

The Home/School Connection:
Collaborating to Promote Best Practice in World Language Education
Issue 7, October 2007

What types of assessments exist for early second language programs?

Dear Parents and Early Language Educators,

Assessment in language study has been changing over the years and is beginning to look very different from what many parents experienced when they studied a foreign language in high school. In this issue, we will be looking at the various types of assessments that are currently being used in the field in an attempt to help you better understand how children's second language skills are being assessed in the context of elementary (Pre-K-8) programs .

Student-Managed Assessments

Sometimes assessments are done in the form of a **checklist**. Students are usually given the checklist in advance, so they know the expectations and can therefore compare their own level of performance with what is expected. Some teachers use checklists at the beginning of each unit so that students can keep track of their own progress through the entire unit.

Rubrics are another common tool when assessing. There are usually three or four mandatory elements

being evaluated which are listed down the left side of the rubric template. Across the top, there are usually three or four scoring categories. When students receive an individual score for each element included, this is called an **analytic rubric**. **Holistic rubrics** do not break down the assessment process into feedback on specific points, but give an overall score that includes all elements in the rubric. Whether holistic or analytic, rubrics are handed out to students before the assessment process begins. In this way, students are better able to manage their own learning, and the assessment process does not have any element of surprise.

Performance-Based Assessments

Many teachers use **performance-based assessments** in an effort to better link assessment with the manner in which students are taught. Many teachers are creating performance tasks that allow the children to use their language skills within a context that replicates tasks and challenges in the real world outside the second language classroom. These assessments focus on what the child can *do with* the language rather than what they *know about* the language.

Performance-based assessments that focus on reading and listening skills might have students listening to/reading a description which includes easily identifiable words that most students recognize and some sentences that only more advanced learners would understand. In this way, the teacher is able to assess a variety of learners at once.

Other performance-based assessments focus on students writing or speaking to present information. Students are not allowed to rehearse and must use the language they remember to describe or talk about a particular object or theme as chosen by the teacher. This includes themes that have been practiced previously in class. Rubrics are often used to provide feedback on these skills.

Another performance-based assessment involves impromptu conversations. Students ask and answer questions they have created. Rubrics are often used to provide feedback on this type of assessment.

Language Portfolios

The **language portfolio** is an assessment that is also used as a learning tool. **LinguaFolio** is a language portfolio being implemented across the nation. It is composed of three parts: the language biography, the dossier, and the student passport.

The **Language Biography** is a record of the child's language learning history and cultural interactions, a personal examination of learning strategies, and a reflection on his/her learning goals.

The **Language Dossier** is a collection of pieces of work and awards or participation certificates chosen by the child to document and illustrate language skills, experiences, and achievements that demonstrate his/her language abilities to others. This dossier establishes a feeling of ownership on the part of each child and strengthens children's sense of responsibility for their own learning.

The **Language Passport** is an official document that records a summary of experiences and achievements, and reports competency levels that are based on the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language's Performance Guidelines for K-12 Foreign Language Learners.

Online Language Assessments

The Center for Applied Second Language Study (CASLS) has been piloting the **National Online Early Language Learning Assessment (NOELLA)** for French, Japanese, Mandarin Chinese, and Spanish. NOELLA is intended to measure the language learning of children in grades three through six, regardless

of the individual school curriculum. NOELLA will help to assess how children are performing in the four skill areas of reading, writing, speaking and listening.

The NOELLA assessment has many graphics and instructions are given orally with animated characters. The assessment's difficulty level is modified according to the child's performance.

Children's performances are compared with those of students in similar programs around the country. Information provided to second language teachers in the form of feedback from the NOELLA will allow them to identify potential strengths and weaknesses in their foreign language programs.**

Large-Scale Nationwide Program Assessments

Some programs choose to use the **Student Oral Proficiency Assessment**, produced by the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, DC, to assess their program. The SOPA interview is fifteen to twenty minutes in length and focuses oral fluency, grammar, vocabulary, and listening comprehension. The students are interviewed in pairs with two assessors. One assessor interviews the children and the other one rates their skills. Pairing students in this

fashion allows for maximum comfort level in students, and allows students to actually assist one another in the course of the interview conversation, making the interview seem more like a real-world conversation between adults and children.

The SOPA includes a warm-up activity targeted at getting students to listen, and a set of simple oral questions. Students sometimes interact with one another and depending on their oral language ability, are given the opportunity to give directions, describe, retell a story, or persuade. The assessment ends with a wind-down activity that leaves the children feeling successful.

Which assessments are right for my child's program?

Although there is a plethora of assessment options to choose from, only those involved in the instructional and administrative aspects of a particular program are really well suited to make this choice. This issue of Home/School Connection is intended to provide teachers and parents with the information necessary to be able to familiarize themselves with the many different assessment options currently used in the field of early second language learning.

* The information provided about LinguaFolio was taken from Jacqueline Bott Van Houten's article "Turning a New Light on Assessment with LinguaFolio", *Learning Languages*, Fall 2006

** The information provided about Online Language Assessments was taken from Carl Falsgraf's and Ann Tollefson's article "NOELLA", *Learning Languages*, Fall 2006

NNELL can assist teachers, parents and administrators with learning and advocacy efforts. Contact your State Representative today. We would love to hear from you!

The "Home-School Connection" flier is full of tips and resources that can be found at www.nnell.org. Teachers may reproduce it and send it home in their students' backpacks. Send suggestions/comments to Tammy Dann, Political Action and Advocacy Chair: trdann@juno.com