ASSESSING UNDERSTANDING: RECEPTIVE AND PRODUCTIVE SKILLS

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Abstract:
Scientists in different fields have a high level of cooperation with foreign partners, so they have a high demand for language learning. In modern society, foreign languages are becoming an important component of professional education. People learn such knowledge first at school, college, lyceum, and then at institutes, training courses or independently by getting acquainted with the basic information sets that help to learn a foreign language. In this segment we will explore ways to assess receptive and productive skills.

Keywords: Receptive skills, productive skills, listening, reading, speaking, writing, manipulative, proficiency.

English language learners can be assessed in both receptive skills (including listening and reading) and productive skills (including speaking and writing). Typically, the communicative skills of speaking and listening comprehension are developed at a faster pace than the more academic skills of reading and writing. Comprehension is such an internal process that listening comprehension and reading comprehension are much more difficult to assess than other areas. In this segment, you will find suggestions for assessing both receptive and productive skills. Even students with low levels of English language proficiency can demonstrate their understanding of instruction without producing language. For example, students can observe daily classroom routines and demonstrate their comprehension of the routines taking an active part in them. This bodily kinesthetic demonstration of comprehension is a valuable tool for both teachers and students who are in the early phases oflanguage proficiency.

In order to assess a student's comprehension, teachers can ask students to providenon-verbal responses. Asking students to "point to" or "show me" the correct answers (with pictures or manipulatives) allows them to demonstrate

comprehension physically and not verbally. Drawing a picture or completing a simple graphic organizer is also effective. In this student work sample, we see that this student has at least a basic understanding of a story about amusement parks.

English language learners need tremendous amounts of scaffolding in order to access knowledge through reading. Research has shown that the processes used by the brain for learning how to read in a first language are similar to the processes used for learning how to read in a second language. Therefore, strategies used to provide support for English language learners are beneficial to all students. Readers must understand the purpose for reading, activate relevant prior knowledge, and focus on the most important aspects of the reading in order to successfully comprehend the text. This is best achieved through instruction that actively involves the use of before, during, and after reading strategies.

Additionally, in order to be able to comprehend the text, students need to be familiar with any specialized vocabulary being used. With a text that is both appropriate developmentally and linguistically, along with instruction in reading strategies and processes, English language learners should be able to demonstrate their comprehension.

Understanding the abilities of students in regards to reading comprehension allows teachers to target their instruction. English language learners begin speaking in order to facilitate their communication with peers and teachers. Interference from the students' native language can impact their pronunciation in English. In most cases issues with pronunciation should only be addressed when the student's language is incomprehensible. It is the norm for second language learners to have accents in a second language. As long as the accent is not so heavy as to interfere with communication, it should not be considered when assessing speaking. As the proficiency level of the student increases, the complexity and accuracy of the student's speech increases as well.

Students with low levels of proficiency may only be able to echo words or phrases. Teachers can use choice questions such "is this a…", "which one of the…", or "pick the…" to assess students at the beginning stages of language fluency. Yes/no questions are also effective at this level. Students with intermediate levels of proficiency typically can speak using simple sentences and then move to complex

sentences, while students at the advanced levels of proficiency are able to speak using more complex grammatical structures with higher levels of accuracy.

As the abilities and language proficiencies of students change, teachers can move to questioning strategies that require increasingly higher amounts of language production on the part of the student - for example, Wh- questions, higher order thinking questions, and embedded questions that ask students to apply personal analysis.

Frequently writing skills are among the last skills fully developed by English language learners. Writing involves the integration of many skills including comprehension, grammar skills, and higher order thinking skills. In assessing student writing, teachers need to be specific about the purpose of their assessments. For example, a student may write about Maryland in their Social Studies class using entirely correct content knowledge, but have improper grammar or spelling. While the teacher may decide to provide meaningful and constructive feedback on the grammar and spelling errors, it would be reasonable to asses the content for demonstrating knowledge of Maryland.

Whenever possible teachers should create rubrics for assignments. For English language learners, rubrics provide clarity and structure by knowing what is expected of them. Additionally, students can take rubrics home, taking more time to understand them. There are several web sites that provide a free service of creating rubrics for teachers. Please see the resources section of this module for more information.

By understanding the differences between receptive and productive language, as well as strategies for assessing each, teachers are better prepared to collect the necessary information to make instructional decisions.

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