6

Assessment and Evaluation: How Can We Be Fair and Demanding?



1. Overview

In this section, we offer suggestions on how you as classroom teachers can **identify** LEP students (See Introduction, p. 10), how you can make decisions about **placing** them in a classroom or instructional program, and how you can **assess** students' progress in your classroom—both in learning academic content and in acquiring English.

Research (Collier, 1995) has shown that programs that are effective in teaching language minority students contain the following elements:

1. active learning of academic concepts through hands-on, collaborative instruction
2. academic instruction in English and in the native language (when possible) that is cognitively complex, that is, instruction that encourages students to use academic skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation
3. a positive social environment that integrates language minority students with their English-speaking peers.

These elements of instruction must be linked to equally complex forms of assessment, so that students' progress in academic subjects, language acquisition, and social integration may be assessed.

2. Placing LEP students in appropriate levels of instruction

After determining that a student does speak a language other than English at home, the next questions to consider concern the child's language proficiency in English and the home language, and the child's knowledge of academic content gained in prior schooling.

English language proficiency: oral communication and literacy

A typical sequence for assessing language proficiency begins with the child's proficiency in understanding spoken English and in responding to English. If the child can communicate orally in English in a face-to-face conversation or on a test of oral proficiency, the next step is to determine the child's literacy, that is, the child's facility in reading and writing English at grade level.

It is important to remember that a student who can understand and respond orally in English in a face-to-face conversation may not be proficient enough in academic written English to be placed in a grade-level English language classroom. Within one to two years, LEP students can acquire social and conversational English from their classmates. However, it may take a student from five to ten years to acquire literacy in academic English, so that the student can understand textbook presentations of content material in science, math, social studies, and language arts.

English proficiency: academic content

After evaluating the student's knowledge of oral English and literacy, the next step is to assess knowledge of content subjects in English. Because each subject has its own specialized vocabulary and grammatical structures, a student who understands basic oral English may still need extra support in learning content subjects in English in grade-level classrooms, especially in the upper grade levels. If the student studied in a bilingual program, you may need to assess content knowledge in the student's home language.

If the student and parents or guardians come to school on the first day, you might ask the following questions about the student's academic background:

1. What subjects did you study in your other schools? Which languages did you study in?

2. Which books did you use in your other schools? Which languages were the books written in?

3. Did you study in a bilingual program? If you did, which subjects did you study in your home language, and which subjects did you study in English?

Spanish:

1. ¿Cuáles materias estudiabas antes de venir a esta escuela? ¿En cuáles idiomas estudiabas?

2. ¿Cuáles libros de texto usabas en tus estudios? ¿En cuáles idiomas estaban escritos?

3. ¿Estudiabas en un programa bilingue? En el programa bilingue, ¿ cuáles cursos estudiabas en español y cuáles en inglés?

3. Assessment and Instruction

Classroom-based assessment informs teachers about student progress; this type of authentic assessment can be so integrated into our instruction that similar activities serve as both instruction and assessment. We can think of authentic assessment as the "clean plate test." If your family or guests have enjoyed a meal, you don't need to give them multiple choice questions to find out how they liked your cooking. Just see how many empty plates are left on the table.

As you build multiple ways of demonstrating knowledge into instruction, you have also automatically built in assessment of student progress precisely connected to your curriculum. This type of assessment also provides important feedback on instruction, allowing teachers to adjust to meet the needs of all students. In addition, multiple types of assessment should include standardized measures that demonstrate that language minority students are attaining district, state, or federal standards for academic achievement.

CLASSROOM TO ESL INSTRUCTOR COMMUNICATION FORM

Student Name _____

Date _____

Class _____

Teacher _____

1. How would you assess the student's progress during the past month?
   (1-5 with 5 being the highest) 1 2 3 4 5

Please circle one of the numbers.

	Low				High
• Oral Comprehension	1	2	3	4	5
• Reading Comprehension	1	2	3	4	5
• Completes Writing Assignments	1	2	3	4	5
• Works Independently	1	2	3	4	5
• Asks for help **when needed**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
• Successful completion of tests/assessments	1	2	3	4	5

2. What would you like the ESL teacher to help the student with during the coming weeks or months?

Comments: _____

_____

_____

Chart 1

4. Adapting content assessment for LEP students

It is important to remember that students who are still in the process of learning English must be supported in learning grade-level academic content. They should be challenged to exercise critical thinking skills, such as analysis or synthesis, during all stages of language acquisition, even while they are in the preproduction stage.

At the same time, understanding of academic subjects must be assessed in a way that allows students to demonstrate their knowledge somewhat independently of their fluency in English. Three techniques for assessing content while reducing language difficulties are scaffolding, differentiated scoring, and visible criteria (O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996, pp. 166-167). **Scaffolding assessment** allows students various ways to demonstrate their knowledge: exhibits or projects, graphic organizers (diagrams or semantic maps), organized lists of concepts, labeled tables or graphs completed by the students, or short answers. Students should be allowed extended time limits for completing scaffolded assessments.

A second method for assessment is **differentiated scoring**, that is, scoring students separately on content knowledge and on language. This also integrates assessment of language arts in other content areas. Students might be scored on sentence structure and the use of key vocabulary from the lesson. In addition, they would be scored on how well they understood key concepts, how accurate their answers were, and how well they demonstrated the processes they used to derive their answers.

A third method for adapting assessment is to use **visible or explicit criteria** for scoring. Students become familiar with scoring criteria before the actual assessment is given, especially if they will be scored separately on content knowledge and language conventions (differentiated scoring). Students might be involved in creating criteria for a good science report or steps in solving a word problem. They should practice applying these criteria to actual examples, in order to become familiar with the criteria.



ESL Student Evaluation

Classroom Performance in Content Area Subjects

STUDENT _____ DATE OF BIRTH _____ DATE _____
CLASSROOM TEACHER _____ GRADE _____ COURSE _____

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE CLASSROOM TEACHER:

To help evaluate the above student's overall achievement, please use the following scale to rate his/her performance in your class. *Please complete separate sheets for math, science, and social studies.*

CATEGORY 1: Rate the student's level of performance in relation to the concepts and skills identified in the graded course of study.

1	2	3	4	5
below grade level		at grade level		above grade level

CATEGORY 2: Rate the student's work habits in your class. Does he/she bring required materials to class? Understand and follow directions? Ask for assistance?

Cooperate and interact positively with other students?

1	2	3	4	5
no effort		average		courteous, hard-working

_____ Please check here if student is not participating in the content area subject due to pull-out or any other reason.

_____ Grade in class to date.

5. Performance-Based and Portfolio Assessment

Definition of Terms

Informal or Alternative Assessment. These are not technical terms, so there are no uniformly accepted definitions. **Informal** and **alternative** assessment are used interchangeably, and indicate the following: any method, other than a standardized test, of determining what a student knows or can do; activities that reflect tasks typical of classroom instruction and real-life settings, and that represent actual progress toward curricular goals and objectives; and activities that are monitored and recorded in some way, either by teacher observation, peer observation or student self-assessment.

It should also be noted that informal and alternative assessment measures are by definition criterion-referenced, (e.g., learners are classified according to whether or not they are able to successfully perform a set of tasks, or meet a set of objectives). Norm-referenced tests, on the other hand, relate one learner's performance against the normative performance of a group. Standardized tests can be either norm- or criterion-referenced.

Performance-Based Assessment is a type of informal or alternative assessment, and is characterized by activities that are specifically designed to assess performance on one or more instructional tasks; activities in which students demonstrate specific skills and competencies are rated on a predetermined scale of achievement or proficiency; and activities that are rated by a teacher or other professional, rather than by peer or self-evaluation.

Portfolio Assessment is a technique for qualitative evaluation. It is characterized by the maintenance of descriptive records of a variety of student work over time; the purposeful and systematic collection of student work that reflects growth toward the achievement of specific curricular objectives; and the inclusion of student self-evaluation as well as teacher evaluation.

Portfolio assessment in ESL has been used mainly to follow progress in reading and writing. Portfolios can, but need not necessarily, contain samples of student writing, records of oral language progress, records on reading achievement over time, and information on the results of formal achievement tests.

Types of Language Performance-Based Assessment

Performance-based assessment should not be limited to a single activity type. In fact, using performance-based tasks gives teachers the freedom to probe with language that formal measures often lack. Whatever activity type is used, never assess more than three items at a time. For instance, a role-play might be designed to see if students can respond to "what" and "where" questions; ask for or respond to clarification; and read addresses or telephone numbers. Any more detail would be difficult for students at Level 1 to integrate, and even more difficult for teachers to rate.

Activities should be as authentic and integrated as possible. If reading or writing would be a natural occurrence within a given context that is mainly geared to oral communication, then it should be part of the assessment. Whether oral or literacy activities are being devised, the key to successful performance-based assessment is the creation of activities that do not rely on language more difficult than the level students can handle.

The activity types listed below are all designed for teacher-student, student-student, triad, or group settings. They concentrate more on oral communication and/or reading than on writing. (The portfolio activities will concentrate on writing.) Activities that pair students or use group interaction are the most numerous. They are often more natural than teacher-student interaction, save classroom time, and give the teacher the ability to listen and watch more closely while acting as rater for one or

more students. Oral activity types include:

- role play
- student-student description, using picture or written prompts
- oral reporting to whole class
- telling a picture story, using a sequence of three or more pictures
- interviews, using written prompts
- completing the dialog/conversation, using written prompts
- debates, either one-on-one, or small group, with turn-taking
- brainstorming
- passing the message on among 3-6 students
- giving instructions from picture, diagram, or written prompts
- completing incomplete stories
- games

Features of Portfolio Assessment

Portfolios are files that contain a variety of information assessing student performance relative to instructional objectives. They are a practical way of assessing student work throughout the entire course. Portfolios can include samples of student work, such as stories, completed forms, exercise sheets, pictures drawn and captioned by students, or other written work; tapes of oral work, such as role play or presentations; teacher descriptions of student accomplishments, such as performance on oral tasks; formal test data; and checklists and rating sheets such as those at the end of this section. Like performance-based assessment, portfolios encourage teachers to use a variety of ways to evaluate learning and to do so over time. These multiple indicators of student performance are a better cross-check for student progress than one type of measure alone.

While it is each student's responsibility to put his/her "best work" in the portfolio file, it is the teacher's responsibility to choose the categories of work that should be placed in the file, (e.g., a written story about people; a description of surroundings; a tape of an oral account of a trip). Student work should be collected with a purpose, and each item a student places in the file should reflect progress toward a particular learning goal. In addition, teachers need to maintain checklists or summary sheets of tasks and performances in the student's portfolio, to help them look systematically across students, to make instructional decisions, and to report consistently and reliably. The checklists contained in this volume are examples. Finally, a Portfolio Contents Form will ensure that the same kinds of data are collected for each student, so the results can be used to assess progress for each student and for the class as a whole.

Portfolios may be particularly appropriate for use with highly mobile migrant students in addition to LEP students for the following reasons:

1. For students moving from one teacher or school to another, portfolios can pass along critical information on their strengths and needs so the new teacher does not duplicate assessments that have already been conducted.

2. For students being considered for placement at different levels within an ESL or bilingual education program, portfolio results can determine their ability to function at various levels.

3. For students being considered for transition from ESL or bilingual education program to a mainstream, English-only program, portfolio results can measure performance relative to classmates in the mainstream.

4. For students being considered for pre-referral to special education programs, portfolio results can be used to determine whether performance is related to language proficiency, including both native language and English literacy skills.

Literacy Development Checklist

Student: _____ Teacher: _____
School: _____ Academic Yr.: _____

Mark:

X =Effective **I** = Sometimes Effective – = Needs Work

READING PROCESSES	Quarter			
	1	2	3	4
I. READING SKILLS				
Comprehends oral stories				
Reading Vocabulary				
Fluent decoding				
Literal comprehension in reading				
Inferential comprehension				
II. INTEREST				
Initiates own reading				
Shows pleasure in reading				
Selects books independently				
Samples a variety of materials				
III. APPLICATIONS				
Participates in language experience story development				
Participates in reading discussion groups				
Writes appropriate dialogue journal entries				
Chooses books of appropriate difficulty				
Uses reading in written communication				

IV. READING STRATEGIES	Quarter 1	2	3	4
Monitors attention				
Notices miscues that interfere with meaning				
Infers meaning based on:				
*Word clues				
*Sentence structure				
*Story structure				
*Prior experience				
Summarizes main ideas or key events				
Links details to main ideas				
Remembers sequence of events				
Predicts conclusions				
Requests help if needed				

Note: Adapted from materials developed by the National Council of Teachers of English and by The Writing Lab of the University of New Hampshire.

Figure 1. Literacy Developoment Checklist

Sample of Student Self-Assessment of Reading Ability

In reading a passage, I can:

READING TASK	Criteria: All the Time	Sometimes	Almost never
1. Understand the main ideas			
2. Understand the details			
3. Understand the vocabulary			
4. Read quickly and still understand most of it			

Figure 2. Self-Assessment of Reading Ability

Math Development Checklist

Comments: _____

_____

_____

_____

	Does not Apply	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Not Noticed Yet
1. Counts to: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10				
2. Has 1: 1 correspondence to: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10				
3. Verbalizes addition				
4. Verbalizes subtraction				
5. Symbolizes addition to: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10				
6. Symbolizes subtraction to: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10				
7. Verbalizes multiplication				

Figure 3. Math Development Checklist

Sample of Rubric For Rating Writing Samples

Rating	Criteria
5	• Vocabulary is precise, varied, and vivid • Organization is appropriate to writing assignment and contains clear introduction, development of ideas, and conclusion • Transition from one idea to another is smooth and provides the reader with clear understanding that the topic is changing • Meaning is conveyed effectively • A few mechanical errors may be present but do not disrupt communication • Shows a clear understanding of writing and topic development
4	• Vocabulary is adequate for grade levels • Events are organized logically, but some part of the sample may not be fully developed • Some transition of ideas is evident • Meaning is conveyed but breaks down at times • Shows a good understanding of writing and topic development
3	• Vocabulary is simple • Organization may be extremely simple or there may be evidence of disorganization • There are a few transitional markers or repetitive transitional markers • Meaning is frequently clear • Mechanical errors affect communication • Shows some understanding of writing and topic development
2	• Vocabulary is limited and repetitious • Sample is composed of only a few disjointed sentences • No transitional markers • Meaning is unclear • Mechanical errors cause serious disruption in communication • Shows little evidence of discourse understanding
1	• Responds with a few isolated words • No complete sentences are written • No evidence of concepts of writing
0	• No response

Source: S.S. Moya, Evaluation Assistance Center (EAC)-East, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., 1990.

Figure 4. Sample Holistic Criteria

Sample Portfolio Analysis Form

DATE: **5/1/92**
STUDENT: **Marisel A.**
TEACHER: **Jones**
GRADE: **4**
EDUCATIONAL GOAL: **Student demonstrates ability on variety of writing tasks**

PERFORMANCE TASK	CONTENTS ILLUSTRATING STUDENT PROGRESS	DATE
* Demonstrates interest and ability in variety of writing	Literacy Development Checklist	3/20/92
* Writes a short story	Writing Sample: Dog Story	4/22/92
* Writes to communicate with others	Letter Dialog Journal	4/10/92 3/31/92
* Expresses writing preferences	Self-Assessment of Writing	4/24/92
* Shares writing with others	Anecdotal record	4/06/92

Summary Comments:

_____

_____

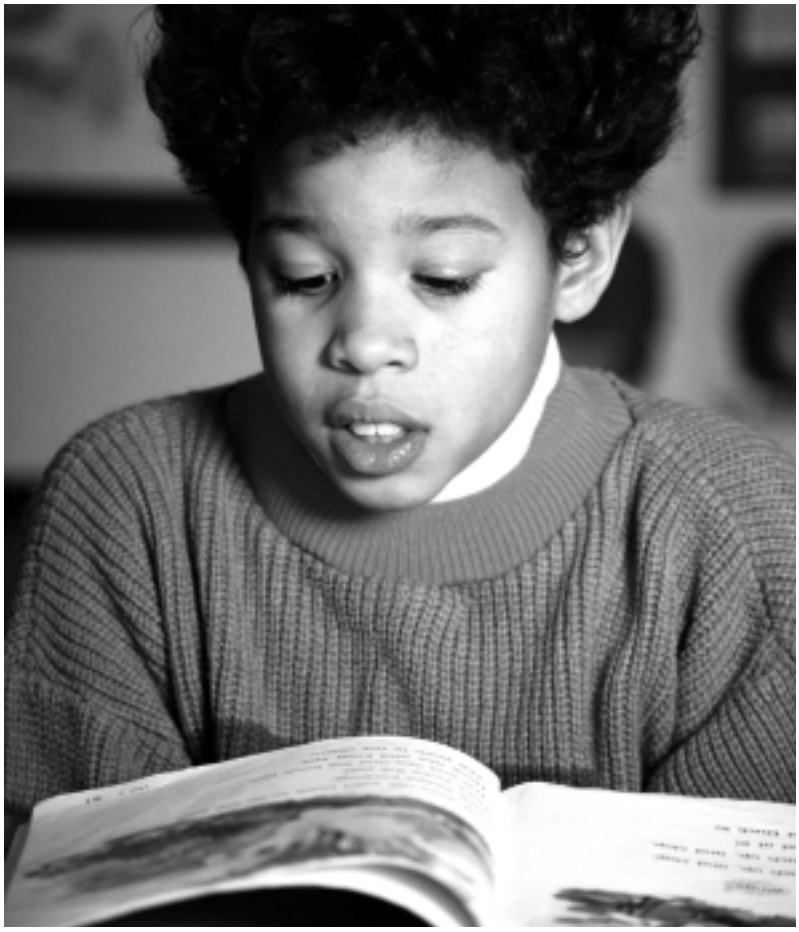
_____

Figure 5. Sample Portfolio Analysis Form

Using Portfolio Results

Portfolio results can be used in a variety of ways. The Sample Portfolio Analysis Form shown in Figure 5 is an essential component in many of these uses:

- **diagnosis and placement**—Student strengths and needs are examined with regard to major curriculum objectives.
- **monitoring student progress**—Growth in learning over the course of the semester or school year can be monitored.
- **feedback on the effectiveness of instruction**—If individual students are not progressing, the instructional approach should be re-evaluated and appropriate adaptations made to meet each student's needs. One possible conclusion is that a student needs instructional support beyond the services provided by the classroom(s) in which the portfolio has been maintained.
- **communication with other teachers**—This incudes other members of the portfolio team and those at other schools to which students may transfer.
- **student feedback—**Portfolios enable students to comment and reflect on their progress and to plan what they would do to improve.



A. Arlington County Public Schools, Virginia Elementary ESOL HILT Program

Reading

- Teacher observation log
- Examples of what student can read
- Books/materials read
- Audiotape of student reading
- Test results, formal and informal
- Conferencing forms
- Examples of skills mastered

Writing

- First piece of writing each year
- Learning log, dialog journal
- January and May writing samples
- Drafts and final products from different genres (personal narratives, exposition, letters, poems, essays, reports)
- Graphics (illustrations, diagrams)

B. Stratham Memorial Elementary School, New Hampshire, Reading Writing Portfolio

Reading

- Favorite books/authors list
- Genre graph, indicating type of literature preferred
- Journal entries
- List of completed books

Writing

- Writing sample and cover sheet
- List of completed pieces

Evaluation

- Goals and/or self-evaluation
- Annual narrative summary by student

C. Orange County Public Schools, Florida, Literacy Portfolio Components

Core Elements

- Reading development checklist
- Three writing samples
- List of books read independently

Optional Elements

- Student self-assessment
- Reading journals
- Audiotapes of student reading
- "Things I Can Do" List
- Test results, formal and informal
- Reading comprehension tests
- Running records (miscue analysis) and anecdotal records

D. Fairfax County Public Schools, Virginia, ESL Program

Core Elements

- Two writing samples
- Two oral production samples
- Informal reading assessment
- List of books to read
- Results of Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) test, Grades 7-12

Optional Elements

- Dialogue journal excerpts
- Teacher observations
- Reading/writing checklists
- Student self-assessment
- Audio/videotapes
- Student-selected work

Figure 6. Reading/Writing Portfolios: Sample Contents

6. Grading

Report card grades are an important part of the communication among teachers, students, and parents (Stiggins, 1988). Grades have two basic purposes in the classroom: to reflect student accomplishments and to motivate students. While grades may indicate the level or rank order of student performance, there are questions about their success in serving as an incentive for students to exert greater effort. Teachers often comment that not all students see grades as motivating (Stiggins, Frisbie, and Griswald 1989). Grades are extrinsic motivation not derived from self-determined criteria, as in learning out of interest and self-created goals. Moreover, as Kohn (1994) notes, people who are promised extrinsic rewards for an activity "tend to lose interest in whatever they had to do to obtain the reward" (p. 39). Wiggins (1993) indicates that grades can be a disincentive to some students because, particularly when teachers grade on a curve, somebody always loses, and a portion of the class is made to feel inept.

The problems with assigning grades are even more evident with group grades. Group grades are typically an attempt to grade the final product of student teams that worked on a project, essay, or presentation. Group grades can undermine motivation because they do not reward individual work or hold individual students accountable (Kagan, 1995). The poor performance of a single person can lower the group grade, thereby undermining the motivation of high-achieving students and rewarding low performers who are fortunate to have a high achiever on the team. In this sense, the group's grade is due to forces outside the control of the high-achieving student. Students need to know that they and other students are individually accountable for their work.

Surveys of grading practices indicate that teachers consider factors other than achievement or growth in determining grades, such as perceived level of effort, attitude, ability, behavior, and attendance (Alverman and Phelps, 1994). Two problems are evident in considering factors other than growth or achievement in assigning grades. First, the intermingling of achievement with other factors can have an unintended negative effect because students receive a mixed message on their accomplishments: "You tried hard but didn't succeed anyway." The second problem is in the extreme variation in grading from teacher to teacher. Teachers vary not only in the factors they use in grading, but also in the criteria they use to assign grades on classroom tests. Among the methods teachers use in grading classroom tests are the following (EAC-West, 1992):

- percentages (90-100%= A, 80-90%= B, and so on)
- mastery (80% = mastery, 60-79% = partial mastery, <60% = nonmastery)
- grading on a curve (top 7% = A, next 24% = B, middle 38% = c, next 24% = D, and lowest 7% = F)
- gap grading (assigning grades to suit large gaps in a score distribution, e.g., 94-100% = A, 90-93% no scores, 83-89% = B, 79-82% no scores, 68-78% = C, etc.)

In determining final grades from classroom tests, some teachers average numerical scores on these tests, while other teachers average the grades received on the tests. The latter approach reduces the impact on final grades from a single high or low test score. For example, an extremely low numerical score such as 3 out of 100 will have a far greater impact on the mean of all the tests than a single F will have on the mean of the corresponding grades. Teachers can also assign different weights to tests, papers, presentations, and classroom participation in determining final grades. In summary, not only does each teacher decide what will be evaluated and how much each activity will count, but teachers also determine how the final grade will be calculated. Because of this variation in grading practices and in criteria used to assign grades on classroom tests, we could expect a great deal of variation from teacher to teacher in the final grades stu-

dents receive, even given a common set of papers or products to rate.

One final difficulty in grading practices stems more from the tests on which grades are based than from the grades themselves. In the past, classroom tests have tended to assess lower-level skills even when teachers claim to value and teach complex thinking (Stiggins, Frisbie, and Griswald, 1989). Inevitably, the resulting grades assigned will be based on lower-level skills instead of on the real objectives and content of classroom instruction.

Despite the problems we have identified with grading practices, our experience leads us to believe that grades can be useful if they are based on authentic assessments and are assigned following certain guidelines. Grades are requested regularly by parents as a guide to their child's performance and are useful as an overall indicator of student achievement. When combined with illustrative samples of student work and with informative scoring rubrics, grades can provide parents and other teachers with a comprehensive picture of student growth and achievement. Part of the usefulness of grades depends, however, on establishing relatively uniform criteria for grades in a school or among classrooms.

The introduction of authentic assessment (including portfolios) to accompany more innovative forms of instruction expands considerably the alternatives that can be used to establish classroom grades. Teachers using authentic assessments evaluate students on samples of classroom performance that may include reports, projects, and/or group work. In authentic assessment, student performance is often rated using scoring rubrics that define the knowledge students possess, how they think, and how they apply their knowledge.

Because the rubrics are specific (or at least should be) their use tends to reduce teacher-to-teacher variations in grading, especially if the teachers base their ratings on a common set of anchor papers. With the use of portfolios, teachers can provide parents with specific examples of student work to illustrate the ratings they give to students on the scoring rubrics. Furthermore, with authentic assessment, teachers often establish standards of performance that reflect what students should know or be able to do at different levels of performance that may also reflect different levels of mastery. Finally, teachers using authentic assessment share the criteria for scoring student work openly and invite discussions of the criteria with students and parents.

With these new opportunities comes a challenge: to define the procedures by which scoring rubrics and rating scales are converted to classroom grades. In rating individual pieces of student work, one option is to directly convert rubrics on a 1-4 scale to corresponding letter grades. This could work acceptably provided that the points on the rubric represent what you consider to be "A-level" performance, "B-level" performance, and so on. While this may be effective in some cases, it is not always a good practice because definitions of what students know and can do at the different levels on the rubric do not always correspond to what is considered to be A or B performance. Further, it may be unwise to confuse the informed feedback provided by a scoring rubric with the external reward of a grade (Kohn, 1994). Thus, a second option is to establish independent standards of performance corresponding to letter grades. That is, identify in advance exactly what students receiving an A, B, etc. are expected to know and do in meeting the course objectives. Then obtain a student grade by comparing the student's actual performance with the established standard. The standard corresponding to grades can reflect overall student performance across activities or projects, thereby avoiding the difficulty of having to create standards for grades on each student product. The score on a rubric for each activity provides effective informed feedback to students on their work, and the standard provides them with direction on what they need to accomplish.

Our recommendations in grading and communicating student performance with authentic assessment are as follows:

- Assign scores to individual student achievement or growth based on a scoring rubric or an agreed-on standard to reflect mastery of classroom objectives.

- Assign weights to different aspects of student performance as reflected in class assignments (e.g., projects, reports, and class participation).
- Multiply each rating by the weight and sum the ratings of scores on individual papers or performances to obtain an overall numeric score.
- Reach agreement with other teachers and with students on the interpretation of the summed score with respect to grades.
- Do not assign grades for effort and especially do not combine effort and achievement in a single grade.
- If you assign grades for group work, assign separate grades for the group product and for individual contributions.

In using anecdotal records to support grades:

- Use the language of the rubric to help you write anecdotal comments, describing specifically what each student should know and be able to do, and using examples.
- Link your comments to instructional goals, and (where appropriate) distinguish between language proficiency and content-area knowledge and skills.
- In expressing concerns, focus on (1) what the student knows and can do, (2) your plan or strategies for helping the student improve, and (3) what the parent can do to help. Discuss growth over time in addition to current performance.
- Use anecdotal comments to provide feedback on group work and group participation.
- Use enclosures: a one-page class or course overview, samples of the student's work, the student's self-evaluation, a letter from you or from the student to parents, etc.

We believe that teachers should explore alternative forms of assessment and grading that are adapted to their instructional methods and to the scoring rubrics they use in evaluating student performance. In one such approach (Brodhagen, 1994), a grade-level middle school teacher attempted to accomplish three goals: to establish a grading system that was consistent with an integrative (thematic) curriculum, to involve students in the design of classroom assessment and grading, and to avoid the stigma attached to grades of D and F by giving students opportunities to improve their work. She and a cooperating teacher agreed to assign only grades of A, B, C, or I (Incomplete), and graded only if the student turned in 80% of required work because anything less would be insufficient to grade. Students were involved in the assessment of their own learning and also in the design of this system. Students selected five or six pieces from a portfolio to represent their "best work," wrote a self-evaluation of the quarter's work, and wrote goals for the next quarter. The teacher used all of this information in a quarterly parent-teacher-student conference with considerable success and a high degree of student participation.

Standardized Testing and LEP Students

Predominance of Standardized Testing as a Measure of Student Achievement

In recent years, there has been increasing emphasis on setting high standards for all students and holding schools accountable for reaching those standards. When educators take into account what second language research tells them about how long it takes to acquire a language, they conclude that holding LEP students to these high standards will require more resources than they now possess. Most states have adopted "waivers" for LEP students that exempt the students from taking the tests for a period of one to three years, but most LEP students will still have difficulty performing well on standardized tests that are both linguistically and culturally biased.

This issue is entirely too complex to discuss in depth here, but there are things that we—as teachers—can do to improve what seems like a no-win situation.

Some suggestions would include:

- Helping LEP students to learn the strategies and skills required for taking a standardized test.
- Advocating for intensive ESL/bilingual programs in your local district.
- Finding out about special "testing modifications" (e.g., extended time, having test read aloud in English, use of bilingual dictionary) that your state allows and use these modifications when you test your students on a regular basis in the regular classroom.
- Ensuring that if an LEP student is able to take a portion of a standardized test (e.g., math) that he or she participates as soon as possible.
- Educating yourself about second language acquisition and recommended strategies for LEP students so that you'll be a more informed advocate for sensible policies.

You are not alone in feeling that simply setting higher standards does not ensure that LEP students will be capable of achieving them. However, if we consider this movement as a process that will end in improving educational programs for all students, then we can work at not only improving our own teaching, but also advocating at every level for programs that we know will help LEP students achieve in ways we never thought possible.