

Tools to Use in Assessment

II. Observations and Checklists

Teachers have always watched and observed students in the classroom and they have made instructional decisions based on these observations. Too often, however, in the foreign language class, these observations have been informal and have not been documented.

Observations can take place in a variety of settings. They can focus on student performance during a single activity or during routine classroom activities.

After deciding what to observe, when to observe, and how often to observe, teachers will need to plan how to record their observations. Observations which go unrecorded in some way will not be as easily defensible to students, parents, and administrators, and may be forgotten over time.

There are several possibilities for recording information to help guide the observations and to make sure that the observations are consistent for all the students involved. Some recording options include the following:

1. Checklists
2. Anecdotal records
3. Rubrics (see previous section on rubrics for details)

Checklists can be used for formative (ongoing) assessment to monitor students' behavior and progress towards reaching stated goals. In this chapter, two kinds of checklists are emphasized.

- ◇ Teacher observation checklists
- ◇ Checklists for self- and peer assessments

What is an observation checklist?

Kay Burke (1994) describes an observation checklist as "a strategy to monitor specific skills, behaviors, or dispositions of individual students or all the students in the class." She suggests that teachers use observation checklists for "formative assessments by focusing on specific behaviors, thinking, social skills, writing skills, speaking skills..."

Checklists only indicate if a student can accomplish the listed objectives. Nothing is included about the quality of performance. In foreign languages, checklists, most often, state the language and cultural skills to be attained.

Throughout the Assessment, Articulation, and Accountability project, several foreign language teachers have developed unit or semester checklists to help them assess the students' language ability.

Foreign language elementary teachers in New Hanover County met on a regular basis to determine the expectations for students at first grade level and devised a series of checklists to assess the students' performance (see samples on pages 255-258). A letter was sent to parents informing them of this new assessment procedure (see page 65 for a copy of the letter). The elementary Spanish teacher in that system reported that the development of this assessment tool has made parents and principals more knowledgeable about the program.

Figure 28 - Letter Sent to Parents

The Spanish Program at Forest Hills Elementary

Spanish will be offered to all students in kindergarten and first grade twice a week. Each class will be 20 minutes long. Second graders will have Spanish once a week for 30 minutes,

Through songs, games, poems, stories, and physical activities, students will learn language dealing with a variety of topics, such as social expressions, feelings, colors, shapes, foods, days of the week, months, family, clothing, house, parts of the body, weather, school, animals, and numbers.

They will also learn to ask and respond to simple questions, and demonstrate understanding of Spanish when spoken in simple phrases and sentences. These topics are expanded at subsequent levels. Whenever possible, Spanish is integrated within the themes and topics that are being studied in the classroom.

At these early levels, the focus will be on listening and speaking. Reading and writing in Spanish will be limited to identifying letters and/or copying words.

This year I will use an additional method of assessment for first grade students. This assessment will be used to identify each student's strengths and weaknesses and to plan appropriate instructional activities. First grade parents will receive a checklist of the student's progress and performance on the different units taught every nine weeks.

As parents, you will want to check your children's progress. Ask them what words they know in Spanish. Can they count to 10? Can they name some colors? What day is today?

Remember that language learning is a slow and very repetitive process, and any reinforcement that you can provide at home is welcomed. Periodically, your child will bring home student made books and/or vocabulary lists with which your child should be familiar. Please review these with your child. Do the best that you can with the pronunciation, your child will correct you!

It is my hope that as children become more aware that there are other ways to communicate, they will also develop an appreciation and respect for the people who speak a different language, for their countries, and for their culture, and that this will provide the base that prepares your child for living in a competitive global society.

I truly look forward to being with your children and showing them how valuable and how much fun another language can be. Thank you for your support. Muchas gracias.

Julie Bordo

In Haywood County, elementary teachers designed a checklist for each unit of study and incorporated the checklists in their local curriculum (see samples on pages 84-87). The checklists were given to students at the beginning of the unit and were added to the students' binders. Throughout the unit, students were able to check off the objectives they could accomplish. At regular intervals, teachers graded the binders to look at the students' self-evaluations on the checklists. In addition, binders accompanied by a letter went home to parents who had an opportunity to examine their children's expectations and assessment over their own learning. A Spanish teacher in that system reported that the development and use of checklists have made the teachers more accountable and the students more responsible for their learning.

Figure 29 - Sample Letter to Parents

January 1999

Dear Parents,

Please sign below after you have reviewed your child's Spanish notebook. These have been kept in the classroom so I wanted you to see their written work so far this year. The units we have been learning about include adjectives, telling time, numbers, weather and calendar, foods, and holidays.

Note the two separate checklists in the notebook. Your child has had the opportunity to assess his/her own progress in several areas.

Thank you for your support. These 5th graders are a pleasure to teach.

Señora Rogers

Yes, I have seen my child's notebook

Student's name

Parent's signature

Submitted by Laura Rogers, Clyde Elementary School, Haywood County

In that same county, middle school and high school foreign language teachers reached consensus on a common core of knowledge and skills needed for student placement in a level II class and designed a Level I checklist to be completed by the middle school teacher (see sample in Articulation section pages 228-247).

Considerations for Planning Checklists

When designing an observation checklist, the teacher must determine the kind of behavior(s) or skills he/she is hoping to observe. Some observation checklists may be devoted primarily to the application of the writing process while others may focus on higher order thinking skills or on the use of spoken and/or written language within the classroom.

Checklists can be used with the whole class, with groups, or with individuals and are most effective when the students are aware, from the onset, of the behaviors and/or skills to be observed. This way, the checklists provide the individuals, the groups, and/or the class with guidelines for self monitoring.

Figure 30 - Suggestions for Conducting Classroom Observation

- ✎ Identify the purposes for which the observational information will be used (e.g., to assess student attainment; to individualize instruction; to adapt instruction to student attainment; to assess the effectiveness of a unit, lesson, or activity; or to explain student learning, or lack thereof).
- ✎ Identify the kinds of observational information that would be useful for these purposes: student language use, work habits, learning strategies, reactions to instructional materials and activities, classroom interaction, and so on.

- ✎ Decide how you will observe in order to collect the desired information. Decide (a) *whom* to observe: individual students or groups of students; (b) *how often* to observe them: once or more than once; and (c) *when*: during which specific lessons or occasions.
- ✎ Select a method (or methods) for recording your observations: anecdotal records, checklists, or rating scales.
- ✎ Prepare the necessary reporting forms.

Source: Classroom-Based Evaluation in Second Language Education, p. 95.

Management Tips for Teachers Using Observation Checklists

- Teachers may want to focus on one student, or on a few students at a time. In a classroom of 25, teachers may observe 5 students each day. However, all students should be observed within a given period of time.
- Teachers may also want to observe students in different kinds of activities.
- Teachers will need to record their observations immediately while they remember which students did what.
- Teachers will need to evaluate students in terms of their own personal growth.

Figure 31- Individual Observation Checklist

INDIVIDUAL OBSERVATION CHECKLIST			
Student Name: Jane Smith Class: French III			
Person(s) responsible for observation(s) and date(s)			
Peer: Marie Dupond	Date: 10-12		
Student (self): Jane	Date: 11-15		
Teacher: B. Morris			Date: 12-10
Use Frequently (F), Sometimes (S), and Not Yet (NY) to document how often the listed behaviors are observed.			
	10-12	11-15	12-10
Listening			
o Recall facts and list details from material heard	F	F	F
Speaking			
o Ask questions and seek information and clarification of meaning	NY	S	S
o Give specific information orally	S	S	F
Reading			
o Obtain information	S	F	F
o Identify main idea and supporting details from authentic materials	F	F	F
Writing			
o Develop an organized summary	NY	NY	S

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Figure 33 - Elementary Spanish Student Progress Checklist

Student's Name: _____ **Spanish Teacher:** _____

Nine-week grading period (circle one) **1** **2** **3** **4**

In Spanish class, your child can:

	1	2	3
1. Identify pictures of family members			
2. Name family members			
3. Sing songs with actions related to family			
4. Select number heard			
5. View a number and name it			
6. Tell the number for the date			
7. Give quantity of objects shown			
8. Sing number songs with action words			
9. Identify weather terms in pictures			
10. Name weather conditions			
11. Tell current weather conditions			
12. Name current month and day			
13. Sing songs about months and days			
14. Express preference of favorite day/month			
15. Hear a date and select it			

Student Indicators:

1 = Some of the time

2 = Most of the time

3 = All of the time

Expected Proficiency of Student:

- Uses isolated word and learned phrases.
- Uses vocabulary sufficient for handling classroom situations and basic needs.
- Makes statements using learned materials.
- Asks simple questions.
- Expresses basic courtesies.
- Understand short learned statements, questions, commands and courtesies.

Units Taught:

Family Numbers Weather Months Days

Objectives taught meet required Second Language goals of the NC Second Language Standard Course of Study.

Developed by Julie Bordo, Forest Hills Elementary, New Hanover County Schools

Figure 34 - Teacher Observation Checklist, 5th Grade**LISTENING**

1. Student is able to perform task when explained by the teacher.
2. Student is able to model appropriate use of language when asked to do so.
3. Student is able to answer simple questions.
4. Student is able to follow simple instructions.
5. Student has no clue as to what the teacher's instructions are.

SPEAKING

1. Student expresses himself clearly.
Student's speech is unintelligible.
Student does not try.
2. Student is creative in his presentation.
Student delivers plain presentation.
Student is not prepared.

READING

1. Student can read select material with correct pronunciation and comprehension.
2. Student can read select material with correct pronunciation and can answer questions at the end of reading.

3. Student can read select material with correct pronunciation but does not comprehend the reading.
4. Student can read select material with broken pronunciation but comprehends.
5. Student can read select material with broken pronunciation and does not comprehend.
6. Student is not able to read material.

WRITING

1. Student is able to create own sentences using learned vocabulary.

Developed by Denise Wall, Northeast Elementary, Wayne County

Anecdotal Records

The recording of students observations need not be limited to the use of checklists. Documentation can also be entered in anecdotal records and can be made on note cards, on a clip board, on adhesive labels to be pasted on a page devoted to each student, or in a notebook designed for this purpose.

Anecdotal notations can be as structured or as open-ended as desired. They can address student participation and effort or can concentrate on the student's progress toward attaining identified course objectives. They are especially useful to record unexpected events which would not be documented otherwise.

Anecdotal records can be made systematically after each lesson, at the end of the day, or less frequently such as at the end of a unit. Of course, these observations should be dated, identified, and organized around previously identified focuses of instruction.

Checklists for Self- and Peer Assessment

While checklists provide many benefits for recording teacher observations, they are also valuable tools to guide students in self- and peer assessment. In this case, the checklists clearly state the unit objectives and students check off the objectives as they are able to meet them. Checklists can be adapted to allow for responses such as: Yes, No, Not Yet, or Always, Frequently, Sometimes, Rarely, Never. Additional columns can be included for peer-assessment and parent assessment conducted at home.

In Wayne County the high school teacher chose to develop checklists to correspond to the specific units in the textbook (see page 114 for sample).