

## Testing as a Part of Genuine Assessment in a High School Language Class

The purpose of assessment in the Latin classroom is too often to assign a grade, to have evidence to show a parent or administrator that procedures were followed and standards were upheld. What happens when tests are given purely to show where progress has been made and improvement needs to take place? Over the years in my own classroom, I have asked myself countless times, usually when facing a stack of tests to grade, why I set exams in the first place. As someone who excelled in school, who has a passionate love for Latin and the Classics, I have, in weaker moments, beamed at the A's and scowled at the D's and F's as if it were a personal insult. "Why did that student not learn? The A students did, so it could not be me. . .right?" We all know, pedagogically and professionally, that there are students who will learn no matter what. There are also students who are determined not care about your required class or who were too homesick to prepare adequately or who simply froze at the time of the exam. Some students will be driven by laziness, an overwhelming workload, or the pressure to succeed to take dishonest shortcuts. What have their grades told you about what they know or what they really can do with the material? The answers as to why and *how* we should test those students are very different from those answers for the student who could learn whether we are in the room or not. This paper will explore the transformation of my classroom from a traditional one-chance quiz/test program to a hybrid of approaches: a flipped model with emphasis on what the students can do with the material at each stage and how that ability will translate to other subjects and tasks. While some of these changes have come through trial and error over the years, others have been prompted by the work of organizations such as ACTFL (Sandrock, 2010) and ASCD (Greenstein, 2010), the most recent redesign of the AP curriculum (College Board, 2012), and interest in recent the skills-based educational movement typified by such groups as P21

(p21.org). Despite a seeming de-emphasis on testing from those influences, my students are actually assessed much more frequently than they were in the past. Both the form of the assessments and their role in the grading scale have changed, however. Now my students are asked to show not only that they have the knowledge they need to read the next section of Latin but also that they can manage their time and apply what they are learning to their future pursuits. Students also have many opportunities throughout the year to showcase their abilities through national tests such as the NLE and the Classical Literacy Exam as well as competition at the State JCL Convention. Results on these standardized tests have improved as I have implemented these reforms, indicating that my students are still learning within the new structure of my class. If these changes help reluctant students come out of their shells or take the pressure off well-intentioned but struggling students so that they can learn to enjoy the material at hand, then my class has indeed passed a more important test than any one traditional final could envision.

### Bibliography

College Board. *AP Latin: Course and Exam Description*. New York: College Board, 2012.

Greenstein, Laura. *What Teachers Really Need to Know about Formative Assessment*.

Alexandria: ASCD, 2010.

P21. "Framework for 21 Century Learning." <http://www.p21.org/about-us/p21-framework>.

Accessed August 15, 2016.

Sandrock, Paul. *The Keys to Assessing Language Performance: A teacher's manual for measuring student progress*. Alexandria: ACTFL, 2010.