



Summary/Commentary

Elizabeth Gould

Session Title: Assessment in English Language Teaching: Reviewing Essentials

Presenters: Lia Plakans, University of Iowa; Diane Schmitt, Nottingham Trent University; and Deborah Crusan, Wright State University

Content Area: N/A

Session Type: TESOL in Focus

Summary

This session was labeled a “TESOL in Focus” session, which is a session sponsored by the TESOL International Association that highlights “special projects and initiatives to further the field, or partnerships with colleague associations.” The colleague association presenting with TESOL members in this session was the International Language Testing Association, and the presenters discussed and gave examples of different types of assessment. Although they mentioned types of assessments such as proficiency exams and aptitude tests, the main focus of their presentation was a description of diagnostic, formative and summative assessments.

Diagnostic Exams

The presenters stated that this type of exam is intended to identify strengths and weaknesses of students in a particular skill area. They did not mention this test as a use for determining appropriate placement of students. The presenter gave an example of a reading/writing diagnostic assessment which was quite similar to what we use for the proficiency test.

Formative Assessment

The presenters defined this as assessment for learning and said these assessments are activities we do on a daily basis. The presenter described this type of assessment as “plain good teaching” and something teachers should engage in on a daily basis. She suggested that the activities done in class or assigned as homework should always have a purpose and that questions instructors should ask themselves when creating these assessments are, “What would successful completion of a task look like? What would unsuccessful completion look like?”

Summative Assessment

Summative assessments are done at the completion of a large chunk of learning such as at the end of a chapter, unit or semester. These tests are used to determine if students have achieved the learning outcomes given them within the determined timeframe. These assessments are generally more formal in nature and should be assessed for reliability and validity.

Commentary

This was a good session for individuals not very familiar with assessment, but I was hoping to get new information about assessment. Unfortunately, the presenters did not provide new insight into research in the area. Despite this, I was reminded of an important concept. The theme that permeated their presentation was that assessment should be integrated with learning, and this reminded me that we should always consider the purpose of any activity we do in the classroom and determine how we can measure, quantitatively or qualitatively, whether or not learning has occurred.

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