

# Table of Contents

*Reproducible pages are in italics.*

<i>About the Author</i> .....	ix
<i>Foreword</i> .....	xi
<b>Introduction: Breaking Ground on Common Language Assessment</b> .....	1
About This Book.....	2
Who This Book Is for.....	3
The Organization of This Book.....	3
<b>Chapter 1: Common Language Assessment</b> .....	5
Rationale for Common Language Assessment.....	6
Definition of Common Language Assessment.....	7
Framework for Common Language Assessment.....	8
Building Blocks.....	9
Professional Learning Teams.....	10
The Structure of Professional Learning Teams.....	11
Professional Development for Professional Learning Teams.....	12
<i>Activity 1.1: A Rating Scale for the Principles of Common Language Assessment</i> .....	14
<i>Constructing Common Language Assessment</i> .....	16
<i>Activity 1.2: Meeting Preferences for Your Professional Learning Team</i> .....	18
<i>Activity 1.3: A Professional Development Plan</i> .....	19
<b>Chapter 2: Phase I—Planning</b> .....	21
Considerations for Planning.....	22
Questions for Phase I: Planning.....	23
The Diversity of Language Learners.....	25
Young English Learners.....	26
Students With Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE).....	27
Newcomers.....	28
Long-Term English Learners.....	28
Learners With Considerations for Special Education.....	29
Heritage Language Learners.....	29
Informing Stakeholders Using Data.....	29
Recap of the Planning Phase.....	31
Building Blocks.....	31
<i>Activity 2.1: Questions for Phase I—Planning</i> .....	33
<i>Activity 2.2: Checklist for Phase I—Planning</i> .....	34
<i>Activity 2.3: People and Timeline for Phase I—Planning</i> .....	35
<i>Activity 2.4: Defining the Population of Language Learners</i> .....	36
<i>Activity 2.5: Language Profiles for English Learners</i> .....	38
<i>Activity 2.6: Planning Common Language Assessment in Settings With Multiple Languages of Instruction</i> .....	39
<i>Activity 2.7: Spheres of Influence</i> .....	40
<b>Chapter 3: Phase II—Design</b> .....	41
Questions for Phase II: Design.....	41
Overall Design.....	43

Examination and Selection of Standards	47
Language Development Standards	49
Common Language Tasks	51
Common Language Tasks With Differentiation	55
Standards-Referenced Recording Forms	61
Recap of the Design Phase	61
Building Blocks	62
<i>Activity 3.1: Questions for Phase II—Design</i>	63
<i>Activity 3.2: Checklist for Phase II—Design</i>	64
<i>Activity 3.3: People and Timeline for Phase II—Design</i>	65
<i>Activity 3.4: Analyzing the Language Demands of Content Standards</i>	66
<i>Activity 3.5: Language Goals, Targets, or Objectives?</i>	67
<i>Activity 3.6: Organizing for Common Language Assessment</i>	68
<i>Activity 3.7: A Template for Designing Common Language Tasks</i>	70
<b>Chapter 4: Phase III—Refinement</b>	71
Questions for Phase III: Refinement	73
Determining the Logistics	75
Piloting Common Language Tasks	76
Assigning Rubrics	77
Involving Students	82
Reviewing and Revising the Initial Plan and Design	85
Recap of the Refinement Phase	86
Building Blocks	86
<i>Activity 4.1: Questions for Phase III—Refinement</i>	88
<i>Activity 4.2: Checklist for Phase III—Refinement</i>	89
<i>Activity 4.3: People and Timeline for Phase III—Refinement</i>	90
<i>Activity 4.4: Questions for Review Prior to Piloting Common Language Assessment Tasks</i>	91
<i>Activity 4.5: Pilot and Feedback From a Common Language Assessment Task</i>	93
<i>Activity 4.6: Selecting Types of Rubrics and Documentation</i>	94
<i>Activity 4.7: Students in Instructional Assessment</i>	95
<b>Chapter 5: Phase IV—Inspection</b>	97
Questions for Phase IV: Inspection	100
Analysis and Interpretation of Data	101
Information From Rubrics	101
Scoring Options	102
Benchmarking Common Language Assessment	103
Benchmarking Common Language Assessment Using Rubrics	104
Benchmarking Language Proficiency	105
Data Analysis: A Multistep Process	109
Step 1: Chart the Data From Common Language Assessment	109
Step 2: Interpret the Results in Reference to Standards and Student Characteristics	109
Step 3: Share the Findings With Stakeholders	111
Step 4: Set Data Targets	112
Step 5: Select and Implement Instructional Strategies or Interventions	112
Step 6: Identify Evidence of Effectiveness	113
Weighting Results From Common Language Assessment for Language Learners	114

Communication of the Results	114
Contextualizing the Results for English Learners	115
Providing Descriptive Feedback for Students	116
Use of Information	117
Making Data-Driven Decisions	117
Revisiting Language Targets	118
Revisiting Common Language Tasks	119
Recap of the Inspection Phase	119
Building Blocks	120
Activity 5.1: Questions for Phase IV–Inspection	121
Activity 5.2: Checklist for Phase IV–Inspection	122
Activity 5.3: People and Timeline for Phase IV–Inspection	123
Activity 5.4: Analyzing Information From Rubrics	124
Activity 5.5: Considerations Prior to Benchmarking	125
Activity 5.6: Benchmarking Common Language Assessment From Start to Finish	126
Activity 5.7: Analyzing Data From Common Language Assessment	127
Activity 5.8: Weighting an Analytic Scale to Match Language Curricular Goals	128
<b>Chapter 6: Phase V—Maintenance</b>	131
Questions for Phase V: Maintenance	132
Management and Storage of Data	133
Multiple Measures	134
Language Portfolios as Bodies of Evidence	135
The Role of Technology in Data Storage and Management	137
Evaluating Construction, Data Management, and Quality Control	138
Issues of Reliability and Validity	139
Validity of Common Language Tasks	139
Inter-Rater Reliability	139
Use of Results	141
Maintenance of a Viable Language Assessment System	142
Educational Systems That Support High-Quality Learning	142
Enhancing Instructional Assessment Systems for English Learners Through Educational Research	145
The Future of Common Language Assessment for Language Learners	145
Recap of the Maintenance Phase	146
Building Blocks	146
Activity 6.1: Last Chance!	147
Activity 6.2: Checklist for Phase V—Maintenance	148
Activity 6.3: People and Timeline for Phase V—Maintenance	149
Activity 6.4: A Data Management Plan for English Learners	150
Activity 6.5: Considerations for Use of Evidence From Student Language Portfolios	151
Activity 6.6: Evaluating the Common Language Assessment Project	152
Activity 6.7: Determining Inter-Rater Agreement on Student Language Samples	154
Activity 6.8: Maintaining Data Sources for English Learners Over Time	155
Activity 6.9: Maintaining a Vision of Excellence for English Learners	156
<i>Glossary</i>	157
<i>References and Resources</i>	163
<i>Index</i>	175

## Who This Book Is For

*Common Language Assessment for English Learners* is intended for educators who wish to engage in a collaborative assessment project that (1) yields meaningful information for and about their students' language learning, (2) builds in student self-assessment, and (3) informs language instruction. This book is useful to teachers, school leaders, and administrators who wish to implement an innovative initiative around home-grown language data that will provide a body of reliable and valid evidence for decision making.

The focus of this book is on two groups of language learners: those for whom English is an additional language, or English learners, and secondarily, their proficient-in-English classmates who are acquiring a language other than English. In addition, although specifically geared to educators of language learners, the principles, procedures, and steps laid out here can be replicated across classrooms in almost any elementary and secondary education setting and apply to both general education and special education student populations. Language teachers are encouraged to partner with content teachers to coconstruct common language assessment tasks designed from grade-level standards and curriculum, and teacher educators and professional development consultants are encouraged to help facilitate, manage, and oversee the process.

Professional learning teams serve as the inspiration, genesis, and sounding board for common language assessment. These teams are committed to furthering student learning as they build common language assessment. Three focal questions help ground them as they collect, analyze, and use language data efficiently and effectively: (1) what is it that we want students to learn? (2) how will we know when they have learned it? and (3) what happens in our school when they don't? (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004)

## The Organization of This Book

Chapter 1 makes the case that common language assessment is a necessary practice in schools or districts with English learners. It offers a rationale, definition, and a framework for assessment. We invite professional learning teams of teachers and school leaders to undergo a five-phase process of building common language assessment and, in doing so, to better understand the complexity of the language of school.

Chapter 2, on the first or *planning phase*, describes the human resources required for building common language assessment. Educators' availability for and long-term commitment to a common cause—the improvement of instructional assessment practices for language learners—are critical. Planning entails solidifying the educator teams, identifying the subgroup(s) of language learners, and soliciting the stakeholders who will be involved in the process.

Chapter 3 describes the *design phase* that assists professional learning teams in sketching out the structure of common language assessment. Much preparation goes into determining the instructional assessment's purpose, selecting standards, and formulating language targets. The steps for designing common language tasks and projects also include knowing how to

differentiate language for English learners and what data to collect. Finally, we devise a professional development plan to capture the collective goals of the professional learning team or district as a whole and to solidify their commitment to common language assessment.

Chapter 4, on the *refinement phase*, emphasizes the coordination of effort required in crafting and fine tuning common language assessment. At this halfway point in construction, we set aside time to review the logistics of implementation. Teachers try out the language tasks and reflect on their effectiveness, and students act as reviewers and contributors. During refinement, the collaborative teams exercise care in the selection or adaptation of rubrics and documentation forms and their match to the language tasks and projects. Toward the close of this phase, professional learning teams take time to modify the initial design.

The *inspection phase*, chapter 5, is a systematic review of what has been accomplished to date, paying special attention to the role of rubrics in interpreting student work samples and achieving reliable ratings. In this phase, we contemplate how best to communicate with different stakeholders. Most importantly, we consider using the information from common language assessment to inform instruction and monitor students' language growth with the ultimate goal of improving their achievement.

Finally, the *maintenance phase* (chapter 6) addresses issues related to the data from common language assessment. In this final building block, we take care to ensure that a viable and valid assessment system functions within the greater school, language education program, or district. In assembling a body of evidence, professional learning teams, along with school and district leaders, discuss the role of technology and formulate policies in regard to data storage, retention, and retrieval. Checks are put into place to verify that common language assessment, built around the characteristics and needs of language learners, promotes high-quality teaching and learning.

Each chapter begins with an Organizing Principle—its big idea or essential understanding, meant to spark thinking and deliberation—and a Lead Question, specifying a topic related to English learners within the chapter's theme.

Readers may find the glossary on page 157 helpful as they work through the phases of construction.

Reproducible activities, at the end of every chapter, signal points at which teachers, school leaders, and professional learning teams can discuss, summarize, synthesize, and apply what has been presented and reflect on its relevance and usability in their own setting. These activities, indicated by an icon like the one shown in the margin, enable teacher-led teams to plan, implement, and evaluate every aspect of common language assessment. Taken as a whole, they chronicle the five phases of the construction process. When educators actively participate in every step of the construction process, the result is a satisfied product and an enduring system built to specification. The time has come for rethinking how to measure language learning and the attainment of language targets and benchmarks for our students and language education programs. Common language assessment can fill that niche in many schools and districts.



# Common Language Assessment

## Chapter 1

*High achievement always takes place in the framework of high expectations.*

—CHARLES F. KETTERING

Language forms the heart of instruction; thus, all teachers are language teachers (Zwiers, 2008). Since language is also a distinguishing characteristic of English learners, educators must be sensitive to students' language development. This opening chapter introduces common language assessment as a tool for measuring language embedded within instruction and, in doing so, affords teachers and school leaders opportunities to set realistic language expectations for students within grade-level, content-driven instruction. It helps explain how language impacts the performance of language learners from classroom to classroom, highlights the challenges English learners face every day in school, and offers a teacher-driven data source for decision making.

We begin by looking at the adventures of a hypothetical school that set out for the first time to build team-based assessment for English learners.

**Organizing Principle:** Common language assessment enables teachers and school leaders to set and measure language expectations for language learners across classrooms.

**Lead Question:** How does common language assessment contribute to understanding the performance of English learners in school?

### ***Common Language Assessment at Graham School***

Over the last decade, Graham School has undergone a demographic transformation, with more and more linguistic and cultural groups arriving at its doors. At the close of last year, a districtwide survey revealed that the number-one priority for teachers was professional development on classroom-based assessment practices.



As a follow-up to the survey, Graham's principal asked her staff to list the language proficiency and achievement measures that they used. It was amazing to discover that there was full coverage for academic achievement at the classroom, school, and district levels. The language educators pointed out that the majority of the measures, however, had not been developed with English learners in mind, and few, if any, measures were available in the students' native languages.

The most surprising finding was that outside of the annual state test and an interim language proficiency measure from a publisher, teachers had little instructionally based information on English learners' language development throughout the year. True, teachers collected data all the time in their individual classrooms, but collectively, there was no uniformity in assessment practices. Language teachers, in particular, felt that they did not have a voice and wanted to contribute to the school culture.

As a result, the principal decided that the school's primary goal for the upcoming year was to promote students' academic language development. One of the vehicles to document students' language growth would be team-based assessment.

## Rationale for Common Language Assessment

Measuring academic language is critical for English learners, as their ultimate achievement often hinges on their use of English, a language with which they are not yet fully versed. Common language assessment allows English learners to demonstrate the extent to which they have the language requisite for accessing grade-level content. At the same time, by agreeing on how language learners can demonstrate meeting the milestones or benchmarks of language development, teachers gain a firm understanding of the complexities of language learning. Common language assessment is a potentially powerful tool and a vital component of a balanced assessment system. Adopting common language assessment practices within a grade, school, language education program, or even district is useful in:

- Informing language instruction
- Better understanding the relationship between the students' language proficiency and their academic achievement
- Offering reliable, valid, and timely language data for low-stakes decision making
- Bringing greater equity into classrooms serving English learners

The ultimate goal of instructionally bound assessment is to support learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Stiggins, 2008). When educators collaborate to build assessment from the ground up, they become vested in the process and advocates for their students. In this book, we examine ways in which teachers and school leaders can become contributors to school