

Study Guide

Discussion: Assessing What Students Can Do

Opening Question: (30 min.)

Goal – Reflect on how we assess our students' language proficiency

Opening Activity: Think of one assessment you have done recently that you feel really captured what your students can do in the target language, using the language to exchange information (interpersonal), to express ideas clearly (presentational), or to show their understanding (interpretive).

- In pairs, share your assessment example and identify what specifically you learned about students' language proficiency through their performance.
- Have each pair share one assessment to the whole group and elicit from the other participants what teachers and students would learn through it.

Connection with Session #1: (20 min.)

Session #1 focused on Wisconsin's four levels describing student proficiency (beginning, developing, transitioning, and refining). You were asked to identify class learning targets or language signals that show students are moving from one level to the next.

- Move into three groups, one for each "border" (beginning to developing; developing to transitioning; transitioning to refining).
- Discuss key signals that show students are moving to the next level and share some classroom activities you use to push students to the next level.
- Plan a two minute summary of your discussion to share with the whole group.

Exploration of Today's Topic: (20 min.)

Goal - Identify what information you can learn from different types of assessment

Prepare ahead: Write each of the following assessment types on a separate 3 X 5 card: multiple choice or true-false, fill in the blank, short answer, translation, dictation.

Have participants form five groups; hand a card to each group. Each group decides what information they can learn from the type of assessment on their card. Share to the large group and discuss.

Expansion: Decide how these types of assessment could be used to elicit language performances from students that are closer to the proficiency benchmarks of the various levels. Consider how to change the traditional use of each assessment type in order to provide a better bridge for students, helping them move to a more open-ended, communicative performance.

Application: (20 min.)

Goal – Identify specific strategies to bring performance-based assessment to your classroom.

Activity:

Consider this quote: “The aim of assessment is primarily to educate and improve student performance, not merely to audit it.” Grant Wiggins (1998).

If you kept this in mind as you planned your units of instruction, what specifically might you change in your classroom? Consider how you would need to change your end-of-unit assessments, your “in process” or formative assessments during the unit, and your daily teaching activities.

Follow-Up/Action Research:

Goal – Explore further implications of these ideas.

[Consider asking participants to do this “experiment” in preparation for your next session]

Try to change one end-of-unit assessment to provide richer evidence of students’ proficiency in using the language (vs. assessment that shows what they know about the language). Discuss with your students their reaction to the assessment task. What have you learned from changing your assessment in this way (what worked, what didn’t, what would make it more effective next time)?