
Assessment Practices

Review by Nathan T. Carr

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ASSESSMENT PRACTICES. Edited by Christine A. Coombe and Nancy J. Hubley. Alexandria, VA: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages Inc. 214 pp. ISBN: 193118507-7 (paperback, \$32.95). (\$24.95 TESOL member).

Assessment Practices, consisting of 13 case studies, is intended for current and prospective ESOL teachers who are new to the field of assessment. Its main contribution is the way in which the case studies present detailed, concrete descriptions of how assessment is performed in a number of distinct contexts, along with practical suggestions based on the various authors' experience. Six of the case studies deal with assessment in EFL contexts and the other seven with ESL assessment, so most readers should find multiple examples that are relevant to their own situations.

Each chapter consists of an introduction, a description of the context in which the assessment takes place, a description of the assessment itself, an explanation of its distinguishing features, a list of practical ideas, and a conclusion. This organizational structure ensures clarity of description, and also helps ensure a sense of internal coherence in each case study, as well as a sense of general parallelism across all chapters. Each chapter relates to one or more of three themes to at least some degree: multiple-measures assessment, assessment in context, and the cyclical nature of assessment. Taken together, however, these themes subsume almost any testing project imaginable, so it is probably more helpful to consider the five topical sections into which the book is divided: comprehensive assessment, curriculum washback, in-program assessment, end-of-program assessment, and program evaluation. The case studies within a given section do not always take that particular topic as their main thrust, but they are always relevant to it somehow.

Each of the case studies provides at least several useful ideas or suggestions, so I recommend this book for teachers or other test developers seeking ideas for their own assessment contexts. That recommendation must be qualified, however, given that from the perspective of commonly accepted assessment theory, a few chapters contain inaccuracies. An example of this is the assertion in one chapter that validation minimally consists of calculating descriptive statistics, conducting

reliability analyses, and analyzing item facility and discrimination. While reliability can certainly be seen as a necessary condition for validity, validation is generally viewed as ensuring that a test measures what it purports to measure, and that any inferences made on the basis of test scores are justified. While most of the chapters do not contain problematic material, this occasional flaw means that this would probably not be the best choice for someone who is looking for their first book in language assessment. On the other hand, the book could probably work well as a supplementary text in an introductory course on language assessment, where the instructor could point out the few inaccuracies.

About the Reviewer

Nathan Carr is an assistant professor in the TESOL program at California State University, Fullerton. His research interests center on language assessment, and include construct validation, web-based language testing, and test task characteristics and their effects on measurement properties. He has taught English in both the United States and Taiwan.