

Jennifer N. Mahdavi

Department of Educational Leadership and Special Education, School of Education

Title of Project

Success through Progress Monitoring: Ongoing Assessment to Improve Learning and Teaching

Statement of Purpose of Sabbatical

I completed an academic/professional development text for teachers and specialists working with students with disabilities on the topic of using progress monitoring for data-based decision making and intervention planning. During the summer of 2019, I entered into a contract with Brookes Publishing Co. and worked through the year to complete a first draft, content editing, copy editing and proofing. The completed book, [*A Teacher's Guide to Progress Monitoring: Track Goals to Refine Instruction for all Students*](#) (link to book website) is now available for purchase.

Description of Completed Project

For nearly as long as I have been a professor, I have been teaching a credential course about assessing children with disabilities (EDSP 423). This course is designed to assist credential candidates working with students across the full spectrum of disabilities. However, finding a text that both provides ample coverage of how to assess students with significant disabilities along with those with milder disabilities, and also of how to use formative assessment data to make instructional decisions has been difficult. Becoming licensed as a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) in 2013, an outcome of my 2012 sabbatical brought me to greater academic and practical knowledge regarding single-case research designs and how these can inform special educators when used as formative assessment tools. In addition, the BCBA licensure raised my awareness of the functional life skills typically being taught to individuals with significant disabilities and assessed through task analysis and single-case research designs. This learning enables me to write and publish the textbook that I cannot find on the current market.

My completed text will be useful for educators and education professionals of all kinds. My intent was to write a book that may be used in credential programs to support the teaching of future teachers, but that may also be purchased and used in school districts and educational agencies to provide in-service professional development. Motivated teachers and professionals will even be able to use the book as a stand-alone method of learning about how to perform progress monitoring procedures and use them to plan more effective instruction and interventions for struggling learners. While I cited research and highlighted evidence-based practice throughout the book, I was careful not to write in an overly technical style that may be difficult for non-academics to access.

The first eight chapters of the book provide the theoretical foundation for using progress monitoring and task analyses as methods of informing instruction in special education settings. A

firm research and evidence-base was established through these chapters, along with step-by-step directions for implementing the practices recommended.

The book concludes with a series of case studies that illustrate how real special educators conceptualized and implemented the progress monitoring and data-based decision-making practices described in earlier chapters. I coauthored these chapters with five current (four of whom have completed degrees now) MA candidates in Education who took taken courses with me in the past related to assessment and pedagogy. Writing a case study of their experiences, under my guidance, was an enriching academic endeavor for them, as well as a rich and authentic contribution to the book. Indeed, expert reviewers of the completed book noted the significant benefits of including real world examples in the book. <https://products.brookespublishing.com/A-Teachers-Guide-to-Progress-Monitoring-P1200.aspx>

IRB approval (proposal #2945) for including anonymized data about real children in this publication as authored by SSU graduate students was granted on September 5, 2018.

Theoretical Framework for Progress Monitoring

The following text is excerpted from chapter 1 of this book.

Progress Monitoring (PM) draws from work in curriculum-based measurement (CBM) that dates back to the late 1970s (Deno, 1985). Developed as tests drawn directly from the curriculum in use in a classroom, CBM was an informal method of assessment designed to be administered, scored, and analyzed simply and quickly (Deno, 2014). The results of CBM assessments were graphed and used to plan instruction for individual students, with positive results for student learning (Marston, Mirkin, & Deno, 1984; Marston & Magnusson, 1985). In short, CBM has three primary goals: measure the effects of instruction on a particular child's learning, permit teachers to make data-based decisions on whether instructional changes are needed, and thereby create more robust educational programs for each child (Fuchs, 2017).

From the beginning, CBM was bound with the idea of PM. With multiple short probes designed to be equally difficult (Fuchs, 2017), CBM tools were always meant to be administered frequently, with their results tracked over time, and used to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction (Deno, 1985; Marston & Magnusson, 1984). Evidence-based practices are statistically effective instructional strategies for most students, but an individual practice may not be useful for the child who is sitting in front of you right now. CBM or PM is a way to test instructional hypotheses about whether an evidence-based practice is right for a particular person; it can be used to ensure that the instruction a teacher provides is reaching each individual student (Espin, Wayman, Deno, & McMaster, 2017).

Over time, researchers began to develop measures unrelated to the actual classroom curriculum. These commercially available measures are designed to be easy to use, efficient, and cost effective, as well as reliable and valid for measuring what they purport to measure (Kaminski & Good, 1996). These measures include such tools as

DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy) or *AIMSweb*, along with others described in chapter 2 of this text. The commercially available measures alleviated technical adequacy and time-based issues that teachers and districts faced when they attempted the difficult work of developing their own sets of tools (Deno, 2014).

Progress monitoring is conducted with quick, short measures, many of which can be administered in five minutes or fewer (Deno, 1985; Kaminski & Good, 1985). An oral reading fluency measure, administered to an individual student for one minute, a math facts assessment in which students get 5 minutes to solve addition and subtraction problems, or a writing prompt in which students are given 3 minutes to write as many words as they can, are the sorts of PM tools that are widely available. Because progress monitoring tools of these sorts are measuring fluency, or how quickly students can complete the task, they are best suited to measure learning in concrete or foundational skills; other measures are better for more complex thinking, such as reading comprehension (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1992). Progress monitoring measures have a great deal of appeal and utility for teachers who are anxious to help their students reach their learning goals.

Potential Benefit for the University

Benefits to Sonoma State as a result of this project have already begun to accrue. I have shared draft chapters with students as part of their EDSP 423 class. My own grasp of progress-monitoring as a form of data-based decision making has become more sophisticated as I have read research articles and synthesized disparate sources of information to inform my own teaching. The iterative process of writing about and teaching about a topic has created a more powerful learning environment for future special educators. Several of them have let me know the ways in which they are implementing what I have taught them to benefit their own students with disabilities. Teaching future teachers has rippling effects from SSU into the communities those teachers serve.

Beyond the benefits I am currently bringing to SSU through this work, publishing a book on an important and timely topic in education will bring recognition of my expertise in the subject area, which enhances the reputation of the university. As well, I offered SSU graduate students the opportunity to conduct applied research under my guidance. This resulted in a publication credit (authorship of the chapters they each wrote) for each graduate student, who is also a special educator in our region. Publications are rare among K-12 communities of educators, which makes them even more meaningful. Through their work, our graduates will also be recognized as experts and leaders within this critical field of study and practice.

Most of all, though, I believe this book will serve communities of educators. We need more comprehensible information about how to improve the teaching of individuals with disabilities. Now that the book is complete, and once this pandemic ends, I would be happy to provide professional development to in-service teachers in our region's school districts. It is my small way of providing leadership and advocacy for students with disabilities who live in the North Bay.