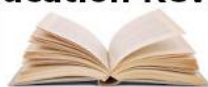


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Stollar, S., & Winn, K. (2026). *Reading assessment done right: Tools and techniques for data-driven instruction*. Scholastic.

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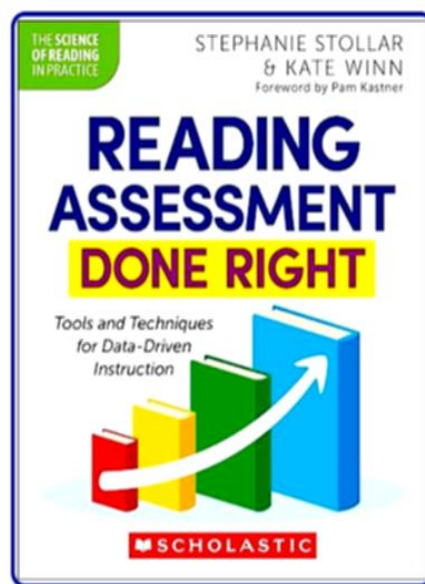
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Stephanie Stollar is widely recognized for her work in multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) and data-based decision making in literacy. Kate Winn brings extensive classroom experience and literacy expertise, particularly in translating research into daily instructional practice. Together, they position themselves at the intersection of research and application, aiming to support educators in using assessment as a meaningful driver of reading instruction.

In many classrooms, assessment has become something we do rather than something we understand. Data are collected, entered, and reported, yet the connection between the numbers and the decisions made in real time with students often feels thin. Teachers sit with spreadsheets full of information and still find themselves asking the same question: What am I supposed to do with this, and where do I even start? This disconnect is not new. Assessment and instruction have long been treated as separate in both purpose and practice, creating barriers to meaningful instructional use (Shepard, 2000).

It is within this space that *Reading Assessment Done Right* situates itself. Stollar and Winn attempt to reposition assessment as purposeful, efficient, and closely tied to instruction. Their central claim is clear. When assessment is used well, it becomes a tool for understanding rather than a task of compliance.

The book centers on a clear claim: reading instruction improves when assessment produces data teachers can actually use. The authors draw a sharp distinction between assessments that provide broad, generalized information and those that allow teachers to make precise instructional decisions. As Stollar reflects, “evidence based assessment...was the compass that provided direction



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and the catalyst that led me to gaining the knowledge and instructional practices my students deserved” (p. 5). With concrete examples and measurement tools, the authors walk educators through how to identify and implement high-quality assessment systems, allowing readers to see how data might move from identification to instructional response.

Stollar and Winn also outline the components of a comprehensive reading assessment system, including phoneme segmentation, nonsense word fluency, oral reading fluency, oral reading retell, rapid automatized naming, spelling, and Maze, described as “an indicator of silent reading comprehension that is used for screening 2nd–8th grade” (p. 73). The inclusion of real assessment examples and interpretation guidance strengthens the practical character of the text.

A significant portion of the book is dedicated to evaluating assessment quality. The authors provide criteria for determining whether universal, diagnostic, and progress monitoring tools are of quality. They are particularly critical of computer adaptive tests, arguing that they are often inefficient and instructionally unhelpful. As they note, “scores are statistically manipulated and reported in a way that is difficult for most educators and parents and other guardians to understand” (p. XX). These assessments, they argue, are not useful for planning instruction or monitoring progress and are often inappropriate for younger learners.

One of the strongest contributions of the book is its sustained focus on actionable data. The authors identify a frustration that many educators experience but struggle to articulate. “For decades, teachers have been handed mandated reading assessments and held accountable for their results, and yet, student outcomes haven't improved” (p. 11). This claim aligns with long-standing critiques in the field that many large-scale assessment systems fail to produce information that meaningfully improves teaching and learning (Popham, 2003).

The text is particularly effective in helping educators distinguish between assessments designed for instructional use and those designed for accountability. This distinction reflects broader conversations in assessment scholarship. Assessment has historically served multiple roles, including gatekeeping, accountability, and instructional diagnosis; and these roles often compete with one another in practice (Nagy, 2000). Stollar and Winn clearly prioritize instructional diagnosis, emphasizing the importance of tools that inform what teachers do next.

Where the book becomes less convincing is in how it accounts for the realities of classroom and district-level constraints. While the critique of computer adaptive testing is well-founded, the recommendation to move away from such systems does not fully acknowledge that these decisions are often made at the district level rather than by individual teachers. Educators are frequently required to use tools they may not find instructionally useful, which creates a tension the book identifies but does not fully resolve.

The authors also raise questions about instructional timing in certain areas. In discussing prosody, the Stollar and Winn recommend modeling prosodic reading but suggest assessing or intervening only with “the small percentage of students

who are accurate and fluent readers but not comprehending” (p. 86). This approach positions prosody as something to be addressed after comprehension difficulties emerge rather than as a component of fluency that can be developed proactively. Given that prosody is closely tied to meaning-making, delaying instruction risks missing opportunities to support students earlier in their development.

This tension points to a broader issue in the field. Assessment systems themselves have become increasingly disconnected from the contexts in which teaching and learning occur (Brown, 2022). Even when tools are technically sound, they do not always translate into usable information within the constraints of real classrooms. In practice, this leaves teachers working to make sense of data that does not always align with the instructional decisions they are expected to make, often within systems they did not choose. This makes it clear that selecting better assessments is not enough. Those assessments must also be usable in the realities of teaching.

One of the most significant strengths of *Reading Assessment Done Right* is its clarity around what makes assessment useful. Stollar and Winn move beyond general claims and provide educators with a structured way to think about how assessment should function in instruction. Central to this is the Collaborative Improvement Cycle, a four-part process that includes gap identification, gap analysis, action planning, and outcome analysis. The cycle is designed to move teachers from simply identifying student needs to making intentional instructional decisions in response. Rather than allowing data to remain static, the framework emphasizes movement and iteration, pushing educators to continuously analyze and adjust their practice.

The strength of this framework lies in how it is supported throughout the text. The authors provide concrete examples, sample data, and guidance for interpretation, allowing readers to see how the process unfolds in practice. This is particularly valuable in a field where assessment is often discussed in abstract terms but rarely demonstrated in actionable ways. The inclusion of specific assessment types and clear criteria for evaluating their quality further strengthens the book, giving educators a lens through which to determine whether the data they are collecting are actually useful.

The book’s limitations are seen in how it accounts for the realities in which teachers are working. While the Collaborative Improvement Cycle provides a clear pathway for decision-making, it assumes a level of control over assessment systems that many educators do not have. In practice, assessments are often selected at the district or state level, leaving teachers to work with systems that may not align with the criteria outlined in the text. As a result, the framework, while conceptually strong, may seem difficult to fully enact within existing constraints.

There are also moments where the instructional implications lean toward a reactive stance. For example, the recommendation to delay prosody assessment and intervention until comprehension difficulties are evident suggests a wait-and-see approach that may overlook opportunities for earlier support (p. 86). Given

the role of prosody in supporting meaning-making, this positioning raises important questions about when instruction should occur and whether fluency is being treated as something to intentionally develop or something to address only after breakdown occurs.

Reading Assessment Done Right offers a meaningful contribution to the conversation about how assessment can better serve instruction. It provides clarity where many educators experience confusion and offers a framework that can support more intentional decision making. For teachers and instructional leaders seeking to refine their use of data, it is a valuable resource.

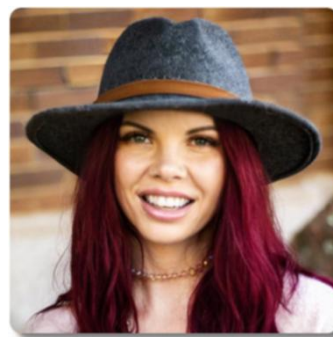
The book reveals the limits of even well-designed assessment frameworks when placed in complex educational systems. The challenge is not simply identifying better assessments but ensuring that those assessments can be meaningfully enacted within the constraints of real classrooms. Ultimately, the book reinforces an essential truth. Assessment is only as powerful as the decisions it informs. Without the time, support, and professional knowledge to interpret and act on data, even the most well-designed systems will fall short of their intended impact.

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About the Reviewer

Amber Woodard is a clinical instructor and field supervisor at East Texas A&M University, where she prepares preservice teachers to translate research into responsive classroom practice. She serves as chair of the Texas Association for Literacy Education and as a Texas Reading Academy cohort leader, she contributes to the development of Reading Academies for Grades 4–8 teachers. Her work centers on literacy, assessment, and data-informed instruction, with an emphasis on bridging research and classroom



realities. She brings two decades of experience across general education, special education, and dyslexia-informed elementary settings.

About the Authors

Stephanie Stollar, PhD, is the founder of Stephanie Stollar Consulting LLC and the creator of the Reading Science Academy. She has provided professional development, conducted research, and published in the areas of assessment, early intervention, and collaborative problem-solving. She is passionate about improving educator knowledge and aligning school systems to prevent reading failure. Previously, she served as Vice President of Professional Learning at Acadience Learning, as an assistant professor at Mount St. Joseph University, and as an MTSS trainer and consultant for hundreds of school districts.



Kate Winn is a Canadian primary-grade teacher with 25 years of classroom experience and a teacher educator who specializes in evidence-based literacy. She is also a freelance magazine writer, TV guest and podcaster. Her varied career in education has included French as a second language, gifted education, and teaching most grades from kindergarten to 8. Her writing can be seen in national magazines like *Today's Parent*, *Parents Canada*, and *Canadian Living*.

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