Chapter

6

RETHINKING ASSESSMENT

A NEW PARADIGM

Student assessment should be grounded in the authentic, real-life activities that are carried out in the classroom. Because effective language learning is meaningful, enjoyable, and interactive, assessment should reflect a similar focus. Using the same activities should therefore define the process for ongoing assessment. . . . Effective tracking of student progress can also be made through reliance on journals, portfolios, performances, or multimedia presentations. These recognize appreciation for student work in various forms, and allow students an opportunity to revisit their work and critique their own progress. Students engaged in this process become more and more actively involved in their learning.

(Armstrong, 1998, p. 233)

Assessment is an **integral, ongoing part of the learning process** itself. New assessment models (which have been called *alternative assessment, performance assessment*, and *authentic assessment*) have in common the goal of guiding instruction to enable all students to achieve high levels of proficiency. The proficiency-based language classroom lends itself to using multiple forms of assessment to evaluate students' progress as well as the impact of instructional strategies. Assessments of student performances are both formative and summative. These assessments facilitate student reflection on the learning process and the improvement of learning. The most reliable assessment of students' capabilities comes from the work they do over extended blocks of time under the close guidance of teachers.

KEY COMPONENTS OF ASSESSMENT

Based on the research of Wiggins (1994) and other experts in the field of performance assessment, the *New Jersey World Languages Curriculum Framework* identifies the following key components of assessment.

Assessments that are an integral part of the learning process:

- reflect instructional objectives, are performance-based, and meet the criteria for authenticity;

- include all methodologies teachers use in daily instruction with students to monitor their progress;

- include an evaluation of skills in a systematic, ongoing way at each level of instruction to demonstrate progress along the proficiency continuum;

- provide consistent feedback to students to facilitate assessing their own achievement and to modify and adjust their individual learning strategies and goals; and

- empower both students and teachers by fostering consciousness raising and critical thinking.

The following chart delineates the essential differences between traditional and alternative forms of assessment.

ESSENTIAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AND ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF ASSESSMENT	
Characteristics of Traditional Assessment	**Characteristics of Alternative Assessment**
■ Discrete points are assessed. ■ Students are assigned scores based on number or percentage correct. ■ Tests are scored easily and quickly. ■ Items are often multiple-choice, matching, or true/false. ■ Items test passive knowledge. (Students are merely required to recognize the correct answer, not to produce it.) ■ Assessments have typically been evaluated for statistical validity and reliability.	■ Emphasis is on the learning process and the product. ■ Assessment tasks involve the application and integration of instructional content. Tasks are often open-ended, offer a wide range of choice and input, and culminate in individual or group performances. ■ Holistic assessment. Scoring requires judgment and use of scoring criteria (e.g., rubrics). ■ Assessments often involve multistep production tasks or require extended time to complete. ■ Tasks require students to demonstrate knowledge actively through problem solving, inferencing, and other complex cognitive skills. ■ Tasks are situation-based or use a real-world context. ■ Assessments often have not been evaluated for statistical validity or reliability.
Use	**Use**
■ To assess learning outcomes. ■ To allow comparisons across populations.	■ To assess • learning outcomes and processes. • instructional processes and objectives. ■ To encourage • student involvement. • student ownership of learning/assessment. • student and teacher collaboration. ■ To plan effective instruction.
Common Formats	**Common Formats**
■ Multiple-choice response tests ■ Discrete-point tests	■ Portfolios and journals ■ Demonstrations ■ Conferences and observations

Note. From *Foreign Language Assessments in Grades K-8: An Annotated Bibliography of Assessment Instruments* (p. xviii), by L. Thompson, 1997, McHenry, IL: Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems. Copyright 1997 by Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems. Chart inspired by Baker (1990), Herman, Aschbacher & Winters (1992), and Lewis (1992). Reprinted with permission.

See Appendix A, Figure 1, for information on *ACTFL Performance Guidelines for K-12 Learners* (performance standards for K-12 students).

ASSESSMENT ALTERNATIVES

Using a variety of classroom assessments provides a better picture of learning and instruction. The following is a suggested list of different types of classroom assessments. (See Appendix B, Figure 2, for an assessment profile.)

- **Performance Assessment**: Students are required to create a product or formulate a response that demonstrates proficiency in a skill or understanding of a process or a concept. Typically, performance assessments are "authentic" in that they are structured around real-life problems or situations.

- **Teacher Observation**: The teacher observes students engaging in a variety of tasks or activities using checklists, rating scales, etc., to record his or her judgment about a student's performance in reaching a specific benchmark.

- **Conferencing**: The teacher and student dialogue to evaluate the student's progress on reaching one or more specific goals.

- **Self-Assessment**: Students reflect upon and evaluate their own work with assessment criteria developed by the teacher and/or student.

- **Peer Assessment**: Students evaluate each other's work with assessment criteria developed by the teacher and/or students.

- **Portfolio Assessment**: The student's work is recorded in a collection of materials decided upon by the student and/or teacher, spanning a period of time, that reflect the student's learning processes, growth, and achievement in an organized and systematic way. See Appendix B, Figure 3, for ideas regarding exhibitions and projects; and Appendix B, Figure 4, for a list of student "artifacts" that may be included in world language portfolios.

ASSESSMENT RUBRICS

A *rubric* is a tool used for assessing a performance task that measures specific elements of that task against an established and defined scale. Rubrics assist in identifying a set of standards and criteria to be used by all students and applied to all students performing a given task. Different scoring rubrics may be designed for a variety of assessment activities and may be developed by teachers and/or students. See Appendix B, Figures 5 through 13, for sample assessment rubrics.

LOCAL ASSESSMENT

In addition to ongoing classroom assessment, provisions should be made for districtwide evaluation of the K-12 world language program. The assessment instrument should reflect the goals of the program and may be used to measure proficiency and achievement as well as program/curriculum evaluation. **Districtwide program assessment is essential for examining areas of strength while identifying areas that need further development in the K-12 sequence**. Examples of a variety of assessment instruments may be found in Appendix B, Figures 14-23.

STATE ASSESSMENT

The state assessment system at Grades 4, 8, and 11 is designed to facilitate the integration of world languages into the *New Jersey Core Curriculum* and is a fundamental component of the *New Jersey Strategic Plan for Systemic Improvement of Education.* It will provide essential information on students' progress in meeting the expectations set forth by the *Core Curriculum Content Standards.*

The assessments will be administered at Grades 4, 8, and 11 according to the timetable disseminated to school districts by the Department of Education.

At the elementary level, the assessment will be **performance-based** with an emphasis on listening and speaking skills. The standards and cumulative progress indicators will serve as guidelines for performance expectations as they assist in defining general communicative abilities that characterize different levels of language proficiency in social and academic settings. The **content domain** of the assessment will reflect curricular themes commonly found at the elementary level. The **goal** of the assessment will be to evaluate the ability of the students to engage in meaningful and purposeful language use. This type of assessment would mirror classroom assessment strategies suggested in this chapter and in the learning scenarios in chapter 10. Educators are encouraged to adapt performance-based assessment practices into their daily classroom repertoire in order to prepare for the state assessment. **(See Appendix B, Figures 14 through 23, for sample district and state assessments.)**

The assessments for all three benchmark grades will likely be performance-based, with increasing emphasis placed on communication skills in reading and writing in Grades 8 and 11. The state assessment program will take into account the varying entry points and years of study a student may have when calculating assessment scores.