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Guidelines for Contributors

TESOL Journal, a refereed publication of teaching and classroom research, is looking for submissions on matters related to children, adolescents, and adults who are learning English as an additional language. Appropriate topics include, but are not limited to, classroom inquiry and research, teacher preparation, literacy/biliteracy, curriculum and policy issues, and methodology.

TESOL Journal welcomes any of the following types of submissions.

Feature Articles

A feature article should be 1,000-3,000 words and should:
1. analyze, present, or discuss novel ESOL methodology, curriculum materials and design, teacher education, and classroom inquiry and research in terms accessible to classroom teachers. You are encouraged to connect your inquiry and research to theoretical principles; heavy referencing, however, is discouraged.
2. discuss and reflect upon research findings that are applicable to classrooms in which there are ESL/EFL learners.
3. encourage practitioners to engage in their own reflective practice and classroom research on connections between oral and written language during language and content learning.

Send your submissions to Christian J. Faltis, Editor, TESOL Journal, at the address listed below.

Perspectives

A perspective submission should present your views on ESOL-related sociopolitical and professional concerns around the world. You should present a cogent argument for your views although references are discouraged. Perspectives should be 300-800 words.

Send your submissions to Christian J. Faltis, Editor, TESOL Journal, at the address listed below.

Tips from the Classroom

Tips from the Classroom briefly recount successful ESOL techniques, activities, or methods in such a way that they could be adapted by teachers in diverse programs or teaching situations. Submissions should not be recounted in the manner of a diary, but rather as a set of guidelines for successful implementation. Tips might include the following information: appropriate levels, objectives, approximate class time and preparation time required, necessary materials, implementation procedure, and any caveats or alternatives to the recommended procedure. Submissions should be 250-800 words.

Send your submissions to Jill Burton, Center for Applied Linguistics, University of South Australia, GPO Box 2471, Adelaide, South Australia 5001.

Ask the TJ

Ask the TJ responds to questions submitted by readers to TESOL Journal on matters relating to teaching and classroom research. Responses should not exceed 100 words.

Send your questions or responses to Nancy Cloud, Editor, Ask the TJ, TESOL Journal, Department of Curriculum & Teaching, 243 Gallon Wing, Mason Hall, 113 Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY 11550 USA.

Guidelines

Your submission must be a previously unpublished manuscript and should conform to the following format.
1. Three copies of each submission; all references to the author’s identity deleted.
2. Typed, double-spaced, with 1” margins on top, bottom, and sides of each page.
3. Copies, not the originals, of student artwork and/or black and white photographs. Originals will be requested if the submission is accepted.
4. Source citations according to APA (American Psychological Association) guidelines.
5. A biographical statement of up to 50 words for each author, including the name and address to which correspondence may be sent. A telephone number, fax number, and e-mail address are also requested.

Submissions of feature articles, perspectives, tips, and reviews will be acknowledged within 1 month of their receipt.

TESOL Journal retains the right to edit all manuscripts that are accepted for publication.

General inquiries regarding TESOL Journal should be sent to:

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Choose the following activities to stay up to date professionally:

- Use your ballot from the October/November issue of *TESOL Matters* to elect candidates to TESOL's Board of Directors. Be sure it reaches TESOL Central Office by January 10, 1996.

- Apply for one of TESOL's many awards or grants by November 15. Descriptions of the awards and grants and instructions for applying or nominating colleagues appeared in the June/July issue of *TESOL Matters*. Contact Lisa Queeney at TESOL for information.

- Say yes to your invitation to TESOL '96, March 26-30, in Chicago. The preliminary program will arrive in November. It offers a professionally impressive program, with Plenary Sessions, Pre- and Post-convention Institutes, Breakfast Seminars, Educational Visits, hundreds of academic sessions, workshops, colloquia, and the world's largest Exposition of cutting edge resources for you to explore. Take a peek at the program using the files on TESL-L or the World Wide Web (http://raven.ritslab.ubc.ca/tesol.html)

- Respond to the Call for Participation for TESOL '97 to be held in Orlando, Florida, March 11-15, 1997. The Call will appear in the December/January 1995 issue of *TESOL Matters*. Why not present your latest research or classroom methodology in this magic setting?

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**TESOL Journal**

**Special Issue on Learner Strategies and Styles**

Co-editors: Christopher M. Ely and Lucinda Pease-Alvarez

The Autumn 1996 special issue of *TESOL Journal* will focus on language learning strategies and/or learning styles. We are particularly interested in articles that explore classroom teachers' work with their students.

Some topics of interest are:

- **Classroom insights**
  - Case studies, personal reports, experiences, and views

- **Individual and cultural considerations**
  - Impact of cultural/educational norms and values on strategies/styles
  - Role of cultural and individual differences

- **Students’ perspectives**
  - Student self-knowledge
  - Learning styles as perceived by students
  - Strategy development (and student autonomy) as perceived by students
  - Students’ attitudes before, during, or after strategy training
  - Dealing with students’ reactions to strategy/style work

- **Strategy development in classroom settings**
  - Using textbook strategy material
  - Developing strategy material
  - Integrating strategy training with other learning activities
  - Innovations and experiments in classroom strategy/style training

- **Research and assessment**
  - Investigating strategy learning, retention, and subsequent use
  - Classroom research on learning styles

Contributions are welcome in all departments: articles, tips from the classroom, reviews, and perspectives. All submissions must conform to regular submission guidelines.

The deadline for submissions is April 1, 1996.

Send inquiries and material to:

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A Note from the Incoming Editor

Christian J. Faltis

This special issue marks the beginning of my tenure as editor of the TESOL Journal. Beginnings are both exciting and scary because they mark a venture into the unknown. In order to minimize the scary part of beginning, I have chosen two people whose work and abilities I know and respect to serve as guest editors for this special edition on alternative assessment. Together, we have assembled an outstanding collection of ideas and practices that represent the best of what is happening in the area of alternative assessment in TESOL. Working with Sandra Fradd, Sarah Hudelson, and the authors was the exciting part of beginning this position.

This special edition is a glimpse of what you can expect of the journal in the coming years. We will continue to have high quality classroom-based feature articles, tips, book reviews, and Ask the TJ. For those of you who are working in K-12 school settings, you should begin to see ideas and practices geared to your circumstances. I also want to reach out to mainstream classroom teachers who have ESL students to invite them into the TESOL community, to enter in a dialogue with them about teaching and learning ESL.

I invite you to approach the readings in this special edition with the hope that you can find a place in your philosophy of teaching and learning to incorporate what you learn from them. I encourage you to talk about them with colleagues and students; to argue about them; to refine them; and lastly, to build upon them.

Alternative Assessment: A Process that Promotes Collaboration and Reflection

Sandra Fradd and Sarah Hudelson

With assessment the topic of this year’s special issue, we anticipated that the focus would be on procedures for measuring student progress in learning English as a new language. This special issue accomplishes this important outcome, but it offers much more. It illustrates the roles of collaboration and reflection in the assessment process. Often associated with implementing effective instructional practices, the roles of collaboration and reflection have seldom been connected with assessment. Although unexpected, the relationship of reflection, collaboration, and assessment became an emerging theme in this special issue.

There is a good reason for the emergence of these activities in developing effective assessment procedures. Recently, control over the collection and interpretation of assessment information has shifted away from centralized authority toward the classrooms where assessment occurs on a regular basis. As teachers and students have become involved in assessment as an ongoing process, the ways of measuring learning progress have become less prescribed and straightforward. Recognizing that they play an important role in the outcomes, teachers and their collaborators, as producers and consumers of daily progress information, also recognize the importance of working together. As collaboration has developed, the insights gained underscore the value of reflection.

Just as the articles contained in this special issue provide clear evidence of changes in the paradigm of what constitutes appropriate assessment, they also promote an understanding of the process of obtaining relevant information. In sharing their work, the contributors to this special issue illustrate their growing awareness of the importance of both individual and group information and of considering the context as well as the content of learning.

Ana Huerta-Macias discusses the strengths of alternative assessment and fundamental issues related to the assessment of students learning English as an additional language. This discussion provides a theoretical framework for the articles that follow. Next, Margo Gottlieb provides a clear rationale for selecting different categories of information in developing student portfolios. Martha J. McNamara and Debra Deane provide insight into the communication between students and their teachers as they illustrate specific activities for involving students in assessing their own progress. The article by Lynn Smolen, Carole Newman, Tracey Wathen, and Dennis Lee illustrates the process of teaching children how to select and assess their achievement of personal academic goals. Bernard Mohan and Marylin Low discuss the difficulties inherent in shared decision making among teachers seeking to implement uniform assessment practices. Virginia P. Rojas invites further discussion of her suggestions for preparing future teachers to use alternative assessment procedures that encourage reflection and self-empowerment. Fred Davidson, J. Charles Alderson, Dan Douglas, Ari Huhta, Carolyn Turner, and Elaine Wylie report on their collaboration to gather and disseminate internationally information about language assessment instruments and practices.

As a collection, the articles within this special issue highlight innovative ways of implementing assessment practices in a variety of contexts. While illustrating the benefits of alternative assessment, these insights hold potential for enhancing practices that work well not only with new English language learners, but with English-proficient students as well.

Sincere appreciation goes to Chris Faltis for his assistance and support in developing this special issue. Thanks also to Beatriz Arias and Nancy Cloud for their insights and collaboration. A most important thank you is also due the contributors and readers for sharing their ideas with others.
An International Survey of Language Assessment Standards

Fred Davidson, J. Charles Alderson, Dan Douglas, Ari Huhta, Carolyn Turner, and Elaine Wylie

The International Language Testing Association (ILTA) was formed in 1992 to promote the improvement of language testing throughout the world. In 1992, ILTA created a Task Force on Testing Standards (TFTS) to examine world guidelines on good test construction. The work of the TFTS is complete, and ILTA has moved to the next phase of standard setting: a new ad-hoc committee to write a code of practice for language testing. This article reports on the work of the TFTS and solicits feedback for the new ad-hoc committee.

The TFTS’s work is contained in a report of 109 bibliographic records from 24 countries containing information on existing standards documents. (A sample record is given on page 7.) Each record represents a document or set of documents offered to the TFTS as some sort of statement of standard(s). Based on what it received, the TFTS has classified the records into four types:

1. guideline, if standard refers to a guideline of good practice (51.4% of the records are in this category)
2. performance, if standard refers to a performance criterion, in other words, the ability to perform certain tasks (14.7%)
3. test, if standard refers to a test or tests described and/or reviewed by the document(s), or if standard refers to some actual test(s) and/or test manual(s) (24.8%)
4. other, if it is not clear how the supplier of the document interpreted the term standard (9.2%)

Records are almost evenly split between a focus on language teaching in particular (51.4%) and educational measurement in general (48.7%), and a slight majority of the records were from private organizations (56%) rather than government (42.2%) or a government/private collaboration (1.8%). Many of the records are for documents that refer to issues in elementary and secondary school language testing, for example, school-leaving examinations, and are therefore of particular relevance to this issue of TESOL Journal. Of the 24 countries represented in the TFTS Text Base, the most prevalent were Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, which probably reflects the makeup of the task force and consequent ease of collecting documents.

The International Language Testing Association (ILTA) is committed to improving world practice in the design and use of language tests, and both the TFTS and committee on the forthcoming ILTA code reflect that commitment. The TFTS report is an important first step to understanding world variety in the design of language tests and in the regulations and customs that govern them. ILTA encourages feedback from all language educators on its activities in the area of standard setting. To provide comments to the committee that is authoring the ILTA code of practice, to purchase a copy of the TFTS report, or to join ILTA, please contact the office of the ILTA Secretariat:

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The TFTS report should have a positive impact on language program administrators and classroom teachers. For example, if a teacher has a student from a country listed in the report, a better understanding can arise of the types of assessment to which that student is accustomed. As another example, an administrator might see an entry in the report that contains some interesting testing practice of relevance to that administrator’s setting; further correspondence (by mail, fax, or...
Sample Record from the TFTS TextBase (TFTSTB)

This record is illustrative only and does not represent any trends in the TFTSTB.

Record: CA05

TFTS Member holding document(s) / author of this record: Turner
Country: Canada
Author/Publisher: Québec, Québec: Direction de l’évaluation pédagogique, Gouvernement du Québec, Ministère de l’Éducation.

Language of document(s): Available in French and English

Whom to contact to obtain copies: Gouvernement du Québec, Ministère de l’Éducation, 600, rue Fullum, 9e Étage, Montreal, Québec, Canada H2K 4L1

Document(s) Authored by government or private agency?: government
Document(s) reflects standards of language testing or general educational measurement?: general educational measurement
Document(s) reflect what type of standard? [see above]: guideline

Additional Comments:

Objective/Purpose of the document:
To specify the intentions of the Quebec Ministry of Education in the field of educational evaluation: e.g., establish respective roles, assist schools in the development of evaluation policies and practices, promote evaluation that will be of greater service to pupils, have evaluation be an integral part of the teaching and learning process, have it be closely related to the curriculum.

Summary of contents:
This document sets out the values, foundation, aims, and basic concepts of educational evaluation within the Quebec context. It discusses in detail roles of responsibility and the different components of a support system in order to pursue a consistent evaluation process: e.g., the place of formative and summative evaluation, the need and means for teacher training in evaluation.

Commentary and remarks:
This document continues to be the policy for evaluation practice. Due to increasing decentralization in the province, however, local school boards are presently being asked to develop their own policies specific to their situations, but based on this document.

e-mail) could establish unique international testing cooperation. In general, the TFTS feels that the strongest contribution of the report is that it documents complex world variation in language testing practice. No single model of testing practice seems to dominate among these documents, though some models have wide influence. This variety should prove beneficial to teachers and administrators who argue for increased flexibility in testing practice at their setting.

Authors
All authors are members of the International Language Testing Association (ILTA) and its Task Force on Testing Standards (TFTS).

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Ari Huhta is a faculty member of the Language Centre for Finnish Universities, University of Jyvaskyla, Finland.

Carolyn Turner is a faculty member of the Department of Education in Second Languages, McGill University, Montreal, Canada.

Elaine Wylie is the Deputy Director of the NLLIA Language Testing and Curriculum Centre at Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia.

Authors’ views in Perspectives are their own and do not necessarily reflect the views of TESOL, Inc. or TESOL Journal.

Reviews of English Language Proficiency Tests

J. Charles Alderson, Karl J. Krahne, and Charles W. Stansfield, Editors

In this comprehensive volume, knowledgeable professionals describe and evaluate the major ESL/EFL tests used worldwide. The 47 reviews follow a consistent format, making it easy for teachers to select tests appropriate to their assessment needs. Technical information includes intended examinee population, purpose of the test, scoring method, type of administration, length of test, test components, and cost.

85 pp., ISBN 0-89791-31-5 $16.50 (member $15)

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Alternative Assessment: Responses to Commonly Asked Questions

Ana Huerta-Macías

I was picking up my fourth-grade daughter after school one afternoon when, as she jumped into the car, she exclaimed, “Mom, I’ve never in my life had none of the above!” I thought for a moment and then realized just what she was talking about—a multiple choice test. Surely enough, as she continued to talk she expressed her frustration at a science test she had taken that afternoon. The teacher had decided to add the choice of “none of the above” to several of the questions, a choice my daughter had not understood. Never having before seen it on a test, she decided it meant that she was not to circle any of the choices listed for the questions that offered “none of the above” as a response. Consequently, she failed the test.

The previous anecdote illustrates but one problem that is found in contrived tests—including standardized tests as well as teacher-made tests such as the one my daughter took. In this case the student knew the concept being tested, but was unfamiliar with the language and format of the test. Thus, her test taking skills were what was lacking, not her scientific knowledge. Other problems that have been discussed in the literature with relation to traditional, standardized tests include norming on a population unlike the one being tested and cultural and language biases (García & Pearson, 1992, 1994; Wrigley & Guth, 1992). In addition, the testing situation itself often produces anxiety within the student such that she is unable to think clearly. The student may also be facing extenuating circumstances (e.g., personal problems or illness) at the time she is being tested, thus also hampering the student’s performance on the test. The problems associated with traditional testing often mask what the student really knows; or in the case of ESL, what the student can do in her second language. What, then, are the alternatives? How can we assess a student’s acquisition of a second language in a valid and reliable way? Are there alternatives that can be adapted to all levels? In this article I will offer responses to these questions by (a) describing alternative assessment procedures; (b) addressing issues related to validity, reliability, and objectivity that are often raised as objections to alternative assessment; and (c) discussing the power of alternative assessment to provide knowledge about a student.

Alternative Assessment Procedures

Alternative assessment has been described as an alternative to standardized testing and all of the problems found with such testing. There is no single definition of alternative assessment. Rather, a variety of labels has been used to distinguish it from traditional, standardized testing. García and Pearson (1994) include the following in their review of these labels: performance assessment, authentic assessment, portfolio assessment, informal assessment, situated (or contextualized) assessment, and assessment by exhibition. They also state that alternative assessment consists of all of those “efforts that do not adhere to the traditional criteria of standardization, efficiency, cost-effectiveness, objectivity and machine storability” (p. 355).

Evaluation is a paradigm of choices... (It) involves situational responsiveness, methodological flexibility...

(Patton, 1987, p. 24)
Alternative assessment is different from traditional testing in that it actually asks students to show what they can do. Students are evaluated on what they integrate and produce rather than on what they are able to recall and reproduce. The main goal of alternative assessment is to “gather evidence about how students are approaching, processing, and completing ‘real-life’ tasks in a particular domain” (García & Pearson, 1994, p. 357). Alternative assessment, most importantly, provides alternatives to traditional testing in that it (a) does not intrude on regular classroom activities; (b) reflects the curriculum that is actually being implemented in the classroom; (c) provides information on the strengths and weaknesses of each individual student; (d) provides multiple indices that can be used to gauge student progress; and (e) is more multicultural and free of norm, linguistic, and cultural biases found in traditional testing.

Alternative assessment procedures are nonintrusive to the classroom because they do not require a separate block of time to implement them, as do traditional tests. Moreover, the same day-to-day activities that a student is engaged in (e.g., writing, role playing, group discussion) are the basis for alternative assessment. Thus, there is little or no change required in classroom routines and activities in order to implement alternative assessment. Because alternative assessment is based on the daily classroom activities, it also reflects the curriculum, unlike traditional, standardized tests that often test skills incongruent with classroom practices. Because the data collected are based on real-life tasks, furthermore, alternative assessment provides information on the strengths as well as the weaknesses of a student. A work sample, for instance, may tell an instructor that a student’s strong points are with the mechanics of English but that she needs additional work on vocabulary and organization of a written piece. Alternative assessment provides a menu of possibilities, rather than any one single method for assessment. Thus, student growth can be more reliably assessed because information from various sources is included in the process. Finally, alternative assessment procedures are multiculturally sensitive. They are particularly suited for the diverse ESL populations because they are free of those biases found in traditional testing. They are not normed instruments, and they are based on student performance in real-life tasks.

Alternative assessment includes a variety of instruments that can be adapted to varying situations. Because the literature (Anthony, Johnson, Mikelson, & Preece, 1991; Goodman, 1991; Holt, 1994; Navarrete, Wilde, Nelson, Martínez, & Hargrett, 1990; Wilde, Del Vecchio, & Gustke, in press) provides ample discussion and illustrations of these procedures, I will only briefly mention them here. Although it is unlikely that any one instrument will fit the needs of a given group of students, the idea is to adopt and/or adapt existing instruments in such a way that they reflect the goals of the class and the activities being implemented in that classroom to meet those goals. Alternative assessment procedures include, for example, the use of checklists of student behaviors or products, journals, reading logs, videos of role plays, audiotapes of discussions, self-evaluation questionnaires, work samples, and teacher observations or anecdotal records. The instructor and students can collaboratively decide which procedures are to be used for assessment in a given class. Individual students are also often given the responsibility of selecting specific products of their work (published pieces, for instance) on which they will be assessed.

Subjectivity cannot be avoided, only masked.

(García & Pearson, 1991, p. 273)

Validity, Reliability and Objectivity

Objections to alternative assessment are often voiced in terms of validity, reliability, and objectivity—terms that have been most often associated with standardized tests. Questions that focus around these issues are (respectively):

- Does the test measure what it is supposed to measure?
- Is the test consistent in its measurement?
- Is the test unbiased? (García & Pearson, 1991)

Proponents of alternative assessment do not suggest that we overlook these criteria, for any high quality assessment must adhere to them. Rather, the suggestion is that we apply new words that have been borrowed from the literature on qualitative research. Concerns with validity and reliability of assessment instruments have been addressed in qualitative research through the use of the term trustworthiness. An instrument is deemed to be trustworthy if it has credibility (i.e., truth value) and auditability (i.e., consistency). In other words, does it measure what it is supposed to measure and would the instrument give the same results if replicated? (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

Kirk and Miller (1986) write that “In the best of worlds, a measuring instrument is so closely linked to the phenomena under observation that it is ‘obviously’ providing valid data” (p. 22). Alternative assessment represents the best of all worlds in that it looks at actual performance on real-life tasks, such as writing, self-editing, reading, participation in collaborative work, and doing a demonstration in front of a group. The procedures in and of themselves are, therefore, valid. Written work samples and published pieces in an ESL class, for instance, will inform a teacher as to how well the student can write in English. The pieces themselves will serve as evidence of the student’s ability to express his ideas in writing in an organized fashion, to use appropriate mechanics, transitions, and vocabulary.

What about reliability, or consistency? It follows that if a procedure is valid, then it is reliable in that it will consistently produce the same results if audited or replicated. The probability is very high, for example, that a student’s written retelling of a story will share the same or at least highly similar characteristics in his writing from one week to the next. Two instructors or even the same instructor who is trained in the use of a holistic evaluation scale will more than likely find that two pieces, written a week apart by a student, will exhibit like characteristics. Thus, the rater will assign the same or a similar score on the scale because the descriptors that best fit the two pieces will most probably be the same ones.

Wilde, Del Vecchio, and Gustke (in press) further suggest the following to ensure reliability in alternative assessments:

- design multiple tasks that lead to the same outcome
- use trained judges, working with clear criteria, from specific anchor papers or performance behaviors
- monitor periodically to ensure that raters use criteria and standards in a consistent manner

Reliability, or consistency, in qualitative research is often ensured through yet another means, triangulation. In qualitative research, triangulation refers to the combination of methodologies to strengthen a study design (Patton, 1987). When applied to alternative assessment, triangulation refers to the collection of data/information from three different sources/perspectives. In the case of an ESL public school class, for instance, a teacher would want to assess students’ literacy development in English. In order to do this, she could collect data that would paint a picture...
Triangulation of Data: Alternative Assessment for ESL Public School Class

Triangulation of Data: Alternative Assessment for Adults in a Workplace ESL Class

of each student’s growth by describing, for example, his (a) background, (b) use of English (reading, writing, speaking, listening) in academic tasks within the classroom as well as in situations outside the classroom, and (c) ability to use literacy behaviors such as inferencing, obtaining meaning from context, and skimming through a text before reading it. In this case, the sources of data might be the parents, the students, and the teacher herself (see above). Data from the parents might include information gathered through conversations, surveys, or informal interviews on the student’s linguistic and cultural background, length of residence in the U.S., language(s) spoken at home, language(s) spoken with friends, amount of reading in English and the native language done at home, among other items. From the student, the instructor might put together a portfolio that includes data such as written work samples, audiotapes of the student engaged in conversation, a video of a role play, a reading log, and self-evaluation sheets. The instructor would then include his own perspectives by adding, for instance, observations or anecdotes of events in the class that demonstrate English proficiency, teacher journals, and checklists on performance.

Triangulation can be applied in varying contexts. Consider, for example, an adult workplace literacy class focusing on work-related English that will assist employees to more effectively carry out their duties. Triangulation in this case might be achieved by gathering data from the instructor, the student, and her employer or fellow co-workers (see below). Data from the instructor and the student would include the same types of information described above. The employer/co-worker might provide additional information on a student’s growth in ESL. This can be done by using surveys, informal phone or personal interviews where the instructor asks about the student’s use of English in varying contexts at the workplace—such as at meetings or informal discussions. In addition, work-related samples, such as forms that were filled out by the student at the workplace, may also be included as data from the workplace.

Another concern that is often raised with respect to alternative assessment is the lack of objectivity. Yet, even though standardized tests are described as objective, the notion of objectivity has been challenged. As humans, we all have biases, whether we’re aware of them or not. A standardized test merely represents agreement among a number of people on scoring procedures, format and/or content for that specific test. In other words, these individuals are not really objective; they just collectively share the same biases. Therefore, in this sense, a standardized test is no more objective than an alternative assessment instrument. One might argue, moreover, that quantitative data—as from standardized tests—can be more subjective because the numbers or statistics can be manipulated to reflect certain biases on the part of the researcher. There is no reason, then, to consider alternative assessment any less objective than traditional testing.

Our knowledge is made up of the stories we can tell.... where we can tell no story, we have no knowledge....

(Mitchell, 1979, p. 34)

Conclusion
I’ve discussed alternative assessment as consisting of valid and reliable procedures that avoid many of the problems inherent in traditional testing including norming, linguistic, and cultural biases. There is yet another advantage to the use of alternative assessment: It has the power to tell a story. The data compiled on individual students provides a clear picture of each student’s development through the various work samples and products collected. As an educator looks at this picture, she can determine growth, areas of weakness, and areas of strength. She can also inform herself about the student’s background, interests, and goals through his journals, compositions, conversations, and observations. In short, the educator becomes acquainted with this person. Thus, contrary to traditional testing, which typically provides only a set of numbers, alternative assessment documents a story for every student—and what is the ultimate goal of evaluation but to give us the knowledge to be able to reflect upon, discuss, and assist a student’s journey through the learning process?
Alternative assessment gives us the power to do all three.

References


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Teachers of linguistically and culturally diverse students have become increasingly convinced that rich, descriptive information about the processes and products of learning cannot be gathered by conventional teaching and testing methods. With the rise of instructional and assessment practices that are holistic, student centered, performance based, process oriented, integrated, and multidimensional has come the subsequent decline of discrete, isolated, skill-based, teacher-directed curricula. To document these new expressions of teaching and learning, portfolios have emerged as the vehicle by which students and teachers can organize, manage, and analyze life inside and out of school.

Portfolios offer the opportunity for students of any age, from prekindergarten to adult, to showcase their accomplishments in any language and through multiple means. They serve as a guide for students in making choices and in demonstrating how they reason, create, strategize, and reflect. Ultimately, portfolios allow students to assume responsibility for their own learning and provide evidence of their progress toward meeting their goals as learners.

For teachers, portfolios provide the framework or backdrop for instruction and their contents chronicle the dynamic curriculum of their classroom. They capture reflective teaching and highlight authentic activities of their students throughout the academic year. Of equal value, portfolios facilitate articulation between teachers and individual students, other teachers, parents, and administrators. It is in the spirit of advocacy for linguistically and culturally diverse students and the promotion of a more coordinated effort among teachers serving these students that the portfolio has taken on new meaning.

A CRADLE Approach to Portfolio Development

The multiple purposes for portfolio use can be envisioned along a continuum. Moving from left to right, each portfolio type may be viewed independently or as an additive step of increasingly complexity. There are six prototype portfolio categories: Collections, Reflections, Assessment, Documentation, Linkages, and Evaluation. In the CRADLE approach (see page 13), each portfolio type signifies a distinct stage of development and has a set of specified criteria that shape its function.

Some general principles shape this model. First, there is no desirability attached to either pole of the scale; the continuum represents a range of portfolio types, each of equal weight, importance, and validity. Second, the farther right along the scale, the more structured and constrained the system becomes. Third, because portfolio development is a natural and dynamic process, there is some natural cross-over and interaction between categories. Fourth, the CRADLE allows teachers and administrators to set realistic goals in regard to designing and implementing portfolios as well as to be aware of their parameters and limitations.

Developing Collections

In working with teachers, administrators, and researchers, I have noticed that portfolio designs, contents, and purposes take on many forms. There is no single way of developing or implementing portfolios; rather they tend to represent many different intents, all of which are educationally defensible. As a means of clarifying the variety of portfolios, their audiences, and their uses, I propose a developmental scheme. In the following section, each type of portfolio is outlined with its identifying characteristics and suggestions for its contents.
are ideal for those who have not previously engaged in this activity as they are easily embedded into instruction and have few defining criteria.

To gain an understanding of the portfolio process, I suggest confining collections to one area of the instructional program such as oral language development, literacy, a content area or, if preferred, an integrated theme. First, brainstorm with students and other teachers to generate a list of tasks, projects, or exhibits for the selected learning area. Process oriented excerpts from students’ journals may also be included. For linguistically and culturally diverse students, the portfolio should house the graphic organizers (such as webs and venn diagrams), tables, charts, and illustrations used to contextualize and express learning.

Second, think of the ways students will be able to provide evidence of learning; the use of multimedia as audiotapes, videos, cameras, computers, as well as work samples of authentic writing and illustrating should be encouraged. Third, with your group of students, formulate a set of guidelines for choosing collection pieces. Keep in mind that hands-on, interesting activities that draw from the students’ experiences and backgrounds, require the use of higher level thinking, and connect the students with the real world should be criteria for selection. To document progress over time, it is important that all entries be dated; even young children can stamp their own pieces.

Collections are an expression of the students, their lives, and their identities. Ownership resides in the students, and with the guidance of the teacher, they should have flexibility in shaping the portfolio and access to the contents. Linguistically and culturally diverse students, especially those at the beginning stages of second language acquisition, should be encouraged to submit entries in their home language.

**Encouraging Reflective Practice**

As a means of reflection, portfolios focus on the student learning process, as reported by students. The teacher’s role is to enhance the students’ metacognitive and affective awareness in learning. The centerpiece of this portfolio type is the students’ perceptions, interpretations, and strategies utilized in acquiring knowledge. How students learn and what their attitudes and reactions might be are as valuable as what they learn.

Response journals, in which students react to literature, and learning logs, in which students react to new concepts, are two means of encouraging reflection. Students may also respond to individual collection entries by completing a form on their thoughts: the reason the piece was selected; how they might change it and why; what they would like the teacher to know about the piece; and based on what they learned, what their future goals are. Young children may dictate to their teacher, an older buddy, or a parent volunteer their feelings about an entry or their reactions to an event.

Another type of reflection is a class-generated checklist or rating scale that can be used by the students for editing process writing, checking for content, or recapping the learning strategies they have undertaken. These rubrics provide the criteria against which students can analyze their work, they should be offered to varied audiences such as peers, parents, and teachers. By utilizing a uniform set of standards for all students and drawing responses from multiple perspectives, the sense of consistency of interpretation, essential for portfolio assessment, begins to surface.

Reflective portfolios offer students an opportunity to compare their present level of achievement with their prior performance level. Thus, students become involved in self-evaluation and begin to monitor their own progress over time. Periodically, students should listen to a story they may have retold or an oral reading from the beginning of the year, inspect two samples of writing, or analyze two graphic organizers. It is the teacher’s role to mediate this process and guide the students to gain insight into their strengths. Linguistically and culturally diverse students are able to recognize and mark their own personal advancement rather than constantly being compared with their native-English-speaking peers.

**Assessing the Portfolios**

For portfolios to be considered an alternative assessment tool, the reliability and validity of the contents needs to be established and maintained. Whereas in collections and reflections, this primary evidence is coupled with specified criteria in the form of a rubric or descriptive scale to provide the necessary secondary evidence. In collections and reflections, selection of entries often rests on students who are encouraged to submit their showcase or pivotal pieces. This practice can result, however, in an imbalanced representation of the curriculum and a biased portrayal of the student’s abilities. In portfolios designed for assessment purposes, data collection is systematic, based on the alignment of curricular objectives/outcomes with assessment tasks and rubrics. Consequently, required entries are often interspersed with supplemental, optional ones.

Psychometric properties are defining criteria of portfolios that serve as a form of assessment. By having portfolios be instructionally embedded, they axiomatically have content (aligned with the curriculum) and ecological (occurring in a natural context) validities. Validity is enhanced for linguistically and culturally diverse students when the language(s) of instruction parallel those utilized in assessment and when the materials, resources, and procedures used in assessment correspond to those of instruction. Reaching close to unanimous agreement among teachers on ratings within a rubric (not an easy feat) on individual entries or the portfolio as a whole provides consistency or reliability.

The heart of alternative assessment is anchored in rubrics that are aligned with specified tasks. These performance indicators, which may take the form of a checklist, a rating scale, or a matrix, serve as the yardstick for measurement. In doing so, a mechanism is created for setting standards for achievement. Students should partake in rubric development and use the rubrics, along with teachers, as a gauge of their achievement.

Often times rubrics, designed for the general student population, fail to address the
issues related to linguistic and cultural diversity. The following rubric modifications should be considered for students receiving support services:

1. expansion of a scale to include the full range of first (when applicable) and second language acquisition
2. creation of a weighting system that responds to the students’ proficiency levels
3. alteration of the specifications for content-based tasks so they become more contextualized and less language dependent and
4. inclusion of multiple indicators by which the students can demonstrate their competencies.

Assessment portfolios, by being the repository for gathering and managing student data, are tied to decision making. For linguistically and culturally diverse students in ESL or bilingual settings, they contribute to the determination of their status within a program or for transition from the support services. Having reached the midpoint on the CRADLE continuum, portfolios, for the first time, come to be associated with educational consequences.

Documenting Achievement

Portfolios that serve as student, classroom, program, or school documentation, utilized in meeting compliance with designated district, state, or federal regulations, can be considered legal documents and are thus maintained as a permanent record of student achievement. Results from standardized testing, as available, can provide one source of documentation in the portfolio and contribute to a comprehensive view of student achievement. Other data sources, such as anecdotal notes, running records, and narratives, are additional forms of documentation that can be incorporated into a portfolio.

When portfolios take the form of documentation, they are often systematized to the point where there is an external set of guidelines being imposed upon teachers to ensure their uniform implementation. Consequently, it is highly unlikely that students claim ownership or become vested in the portfolio process. Likewise, teachers may come to view portfolios as a time-consuming management tool rather than be able to see their richness and potential.

Ensuring linkages

Once portfolios are established as legal documents, it is important that the information be transmitted in order to ensure the continuity of services for students. There are two kinds of linkage systems: One relies on connections among human resources and one on organizational structures. As links from one person to another, or from one setting to another, portfolios can

1. build communication networks among the school, home, and community
2. ease transitions of students from class to class or from year to year

●

Collection and reflection portfolios are so personalized and tied to an individual student’s expression of learning that the students themselves should determine their fate.

●

3. promote articulation among teachers horizontally (within an age/grade level) and vertically (across levels).

For linguistically and culturally diverse students, collaboration among ESL, bilingual, and classroom teachers is essential to maximize the integration of services.

Collection and reflection portfolios are so personalized and tied to an individual student’s expression of learning that the students themselves should determine their fate. Assessment portfolios have the capacity of being linked, but without the high stakes attached to document portfolios, may fall short of being transported with the students through the years. Teachers need to have blocks of time allocated for articulation of issues and sharing of ideas in order to bridge assessment portfolios to linkages. Through linkages, a mechanism is formulated to promote continuity and fluidity, thus ensuring alignment within the system.

If portfolios are to serve as linkages, there must be a long-term commitment to their implementation and an acknowledgment of their role across levels. With the portfolio becoming routinized as part of school life, students come to understand the responsibilities of becoming lifelong learners. Consequently, standards of excellence for all students can be set and maintained through the linkage portfolio.

Evaluating Portfolios

At the right hand end of the continuum, a portfolio should accurately represent what is of instructional and programmatic worth by providing summary data for educational decision making. A value is assigned to the whole portfolio as a means of summative evaluation at the completion of a theme cycle or at the end of an academic year. The reporting system devised for the evaluation portfolio should overarch curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Each entry should contribute to the evaluation, but it is not necessary to create a scoring system with the magic sum of 100 in order to facilitate conversion to grades. In fact, the utility and authenticity of an evaluation portfolio most likely will stimulate the revision or replacement of the traditional, grade-driven report card.

The summary data generated by the evaluation portfolio may be aggregated and used for accountability purposes at a grade, program, school, or district level. Teachers, however, must have extensive professional development and ongoing dialogue in order to reach acceptable levels of reliability for the entire portfolio. Of equal importance is the opportunity portfolios offer for teachers to review their instructional practices and revise curriculum to reflect content and performance standards.

In its totality, movement along the CRADLE continuum is a 3- to 5-year journey. Together, students, administrators, teachers, and parents need to set realistic goals, become vested in the process, and rely upon and support each other along the way. Educators of linguistically and culturally diverse students, understanding the full range of portfolio offerings, can shape portfolios so that the accomplishments of students, classrooms, programs, or schools are highlighted.

Author

Margo Gottlieb, Director, Assessment and Evaluation at the Illinois Resource Center, Des Plaines, Illinois, works with schools and the state in developing alternative assessment systems for language minority students. She also serves as co-principal investigator of Project TRANSFER, the Illinois site of the National Head Start-Public School Transition Demonstration Project.
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When considering assessment in a traditional sense, we usually think of tests developed by a teacher or a testing service to measure students’ mastery of some aspect of language. In recent years, however, ESL experts have emphasized the importance of a different type of assessment, learner self-assessment (e.g., Cohen, 1990; Nunan, 1988; O’Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). Nunan (1988) stresses this importance when he notes that the “twin goals of the learner-centred curriculum” are for learners to develop not only their language but also “a critical self-consciousness ... of their own role as active agents within the learning process” (pp. 134-135).

Three Self-Assessment Activities

Self-assessment is highly important for successful language learning, but research suggests that few students engage in it to improve their abilities (Oxford, 1990). To facilitate autonomy in language learning among our university ESL students, we designed a variety of activities that foster self-assessment. In this article, we describe three activities that have been particularly successful: writing letters to the teacher, keeping a daily language learning log, and preparing an English portfolio. These activities engage students in routine and ongoing self-assessment so that they develop a critical awareness of their language learning process. Specifically, these activities can help students:

- Identify their strengths and weaknesses in English
- Document their progress
- Identify effective language learning strategies and materials
- Become aware of the language learning contexts that work best for them
- Establish goals for future independent learning.

These activities also give us a window into our students’ language learning process and allow us to individualize their instruction. We have used these activities in an advanced integrated skills intensive English course. Most of the students are preparing to pursue postsecondary studies in the U.S. Their TOEFL scores range from 480 to 550.

Writing Letters to the Teacher

At the beginning and end of the semester, the students write letters to us. In the initial letter, they assess their strengths and weaknesses in English and describe specific areas that they would like to improve. While composing their letters, the students reflect on their abilities, determine their needs, set priorities, and articulate this information to an interested reader, their teacher.

This letter is the first step in placing the responsibility for learning with the student, not the teacher. Moreover, it is an important diagnostic tool in three ways. First, as a writing sample, it provides information about the students’ fluency and proficiency in writing. Because the students write with a purpose for a real audience on a topic they know and care about, the texts they create tend to be good indicators of their first draft writing ability.

Second, the initial letter gives an indication of how students perceive themselves as users of English. Many of the students assess their abilities more or less accurately. Some, however, are off the mark. They might under- or overestimate their abilities in different skill areas. For instance, a fluent speaker might write that she needs to work on oral production, when in fact, she really should focus on reading and writing. A fluent, eloquent writer might mistakenly denigrate his writing ability.
Dear Martha,

I’m Li. I’m a student from PR China ... I have taken a TOEFL test three years ago. I think my weak areas are listening and vocabulary. I’m looking forward to improve my English level in these areas. And also, I should improve my oral English. I always feel sad that I can’t express my idea clearly. I hope I’ll have more chance to speak, to open my mouth and to listen. Sometimes I feel I can understand you but when I go out, I can’t understand what they say. So I’d like to contact with you and other students and other American people if there are some chances.

Third, the letter often reveals students’ perceptions of the language learning process. We may learn, for example, that a student views second language learning as memorizing structure patterns and rules. Another student might write that language learning means drilling for the TOEFL. Clearly, it helps us to know early on in the course how the students perceive themselves as English users and what they understand the L2 learning process to entail. Once we have seen enough of their work, we can make our own evaluations, which either corroborate their assessments or highlight their misperceptions. With this information, we can start to help them become better, more efficient learners. When we discover a misperception, we can work with the student, explaining what language learning involves and what constitutes proficiency in different language skills. We can help students establish realistic expectations about what language skills they need to achieve their goals. This first letter, then, becomes an important point of reference when working with individual students and helping them identify their objectives for the semester.

At the end of the semester, the students write a letter for inclusion in their portfolio, which we describe in a later section of this article. In this letter, they assess their efforts in the course and give themselves a letter grade. They also describe
  - the area of English in which they have made the most progress during the semester and why they have improved
  - their strong area in English and why they feel it is a strength
  - their weak area in English, why it is weak, and their plan for improving this area.

Above is the first part of the letter that a Chinese student wrote at the beginning of a 8-week summer session. An analysis of her initial and final letters shows that she underwent a major transformation in 2 months.

This first paragraph of Li’s letter reveals a great deal about her approach to self-assessment and about her perceptions of language learning. At this point, Li is primarily relying on an external measure to assess her ability—the TOEFL. Interestingly, the test score that informs her assessment of her weak areas is 3 years old, too old to be considered valid. Nonetheless, the power of the standardized test prevails, and this artificial construct is Li’s main self-assessment tool at this point. The letter also clearly shows the affective side of language learning, that the inability to express ideas results in her feeling sad. Finally, when Li writes that she hopes she will have chances to speak with Americans and others, she indicates that she sees herself as a passive participant in her language learning process, not as the person in charge. She seems to feel that if she gets lucky, she will have some good practice opportunities. At this point, she does not realize that her language learning is up to her.

A look at part of her final letter shows a new Li (see page 19).

In this letter, Li states that listening and speaking had been her weak areas at the beginning of the semester, not just because the TOEFL indicated that, but also because in China she had not been able to use these skills much. Now, she measures her progress not by a test score but by what she is able to accomplish in English. Her assessment criteria are internal, not external. She believes her speaking and listening are better because now she knows she can live and study in the U.S., that is, she knows she can reach her goals. In this letter, she writes “I can” several times, showing a level of confidence and determination not apparent in her first letter. Best of all, Li indicates that she is the architect of her language learning opportunities, that she can create the chances to speak English. Practice is no longer a matter of luck but of action. Although we cannot say for sure how Li made this transformation in 8 weeks, one activity that may have helped her was keeping a daily language learning log.
Keeping a Daily Language Learning Log

There are many ways for students to keep a language learning log. For example, they could

1. keep a weekly record of how much time they spent on homework assignments
2. record their use of specific language learning strategies and describe their successes and failures with each one
3. write about and analyze their experiences with classwork.

In one variation that has proved successful in our advanced integrated skills class, students write in their logs each day, recording all of their experiences with English over and above their classwork and homework. We want them to write about their extracurricular uses of English to reinforce the idea that because they are living in an English-speaking country, course-related work is only a small part—the tip of the iceberg—of their language learning development.

Experiences that students might describe in their log include listening to the radio or watching TV; talking to others (e.g., people in stores, friends); reading newspapers, books, letters; and writing letters in English. For each entry, they record the date, the activity, the amount of time engaged in the use of English, the location, and a description and analysis of their English use. In the analysis, students comment on the ease or difficulty of the activity and the reasons for that ease or difficulty. They reflect on the English experience and evaluate their part in it. In addition to the daily entries, students write a weekly evaluation of their progress in English. To do this, they reread their entries for the week to see where they have made improvement and where they might be stalled. They reflect on the English experience and evaluate their role and performance in the language learning process. With this evidence, they are more apt to see their progress, to repeat a strategy that worked, and to look for a new strategy when they realize that one was not successful for them. They also have a clear record of how they are spending their time and if they are using it effectively.

Through the students' analyses, we see documented proof of the transfer of course work to their uses of English in the real world outside the classroom. Early in the semester, their explanations for success or failure often seem predictable and unexamined. For example, at the beginning of the course, nearly every student attributes every listening problem to fast speech: "I couldn’t understand the MCI agent on the phone because he spoke too quickly." As the semester progresses and they become aware of and practice various language learning strategies, the analyses become more informed and insightful. After learning that tapping background knowledge can aid in comprehension, a student analyzed an unsuccessful phone call as follows: "I had trouble understanding the MCI agent on the phone because I had no background knowledge about the system of the bank.

Yoshifumi’s entry illustrates the benefits of keeping this language learning log. As a record of what the students did, how they did it, what worked and what did not work, the log gives students concrete evidence of their role and performance in the language learning process. With this evidence, they are more apt to see their progress, to repeat a strategy that worked, and to look for a new strategy when they realize that one was not successful for them. They also have a clear record of how they are spending their time and if they are using it effectively.

Dear Martha,

This is the second letter I write to you ... I can say that it is a harvest semester.

First of all I think I have made the most progress in listening and speaking. Since I came from China, I had less chance to speak with the foreigners and to listen to them. So it was the weakest area of mine. But now I don’t think so. Although I still have some trouble in these areas, I can almost deal with all the situation here, and I think I can live here and I can study here now ... The second reason is that I have an environment here. Although I still don't have a lot of chances to speak English (because we share the apartment with a Chinese family), when I go out, whenever I want to get help, whenever I want to speak with my classmate, I must use English. And whenever I turn on the TV, they speak in English. I have no choice, the only thing I can do is listen to them. That's really good for me. The third reason is that sometimes I create some chance to speak English. For example, I ask my husband to speak English with me, thus I have more time to practice listening and speaking.
Daily Language Learning Log

Entry 1

1. Date: 9/8/94

2. Activity: Conversation with Bank Clerk

3. Amt. of Time: 20 minutes 2 minutes

4. Location: The First National Bank of Ohio, U of A Branch

5. Comment: I went to the bank to get a new check booklet because my temporary check booklet remained one check sheet. If I get a bill from phone company, I must use that one and I will have no check sheet.

After arrived at the bank, I asked a clerk what should I do to get a new booklet. I wanted to know only how to do. But she asked me “temporary or order?” “Order?!” I was surprised at this word. My friend told me “Your check booklet will be sent you next week or another next week after you open your checking account.” I didn’t order my check booklet at that time, but I had to do. That “word” almost drove me panic! My brain started to work in Japanese, not in English. So after that, I couldn’t understand what they said. I went to customers service and sat down in front of the desk. I told my name to the clerk and she checked my data. After that, she said, “OK... Thursday or Friday... Thank you.” I couldn’t understand what she said. I guessed that my new check booklet will be send to me in this week. Then I said goodbye.

Why I couldn’t understand what they said? There are three answers. One is that I was in the panic. Next one is that their voices were lower and small because they worked on a bank. The last one is that I didn’t understand the system of the bank. Next time, when I will go to the bank to ask them a question, I will have to prepare my mind. If I will go to panic, I breathe 3 times or more deeply. If possible, I ask them to make their voice louder. (But I think they can’t do that because they deal with customer’s secrets.)

And after I finish this course, I will go to the bank to make sure of my thought about their system of issuing check booklet.
plan.” As they regularly self-evaluate, students apply strategies that they practice in class to real communicative activities, that is, to their own curriculum that they develop for themselves in the natural language setting.

When reading the language learning logs, we do not correct grammar and mechanical errors. Instead, we provide feedback about their language learning concerns and strategy use. We also help them set realistic expectations for their learning and for their current proficiency level. Often in the beginning of the semester, students write depressing assessments of their experiences. They tend to be overly critical of their errors and problems, showing that they have unrealistic expectations for what they should be capable of doing. A student might write: “I listened to the TV news last night. I knew what all the stories were about but I couldn’t get any of the details. My English is awful.” We can write back and reassure the student that comprehending the main idea of the stories constitutes a high level of success at this point. In other words, we provide a reality check.

Preparing an English Portfolio

As the culminating activity in our integrated skills class, students prepare an English portfolio. Although it is impossible to provide an example of an entire portfolio in this article, we describe the activity here because it is the crowning self-assessment experience of the course. To prepare their portfolios, students look back over a whole semester of work and identify the watershed language learning experiences of the semester. Moreover, our portfolio assignment is not typical—it is not just a writing portfolio but an English portfolio. The students include one or two representative samples of themselves as English users in each of the four skill areas, reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The samples represent not only the students’ range of English use, that is, the four skills, but also their progress in English. They can come from their course work or any English experience that they had during the semester.

We distinguish between what we call direct and indirect evidence. Direct evidence is an actual written text, an article read, a video- or audiotape of their speaking. Indirect evidence is a short written description of a time they used English. Often, the indirect evidence comes from a daily language learning log entry. The students attach a cover sheet to each piece of evidence, identifying it and briefly explaining its significance in their language development.

We have found that the three activities described above complement traditional evaluation techniques. With traditional measures, such as tests and quizzes, teachers retain complete control of the criteria and the means for assessment and impose them on students. With these three activities, the steps for completion are explicit, but the criteria and means for assessment are up to the students. They assume control of demonstrating which language learning experiences are significant for them, how they are significant, and why. Using these complementary assessment tools—traditional measures and student self-assessment information—we have a more complete picture of our students’ ability, effort, and progress. More importantly, students have a greater voice in their language learning process.

References


Authors

Martha J. McNamara and Debra Deane are instructors, curriculum coordinators, and materials developers at the English Language Institute at the University of Akron, Ohio, in the United States. Debra Deane recently became the director of the ELI. Both authors are currently involved in a program wide review and revision of the ELI curriculum.
Developing Student Self-Assessment Strategies

Lynn Smolen, Carole Newman, Tracey Wathen, and Dennis Lee

Actively involving students in their own learning continues to be a major goal for educators. One effective way to involve students is through the development of student-managed portfolios. Proponents of portfolio use report that one of the major advantages of the process of collecting and assessing students’ performance is that it empowers students to become partners and decision makers in their learning (Newman & Smolen, 1993). Used from kindergarten to college, student-developed portfolios become a process assessment package, demonstrating individual progress. As goal setting and self-assessment through reflective statements are taught, students can work collaboratively with teachers and classmates to establish standards of excellence that provide the framework for learning (Graves, 1992). Students develop a sense of ownership as they take on some of the traditional teacher decision-making tasks (Vacca & Vacca, 1993; Valencia, 1990). Students are further motivated by their role in making judgments about what to include in their portfolios and by their responsibility for explaining what each piece of work represents in their educational development (McCombs, 1991; Schunk, 1990).

Many educators now recognize the value of portfolios for culturally different students (Freeman & Freeman, 1991). Teachers of ESL have discovered that portfolios show great promise as a means of assessing their students by examining achievement, effort, improvement, and self-evaluation (French, 1992). Many school districts across the country are implementing portfolios to evaluate their ESL students (Pierce, Bass, Fagan, & Millet, 1995).

Teaching Students to Become Independent Learners

Although the value of portfolio assessment is well recognized, teachers still have concerns about student ownership and responsibility in the assessment process. van Krayenoom (1993) suggests self-assessment as a way to promote both ownership and responsibility, two important aspects of literacy development. One way of promoting these outcomes is by focusing on how to teach students to become more independent learners. Goal setting is an ideal strategy for guiding students to become more in tune with their strengths, their instructional needs, and the course their learning needs to take. To promote goal setting and achievement, students must first learn to critically examine their work, to judge it against some standard they understand and perhaps have helped to create. Once they have this understanding clearly in mind, they can decide which aspects of their work to improve. Instead of relying on the teacher to provide a focus, students become sensitive to their own needs while developing their own focus. They can acquire the skills necessary to determine if their work meets their expectations and, as a result, learn how to set reasonable goals for personal growth.

The process of learning to self-evaluate and to set goals provides students with opportunities to take responsibility for making decisions concerning what is good, what needs to be improved, and what needs to be focused on next. It also enhances self-knowledge and self-confidence as students learn to apply metacognitive strategies to improve their learning. Through this process, students are empowered to become partners with their teacher in making the decisions that direct their day-to-day learning activities.

Developing Self-Assessment

This article presents one teacher’s approach to promoting self-assessment with her ESL students. Literacy was the focus in this classroom, but the dynamic process of portfolio development can be applied to many other areas of the curriculum.

Much has been written about the theories involved in using portfolio assessment in the classroom. Less has been written on how to implement the portfolio components to guide students as they become self-assessing, independent learners. An effective portfolio assessment program utilizes students’ abilities to assess their own progress. In order to do this, however, goals need to be clearly identified by individuals who have learned to articulate them in their own words. The use of modeling, the implementation of appropriate practice, and the development of more sophisticated goal-setting and self-assessment techniques promote these positive outcomes.

Working in collaboration with teacher educators, Tracey Wathen developed a two-tiered portfolio system in her middle school ESL classroom. She designed her portfolios to encourage the development of metacognition...
Contents of the Student Working Portfolio

Goal Cards

Goal cards, developed as part of the portfolio assessment procedures, significantly affected student involvement in the portfolio process (see pages 24, 25).

Establishing personal goals based upon self-evaluation of their work actively engaged students to make decisions about what to focus on next in their learning. This process encouraged students to assume responsibility for making educational choices that affected positively their view of themselves as learners and decision makers.

Time Planning Sheets

In addition to the goal cards, a time planning sheet (see page 25) and a daily learning log (see page 27) were created for the ESL classroom. These tools were designed to help students schedule their own learning activities and to help them stay on task. The time planning sheet was a graphic organizer, which was particularly valuable because it encouraged student ownership by providing them with the opportunity to collaborate with the teacher in planning their ESL activities. It divided class time into 10-minute segments, some of which were blocked off each day for minilessons or whole class activities by the teacher, and some of which were identified by the students as their time. Students used their time blocks to work on weekly goals and to evaluate how well they had met those goals. Because a connection between ownership and academic growth had been observed, Tracey felt that it was essential to include these tools in each child’s portfolio.

The cards and other management tools became important components in Tracey’s assessment program, but the goal cards initially failed to live up to expectations because students were writing simplistic goals. Some students wrote, for example, that they wanted to finish their spelling lists. Others addressed a desire to type a finished draft of writing on the computer before the week was through. Reflective statements on these goals also tended to be simplistic, addressing whether or not they completed their goal instead of their thoughts on why and how they completed it and what they learned.

In order to make goal setting valuable for her students, Tracey decided that she needed to help them create more meaningful goals. She had reservations, however, because she wanted to avoid taking too much control.

as a key to student-directed learning. Both product and process versions of weekly literacy activities were regularly placed in a working portfolio (see above).

On Fridays, students selected samples from their working portfolio that represented their academic growth. They then wrote a reflective statement explaining why that piece was important to them and placed these samples and statements into a showcase portfolio (see page 24).

The showcase portfolio became a chronicle of their growth as they repeatedly reviewed and added new accomplishments.

Tracey has commented often on the importance of goal setting in a portfolio system like hers, which relies heavily on self-motivation and self-efficacy.

Index cards were distributed every Monday for students to write their weekly goals. After several weeks of modeling, explanation, and practice, students learned to write their goals on one side of the card on Mondays and to write a reflective statement describing how well they achieved their goals on the reverse side on Fridays. During the week, students placed their goal cards on their desks to serve as a reminder of what they had chosen to accomplish. As they became more comfortable with the process, students consulted their goal cards, deciding how to use their time.
Selecting Samples for the Student Showcase Portfolio

Each Friday students select a sample of their work for inclusion in their showcase portfolio.

The student then writes a reflective statement explaining why this piece is important and why it was chosen for the portfolio.

The Front of Bao’s Card

1. “My goal for this week is to stop during reading and predict what is going to happen next in the story.”

2. “My goal for this week is to finish writing my Superman story.”

We confirmed this problem by analyzing early entries in the reading response logs used during sustained silent reading (SSR). Our analysis revealed that students were not using metacognitive strategies to help them construct meaning as they read. Tracey believed that students needed to become skilled, not only in the articulation of these strategies but also in the planning and monitoring of their reading process.
strategies, but also in incorporating them into their reading goals and behaviors, and applying them appropriately in learning activities. Therefore, she developed a lesson to elicit students’ opinions of what good readers do.

Students gathered around chart paper and brainstormed a list of good reading strategies, each student contributing what she remembered or learned from previous classroom lessons. On the following day, typed versions of these reading behaviors were given to four cooperative groups in the class. Students separated each idea by cutting the typed page of reading behaviors into strips. Cooperative learning teams looked at each idea and discussed how to classify the reading behaviors. Tracey facilitated this process by guiding students through questioning to identify at what point during reading a good reader might use these strategies.

The following day, after large-group sharing and discussion on how the cooperative learning teams organized the different strategies, a final copy of good reading...
Good Reading Behaviors Poster

While you are reading

Make a picture in your mind of the story.

Stop during reading and predict what is going to happen next.

Think about when the story takes place.

Think about where the story takes place.

behaviors was created, enlarged into several poster-size charts, and placed in the most visible area of the room, just above the chalkboard (see above). These visual reminders helped students remember and use their reading strategies.

The portfolio process had already given students the necessary framework, which prepared them to select weekly goals and evaluate their attainment of the goals through the writing of reflective statements. After the posters were in place, students were encouraged to select a more meaningful goal from the posted strategies. Bao, one Vietnamese student in Tracey’s class, picked, “Stop during reading and predict what is going to happen next in the story,” as his goal for the week (see pages 24-25).

Evidence that he understood and applied his goal was found in his reflective statement and reading response log. He said, “I met my goals for this week. The first goal help me understand a lot when I’m reading” [sic]. Bao recorded additional metacognitive statements in his response log after reading a selection about an African king. He wrote:

I predict that the king is an ordinary man and then he were made into king by the people. My prediction it is partly right but not totally correct. The reason is because the forest king made him king, but the people accepted him as a king ... [sic] (see page 27).

What is particularly exciting about Bao’s responses is that they provided Tracey with a window into Bao’s reading development. In other words, Tracey was able to assess more than reading comprehension. She gained insight into her student’s thinking and how he constructed meaning when he read. More importantly, Bao began to learn the process of self-evaluation. He began to master some of the concepts and language necessary to express his own awareness of what and how he learns, and he began to consciously employ the metacognitive strategies needed to become a good reader.

Several other students also chose prediction strategies. A review of their reflective statements and reading response logs illustrate an ability to evaluate their predictions and identify why their predictions were correct or incorrect. There seems to be both an increase in the amount they wrote in response to their reading and a sense of satisfaction from being able to predict, attempt to validate, and explain their thinking.

Building the Assessment Partnership

Specific, goal-centered activities like those in Tracey’s reading project helped to build an assessment partnership between students and teacher in the portfolio classroom. As students began to take more control of their learning and the assessment of their progress, they developed self-awareness. They began to use time more efficiently and to gain self-confidence in their choices. Tracey’s students demonstrated this new academic maturity nicely by writing more and by taking risks in their writing. As their metacognitive skills developed, higher order thinking became more apparent in their day-to-day activities, justifying the emphasis placed on the assessment of the process as well as the product. A partnership grew out of their shared vision.

References


Authors

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Bao’s Reading Response Log Entry

King of Another Country

This book is about an ordinary African man named Ojio and how he became king by the forest king. My prediction for this book is that Ojio is gonna open the carved door.

My prediction was not quite correct because Ojio didn’t open the carved door but his wife did.

I predict that the king is some an ordinary man and then he was made into king by the people.

My prediction it is partly right but not totally correct. The reason is because the forest king made him king but the people only accepted him as a king.

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Collaborative Teacher Assessment of ESL Writers: Conceptual and Practical Issues

Bernard Mohan and Marylin Low

Many ESL students participate in academic courses that are primarily based on the learning of content. In many of these classes, students are required to demonstrate content understanding through written assignments, and teachers are expected to evaluate the written task by assigning a mark or grade. It is a complex process that engages the ESL student in expressing knowledge of a topic through writing, and for the teacher in assigning a mark or grade to that writing (Cohen, 1994; Hamp-Lyons, 1991; Johns, 1991; Reid, 1990).

An essay may be evaluated on language; it may be evaluated on content; or it may be evaluated in some fashion (integrated, unIntegrated, or even conflicting) as an evaluation of both language and content. In this study, the teachers are required to do both language and content or “integrative” evaluation. As well, they are expected to ensure consistency in their grading practices, adding further complexity to the assessment process. Consequently, tension results as teachers question the what and how of evaluating ESL students in an academic context.

One approach to overcome inconsistency in assessment practices is collaborative assessment (see Werner & Case, 1991, for this approach with school-based projects). In the context of this study, collaborative assessment is a process that asks different teachers teaching the same course to define collaboratively and then apply consistently evaluation criteria to ESL student responses to common test questions. It is a complex process and a change in practice for many teachers. More regularly teachers mark their students’ work independently, with the assumption that they share a common understanding of the evaluation criteria. However, in a collaborative process, the dialogue among teachers often brings to light the differing assumptions about the perspectives on language that teachers have. This, in turn, raises difficult questions about conceptual clarity. What is being evaluated? What are the teacher’s assumptions about language, about content, about the relationship between language and content? As more teachers become responsible for teaching and evaluating both the language and content learning of ESL students in mainstream classes, collaborative assessment may become an essential tool for fair and consistent evaluation practices.

The Context

This study took place at a Canadian international college for Japanese nationals. All students attending this college have English as an additional language and are graduates of the Japanese school system. They are students in an International Studies Program and take a required global education course in their second year of study. An expectation of this course is that a main component of their learning centers around an integrated development of language and content. Therefore, a main component of student evaluation focuses on their achievement in using language appropriately to express content.

There are 12 sections of the global education course offered to support the learning of a diverse group of more than 200 students. To ensure integrity of the minimum standard established for successful completion of course requirements, college administration mandated that core testing be implemented. The core, or common, test was to be given in the spring and fall terms to all students in the course. Students were asked to write about questions that reflected the content and language they had studied that term.

During one of the collaborative assessment meetings, the eight teachers teaching this course tried to reach an agreement on standards for evaluating a composition question on a core test. After much discussion and disagreement, the resulting tension caused the teachers to question the validity and value
of this approach even though initially they were strong advocates. Near the end of the collaborative assessment process, we sought the input of three teachers from that group to more fully understand their perspectives on the process of collaborative assessment.

The three teachers were interviewed individually and then collectively. The individual interviews focused on a discussion of the evaluation of the original core test responses. The collective interview involved collaboratively assessing two written student responses to one question from the core test. It is in this specific situation that a group of teachers worked toward a common goal of evaluating ESL compositions fairly and consistently.

**Shared Meaning**

Collaboration implies that the members of the collaborative group have a collective understanding of the what and the how they are evaluating. None of these teachers had engaged in this specific practice before. In the past they had developed common tests and decided collectively on the value of specific questions. Even the criteria on which to base their evaluation had been discussed and agreed upon. However, they would mark independently. Therefore, none had attempted to reach agreement together on a mark for any one paper. How do teachers reach shared meaning? Shared meaning develops over time through opportunities to practice and discuss evaluation collaboratively. When the nature of a change in practice is social and developmental for its participants, as it is with collaborative assessment, defining a shared meaning places additional demands on the teachers to engage in interactive, reflective discussion. Essential in this process are collaborative skills that address both conceptual and procedural clarity (Fradd & McGee, 1994; Fullan, 1991). Understanding what collaborative assessment of language and content is, and how to achieve it, is critical to its successful implementation.

There was a strong commitment to the process at this college; teachers wanted to be fair evaluators and work collectively. Common comments were:

- I know we don’t work in a vacuum but we often mark in a vacuum. This time I want to be very, very clear on how we’re going to mark before we mark with the process of change. This added further complicated an already complex process.

**Initial Stages of Development**

Initially, when the core test was developed, discussion focused on establishing a list of criteria for marking the composition question on AIDS. One teacher commented that we met and set up our criteria language of cause and effect, subject verb agreement, content (what is the cause of AIDS and what is the effect of AIDS), content we had taught them. We also marked on vocabulary for that question (the composition question).

The three teachers decided to use the same criteria used by the group for evaluating the two ESL compositions. At this point the shared meaning was at a very general level, as expressed by these comments:

- We had vague ideas of what the criteria was going to be.
- We all agreed on cause and effect language but we didn’t say specifically what that was.
- I really wasn’t clear on what would be acceptable or not by the other teachers, I just knew what I expected from the students I taught.

The information given to students on the test supported this unclarity and generality:

You will be marked (5 points) on each of the following:
- ideas and opinions
- correct essay form
- using the language of cause and effect
- subject verb agreement
- vocabulary

Although the teachers had access to a curriculum that included activities for developing each of these criteria, they had not discussed their interpretations of these terms in any detail with each other. They assumed a common understanding of the meanings of these terms.

**Refining the Collaboration**

Once the actual group marking began, the lack of clarity around the criteria began to surface. Comments were made that brought into question the relationship between language and content. Members had difficulty agreeing on whether vocabulary should be marked separately from ideas and opinions or together. One teacher referred to the common sense notion that ones’ ability to express ideas is realized in the appropriate use of vocabulary. Therefore, to separate vocabulary from ideas and opinions was not natural or desirable. As the other group members began to reflect on this, there was more talk about the language/content relationship, raising questions about what Saville-Troike (1991) and Mohan (1986, 1990) call the intersection of language knowledge and content knowledge. Teachers commented:

My own inexperience with language and content ... I will isolate some parts of the language, like the conditional
Although the teachers agreed that thoroughly discussing criteria would have been helpful, they questioned whether they really understood the relationship between language and content.

The criteria on the core test, even though we listed five different things... I found that I could still read a paper that didn’t make sense and that wasn’t really clear what they were trying to say, yet it was organized and they even covered an introduction and a conclusion and there was subject verb agreement. I didn’t know how to mark it.

This response seems to have the ideas I was looking for but it is so difficult to read. I think I know what the student is trying to say.

A similar discussion came about when marking the language of cause and effect. It was difficult for the teachers to clarify in detail what the language of cause and effect was and to separate it from ideas and opinion. One teacher noted that in fact the students were expressing cause and effect in their composition without using any of the language that had been taught in class. There was clearly an assumption made when establishing the criteria that what the language teachers would be marking was what they had been taught. This underlined the need for further clarification or shared meaning of the criteria before the actual marking took place.

One teacher commented:

Once we got our test questions down we hadn’t really agreed on what would be an appropriate response to these questions. When it came to grading that test and we went over it, that’s when problems arose; we realized that one teacher felt this was a full response and another one didn’t. We couldn’t agree on the core response.

Incorporating Teachers’ Knowledge and Experience

Linked to conceptual clarity and affecting the depth of shared meaning are the varying kinds of knowledge and experience teachers have had teaching language and content. Some have studied language from a grammar or formal perspective, others from a communicative or functional perspective. Some have had more formal training in teaching writing, others have not. When discussions focused on clarifying any one of the evaluation criteria, reaching shared meaning was challenging. As one teacher commented about the importance of hearing other perspectives:

It’s important to know that in the past when we did all our marking as a group, all of us have been in the same room including someone who has some expertise in testing and we all mark together and we say, “Here’s one I’m not really sure about, would you please have a look at it.” So we’ve passed papers back and forth and we’ve had a chance to decide about these things together.

Clarity comes about as teachers recognize differing perspectives and learn from each other. When the three teachers were discussing what mark to give a composition for correct essay form (five-paragraph essay: introduction, body and conclusion), there was initial disagreement over what constituted a paragraph:

I think as people read things there might be a different idea about what would be a complete paragraph, for example, it just didn’t mean an indentation and three sentences make a paragraph. I felt there should be some kind of topic sentence and somebody else felt that the shape of a paragraph was enough.

Three teachers spent approximately 15 minutes reflecting on each other’s perspectives, clarifying their ideas, going back to the composition to reach agreement and understanding. It was through this process of deliberating, trying to agree on a mark, deliberating and trying again, that clarity and a “shared language of common meaning” (Fradd & McGee, 1994, p. 29) occurred.

Introducing collaborative assessment is not an easy process. Implementation of this change has many facets that affect its success. The questions “What is the assessment of language and content, and how do teachers do it?” were explored through the experience of three teachers. The interviews revealed tensions caused by lack of in-depth shared meaning. The tensions were shaped by differing perspectives on what language is and what content is and how to evaluate ESL student writing; uncertainty about the nature of the relationship between language and content; and lack of agreement on common definitions of the evaluation criteria.

One of the issues raised by this study is: How does conceptual clarity emerge for teachers when implementing ideas that are complex and vague? The language and content relationship is not simple and not clear. Central is the evaluation of both language and content—not just evaluation in general, not just the evaluation of academic writing, not just the evaluation of ideas. Central too is the requirement that the evaluation is based on an actual overlap or intersection of language goals and content goals. Merely having two separate lists of goals is not sufficient. Further requirements are a norm of shared understanding of the integrated relationship of language and content and a way of talking about and evaluating it.

This “common goals” view of integrative evaluation is very different from a “separate goals” view of evaluation. Short (1993)
provides an excellent overview of the separatist position, emphasizing that “the difficulty with assessment centers on isolating the language features from the content objectives so one does not adversely influence the other” (p. 627). For example, students who can solve math computation problems correctly may not be able to solve a word problem using the same computation if their English proficiency is low. Accordingly, Short recommends using alternative assessment measures, such as checklists, portfolios, interviews, and performance-based tasks. These alternatives reduce language demands, but they do not solve the common goals problems that the collaborating teachers uncovered.

Although it has seldom been clearly raised, the question of integrated evaluation cannot be avoided. Why? For one thing, content evaluation assumes an adequate interpretation of the language of the essay. For another, school systems assume that language work on writing is supportive of the student’s writing performance in content areas. These are assumptions about language as a resource for meaning, assumptions about the content/language relation (more technically the content/expression relation) in students’ essays (Mohan, 1986, 1990). Can the students express what they know? Can the assessor interpret what students mean from what they say? Although this issue is highlighted because ESL students are writing in their second language, it is a general issue in the evaluation of writing and in fact a generic issue for all evaluation that uses the evidence of discourse.

Conclusion

Collaborative assessment can help to produce fairer and more consistent evaluation. Although they did not find collaboration easy, these teachers were able to learn from each other and develop shared understandings. In addition, they were able to uncover important and difficult questions about integrated language and content evaluation, matters that affect fairness and consistency. To engage these difficult questions, teachers need to go beyond sharing their opinions. Collaborative assessment must move to a new and more complex stage, in which collaborating teachers join in a guided and focused dialogue with second language researchers and functional discourse analysts.

References


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A View From the Foxhole

An outsider would have seen a typical controlled examination setting. Approximately 30 graduate students, heads bowed over the ubiquitous end-of-program blue books, sat scattered across the room in cheat-proof seats. Up front stood the tight-lipped supervisor, myself, in total control, eyes roaming the room in patterned flight. As an insider, however, I knew that the last thing I was feeling was control. I cleared my throat hoping it would relieve me of their obvious discomfort and of the tension I felt between my responsibility to them as a model of educational reform and my role as the guardian of reified excellence. Any temptation to acknowledge negligence quickly retreated to the comfortable justification of accepted expectations sustaining me as, later that evening, I read through book after book of canonized scripts. It was the shadow of a postscript, though, that left me guilty as charged in the power-relations struggle of dehumanizing classrooms. There it was: the one-shot struggle for intellectual voice.

“Dear Dr. Rojas,” it began, “I know you to understand my limitations to expressing myself in the written English on the first time. If this is not good enough, please give me the opportunity to do it again as in class.”

How was it, I thought, that I was able to make the epistemological rupture with the prevailing doctrines of language teaching to model a critical pedagogy of possibility and yet was unable to heed the call for educators to practice in their professional endeavors what they preach in their theoretical formulations (Giroux, 1987)? After all, by defining my classroom within the Freirian notion of learning, I prided myself on not depositing heavenly knowledge into my students’ anesthetized memories. Each of my lessons painstakingly aspired to model the view of learners and teachers as partners involved in dialogical and dialectal acts of cognition. I wholeheartedly supported a problem-posing methodology for unveiling the problematic realities of teaching ESL under sometimes hostile circumstances and for assuming the intent to transform such situations. I repeatedly promoted the self-image of the learner as a creative, autonomous individual. No one could be more supportive of learners’ rights to personally develop and succeed. But, if that were true, why couldn’t I make assessment an ongoing, unbounded event where the expression of what graduate students knew went beyond their ability to replicate my meaning as currency to be exchanged? The mandate was clear: find a way to model an emancipatory assessment program.

According to the Latest Study

Confession may grant absolution, but it does not necessarily lead to action. Doing what comes naturally to me in the face of an intellectual crisis, I began reading as much as I could on the changes in assessment being shaped by educational reform. The imperative was there—a portrait of renaissance assessment, a well-conceived design of systematized procedures for consistent and dignified feedback (Costa & Garmston, 1994). Rather than the static overreliance on recording the what of knowledge, these procedures refocus on the dynamic process underlying the how of learning (Fradd & McGee, 1994). My Freirian framework of reflection and critique between equals, though, was most notable in Wiggins’s (1993) “Assessment Bill of Rights.” An abundance of opportunities should be available for students to reflect on what they and others have learned as well as to evaluate their own and each others’ work. Selecting those options best serving their own interests as indicators of growth, students are rewarded for the insight and justification of their choices. Clear and consensually constructed criteria are created to provide structured feedback so that students have occasion to revise, improve, and defend their performance. Collegiality and respect characterize the relationship between co-evaluators; mutual elicitation occurs in a trustful climate free of oppositional intentions or power relations. Authentic assessment resonates in a rational moment of intellectual fellowship and liberation.

I took solace and impetus from this critical theory of assessment—with its language
of criticism and its discourse of possibility—as it propelled me into familiar action. After all, it wasn’t so long ago in my own teaching that I had to relinquish the role of transmitting information and canned curriculum packages. Couldn’t I now give up exclusive rights to the ways of monitoring achievement and offer an equal chance to my students to participate in the decision-making process of their comprehensive examination? Couldn’t I publicly problematize the accepted routine and commit myself to help learners develop a deep and abiding faith in their capacities to do the same? How difficult a time would I have in discarding a minimalist outlook of assessment—demanding only that students engage in the restricted practice of passing a test—and modeling the maximalist viewpoint of requiring complete command of an extensive array of activities and capacities? Freire’s (1986) messages echoed in my consciousness:

- communicate without ambiguity and manage the moment democratically
- find the courage to care out loud in the face of condemnation or resistance
- take the risk to disrupt a passive education
- cultivate the humility necessary for subject-subject dialogue
- develop the political clarity to break away from the oppressive distortions of learning.

Rites of Passage
As the components of competence spread before me from a one- to a multidimensional conceptualization, a strategic plan of action emerged. The goals of the Master’s Degree in International and Overseas Teaching and Administration (ESL track) are explicitly understood by its participants: (a) to link theories of second language acquisition with a range of instructional practices, (b) to decentralize curriculum planning and position it as a connected activity between ESL and mainstream teachers in international schools, (c) to foster the creation of learner-centered classrooms and autonomous language acquirers, (d) to develop research and leadership skills to counteract the imposition of socially distorted interpretations of multilingualism, and (e) to infuse an ethos of cultural empathy into the overseas school setting. These generic goals have particular meaning to learners depending on their real-world situations; therefore, students must develop those concepts most laden with the pragmatic significance of their experiences. The process becomes symbolized in a codified form—a journal or a research proposal for example—that captures the tension of the learning

I cleared my throat hoping it would relieve me of their obvious discomfort and of the tension I felt between my responsibility to them as a model of educational reform and my role as the guardian of reified excellence.

Private Practices
Based on my own experiences of working with overseas and international schools, I focused on recurring themes. The following are examples of the performance assessment activities that I therefore suggested to the students.

Sample Performance Assessment Activities

Action Research Project: Attached is a brief article on the topic of teachers doing research in their own classes. Choose a burning issue from your Practicum journals that would be susceptible to change or improvement in your setting. Be prepared to write and defend a proposal as to how you would go about doing it and why it would be significant for you. Guidelines will be disseminated at our initial meeting.

Videotape Evaluation: You might create an evaluative checklist of effective second language instructional practices. You will use it to evaluate your own or others’ Practicum videotapes, to defend its findings, and to offer suggestions for instructional improvement. Bring your notes from the supervision course.

Rewritings/Retellings: Bring a first paper that you submitted in your program or the outline for a presentation that you gave in an initial course. Be prepared to rewrite or to retell it based on everything you’ve learned since that time.

Workshop Project: Consider giving a workshop next year for your school or at the regional Teacher’s Conference. Select a topic of import to you and your colleagues (e.g., strategies for including ESL students in mainstream programs). You will have the opportunity to prepare for and perform it. Begin reflecting on the criteria for evaluation of such a workshop.

Publications: Take this opportunity to submit an article for publication to a journal as you will have an uninterrupted block of time to complete it. Don’t forget to bring the contributors’ guidelines of the targeted
journal with you (I recommend the TESOL Journal). Begin reflecting on the criteria that might be used for selection.

Holistic Assessments: Here is a chance to develop that multidimensional assessment program for evaluating the cognitive academic language proficiency skills of your students and for determining entry and exit criteria. Bring whatever curricular resources you may need to complete the task.

Content Essay Questions: Put together at least one essay question that you think would be fair to have another student answer. Try to think of a concrete situation from an international school that requires application of the principles studied in this program (i.e., action).

Attitude Surveys: Start thinking about questions that you could use to survey the attitudes of the teachers on issues related to bilingualism or multiculturalism in your school. This might be an especially appropriate choice for those of you enrolling in the Research and Cultural Foundations sequence this summer.

Standardized Test Results: Most of you have expressed your schools’ concerns over the identification of special needs among the multilingual population. Find out what tests are currently being used and bring along some (anonymous) results. This would be an appropriate choice for those of you enrolling in the Testing and Evaluation course this summer.

Anecdotal Records: Perhaps you have tried to integrate the ESL curriculum with that of the whole language mainstream curriculum or utilize cooperative learning with mixed-proficiency groups. If so, then you have probably begun to use this tool for keeping records of critical events. Bring them with you this summer along with some thoughts for analysis.

Reading Records: Either you have spent this year reading articles and books (just completed an independent study or practicum) or you are going to next year. Bring along a list and start thinking about participating in a discussion group. What criteria would be appropriate for evaluating students’ involvement in such events?

Policy Documents: I hope that some of you have been actively involved in the development of a language policy across the curriculum. If so, or if you would like to finally have a chance to work on one, bring along samples and ideas. What issues would you include and how would you go about surveying your community to ascertain their concerns (e.g., students learning the host country language while still in ESL)?

Observation Rating Scales: Have you thought about working with content teachers in your school to develop performance tests as a means for grading mainstreamed ESL students (e.g., science classes)? Have you devised a rating scale with them? If not, bring along some ideas for doing so. I recommend that you interview the teachers beforehand for some ideas about what is crucial to their content.

Portfolios: Attached is a one-page article discussing the use of portfolios to evaluate teaching performance at an international school. Following the guidelines, begin collecting those artifacts that most proudly display the professional you have grown into while in this program. Begin reflecting on criteria that you would use to evaluate others’ portfolios.

The Last Page

My closing comments to the students, as they are to you the readers, were that this is not a finished product but the beginning of a process in need of considerable development. The ideas introduced should, therefore, be regarded as suggestive rather than as convincing. They are neither perfect nor complete. The admission of this effort as limited, incomplete, and perhaps defective is to be heard as a plea for others to pick up where this leaves off. Consequently, whatever has been put forth must be accepted only as a point of departure. I am asking for an open dialogue—within the context of subject to subject relations—among those of us who still suffer from occasional bouts of discomfort with our own practices, and, I imagine, our dialectical roles as double agents. My reflections have forced the painful awareness that my practices remain overpopulated with past intentions although this past summer offered another ray of emancipation. I invite others to nurture a critical vision of assessment with our graduate students and to share in its attainment.

References


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**Erratum**

Karen Bromley wishes to thank Jennifer Boushie, now a teacher at Bainbridge-Guilford Elementary School in Guilford, New York, for her help as a graduate assistant and the students and teachers at C. Fred Johnson Middle School and Lincoln Elementary School in Johnson City, New York, who cooperated in this project.


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**Free 200 Questions for review**

You didn't know to ask
Let's face it — most ESL teachers are not exactly enthusiastic about the subject of assessment. However, our contributors' creative ideas can turn what many of us view as a necessary evil into an enjoyable process. Michael Lynn offers thoughtful advice on how to ensure success with alternative assessment in his tip “Caveat Emptor.” If you are looking for a way to encourage beginning-level students to assess their feelings, take a look at “Drawing Lessons.” Yue Huang describes how she helped middle school ESL students use art and the writing process to tell about their earthquake experiences. In “Four Enjoyable Test Review Activities,” Dawnell Jones and Diana Thompson Nelson offer some entertaining activities to relieve the tedium of test review. Brian McClure’s “Teaching Socially Acceptable Responses in Small-Group Competition” gives us some ideas about how to assess students’ knowledge of expressions of gratitude.

Caveat Emptor: Using Innovative Classroom Assessment

Michael J. Lynn

Teachers have been encouraged to adopt various descriptive modes of classroom assessment either to replace or supplement traditional methods of evaluation (e.g., multiple choice, fill-ins, true/false). These kinder and gentler qualitative approaches to assessing student achievement (both by the teacher and the student) have grown out of the popularized notion of humanistic education in the 1960s, and the communicative language teaching movement of the 1970s and 1980s (Nunan, 1990). In fact, it is to this end that many teacher education centers have embraced the idea that the goal of sound teaching is a student-centered classroom where innovative assessment allows for active learner participation in assessing student progress. However, the question is whether this emphasis on providing the next generation of teachers with learner-centered teaching philosophy, the latest procedures in communicative teaching, and a stock of methods by which learners’ progress can be monitored throughout the learning process will be enough to nurture relevant assessment in the language classroom. The answer to this question is, maybe, keeping in mind that the success of any educational innovation depends on how well the teachers can adapt these ideas to work in their own teaching situations. In essence then, it’s helpful for teachers to consider what steps they personally have to take to foster an effective setting for new trends in assessment to take place.

Considerations in Successful Innovative Classroom Assessment

In the previous decade, a good teacher was one who actively contributed to the dynamics of student learning (Strevens, 1987). In the 1990s it could be said that a good teacher contributes to the student learning process through an ability to develop classroom assessment systems of student-teacher collaboration. But to ensure success in cooperative assessment techniques an informed teacher needs to keep in mind some considerations. The following tips might help direct such efforts.

Consider creating an assessment file folder that holds readily available qualitative methods of assessment to assist in charting learner progress. Teachers need to have a stock of methods by which to assess learner progress. Much work has already been done in providing examples of portfolios, student profiles, progress cards, and interview techniques (Curriculum Development Centre, 1988; Nunan, 1990). A file of working models can aid the teacher tremendously in coming up with some time-saving tips regarding the assessment of achievement in a learner-centered curriculum.

Consider developing a well-defined concept of the kind of mastery of material you expect from your students. One danger I have noticed in using qualitative assessment tools
to record learner progress is that it is tempting for a teacher to allow a student to progress to the next level of proficiency based on the student’s ability to organize and assess himself and not on whether or not the student is well prepared in the content area of study. Clearly defined mastery of the material will make it easier for the teacher to give real grades, thus nurturing learners in the truest sense by allowing them to be responsible for what they were to learn well.

Relax in the knowledge that it is not reactionary for an instructor to be at the center of the classroom or to issue directives. Some teachers, in their interpretation of student-centered instruction, have tried to make their role as teacher as unobtrusive as possible. But they must keep within sight the notion that empowering students to get involved in the learning process does not mean that the teacher is to disappear (Nunan, 1995). Any system needs clearly defined leadership and instruction and to not provide it, or to mask it beyond recognition will be disappointing to students and could lead to student loss of confidence in the instructor.

Consider how to budget your time so that you quickly mark student class work, not with delay and excuses about the returning of student work. It is easy for teachers to get so involved in organizing descriptive modes of assessment, and encouraging students to take an active part in their own progress, that teachers might put off the actual grading of class exercises and papers. If this happens, students might feel cheated in that they have to do a lot of the work without receiving the timely corrections they desire for improvement.

Keep in mind that in most cultures teachers and students are not considered equivalent in terms of mastery of the subject matter. In most cultures the teacher is viewed as an expert in the subject at hand, a fact readily accepted by students who want to learn from someone who knows what they are talking about. Granted, the students can teach each other and the teacher a great deal about their lives, their interests, and their needs, but the well-informed teacher will be counted on to provide the vision of the semester as well as the expectations for the class and individual students (Cook, 1995). Any attempt, therefore, to introduce new trends of looking to the student for curriculum guidance or assessment must be handled carefully and with expertise. The very idea of incorporating students into the decision-making process of doing things in class may strike students as odd (Nunan, 1995). Of course, some students, regardless of culture, will flourish, but the confused response of many could lead to a quality of work not reflecting the students’ potential. Certainly above-average knowledge in knowing what modes of assessment the students are used to, and knowing how to articulate the value of teacher-student collaboration in the classroom will be required of the teacher.

Keep in mind that preparation in understanding the basics of test construction at both the classroom and professional level are fundamental to student assessment. Teachers need to gain basic knowledge in the traditional ways of testing, both at the professional and classroom level. It is through this training that teachers will be well qualified and better able to make appropriate decisions when it comes to the modes of assessment they select to use in their classrooms (Alderson & Clapham, 1995).

References


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Michael Lynn is a teacher of ESL at UCLA, California State University, Los Angeles, and Glendale Community College. He was formerly a language program developer and teacher at Kwansei Gakuin University, Japan, where he assisted in improving the methods of student assessment.

Drawing Lessons

Yue Huang

How can we draw on students’ strengths when they don’t have enough English to express themselves verbally? How can we help our students respond to situations, particularly difficult ones, when they have more emotions than words in English to express them? Both of these questions can be addressed by a “draw and write” technique.

At the beginning of the past year, about a third of my intermediate-level ESL students at George Washington Carver Middle School in the Los Angeles Unified School District could not write a single English word and handed in their work in Spanish. Few of the others could write a simple sentence without errors. However, I did observe that my students enjoyed drawing pictures — even during class time when they didn’t want to listen. I decided that if students’ artwork could be incorporated into their language acquisition activities, lessons would be more interesting and effective. So I have instituted an ongoing drawing and writing project.

I use the drawing and writing activities about once a month. For each session, the students spend about 20 minutes for simple drawing, or longer periods for more careful drawing. I begin with graded exercises: Students draw pictures to illustrate descriptions from a textbook; students draw pictures and write their own descriptions following a given pattern; students look at a picture and write freely about it. I regularly evaluate the drawing and writing work and display it on the classroom bulletin boards. As their writing progresses, I encourage them to be more creative in both drawing and writing.
Recently, we had an opportunity to see how this technique could help students even in extraordinary situations. On January 17, 1994, a powerful earthquake struck Los Angeles. The school was closed for a week, and when students came back, they were badly scared and obviously not ready to concentrate on a textbook. I simply handed out paper and crayons — this was time they needed to share their feelings and experiences. I thought that drawing what the earthquake looked like and then describing one another’s pictures might help get at unexpressed feelings and diminish anxieties.

Most students drew wonderful pictures of the life and death experiences they had just gone through. But the work was half done. Among the 35 students in class, only two wrote about their earthquake experiences; the rest complained that they lacked the vocabulary to describe this.

I decided to incorporate not just writing with artwork, but all other language skills as well. I collected articles, pictures, and data about earthquakes, and engaged my students in a formal “Earthquake” project that involved listening, speaking, reading, and writing with the drawing activity. This consisted of the following four steps.

Steps

1. Students drew what the earthquake looked like on white paper, leaving a quarter of the space for writing. The students first used pencils to draw their pictures and then colored them with crayons. Students worked independently, with no models or hints from me.

2. Students read and discussed texts on the earthquake and learned useful words for their writing. We studied and discussed articles, pictures, and quake maps form newspapers and magazines. I highlighted the key terms (e.g., earthquake, aftershock, epicenter, helicopter, ambulance, apartments, freeway, disaster, collapse, damage, destroy, gas main, electricity, and explosion) by asking students to underline them, and by writing them on the chalkboard. Students copied down expressions that might come in handy later in their description of the picture.

3. Students wrote about their own pictures and revised their writing through guided pair or group work.
   - First draft: Students wrote a description of their pictures, using words they had learned from reading.
   - Second draft: Students exchanged their work with partners and checked one another’s spelling, capitalization, and punctuation before turning in their revisions. I read the second drafts, underlining the parts that needed clarification and improvement, but ignoring minor errors.
   - Third draft: Students worked in groups on the returned second drafts, making comments and suggestions on peers’ work, then writing the third draft.
   - Final version: I worked with each student on the third drafts. If there was no need for further revising, the students wrote the final version in the space reserved on the drawing paper.
Oral presentation: Students talked about their pictures in class and answered questions from their peers. Students talked about their picture for 3 minutes or more, sharing their experiences of the earthquake. Their peers asked questions about the picture. Most students asked wh-questions: “Who is under the table?” “My sister.” “What are falling down from the tree?” “Apples.” “What is the black at the top of your picture? Is it a cloud?” “No, it is smoke.”

This was the most exciting part of the project; I played a minimal role, for example, reminding students of time limits. Some students made their presentations very effective by role-playing the “shaking” experiences and seemed very proud of performing like an important speaker, giving speeches, accepting applause, and picking the questions from the audience.

Results and Applications

This experience not only helped students overcome their fears and anxieties about the earthquake itself but showed that language teaching can be more motivating and effective when it is combined with learners’ interests and needs. Of course, this is no substitute for appropriate and necessary therapy or counseling, but it does help students learn to talk and write about what is important to them. Drawing and learning together is an approach that has worked wonderfully with my students and may prove useful for other teachers.

I should add that I myself cannot draw. The students took care of their own artistic endeavors. A teacher does not have to be able to draw in order to conduct this activity, but does need to know how to make use of it and incorporate it with subject matter.

Acknowledgment

I thank Lise Winer for her valuable comments and suggestions.

Author

Yue Huang teaches at George Washington Carver Middle School, in Los Angeles, California, in the United States.
Exams aren’t fun for anyone. Teachers hate writing traditional exams, and students don’t like taking them. With this atmosphere hovering over the classroom, can anything be done to alleviate students’ anxieties?

Yes. With creative, enjoyable, and constructive review activities, students will not only enjoy preparing for the exam, but they will also feel a sense of accomplishment when they realize how much they have learned.

The following four activities have helped our students prepare for exams and have added an element of fun to the traditionally dreaded exam time.

**Classroom Feud**

This game can be played with students at any level and takes approximately 10 minutes. The only material needed is an object the students can grab (e.g., a ball, pen, or eraser). Preparation time depends upon the depth of review you want to carry out. Prepare a list of questions pertaining to review material in advance. For example, if the topic is the environment, sample questions could be: *Give an example of air pollution; name two things you can recycle.*

Divide students into two teams. Ask a representative from each team to come to the front of the classroom, stand on either side of the desk, and focus on an object placed in the middle of the desk. Ask a question, and the first student to grab the object must give the correct answer within 5 seconds or the turn goes to the other team. The team that answers correctly receives one point.

Be sure to explain the instructions clearly and inform the students that if the team representative does not know the answer, the rest of the team cannot help.

**Tongue-Tied**

This activity is a take-off from the popular game *Taboo* and is especially effective for encouraging students to use English creatively as they describe target vocabulary words. This game is appropriate for any level and can be done either in pairs or small groups. It takes approximately 5 to 10 minutes. The materials needed are index cards or slips of paper. We suggest two variations of this activity.

- Make vocabulary flash cards, with one word written on each card. Students work in pairs, with one student explaining the word and the other student guessing it.
- Write four or five different vocabulary words pertaining to one topic, and then give a different card to each student. (Make sure that partners have different vocabulary words on their cards.)

One student describes the first word on her card while the other student tries to guess it. (The other student then does likewise.) Make sure the students know the vocabulary before they play and counsel them not to use gestures.

**Row Recall and Review**

Students at any level can participate in this activity, which can take anywhere from

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10 to 20 minutes. Arrange students’ desks in two rows that face each other. Stand behind one row and hold up an object, word, or phrase. Students in the row facing you explain it to the person across from them, who then must guess what the word is. Next, stand behind the opposite row and do the same thing.

We have found this activity is most productive if students are given a guideline to follow. For example, if students are describing words pertaining to sports, write questions on the board such as the following: Where is it played? Is it a team or an individual sport? What equipment is used? The students need to follow this outline when describing the words to their partners. After a series of three or four words, one row of students should move down one seat to allow students to work with more than one partner. This activity can be used to review vocabulary, grammar, writing, and reading.

Auction
A great way for intermediate and advanced students to review writing, this activity takes anywhere from 15 to 30 minutes. Students are divided into small groups, and each group is given equal amounts of play money. The object is for students to “buy” correct sentences, and the group with the most correct sentences wins. You should collect samples of correct and incorrect sentences from students’ homework in advance. These sentences can either be put on an overhead projector or written on the board. Explain what an auction is and tell students that if a sentence is incorrect, they need to fix it. In other words, the groups buy correct sentences and fix incorrect sentences. If a group “buys” an incorrect sentence, they lose the money they bet on that sentence, thus limiting their chances to buy other correct sentences. You become the auctioneer, trying to persuade students to buy all the sentences. For example, you can say, “Here’s Sentence 1. I’ll start the bidding at $50. Which group wants to buy this beautiful sentence? Going once! Going twice ... Oh, Group 2 just bid $100. Will anyone give me $200?” When the sentence has finally been sold, the auctioneer tells everyone whether or not it is correct. If the sentence is correct, the auctioneer doesn’t collect the money and moves on to the next sentence. If it is incorrect, the teacher asks a group to explain how they would fix it and then collects the money from the group who bet the most on the wrong sentence.

Our students have loved these activities, and we’ve found them to be effective in preparing them for exams.

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Diana Thompson Nelson is an instructor at the English Language Center at Brigham Young University. She will receive her MA in TESL in August 1995. She taught for a year in the People’s Republic of China.
Even students with advanced English conversation skills sometimes find themselves tongue-tied in interpersonal situations with native speakers, and the confusion is often cultural rather than linguistic in origin. In their study of nonnative expressions, Eisenstein and Bodman (1986) concluded that one particularly troublesome area is expressions of gratitude. In my experience in Japanese university conversation classes, other areas include expressing interest and accepting gifts, compliments, and favors.

In these situations, intermediate learners will often simply translate their native expression into English. In such cases, although the English usage may be perfectly understandable, the response itself is likely to be socially inept, even unacceptable. One good example of this is my students’ tendency to accept a favor or gift by saying “I’m so happy,” rather than expressing appreciation toward both the giver and the gift.

Even the more conscientious students who refrain from translation often either use outdated expressions or overcompensate by exaggerating their pleasure. These problems have been particularly distressing to my students who have spent time in an English-speaking country: the awkward silence that often follows such faux pas makes it clear that somehow what they said was not quite right.

The Eisenstein and Bodman study relied on a short-answer questionnaire designed to test the learner’s knowledge of appropriate social responses. I’ve found that a similar questionnaire in multiple-choice form makes for an enjoyable and challenging lesson.

**Procedure**

I tell the class to pretend that they are exchange students in a university in my home country (in my case, the U.S.), and have them choose the most socially acceptable response to various commonly encountered situations.

Here are some sample questions I have used in the past that exemplify expressing appreciation and accepting offers, favors, and compliments.

1. You’re visiting your friend Stacey in her new apartment. The apartment is okay, but not great. It’s quite old, and you think it’s a dangerous neighborhood. What would you say?
   a. “I really like your apartment, but isn’t it dangerous to live here?”
   b. “I really like your apartment. How old is this building?”
   c. “I really like your apartment. How much does this place cost?”
   d. “I really like your apartment, but aren’t you lonely here?”

2. You are at school with your friend Greg. It’s lunchtime, and you realize you have left all your money at home. Your friend says, “Here, I’ll lend you five dollars for lunch today.” What would you say?
   a. “Thanks, that’s kind of you.”
   b. “No, that’s okay. I’ll just miss lunch today.”
   c. “Thanks. I’ll return the money soon.”
   d. “Thanks. That’s really nice of you. I’ll pay you back tomorrow.”
3. Your English professor invites you to dinner at his home. At the end of the evening, as you are leaving, he says, “Thank you for coming tonight. I hope you had a good time.” What would you say?
   a. “Yes, thank you.” and shake hands.
   b. “Thanks, dinner was good. I’m full.”
   c. “I had the best time of my life. You have been so kind to me, I’ll never forget you.”
   d. “Thank you so much for inviting me. I had a nice time.”

4. Near the end of your year in America, your friend Sid tells you that your other friends are planning a farewell party for you. What would you say?
   a. “Wow! I’m so happy!”
   b. “Oh, that’s not necessary. They’re all so busy, and they’ve been too nice to me already.”
   c. “That sounds like fun. Should I bring something?”
   d. “That’s nice. Tell them I’ll come.”

5. After your English class, your professor says to you, “You’re one of the best exchange students we’ve had at this school. Your English is good, you’re really friendly, and you work hard.” What would you say?
   a. “Thank you. You’re my favorite professor, too.”
   b. “Thank you, but you’re too nice. I know my English is poor, and I’ve got to work harder.”
   c. “Thank you so much. Please come to visit my family in Japan.”
   d. “Thank you. I really appreciate that.”

All that’s necessary to write this type of questionnaire is knowledge of your students’ common mistakes. The incorrect answers should be representative of these common mistakes.

Although it’s possible to simply call on individual students to answer each question, I’ve found it’s more entertaining to use small groups in a team competition. I read each question aloud, then allow enough time for the teams to choose their answers and practice pronunciation and intonation. Each team then answers each question aloud, and I keep score on the board, explaining why some answers are inappropriate. Ideally, a different student in each group should be able to answer at least one question. In a 40-student class, a 10-question exercise typically takes about an hour to complete.

Acknowledgment
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References

Author
Brian McClure is the current Foreign Professor of English in the Department of English, Faculty of Education, Shizuoka University, Japan.
Reflection on engagement in the language class has encouraged creative thinking about observation and process; it has also encouraged on-the-job performance-based integration of teaching and assessment. The 11 case studies described in Language Assessment in Action, edited by Geoff Brindley, provide vivid evidence of that integration in a range of Australian ESL language teaching encounters. Brindley, in his own chapter on competency-based assessment, makes the point that this integration can provide a focus on “language as a tool for communication rather than on language knowledge as an end in itself” (p. 158). What he does not say is that communicative language assessment must, like all assessment, provide clear information about learning success. It is not evident that it does: Indeed the information it does provide may confuse because of mismatches of teachers’ and learners’ expectations.

Brindley makes the following case for the volume:

the last few years have...seen greatly increased activity in the development of tests and assessment procedures for assessing, monitoring and reporting learners’ proficiency, progress and achievement in ESL programs. These range from large-scale procedures, standardized proficiency tests, and reporting systems to informal monitoring aimed at assisting teachers to keep track of individual classroom learning. The aim of this volume is to bring together a range of these testing and assessment initiatives and to document the issues, problems and dilemmas, which arise as practitioners and language testers attempt to devise systems, instruments and procedures to meet their particular assessment needs.

(p. 1)

There are, writes Brindley, “relatively few case study accounts of the way in which assessment tools have been constructed to meet the needs of particular groups.” He hopes that this volume will “fill the gap by providing some insights into the rationales and decision-making processes that have accompanied the development of tests and assessments in both institutional and classroom contexts” (p. 1).

Does it fill the gap? The first three chapters bring together assessment needs of large-scale systems and theoretical approaches: McDowell and McKay appealing to Bachman (1990) and to Bachman and Palmer (forthcoming); Mincham to Halliday (1985). Then, Corbel and McIntyre discuss very different uses of the ASLPR (Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings), Corbel describing his development of Exrater, a computer program incorporating an “expert system” aimed at assisting language assessors to apply the ASLPR, and McIntyre reporting a comprehensive review he carried out of the ASLPR. Given the exposure ASLPR has had in Australia, it is useful to have two such critiques: The fact that they both question the ASLPR’s claimed validity is a valuable bonus. Clarkson and Jensen’s chapter reports on their experience of developing a task-based instrument for assessing achievement of objectives in an English for Professional Employment course for adult immigrants; Grierson and Gunn both consider criterion-based assessment procedures, while Cram and Wilkes describe their very different experiences with self-assessment in language programmes.

Bachman’s Fundamental Considerations in Language Testing (1990) acts as a start-up vademecum, a kind of beginner’s constant companion, for most contributors to this volume: The book appears in nine of the individual lists of references. A relevant question, of course, is to what extent the authors’ conclusions on their assessment experiences support that early appeal to Bachman. There is little evidence either way. True, Mincham concludes that “focus on a predetermined set of criteria helped (the
teachers) in becoming more aware of learners’ individual needs” (p. 87). But Gunn takes a contrary view: “We discovered only through practice how difficult it is to specify criteria for task performance in a clear and unambiguous way” (p. 261). My own reading of these contributions does not accord with the strong theoretical tilt Brindley gives in his introduction (p. 8). Indeed, by drawing into relief the growing number of test development projects that draw explicitly on current theoretical frameworks of communicative language ability, in particular those proposed by Bachman (1990) and Bachman and Palmer (forthcoming), Brindley draws attention to the lip-service paid by language testing practitioners to theoretical models.

Such a forced yoking takes us no nearer the holy grail of true proficiency: What it tells us is that if you set up a model of language proficiency, people will say they are following it, whether they are or not. The case studies reported in the volume under review could have done with less applied model and more applied linguistics. Nevertheless, they stand in their own right: They provide interesting and thoughtful accounts of the realities of engagement in language teaching and testing.

References


Author

Alan Davies has taught Applied Linguistics at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, for 30 years and is currently Director of the NLLIA Language Testing Research Centre at the University of Melbourne, Australia. His publications include Principles of Language Testing (1990) and The Native Speaker in Applied Linguistics (1991). He is past editor of Applied Linguistics and current editor of Language Testing.
One of the major challenges facing ESL professionals in the U.S. public school system today is the multilevel classroom. To survive, we devise creative ways to group our learners, we seek practical strategies amenable to expansion or simplification, we rely upon language experience, live action English, and whole language — three approaches that lend themselves somewhat to a variety of proficiency levels. The material resources, unfortunately, have been few. However, we now have *Chalk Talks*.

In *Chalk Talks*, Shapiro and Genser offer us an approach that allows several proficiency levels of language learners to work together successfully. It is a novel combination of language experience and action English strategies, which uses content that is student generated. *Chalk Talks* lessons transform a single student’s experiences — life, home, school, work experiences — into comprehensive language lessons for the entire class.

In the context of the classroom, the teacher elicits a student narrative and builds up the chalkboard with a sequence of small, simple symbols or drawings. In essence, as learners listen to a classmate tell her story, they follow their teacher’s board illustrations, practicing paraphrased oral sentences that correspond to them. Ultimately, all students can retell and write down their class member’s narrative, individually or with partners, at their own particular English proficiency level.

*Chalk Talks* lessons may spring spontaneously from unexpected occurrences in the classroom, or from current events in the students’ lives, or they may be predesigned and initiated by the teacher. The authors give many clear examples of these highly motivating, personalized lessons that take the form of descriptions, narrations, questions, opinions, or step-by-step sequences. "When you look at your students, you see a classroom filled with people who have a history to tell and families to talk about. It is almost impossible to run out of materials for student-generated lessons" (p. xiv).

In addition to providing a milieu wherein all class members can participate at their own level, several other advantages are inherent in *Chalk Talks* lessons. By their very nature, they maintain a high level of interest; and cultivate an atmosphere of good will, empathy, and community. We are reminded that, true to Freire, material that originates from students’ own lives excites and engages them in ways that nothing else can: "Learners who are participating in a student-generated lesson feel as if they are really speaking English. They are using actual events and [Image]"
they are talking to each other. They have a real audience and a genuine need to communicate” (p. xiv).

If one of our goals is to foster multicultural appreciation, we are encouraged: “Every person can provide a story. Every ethnic group can have its moment. The number of culturally relevant lessons is limitless” (p. xiv). And for those teachers with limited resources and preparation time, Chalk Talks lessons require very little before-class preparation and virtually no materials development.

Shapiro and Genser provide clear, detailed instructions for planning and implementing spontaneous lessons. They also include a full dictionary of simple, immediately comprehensible symbols or drawings a teacher can copy to illustrate the student-dictated lesson and cue the group response. (I must emphasize here that I am not talking about art when I say “drawings.” Any teacher who can hold a piece of chalk can use the Chalk Talks symbols.)

Additionally, for teachers who may be initially hesitant about implementing spontaneous lessons, 32 sample lessons are given, complete with teacher notes and reproducible picture pages.

Without reservation, I recommend this teacher-friendly, innovative resource for both new and experienced teachers, kindergarten through adult education, whose students are at a beginning and intermediate proficiency, in single- or multilevel classes. No, it is not a miracle answer. But it is a most welcome clue toward solving this language-teaching conundrum. Shapiro and Genser are on to something.

Author

Sharron Bassano, TESL trainer for three University of California Extension programs, taught ESL for 21 years and is author of 12 ESL texts and teacher resources.
The Heinle & Heinle TOEFL Test Assistant: Test of Written English (TWE) is for intermediate to advanced nonnative-English-speaking students who plan to take the half-hour written test of the TOEFL. Clearly written to and for students, the book is sequenced so that they can easily work through it without the help of teacher or tutor, though teachers might also find it useful.

The authors state that the book is designed to help students produce "academically acceptable essay[s] under test-taking conditions similar to those which students will encounter during the TWE Test" (p. iii). To this end, the book begins with an explanation of the TWE (what it is, when it is administered, how it is scored, who should take it) and includes six sample student essays written in response to the same TWE question, each of which exemplifies one score between one and six on the TWE scoring chart (also included as a reference). These sample essays are accompanied by brief comments to justify the assigned scores.

The text is divided into three main sections: "Writing Skills for the TWE Test," "Strategies for Scoring on the TWE Test," and "Practice TWE Test Questions." The first section is the most substantial, providing authentic essay questions and useful information about how to respond to them. It contains chapters on the writing task, essay development, and organization, use of transitions to create cohesion, and sentence structures. The primary strengths of this section include the discussion of how writers can identify what the different types of TWE questions require them to do and emphasis on the use of brainstorming and sketch outlining to generate and arrange ideas for essay responses. The sample essays that illustrate the ways in which writers succeed or fail at addressing essay questions are thoroughly critiqued, helping writers to understand the nature of the task(s) presented by TWE questions. An additional strength of this section is the explanation of transitions and sequencing words.

The second and third sections of the book are brief but helpful, the former giving students an opportunity to practice scoring TWE responses, and the latter giving them the chance to practice writing an essay response under test conditions similar to those they will encounter when they take the TWE. The book includes 20 sample TWE questions so that students may practice timed essay-writing skills with a variety of questions types. (One problem concerning the last scoring-practice activity in Section 2 should be noted. This activity does not specify the scores that should be assigned to each of the sample essays that are included. Thus, students, who are generally unskilled in scoring TWE tests, may be left frustrated and confused about what level of mastery each of the sample essays represents.)

The book begins by showing that writing is a process, but for the most part it endorses a prescriptive approach to writing essays in English. It informs students that "the American way of writing is very direct" (p. 29) and spends a good amount of time on issues of grammatical accuracy. In discussing organization, the authors prescribe and exemplify the standard introduction with the thesis, body, conclusion model. Accompanying exercises give students ample opportunity to practice creating strong theses and topic sentences from main points that are provided and to generate relevant supporting points for given theses and topic sentences. Because the book is test driven, and the TWE is scored quickly for organization and coherence, this endorsement of writing as a formula may be appropriate.

The reliance on closed-ended writing exercises is another weakness of the book. In general, the activities tend to be limiting and often the answers given as correct seem to be open to debate, particularly in the section on distinguishing relevant from irrelevant ideas for
various TWE topics (pp. 16-23). However, the answer keys that accompany some exercises suggest alternative responses, which encourage students to view writing as a process over which they have ultimate control.

Overall then, the Assistant provides students with good advice on how to address different types of TWE essay prompts and on how such essays are scored. Though its emphasis on prescribing traditional organizational patterns and grammar rules may be more helpful in terms of ESL writers’ short-term goals than their long-term goals for second language writing proficiency, its detailed descriptions of the requirements and scoring of the TWE will be of great value in familiarizing them with the test.

Author
Colleen Brice is a doctoral student in English Linguistics at Purdue University in Indiana. She teaches composition to native-English-speaking (NES) and ESL students and oral communication skills to prospective international teaching assistants. She is also a tutor in the writing lab, where she works with NES, ESL, and EFL writers.

Testing resources
A New Decade of Language Testing Research
Selected Papers from the 1990 Language Testing Research Colloquium
Dan Douglas and Carol Chapelle, Editors
This look at current research directions and practical issues of language ability measurement is based on Michael Canale’s theoretical work on communicative competence. In Part I, contributors explore a variety of approaches to producing validity evidence for language tests. In Part II, authors report research on attempts to develop new tests of communicative language ability.
Contributors include Alderson, Anbar, Bachman, Clapham, D’Arcy, Foulkes, Helm, Ingram, Perkins, Rodgers, Selinker, Wylie, and others.
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To those who are teaching ESL at different levels, testing their students on a regular basis, and trying various assessment alternatives, Teaching, Testing, and Assessment: Making the Connection is a theoretical and practical guide. This book focuses on the relationship among teaching, testing, and assessment, and addresses from multiple perspectives the needs and concerns of foreign language professionals who are constantly struggling to link these three critical constructs.

Teaching, Testing, and Assessment: Making the Connection comprises nine chapters in three units. The first three chapters give a theoretical underpinning for the relationship among teaching, testing, and assessment. The next three deal with practical concerns in terms of the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The final three address the relationship from the perspectives of culture, affective factors, and teacher education.

Foreign language professionals in general, and ESL instructors in particular, might find this book helpful in at least three ways. Thought provoking and well focused, this book demystifies many concepts and terms that are essential and yet so confusing in building a theoretical framework among teaching, testing, and assessment. For instance, individualized instruction is differentiated from performance-based instruction in terms of the goal, the function, and the ultimate results (p. 5); context is distinguished from contextualization in foreign language instruction (p. 19); authenticity is distinguished from performance (p. 75); and portfolio assessment in culture is distinguished from culture testing (pp. 163-182). A glossary of selected terms in the appendix is another example of a helpful resource and an in-depth treatment of the subject matter.

Most of the models and criteria proposed based on the theoretical framework of teaching, testing, and assessment are followed by numerous examples so that classroom teachers will find them reasonable and practical. For instance, Valette uses a football analogy to describe a five-step performance-based model of second language instruction as applied to the teaching, testing, and assessing of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and culture competence (pp. 21-30). In addressing the relationship between authentic assessment and authentic testing in proficiency-oriented programs, Wiggins offers a set of nine criteria for judging the authenticity of a test followed by a concrete example about New York (pp. 75-78).

This book is informative and comprehensive, offering an overview of current research projects in the realm of teaching, testing, and assessment in foreign language instruction. For example, several ongoing national, regional, and state initiatives are carefully reviewed and summarized in terms of their commonalities by Stansfield (pp. 43-67). In addition, readers can find examples of current research in the annotated bibliography included in the appendix.
In spite of the many strengths, certain additions might have made this book more user-friendly. Although the logical connection among the three units is mentioned in the preface, readers would have benefited from unit introductions and accompanying discussion questions. A subject index might also have been helpful.

Nevertheless, the book reflects many perspectives on three major issues in language instruction: teaching, testing, and assessment. If the reader considers one key question: “Do my teaching, testing, and assessment match?” before, during, and after reading this book, then the purpose of the book has been well served.

**Author**

Jun Liu is a doctoral candidate in foreign language education at The Ohio State University (OSU). With 10 years of EFL teaching experience in China, he is currently teaching ESL composition at OSU and has published in both English and Chinese.

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Fables are a type of story told around the world. They are short, easy-to-remember tales that teach lessons about how people behave or about how they should behave. Read the fable below. What is the moral, that is, lesson about human behavior, of this fable?

Fable 1: The Lion and the Four Bulls

Lion used to walk about a field in which Four Bulls used to live. Many times he tried to attack them, but whenever he came near they turned their tails toward one another so that whichever way the Lion tried to attack, he would have to face the horns of one of them.

At last, however, the bulls started arguing with each other, and each went off to a different part of the field by himself. Then the Lion attacked them one by one and soon had killed all four.

What are some fables that you have heard? Your teacher may want you to work in small groups to make a list of fables you know before you read the fables in this chapter.

Read the fables below and, after each one, write the moral. You may find that some fables have more than one moral or that two individuals see more than one moral in the same fable. You may also notice that different fables have the same moral.

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In the Spring 1995 issue, Mary Hickman, an ESL teacher from the Abbey Lane Elementary School, in Levittown, New York, requested suggestions on how to assess the writing abilities of her students who are at the beginning stages of oral proficiency in English. TESOL Journal readers offer a variety of perspectives.

Dear Ms. Hickman:

Here are some suggestions for working with beginning ESL students that I have used in my classes to develop writing skills and to evaluate students’ writing.

I have found that it’s important for students to write about topics of interest to them to make the writing task purposeful and something which will hold their attention. I suggest beginning with a prewriting activity such as clustering. For example, have the students list all of their own physical characteristics. This type of activity minimizes the need for oral production while teaching children some of the organizational skills needed for writing. You may find that at this point in the students’ overall development, the prewriting activities (such as clustering) will be the end of your writing exercise. Actual writing of sentences or paragraphs might best happen at some future point in the students’ development, unless they are strictly guided tasks.

Young children love to listen to stories, so take advantage of this to develop the connections between listening, reading, and writing. The students probably use a variety of readers and storybooks, either in the native language or in English; you can use these to develop their writing skills. For example, if comprehension skills are adequate, you can read to the students and have them draw pictures about a favorite incident or scene in the story. These pictures would serve as the basis for making relevant vocabulary lists that could be categorized, or you could use the lists for clustering activities and future writing activities.

To evaluate the writing, collect all of the students’ writing samples and make files to be kept within the classroom. If the students are old enough, make them responsible for putting their work into the files. You can periodically grade the contents based on a predetermined checklist of expected prewriting and writing behaviors so that everyone knows in advance the standards for writing in your class. Balancing a focus on grammatical accuracy with the expression of meaning will be one of your greatest challenges.

As the students’ oral production skills improve, you can begin to talk to them individually about their work as Donald Graves suggests in Writing: Teachers and Children at Work (1983). These short conferences will help the students clarify their topics and produce writing that is meaningful and interesting for both the teacher and the student.

Joseph H. Dow
Massachusetts Department of Education
Malden, MA, USA

References


Dear Ms. Hickman:

Your question about how to assess writing for beginning-level ESL students is one I’m sure many teachers are asking. Unlike years before we began reading and writing, today many ESL teachers, in particular those who espouse a whole language philosophy believe that students develop all four language skills simultaneously when given the opportunity. Therefore, we need to be able to assess writing for students who do not yet speak much English.

Before we can assess writing, however, we need to be able to elicit it from students. You mentioned using labeling and framed/guided writing tasks. A drawback of this type of elicitation strategy is that it may result in writing that is lifeless and unnatural. I believe that there are other types of writing experiences that give the students more ownership of their work. If you create situations in which the students themselves feel the need to express their passions, ideas, and concerns or to communicate to others, their writing will be their own and they will be more committed to write well. If, for example, no one can read their notice “Do not feed the guinea pig” and the beloved pig is still getting sick on popcorn, the children will see the need to write better, and I don’t mean just penmanship. If you read the students a moving story with powerful pictures and show them books that other ESL students have written in response, they may feel the urge to create a similar masterpiece. According to Lucy Calkins, children have as natural a tendency to write as to draw, speak, and listen. It is only in school where we have made the act so unnatural that they lose all desire to put their words to paper.

We also need to provide a structured, orderly physical environment as well as emotional support for students to engage in the messy act of writing. Students need to have space, many types of materials, and time if they are going to write. I once worked with three young, beginning students crowded around a small table, but it was enough for each of us to have a sheet of paper and elbow room. Crayons, markers, pencils, pens, highlighters, scissors, tape, staplers, hole punchers, and tacks were available in the middle where all could reach them. Construction paper, lined and unlined paper, tracing paper, small and large paper were accessible on a student desk behind us. Most days, half of our 45 minutes was spent in front of that paper. (The other half was spent crowded on a couch reading beautiful picture books to each other.)

Much of our writing and drawing was in response to the books we had just read, but we also wrote about field trips and other experiences we wanted to share. I wrote and drew with them, but spent a good deal of time talking with them about what they were drawing and writing, and sharing my
Dear Ms. Hickman:

Your letter requesting suggestions for assessment strategies for beginning-level writers addresses one of the most complex issues we encounter in teaching students who are learning ESL.

A key issue for assessment of the ESL learner lies in how student language production is interpreted. One of the best approaches is to assess language skills over time. One long-term writing project that will give both you and your students a sense of their progress in writing and their control of English is the use of interactive journals. In these interactive journals students write about their experiences. Initially, students may write about their personal experiences or subjects that you suggest, based on the language proficiency development, using audiotapes. You will be able to note the appearance of such features of skillful writing as logical structure or relation among the elements, reasonable or complete content, inclusion of specifics/detail. A parallel technique might also be applied to oral production, while guided by the teacher, reflects the student’s own emerging fluency.

You don’t mention the age of your students, their home culture(s), aspects of any prior schooling (how much, how recently, whether interrupted) they may have had in their native language, or how much English instruction these beginners have been given. All of these are important factors in language learning and in language production. Using journals as a technique for assessing writing skills has two major advantages, especially in our field where teaching assignments often encompass students of various ages, developmental levels, and educational backgrounds:

- Journals can be adapted to different age, grade, and English proficiency levels.
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Also, we would be happy to send you our resource list, “Using Alternative Assessment with English Language Learners: References and Resources.” You may also access this document through our World Wide Web page: http://www.gwu.edu/~eaceast/

Jan Chapman Huber
Associate Director,
Evaluation Assistance Center East
Arlington, VA, USA

We want your questions as well as your responses. Do you have any questions that you would like to ask your fellow TESOL professionals? Ask the TJ is an open forum for giving and getting advice from professionals around the world.

Questions, responses, and suggestions for Ask the TJ should be sent to:

Nancy Cloud
Editor, Ask the TJ
TESOL Journal
Department of Curriculum & Teaching
243 Gallatin Wing
Mason Hall
113 Hofstra University
Hempstead, NY 11550 USA

Karen Hartman
Cashmere, WA, USA

Dear TJ Readers:

I am having difficulty finding research on how to teach writing to adult students whose speech has fossilized and contains many grammatical and syntactical errors. My professors have had some good ideas about how I might address this issue, but none can locate anything in the way of research. Any leads from TJ readers would be most appreciated.

Karen Hartman
Cashmere, WA, USA

References


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TESOL has Individual, Student, and Joint categories of membership. Members in all of these categories have voting privileges in the association’s annual election and receive six issues of TESOL Matters, the bimonthly newspaper. Membership also includes receipt of up to two newsletters from the primary interest section as well as discounted rates for the TESOL Convention and TESOL products and services.

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