

Assessment Guidelines for NCEA Learning Languages

Assessment for NCEA Learning Languages is seen within the wider framework of the Ministry of Education's focus on effective teaching. This framework includes the national assessment strategy. Internal assessment of languages for NCEA fits into this wider picture. The resources on Te Kete Ipurangi, the Ministry's on-line resource centre, are very helpful for teachers seeking to learn more about effective teaching, student learning and assessment: <http://www.tki.org.nz/r/assessment/>

These Guidelines are intended to help teachers as they and their students work together to collect evidence of the students' achievement during the teaching and learning process or during teaching and learning.

Effective Assessment

Assessment in *Learning Languages* is most effective when it is seen as an integral part of the teaching and learning.

Some of the key classroom assessment actions which can work *to support students' learning* are:

- explaining and discussing the purpose and relevance of the learning;
- providing choice and supporting students towards responsibility;
- providing opportunities for students to learn with others;
- providing specific, descriptive feedback and involving students in assessment;
- involving students in self-assessment, especially helping students to give themselves feedback in relation to clear, easily understood *criteria for success*; (self assessment using agreed rubrics which identify where the work meets the criteria and also where improvement can be made);
- helping students to value effort.

Some practices have been shown to be *ineffective in supporting learning*. It is therefore preferable for these practices to be less used. These are:

- testing; (eg a "practice" which does not involve feedback, time to make improvements and possibly further learning);
- drilling and practising for test taking;
- self-evaluation according to grades;
- comparison of students in terms of grades.

Research has shown that when students are given a grade *and* a feedback comment, they do not read the feedback.

Explaining the purpose and relevance of the learning

Teachers and students together clearly identify the learning objectives and how students' progress will be monitored, taking into account both formal and informal assessment. The sequences of the learning and expectations of the students are agreed with and made clear to the students, and are referenced to the appropriate curriculum levels and achievement criteria.

Achievement Criteria

Many teachers are developing exemplars with their students to help understanding of the levels of performance expected and how the assessment criteria are connected with the work. In doing this, teachers and students also develop a shared language to talk about the quality of the students' work. For example "development" in a *speech* about an issue of interest to the student will be different from "development" in a conversation about a film the class has seen.

The vocabulary and also the functions, kinds of structures and language devices used will differ according to the context and nature of the task. For example, "development" in a conversation may involve negotiation of meaning and "development" in a written text may involve reasons, opinions and additional information. **These kinds of understandings must also be transparent to students.**

Curriculum Levels

Curriculum levels are recognised in a complex interweaving of achievement objectives and the communication purposes for which the language is used, underpinned by appropriate language and culture.

Curriculum levels are made transparent and accessible through examples from the listening and reading, speaking and writing done by the students in the course of the learning. Some teachers have charts for each of the relevant curriculum objectives on the classroom wall (a different colour for each curriculum level) and as the learning progresses, students write phrases and sentences which exemplify the achievement objectives. In this way an A/O which may not be very clear on its own, eg *give and respond to advice, warnings and suggestions* is exemplified in many different ways, relevant to the contexts the students are working in.

Providing choice and supporting students towards responsibility

Learning is most successful when it is referenced to students' own needs and interests. *Learning Languages* curriculum documents allow students and teachers to make their own choices of contexts for learning the language/s. Students who work in classrooms which are rich in resources and who have some choice over the range of evidence provided to show their achievement, will begin to take more responsibility for their own progress.

Open-ended assessment tasks which are based around particular achievement objectives but which give scope for the students' own interests often produce work of a high quality. A conversation about different TV watching habits; films to see; books and magazines to read with opinions and reasons; agreement, disagreement and advice and suggestions for viewing/reading is well situated in NCEA level 2. The language and socio-cultural learning is done by the class but the specific context of the conversation is the student's own choice.

The learning involves both processes and products. For example, formative practices are part of the learning and, well used, they improve the quality of the learning *and* the final piece of work. There is ongoing interaction between teachers and students, and the students are engaged in planning for and interpreting the results of assessment.

Providing specific, descriptive feedback and involving students in assessment

When students and teachers together have agreed a language to talk about the work, teachers, peers and students themselves are able to give specific feedback. They can describe the quality of the work according to criteria understood by all and point out next steps towards improving the work.

There is evidence that many effective teachers do not routinely correct students' errors; rather they ignore errors when they are inconsequential and forestall errors that the student has made previously by offering hints or asking leading questions. When the forestalling tactic fails, such teachers intervene with a direct question which forces the student to self correct. Such an approach deals with errors at the same time as it helps to maintain student motivation and self-confidence. Teachers also avoid the dilemma where they have intervened so directly in correcting a student's errors that the work is no longer evidence of the student's own achievement.

Helping students to give themselves feedback is an important part of the process. Many key writers on formative assessment agree that it is not sufficient for feedback on learning to be given only by the teacher. Students themselves have a necessary role in taking responsibility for assessing their own work. Successful students have been shown to be self-monitoring. They see information from assessment in terms of what it has told them about themselves as learners and as information which helps them understand what they need to do to continue progress.

For example, if the task were to write an advertisement for a health farm, the feedback would highlight maybe three areas where the text closely met this aim (individual words or sentences), and an asterisk or a line where the work could be closer to the intention of the text. Then below the work the teacher could write a prompt like "give some suggestions for healthy activities" with maybe a reference to one of the resources. With the support and use of some formulaic language, this can also be done in the target language, thus becoming part of the learning. Students can use the prompt to improve their work, but the positive feedback also helps them identify which part of the text they can build on. **Gradually the teacher can hand over control of this process more and more to the students themselves.**

Assessment for NCEA

Many teachers of languages prefer to have a least one formal assessment task (often test like) for each of the three internally assessed achievement standards. The most successful formal assessment tasks are developed with the students and come directly from the teaching and learning. They are also open ended enough to allow choice and responsibility on the part of the students themselves. It is also important to bear in mind "One off assessment is likely to be less reliable than a range of assessments." *NZQA July 2004*

Decisions about length of formal pieces of work, support from cue cards, visual aids and the general form of the assessment tasks are decisions for teachers to make with their own students. The notes in the achievement standards give indications of the kind of length which is suitable to show evidence of achievement in formal

assessments. However, it is the **quality** of the evidence which forms the basis of the judgements made, not the length. For instance, the teacher/assessor may decide that evidence from one very short talk is not sufficient and will collect, or encourage the student to collect, supplementary evidence of achievement.

The use of cue cards and other “props” will depend on context – both the language and the cultural context and whether the tasks are situation based or based in the real-world context. The decisions made about these matters will be guided by the fact that the assessor must be clear that there is enough evidence that the students can do what the title of the standard describes. If the student *reads* a speech entirely from cue cards, that student has not provided evidence of giving a speech.

Validity and Fairness

Some teachers worry that for an assessment task to be “valid”, it must be exactly the same for each student. Validity and fairness do not come from this rigid uniformity, which can often work in a very unfair way. The two important criteria for valid assessments are “transparency” and “justification”. The students must know exactly what will be evaluated, and the range of possible tasks and ways of providing evidence available to them. Agreed rubrics for feedback form part of this transparency. Quality assurance comes from presenting a series of assessment cases (processes, tasks and judgements on work) to colleagues (and also sometimes to moderators) to see whether the assessments are defensible and thus “valid”.

Each formal assessment task must have its own integrity. For example, if a student gives a “How To..” talk at NCEA Level 1 (*give and follow instructions*), it would not be appropriate to do the formal writing task on the same area of the curriculum.

The Assessment Tasks

When composing an assessment task, it is necessary to be sure that the whole assessment process used is appropriate for the skill, at the same time keeping in mind the integration of learning and assessment:

- What needs to be known about the students’ achievement?
- Does the assessment process and the task under consideration match the purpose for which the students are being assessed? *For example*, a conversation about a famous person can deteriorate into a *talk* punctuated with questions. There is no opportunity to *converse*. A conversation about an issue may, however, provide opportunities for an exchange of opinion which exemplify the aspects which make a spoken text *conversational*.
- Is the level for which this process or instrument was developed appropriate for the students who are being assessed? *For example*, a written text about *a day in the life* ...may not give much opportunity for the student to show functions from the higher levels of the curriculum.
- Does the assessment task measure the language skills that need to be assessed? *For example*, spoken texts have different characteristics from written texts. Conversations have different characteristics from talks. The tasks and processes will need to be different.

Writing with the support of resources

As this involves *drafting*, *reworking* and *writing* texts, it is important that the students have the time and expertise to carry out this process. This process includes planning, drafting, feedback, feed forward to redrafting and final writing. This is the kind of process which occurs often in a real-world context.

It is important that the students get and know how to give themselves focussed, descriptive feedback and that they have time to implement the improvements. Feedback needs to be focussed on the “learning intentions”.

Some of the feedback may involve further learning and it may not be appropriate for such a process to take place over too tight a time frame. The students need time to rethink and make improvements. The time frame is for teachers to decide with their students.

The use of resources is also appropriate to a real world context. There needs to be thought about the kinds of resources which will be helpful to students and what use they are expected to make of them. For instance, dictionaries may not be helpful but word lists that the students and teacher have written together during the learning may be easy for students to use. Sometimes exemplars and notes the class has written together or authentic exemplars may be useful. Grammar books help some students to check their language. This is for teachers and students to decide together. The students must also all have equal access to good quality resources.

Students need help to understand how to use resources to help them write *new* and *original* text. *For example*, copying pieces from previously marked work would not provide new and original work. Students need to learn about plagiarism and how to reference their work.

Keeping the drafts and the planning with the teacher at school prevents doubt about authenticity.

Talk/spoken presentation/speech

This achievement standard involves *preparing* and giving a talk/presentation/speech. The grade comes from the talk but the process of preparation is important. An effective task involves the application and integration of the content of the learning and allows students some choice and autonomy. This standard assesses the student's ability to speak in front of an *audience* and should not be treated as a research exercise. *For example*, *compare and contrast people, places and things* is a function which students could use in many different contexts in their own original way. Unmodified extracts from any external source would not be suitable.

Students should be encouraged to speak to an audience and maybe students could choose their own audience, if appropriate. Teachers and students can agree this together.

During the learning students have opportunities to give talks to each other and gain specific descriptive feedback against the assessment criteria. It is not helpful to the learning to drill the same talk over and over. As this is an oral assessment, the feedback should be on spoken, not written, texts.

The *communication* which is important here involves pronunciation, intonation, appropriate pausing as well as language and culture. *Development* and *variety* need to be seen in terms of a spoken text. Long, involved sentences may not be suitable in all talks. Many students do not speak as effectively as they might because they and their teachers have seen the talk as a written text. The whole process must show that the student is indeed able to give a talk which communicates effectively. The contexts depend on the students and teachers. Some students may prefer to give a group presentation, some may use real-world aids like power points, some may tell a group story, others may give a formal speech. This is for the teacher and students to decide.

Conversation

There is broad agreement among researchers that conversation involves interaction that is only more or less planned, and where those speaking are sensitive to what is being said and that they answer in ways that link in a relevant way to what has been said before in the conversation. Even if the positions of those speaking are unequal (as is the case in an NCEA conversation between student and teacher/assessor), there may not necessarily be a difference in rights and duties in the conversation. *For example*, a conversation is not an interrogation or a learnt part, as in a play. Students can be encouraged to take charge of the conversation.

These processes can apply to each level, depending on the complexity of language, the demands of the task and the degree of support provided to the students. Even at NCEA Level 1 students should be encouraged to interact in a simple way or else they are not learning to converse. Interaction may initially be simple and formulaic and gradually progress to more natural interaction.

Tasks need to give autonomy and choice to students as well as the opportunity to show how well they can converse and interact.

Sometimes students believe they have to learn off conversations in advance because of the need to show complicated *development* such as may be found in a written text. *Development and variety* in a conversation often involve interaction, referring back to things already said, and clarifying and negotiating meaning; to begin with by using formulaic and quite simple expressions and in NCEA Level 2 and 3 by using language in a more natural, authentic way.

Similarly *communication* in a conversation is achieved when the meaning is successfully negotiated and where the pronunciation, intonation and pausing help the communication to be effective. *Any errors do not hinder communication* (excellence) means that the meaning is ultimately clearly and successfully negotiated, not that there are no errors.

Recognising Achievement in Learning Languages

“For all internally assessed standards the teacher decides how evidence can be assessed and judged against the standard.” NZQA July 2004.

In communicative language teaching and learning there is emphasis on dialogues and pair work, situated contextual training, strategy training, elaboration and,

increasingly, intercultural awareness raising. It is these aspects that make the teaching and learning “communicative”. This emphasis on the learning as well as on the product, provides a rich source of additional evidence of achievement for language students and teachers. Portfolios, journals, demonstrations, conferences, observations all form part of this. With support, much of this can be done in the target language.

Portfolios may include digital voice and video recordings demonstrating students’ oral proficiency. Students may keep journals in which they can demonstrate their language skills by using the target language to record their learning activities and reflect on their progress. Students may record specific descriptive feedback to their peers in the target language during group drama performances or demonstrations. Teachers may record information on the different assessment criteria in their mark books as they observe pair work and use this as evidence of student achievement. These are not extras, but are a natural part of the teaching and learning. Teachers will explore the ways of collecting additional evidence of achievement to suit their own students and the learning contexts used.

To evaluate students’ progress and proficiency effectively, teachers will probably need to use a variety of assessment measures and procedures. This approach also has the advantage of supporting the learning without taking endless time from the learning on formal assessments and “resubmissions” which hold up the learning.

Making Judgements on Students’ Work

It is vital that teachers and students are clear that language is assessed holistically against the assessment criteria. The extent to which the work reaches the standard described in the assessment criteria decides the grade. This is made explicit to the students and the assessor with examples of text at each grade level. It is not valid to count items of content, vocabulary or structure. Curriculum levels are recognised from a complex interweaving of achievement objectives and the communication purposes for which the language is used, underpinned by appropriate language and culture. Curriculum level is not identified by particular pieces of language.

To ensure validity of judgements made, teachers must continue to evaluate and discuss samples of students’ work together. The validity of the judgements comes from this discussing and agreeing with colleagues. This must not be done alone. Cluster meetings and other meetings with colleagues must be part of the whole assessment process, if the judgements are to be valid and fair.

Authenticity

Many schools have their own authenticity procedures. In addition, the assessment principles described here provide clear evidence of processes and learning which lead to the final grade. This evidence also provides evidence of the student’s own achievement.

External Moderation

External moderation for the NQF is a mechanism by which NZQA:

- checks that the judgements teachers are making are at the national standard;
- samples the approaches teachers are taking to assessing student achievement.

All assessment activities submitted for moderation are expected to:

- give the learner sufficient opportunity to meet the requirements of the standard;
- have an assessment schedule that gives evidence of appropriate learner responses and clear judgements at all levels;
- NZQA moderators trained in 2004 were made aware that increasing numbers of teachers are adopting flexible approaches to the collection of evidence used to recognize student achievement. There should be no reason for any moderator to not approve materials because they are not task based.

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Here is a great site for downloading digital voice recording software.

<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>