Assessment in Language Teaching

SLAT Colloquium
Feb.19, 2016

Dr. Eddy White
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Assessment refers to a variety of ways of collecting information on a learner’s language ability or achievement.

Tests are a subcategory of assessment.

A test is a formal, systematic procedure used to gather information about students’ behavior.

Evaluation is all-inclusive and is the widest basis for collecting information in education.
The goal of assessment is to...
The goal of assessment has to be, above all, to support the improvement of learning and teaching.

(Frederiksen & Collins, 1989)
Assessment = process of **planning, collecting, analyzing** and **reporting** information about student learning.
Assessment Ideas to Think About
“The nature of assessment is central to everything that students ‘do’- it governs how they study and learn”.

Dr. Nigel Miller, University of York
Assessment

...is the engine which drives student learning

(John Cowan)
There is substantial evidence that assessment, rather than teaching, has the major influence on students’ learning. It directs attention to what is important, acts as an incentive for study, and has a powerful effect on student’s approaches to their work.

(Boud & Falchikov, 2007)

Rethinking Assessment in Higher Education
Improving student learning implies improving the assessment system.

Teachers often assume that it is their teaching that directs student learning.

In practice, assessment directs student learning, because it is the assessment system that defines what is worth learning.

(Havnes, 2004)
The way in which students are assessed fundamentally affects their learning.
Research suggests that teachers spend from one-quarter to one-third of their professional time on assessment-related activities.

(Stiggins, 2007)
Teachers learn how to teach without learning much about how to assess. (Heritage, 2007)
Historically, educational leaders and teachers have not been given the opportunity to learn about sound classroom assessment practices.

Further, over the years, the measurement community has narrowed its role to one of maximizing the efficiency and accuracy of high-stakes testing while playing virtually no attention to assessment as it plays out for teachers or learners day to day in the classroom.
Assessment Literacy
Are you **assessment literate**?

How would you respond to this question in a job interview?

In a discussion with colleagues?
Assessment Literacy

Know-how and understanding teachers need to assess students effectively and maximize their learning.
Assessment literacy

• the kinds of assessment know-how and understanding that teachers need to assess their students effectively

• **Assessment literate educators** should have knowledge and skills related to the basic principles of quality assessment practices

(SERVE Center, University of North Carolina, 2004)
Assessment-literate teachers come to any assessment knowing . . .

- what they are assessing,
- why they are doing so,
- how best to assess the achievement of interest,
- how to generate sound samples of performance,
- what can go wrong,
- and how to prevent these problems before they occur.

Assessment literacy for the 21st Century (Stiggins, 1995)
Second Language Assessment
The Cambridge Guide to
Second Language Assessment
Clearly, there is widespread global recognition that language assessment literacy represents an important aspect of teachers’ professional knowledge.

Pre-service and in-service teachers often don’t have the necessary skills to effectively administer sound assessments in the classroom.

Research continues to characterize teachers’ assessment and evaluation practices as largely incongruent with recommended best practice.
There is no getting away from the fact that most of the things that go wrong with assessment are our fault, the result of poor assessment design—and not the fault of our students.

(Race et al., 2005)
Assessment Literacy
Language Assessment—Purposes

• identify strengths and weaknesses of individual students,
• adjust instruction to build on students’ strengths and alleviate weaknesses,
• monitor the effectiveness of instruction,
• provide feedback to students (sponsors, parents, etc.), and
• make decisions about the advancement of students to the next level of the program.
What is a test?
A test...

- is a **method** of measuring a person’s ability, knowledge, or performance in a given domain.
- is an **instrument** – a set of techniques, procedures, or items – that requires performance on the part of the test-taker.
The word ‘test’

- can refer to traditional ‘paper and pencil’ or computer based tests (e.g. multiple choice, fill-ins, short answers, essays, etc.)

- or ‘performance assessments’ (presentations, projects, interviews, or other alternative assessments)
2 Key Elements of Any Test

1. the task(s) – what we ask students to do

2. the scoring
What do language tests assess?

- Listening and Reading tests primarily assess . . .
- comprehension
- Speaking and Writing tests primarily assess . . .
- fluency and accuracy
Tests are essential components of a successful curriculum.
Are you assessment literate?
Quiz time!

Test Your Knowledge
Item #1 Quiz
Classroom assessment

Three types, each serving a different purpose
Classroom assessment categories

1. Diagnostic
2. Summative
3. Formative
Diagnostic assessment

- precedes instruction, pre-assessments
- used to check students prior knowledge and skill levels, identify student misconception, profile learners’ interests, etc.
- provide information to assist teacher planning and guide differentiated instruction
- normally not graded
Summative assessment

- summarizes what students have learned at the conclusion of an instructional segment
- evaluative; reported as a score or grade
- results typically ‘count’ and appear on report cards and transcripts
Formative assessment

- on-going, occurs concurrently with instruction
- provides specific feedback to teachers and students for the purpose of guiding teaching to improve learning
- formal and informal methods, such as ungraded quizzes, oral questioning, teacher observation, draft work, self- and peer-assessment, etc.
- results not factored into summative evaluation and grading
Classroom assessment categories

1. Diagnostic
2. Summative
3. Formative
- excellent
- good
- average
- poor
Item # 2 Quiz
What are the 4 main types of language tests?

1. Placement tests
2. Diagnostic tests
3. Proficiency tests
4. Achievement tests
Types of Tests

1. **Placement test** – intended to provide information that will help place students at the stage of the teaching program most appropriate to their abilities.

2. **Diagnostic test** – used to identify learner’s strengths and weaknesses; intended primarily to determine what learning still needs to take place.

3. **Proficiency test** - designed to measure people’s ability in a language regardless of any training that they may have had (e.g. TOEFL, IELTS).

4. **Achievement test** – in contrast to proficiency tests, these tests are directly related to language courses; purpose is to establish how successful student have been in achieving course objectives.
‘Testing a test’ – Evaluating Classroom Assessment Tools
Q. How do you know if a test is effective, appropriate, useful, or, in down-to-earth terms, a “good” test?
The ‘cardinal criteria’ for evaluating a test
Item # 3

Quiz
What are the ‘five cardinal criteria’ that can be used to design and evaluate all types of assessment?
Five key assessment principles

- Validity
- Reliability
- Practicality
- Washback
- Authenticity
The principles can be expressed in question form.
Key Assessment Principles

1. **Validity** - Does the assessment measure what we really want to measure?

2. **Reliability** - Is all work being consistently marked to the same standard?

3. **Practicality** - Is the procedure relatively easy to administer?

4. **Washback** - Does the assessment have positive effects on learning and teaching?

5. **Authenticity** - Are students asked to perform real-world tasks?
Q. How do you know if a test is effective, appropriate, useful, or, in down-to-earth terms, a “good” test?
Answer. A ‘good’ test:

- can be given within appropriate administrative constraints, [practical]
- is dependable, [reliable]
- accurately measures what you want it to measure, [valid]
- the language in the test is representative of real-world language use, [authentic] and
- the test provides information that is useful for the learner. [positive washback]
- excellent
- good
- average
- poor
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Receptive Skills (Reading, Listening)</th>
<th>2. Productive Skills (Speaking, Writing)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students are ‘receiving’ language</td>
<td>Students are ‘producing’ language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment focus = language comprehension</td>
<td>Assessment focus = language production</td>
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<td></td>
<td>fluency, accuracy</td>
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</table>
Which of the four skills is most and least challenging to test? Why?
FINISH
The way in which students are assessed fundamentally affects their learning.
The goal of assessment has to be, above all, to support the improvement of learning and teaching.

(Frederiksen & Collins, 1989)
Assessment Literacy

Know-how and understanding teachers need to assess students effectively and maximize learning.
In 2009, I had this article published in a journal in Japan for college and university educators (OnCUE). At that time, I was completing my doctoral research related to classroom-based assessment at a woman’s university in Tokyo. [Eddy White, Ph.D., Assessment Coordinator, Center for English as a Second Language, University of Arizona]

Feature Article

Are You Assessment Literate? Some Fundamental Questions Regarding Effective Classroom-based Assessment
Potential Impact of the Assessment Literacy of Teachers
Improved assessment literacy means better assessment

Better assessment means better teaching

Better teaching means better learning

Better students means better opportunities for a better life

Better learning means better students
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