
Assessing language learning

Pre-reading

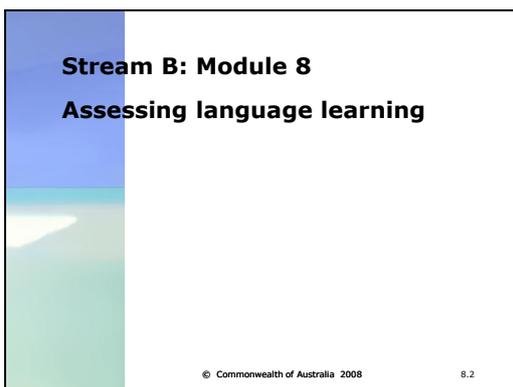
The Assessment Reform Group's (2002) *Assessment for Learning: 10 principles* inform understandings and activities within the module. The 10 principles themselves are included in the module as Handout 1. The principles are also published on the Internet in a poster format.

Participants are advised to locate this document at <http://k1.ioe.ac.uk/tlrp/arg/CIE3.PDF> and to bring their own copy of the poster (preferably in A3 size) to the workshop, as it will assist in the tasks.

In addition, an assessment exemplar used in the module uses the lyrics of a song. The lyrics to this song, in Spanish and English, are widely available on the Internet, including the Sewanee University website, at <http://forum1.sewanee.edu/spanish/gracias.html>.

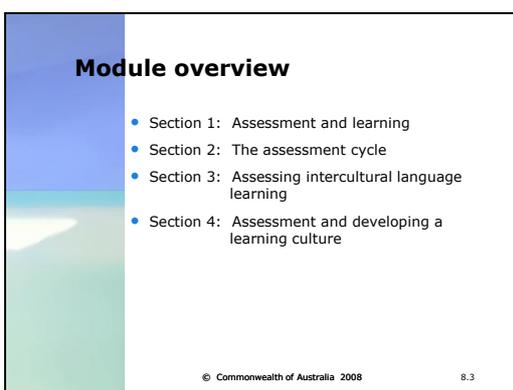
You may wish to bring a copy of these lyrics to the workshop.

NOTES



Stream B: Module 8
Assessing language learning

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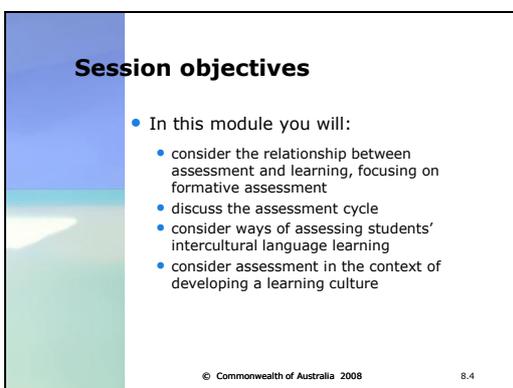
Module overview

- Section 1: Assessment and learning
- Section 2: The assessment cycle
- Section 3: Assessing intercultural language learning
- Section 4: Assessment and developing a learning culture

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The **Language pedagogy** standard highlights the importance of assessment for accomplished languages teachers:

Their approach to assessment examines understanding, learning, and performance, and uses assessment to foster learning as well as to evaluate learning. They know and use a range of assessment approaches and select assessment tasks which are appropriate to the purposes of assessment and use the assessment for effective feedback and reporting.

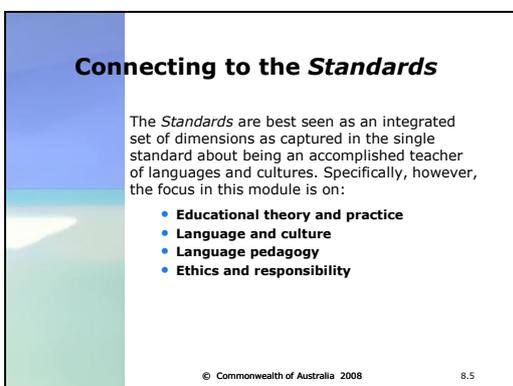


Session objectives

- In this module you will:
 - consider the relationship between assessment and learning, focusing on formative assessment
 - discuss the assessment cycle
 - consider ways of assessing students' intercultural language learning
 - consider assessment in the context of developing a learning culture

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It is appropriate that a standard for assessment is located in the area of pedagogy, as the major purpose of teacher assessment is to promote learning. All that we say about interactive teaching and learning pertains also to assessment. For this reason, the objectives of the session need to be seen as interrelated.



Connecting to the Standards

The *Standards* are best seen as an integrated set of dimensions as captured in the single standard about being an accomplished teacher of languages and cultures. Specifically, however, the focus in this module is on:

- **Educational theory and practice**
- **Language and culture**
- **Language pedagogy**
- **Ethics and responsibility**

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Module 8: Assessing language learning

Overview

This module focuses on assessment as an integral part of student learning. While it is recognised that teachers' work also involves making end-of-unit / end-of-course judgments about students' learning and progress (assessment of learning), and notwithstanding the important relationship between the two, this module highlights formative assessment (assessment for learning). In addition, it considers the assessment of intercultural language learning; that is, ways of assessing not only language, but also language use in the context of culture, and awareness of language and culture. The module concludes with a call for assessment to be part of the learning culture. As such, the module addresses the single, generic standard for accomplished languages and cultures teaching, with particular focus on:

- **Educational theory and practice**
- **Language and culture**
- **Language pedagogy**
- **Ethics and responsibility.**

This module is divided into four sections:

1. Assessing language learning
2. The assessment cycle and intercultural language learning
3. Assessing intercultural language learning
4. Assessment and developing a learning culture.

Objectives

In this module you will:

- consider the relationship between assessment and learning, focusing on formative assessment
- discuss the assessment cycle
- consider ways of assessing students' intercultural language learning
- consider assessment in the context of developing a learning culture.

NOTES

Section 1: Assessment and learning

Assessment and learning - 1

- Purposes
 - assessment **of** learning
 - assessment **for** learning
 - assessment **as** learning
- Common theme : assessment ↔ learning

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These phrases are used by most systems around Australia to describe different purposes of assessment. What they have in common is the emphasis on learning. All of them have a place in assessment, and represent different cultures of assessment.

Assessment and learning - 2

- Learning theory influences teaching, learning *and* assessment
- Contemporary learning theories (constructivism, cognitive theory and sociocultural theory) share two important principles:
 - that knowledge is constructed
 - that learning and development are culturally embedded, socially supported processes

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Note that:

- assessment is influenced by the learning theory that teachers hold – whether implicit or explicit
- contemporary theories of learning recognise that knowing involves a process of active construction. This includes interaction, mediation, talk and scaffolding with more knowledgeable others – learning is both social and cultural.

Assessment and learning - 3

- Vygotsky's (1978) cultural theory of development includes development through mediation in interaction on the social plane and internally on the individual plane
- The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is a space between what the learner can do independently and the level of potential development under guidance or with support
- Learning in this space is an interactive activity where the teacher focuses on both fully proficient performance and what the learner is able to do currently, with assistance
- Formative assessment to develop learning within the ZPD → scaffolded, dynamic assessment

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Vygotsky, one of the most influential sociocultural theorists, describes learning as occurring through interaction on a social plane followed by internalisation (making the learning one's own) on an individual plane.

The ZPD provides the theoretical framing for dynamic assessment (see Slide 8.8), which recognises that a student's performance on any task does not provide a full picture of what the student can do in the future.

Formative assessment – in the sense of forming/shaping – is closely related to dynamic assessment. In line with Vygotsky's notion of mediation/scaffolding, if students are to learn through the assessment process, teachers need to provide appropriate scaffolds so that they can see what students can do unassisted and what they do when particular scaffolds are provided.

The implication here is that teachers need to be aware of both the kinds and extent of scaffolding they provide for different learners.

Formative assessment, then, involves an ongoing dialogue about learning between the students, their peers and teacher.

Key ideas / learning

Assessing language learning

<i>Interaction / tasks / questions</i>	<i>Supporting resources</i>
<p>Facilitator interactive presentation</p> <p>The facilitator gives a presentation, inviting discussion/comments of the points with each slide.</p> <p>Anticipated time: 30-35 minutes</p>	<p>PowerPoint slide 8.6 – 8.12</p>

NOTES

Section 1: Assessment and learning

Assessment and learning - 4

- Four strategies that connect learning and assessment
 - eliciting prior knowledge
 - providing effective feedback that moves the student forward
 - teaching for transfer of knowledge
 - teaching students how to self-assess
- creating a learning culture

(Shepard, 2005)

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Contemporary learning theories reveal some key connection points between assessment and learning, including:

- the need to know what it is that students already know; to draw out their prior conceptions in order to identify what scaffolds they need. This can only be established through assessment
- a focus on feedback – not just giving praise but giving the kind of feedback that informs learning
- encouraging application of knowledge in different contexts
- encouraging self-assessment, such that students develop self-awareness as learners.

Assessment and learning - 5

- Formative assessment:
 - Assessment for learning is any assessment for which the first priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting pupils' learning. It thus differs from assessment designed primarily to serve the purposes of accountability, or ranking, or of certifying competence.
 - An assessment activity can help learning if it provides information to be used as feedback by teachers, and by their pupils in assessing themselves and each other, to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged. Such assessment becomes 'formative assessment' when the evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching work to meet learning needs (Black et al 2002).

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Black *et al.* (2002) is the team of UK researchers that has done the most in-depth research on formative assessment / assessment for learning.

Note the distinction made between assessment for learning, and reporting. In Australia, in the past decade, there has been a great deal of emphasis on assessment of outcomes for reporting and accountability purposes.

The second part of the definition emphasises the need for good diagnostic information, to use as feedback to students.

The definition suggests a change in the *culture* of assessment to let students into the assessment picture. There is ongoing dialogue; students actually understand what particular aspects of their work/understanding they need to consider, and why.

Assessment is only considered formative when the information gathered is actually used to change what students do.

This quotation emphasises the distinction between:

- static and dynamic assessment
- solo and interactive performance
- unassisted and assisted performance.

It also emphasises:

- different kinds of supports
- that the support needs to be appropriate to the gap in students' understanding as perceived by the teacher
- that it is important for the teacher to be in tune with how the individual responds to the scaffolding.

This makes for a complex process of bringing together the information that the teacher observes/gleans/infers from the students' responses, and determining (a) what to make of the composite information, and (b) how to act upon it in ways that generate understanding on the part of the student.

(The reference to 'examiner'/'examinee' is not reflective of the kind of process and relationship established in DA).

It is also worth distinguishing between episodic (one-off) assessment and long-term ongoing assessment that involves coming to understand students' performances over time.

You may wish to discuss what is meant by 'leading questions', 'meta-cognitive prompts' and 'feedback'.

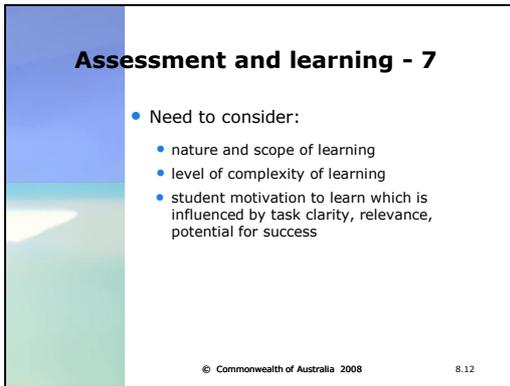
Assessment and learning - 6

- Static and dynamic assessment (DA)
 - one of the fundamental differences between static assessment and DA is that the former would seek to measure predefined abilities with instruments and activities (tests and tasks) that would require unassisted, and in the main, solo performance, whereas DA is built on the dynamic interaction between the examiner and the examinee in which the examiner responds to the examinee's difficulties with appropriate support in the form of leading questions, meta-cognitive prompts and other forms of feedback. It is the examinee's responsiveness to supportive feedback that provides an indication of their likely future development (Leung, 2007).

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Section 1: Assessment and learning



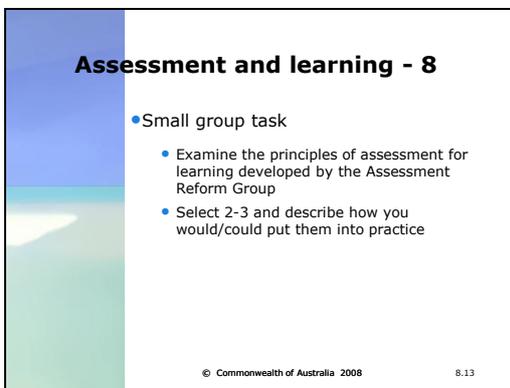
Assessment and learning - 7

- Need to consider:
 - nature and scope of learning
 - level of complexity of learning
 - student motivation to learn which is influenced by task clarity, relevance, potential for success

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Having emphasised the process of interaction in learning, three further points also require consideration in designing assessment processes:

- what is being learnt, its extent, depth, range and variety
- the level of difficulty (connected to the level of support made available), and above all
- the learners themselves, specifically what will be sufficiently engaging for them such that it stimulates a desire to work towards success.



Assessment and learning - 8

- Small group task
 - Examine the principles of assessment for learning developed by the Assessment Reform Group
 - Select 2-3 and describe how you would/could put them into practice

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These principles were developed by the Assessment Reform Group in London as a set of principles for assessment for learning.

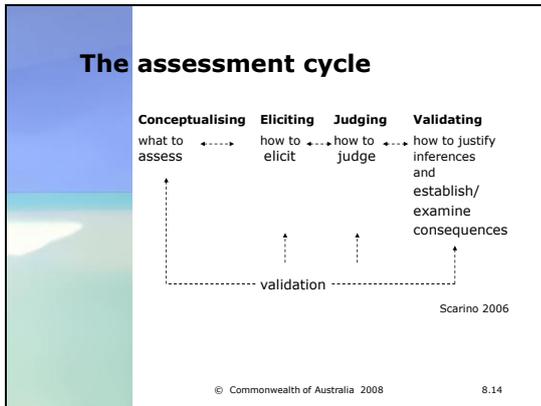
You may wish to comment on these in a range of ways.

Key ideas / learning
Assessing language learning

<i>Interaction / tasks / questions</i>	<i>Supporting resources</i>
<p>Small group task</p> <p>Examine the principles of assessment for learning developed by the Assessment Reform Group.</p> <p>Select two or three principles and describe how you would/could put them into practice.</p> <p>Anticipated time: 30 minutes</p>	<p>PowerPoint slide 8.13</p> <p>Handout 1</p>

NOTES

Section 2: The assessment cycle



This diagram presents a way of understanding the assessment process. It includes:

- conceptualising, i.e. understanding deeply *what* is being assessed
- eliciting, i.e. developing ways of obtaining assessment information; this may be from particular tasks or through a range of information-gathering processes that include: observation, interactive questioning, values questionnaires, self-assessment, peer-assessment
- judging, i.e. how to *interpret* performance, how we understand evidence, what we make of students' work
- validating, i.e. how to ensure that the inferences we make about students' performance are in fact fair and justifiable.

These 4 processes are mutually informing.

The remainder of this module focuses on elicitation, particularly in the context of intercultural language learning.

Section 3: Assessing intercultural language learning

Assessing intercultural language learning - 1

- Assessing communicative performance and meta-awareness
- Learner positioned as participant in interactions that require using language *and* as an analyser/learner reflecting on language, culture, the intercultural and the process of interpreting and creating meaning in interaction and in communication

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Assessing language learning involves recognising that:

- two languages, and therefore two systems of values and meanings are involved
- it involves students as both learners and as young people 'making sense' of self, others and their world (i.e. the tasks/processes have meaning for students)
- the students are positioned simultaneously as:
 - performers, i.e. engaging in active language use in *interaction* with others, and as
 - analysers/learners, continuously making observations / noticing things about language, culture, communication and meaning.

Assessing intercultural language learning - 2

- Focus on understanding (observing, noticing, comparing, interpreting) interactions, texts, attitudes
- Focus on meta-awareness
- Implications
 - careful selection of input resources/texts
 - careful formulating of questions beyond display types
 - consider a range of text-types and question/response types
 - consider relationship between reception and meta-awareness. Are both needed simultaneously?

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Active receptive tasks relate to listening and reading; the word 'active' stresses that students are actively engaged.

To achieve active engagement it is important to:

- select texts that are meaningful to students, and
- develop questions that not only encourage understanding and responding to the content, but also noticing, comparing, observing those subtle but fascinating things about the choice of words, tone, meaning, biases, implications, linguistic and cultural comparisons across languages, etc.

The latter is what we call meta-awareness. If this dimension is absent from assessment, it is difficult for a teacher to see how students are understanding interculturality (i.e. what happens at the intersection point of their L1 and the language being learnt).

Key ideas / learning

Assessing language learning

<i>Interaction / tasks / questions</i>	<i>Supporting resources</i>
<p>Facilitator presentation</p> <p>The facilitator explains the assessment cycle as represented on the diagram.</p> <p>Anticipated time: 5 minutes</p>	<p>PowerPoint slide 8.14</p>

Key ideas / learning

Assessing intercultural language learning

<i>Interaction / tasks / questions</i>	<i>Supporting resources</i>
<p>Facilitator presentation</p> <p>The facilitator will give an interactive presentation of the assessment cycle and intercultural language learning.</p> <p>Anticipated time: 25 minutes</p>	<p>PowerPoint slides 8.15 – 8.19</p>

NOTES

Section 3: Assessing intercultural language learning

Assessing intercultural language learning - 3

- Focus on enacting/participating *in vivo* in interactions, in 'critical moments'
- Focus on meta-awareness
- Implications
 - careful design of scenarios representing 'critical moments'
 - attention to the positioning of the learner
 - careful formulating of questions, particularly for meta-awareness
 - consider a range of task-types
 - consider relationship between production and meta-awareness. Are both needed simultaneously?

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Active productive tasks involve speaking and writing.

The points made about active receptive tasks (see previous slide) are also relevant to active productive tasks.

The idea of 'critical moments' represents a way of recognising that the task needs to be meaningful to the students (i.e. worth investing in), but also require some intercultural negotiation (i.e. negotiating the cultural and linguistic differences across the two languages).

Assessing intercultural language learning - 4

- Long-term assessment
 - Given that experiences of the intercultural are cumulative, assessment needs to be long-term
 - Examples
 - ongoing observations (teacher and students)
 - portfolios
 - logs/journals recording intercultural experiences and learning
 - extended projects
 - Strengthened by respective analysis, cumulative commentary, reflection, summation, explanation, elaboration

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Earlier we discussed dynamic assessment (DA) and the fact that developing an intercultural capability is a long-term, continuous process. Some suggestions are now considered about assessment processes that can be continued over a period of time. This provides the added benefit that students become increasingly aware of their own progress. At all points, there must be questions/processes that encourage decentring; that is, students standing back and reflecting on the play of language and culture across the two languages.

Assessing intercultural language learning - 5

- Young learners
 - Assessment as predominantly formative i.e. in action-related talk
 - Interactions are scaffolded, probing conceptions, responses
 - Attention to nature and extent of scaffolding

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For young learners assessment is essentially formative, achieved through interactive talk around actions.

The way of capturing this information is through audio or video-recording classroom interactions. By doing this, the interaction becomes available for analysis and reflection. It also becomes a live record of student achievement.

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Section 3: Assessing intercultural language learning

Examples

- Critically examine the range of examples provided
 - What are their strengths?
 - How would you modify them?

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These examples were developed by teachers experimenting with intercultural language learning and its assessment.

In the Chinese example, notice in particular the kinds of questions used. In the Spanish example, note the amount of context-setting that the teacher does to set the scene for the writing task. Note the inclusion of reflection material with the Chinese example and an extract from a transcription of a context-setting lesson with the Spanish example.

These materials demonstrate some of the teacher thinking that goes into developing student understanding and learning.

The investigations suggested for this module would yield this kind of data, which is important for developing teachers' awareness of their role in assessment.

Section 4: Assessment and developing a learning culture

Assessment and developing a learning culture

- A classroom where:
 - teachers and students focus on learning i.e. jointly focussed on what makes sense
 - dialogue around work, criteria, 'evidence'
 - assessment as generating useful information rather than rewards and punishments

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Working with assessment as suggested in this module requires developing a learning culture in the classroom, whereby this kind of assessment becomes the regular way of working. Students and teachers will need to develop this kind of dialogue together.

Key ideas / learning

Assessing intercultural language learning

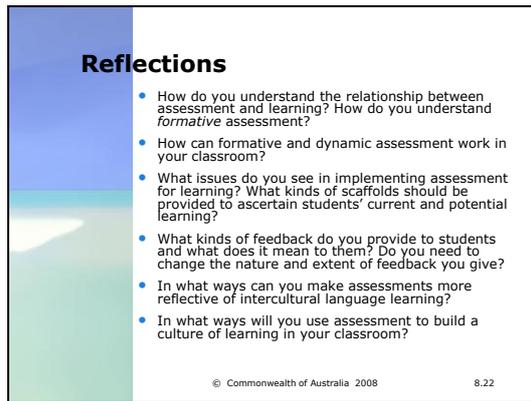
<i>Interaction / tasks / questions</i>	<i>Supporting resources</i>
<p>Small group task</p> <p>Examine the examples of assessment tasks provided and comment on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• their strengths• if and how you would modify them <p>Whole group discussion. Facilitator moderates a plenary discussion.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Anticipated time: 40 minutes</p>	<p>PowerPoint slide 8.20</p> <p>Handouts 2 and 3</p>

Key ideas / learning

Assessing and developing a learning culture

<i>Interaction / tasks / questions</i>	<i>Supporting resources</i>
<p>Small group task</p> <p>Consider the need for developing a learning culture that regularly uses the kinds of assessment considered in this module. How would you begin to establish such a culture?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Anticipated time: 15 minutes</p>	<p>PowerPoint slide 8.21</p>

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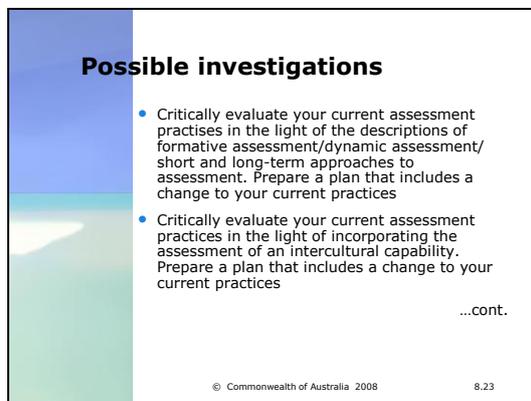


Reflections

- How do you understand the relationship between assessment and learning? How do you understand *formative* assessment?
- How can formative and dynamic assessment work in your classroom?
- What issues do you see in implementing assessment for learning? What kinds of scaffolds should be provided to ascertain students' current and potential learning?
- What kinds of feedback do you provide to students and what does it mean to them? Do you need to change the nature and extent of feedback you give?
- In what ways can you make assessments more reflective of intercultural language learning?
- In what ways will you use assessment to build a culture of learning in your classroom?

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Reconsider your experience of this module as a reference point for critically appraising your own assessment practices.



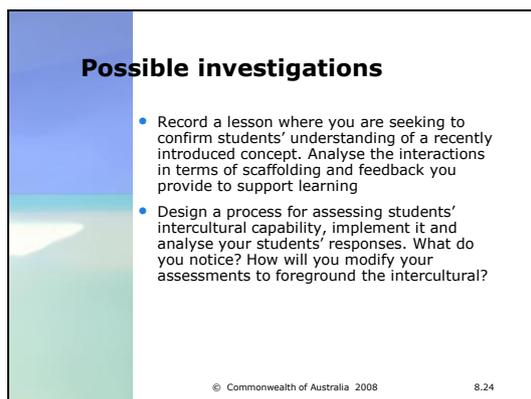
Possible investigations

- Critically evaluate your current assessment practises in the light of the descriptions of formative assessment/dynamic assessment/ short and long-term approaches to assessment. Prepare a plan that includes a change to your current practices
- Critically evaluate your current assessment practices in the light of incorporating the assessment of an intercultural capability. Prepare a plan that includes a change to your current practices

...cont.

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You are invited to undertake an investigation in this area, as suggested here or in relation to other aspects of assessment.



Possible investigations

- Record a lesson where you are seeking to confirm students' understanding of a recently introduced concept. Analyse the interactions in terms of scaffolding and feedback you provide to support learning
- Design a process for assessing students' intercultural capability, implement it and analyse your students' responses. What do you notice? How will you modify your assessments to foreground the intercultural?

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NOTES

References

Black, P.J. et al. (2002). Working inside the black box: Assessment for learning in the classroom. London. King's College London, School of Education.

Leung, C. (2007) Dynamic assessment: Assessment for and as teaching. *Language Assessment Quarterly*. 4, 3, 257-278.

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Vygotsky, S. (1978) *Mind in society*. The development of higher psychological processes. Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press.

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- Black, P. J. *et al.* (2002). Working inside the black box: Assessment for learning in the classroom. London: Department of Education and Professional Studies, King's College London.
- Leung, C. (2007). Dynamic assessment: Assessment for and as teaching. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 4(3), 257-278
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- Vygotsky, S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

NOTES

Attachments

Handout 1 Assessment for learning..... *page 25*

Handout 2 Student task Chinese, Year 9: 'Letter to the *Beijing Youth Daily*' *page 27*

Handout 3 Spanish assessment task exemplar: 'Gracias a la vida' *page 31*

NOTES

The 10 principles: Assessment for Learning

Assessment Reform Group, 2002. © Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, retrieved from http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_4336.aspx (text); <http://k1.ioe.ac.uk/tlrp/arg/CIE3.PDF> (poster)

Assessment for learning should be part of effective planning of teaching and learning

A teacher's planning should provide opportunities for both learner and teacher to obtain and use information about progress towards learning goals. It also has to be flexible to respond to initial and emerging ideas and skills. Planning should include strategies to ensure that learners understand the goals they are pursuing and the criteria that will be applied in assessing their work. How learners will receive feedback, how they will take part in assessing their learning and how they will be helped to make further progress should also be planned.

Assessment for learning should focus on how students learn

The process of learning has to be in the minds of both learner and teacher when assessment is planned and when the evidence is interpreted. Learners should become as aware of the 'how' of their learning as they are of the 'what'.

Assessment for learning should be recognised as central to classroom practice

Much of what teachers and learners do in classrooms can be described as assessment. That is, tasks and questions prompt learners to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills. What learners say and do is then observed and interpreted, and judgements are made about how learning can be improved. These assessment processes are an essential part of everyday classroom practice and involve both teachers and learners in reflection, dialogue and decision making.

Assessment for learning should be regarded as a key professional skill for teachers

Teachers require the professional knowledge and skills to: plan for assessment; observe learning; analyse and interpret evidence of learning; give feedback to learners and support learners in self-assessment. Teachers should be supported in developing these skills through initial and continuing professional development.

Assessment for learning should be sensitive and constructive because any assessment has an emotional impact

Teachers should be aware of the impact that comments, marks and grades can have on learners' confidence and enthusiasm and should be as constructive as possible in the feedback that they give. Comments that focus on the work rather than the person are more constructive for both learning and motivation.

Assessment for learning should take account of the importance of learner motivation

Assessment that encourages learning fosters motivation by emphasising progress and achievement rather than failure. Comparison with others who have been more successful is unlikely to motivate learners. It can also lead to their withdrawing from the learning process in areas where they have been made to feel they are 'no good'. Motivation can be preserved and enhanced by assessment methods which protect the learner's autonomy, provide some choice and constructive feedback, and create opportunity for self-direction.

Assessment for learning should promote commitment to learning goals and a shared understanding of the criteria by which they are assessed

For effective learning to take place learners need to understand what it is they are trying to achieve - and want to achieve it. Understanding and commitment follows when learners have some part in deciding goals and identifying criteria for assessing progress. Communicating assessment criteria involves discussing them with learners using terms that they can understand, providing examples of how the criteria can be met in practice and engaging learners in peer and self-assessment.

Learners should receive constructive guidance about how to improve

Learners need information and guidance in order to plan the next steps in their learning. Teachers should:

- pinpoint the learner's strengths and advise on how to develop them
- be clear and constructive about any weaknesses and how they might be addressed
- provide opportunities for learners to improve upon their work.

Assessment for learning develops learners' capacity for self-assessment so that they can become reflective and self-managing

Independent learners have the ability to seek out and gain new skills, new knowledge and new understandings. They are able to engage in self-reflection and to identify the next steps in their learning. Teachers should equip learners with the desire and the capacity to take charge of their learning through developing the skills of self-assessment.

Assessment for learning should recognise the full range of achievements of all learners

Assessment for learning should be used to enhance all learners' opportunities to learn in all areas of educational activity. It should enable all learners to achieve their best and to have their efforts recognised.

NOTES

Exemplar

Student task Chinese, Year 9: 'Letter to the Beijing Youth Daily'

Source: Liddicoat *et al.* (2003). *Report on intercultural language learning*, Canberra: Department of Education, Science and Training, pp. 80–82.

Teacher reflection

'I found that, for me, it's a different sort of way of organising the course, it's not profound by any means, as you know I was concentrating very much on the *essential learnings* and in Year 9 we start with likes and dislikes and particularly focus on sport. At the end of the year we've got a unit on being able to describe how you did in a test and different aspects of school subjects and so on. In Term 4 the units have leaked into each other from the start of the year to the end of the year. Here I'm doing something on identity and the link provides an expert way of connecting what would just be completely separate units of work throughout the year. It's just trite stuff for me, when we did 'likes and dislikes' we got the kids to cut out silhouettes of their heads and sort of fill it in and say things about what sports they like doing. Now we've got kids standing up and doing a class presentation on their favourite piece of work of the year in any subject and how they felt about it and how long it took them to do it and a whole bunch of stuff that's about self-esteem. So at that level it's worked quite well and it's provided different ways of looking at the course. It's also perhaps given me more incentive to try to search around and find authentic stuff to use and not just textbook stuff because, for example, trying to find stuff to work with in relation to *essential learnings*, I've got a number of articles off the Internet from Chinese newspapers and even though the article is only two paragraphs long, it's substantially more difficult than anything kids have had to encounter in a textbook. This is 'real language'. At the moment in Beijing there is this huge focus on making Beijing into a civilised city in preparation for the 2008 Games so there's this fantastic little letter from two primary school kids riding their bikes to school and they see a couple of high school kids eating Xiang Xiou (bananas). After they'd finished eating their bananas, over the shoulder went the banana skins and the high school kids went off to school and these two primary school dibber dobbers had written in to the *Beijing Youth Daily*, complaining and saying how they felt this enormous loss of face that the people of Beijing could be portrayed as uncaring about the face of their city. So these two paragraphs provide a really interesting thing about the concept of face in China, how different sort of education systems would provide an incentive for kids to take the responsibility on their shoulders to write into a newspaper and make a big issue of this. A number of kids picked up on the fact that as Australians they just wouldn't have given a damn, 'that person did that it has nothing to do with me' but in China there is a much stronger collective sense and if someone does something it reflects on everyone. So it was good. It was just little things like that through the year that we wouldn't have done otherwise – long live the *essential learnings*.'

Stimulus Text: Source: *Beijing Youth Daily*, July 2002

小明，还差这一点

在上学的晚上，我看见两个中学生一边走一边吃香蕉。

香蕉吃完后，他们随手把皮往身后一扔，头也不回地走了。

他们真给北京人丢脸。

平谷赵家务小学六 (2) 班

北京青年报

2002年6月27日

English translation

'Culture – civilised? Not quite yet!'

On the way to school, I saw two middle school students walking along, eating bananas. When they finished, they threw their banana peels behind them and walked on without looking back. They really make Beijingers (people) lose face.

PingGu Town, Zhaojiawu Village'

Student task

Answer the following questions (in English):

1. This letter was published in a Chinese newspaper. What is the name of the newspaper?
2. What do you know about the identity of the author? Any comments?
3. What is the tone of the writer (e.g. happy, sad)?
4. What is the purpose of the letter (e.g. to inform, to request, to greet)?
5. What is the meaning of 'lose face' in the last sentence? How does your understanding of this term account for the tone and purpose of the letter?
6. If the incident described in the letter had happened here, and you had observed it, would you have written to a newspaper or taken any other action? Why, or why not?

Background: Now that Beijing has won the right to host the 2008 Olympics, the media (owned by the Government) is conducting a campaign to make citizens' behaviour more 'civilised'. This is intended to make a good impression on the many visitors expected during the Olympics.

Commentary

This student task in a Chinese Year 9 class exemplifies the following:

- Teacher-understanding for the need to ‘link’, to make relevant connections of ‘curriculum-defined’ areas of learning (‘essential learnings’, ‘likes/dislikes’ task, ‘sports’ theme) with critical reflection on one’s own learning and the reasons for different ways of organising and framing a course. [Principle 2: making connections]
- How fundamental intraculturality (i.e. one’s own understanding of self-formation) is for the development of one’s own intercultural sensitivity (e.g. ‘difference’, ‘other-ness’ as shared human condition) in the context of intercultural education. [Principle 4: reflection]
- Interrelationship of abstraction exemplified in ‘departmental documents’ (e.g. ‘essential learnings’) and living/experiential examples of target language and culture reflected through relevant, contemporary, and comparable cultural and linguistic contexts (e.g. letter to editor culture, civilised nation-forming, youth involvement in littering, environmental issues, urban global culture). [Principle 1: active construction]
- How micro-level topics for discussion (‘primary school dibber-dobbers’ report a public littering by ‘high school kids’) can function as catalysts to macro-level discussion on transcultural issues in regards to social responsibility (personal, collective) and its value (for the individual, or collective) and to rights of a citizen (no matter the age) to comment on public behaviour deemed unsavoury and detrimental to a collective effort (i.e. ‘the’ Olympic-city as a window (an icon) of a culture’s achievement recognised internationally). [Principle 2: making connections]
- Making use of a very specific authentic text to mediate, address and compare a specific value (i.e. ‘face’ vs. ‘loss of face’) in order to explore its universality — overt or covert — and its manifestation in a variety of social contexts across the planet (e.g. queue-ing culture, honouring-the-dead culture, public ridiculing, drug-use public exposure of athletes). [Principle 3: social interaction]
- Personal engagement of each learner with the issue at hand (i.e. ‘reporting’ the offence) through direct questioning at the end of the task emphasising the importance of intercultural self-reflection and, thus connecting directly to the teacher’s desire to enable the students to make their own ‘links’. [Principle 5: responsibility]

NOTES

Spanish assessment task exemplar: 'Gracias a la vida'

Used with the permission of the author, Philip Reuter.

School of Languages

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT TASK COVER SHEET

LANGUAGE: SPANISH		LEVEL: S1 BEGINNERS	
SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT TASK: Response to an Aesthetic Item			
Learning Outcome: 5		Weighting: 20%	
STUDENT'S NAME:		DATE: T 3, W 10, 2005	
Task description:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See attached 			
Conditions:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The song will be presented in class and its language and content will be discussed. There is no time limit on this. 30 minutes writing time under exam conditions, ie dictionaries allowed but no other notes. at least 120 words in length. 			
Criteria for assessment:		Mark:	Max
LANGUAGE			8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accuracy and appropriateness of expression Grammar and syntax are correctly used – basic sentence structure, article / noun / adjective agreement, regular and common irregular present tense verb endings, use of <i>ser / estar</i>, and <i>hay</i>, reflexive verbs, stem changing verbs, verbs like <i>gustar</i> and use of the infinitive as second verb. There may be evidence of the correct use of direct object pronouns. Range of language A varied range of vocabulary relevant to this task is used. 			
CONTENT			6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relevance to task The link between the song and the response is evident. Depth of treatment An appreciation of the social and cultural context of the song is evident. 			
STRUCTURE AND SEQUENCE			6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The text type is not specified. Free prose or poem format is acceptable. Standard sentence structure and punctuation is expected. 			
TEACHER COMMENT:		TOTAL MARK:	20

‘Gracias a la vida’

This song, originally made famous by the Chilean activist Violeta Parra and since recorded by artists such as Joan Baez, Mercedes Sosa and Linda Ronstadt, is a celebration of the beauty of human existence.

After listening to the song and studying the words, write your own piece in which you talk about what brings you pleasure in your day-to-day life. You can write in the form of prose or poetry, but you must adhere to the rules of Spanish grammar! You can draw on the language of the song but you must write in your own words. You might find these useful as sentence starters.

Me encanta.....

Me apasiona.....

Adoro.....

Amo.....

Cuando por la mañana me levanto a/ me despierto.....

Cuando de noche me acuesto / me duermo.....

The profound optimism of ‘Gracias a la vida’ inspired the Turkish photographer Reyhan Dökmen to give this same title to her photo, taken in a street in the city of Tashkent, in Uzbekistan. It may help inspire your writing!!

'Gracias a la vida'

by Violeta Parra, translator unknown¹

The lyrics to this song, in Spanish and English, are widely available on the Internet, including the Sewanee University website, at <http://forum1.sewanee.edu/spanish/gracias.html>. Note that there are significant discrepancies between the words of various versions of the songs.

¹ 'Gracias a la vida' was the title of an album released by Joan Baez in 1974. Mercedes Sosa also released an album with the same name in the early 1970s.



Photograph, 'Gracias a la vida', by Reyhan Dökmen, retrieved 27 February 2008 from <http://www.trekearth.com/members/psykhe/photos/Asia/Uzbekistan/>

Philip Reuter's transcription (2005)

Teacher: One of the summative assessment types SSABSA requires us to do is called an 'aesthetic piece'. It's a bit of a pompous name for what really amounts to a piece of creative writing. Now when you're in the early stages of learning a language, creative writing is a bit of a tall order and we always scratch our heads as teachers to find a task that we think is not completely silly, umh, but manageable by students. It's a bit easier in the second semester than first semester so we decided this time after much discussion to do something a bit different and start you off with a song and so your piece of creative writing is going to be a response to this song. Now it's a song that I played right at the end of Term 1. I played it right at the end of the lesson and we didn't really have time to talk about it. I probably said to you at the time it's one of my favourite songs of all time.

Before we listen to the song I want to give you a bit of contextual information or I want you to give me some contextual information perhaps.

The song is written by Violeta Rosa Parra, a Chilean song writer who was born in 1917 and died in 1967, so she lived during the first half of the twentieth century. She was born into a poor and large peasant family. Her father was a schoolteacher of music. Her mother was an accomplished, although uneducated musician and singer and all her numerous brothers and sisters were very musical and a number of them became professional performers too. And there are still Chilean performers with the name 'Parra' who are either her younger siblings or her children. She wasn't a particularly good student. She wasn't very interested in study and she had limited opportunities to do so. So she left school quite young partly because the family pressured her into gaining some sort of employment to help support them. She used to go from bar to bar or from club to club because in even tiny Chilean villages they have these clubs called *peñas* which are sort of meeting places where people eat and drink and play music so even as a child she used to go from *peña* to *peña* playing guitar and singing. She moved to the capital Santiago when she was 15, lived with her brother and he actually arranged for her to get some formal education and she spent 2 years at a teachers' college. So by the standards of the day she ended up reasonably well educated. Already in the 1930s she was beginning to sing professionally and with some success. Often with her sister she even began composing music. By the 1940s she had been married twice and had several children and her career was really beginning to take off. She was working in Chilean radio and won a number of prestigious prizes for performance. In the 1950s she began recording quite extensively and touring too, particularly in the Eastern Bloc countries. She was invited by the Polish and Russian Soviet Governments to tour in Eastern Europe and she also spent a lot of time in France and a number of recordings were made in France and probably her biggest audience today is French. That's the biggest audience after the Chileans.

In the 1960s she became interested in a whole range of arts. She started to paint, she did sculpture and weaving. You know those South American weavings that are quite popular even from shops like the ...

Student: Oxfam

Teacher: Oxfam shop and she was actually invited to exhibit at the Louvre in Paris so that was a feather in her cap. But her greatest interest was promoting Chilean folk music. Her aim was to make people proud of music not being taken seriously as an art form. As you know particularly Chilean music these days is perhaps the best known of the types of Latin American music.

She died in 1967. She committed suicide. I got this information from a number of web sites and there are dozens and dozens of web sites about her and in each one the circumstances of her death were never clarified as to why she committed suicide. There was no indication she was depressed but there were no investigations so circumstances remain a mystery.

Thousands and thousands of traditional folk songs have been laboriously collected, copied and music written for them and she's credited with really bringing value to folk culture. Now bear in mind that she was working and writing in the first half of the twentieth century and Chile was a reasonably stable country in that period unlike most of its neighbours in South America. It had a democratically elected government for most of the century. Only that hideous period from 1972 to 1990 when Arista Pinochet was dictator did the country lapse into dictatorship. It has always been and still is by Latin American standards, a prosperous country. It has a high standard of living. Its economy has lapsed into recession from time to time because its economy is fairly dependent on mining so when the world prices of copper and nickel fall so the economy of Chile struggles. Earlier in the century there was quite a significant agricultural labouring class and Violeta herself came from this group, and while they were not poverty stricken in the way that some people in Latin America are, they certainly didn't live well. Another interesting feature of twentieth century Chile was that women even early in the century and certainly now had enjoyed remarkable freedom by later standards and if you look at the statistics apparently

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the number of women who head up big companies or have professorships in universities is really quite significant but despite that divorce only became legal in Chile in 2004.

The geography of Chile is interesting.

What do you know about it, without looking at the notes?

Student: Long and skinny.

Teacher: Long and skinny, yes it is. Do you know how long it is? 3000 kilometres long. It makes it the longest country in the world. And when you look at a map of the world with Chile highlighted you can see that from north to south it's a greater distance than you have in China, Canada, U.S. or in Australia, it's an extraordinarily ... uh ...

Student: Long and skinny.

Teacher: The widest point is only 240 kilometres wide and the range of climate and topography is equally remarkable. Like in the north you have the Katakana Desert, the hottest and driest place on Earth. In the south you've got the city of Punta Arenas, which is the most southern city in the world. And in between you've got everything in between from coast to mountains to desert probably the same range of climate perhaps even more extreme than our own. In a much smaller area. Even though the country is so long and skinny the total area is not particularly big.

I'm going to play you two versions of the song. One sung by Mercedes Sosa. Sosa is an Argentinian performer. I've chosen her version because it's the closest one, I am told to Violeta Parra's own version and as I was not able to get a copy of the original version, but we have a Chilean teacher on our staff at school and she says that the Sosa version which is the one I played you first time is the one that sounds most like the song originally sounded. The Joan Baez version is a bit more up tempo and I realised how old I am when I was talking to some younger colleagues about this and would you believe that they had not only not heard of Joan Baez but when I said she was a contemporary of Bob Dylan they hadn't heard of him either!

Teacher: So bearing in mind the contextual information that I gave you before the information about Violeta Parra, about the geographical, economic, social context, of the country, she lived and worked in, how is that reflected in the song itself?

Student: In its simplicity

Teacher: In its simplicity, 'cause it is simple isn't it?

Student: She liked the simple things as well.

Student: It has the repetition which after the ... paragraph it says next to life, which is very simple it uses repetition ...

Teacher: Exactly. What else?

Student: She takes pride in Chile as well, you know like the beaches, rivers and mountains, the plains ... geographical.

Student: There's nothing negative about this and it's only positive ... it doesn't really mention about materialistic things, more feelings.

Teacher: Mmm – and when you consider the conditions in which she was living / working that the optimism is probably maybe a bit surprising especially when you think of the manner of her death and it was one of the last songs she wrote.

Student: Sounds like she was close to her family. Her brother.

Teacher: What connection can you see between the song and the photograph?

Student: 'Gratitude' – because probably this person has received money. 'Gratitude' – as in guilty.

Teacher – That would seem to be the view of the photographer. As I told you, Violeta Parra travelled extensively in Europe in the '60s. She would have been better known in Europe than she was in Chile probably and so the photographer obviously came in contact with her work and found the optimism of that song inspirational.

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Student: Is it a beggar?

Student: Isn't she laughing because she's got ...

Teacher: I think she's laughing. It's hard to know isn't it?

Student: She doesn't look despondent maybe she is crying. Certainly not in an elongated type of crying.

Teacher: We've sort of established that this is a very Chilean song but would you say that the message ...

Student: Is reminiscent?

Teacher: Yeah, to me that's the thing that most struck me about this song the first time I heard it. I've never been to Chile but from what I know when I listen to this song I can hear Chile being described just as Victoria said but the same time the message is a very universal one isn't it?

Let's just have a look at some specific language. You know we've been working on 'object pronouns'. Can you see in that first verse an 'object pronoun'?

Student: *Que me ha dado*

Teacher: *Que me ha dado*. Is it direct or indirect the 'me'?

Student: Indirect

Teacher: It's indirect. The verb 'give' takes the indirect object 'give to me' 'it has given to me' '*distingo el negro del blanco*' 'I distinguish black from white' so that's not an 'object pronoun' in the previous there's one.

Student: *Me dio dos luceros*

Teacher: *Me dio dos luceros* ... it gave me two eyes; *lucero* actually means a 'bright star' but it's being used here to mean 'eyes'.

Student: *Que cuando*

Teacher: *Que cuando los abro*. So what does the *los abro* mean?

Student: I opened them.

Teacher: I opened them, my eyes. We are about to start on past tense and you know ...

On the next page, third verse down the very last word *tu patio*. I want to draw your attention to the word *patio* because the translation there says *patio* and *patio* conjures up an image doesn't it in Australia. What image does it conjure up?

Student: Outback verandah

Teacher: Patio

Student: Entertaining area

Student: Like those ads you see.

Teacher: I know what he's thinking ... no no I know what he's talking about. The company that makes ... um

Student: Stratco

Teacher: Stratco they describe it as out ...

Student: Outback patio

Teacher: But leaving aside the Stratco advertising, *patio* conjures up as you said a backyard maybe a paved area with pot plants, a bbq. It's something very Australian isn't it?

Student: I say it, as *pasio* god knows why.

Teacher: Why would it be *pasio*? Where would *pasio* have come from?

Student: No idea.

