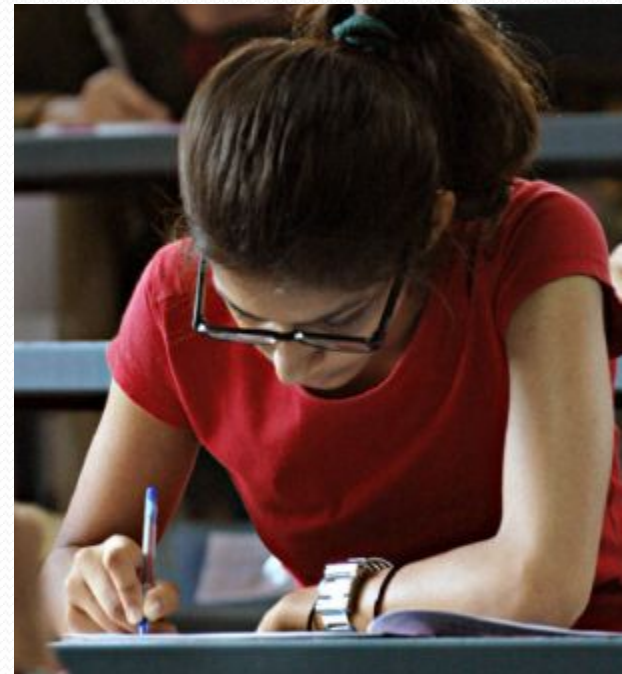


# Swain's Four Principles of Communicative Language Test Development

A Framework to Help Teachers Promote  
Communicative Competence  
Through Testing

# Four Principles of Communicative Language Test Development

- Start from Somewhere
- Concentrate on Content
- Bias for Best
- Work for Washback



# Four Principles of Communicative Language Test Development

## **The Context: A Test of French**

French immersion programs for English NSs (“anglophones”) in Canada

Teen-agers who’d been in immersion classes for many years

“A Vous La Parole” – a four-skills test with tasks situated in a summer camp job context

# Four Principles of Communicative Language Test Development

Think about how you can use Swain's four principles to develop better assessment procedures and help your own students.



# Four Principles of Communicative Language Test Development

## Start from Somewhere

- Assessment should be based on sound theoretical principles:
- Know what we are assessing (the Construct Definition Chart)
- Know what test task and item types are appropriate for doing so.

# Four Principles of Communicative Language Test Development

## Concentrate on Content

The subject matter of the stimulus material and the tasks posed to the learners should be appropriate & interesting in terms of students

- Proficiency levels
- Interests
- Goals
- Age



# Four Principles of Communicative Language Test Development

## **Bias for Best**

Test tasks should be designed so as to elicit the learners' best possible performance.

How can we, as teachers with language assessment responsibilities “bias for best”?

# Four Principles of Communicative Language Test Development

## Bias for Best

- Give clear instructions (maybe in the L1)
- Label the sections of the test, including point values
- Use schema activators
- Provide sample items



# Four Principles of Communicative Language Test Development

## **Work for Washback**

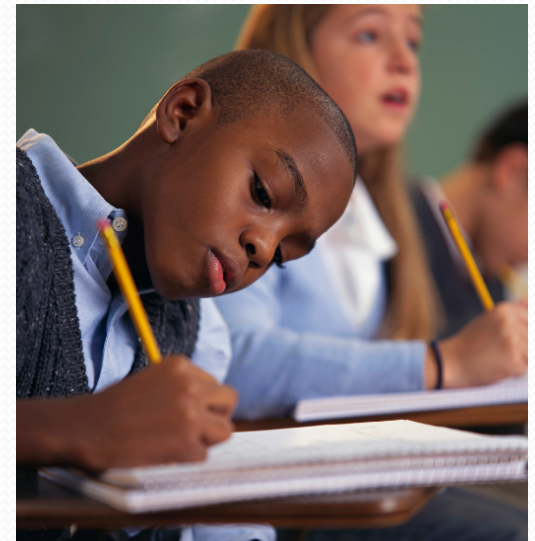
Assessment procedures should promote positive washback – i.e., give information to

- Teachers and program administrators
- Materials developers and researchers
- Students (and also parent of young 2LLs)

# Four Principles of Communicative Language Test Development

**You will use Swain's framework**

- In writing your test review
- In building and analyzing your own original language test
- In critiquing other language tests in the future



# Four Principles of Communicative Language Test Development

## Reference:

Swain, M. (1984). Large scale communicative language testing: A case study. In S. Savignon & M. Berns and (Eds.), *Initiatives in communicative language teaching* (pp. 185-201). Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

# Four Principles of Communicative Language Test Development

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