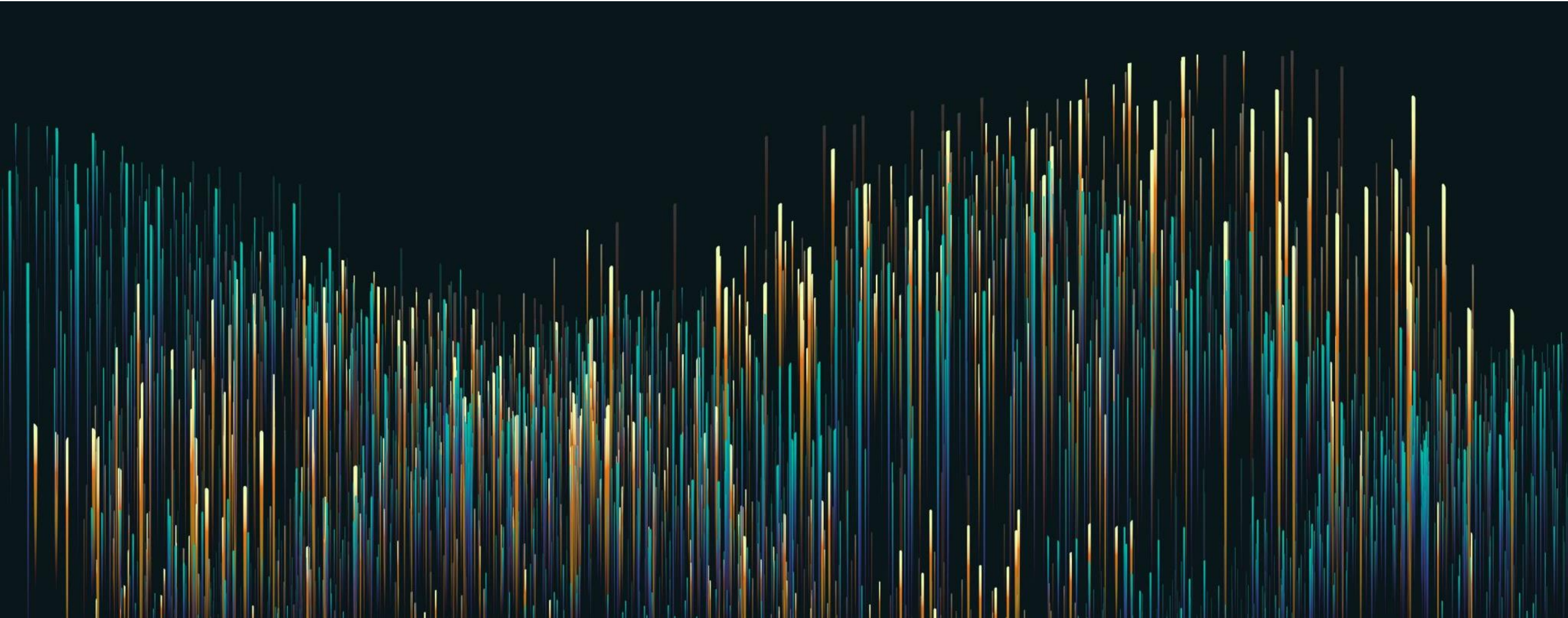


Early Literacy Screening: Building a Foundation for Every Reader

April 9th, 2025

David Fainstein, PhD, NCSP





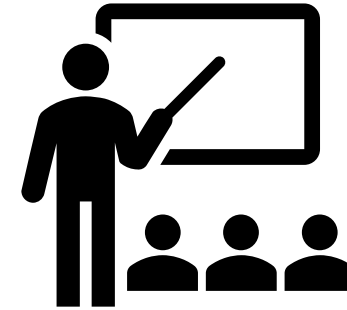
Welcome!

Shape of our Session

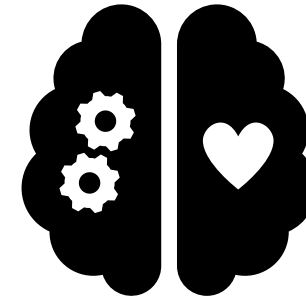
- ✓ Introduction
- ✓ What is a screener? Examples & non-examples from early literacy research and practice
- ✓ Common misconceptions
- ✓ The proactivity and promise of early screening
- ✓ Preview, and Q&A

Hi, I'm David

Currently working as a professor in
Seattle, Washington



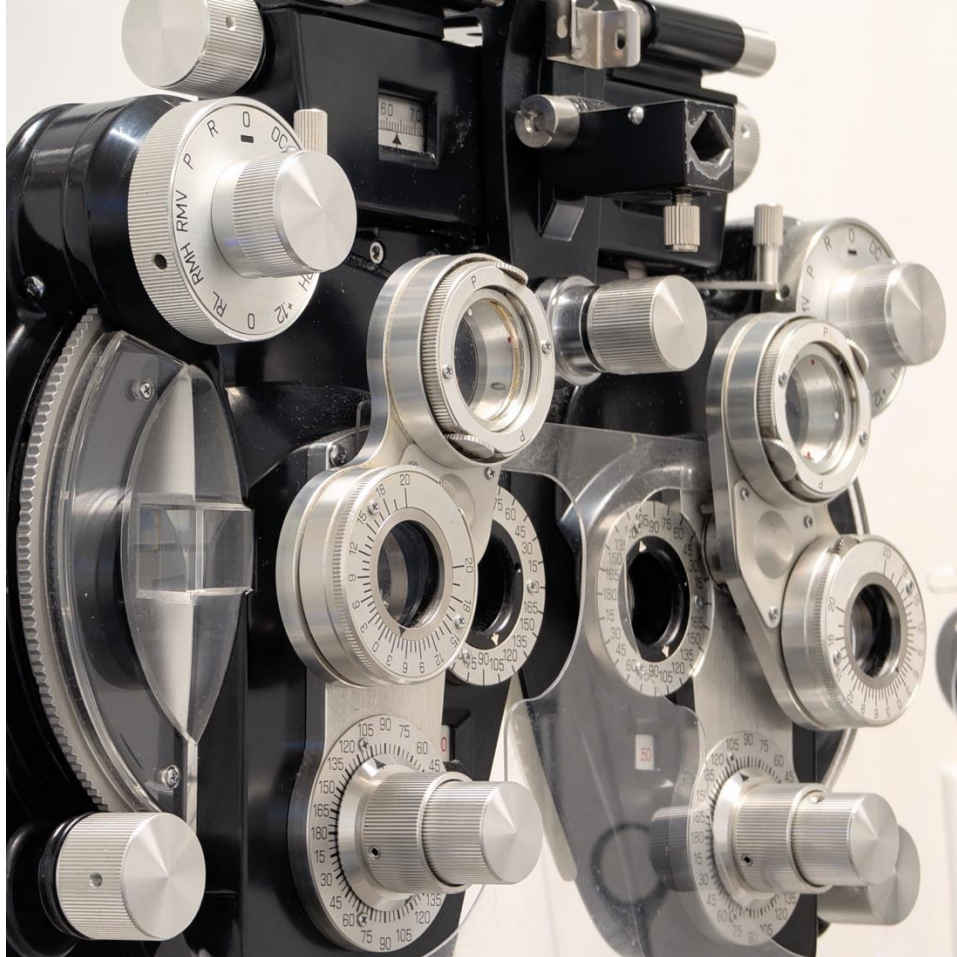
Four years experience doing school and
applied psychological work in British
Columbia



Over a decade of work as an EA, tutor,
interventionist, classroom volunteer, and
more



Screening

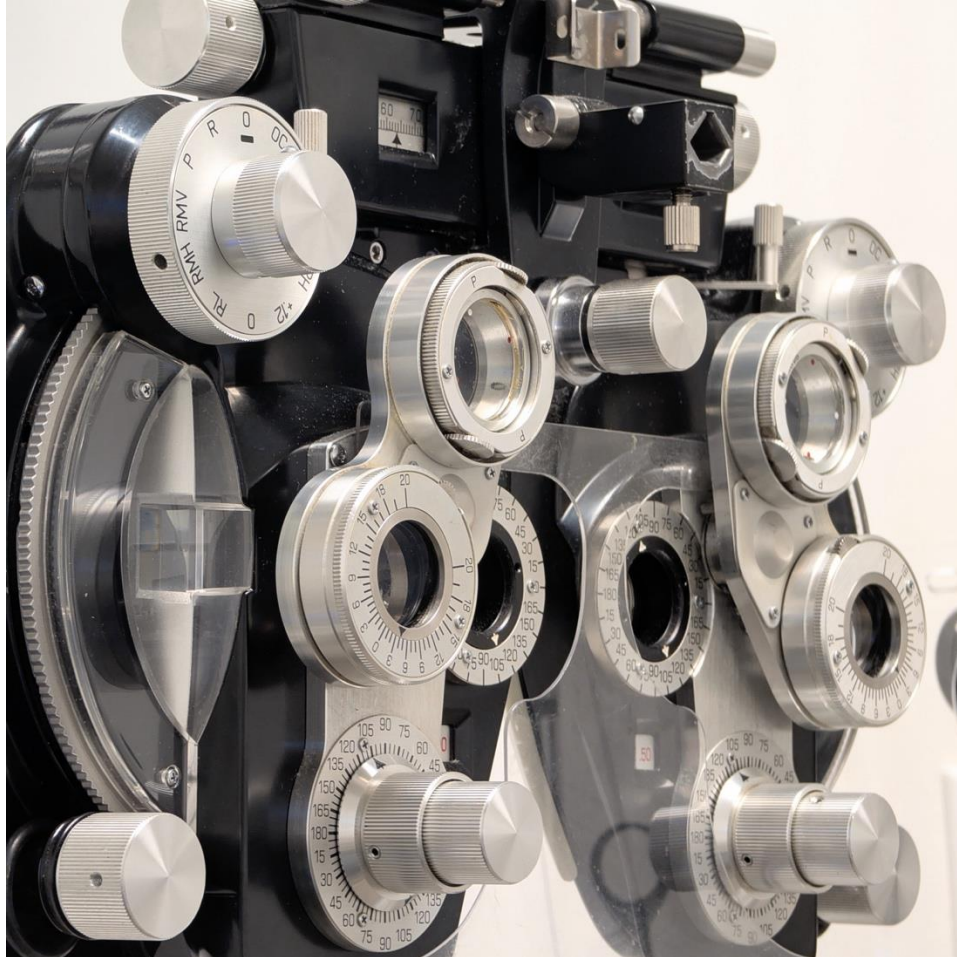


@steevithak, CC

Let's start with some **background knowledge**

- Screening is cross-disciplinary
- When a professional administers a screening, it has a few known features:
 - It is fast
 - It provides an indication of needing to dive deeper
 - It is for everyone

Screening



@steevithak, CC

Let's start with some **background knowledge**

- Screening is helpful by taking a quick peek into something about us that we might need to address early to prevent a concern down the line
- Screening can be done more than once because we don't always know when concerns might pop up

What is Screening in an Educational Context?

Screening is a short process to find students who need help in reading, writing, spelling, or math

What is an Early Literacy Screener?

An early literacy screener is empirically supported to efficiently measure foundational literacy skills highlighting which students will benefit from more support in learning how to read

You Might be Wondering...

What does **empirically supported** mean?

- There is a convergence of evidence and research showing that this early literacy screener is valid, reliable, and useful for you as a teacher

What does **efficient** mean?

- Efficient means fast! Individual screening tests take about 90 seconds with instructional and behavioural supports. All screening tests together usually take less than 10 minutes.

You Might be Wondering...

What are the **foundational literacy skills**?

Decades of research and practice have brought us the “Big 5” in early reading skill development:



Examples of Early Literacy Screeners

Screening task example: Phoneme Segmentation Fluency

You say: *“let’s say the all the sounds in words. I’ll show you: all the sounds in the word ‘moose’ are /m/ /oo/ /s/. Now you try one, what are the sounds you hear in the word ‘bird’?” Then attempt task for 60 seconds*

For those earliest in their reading development, we focus on **Phonemic Awareness**

- First sound fluency
- Phoneme segmentation fluency
- Blending fluency
- Final sound fluency
- Rhyme production
- and many more!

Examples of Early Literacy Screeners

Screening task example: Letter Sound Fluency

You say: *“let’s say the letter sounds we know. I’ll show you: the sound of this letter ‘L’ is /l/. Now you try one, what sound does this letter ‘R’ make?” Then attempt task for 60 seconds*

For those earliest in their reading development, we focus on **Alphabetic Principle**

- Letter naming fluency
- Letter sound fluency
- and several others

Examples of Early Literacy Screeners

Screening task example: Oral Reading Fluency

You say: *“I’m going to listen to you do your best reading with this passage. Try to do your best reading. When you’re ready, start here”*

Then they read for 60 seconds

For those earliest in their reading development, we focus on **Accuracy and Fluency**

- Oral Reading Fluency
- Word Reading Fluency
- Passage Reading Fluency

Some Noticings

It is likely that you've made several connections thus far:

- ✓ Screeners are often fluency-based measures
- ✓ There are a wide variety of screening tests that can be used for each area of foundational literacy
 - ✓ *True, except vocabulary*
- ✓ Screeners are an organized series of short tasks
- ✓ There are commonly used instructions/structures
- ✓ I feel like my students are ready / not ready for these tasks

Non-Examples of Screeners which are Examples of Other Forms of Assessment

Not every assessment is a screener. Remember the components from our definition of screener:

1. Empirically supported
2. Efficient
3. Assesses foundational literacy skills
4. Identifies which students will benefit from increased support

Non-Examples of Screeners which are Examples of Other Forms of Assessment

Not every assessment is a screener. Non-examples of screeners, and yet, still high utility assessment tools for educators:

- Unit tests
- Diagnostic tests
- Summative assessments
- Any literacy assessments lacking benchmarks or goals
- Assessments taking significant time to administer

Common Misconceptions

#1 Misconception:
Fluency-based screening
tests are encouraging
speed reading

Not at all! In fact, it is good educational practice to use your observational skills to pick up on when our students are rushing through and encourage them to do their best work instead of their fastest work

#2 Misconception:
screeners are just fast
diagnostic tests

Also no. Diagnostic tests have a deeper set of skills, competencies, and knowledge that they tap into. Screeners indicate which students might benefit from a follow up diagnostic test.

#3 Misconception:
Universal screeners don't
apply to my student because
they have _____

No again, because universal screeners are universal! Students with significant hearing or vision issues have different assessment instruments, otherwise screeners are designed for all others students inclusively

The International Dyslexia Association (2019)

‘Since research has shown that the rapid growth of the brain and its response to instruction in the primary years make the time from birth to age eight a critical period for literacy development (Nevills & Wolfe, 2009), it is essential to identify the instructional needs of struggling students as soon as possible. It is imperative to “catch them before they fall” (Torgesen, 1998).’

Prevention: A Note of Optimism

Decades of research demonstrates that **reading difficulties are largely preventable**. The earlier we screen and intervene, the more we advance the **protective factor of literacy acquisition**



@eekim, CC

Prevention: A Note of Optimism

Early literacy screening is one of the best tools in our toolkit for preventing reading difficulties. Relatedly, under-developed reading skills can occur throughout the life course, and it is never “too late” to aim for prevention.



@eekim, CC

Next Time

April 16th: “Understanding Early Literacy Screening Data: Making Sense of the Results” will help us answer a few questions:

- ❑ What do early literacy screening results tell us? What conclusions might be too much of a leap?
- ❑ Am I assessing [this literacy skill] right? What are some practitioner tips for using early literacy screeners?
- ❑ How can I organize early literacy screening data for my classroom? how do I extend up to use this data at a grade-level team or school level?

Questions

Please route all questions to **Jen Kelly** in the Chat

