Contents

1 Why Do We Assess?

1.1 Definitions and Dimensions of Assessment

Assessment plays an essential role in language teaching and learning. The day-to-day assessment of student learning is unquestionably one of the teacher's most important, complex and demanding tasks. As teachers, we are the principal agents of assessment, so we need to ensure the quality of classroom assessment practices and to use these practices in ways that best support our students' learning.

What is assessment? Assessment refers to 'all those activities undertaken by teachers, and by their students in assessing themselves, which provide information to be used as **feedback** to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged' (Black and Wiliam, 1998, p. 2). There are two important points about this definition. First, assessment involves teachers and students. An assessment activity can be carried out between a teacher and a student or a group of

students. It can also be carried out between a student and another student or among students themselves. Second, these activities include both the classroom tests and daily assessments that we teachers use in our classroom, and the large-scale tests that our students take such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). In this sense, assessment has multiple dimensions, as do our instructional activities.

Assessment activities include *events*, *tools*, *processes* and *decisions* (Taylor and Nolen, 2008) – four fundamental aspects of classroom assessment:

- *Assessment events,* such as when a teacher organizes an oral presentation or a listening activity, can support students when the events occur with the right frequency, so that the teacher knows whether instruction is successful, which areas need more instruction, and which student or group of students may need additional support. As teachers, we need to consider how many assessment activities we use and how frequently we use them in our classroom. ***How do we judge the right amount and frequency of our assessment activities, and when should those activities take place?*** We examine responses to this question in Chapters 3 and 4.
- *Assessment tools* can support student learning when the tools give students clear ideas about what is important to learn and the criteria or expectations for 'good' work, and when assessment goals are aligned with instructional goals. Assessment tools are important in that they are the instruments we use to collect evidence of students' learning. Choosing an assessment tool is like choosing a scale to measure our body weight, a tape to measure the size of a desk, or making notes on the advantages (and disadvantages) of a new textbook we are choosing for a class. In our own classrooms, we may assess students' ability to communicate by using performance tasks, such as making an oral presentation or writing a report. We may assess our students' ability to read by using multiple-choice **items** on a test of reading comprehension or by asking them to read a passage aloud and explain what it means. The tool we use to assess has to fit with

both the type of learning that is being measured, and the type of learning that is the goal of our instruction. **How do we ensure that we choose the right assessment tools to measure what we intend our students to learn?** We address this question in Chapter 2.

- *Assessment processes* can support students' views of their teachers as allies in their education; feedback can help students focus and better understand the requirements of a task. Assessment processes are about *how* we carry out our assessment activities. We need to remember that the central purpose of assessment is to support student learning, so in one way or another, our assessment has to centre on this purpose. **How do we provide feedback to our students? How much feedback and what type of feedback will best support our students' learning?** We respond to these questions in Chapter 6.

- *Assessment decisions* can support students' learning when grades accurately reflect what students know and can do. We make a range of decisions based on the results of our assessment. These decisions range from micro-level course decisions, such as what we need to do more or less of in a follow-up lesson, to macro-level decisions, which have important (even life-changing) consequences for our students, such as deciding which class a student should be placed in or whether a student can be admitted into a university. **What informs your assessment decisions? How can we ensure that our decisions are supporting our students' learning?** Chapters 3–7 address these questions.

As Taylor and Nolen (2008) rightly point out:

Assessment tools and processes have tremendous power in the lives of students – both in the ways that students come to judge their own abilities and in the ways that they represent what is important to know and be able to do. (p. 95)

As mentioned earlier, *assessment* is an umbrella term, which includes both our daily classroom assessment practices and large-scale testing, which is externally designed and administered to our students. In many cases, being successful in an

external, large-scale testing context is one of the learning goals of our students, which in turn influences our own instructional and assessment goals.

The following two terms best represent these dimensions of assessment:

- **Assessment *for* learning** refers to the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by students and their teachers to decide *where* students are in their learning process, *where* they need to go and *how* best to get there.
- **Assessment *of* learning** refers to assessments that happen *after* learning has occurred, to determine whether learning has happened. They are used to make statements about a student's learning status *at a particular point in time*.

As teachers, we engage in both dimensions of assessment practices. In fact, the synergy of assessment *for* learning punctuated with the use of assessment *of* learning is the best way to support our students' learning.

There are other ways of defining assessment, for example, formative assessment and **summative assessment**. According to Black and Wiliam (2009), formative assessment encompasses the following processes:

> Practice in a classroom is formative to the extent that evidence about student achievement is elicited, interpreted, and used by teachers, learners, or their peers, to make decisions about the next steps in instruction. (p. 9)

Alternatively, Cizek (2010) refers to formative assessment as:

> The collaborative processes engaged in by educators and students for the purpose of understanding the students' learning and conceptual organization, identification of strengths, diagnosis of weaknesses, areas of improvement, and as a source of information teachers can use in instructional planning and students can use in deepening their understanding and improving their achievement. (p. 6)

Formative assessment is in line with assessment *for* learning, where assessment processes are carried out collaboratively, and the assessment decisions are primarily about the direction in which teaching and learning should go. So typically there should not be a mark associated with formative assessment. Sometimes, as an incentive, teachers may award marks for participating in a process or completing a stage of an activity (e.g., participating in a writing conference, leading a group discussion). Such a practice may be problematic as it uses formative assessment for summative assessment purposes therefore changing the nature of the assessment. **Summative assessment** is used to evaluate student learning, skill acquisition and academic achievement at the conclusion of a defined instructional period – typically at the end of a project, unit, course, semester, programme, or school year. Summative assessment is in line with assessment *of* learning. Generally speaking, summative assessment is defined by the following three major criteria:

- Tests, assignments, or projects are used to determine whether students have learned what they were expected to learn. In other words, what makes an assessment 'summative' is not the design of the test, assignment, or self-evaluation, per se, but the way it is used, and the *decisions* made based on the assessment, that is, to determine whether and to what degree students have learned the material they have been taught. There is usually an evaluation mark given.
- Summative assessments are given at the conclusion of a specific instructional period, and therefore they are generally evaluative, rather than diagnostic, that is, they are more appropriately used to determine learning progress and achievement, evaluate the effectiveness of educational programmes, measure progress towards improvement goals, or make course-placement decisions, among other possible purposes.
- Summative-assessment results are often recorded as scores or grades that are then factored into a student's permanent academic record, whether they end up as letter grades on a report card or test scores used in the university-admission process.

Summative assessments are typically a major component of the grading process in most courses and programmes.

In recent years, increasingly, a new term has been used based on the research literature on the realtionship between assessment and motivation (Harlen and Deakin, 2003). **Assessment *as learning*** occurs when students reflect on and monitor their progress to inform their future learning goals. It is regularly occurring, formal or informal (e.g., peer feedback buddies, formal **self-assessment**), and helps students to take responsibility for their own past and future learning. It builds metacognition as it involves students in understanding the standards expected of them, in setting and monitoring their own learning goals, and in developing strategies for working towards achieving them.

ACTIVITY 1.1

This activity helps you to explore the meaning of classroom assessment, that is, what you do and what your students do (in peer/groups or individually). Look at Figure 1.1 below and note examples of the three types of assessments that you use in your own teaching. Identify examples of assessment that you use in your own classroom (or have experienced) which help to clarify where the learner is going; where the learner is; and how to get there. Here are two examples elicited from teachers who responded to this activity:

> Teacher 1: 'I provide oral feedback to students' first draft of writing to help them to refine their writing' – to provide feedback that moves learners forward.
> Teacher 2: 'I have asked my students to work in groups to do research on world music, so each student has something to contribute to the learning, and so assessment *of* the learning is shared among learners on an on-going basis' – to activate students as learning resources for one another.

	Where the learner is going	Where the learner is	How to get there
Teacher	Clarifying, sharing, and understanding learning intentions	Engineering effective discussions, tasks and activities that elicit evidence of learning	Providing feedback that moves learners forward
Peer		Activating students as learning resources for one another	
Learner		Activating students as owners of their own learning	

Figure 1.1   Dimensions of assessment (adapted from Wiliam, 2015)

1.2 Purposes of Assessment

As we can see from Figure 1.1 and from the above activity, assessment has multiple dimensions. Assessment also serves multiple purposes. Three main purposes of assessment are common in our classrooms.

- *Instructional*: This is the most essential purpose of our assessment practice, yet it is often neglected in the assessment literature. Assessment serves to gather information about students' understanding and skills. This purpose will require teachers to use *assessment tools* in collecting data on students' learning, understanding, and skills. Based on where students are in their learning process, as teachers we can plan and adjust our instruction. We engage in this type of assessment all the time in our classroom, for example, every time we ask our students if they have understood a point we

have presented, or when we observe a student working in a group. We need, however, to be more mindful in what assessment we do and how we do it. The *assessment events* and *processes* we conduct signal to our students what is important to learn, and how well their teacher supports their learning.

- *Student-Centred*: Diagnostic assessment refers to the process of identifying individual students' strengths and weaknesses (Alderson, 2005; Fox, Haggerty and Artemeva, 2016). The concept of diagnostic assessment has often been compared to assessments used for placement or remediation purposes. Both assess learning in order to establish which learning opportunities are appropriate for students' learning needs. In the case of **placement testing**, however, the purpose is to group students in a class based on, for example, similar skill development, learning needs, or proficiency levels, so that instruction is suitable for all of the students in the class. Diagnostic assessment, on the other hand, focuses on the individual student's strengths or weaknesses. Increasingly, external diagnostic assessment approaches are being used to identify students at risk of failing university courses in order to provide support for learning. For example, there are a large number of post-admission language assessment approaches (PELA) that connect external diagnostic assessment to learning opportunities (see, for example, Fox, 2009; Fox, Haggerty and Artemeva, 2016; Read, 2016). Within the classroom, teachers may draw on diagnostic assessment techniques to adapt course instruction and better meet their students' learning needs (Black and Wiliam, 1998). Both assessments for placement and for diagnostic purposes involve identifying students' needs in order to support their learning.

- *Administrative*: Grading is the process of summarizing student achievement using a numerical (e.g., 78) or ordinal (e.g., A, B, or C) scale. Grading is a complex evaluative practice that requires teachers to make judgments about student learning. Grades are used, most notably, to make public statements to students, parents and principals about student achievement. Thus, grading is one of the most high-stakes classroom assessment practices, with significant consequences for a student's self-perception, motivation for learning, for the prioritization of **curriculum** expectations, parental expectations and social relationships (Brookhart, 2013). Grading happens at the end of the instruction, and it is usually based on the final product or performance. This purpose is related to *summative assessment* or *assessment of learning* (see Chapter 6 for additional information).

ACTIVITY 1.2

Why do we assess our students? Take a look at the following purposes of assessment in Table 1.1 and see if you can put them into the following three categories: student-centred purposes, instructional purposes and administrative purposes. You can add your own examples to the bullet points below. If you wish to find out how a group of 267 English as a Second Language (ESL)/English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers categorized these purposes, you can read Cheng, Rogers and Hu (2004, pp. 367–368) for more information.

1. Student-centred purposes
   ○ Obtain information on my students' progress
   ○ Provide feedback to my students
   ○ ...
   ○ ...
   ○ ...

2. Instructional purposes
   ○ Plan my teaching
   ○ Diagnose strengths and weaknesses
   ○ ...
   ○ ...
   ○ ...

3. Administration purposes
   ○ Provide information to the central administration
   ○ ...
   ○ ...
   ○ ...

Table 1.1   Purposes of assessment and evaluation

Purposes

- To group my students for instruction purposes in my class
- To obtain information on my students' progress
- To plan my instruction
- To diagnose strengths and weaknesses in my own teaching and instruction
- To provide feedback to my students as they progress through the course
- To motivate my students to learn
- To 'make' my students work harder
- To prepare my students for standardized tests they will need to take in the future (e.g., the Test of English as a Foreign Language)
- To diagnose strengths and weaknesses in my students
- To formally document growth in my students' learning
- To determine the final grades for my students
- To provide information to the central administration (e.g., school, university)
- To provide information to an outside funding agency

Understanding the different purposes for assessment is the most important first step in making informed assessment decisions. The purposes of our assessment influence the frequency and timing of our assessment (*assessment events*), the methods we use (*assessment tools*) and how an assessment is carried out (*assessment processes*). The above assessment purposes are not mutually exclusive, nor are they inherently *good* or *bad*. The key is for us to contemplate assessment purposes, their impact and the many choices we have in conducting our assessments, choosing assessment tools and creating

assessment processes. Only by making a conscious and well-informed effort can we ensure high-quality classroom assessment practice.

1.3 High-Quality Assessment

High-quality assessment practices are those that provide results verifying and promoting targeted student learning. There are a number of fundamental aspects of such high-quality practices.

- **Alignment:** The degree of agreement among curriculum, instruction, standards and assessments (tests). In order to achieve alignment, we need to select appropriate assessment methods, which reflect or represent clear and appropriate learning outcomes or goals.
- **Validity:** The appropriateness of inferences, uses and consequences that result from the assessment. This means that a high-quality assessment process (i.e., the gathering, interpreting and using of the information elicited) is sound, trustworthy and legitimate based on the assessment results.
- **Reliability:** The consistency, stability and dependability of the assessment results are related to reliability. This quality criteria guards against the various errors of our assessments. For example, reliability is the indicator of the number of errors we are making in marking students' work and how consistent our marking is.
- **Fairness:** This is achieved when students are provided with an equal opportunity to demonstrate achievement and assessment yields scores that are comparably valid. This requires transparency, in that all students know the learning targets, criteria for success, and on what and how they will be assessed. Fairness also means that the students are given equal opportunity to learn. Fair assessment avoids student stereotyping and bias in assessment tasks and procedures. Appropriate accommodation is provided to students with special needs.

- **Consequences:** This term is associated with the results of the use or misuse of assessment results. Research into the consequences of large-scale testing tends to focus on the after-effects of test interpretations and use on various stakeholders including value implications and social consequences (Messick, 1989). The term *washback* – the influence of testing on teaching and learning – is now commonly employed in applied linguistics (Cheng, 2014). Some examples of consequences are that students can learn in ways that are consistent with the assessment **task**. Assessment can motivate (and, when it is of low quality, potentially demotivate) students to learn. The student–teacher relationship is influenced by the nature of assessment.

- **Practicality and Efficiency**: Considerations are given to the information that is gathered by assessment. A teacher's life is extremely busy, and this influences the choice of assessment events, tools and processes. Are the resources, effort and time required for the assessment worth the investment? For example, it is not realistic to mark all students' first written drafts. In fact, teachers should not mark the first draft. Rather, teachers need to guide students in self- and **peer-assessment** of their drafts, support students' learning, and encourage them to take responsibility for their own learning, that is, activate students' ownership of their learning as illustrated in Figure 1.1.

ACTIVITY 1.3

1. Reflect on one experience in your life when you felt good about being assessed or taking a test.
   Or
   Reflect on one experience in your life when you felt bad as a result of being assessed or taking a test.
   - What was the experience?
   - Which aspects of testing and assessment were related to that experience?
   - Was the experience related to test contents, test tasks, test types, test administration, or how the test was marked?

2. Write down the factors that you feel contributed to your positive experience in taking a language test. For example,
   ○ Clear test directions
   ○ Familiar test formats
   ○ ...
   ○ ...
   ○ ...
3. Write down the factors that you feel contributed to your negative experiences. For example,
   ○ Noisy testing environment
   ○ Too little time
   ○ ...
   ○ ...
   ○ ...
4. How do these positive or negative factors contribute to the overall quality of assessment?
5. Read the following two excerpts from test-takers about their test-taking experiences from Cheng and DeLuca (2011), and see how these experiences enhance or decrease the overall quality of assessment.

I couldn't hear the tape clearly so I immediately told the invigilator and was sent to the special room [an alternate listening room]. Already anxious about missing some listening materials, I was assigned to sit at the back of the room in front of windows that faced a basketball court. The door to my right was open and I could hear the noise of students playing downstairs and of those walking past. A portable stereo player was placed on a chair at the front of the room. The volume was really low and I found it extremely difficult to follow the content. (Cheng and DeLuca, 2011, p. 110)

Excerpt 1 Negative test-taking experience

> Usually when taking listening tests, the time limit is so tight it makes me nervous. Some tasks or questions appear after a long audio text such that test-takers have to memorize what they have just heard; the tests require test-takers to have good memory skills. In contrast, this listening test was chunked into 4 parts, and the first three parts were divided into further sub-parts. Before and after each part and sub-part, sufficient time was given to test-takers to familiarize themselves with the questions, or check their answers. These practices allow test-takers to feel at ease and enabled assessment of test-takers' listening ability – which should be the major criterion. (Cheng and DeLuca, 2011, p. 111)

Excerpt 2 Positive test-taking experience

The first excerpt illustrates how test environmental factors contributed *negatively* to a test-taker's perceptions of assessment fairness. The second excerpt, on the other hand, describes a testing experience where time was more effectively managed so that this test-taker could complete tasks and respond to the test tasks in ways that were more consistent with authentic listening in non-test contexts. Furthermore, because the tasks were 'chunked' into well-timed parts and sub-parts, and breaks were allowed throughout the test, anxiety levels were reduced. As a result, this test-taker may well have performed at a higher level, which was more representative of his or her actual listening proficiency.

Understanding such testing and assessment experiences is an essential area for continued validation inquiry. Such inquiry can help teachers to learn experientially and reflect critically on core aspects of assessment, such as *construct representation*, that is, how well a test measures what it is designed to measure. Tapping into testing experiences gives us a window on test structure and content, scoring, administration/conditions and timing. All of these features of testing are

important in our consideration of how well the test is measuring the intended construct.

Investigating testing experiences also helps us to better understand sources of *construct-irrelevant variance*, that is, what interferes with the measurement of the construct. We need to ask, are we measuring something that we did not intend to measure? For example, if we are measuring listening comprehension on a **proficiency test**, and students at the front of the room can hear more clearly than students at the back of the room, then where students sit may negatively or positively influence their scores on the test. In this case, sound quality and seating position contribute to construct-irrelevant variance. We need to reflect on and address the many sources of construct-irrelevant variance that may interfere with good measurement, such as test coaching/preparation, emotions/self-efficacy and the misuse of test scores, in evaluating the usefulness of a test. In your own experience of taking tests, you may remember a time when you did not do well because of something that undermined your performance. Conversely, there may have been a time when you did better than expected, because of some advantage that was not related to the skill being measured. Eliciting testing experiences from stakeholders (e.g., students, parents and teachers) helps us to clarify the impact or social consequences of a test by considering their accounts of how valid and/or fair they consider the test. It helps teachers to better understand the interconnectedness of testing constructs, processes, uses and impacts on learning. We will revisit this point in Chapter 7 of this book.

1.4 Beliefs about Assessment

What we assess and how we assess it depends to a large extent on our interconnected – typically implicit – system of knowledge, values and beliefs that inform our actions in the classroom. These constitute our *teaching philosophy*. As teachers, it is important for

us to be aware of our own philosophy of assessment, to explore the philosophies of others, and to acknowledge the overlaps and differences between the two. Reflecting on our own teaching philosophy is a useful first step towards building common ground on assessment in our classrooms, programmes, schools, universities and other language learning contexts. However, you may not have stopped to consider your own beliefs, assumptions and knowledge about assessment as you engage in the day-to-day teaching of your class. Teaching demands your full attention, and there is rarely time to step back and consider fundamental questions about what we are doing or why.

It is not that we do not spend a great deal of time planning, organizing and implementing our lessons, and a large part of this involves ongoing assessment such as marking our students' papers, maintaining records of student performance, providing feedback to students on work-in-progress, and developing quizzes, essay assignments, or projects. It is likely, however, that you may not have had the time to reflect on *why* you decide to assess one way instead of another, nor is it likely that you have had the time to discuss your **assessment plans** and experiences with other teachers. One unfortunate characteristic of most language teaching situations is that time for talking with colleagues is often limited either to meetings that are primarily focused on administrative concerns or to brief discussions during breaks or over lunch.

Even in educational settings where much or all of the assessment that counts is *external* to the teacher and classroom, for example, in contexts with **high-stakes** national examinations, proficiency tests, or professional certification tests, individual teachers will prepare their students in distinctively different ways. It may be that *all* of the students in a programme, school, or university are taking the *same* test, but research suggests that each teacher's approach to test preparation and support is unique (Fox and Cheng, 2007; Wang and Cheng, 2009). Over the years, much has been written about teacher decision-making in the classroom (e.g., Cheng, 1999; Woods, 1996) and although external factors such as tests, textbooks, students' proficiency, class size and workload may to

some extent influence a teacher's choice of assessment activities, what a teacher *believes* about language teaching and learning – based on attitudes, understanding, knowledge and experience – may be far more important in the choice of specific assessment activities.

Teachers' individual philosophies may align with or diverge from the prevailing educational or curricular expectations that shape the contexts within which they teach and assess (see Cortazzi and Jin, 1997; Gorsuch, 2000). As mentioned earlier in the chapter, alignment is the ideal in ensuring high-quality assessment. At times, however, there may be more divergence than alignment. Commenting in 2001 on the role of externally imposed tests and standards on classroom teachers in Australia, Davidson noted the 'tension between the philosophical base of the ESL field which emphasizes diversity and complexity, and the demands of the "mainstream" educational agenda for commonality, simplicity, and homogeneity' (Davidson, 2001, p. 30). When there is misalignment or divergence, teachers often adapt their assessment approaches so that they are consistent with their philosophies of teaching and learning. In the rest of this chapter, we will consider four prominent educational philosophies that have been influential in the history of language teaching. Then, we will help you to probe your own philosophy of teaching and learning. At the end of the chapter, we will ask you to consider how your philosophy of teaching and learning languages relates to the decisions you make about assessment.

1.4.1 Prominent Educational Philosophies in Language Teaching

White (1988) identified three different educational philosophies, which have characterized the mainstream educational agenda during different periods of language teaching history. He labelled these philosophies: *classical humanism, progressivism* and *reconstructionism*. White discussed the implicit beliefs, values and assumptions that are evident in these three different philosophies of language teaching curriculum. His labels are useful for our discussion of your own philosophy of assessment.

Using White's labels, let's briefly define each of the educational philosophies that inform language teaching curriculum. We will then look at how these curricular philosophies influence the way in which we undertake assessment in our classrooms.

- *Classical Humanism*
  A classical humanist curriculum values tradition, culture, history, literature and knowledge about a language. The main curricular goal is to pass on to the most capable students the knowledge, values, literature and history of a language. Sometimes the emphasis on knowledge has meant that living languages – such as English, Spanish and French – have been taught as if they were dead ones, such as Latin. Students typically translate texts, memorize vocabulary, learn about the grammar of the language and practise grammatical exercises. Literature is of primary importance. Texts (usually short passages) are chosen because they have particular literary or historical significance. They may be memorized and recited, copied, analysed, or translated. Performance expectations are fixed, and typically, excellence is defined in terms of accuracy.

- *Progressivism*
  A progressive curriculum focuses on the individual learner and defines language teaching activity as learner-centred or learner-led. Although informed by overall purpose and goals for language learning, progressive curriculums typically require teachers to define course activity and content in relation to **needs analysis** or other evidence of student interests, preferences, or performances, which set the direction, emphasis and activity of the course. The teacher's attention is focused on the ongoing processes of language learning and development in relation to the predefined purpose and/or goals of the course. Because each learner is unique, varying in background, aptitude, interest and motivation, learning is also unique and individual. Teachers may negotiate learners' individual work plans by probing learners' views on what they need or want from their language learning experience; and through examination of gaps between a student's current language capability and the goals of the student, teacher and course. Allwright (e.g., 1982) is often referred to as a pioneer in discussions of students' perceived *needs* and *wants* in relation to teachers' assessments of *lacks* – the difference between a current level and a desired level of language competence, proficiency, or performance. The language teacher's role, according to Allwright, and in keeping with a

progressive curriculum, is to: (1) help students to identify with increasing clarity their language skill areas in need of improvement, and (2) elaborate strategies, which would help students to attain the desired increase in their achievement of those skills. Ongoing activity is structured in relation to the process and progress in the course. What happens in a class depends directly on the teacher's day-to-day assessment of what an individual or a group of learners need to move closer to the purpose or goals that have been negotiated.

- *Reconstructionism*
  A reconstructionist curriculum identifies specific learning outcomes based on overall course purposes and goals. These learning outcomes guide the selection of activity and experiences in the course, all of which are designed in relation to the predefined criteria, which identify what students should know and be able to do at the end of the course. Teachers may work with specific materials, textbooks, or tasks as they support their students in achieving the predefined course goals, which are often referred to as intended learning outcomes (e.g., Biggs and Tang, 2011). Some reconstructionist curriculums are mastery-based (pass or fail), others are related to successfully demonstrating a degree of achievement and attainment in relation to benchmark criteria (e.g., the **Common European Framework** of Reference; the **Canadian Language Benchmarks**). Criteria are often related to tasks with different levels of difficulty. Where tasks are not defined, teachers develop their own tasks in relation to the benchmark criteria, taking into account the students they are working with. In Chapter 2 we take a closer look at outcomes-based or reconstructionist curriculum in language teaching.

To White's three curricular philosophies, we will add one more:

- *Post-Modernism or Eclecticism*
  This educational philosophy values the spontaneous, unique, unplanned and emergent learning that takes place each day in a classroom setting. Because we are all unique individuals, every classroom, every interaction between a student and a teacher, the experiences of a language activity, and what may be learned from it are also unique, individual and unpredictable. Developmental and individual learning is valued; outcomes will differ because learners differ. Typically learners are divided into groups by proficiency levels, interests, ages and so on. The teacher supports their

development on an ongoing basis by identifying whatever activity seems to provide the next best step in supporting the individual student's learning processes.

The four curricular philosophies defined above have very different expectations for teachers, students, content, context and assessment. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1988) we can analyse any language curriculum by examining the role of the content, the teacher, the student and the context or milieu. To this list of 'commonplaces of curriculum' (pp. 84–85), we will add the role of *assessment*. We will now examine the implicit roles which each of the four curricular philosophies suggests in the following activity.

ACTIVITY 1.4

Each of the four language curriculum philosophies defined in this chapter is listed in Table 1.2. Working alone, with a partner, or in a small group complete the table with what you under-stand to be the role of teacher, student, content, context and assessment. An example is provided for you in Table 1.2.

After identifying the role of assessment, list one or two assessment practices that you think would be used by teachers who subscribe to this teaching philosophy. If you fill in the table on your own, discuss it with a partner or a group when you have finished.

Also answer these questions below if there is time.

- Have you ever taught a class in which the curricular philos-ophy was similar to one of the four we have defined in this chapter?
- Have you ever studied/learned a language in a class which was similar to one of the four educational philosophies?

Table 1.2 The commonplaces of language curriculum

Educational philosophy of curriculum	Role of the teacher	Role of the student	Role of content	Role of context	Role of assessment: Assessment practices	My experience
Classical humanism	To provide a model; to teach reading of valued texts; to monitor careful replication of texts and their meanings. Focus is on reading and writing.	To reproduce, memorize, or translate valued texts.	Students learn **about** a language (often its history and culture) through exposure to highly valued texts. They do not learn how to use the language.	The texts provide the context.	Focus on correct form, accuracy: e.g., grammar tests, translation, dictation, recitation, vocabulary tests.	
Progressivism						
Reconstructionism						
Post-Modernism						

1.4.2 What is Your Own Philosophy of Assessment?

Now that we have had a chance to discuss different curricular philosophies, consider your personal philosophy of teaching and learning and its relationship to what you assess and how you assess it in your own language classroom. It is useful to reflect on our own values and beliefs about teaching and learning languages and to consider how these influence assessment decisions that we make in our classrooms. In examining our teaching philosophy it is important to keep in mind Prabhu's (1990) advice that there is no one best method for language teaching. This is equally true of assessment.

ACTIVITY 1.5

You can use your responses to the statements in the questionnaire in Table 1.3 to reflect on your teaching philosophy and consider how it influences decisions you make about assessment in your classroom.

Respond to each of the following statements by circling the number on the right-hand side of the table which best reflects your agreement (or disagreement). This questionnaire uses what is referred to as a Likert scale (named after the man who invented it). If you circle zero, you indicate that you completely disagree with the statement; if you circle five, you indicate that you completely agree. In many cases you may be somewhere in the middle – at times, leaning in the direction of disagree; at other times, leaning in the direction of agree. Circle the number that best reflects your response to each of the statements.

Please respond to all of the statements! After you have finished, you may want to compare your responses with one of your peers or colleagues and discuss where your responses were similar and where they differed.

Table 1.3 Questionnaire: What is most important in teaching a language?

ITEM	STATEMENTS	DISAGREE --------AGREE
1.	When I teach a language, my primary focus is on the rules of grammar.	0 1 2 3 4 5
2.	Memorizing vocabulary is essential in learning a new language.	0 1 2 3 4 5
3.	First and foremost, the needs of my students determine what I teach.	0 1 2 3 4 5
4.	Day-to-day interaction with my students guides what we will learn next, and how we will learn it.	0 1 2 3 4 5
5.	Understanding of the literature, culture, and history of a language is the most important reason for teaching a language.	0 1 2 3 4 5
6.	I plan all of my lessons in advance in relation to predetermined goals for learning.	0 1 2 3 4 5
7.	It is important to teach what the syllabus or textbook tells me to teach, to ensure the aims of the course are systematically met.	0 1 2 3 4 5
8.	Before teaching a new course, I start by defining what my students should know and be able to do by the end of the course.	0 1 2 3 4 5
9.	I prefer to negotiate the content we will cover during a course directly with my students.	0 1 2 3 4 5
10.	The quality of learning increases when it is meaningful to a learner.	0 1 2 3 4 5
11.	Students learn the most when they are actively engaged.	0 1 2 3 4 5

12.	It is impossible to predict what an individual student will learn, but I will help each student to learn as much as possible.	0	1	2	3	4	5
13.	My overall plan is to let language learning just happen freely and naturally in my classroom.	0	1	2	3	4	5
14.	How and what I teach depends directly on what seems to work with the greatest number of students.	0	1	2	3	4	5
15.	I always begin a course by identifying my students' needs and interests.	0	1	2	3	4	5
16.	The ongoing *process* of learning is most important – not the content we cover, the products, or the outcomes.	0	1	2	3	4	5
17.	I'll try any approach that I think will work to support my students' learning.	0	1	2	3	4	5
18.	It is important to correct any and all student mistakes.	0	1	2	3	4	5
19.	Unplanned and spontaneous student interaction promotes the most meaningful language learning.	0	1	2	3	4	5
20.	My main focus is on the long-term goals of my course.	0	1	2	3	4	5
21.	*Who* I am working with determines what and how I teach a language.	0	1	2	3	4	5
22.	I need to constantly reflect on my teaching with a view to modifying my goals in relation to my students' day-to-day development.	0	1	2	3	4	5
23.	I do not expect all of my students to achieve the same outcomes, because every student is different.	0	1	2	3	4	5
24.	The best and brightest students in my class deserve the most attention.	0	1	2	3	4	5

25.	Who is in my class is not as important as what I am teaching.	0 1 2 3 4 5
26.	I continuously evaluate my students' learning in relation to the learning outcomes defined for my course.	0 1 2 3 4 5
27.	Students only value what is graded and marked.	0 1 2 3 4 5
28.	Students' achievement increases when classrooms are highly competitive.	0 1 2 3 4 5
29.	All language in the class must be monitored and corrected by the teacher, because if students are exposed to errors, they will learn and reproduce them.	0 1 2 3 4 5
30.	Teachers must plan and then follow their plans in teaching a language class, because digressions waste everyone's time.	0 1 2 3 4 5
31.	Incidental or unexpected learning is not as important as predetermined course outcomes.	0 1 2 3 4 5
32.	Spontaneous and free-flowing interaction is essential in learning to use a new language.	0 1 2 3 4 5
33.	I don't know exactly what I'm going to teach until I'm actually teaching it.	0 1 2 3 4 5
34.	Every language task, activity, or experience should be undertaken with a clear purpose or goal in mind.	0 1 2 3 4 5
35.	I define the learning outcomes of my course first, and then I design the tasks and activities that will help my students achieve them.	0 1 2 3 4 5
36.	Students learn the most when something is personally interesting or useful.	0 1 2 3 4 5

1.4.3 Your Own Assessment Profile

You may have found some of the statements in the questionnaire above were difficult to answer. You may also have been surprised to find, if you discussed your responses with others, that some statements prompted considerable disagreement. The areas of disagreement are the most informative because they suggest deep values, beliefs and assumptions about learning and teaching, which are unique to individuals. These differences are key when we are working with our colleagues within a programme. It is important to acknowledge and discuss all of our areas of agreement, but it is equally important to air our differences and work together towards the co-creation of common ground. This is particularly important when we are deciding how best to assess multiple classes in a programme, to evaluate programme quality and monitor the programme's success in meeting its aims and purposes.

ACTIVITY 1.6

We can now relate your answers to the questionnaire in Table 1.3 to our discussion of curricular and personal teaching philosophies. Each of the questionnaire items reflects one of the four curricular philosophies introduced above, namely, classical humanism, progressivism, reconstructionism, or postmodernism/eclecticism.

Directions: Write each number you circled on the Likert scale in the questionnaire above (Table 1.3) next to the questionnaire items listed in Table 1.4 below. When you have finished entering the numbers in Table 1.4, add up each column in order to create your own teaching, learning and assessment profile. The totals provide you with an overall profile of your philosophy of teaching and learning across the four curricular philosophies.

- Which curricular philosophy is dominant in your profile? Which is least relevant to you?

- How does your personal profile relate to the curricular philosophy of the context in which you are teaching (or plan to teach)? Is your personal profile aligned with the prevailing philosophy of education in your context of teaching?
- Is there a gap between your personal philosophy and that of your programme?
- How does your profile compare with those of your peers or colleagues?

Table 1.4 My philosophy of teaching and learning

Classical Humanism	Progressivism	Reconstructionism	Post-Modernism or Eclecticism
Item 1:	Item 3:	Item 6:	Item 4:
Item 2:	Item 9:	Item 7:	Item 13:
Item 5:	Item 10:	Item 8:	Item 14:
Item 18:	Item 11:	Item 20:	Item 16:
Item 24:	Item 12:	Item 26:	Item 17:
Item 25:	Item 15:	Item 30:	Item 19:
Item 27:	Item 21:	Item 31:	Item 32:
Item 28:	Item 22:	Item 34:	Item 33:
Item 29:	Item 23:	Item 35:	Item 36:
Total:	Total:	Total:	Total:

1.5 Looking Back at Chapter 1

At the beginning of this chapter, you read about assessment. Next you considered beliefs, values and assumptions about teaching and learning languages, which, along with your

knowledge, come together to form your general philosophy. This is how you can relate your philosophy of teaching and learning to assessment.

Now we are ready to focus on assessment – your philosophy of assessment.

- Given your profile, which assessment practices would best align with your personal philosophy of teaching and learning languages?
- Which assessment practices would seem not to?
- Which types of assessment dominate the context in which you are teaching (or planning to teach)?
- Can you identify ways in which you might adapt or work with a dominant assessment strategy so that it supports your philosophy of teaching and learning?

You may want to read more about the issues discussed in this chapter. The following are suggested resources for further reading and reflection.

Suggested Readings

Cheng, L., Rogers, T. & Hu, H. (2004). ESL/EFL instructors' classroom assessment practices: Purposes, methods and procedures. *Language Testing,* 21(3), 360–89.
This is one of the first studies published in language testing on teacher assessment literacy. This comparative survey study examined a range of teaching contexts represented by Canadian ESL, Hong Kong ESL/EFL, and Chinese EFL in which 267 instructors participated. This study documented the purposes, methods and procedures of assessment in these three contexts. The findings provide insights into the nature of assessment practices in relation to ESL/EFL classroom teaching and learning at the tertiary level.

Clandinin, D. J. & Connelly, F. M. (1992). Teacher as curriculum maker. In P. Jackson (ed.), *Handbook of Curriculum Research* (pp. 363–41). New York: Macmillan.

Clandinin and Connelly's seminal discussion of the centrality of the teacher in curriculum making (planning, implementation and evaluation). In their long-term collaboration, Clandinin and Connelly have published extensively on *narrative inquiry*. This research approach gathers teachers' personal narratives of their classroom experience in order to increase our understanding of teaching and learning in practice.

Davidson, C. (2001). Current policies, programs and practice in school ESL. In B. Mohan, C. Leung & C. Davison (eds.), *English as a second language in the mainstream: Teaching, learning and identity* (pp. 30–50). London: Longman.
Davidson examines the tensions that exist between external policies and language teachers' perspectives on teaching and learning at the classroom level. This chapter demonstrates the important interactions that take place when policies, programmes and practices are being discussed by language teachers who have very different beliefs about teaching.

Fox, J. (2009). Moderating top-down policy impact and supporting EAP curricular renewal: Exploring the potential of diagnostic assessment. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes,* 8(1), 26–42.
Fox provides an in-depth view of the role that a diagnostic assessment approach played in addressing issues arising from a policy decision with negative impact on language teaching in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programme. Her research investigates the differing responses of a group of EAP teachers to diagnostic information provided to them through assessment. These differences are evidence of teachers' varying philosophies of teaching.