Chapter 13

Using Classroom Assessment Data to Guide Instruction

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ABSTRACT

It is important that assessments used in a classroom reflect the standards that students are expected to achieve. When this occurs, the data collected can be used as indications of a student’s proficiency in a language. This chapter focuses on how the data collected in the classroom can be used to guide instruction. The author begins with an overview of assessments that are available to foreign language teachers. This is followed by information on data collection and analysis. The second half of the chapter focuses on how to use the data to develop lessons that provide all students with the instruction they need in order to be successful in the foreign language classroom. Examples of analysis of authentic data and changes in classroom elements, as well as the need for a mastery mindset, are also presented.

INTRODUCTION

Assessment has become an unpopular word thanks in part to the number of tests that students are required to take for which the results are often used for teacher accountability rather than to assess student learning. However, assessment does not always mean taking a test, nor is it always synonymous with grading. When used appropriately and consistently at the classroom level, assessment is an important tool in helping teachers to answer questions such as: Did students reach their goals? Can the student apply what they have learned? Does the lesson need to be retaught? What should be included in future lessons? (Sandrock, 2012) By collecting and analyzing data from assessments, teachers are able to determine the answers to these questions. A wider view of assessment is used to determine the individual strengths and needs of their students and provide the instruction needed for them to progress. Using assessment as a tool rather than the source of a grade is somewhat of a paradigm shift for teachers. In order for this shift to occur, teacher candidates need new experiences with assessments. These experiences should provide teacher candidates with opportunities to: 1. learn how to create and analyze appropriate classroom assessments, 2. observe how these assessments are created and analyzed by classroom teachers, 3. imple-
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ment what they have learned and observed in their own classroom, 4. share and discuss the assessments and data collected with like-minded instructors, classroom teachers, and other students, and 5. develop flexibility in modifying future lessons based on the data. (Graham, 2005) This chapter will focus on the collection and analysis of data from classroom assessments (the creation of assessments is beyond the scope of this chapter) and the changes in instruction that can be the result of the data.

ASSESSMENT AND DATA COLLECTION

Developing Assessments

The first step in using data to guide instruction is to review or create the assessment system that exists in the classroom. Teacher candidates should become familiar with the types of assessments in which our students are required to perform at the national, state, and classroom levels. In foreign language, national assessments, such as the Advanced Placement Examinations in various languages and the American Council of the Teachers of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) K-12 Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) and Writing Proficiency Test, are available (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2007). Many states also provide performance standards, rubrics, and sample assessment tasks (CARLA, 2018). Results of national and state tests can provide teachers and districts with information about the overall proficiencies of the district’s students in relationship to students in other districts. This data can also show gaps in the curriculum being taught. The results from classroom assessments that are developed by teachers can provide data on the progress of individual students.

The Proficiency Guidelines from the American Council of the Teachers of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) are a key resource in providing a direction for this assessment system. These guidelines provide language instructors with a range of abilities in all of the four communication skills: reading, listening, writing, and speaking. Based on criteria that have been developed by ACTFL, students fall into one of five proficiency levels: Distinguished, Superior, Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice. The goal of language instruction is to move students from their beginning proficiency in each skill to the highest proficiency they can reach given the amount of time they are in a language classroom (ACTFL, 2012). Reviewing these guidelines multiple times and being involved in discussions which strengthen a teacher’s understanding of them will help teachers to better apply the guidelines in constructing their own assessments. Being able to communicate with others about the assessments that have been created and the challenges in this process can help to ensure that a cohesive assessment system across levels is being created (Romaniuk, 2018). Appendix 1 provides samples of two units from a world language curriculum document that were developed for Grades 6-10. The proficiency skills required at each level are based upon the ACTFL Guidelines.

At the classroom level, the ACTFL guidelines, or a curriculum like the one in Appendix 1, provide teachers with the base from which to develop the necessary assessments and instruction that their students need in order to progress in their language proficiency. For example, if a student is able to speak “primarily through the use of isolated words and phrases that have been encountered, memorized, and recalled” (ACTFL, 2012, p. 9), they fall into the Novice level. If after a certain amount of speaking instruction and practice students are “combining and recombining known elements and conversational input to produce responses typically consisting of sentences and strings of sentences” (p. 7), they have
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