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Assessing Language Ability in the Classroom, 2

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Assessing Language Ability in the Classroom, 2nd ed.

Andrew D. Cohen (1994)

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Those involved in language teacher preparation have long faced considerable difficulty in testing and assessment courses. Many of the more widely used texts have focused on test the statistical procedures involved (e.g., Henning, 1987). Knowledge of such questions is c program administrators, particularly those in programs that rely upon traditional discrete teachers and students in teacher preparation programs find it difficult to see the relationsl characterizes many textbooks on testing and the communicative approaches they use in t methodology courses. The extensively revised second edition of Andrew Cohen's *Assessir* suggests, is concerned with assessment as it impacts on the experience of teachers and lea volume, directed to a broad audience of language educators and teachers in training, prov evaluate and develop assessment instruments. In addition, Cohen offers numerous exam that forms part of a well-conceived language class.

Cohen broadens the meaning of the term testing from its usual restricted sense to include assess the language abilities of respondents” (p. 11). This broader definition, then, allows such as different types of validity and item analysis, but also for a review of currently popular assessment. The result is a volume that is accessible to novices and much more in the main which, as Cohen himself observes, was written “around the edges of other testing books,, elsewhere” (p. 358).

The volume consists of eight chapters in addition to an introduction and conclusion. In key chapters are organized around key practical questions or topics, e.g. “What is the purpose used?” For those whose concerns include research, each chapter contains research notes, evidence about the topics discussed and provide sources for further investigation. One valuable draws upon studies of learners of a variety of target languages and a wide range of educational usefulness of the book as a text in foreign language education as well as TESL. Finally, each questions. For the most part, the questions are well conceived and suggest a variety of applications are novices in test design and implementation.

Space limitations preclude a full discussion of all the topics Cohen covers. However, a brief and portfolio assessment of writing will serve to illustrate how Cohen has moved into the

Cohen devotes considerable attention to self-assessment and includes sample instruments well as an instrument designed to assess the small-group participation of elementary school major studies that support self-assessment, as well as those that challenge its validity. He assessment by students in a classroom could be one of the means for multiple assessment assessment might be more problematic” (p. 199).

In recent years, school districts in many states have adopted portfolio assessment, and praise zeal (see, e.g., DeFina, 1992). In contrast, Cohen pays careful attention to the limitations of recognizing the value of portfolio work in building a sense of community among peers and and student. He notes that portfolios require great amounts of teacher time and that grades failing to provide adequate discrimination. Cohen also cites at length Hamp-Lyons and Co basic assumptions about portfolios, including the belief that portfolio evaluation necessarily portfolio is taken into account or that multiple genres are always represented in a portfolio in portfolios, however, Cohen is by no means wholly negative about their potential, concluding beneficial...to the field of language assessment since the emphasis is on convergent and r measures at one point in time” (p. 361).

To sum up, Cohen offers a clear treatment of most of the topics usually covered in an introductory highly accessible to classroom teachers and students in teacher education programs. Cohen the use of multiple means of assessment, as well as his judicious treatment of currently popular

numerous examples of assessment [-2-] instruments for a variety of age and proficiency levels for classroom practitioners. Classroom teachers will most likely come away from the text with a much clearer understanding of how to reflect and reinforce current communicative approaches to language teaching. The volume is most suitable for those whose interests are primarily in research or whose responsibility for language instruction in the classroom, lies in its scant treatment of the statistical dimensions of testing. As Cohen himself notes in his item analysis (pp. 101-104), readers who need to understand the basis of, for example, test reliability and validity, should consult more quantitatively oriented texts such as Bachman (1990), Hatch and Lazaraton (1991), or Cohen and Gage (1997).

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