

Book Review: Assessment

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Harris, M. y McCann, P. (1994). *Assessment*. Hong Kong: Macmillan-Heinemann.

This book is focused on learning assessment in language learning-teaching. This book can help any language teacher with clear explanations about what assessment is and what it is not. It also provides instructors with excellent practical ideas to assess students in the different language skills such as reading, writing, listening and speaking. In addition, the most commonly used assessment techniques are analyzed giving teachers a wide range of them, and explaining their advantages and disadvantages.

This book can also be used in Language teaching programs because it is very didactic and can help lecturers teach this difficult subject because of the features mentioned next. It provides students with clear explanations of the theory using simple language. It also includes illustrative examples of techniques and materials to be used when teaching this subject. Furthermore, it includes photocopiable tasks that help student reflect on different issues around assessment, an example of this is on page 6 where the readers have to answer a series of items related to informal assessment, they have to say what they think of some statement by choosing the correct option (disagree strongly, disagree, indifferent, agree and agree strongly).

The book is divided into three chapters: chapter 1: Informal assessment, 2: Formal assessment and 3: self-assessment. This handbook begins with an introduction to assessment where the authors state the difference between assessment and evaluation, explains what assessment involves and the purpose of it. It also makes the reader reflect on when, who, and how to carry out assessment in a language course. To continue, a brief description of each chapter will be given.

Chapter 1: Informal assessment

This chapter begins with a dissertation on what informal assessment is and what it is not. It provides with a general idea of what to assess and talks about linguistic and non-linguistic factors. It introduces readers to the idea of using descriptors to assess students, the use of bands (as they call these descriptors, some authors call them rubrics though). Some examples of bands and formats are included to carry out the assessment of the different skills, including grammar and vocabulary. They also present in this chapter the idea of making an assessment plan that consists of identifying the factors to be assessed, whether students would be assessed informally, with activities in normal classroom condition, or formally, with exams and assigning a weight of each type of assessment.

Chapter 2: Formal assessment

In this chapter, the authors explain briefly the reasons to give tests to students and clarify any possible misconception around testing. This chapter includes a description of the different types of tests that have been used in language testing such as progress, summative, placement, diagnostic and proficiency tests. The authors emphasize the importance of making a plan to design and apply good language tests; they include an excellent diagram that contains the following stages: planning, construction, administration and results. They also highlight the importance of the contents to be tested, the weighting of each content and the format to be used when designing the test when teachers are going to do the assessment. They present a great revision of test formats or types of exercises used when testing by language skills. The authors show the advantages and the disadvantages of using each of these format and provide with examples. They also offer a wide variety of ideas to administer and mark tests.

Chapter 3: self-assessment

This is the most innovative section of the book because even though teachers now talk about this type of assessment, very few use it in their classrooms. The authors start the chapter by explaining the importance of self-assessment and the way they visualize it. They think self-assessment is an integral part of learning. It is a way to reflect on our own performance when learning something and a right in any learning –teaching situation. Self-assessment enriches the assessment process in any classroom because it provides the students insight on it. They present excellent ideas to carry out self-assessment by language skill such as learner diaries, checklists, and progress questionnaires.

This book about assessment can be a great companion for any language teacher and for any language teacher trainer because it provides them with the theory that support their ideas and practical techniques and formats to carry it out.