Language Classroom Assessment

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Author:	Liying Cheng (2013)		
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Language Classroom Assessment is a very short book that is part of the practitioner-friendly English Language Teacher Development Series published by TESOL (Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages). By discussing current theory and practical applications, the purpose of the book is to help equip ES/FL instructors with the means to carry out meaningful assessment of their students. Additionally, the book attempts to help practitioners self-evaluate their current assessment methods. It is intended to serve as a quick resource that allows for teachers to become familiar with certain theories and the application of them and is therefore not intended to be an exhaustive text on the subject of language assessment.

Cheng begins the book by stating that the reader will become familiar with three topics: What is language assessment?; What are four major aspects of language assessment?; and What evidenced-based research supports the described assessment methods? She introduces the readers to six terms that provide the structure for the book. The first two terms are *assessment of learning* and *assessment for learning*. Assessment of learning happens after learning in order to see whether learning has actually taken place. Assessment for learning is a process of determining where the student is in the actual learning process, and it ultimately provides useful information for the teacher and student to reach certain goals.

The next four terms are derived from Cheng's definition of assessment, which include assessment events, *assessment tools*, *assessment processes*, and *assessment decisions*. The events and decisions explain the purpose for why the assessment is being conducted.

Cheng explains that understanding the purpose of an assessment will help instructors self-evaluate their assessment techniques. Tools are not only the various methods which can be used in assessment for reading, writing, speaking, and listening, but they also refer to the sources from which the assessments come (e.g., teacher-created material, material found on the internet, material dictated by a governing school body). Finally, she moves into the *processes* of assessment that deals with what to teach and assess, and how to reinforce the assessment so it is meaningful. In this explanation, she presents a start-to-end progression; notwithstanding that the diagram she uses depicts this progression as a cyclical event that is continually happening. Furthermore, in this section, she devotes attention to the kinds of methods used to solicit meaningful feedback.

Looking at practical application, Cheng explains how there is not a great deal of research for classroom assessment practices for English teachers (hence its importance). In contrast, there are a fair amount of studies examining larger standardized tests of English. The relatively little research that has been conducted on classroom assessment practices indicates that classroom assessment practices tend to be influenced by the larger assessment structures (e.g., TOEFL). The problem with classroom assessment that mimics these larger exams is that such exams are actually assessments *of* learning, not assessment *for* learning. Even looking outside of ESL/EFL instruction, for instance on the high school level, teachers of various subjects are influenced by the high stakes of final exams. Likewise, in many university and college programs, many students are driven to pass a certain gateway exam. Cheng explains that to have successful classroom assessment, certain areas need to be considered. These include, for example, the goals of the English program and the teachers' beliefs about the purposes of assessment. Depending on the structure of a language program, it may be easier or more difficult to implement some of the strategies in the book.

Another area of consideration in language acquisition is the need for students to have a motivation for study. Cheng explains self-determination theory and the role it plays in the students' education. Understanding the motivational aspect of learning helps instructors decide on what methods they will use for assessment *for* learning. The more the assessments involve the students, the more "they take responsibility for their own learning" (p. 17).

The preface of the book states that books in this teacher development series are "jargon-free and accessible…for all types of teachers of English (native and nonnative speakers of English, experienced and novice teachers)." While I believe the book is highly accessible, some readers might need more than a single read through. One term, for example, that might challenge some readers is the notion of appears a *theoretical framework*. A simple way to explain this is when researchers have a problem they want to address, the manner in which they go about studying the problem is viewed through a particular construct. Thus, if we would like to study how best to use assessment, we can take a method or theory and use it as a lens in which to look through in evaluating assessment techniques or beliefs. Additionally, with regards to terminology, Cheng does offer scaffolding of concepts introduced in earlier sections. Readers new to issues of assessment might find themselves paging back and forth to follow the trail of Cheng's

terminology. While I would not allow that to be a deterrent from purchasing the book, the reader will need to take notes or keep a mental map of what is being discussed. Consequently, this book is very well suited for Professional Learning Communities (PLC) or other collaborative learning sessions where seasoned and new teachers can interactively discuss concepts and their applications.

Cheng put together an interactive book, which contains reflective breaks, teacher-centered activities, diagrams, and classroom examples. These breaks are spaced out through the book, engaging the reader to reflect on assessment and other teaching practices. There are multiple terms used which are current to the area of assessment, and they are explained or defined as they occur through the book. The references used cover dates from 1980 through 2013, although the latest dated material, 2011 and 2013, are from books she also co-authored. Discussing assessment, she does not leave out the concept of creating teacher driven and student driven motivation. Consequently, she speaks of how to have assessment techniques that motivate the students. The introduction and use of current terminology allows for teachers to familiarize themselves with terms, research, and theories of language assessment they may encounter in other texts or conferences. The limited amount of pages makes the book an attractive option for time-constrained workshops and instructors. It also would prove beneficial to an individual teacher seeking to learn more about assessment methods and serve as a useful tool in a teacher's repertoire.

Reviewed by Colin Hueston
University of Colorado Denver
Colin.Hueston@ucdenver.edu