



Teacher Training Session 9: Assessment Principles

Discussion Questions: (In groups, discuss the following)

1. Who assesses students' learning? _____
2. What is assessed? _____
3. Why assess students' learning? _____
4. How can you assess student's learning? _____
5. What is done with the results of the assessment? _____

VALIDITY: A test is valid if it tests what it claims to test.

- How do we know? Does the test assess only what the teacher taught, or does it require the student to use OTHER knowledge or skills to complete the assessment?
- In an end-of-unit vocabulary test, would it be good [valid] if several of the vocabulary items had not been taught in class?
- Would it be good [or valid] to assess essay-writing ability with a multiple choice test on grammar and stylistic knowledge?

RELIABILITY: Are the results consistent?

- If the same person takes the same test again one week later (without any further study or preparation) and the results are very different, the test may not be reliable.
- If two people of the same level take the same test, but have very different results, the test is not reliable.
- If two or more trained teachers using the same system come up with very different evaluations of the same speaking or writing sample, the test may not be reliable.

FEASIBILITY: Are we happy with the “cost/benefit ratio” of the test?

- That is, how much *time/money/resources are required* compared to *the information gathered*?
- For example, if you want to have a very accurate test of international students' ability to perform in academic classes at a U.S. college, you could have them spend a week participating and doing assignments in a college classroom. to predict very well how each student would do in her/his “real” college courses.
- However, it would cost an incredible amount of time and energy and money to do this. Maybe we find ways to assess international students' academic ability with a test (BAC?)--that might take less time, be more cost-effective, and be good enough in terms of information.

BACKWASH is the effect that testing has on learning.

- Backwash can be positive or negative. A test that reinforces the way that the content was taught in class is positive backwash. If the test makes the teaching seem unhelpful—that it did not prepare the students for the test, then the backwash is negative.
- For example, if I have been learning English expressions and role plays have been a regular routine in class and I know that we will be assessed using similar role plays (oral exams), the assessment will encourage my learning and have positive backwash. However, if I am teaching expressions through role plays, but the final exam is a multiple choice test on grammar rules and vocabulary, the backwash will be negative. Students may stop putting effort into class activities and focus on memorization of items just to prepare for the final exam.

Activity: Think of a good example and a bad example of each assessment principle listed above.