

## How are your students experiencing your heritage language program - the value of Obtaining Student Feedback.

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In student-centred classrooms instructors and students work hand in hand to improve the learning of all. In order to maximize the learning potential of each student, instructors can benefit from finding out how their students best learn: how they are experiencing the course or program. What activities do they enjoy? Are they too difficult? Too easy? Are activities paced at a reasonable rate? Or too slow or too fast? Are classroom activities interesting? Difficult? Do they appeal to their learning styles and intelligences? As much as instructors can try to consider all of these factors in their planning, they must obtain feedback from students in order to either verify their 'teacher intuitions' or become aware of how the students are really feeling.

Three strategies that may help you gain feedback from students follow: a structured reflection sheet, exit cards, a short questionnaire.

The **structured reflection** sheet is designed to help the student think about positive and negative aspects of the course as well as to let the instructor know areas that are difficult for the learner. I usually use a four square approach with the beginning of one sentence in each box:

*Today/This week I REALLY liked:*

*Today/This week I really did NOT like:*

*Today/This week I learned:*

*Please clarify/explain/help me with:*

I ask the students to complete each sentence on their own. I tell them that there is no correct answer and that everyone may write different things. I also tell them that they do not have to worry about spelling or grammar and can write in any language. My goal is to find out how THEY are experiencing the class. In my years of using this format with learners of various ages I have always been surprised by what I have learned. Sometimes I discover that quiet learners really enjoy the course. Sometimes I learn

that energetic students who are always smiling want more of a challenge!

Depending on your students' age and language competency, it may be more beneficial to give students a choice of filling out the form in English or the heritage language. That way they will be able to express their ideas more fluently and the instructor will convey the impression of really wanting to know the answers. Depending on the trust level in the classroom the instructor should also decide whether or not students should put their names on the sheet. See Appendix A.

Another useful way to collect feedback from students about instruction uses an **exit card**. An exit card is a file card that is distributed to students at the beginning of a class and then collected at the end. In between, the instructor explains to the student what to write on the card. I will usually ask my students to write about only one thing each time. Some questions that may be helpful are:

*What did you like best about today's class?*

*What do you do to remember new vocabulary?*

*What songs do you listen to in the HL?*

*What is difficult for you in this class?*

Again, ask students to write their comments in which ever language they like. In my experience students are always honest about their feedback and appreciate the opportunity to tell you what they think. They respect a teacher who cares about their opinions. I always look carefully at myself as I read their comments. Because of their comments I have learned a lot about how to teach more effectively and about what my students enjoy and find most beneficial. See Appendix B for examples.

A third way to collect feedback from students is through a **questionnaire**. Composed by the instructor, the questionnaire should be about 10 questions in length as research confirms that the longer it takes to complete a questionnaire, the fewer people will complete it! A questionnaire can ask direct questions about student's interests (See Appendix C), how students think they learn best and about one's instruction (See Appendix D).

Since instructors know their students best they can easily adapt any of these tools to meet their interests and needs. Although questions can be added or deleted or changed to match the age and maturity of the learners, every questionnaire can give instructors useful feedback about ways to improve their program.

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**Appendix A: STRUCTURED REFLECTIONS**

(Enlarge this model chart for your students)

Today/This week I REALLY liked:	Today/This week I really did NOT like:
Today/This week I learned:	Please clarify/explain/help me with:

COMMENTS:

How do you remember  
new vocabulary?

What did you like best  
about today's class?

How could today's class  
be more interesting?

**LEARNING MORE ABOUT YOUR STUDENTS: INTEREST INVENTORY**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ AGE \_\_\_\_\_ GRADE \_\_\_\_\_

Please answer the following questions to help me better plan (state the language) LANGUAGE activities for you.

**1. What are your hobbies?**

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**2. What activities do you do on weekends?**

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**3. What is your favorite sport? Why do you like it?**

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**4. What is your least favorite sport? Why do you not like it?**

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**5. What is your favorite TV program? Why do you like it?**

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**6. What is your least favorite TV program? Why do you not like it?**

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**7. What is your favorite book or story? Why do you like it?**

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**8. Name one thing that you liked last year, but don't like as much any more. Why don't you like it as much?**

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**9. Complete this sentence:**

I am really proud of \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Please write down the kinds of games you like to play in school.**

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Thank you.

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**APPENDIX D: HOW STUDENTS THINK THEY LEARN BEST**

**What helps you learn \_\_\_\_\_ (state the language)?**

*I want to make our class time enjoyable and helpful to you. If I understand how you learn then I can better help you. Please check **all** of the ways that you think help YOU learn. There are no right or wrong answers so please be honest.*

- \_\_\_\_\_ listening (hearing the material)
- \_\_\_\_\_ reading (seeing the material)
- \_\_\_\_\_ playing games            to practice new words
- \_\_\_\_\_ memorizing
- \_\_\_\_\_ doing homework alone
- \_\_\_\_\_ doing homework with other people around to help me
- \_\_\_\_\_ using the computer
- \_\_\_\_\_ singing songs
- \_\_\_\_\_ group projects
- \_\_\_\_\_ making up and acting out a short play
- \_\_\_\_\_ working alone
- \_\_\_\_\_ talking alone with the teacher
- \_\_\_\_\_ learning grammar
- \_\_\_\_\_ writing stories
- \_\_\_\_\_ translating
- \_\_\_\_\_ watching films
- \_\_\_\_\_ listening to music
- \_\_\_\_\_ looking at word-picture charts to remind me of words
- \_\_\_\_\_ making my own dictionary to remember new words
- \_\_\_\_\_ repeating new words many times
- \_\_\_\_\_ looking at pictures as I read a story
- \_\_\_\_\_ when the teacher acts out the meaning of new words
- \_\_\_\_\_ when the teacher draws the meaning of new words