



# Big Ideas in FSL... Connecting For Success

This is one in a series of *HOT TOPICS* articles that support FSL educators in their professional learning.

## User-friendly Assessment and Evaluation



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Assessment refers to any activities performed by students whereby the teacher, along with the students, breaks down and analyzes the success of a performance. The analysis is based on pre-established and understood criteria. The results of the analysis (what the learner did well and what needs improvement) may be collected over time to demonstrate growth. Or, the results may simply be used as an inventory at the outset of a new learning sequence.

### Assessments fall into the following authentic-task categories:

- oral;
- written; or
- reading.

Students need frequent opportunities to compare their own competencies to real models of the desired outcomes. They need the tools to reflect on what they must do next in order to approximate the model and improve their learning. Students are invited to set goals for themselves and to comment on their learning using self-assessment. Self-assessment may be done individually or with a partner to critique each other's work. It is recommended that the teacher comment alongside the student.

### Students in elementary FSL need to:

- understand the purpose of their learning;
- feel confident in order to take risks in their learning; and
- understand how to improve upon their learning.

Creating and maintaining real engagement in learning additional languages is an ongoing challenge for teachers and a prerequisite for effective second-language classrooms. Second-language learners are engaged when teachers share assessment strategies with them before, during, and after learning sequences. This assessment process helps students break down facets of their learning so they understand how to improve based upon real competencies.

Assessments that are gathered and summarized for grading purposes should be familiar tasks that students have grown accustomed to in the routines of the classroom, and the same criteria should apply. Exams and tests should be performance-based and reflect real, meaningful learning situations. Portfolios and student-led conferences are useful ways for students to keep track of their progress and see the value of their learning over time.



## Creating Conditions for Students' Success

Elementary FSL classrooms are comprised of a wide range of students with:

- diverse backgrounds;
- diverse interests; and
- varying abilities.

In any given classroom, some students are intrinsically motivated and confident about the opportunity to learn another language, while others are not. How can teachers accommodate the wide variety of student needs and engage all learners in finding success in second-language classrooms?

Teachers who create conditions for students' success plan for three important components:

- personalization;
- choice; and
- practice.

Each of these important components becomes embedded in the teacher's instruction, as well as in the nature of the interactions with students, on a daily basis.

**Personalization** may be achieved by establishing connections between the content and student's real lives, adjusting assignments to different abilities, and finding ways to provide coaching for some students and extending expectations for others. Getting to know students as people, so that they may bring their other interests and strengths to the second-language classroom, demonstrates to students that they are cared for and respected.

Providing **choice** in project style, topics, working groups, and in ways to be evaluated offers students increased control over their own learning. Students' personalities, sense of humour, and fun should shine through in the second-language classroom. Language learners need to **practise**

real speaking and communicating in order to feel safe. Students overcome nervousness and uncertainty when they can rehearse their learning in a supportive environment. The second-language teacher needs to build ground rules of respect, and reinforce that taking risks is the best way to learn languages. Time should be built into each lesson for flexible groupings and partner work where students can actively try out new learning without fear of failure.

Students learn best when their background knowledge and experience is actively engaged in new learning. Opportunities for students to bring themselves into the second-language classroom, whether through the other languages they speak or their own personal hobbies and interests, can create success for a wide diversity of students.

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