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Assessment in the Language Classroom: Teachers Supporting Student Learning 1st ed. (2017)

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Assessment in the Language Classroom is one of the five books in Applied Linguistics for the Language Classroom Series edited by Andy Curtis. The focus of the book is classroom assessment rather than large scale language testing. Teachers need to be good assessors as assessment is one of the crucial tasks that they perform before, during, and after teaching. Thus, a language teacher who wants to succeed in his/her profession needs to have both theoretical and practical information about teaching and assessment. However, most novice teachers face problems about assessment as it is a complex, demanding, and difficult process. To tackle the issues related to assessment, they should not only possess theoretical knowledge but they should also be able to apply practical strategies. As the authors claim, this book is an attempt to provide teachers with such knowledge and strategies.

The book is organised into seven chapters. The first chapter of the book is an introduction to essential aspects of assessment. They start with definitions of assessment and go on to make a distinction between assessment for learning, assessment of learning, and assessment as learning. The purposes of assessment are concisely presented in the chapter, which is the subject matter of a whole chapter as well.

The second chapter of the book tries to find answers to the question of “What do we assess?” The focus of the chapter is how to decide what to teach, what to assess, and how to link the assessment with the learning goals and outcomes. They also provide a template for course planning, which might be very beneficial to pre-service teachers in that it can serve as a sample for them. It might also be beneficial to in-service teachers who are willing to update their syllabi.

The third chapter concentrates on the question “How do we assess?” In this chapter, the authors focus on the differences between the large-scale testing and classroom assessment. Next, the authors present their categorization of assessment methods which includes teacher-student conversations, observations, and student products. The rest of the chapter is devoted to portfolio assessment, which has widely attracted attention in the alternative assessment literature in the last two decades (Aydın, 2010).

The fourth chapter is devoted to developing a test, analysing and evaluating its quality, and identifying features of a high-quality test. The authors shed light on test specifications, a very crucial element of a high-quality test. A comprehensive part of the chapter is devoted to the test development process that they present in a step-by-step fashion. Next, the authors inform the readers about rating scales, test administration and analysis, and using the results for classroom assessment.

The fifth chapter focuses on ways and the importance of getting to know students, which is crucial in education in that each student is a unique and varied individual with social, cultural, educational and emotional characteristics, all of which should be addressed during teaching and assessment. To shed light on this issue, the authors explain placement tests, proficiency tests, needs analysis and diagnostic tests in a detailed way with activities and samples of these tests.

Chapter 6 is devoted to feedback and motivation that are closely related to assessment. First, the authors define feedback and discuss the role of feedback on students' learning-in-progress. Next, they link the role of motivation in learning with its role in assessment. Last, they discuss the relationship between assessment and motivation from the perspective of self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The last chapter of the book concentrates on the question of how assessment can be used to move the students' learning and achievement forward. The discussion includes grading, research on grading, and grading practices of teachers.

In 246 pages over seven chapters, the authors present the hands-on experience they have gained in various parts of world where they have taught. The central point of the book is that teachers are the main agents of assessment and they should strive to enhance the quality of their assessment practices, which should be used to best support students' learning by aligning their assessment to learning outcomes of a course. The book differs from other books written on language testing and assessment in that it deals with what classroom teachers need during their practice of teaching English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL). The intended readers, who are pre- and in-service teachers of EFL and ESL, do not have to struggle with the statistical side of testing literature as the book avoids technical jargon.

Each chapter starts with 3-5 general questions posed to activate readers' prior knowledge and experiences about the subject in hand and the chapters close with a summary of the key points of the subject discussed in them. The book makes use of abundant tables and figures that add much to intelligibility of the content. In each unit, there are teacher-friendly activities relevant to the subject that help readers think about the subject, understand it better, reflect on their practice and practise what they have learned. There is a glossary of key terms used in the book. It aims to help readers to understand what the specific terms mean and how they are operationalized in the book. The book contains an appendix devoted to samples of some commonly used classroom assessment tools and test formats.

One drawback of the book can be it does not devote enough space to the investigation of assessment of language skills and components in separate chapters or parts. If it did so, it would be a good guide to teachers who were in need of specific strategies to assess these skills and components.

All in all, the book proves to be an excellent source for pre- and in-service teachers who are concerned with by actively questioning their teaching and their students' learning and who wants to further their assessment practices in the classroom.

As a lecturer of a one-semester three-credit Testing and Assessment in Language Teaching course, I used this book as the main material of the course. It served as fruitful material. As the authors claimed, the book proves to have non-technical but an accessible jargon (p. xviii). Thus, it may add to understanding and good practices of assessment of teachers of English by helping them bridge the gap between theory of assessment and classroom practices.

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