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Summary Writing as a Form of Integrated Assessment in Tertiary Settings

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The article is for EFL teachers and teacher trainers
interested in alternative forms of assessment

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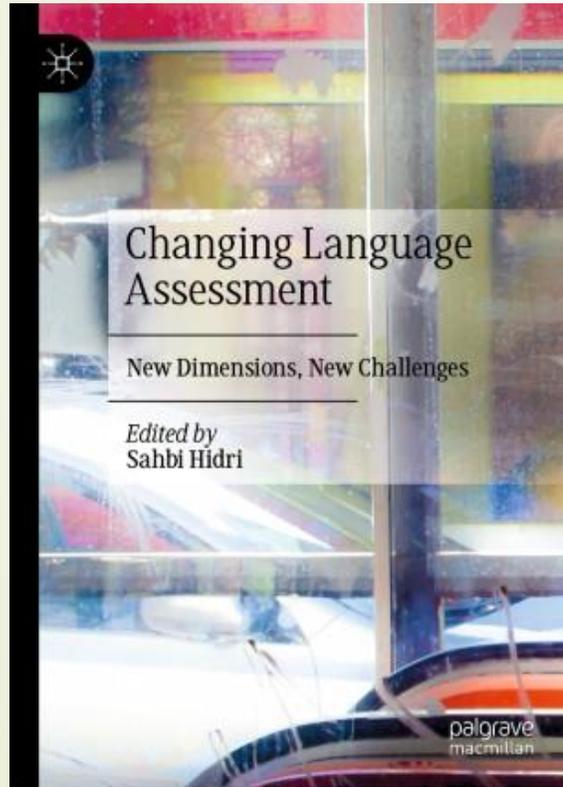
Summary Writing as a Form of Integrated Skills

Assessment in Tertiary Settings

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This edited book brings together fifteen original empirical studies from a variety of international contexts to provide a detailed exploration of language assessment, testing and evaluation. Language assessment has a key role in the development and implementation of language and educational policies at the national level, and this book examines some of the impacts - both positive and negative - of different skills testing and examination approaches on learning outcomes and individual students' language learning. This book will be of interest to scholars working in applied linguistics and language education, teacher training, testing and evaluation, as well as stakeholders such as practitioners, educators, educational agencies, and test developers.

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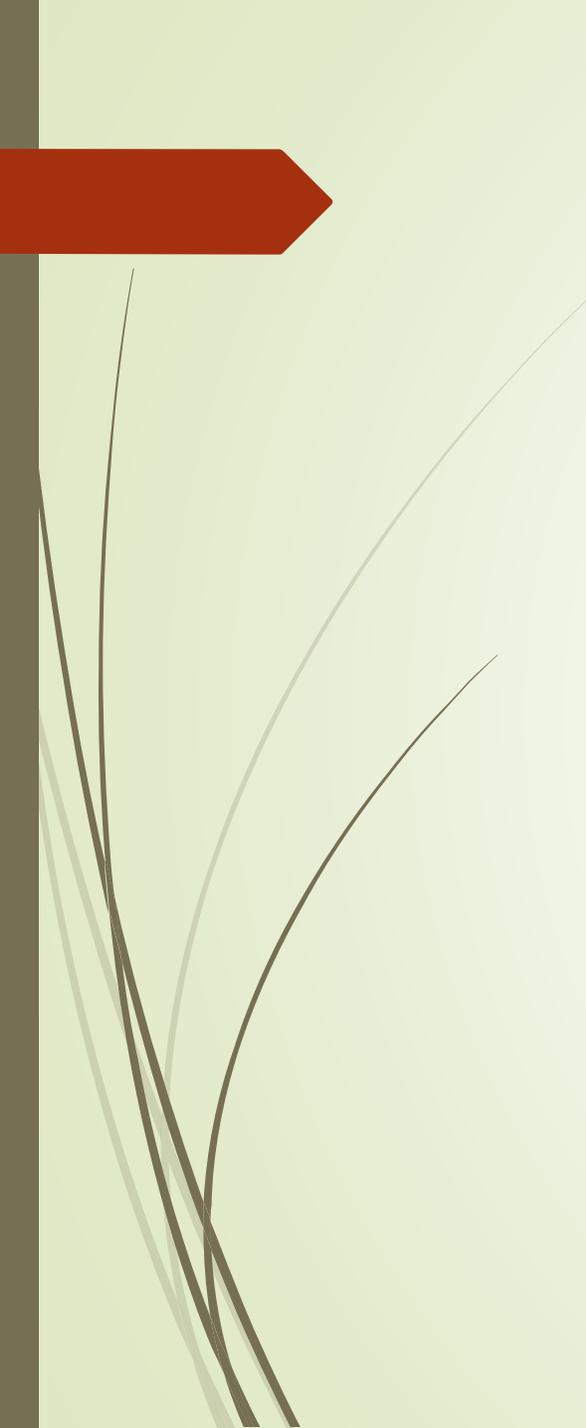
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Editor

Changing Language Assessment

New Dimensions, New Challenges

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In tertiary context, assessment is central to the learning process, especially at advanced levels of language proficiency, as achievement depends not only on fluency in L2, knowledge of sophisticated vocabulary, ability to use complex grammatical structures, but on critical thinking skills not specific to the target language only. The chapter discusses the theoretical foundation of this approach and makes a case for summary writing as a form of integrated assessment, which gives teachers an opportunity to assess as full a combination of aspects as possible, including critical reflection on a text as well as mastery of language. The authors claim that this form of assessment promotes higher-order thinking abilities and stimulates a creative approach to learning rather than simply records students' final achievement.

Introduction

The integration of reading and writing tasks is not a new development in language teaching, but the criteria of assessment, the construct of the task, the teaching techniques will all be unique to those educational institutions that employ the method depending on their purpose, proficiency level of the students, standard testing procedures, and other specific characteristics. We would like to share our approach and contribute to the discussion of the method's validity, its educational benefit, and particular practices that are necessary to successfully implement it.

Although over the past decades there has been extensive research into a variety of approaches to assessment, including widely administered exams like TOEFL and IELTS, still the area of language studies for academic and professional purposes has been under-represented in this research. We argue that linguistic competency depends not only on fluency in L2, knowledge of fully expressive vocabulary, ability to use complex grammatical structures, but, no less importantly, on critical thinking skills not specific to the target language only. Following the principles worked out by the Russian school of psycholinguistics such as Vygotsky, Leontiev, and Zimnyaya, we believe that an idea, meaning is the content of speech, and it is "a phenomenon of both speech and intellect... Speech is connected with thought and illuminated by it" (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 244). Speech embodies thoughts/ideas as a reflection in human consciousness of the links and relationships of the real world. This determines the purpose of speech, which is to convey an idea, and the language and the language system are the means of doing that. Thus, a speech act is viewed as a product of mental activity (Zimn, 2001). This leads us to conclude that what you want to say is essential to the act of speech and that is what our approach is premised on: the primacy of thinking and analysis over the selection of linguistic means.

To strip the process of learning a language of intellectual content, to believe that language can be acquired without the need to convey

meaning is to imagine that it is possible to use barren soil to grow beautiful fruit trees. What may emerge as a result is weeds no one wants. In other words, in second language education the development of cognitive abilities should go hand in hand with the development of linguistic competences. And while endeavoring to elicit speech teachers should clearly understand that learners need an intellectual impulse to produce a meaningful utterance. The challenge to make sense of a piece of text could give rise to this impulse. To a great extent, the purposes for which one intends to use language will determine the content of language learning. You cannot expect a beginner to want to engage in theoretical discussion of philosophical issues, but the further you proceed with language studies, the more sophisticated and far-reaching goals you set for yourself, and, conversely, the more advanced you are as a learner, the more ambitious goals you want to achieve in terms of the content of speech. As a result, the type of work learners do at intermediate and upper-intermediate levels, such as preparation for standardized tests with their formal criteria and focus on accuracy and fluency, cannot motivate them to aspire to more in-depth, professional knowledge of the language. Another important aspect of higher-level studies is learner autonomy. Here success depends not on memorizing new vocabulary or grammar phenomena, but on creating linguistic schemata, understanding the associative links that emerge when language is produced by native speakers, distinguishing minute emotive nuances of meaning. It depends not so much on the ability to read, listen to, and answer the general question on the contents of a text, but on the ability to express one's complex ideas and prove oneself as an expert in the chosen field. All this requires self-direction rather than direction by the teacher, identifying one's weaknesses and motivation to work on them.

Theoretical Background

Drawing on the work of leading researchers in the sphere of psychology and psycholinguistics (Vygotsky, Kozulin, Zimnyaya), we believe that learning/teaching is inextricably linked with assessment and the latter not only informs the former but is a crucial stage in learner development