

# Evolution of An Assessment Tool

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International Language Institute (ILI) has always been extremely interested in alternative assessment. Since the program began in 1984, students have been asked to evaluate their progress and their classes through ongoing oral feedback in the classroom, individual conferences with students, and written mid-term and final evaluations. Through in-house workshops and attendance at state-wide and national conferences, ILI staff have focused on assessment and over the years have added daily dialogue journals, student writings, taped recordings of the students, and — the subject of this article — learner logs as a way of looking at student's progress through portfolio assessment.

Being involved in Component #3 has been rewarding because it has allowed ILI to study alternative assessment in-depth through intense discussions about assessment with other Component #3 participants and the chance to examine tools that other programs are using in the field.

Meeting with participants of Component #3 over the last year and a half has made it quite apparent that alternative assessment is an ongoing process; tools that ILI used last year are not used now, the weekly evaluation tool has changed many times, new tools have been adopted as a result of sharing tools from other programs, and we still feel that more tools need to be developed for our low-level ESL and ESL Literacy classes.

ILI's involvement with Component #3 helped us to refine our Learner's Log, and the purpose of this paper is to discuss the evolution of the Learner's Log as an assessment tool.

## **The Learner's Log**

At ILI, portfolio assessment is used to measure progress by both the student and the teacher. Each student has a folder that is kept in their classroom. In the folder are the student's learner log — a series of assessment tools that are stapled together (filled out on a weekly basis) and

writings that the students have placed in their folder. The student tapes are kept in the classroom, and the students keep their dialogue journals during the course. At the end of the course, everything in the portfolio is kept in the student's file.

The original components in the first Learner's Log (Winter 1992) contained an assessment tool which students filled out on a weekly basis. Students responded to the following statements:

- Some things I have learned
- Some things I didn't understand
- Some things I liked
- Some things I didn't like
- Some things I want to do next week

(adapted from the Read/Write/Now ongoing assessment tool, called "A Learning Log," Janet Kelly, *Adventures in Assessment*, Volume 2.)

The students seemed to be intrigued by the collection and were receptive to writing their thoughts about the course at the end of each week. Also included in the Learner's Log was a learning styles instrument from the Center for Innovative Teaching Experiences. This tool asked students to respond to statements about their learning styles. (ILI only used this tool in the Spring 1992 program, as it met mixed reviews by the students. Instructors are looking into other tools that help students determine their individual learning styles.)

It quickly became apparent that you can't hand out this neat little booklet and expect your students to respond to the statements in the detail desired by the teacher. Most importantly, students need to know why the instructor is taking class time to discuss progress and self-assessment. Students need to understand the importance of looking at their progress weekly. As we read the responses in the Learners' Logs ILI came back to the same questions: How can we get students to look at their learning? How can we help them see their learning as a process and evaluation of their progress as part of the process? How can we get the students to measure their own progress rather than relying solely on the instructor? How can we get our students to answer the weekly evaluation questions with more than one sentence? How can we get our students to critique the classes and know it isn't going to be taken as an insult to the instructor?

At the end of the Winter 1992 program, ILI asked the students if they felt that the Learner's Log was useful. Most students felt it was valuable, and we decided to continue with it and add some additional pieces. The Spring 1992 Learner's Log was presented to the students on the first day of class rather than at the end of the first week. Some additional pieces required

students to fill out and understand the pieces on the first day of class. Included in the Spring Program's Learner's Log were the following:

- a page that listed general course information
- a program entry writing sample
- a page divided into four sections of expectations, goals, fears, and self-help for the program that students responded to
- reading and viewing logs.

In the latter, students keep a running list of what they have read and what they have seen on TV, with comments.

The Learner's Log also took on more of a professional appearance with a colored cover and end page.

At the end of the Spring Program students were asked for feedback on the Learner's Log. Students still felt it was valuable for them to fill out, but they didn't like filling out the same assessment tool week after week. The instructors also found lower level learners had difficulty responding to the statements; very often the statement of "Some things I like" was answered, "I like everything." The instructors decided that the weekly assessment was working, but the tools needed to be changed.

In the Summer 1992 program, the original weekly assessment tool was exchanged for two assessment tools that alternated weekly. One assessment tool asked each student to list the week's activities and to rate them for both their enjoyment and value. The teacher writes these activities on the board; the students record the specific activities in the Learner's Log and rate them. The tool also asks the students to answer the following questions:

- Which activities were the most helpful? Why?
- Which activities were the least helpful? Why?

The other assessment tool that was used was developed at the Community Learning Center.<sup>1</sup> This tool divides the assessment into two sections: in class and out of class:

*In Class:*

1. Now I understand.....
2. In class, I need help with.....

*Outside of Class:*

3. This week I spoke English.....
4. I listened to.....

5. I read English.....

6. I wrote English.....

The Summer 1992 students all seemed to write more on the weekly evaluation that asked them to list the activities and rate them. It appeared that the process of listing all the activities first and then evaluating them was much more effective than having the students respond to statements about what they had learned/done in class. The students still expressed the desire to have different weekly assessment tools. In the Fall 1992 program the Learner's Log looked similar to the Summer 1992 Learner's Log, but in the 12 week course the weekly evaluations alternated between three assessment tools instead of two. The instructors also came up with an additional final evaluation that contained the following questions:

- Has your English improved since you started this course?
- Do you use more English now outside of the classroom? Where? With whom?
- What were your goals when you began the class, and are you closer to achieving them?
- Was this class different from what you expected? How?
- Was the style of teaching comfortable for you? Effective for you?
- What activities did you like to do outside of class?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- Did the class make you feel good about yourself?
- If you were the instructor, what would you do differently?
- Would you like more interaction with other ILI students?
- Additional comments

The instructors were very pleased with this final evaluation as it sparked a lot of discussion first, and students wrote quite a bit in their answers. The students were still responding more to the assessment tool that had students list the activities. It was decided the Winter 1993 Learner's Log would only use that assessment tool for the weekly assessment.

## **The Second Year**

Throughout the program, students meet individually with the instructor to discuss progress. In the Winter 1993 Program, ILI began documenting the individual exit interview with the instructor. The instructor wrote down what the student and teacher discussed during the interview. The exit interview is kept in the Learner's Log. The student interview record included the following areas:

- Goals met
- Goals not met
- Recommendations
- Plans for future action

The Spring 1993 Learner’s Log brought back the alternating assessment tools, but this time allowed students to choose their weekly assessment tool. Students still preferred the assessment tool that listed the activities first, but the instructors were still not satisfied with the tool. At the end of the Spring 1993 Program Tim Rees and Pat Sandoval developed a two-page weekly assessment tool that is being used in the Summer 1993 Program (See Figure 1). The instructors have been using the tool for three weeks and are very pleased with the results. The instructors also developed a new final student evaluation (Figure 2) which will be evaluated by both students and instructors at the end of the Summer 1993 Program. During the Learner’s Log evolution, ILI has realized the importance of continually reevaluating the tools and how teachers and students alike must understand that assessment is a necessary process. It is safe to say that the Learner’s Log will never be a finished product. Our ongoing evaluation of our Learner’s Log is not just within the parameters of a given program. Plans are already being made to create weekly assessment tools for the beginning ESL learner to develop a tool for students of all levels that would help them look at how they learn. Stay tuned for the next installment!

**Figure 1**

| WEEKLY EVALUATION OF CLASS ACTIVITIES   |       |                  |
|---|-------|------------------|
| Date:   |       |                  |
| Please rate the week’s activities for both their enjoyment and value. “1” is extremely low and “5” is extremely high. For example, you might feel that a particular activity was a lot of fun, but you don’t think that it helped you learn anything new. In this case you may rate it “4” or “5” in enjoyment and “1” or “2” in value. |       |                  |
| Enjoyment   | Value | Name of activity |

Which activities were the most helpful? Why?

Which activities were the least helpful? Why?

Hours in class:

Homework assignments given:

Homework assignments completed:

Circle an answer:

I spoke English with people who speak my language. YES | NO | SOME

I wrote in my journal every day. YES | NO | SOME

I used what I learned in class when YES | NO | SOME

I left the school.

Did you speak or listen in class? SPEAK | BOTH | LISTEN

What did you read in English outside of class?

newspapers magazines stories books other\_\_\_\_\_

What did you watch in English outside of class?

movies soaps comedies news documentaries other\_\_\_\_\_

### **The BIG QUESTION!!!**

Write about you and your experiences both in and out of class this week.... or...how's it going?

Figure 2

### Final Student Evaluation

Teacher's name \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Student: We are very happy that you have been a participant in this program. We hope that you have enjoyed your time with us, and that you have learned a lot of English. To help us evaluate this program and plan for future programs, we ask you to complete this form. We appreciate your opinions and feedback, so please try to be specific. Thank you!

1. Expectations:

When you came to I.L.I., what did you expect to learn?

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Did you do what you wanted? Please comment.

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2. Motivation:

Did you speak in class when you needed to? YES | NO | SOME

Did you do the assigned homework? YES | NO | SOME

Did you try to use what you learned in class when YES | NO | SOME  
you were not in school?

Were you on time for class? YES | NO | SOME

How often were you absent from class? OFTEN | SOMETIMES | NEVER

What else did you do to help yourself?

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3. Your instructor:

Did you understand your teacher when he/she spoke? YES | NO | SOME

Did you understand why your teacher chose classroom activities? YES | NO | SOME

Could you talk with your teacher about problems or concerns you had? YES | NO | SOME

4. Class atmosphere:

Did you enjoy spending time with other students? YES | NO | SOME

How much time did you spend speaking your first language? NONE | SOME | LOTS

Please comment on the class atmosphere in general?

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5. Class:

A How much improvement have you made?

B What were the most useful activities that helped you?

A Grammar: LITTLE | SOME | LOTS

B \_\_\_\_\_

A Vocabulary: LITTLE | SOME | LOTS

B \_\_\_\_\_

A Pronunciation LITTLE | SOME | LOTS

B

A Speaking ability: LITTLE | SOME | LOTS

B

A Listening: LITTLE | SOME | LOTS



B

A Reading: LITTLE | SOME | LOTS

B

A Writing: LITTLE | SOME | LOTS

B

6. Culture:

Did you learn more about American culture? What helped you?

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Did you learn more about the cultures of students in the class? YES | NO | A LITTLE

What helped you? \_\_\_\_\_

7. Last comments:

What do you think about the program in general?

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