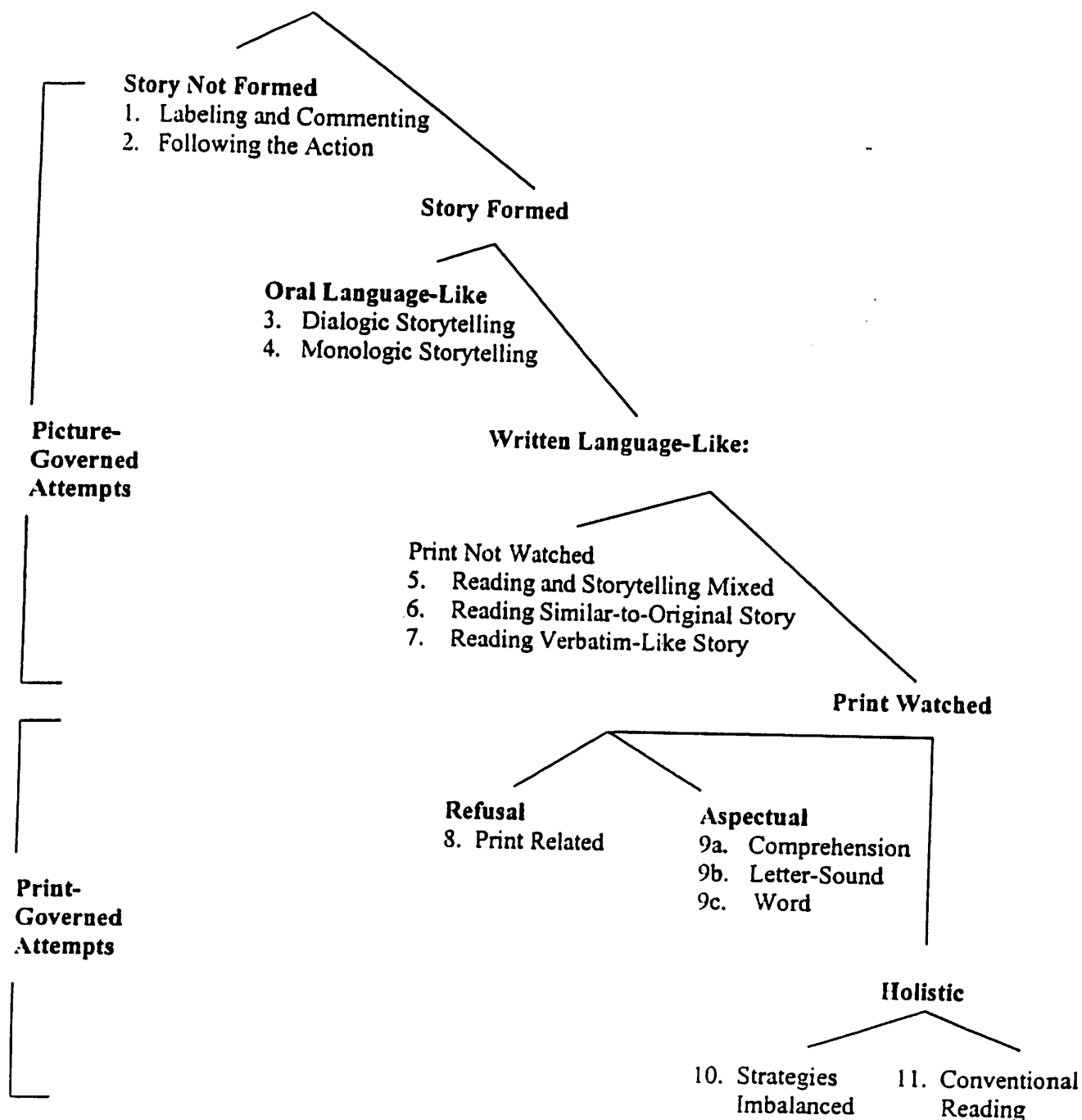
Level 10

- Uses 2 aspects of reading with the exclusion of one

Level 11

- Flexible and coordinated conventional reading

Sulzby's (1985) Classification Scheme for Children's Emergent Reading of Favorite Storybooks:
Categories of Storybook Reading



Sulzby, E. (1985) Children's emergent reading of favorite storybooks: A developmental study, *Reading Research Quarterly*, 20, 458-481. Adapted by E. Sulzby (1996)

How can this assessment inform instruction?

If we assume that the basic premise of assessments is that they will help teachers make better decisions about the instruction they provide their students. Then the answer to the question "How can this assessment inform instruction?" becomes very important. We need to know how we are going to individualize instruction based on the information gained from the assessment or we will question the need of the assessment. The question "How can this assessment inform instruction?" can best be answered by taking a close look at the classification tree.

Suggestions to help guide your thinking about how this assessment can inform instruction.

First take a look at the overall structure of the tree, it is divided between picture-governed attempts and print-governed attempts. **How would you differentiate instruction for students who score in these levels?** One example might be that students who score in the print-governed levels receive guided reading lessons and students who score in the picture-governed levels receive instruction on how to use picture cues to predict text.

Next take a look at the broad categories of levels, story not formed, story formed, oral language-like, written language-like, print not watched and print watched. **How would you differentiate instruction for students who score in these levels?** Here you will need to think about what the child will need in terms of skills to get to the next broad category. After identifying the skills you will need to think about the instructional practices you need to deliver either individually or in small groups for those students not progressing as expected. One example might be that students who are predominantly at the oral language level in their reading need additional exposure to books that have lots of "book talk" or they need to be read to by someone who reads with the correct intonation.

Finally take a look at each level. **How would you differentiate instruction for students who score in each level?** Here you will need to think about what the child will need in terms of skills to get to the next level. Again after identifying the skills you will need to think about the instructional practices you need to deliver either individually or in small groups for those students not progressing as expected. One example might be letter-sound correspondence work for students in levels 5-7.

Final thoughts

While all children who are reading emergently need continued, repeated exposure to high quality children's literature, individualized instruction is possible dependent on the child's assessed level of reading. It will take experience using the Sulzby Classification Scheme before you are able to determine if a child is progressing up the levels as expected. In developing this experience with the classification scheme and thinking about individualizing instruction in relation to this scheme you will grow stronger as a teacher. It is through matching your strengths with your students' strengths that you will be able to provide powerful learning opportunities.

SULZBY CLASSIFICATION SCHEME OF EMERGENT STORYBOOK READING INDIVIDUAL SCORE SHEET

Student _____ Age _____ Grade _____

Reading Classification Scheme:

Attending to Pictures/Not Forming Stories

1. Labeling & commenting
2. Following the action

Attending to Pictures/Forming Oral Stories

3. Dialogic storytelling
4. Monologic storytelling

Attend to Picture/ Mixed

5. Reading & storytelling mixed

Attending to Pictures/Forming Written Stories

6. Reading similar to original story
7. Reading verbatim-like story

Attending to Print

8. Refusing to read based on print awareness
9. Reading aspectually (Child focuses on one or more aspects to the exclusion of other cues)
10. Reading with strategies imbalanced
11. Reading conventionally

Date	Title of Book Read	Classification Score	General Comprehension			
_____	_____	_____	4	3	2	1
_____	_____	_____	4	3	2	1
_____	_____	_____	4	3	2	1
_____	_____	_____	4	3	2	1

Ideas adapted from Elizabeth Sulzby "Assessment of emergent literacy: Storybook reading", The Reading Teacher Vol. 44, No. 7, March 1991

Guidance for General Comprehension from Dr. Scott Paris of University of Michigan