

CASE STUDY:

Linking Assessment and Instruction: Northwest Evaluation Association and The Lexile Framework for Reading



Lexile: Matching readers to text

While standardized testing has been a part of the public school experience for decades, the federal No Child Left Behind Act requires educators to link testing and curriculum in new ways. Preparing students for a specific assessment is straightforward; however, there hasn't always been a clear path for teachers who want to use those test results to improve student learning.

Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) is one organization that makes the path clear. A nonprofit assessment organization that provides testing to more than 1,900 U.S. schools serving more than 2 million students, NWEA has linked its assessment data to The Lexile Framework® for Reading.

The Lexile Framework provides a common scale for matching reader ability and text difficulty, enabling teachers and parents to choose materials that can help to improve student reading skills and monitor literacy across the curriculum and at home. More than 100,000 books and 80 million articles have Lexile® measures, and all major norm-referenced tests can report student reading scores in Lexiles.

“When we launched Lexiles, NWEA was one of the first testing organizations to realize the power of using a common scale for matching reader ability with text difficulty,” said Malbert Smith III, Ph.D., president, MetaMetrics, Inc., developer of The Lexile Framework for Reading. “Today, more than six years later, we continue to collaborate to ensure that teachers administering NWEA assessments have the tools and resources to use Lexiles to improve student reading ability.”

Giving Teachers Tools to Improve Student Reading Ability

Luanne Sbarbaro, NWEA's vice president of client services, said it's an organizational imperative to provide teachers with as much useful information as possible when administering an assessment. “Any time we can give teachers more specific resources to use with their students, it's a good thing,” she said. “Today, teachers have a lot of information but may need help to understand what they can do with it. Using Lexiles gives them a walkover from data to actual use.”

NWEA began to include Lexile measures with its test results in 1999 and immediately recognized the power of the collaboration. The organization's assessment, Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), is a computer-based test that adapts to the student's achievement level and is based on an equal-interval growth measure to accurately measure and report what a child knows and needs to learn.

“Our reading test is truly a test of reading comprehension,” said Sbarbaro. “It gives the appropriate instructional level for every student. It makes sense to offer Lexile measures with our MAP scores. MAP supplies the appropriate level for instruction, and Lexiles identify the reading materials.” Teachers receive test results for an entire class within 24 hours, with both MAP and Lexile measures for every student.

It wasn't enough just to provide Lexile measures. NWEA leaders discovered teachers also needed to learn how to put the information to use in the classroom. NWEA offers extensive training in administration of its assessments. It also teaches how to use data from testing sessions, such as Lexiles, to link assessment to instruction—a key component of this professional development.

“We have a training continuum that's broken down into steps,” Sbarbaro explained. “By step three of the training, we're totally focused on instruction, and Lexiles figures heavily into that. We tie Lexiles into other resources we provide and show teachers how to incorporate Lexiles in lesson plans. One of the most important things we can do is teach them how to use the Lexile Web site, where we walk through the reports step by step. We can actually help them look at their students' results. If they're teaching ‘Tom Sawyer,’ we show them how to check the Lexile measure to see if it's truly appropriate for their class level. The power is in actually experiencing it.”

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NWEA client Michael Hopkins, superintendent, Rochester (N.H.) School Department, attests to the effectiveness of NWEA's professional development. "We have teachers using Lexiles to guide students to books they can read," said Hopkins. "Several teachers have put Lexiles on, or color-coded, the books in their classroom libraries, so students can match their Lexile measure or color-coded card to the books. One teacher using this method had her class progress from only 60 percent reading at grade level to 100 percent." School library books are also Lexiled and color-coded.

"Our classroom teachers used the Lexile Web site to check the Lexile measures for their textbooks," Hopkins said. "If the textbook is too difficult for their students, then they find appropriate material through the Web site."

Transforming Assessment Data Into Instructional Strategy

In January 2006 NWEA announced a new assessment reporting package that emphasizes the synergy between its MAP testing and Lexiles. The Dynamic Reporting Suite includes two interactive reports that are designed around Lexiles.

"MetaMetrics gave us permission to load the Lexile Book Database into ours so we have direct reporting," said Sbarbaro. "We have a Lexile report that is a graphic representation of the Lexile ranges for all the students in the class, so a teacher can immediately identify the students' reading achievement level."

A second report, called a "Booklist," extrapolates the student data into a tangible course of action. "Teachers are moving directly from the student data to the Booklist," said Sbarbaro. "After entering a few criteria, they push a button and a Booklist is automatically generated for each student based on the MAP data. Now teachers can do the spring assessment and send individual lists home for summer reading. The teachers who have seen this are very excited."

Helping All Students Grow

Allan Olson, president and executive director of NWEA, said the partnership with MetaMetrics has significantly increased the value and instructional focus his organization provides its clients. "NWEA has a passion for helping all students learn and wants that learning experience to be positive, meaningful and useful," he noted. "Lexiles take the longitudinal growth data and individual comprehension ability derived from our assessments and interpret them as specific, useful, meaningful resources for reading and learning. This presents all children with appropriately challenging opportunities to read, learn and grow at their individual pace."

Sbarbaro draws on her experience as a classroom teacher to picture how the collaboration benefits educators and students. "I think what teachers need to realize is the power of having instructional data and instructional materials that meet the needs of every student. That's what MAP and Lexiles do together for reading. The result is so much more than a simple score. It's finding appropriate books, and it's thinking through textbook selection. If a teacher tells the students to read chapter six in their science textbooks, can they do that? I think it opens the eyes of teachers to consider things they may never have considered before."

Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA), is a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing partner educational agencies with assessment and analysis products and services to promote academic student growth and school improvement.

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The Lexile Framework® for Reading provides a common scale for matching reader ability and text difficulty, enabling teachers and parents to choose materials that can help to improve student reading skills and monitor literacy across the curriculum and at home. Recognized as the most widely adopted reading measure in use today, Lexiles® are part of reading and testing programs at district, state and federal levels. More than 100,000 books and 80 million articles have Lexile measures, and all major standardized tests can report student reading scores in Lexiles.

Benefits of Linking MAP and Lexiles

- Allows teachers to use assessment results to differentiate instruction
- Dovetails with NWEA's proprietary assessment tool, Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)
- Provides an opportunity to package a more comprehensive suite of assessments and tools for client school districts

For more information on Lexiles, contact us at **1.888.LEXILES** or visit **www.Lexile.com**.

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