

The Home/School Connection:
Collaborating to Promote Best Practice in World Language Education, PreK-8
Issue 7

What types of assessments exist for early second language programs?

Dear Parents,

Assessment in language study has been changing. It is beginning to look very different from what you experienced when you studied a foreign language in high school. In this issue, we will look at the various types of assessments that are currently used in the field to help you better understand how children's second language skills are assessed in 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 compare their own performance with what is expected.

Rubrics are another assessment tool. There are usually three or four elements evaluated which are listed down the left side of the rubric. Across the top, there are usually three or four scoring categories. Students can receive an individual score for each element or an overall score that includes all elements in the rubric. Rubrics are often given to students before the assessment process begins so there are no surprises.

Performance-Based Assessments

Many teachers use *performance based assessments* in an effort to better link assessment with the manner in which students are taught. Performance tasks are created that allow the children to use their language skills within a context that replicates tasks and challenges in the real world. 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 learners at different levels all at once.

Other performance based assessments focus on students writing or speaking. When presenting 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. When asked to have impromptu conversations, students ask and answer questions they have created. Rubrics are often used to provide feedback on writing or speaking assessments.

Language Portfolios

The **language portfolio** is an assessment that is also 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, cultural interactions, a personal examination of learning strategies, and a reflection on his/her learning goals.
- The *Language Dossier* is a collection of work and awards or participation certificates chosen by the child to document language skills, experiences, and achievements that demonstrate his/her language abilities. The dossier establishes a feeling of ownership on the part of each child and strengthens the child's sense of responsibility for his/her own learning.

- The **Language Passport** 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. (Bott Van Houten)

Online Language Assessments

The Center for Applied Second Language Study (CASLS) produces 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 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 strengths and areas of improvement in their foreign language program (Falsgraf & Tollefson).

Large-Scale Nationwide Program Assessments

Some programs use the **Student Oral Proficiency Assessment**, produced by the Center for Applied Linguistics, to assess their program. The **Student**

Oral Proficiency Assessment (SOPA) interview is about 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 allows for maximum comfort level in students, and allows the children to assist one another in the course of the interview. This makes the interview seem more like a real-world conversation between adults and children.

The SOPA includes a warm-up activity to get students to listen and a set of simple oral questions. Students sometimes interact with one another and depending on their oral language ability, are give 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?

Assessments are valuable tools for students, teachers, parents, and administrators. Most second language teachers use a variety of assessments to monitor and report out on student learning and progress. Your child will experience some or even all of the assessments during their early language experiences.

Bott Van Houten, J. “Turning a New Light on Assessment with LinguaFolio”, *Learning Languages*, Fall 2006

Falsgraf, C., & Tollefson, A. “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!

This issue of Home/School Connection was written by Tammy Dann. It 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, NNELL’s Early Language Advocate: trdann@q.com