



ELL ASSESSMENT KIT

Assessment for Learning: Using Assessment as an Instructional Tool

Margo Gottlieb, Ph. D.

Assessment is a potentially powerful instructional tool. Collected systematically on a regular basis, results from assessment are useful for general education, English as a Second Language (ESL), and bilingual teachers. Armed with reliable, valid, and practical information about their English language learners, teachers will be able to:

- Profile students' accomplishments
- Place students in appropriate instructional settings
- Target standards for instruction
- Plan instructional assessment activities, tasks, and projects
- Provide differentiated instruction
- Monitor student progress over time
- Reclassify students based on accumulated evidence
- Have a voice in accountability.

In today's standards-based educational arena, teachers are increasingly aware of how English language proficiency and academic content standards work in tandem for their English language learners. The current emphasis on academic language associated with the core content areas has come to complement the social and cultural dimensions of language proficiency. As a result, language teaching is more closely tied to and integrated with content. This shift is evident in the redesigning of English language proficiency standards (TESOL, 2006) and the retooling of instructional assessment techniques.

As seen in Figure 1 below, standards bind instruction and assessment at the classroom level. Concurrently, standards are the centerpiece in large-scale state assessment. Thus, standards-based

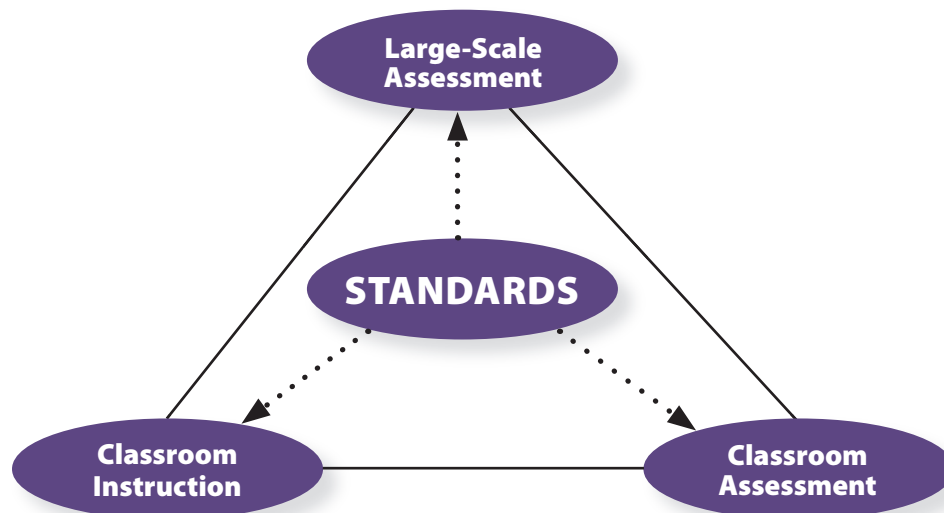


Figure 1. The relationship between standards, assessment, and instruction

classrooms with English language learners are to be synchronized with both English language proficiency and academic content standards.

Accountability for English language learners rests on this dual set of standards. Teachers, schools, and districts must demonstrate that students are gaining English language proficiency across the language domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing while simultaneously achieving academically, minimally in English language arts, mathematics, and science. At the classroom level, strategic teaching must focus on incorporating the language along with the knowledge and skills necessary for success in school and beyond.

Classroom-based formative assessment must mirror these new trends. ESL, bilingual, and general education teachers need to team and collaborate in the planning, delivery, and reporting of assessment that is embedded in instruction. Likewise, assessment conducted on a summative, large-scale basis should be a joint responsibility. This sharing of information and ideas will enrich the educational program for English language learners and facilitate continuity of services.

Proven instructional strategies for English language learners are equally effective for classroom assessment. Visual and graphic supports, such as pictures, photographs, graphs, tables, and charts, incorporated into instruction and assessment provide English language learners greater access to challenging curriculum and additional avenues to meaning. Differentiation of instruction and assessment enables teachers to target language and content based on the students' prior educational experiences, native language foundation, and language proficiencies in English. Inter-related activities and tasks that are coached within a content related theme allow English language learners to scaffold their learning experiences.

The demands and pressures on teachers to meet federal, state, district, and personal educational goals are tremendous. Standards that serve as the arbiter and anchor for classroom and large-scale state assessment help direct teachers to formulate curriculum and instruction. A classroom assessment toolkit for English language learners that is standards-based, representative of grade level curriculum, and provides useful information is a welcome and helpful resource. With it, teachers will be able to better guide English language learners and be informed by teaching and learning.



Dr. Margo Gottlieb, Ph.D., is a specialist in the design of standards and assessment for English language

learners in PreK–12 settings. In addition to her two decades as an English-as-a-second-language/bilingual teacher and administrator, Dr. Gottlieb has provided technical assistance and consultation to governments, school districts, and universities. She holds a Ph.D. in public policy analysis, evaluation research, and program design, as well as an M.A. in applied linguistics.

Dr. Gottlieb is currently serving as Director of Assessment and Evaluation of the Illinois Resource Center and is the Lead Developer for World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA), a multi-state consortium.

Dr. Gottlieb's research focuses on using assessment as a powerful instructional tool—specifically, using assessment to inform and guide instruction according to each learner's needs.



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