Curriculum-Based Measurement: Spelling

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Curriculum-based measurement (CBM) involves observing and recording a child’s performance in their curriculum to gather information for instructional programming. Much of CBM work has revolved around assessing basic skill areas for reading and mathematics; however, it has also been utilized for writing and spelling. The primary purposes of CBM include screening children for academic problems, placing children into curriculum, monitoring student progress, instructional planning, and placing children into special programs (Witt et al., 1998). CBM involves the development of brief probes (i.e., usually one to three minutes) from the curriculum that can aide in the above purposes.

When utilizing CBM to assess spelling, the content of the evaluation is selected from the child’s curriculum in spelling and potentially reading. It is recommended that words be selected randomly from the spelling curriculum and made into probes consisting of 20 words (Shapiro, 1996). A spelling probe is then conducted with words being dictated to the student every seven seconds. Direct observation and recording of spelling involves either counting the number of correct letter sequences or number of words spelled correctly during two minutes (Marston, 1989).

These CBM results for spelling then establish a baseline performance for the student to allow the educator to evaluate whether intervention is necessary by comparing student performance to grade level peers. Criteria of what is considered grade level have been proposed which allow the evaluator to determine how much additional drill and practice with spelling words will be necessary given the student’s instructional level. If intervention appears warranted given the student’s performance in the curriculum, potential intervention strategies can be
implemented with additional CBM probes being conducted to determine whether the intervention resulted in spelling gains (i.e., correct letter sequences or correct words spelled). Once an intervention is found to increase spelling performance, these brief probes can be given repeatedly and graphed to monitor whether instruction is impacting spelling performance.

This type of assessment has proved to be reliable and valid as compared to standardized achievement tests, yet CBM takes a fraction of the time to complete. Other advantages of CBM over more traditional weekly teacher made tests and standardized tests include providing a direct assessment of the academic skill of interest, allowing for repeated measurement, requiring little time to develop and score, and providing a great indicator of student progress.
References


Suggested Readings for Professionals:


Suggested Reading for Nonprofessionals:


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