
Fundamentals of Language Assessment: A Practical Guide for Teachers in the Gulf

Review by Neil McBeath

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FUNDAMENTALS OF LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT: A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR TEACHERS IN THE GULF. Dwight Lloyd, Peter Davidson, and Christine Coombe, Editors. 2005, TESOL Arabia, pp. 192.

The subtitle of this book does it a disservice. *Fundamentals of Language Assessment* may have been aimed at teachers working in the Arab Gulf in the first instance, but the book has truly global implications. Examples may be taken from Arab Gulf contexts, but much of the advice is intercontinental in its application.

The book consists of five major areas, subdivided into 16 chapters, and a “Glossary of Important Testing Terms” is appended (pp. 183-192).

Part One—*Key Issues of Language Testing* (four chapters) gives an overview, “The Cornerstones of Language Testing” (pp. 3-16), before exploring test specifications, washback, and the extent to which teachers and students should share responsibility for test preparation.

Part Two—*Assessing Receptive Skills* (three chapters) gives directly practical, how-to-do advice on developing tests of listening and reading, together with a short paper entitled “Text Mapping” (pp. 65-71), which demonstrates how teachers can collaborate in the preparation of test items.

Part Three—*Assessing Productive Skills* (three chapters) examines tests of oral proficiency and writing skills while drawing the reader’s attention to the importance of using the correct approach when writing assessment scales. Both holistic and analytic marking have their advantages and disadvantages, and the teacher’s individual context will determine appropriateness.

Part Four—*Assessing Language* (two chapters) explores different approaches to the testing of vocabulary and grammar. The first paper considers multiple choice questions, completion and matching exercises, but also considers self-reports and translation. The paper on grammar retraces some of this material, but also covers the correction of sentences, rearrangement of items, and paraphrase.

Part Five—*The Future of Language Testing* (five chapters) examines portfolio assessment, task-based integrated skills assessment and computerized testing, but the first paper, “Alternatives in Language Assessment” (pp. 137-143), by Lisa Barlow and Christine Coombe also mentions self-assessment, student-designed tests, learner-centered assessment, projects and presentations. For this reviewer, the paper was tantalizingly short, and a restatement of its concerns, in far greater detail, would be more than welcome.

Fundamentals of Language Assessment is genuinely concerned with fundamentals. It is an excellent introduction to the field of English language testing, but many of the issues raised in this book go far beyond basics.

About the Reviewer

Neil McBeath is an English Education Officer working for The Royal Air Force of Oman. He is currently teaching ESP courses to aircraft engineering technicians. He holds two Master's degrees and has been awarded the Distinguished Service Medal of the Sultanate of Oman.

Conference Announcements

Teacher Education in Language Teaching. April 24-26, 2006. 41st RELC International Seminar. Contact SEMINAR SECRETARIAT SEAMEO Regional Language, Centre 30 Orange Grove Road, Singapore 258352 REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE. Tel: (65) 6885 7813 / 6885 7844. Fax: (65) 6734 2753. E-mail: admin@relc.org.sg. <http://www.relc.org.sg>.

Eastern Mediterranean University. May 2-5, 2006. Eastern Mediterranean University, North Cyprus 2nd International ELT Conference, “ELT Profession: Challenges and Prospects.” Contact Dr. Suleyman Goker, Faculty of Education, Eastern Mediterranean University, Famagusta, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Mersin-10 Turkey. Tel: (90) 392-630-2400. Fax: (90) 392-630-2542. Email: suleyman.goker@emu.edu.tr. <http://elt2006.emu.edu.tr>.

METU International ELT Convention. May 3-5, 2006. “The Fusion of Theory and Practice,” Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey. Contact Serap Yucel and Aycil Oral, Convention Coordinators. Email: metuconv@metu.edu.tr. <http://www.elt.metu.edu.tr>.