

MY EXPERIENCE WITH INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

My introduction to IPA's came when my state (Ohio) announced that the new teacher evaluation system would include a student growth measure. Like many of my colleagues, I was immediately concerned by this change. While many of my students were successfully learning the vocabulary and structures that I was teaching them, there were others who were not able to memorize the long lists of vocabulary and various verb conjugations that comprised my textbook-based curriculum. These students often did very well on the communicative activities that I incorporated into my teaching, but they weren't able to demonstrate mastery of isolated vocabulary and structures on written tests.

Fortunately for me, both the Ohio Department of Education and the Ohio Foreign Language Association provided a series of professional development opportunities designed to introduce my colleagues and me to a type of assessment that would enable us to measure growth in our students in a more comprehensive way. Rather than assessing the extent to which our students had memorized a specific set of vocabulary or grammatical structures, we were encouraged to evaluate our students' growth in language proficiency using an Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA). Although ACTFL has been encouraging this type of assessment for years, I had never used one with my own students and knew very little about this type of evaluation.

As I have since learned, an IPA is an assessment of all three modes of communication. In the first phase, the students read and/or listen to an authentic text and complete a comprehension guide. In the second, they complete an interpersonal task in which they have a conversation related to the topic in the text they interpreted. In the third phase, the students present what they have learned from the text and/or conversations in a written or oral presentation. Rather than identifying the extent to which a student has memorized a list of vocabulary words or mastered a grammatical structure, these assessments assess a student's overall proficiency on tasks related to the unit of study.

After consulting some examples of IPA's created by other teachers, I was ready to begin implementing this type of assessment for my students and using the resulting data to measure their growth. While my IPA's have continued to improve since these first attempts, I saw immediate improvements in my stu-

dents' proficiency as a result of using this type of evaluation. Two years later I am in awe of what my students are able to do with their language skills! The proficiency-based methodologies I have adopted as a result of implementing IPA's have not only increased my students' proficiency, they have fostered my own professional growth enormously. I am now designing my own thematic units and creating IPA's in each of the five different French classes that I teach each day.

While each teacher will find her own ways of creating and implementing IPA's, I have found that the following process works well for me. As suggested by the principles of backwards design, I begin my planning of each thematic unit by creating the IPA I will administer at the end of instruction. My first step in this process is to identify a context in which my learners would use the functions, structures, and vocabulary that I will teach in the unit. For example, a student must be able to express his likes and dislikes, to write a letter to a keypal describing her family, to write a post for an *au pair* Web site. These contexts play an important role in establishing how the students' learning can be applied to a real world experience.

After identifying a context for the IPA, I choose the authentic texts that the students will read and/or listen to for the interpretive task. Although many teachers are hesitant to assign authentic resources to their novice learners, I have found that when I adapt the task to the students' proficiency level, they are able to successfully interpret these texts. For example, a new learner can comprehend an office supply store's flyer by using visual clues, cognates, and basic vocabulary that he learned in the first few days of language study. As his proficiency increases, he will be able to interpret meaning from infographics, Tweets, children's magazine articles, and eventually longer texts related to his own personal interests. Likewise, a student's increasing proficiency in interpretive listening skills allows her to progress from understanding the main idea in a cartoon to identifying specific details in a news video. While the process of curating appropriate authentic resources takes some time, there are many great resources that can streamline this process. AATF curates appropriate YouTube videos at [<https://www.youtube.com/user/aatfrench/videos?view=1>] and resources of all types at [<https://www.pinterest.com/aatfrench/>], [<https://delicious.com/>

2016 National French Week - November 4-10

AATFrench], and [<https://www.facebook.com/AATFrench>], and on their new wiki, [<http://frenchteachingresources.wikispaces.com/>].

After selecting the authentic text(s) for the IPA, I create the comprehension guide that I will use to assess the extent to which the students are able to interpret the text. ACTFL provides a useful template for these guides in their manual, *Implementing Integrated Performance Assessment* (available for purchase at [www.actfl.org/publications/books-and-brochures/implementing-integrated-performance-assessment#sthash.PBGCLqCB.dpuf]).

Next, I create the interpersonal task in which the students will discuss a topic related to the authentic text. The Novice Mid learners in the earlier examples might discuss their own school supplies after reading the office supply flyer or their personal likes and dislikes after reading posts on a keypal Web site. Novice High students might discuss their daily routines after reading an article about a Francophone child's typical day, while the increased proficiency of Intermediate students allows them to complete more complex tasks such as debates related to the content of an article on an environmental or political topic. While I prefer to assess my students' interpersonal performances "live," other teachers have the students record these conversations so that they can be assessed at a later time.

Finally, I create the presentational task in which the students present the information they have learned from the interpretive and interpersonal tasks either orally or in writing. The type of task depends, of course, on the proficiency level of the students. At the beginning of instruction the writing may be limited to composing lists, but after a few weeks of instructions the students can write Tweets, keypal messages, and blog posts incorporating information gleaned from the authentic text and interpersonal conversation.

Although an IPA is, by definition, a type of assessment, adopting this form of measurement has significantly changed how I teach. When I began using this type of test, many of the traditional methods I had been using no longer seemed relevant. Exercises which focused on forms rather than meaning did not provide opportunities for my students to practice the skills they would need on the IPA. While a well-designed IPA assesses the extent to which students have acquired the vocabulary and structures required

to perform the tasks, rote memorization of this content is not enough. Instead, students need to practice the communicative skills that will be evaluated on these assessments.

As a result of incorporating IPA's into my teaching practices, I have made considerable changes to my overall methodology. The majority of my instructional time is now devoted to activities in which my students interpret authentic texts, discuss topics related to the unit theme, and present information orally and in writing. These tasks enable the students to not only acquire the vocabulary and structures that they will demonstrate on the IPA, they also develop the students' overall proficiency. By providing opportunities for students to interpret authentic texts throughout the instructional period, I ensure that my students improve their ability to use context clues and make inferences, while at the same time increasing their vocabulary. Frequent open-ended partner conversations provide opportunities to use both vocabulary and structures in context and negotiate meaning, while preparing written and oral presentations help students memorize these structures.

As my methodologies have evolved to focus on proficiency I have seen many positive results in my classroom. Most importantly, all of my students are now

able to experience success in language learning. While some types of learners struggle to memorize long lists of vocabulary and grammatical rules, in my experience nearly all students can demonstrate increased learning on an IPA. Not because it's "easier" but because I am assessing them on a continuum of performance. Instead of taking tests designed to reveal what they don't know, my students are now completing assessments designed to show what they can do with their evolving language skills. While I might spend more time creating an IPA than I did when using a textbook assessment, I find that the time is well worth it in terms of increased student confidence and ability to use their language skills in real-world tasks. As my students experience this success and understand the relevance of their learning, they are increasingly enrolling in upper level classes. Lastly, the IPA's I use for my annual pre- and post-tests have provided data that demonstrates growth in every student.

For specific examples of IPA's that I have used with my students, see my blog, *Madame's Musings*, available at [madameshepard.com].

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