Good-bye school year, Hello summer!

Another school year has come and gone. Much has been taught and learned—both in and out of the classroom *and* by students and teachers alike. What have you learned this year? What do you want to learn more about? If you had to create a K-W-L chart for your own professional development needs, what would you put on it?

Summer is hardly the two-month "vacation" many outside of the education profession perceive it to be. Yet, in the reprieve of the hustle and bustle of the finished school year, summer does provide an opportunity to reflect on all that went on over the course of the school year and make plans for next year. Consider it Vitamin D for your professional soul—a time to replenish all the school year has taken from you.

Whether or not your state or district mandates or provides summer professional development opportunities, summer is a good time to do some professional development on your own. It's a great time to read books and periodicals about educational research and issues specific to your teaching situation that you likely did not have time to read during the school year. It's a great time to consult with others within your state and district with whom you do not often have a chance to reach out during the school year. It's a great time to brainstorm and plan with your fellow teachers whose daily schedules and responsibilities are not compatible with yours during the school year.

Professional development doesn't have to be formal nor does it have to be something that takes a lot of time or requires a lot of extra "work." It can be those simple things you do of your own volition because you have the thirst to add to your skill set because you recognize that anything you can do to enhance your own learning is likely to enhance the teaching and learning process for your students.

Have a great summer! Try to soak up the sun (with sunscreen, of course) as well as any bits of professional development you can find.

Learning Progressions: Connecting Ongoing Learning to Assessment

By Karin K. Hess, Ed.D.

States have been assessing students with significant cognitive disabilities (SWSCD) for many years; still little is really known about how – or to what degree – these students acquire academic skills and knowledge over time, or how their learning pathways might compare with how "typical learners" develop expertise in reading or mathematics. Research related to students taking alternate assessments has focused less on how students learn academic content, and more on describing characteristics of the learners and the

assessment items (accessibility of test items, alignment to standards, etc.). While these two components are critical to developing valid and reliable assessments, without considering the third leg of the assessment stool – a conceptual model of how and to what degree SWSCD acquire skills and concepts over time – the stool will not be balanced.

THE ASSESSMENT STOOL

MODELS of LEARNING

ACCESS

LEARNER
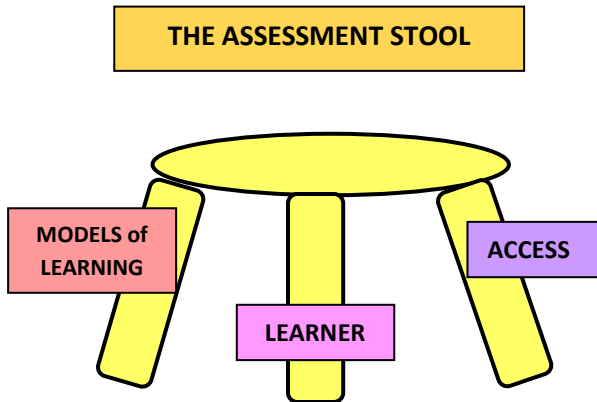
As we prepare for the next generation of alternate assessments, the time has come to pay more attention to academic instruction and the longer-term learning pathways for students with significant cognitive disabilities. **Research-based learning progressions may provide new conceptual models and greater insight into…**

- **how** SWSCD learn academics;
- **the range and complexity** of what SWSCD can learn;
- **the most important** skills and content for SWSCD to learn (because it can be connected to new/next learning); and perhaps
- **how much** SWSCD are able to learn in a realistic time frame.

This is more than a small shift in our current thinking. Equitable assessment of students taking alternate assessments depends upon rich, ongoing opportunities to learn academic content; which by necessity requires educators to increase their understanding of how content knowledge develops over time and which instructional practices will support that learning. Ultimately this shift will move teachers, test developers, and policy makers to envision new ways to conceptualize how we use assessment to monitor progress and describe learning growth.

What are learning progressions?

Learning progressions (LPs) – descriptive continuums of how students' might typically develop and demonstrate more sophisticated understanding of content over time — are becoming an increasingly important tool in today's classrooms. Simply stated, a learning progression can help teachers to visually and verbally articulate a *hypothesis,* or an anticipated path, of how student learning might move toward increased understanding over time *with focused instruction*. The strategic use of teacher observations, student work samples, and other assessment evidence can be used to validate/refine these hypotheses and better understand how learning progresses (Corcoran, Mosher, and Rogat 2009; Hess 2012). Closely observing how children learn can lead to tracing the path they might follow as instruction helps them move from naïve ideas to more sophisticated understanding. While it is recognized that competence can develop along multiple pathways to reach the same understandings, we are learning that some paths will be followed more often than others. These typical paths provide the basis for developing learning progressions.

Unlike content standards (the Common Core) that simply describe the end points for learning –

grade level "expertise" in a content domain – learning progressions suggest an intentional mapping of how to teach and build upon earlier concepts to reach the learning goals (Hess, 2012b). Learning progressions propose the *intermediate* understandings forming "reasonably coherent networks of ideas and practices…that contribute to building a more mature understanding"… [and often] "important precursor ideas may not look like the later ideas, yet crucially contribute to their construction" (NRC, 2007, pp. 219-220).

Four Interrelated Guiding Principles of Learning Progressions

Drawing from the various definitions and descriptions of learning progressions, Hess (2008) identified four unifying ideas that can shape our thinking about what makes a well-constructed learning progression. Learning progressions are different from standards and curriculum because they…

- are developed (and refined) using available **research**;
- are **organized around the big ideas** of each content domain and have clear binding threads that articulate development of essential/core concepts and processes;
- **articulate movement toward increased understanding** (deeper or broader or generalizable transfer); and
- **go hand-in-hand with well-designed and well-aligned assessments**.

A Promising Framework for Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

Most current approaches to curriculum, instruction, and assessment are based on models that tend to be fragmented, outdated, or that are too generic and poorly delineated for different areas of content learning. In short, the current models for what we teach and assess have not kept pace with what we know about how people learn (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999; Pellegrino, Chudowsky, & Glaser, 2001).

Developing and applying a central theory about the nature of learning and knowing for students with significant disabilities should probably not begin with their disabilities, but with what we know about learning, regardless of disability. Once we can articulate a research-based theory of learning to describe building expertise in a content domain, we will begin to develop testable hypotheses that may apply to all, many, or only some students. Learning progressions can open the door to new research and build upon what we know about SWSCD:

1. SWSCD can learn academic content – but we still do not know what content is essential to learn, or if some chunks can be skipped and students can still go on and lean more.
2. Learning takes longer – but do not know how much is reasonable to learn in a school year.
3. Many SWSCD learn more when included in general education classrooms and might learn in similar sequencing of instruction – we need a closer look at possible optimum sequencing of instruction that could inform test item and blueprint development and content emphasis.
4. Educator use of LPs may increase their use of formative strategies and instructional decisions and shift perceptions away from a deficit model of education for SWSCD.

A learning progression example

A learning progression can be thought of as a set of steps that students might take en route to mastering a more distant curricular aim (standards). Beneath each step are possible sub-skills – instructional building blocks that enable learning. For example, if a standard calls for students to become skilled readers, a learning progression might include sub-skills that require students to learn to take texts apart to understand how and why authors put those texts together that way. The complete learning progression for becoming a skilled reader will include many possible sub-skills for different students. <u>Reading each new type of informational text requires students to "go up and down the steps" again and again</u> to: learn a strategy that will help them understanding this text, take the text apart to understand smaller pieces, and put the text back together for more complete understanding (summarize key ideas, make inferences, etc.).
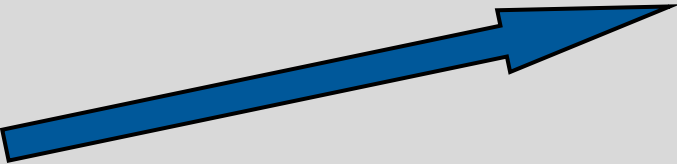
The visual on the following page shows an excerpt from the Learning Progression Framework (LPF).

- o Progress Indicators show the steps many students take along a learning path within and across grades.
- o Progress Indicators are linked to *parts* of Common Core standards to help teachers unpack standards and think about precursor skills needed for success. Standards can include reading, language, and speaking-listening standards (as in the example below).
- o Instructional Building Blocks guide learning at each step – the Core Content Connectors have been developed for this purpose.

References

Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, (1999). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school.* Washington, DC: National Academies Press. Corcoran, Mosher, & Rogat. (2009). *Learning progressions in science: An Evidence-based approach to reform.* Philadelphia: Consortium for Policy Research in Education.

Hess, K. (2008). Developing and using learning progressions as a schema for measuring progress. Available online at: http://www.nciea.org/publications/CCSSO2_KH08.pdf

Hess, K. (2012). Learning progressions in K-8 classrooms: How progress maps can influence classroom practice and perceptions and help teachers make more informed instructional decisions in support of struggling learners (Synthesis Report 87). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes. Retrieved from http://www.cehd.umn.edu/NCEO/OnlinePubs/Synthesis87/SynthesisReport87.pdf

Pellegrino, Chudowsky, & Glaser, (Eds.). (2001). *Knowing what students know: The science and design of educational assessment*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

National Research Council (NRC). (2007).Duschl, Schweingruber, & Shouse, (Eds.). *Taking science to school: Learning and teaching science in grades K–8*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

ncsc

National Center and State Collaborative

Excerpt from the Grade 7 LPF: Progress Indicators (PI) for Reading Informational Texts, with grade 7 Common Core related standards, and possible *instructional* Building Blocks for each step (PI)

PI: M.RI.j use supporting evidence to summarize central ideas, draw inferences, or analyze connections within or across texts (e.g., events, people, ideas)
7.RI-1, 2, 3, 9

PI: M.RI.i utilize knowledge of text structures and genre features to locate, organize, or analyze important information
7.RI-5

Instructional Building Blocks for this PI might include:
- Match/locate key words or text evidence with the central idea stated in the text **7.RI-1**
- Put steps (how to build or make something) or key events in the correct sequence;
- Summarize key ideas **7.RI-2**
- Find similar OR different information about a topic in two texts **7.RI-9**
- Draw inferences from or make connections about what is stated or implied in one text **7.RI-3**

PI: M.RI.h flexibly use strategies to derive meaning from a variety of print/non-print texts
7.RI-4; 7.L-4, 5a; 7.SL-2

Instructional Building Blocks for this PI might begin with
- Listen for key ideas in news/media stories **7.SL-2**
- Interpret visuals in informational texts (e.g., arrows in a graphic organizer showing how a plant grows or how water evaporates) **7.SL-2**
- Answer the question: does this word make sense? **7.RI-4; 7.L-4**

Instructional Building Blocks for this PI might include:
- Locate & use informational text features to answer questions (captions, titles, headings, etc.)
- Identify the kind of information found in different informational texts (newspaper versus magazine)
- Recognize structures that help to organize information (e.g., introduction, body, conclusion; signal words for compare-contrast) **7.RI-5**

ncsc
National Center and State Collaborative

Recommendations for You

Fiction Summer Reads

My Brother Sammy by Becky Edwards and David Armitage
This book for children from preschool to second grade contains beautiful water color illustrations. Sammy rides a different bus to a different school and plays in different ways. Sammy's brother expresses feelings of sadness, loneliness, and frustration typical of many siblings before realizing that Sammy's way of doing things is not so bad.

Rules by Cynthia Lord
This winner of a Newberry Honor Medal is targeted toward students ages 9-13. It centers around Catherine, a young girl who has a brother with autism. She loves her brother but, at times, resents how his autism impacts her family. Catherine copes with many of his behaviors by creating "rules" for him. This book provides an accurate portrayal of how having different disabilities affect relationships within the family and with people in the community.

Al Capone Does My Shirts by Gennifer Choldenko
Written for a young adult crowd but with a historical setting and message that older adults will enjoy, this book is a fiction novel about a family that lives on Alcatraz Island at the time Al Capone was imprisoned there. The father of the family works at the prison. The story centers around the family's efforts to keep their daughter's autism a secret while trying to get her enrolled at a "special" school in nearby San Francisco. In a sense, it serves as a reflection on how far our society has come in terms of its attitudes about and acceptance of persons with disabilities.

Sites for Universal Design and Differentiation

www.cast.org

www.udlcenter.org

http://differentiationcentral.com

Sites with Multiple Resources

http://www.scholastic.com/teachers

www.paec.org/fdlrstech/index.html

A FL Department of Education sponsored site which contains useful information and resources on many different subjects such as assistive tech, UDL, and academic content.

ncsc
National Center and State Collaborative

Going Over to the Dark Side
submitted by Cindy Collins

I can still remember a time when I stood up at an alternate assessment training in Thermopolis, Wyoming and said that it was wrong to expect severely disabled students to perform on standardized academic assessments. I felt it was cruel to the students and a waste of my time as their teacher. My conversion was a gradual process, ignited by my work with Charlene Turner and Bill Herrara, both formerly with WDE, then my work with Project Mastery and National Board Certification. However, it was students that solidified my change of perspective and I want to share an example of why I have, as some of my peers say, "Gone over to the Dark Side."

When John came to middle school, I often saw him in the hallways with his paraprofessional or our physical therapist. John had a feeding tube and limited mobility. He was in our life skills program. His case manger stated that John was unable to learn and it was a waste of time to try. One day I watched John interacting with his PT and realized they were communicating just fine. There was give and take and a real light in John's eyes as he teased the PT. This bothered me for days. Finally, I offered to include this student in a reading lesson with the one student with SCD that I worked with. What I quickly found out was that this student had plenty of ability and wanted to learn. I used him in my Project Mastery training and later that year in my national board certification work. The highlight of our work together was John's participation in a regular education life science class. He did two dissections with a regular education peer. John had NEVER been in a regular education classroom before. He used an adapted PowerPoint and a preprogramed ACC device to give his answers and take his adapted assessment. Now, John has a new case manager and receives academic instruction every day.

John changed who I am as a teacher and his impact will affect every other student I teach forever. A beautiful mind was inside him all along. If I had not done the work with people who passionately believed that all students deserve a chance to learn academic content, these two students might never have had an opportunity to show their innate abilities. It was easy to write them off. As our UNC-C team says, "Just because a student is not toilet trained, does not mean they cannot learn to read."

I Have a Voice and I Can Sing... Learning to Communicate with an IPAD submitted by Cyndi Mettling

I have a 6 year old student who has Down Syndrome and had been pretty much non-verbal. When she did speak, you could hardly hear her. During Christmas, I was working with her and using my IPAD. I started to play some Christmas songs such as "Jolly Ole St. Nicholas." I was singing "La la la la" to the tune. All of a sudden, she started singing "La la la la" to the tune, holding the note at

ncsc
National Center and State Collaborative

the appropriate time, and loud enough to be heard. I was so excited! I took the IPAD and my student to the front office to see the principal. My student sang "La la la la" to the tune with me and it was loud enough to be heard. Starting then, she began increasing her tone and volume, communicating with her peers, participating in activities, becoming more independent, and defiantly saying the word "NO."

After three months of using an IPAD, my student is singing to the tunes she hears on IPAD apps, answering questions that are asked of her during various activities, carrying on 5-7 word sentences with her classmates, naming her colors, shapes, saying the names of her classmates/teacher, and expressing her wants and needs. She continues to use and strengthen her voice muscles, improve in her tone/volume, and her once aggressive behavior has decreased. However, small or big her communication is to others - to her family and to me - she is being heard, she has a voice, and it is a "miracle!"

Miscellaneous information and updates

Please inform your NCSC trainer and your state department of education lead if you are changing districts for the fall and will have new contact information. While no NCSC grant sponsored face-to-face meetings are planned for this summer, some states are holding their own meetings. Your state lead will contact you directly if your state is planning one.

We hope that you have enjoyed this expanded edition of our newsletter. Our next edition will feature information on our summer communication summit that many of your state leads attended. The NCSC grant staff hopes that everyone has a wonderful and restful summer. We look forward to continuing our work together!

Communication Corner

Listed below are a few tips and reminders about communication for students with SCD.

All students communicate. If a student's communication is unconventional or involves pre- or emerging-symbol use, educators' roles involve determining communicative intents and providing the student with a more conventional mode of communication (and teaching symbolic language use) in order to facilitate listener comprehension.

Always presume competence. Many students have a receptive vocabulary that is much larger than their expressive vocabulary. Research is showing us that even students with significant cognitive disabilities can develop symbolic language and use augmentative communication systems. We can work to create situations and supports for students to show their competence.

Provide clear, consistent expectations. Work on one thing at a time. For example, do not require a student with a physical limitation to cross the midline during communication instruction. Direct communication instruction may not be the time to embed goals that might compete with early communication success – especially for beginning communicators. Such instruction is best provided in typical routines where the reward for communication attempts is listener comprehension, the ultimate in communication success!

If you see no growth within a few weeks, re-examine the system, the environment, and the instruction. Don't give up! While it's not always easy, we CAN find a way to enable all students to express themselves. Remember: All students CAN communicate!

ncsc

National Center and State Collaborative