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MATERIAL DESIGN

PRINCIPLES OF INTRICICALLY MOTIVATING TESTS

The reasons for assessment can be grouped under two main headings: for feedback to aid learning and for a comparable measure of competence. Comparable measures are the reason for public examinations and regular assessment or test-

ing within educational institutions. Assessment as an aid to learning encompasses benefits such as reinforcement, confidence building, involvement and building on strengths (Dudley-Evans, Jo St. John 1998:210).

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So, assessment is a process of measuring, and one formal method of measuring is to test.

It is important to understand the difference between testing and teaching. They are very interwoven and interdependent. Every instructional sequence has a testing component to it, whether the tests themselves are formal or informal. Teachers measure or judge learners' competence all the time. Whenever a student responds to a question or tries out a new word, that student might be tested. How are testing and teaching different?

The difference lies in formal and informal testing. Informal tests are unplanned assessments that are made as a course moves along toward its goals. Most informal testing is formative evaluation: assessing students in the process of forming their competencies and skills with the goal of helping them to continue that growth process.

Formal tests are exercises or experiences specifically designed to tap into an extensive storehouse of skills and knowledge, usually within a relatively short time limit. They are systematic, planned sampling techniques constructed to give teacher and student an appraisal, as it were, of their achievement. Such tests are often summative, as they occur at the end of a unit or course, and therefore attempt to measure, summarize, what a student has got.

It is very important to make the distinction between teaching and formal testing. Students must have the freedom in the classroom to experiment, to try things out without feeling that their overall competence is being "judged" in terms of errors.

Teaching sets up the practice games of language learning, the opportunities for learners to listen and think, to take risks and set goals, to process feedback and cycle and recycle through whatever it is that they are trying to set in place. It is impossible to escape from the informal testing that

naturally ensues while teaching, formal testing places a different set of expectations on students. Formal tests are the tournament games.

There are four major principles to create intrinsically motivating tests.

1. The principle of giving students advance preparation

The first task in creating intrinsically motivating tests is to be an ally in the preparation process.

- Provide information about the general format of a test
- Provide information about types of items that will appear
- Give students opportunities to practice certain item types
- Encourage a thorough review of material to be covered
- Give advice on strategies for test preparation
- Offer advice on strategies to use during the test itself
- Give anxiety-lowering reassurance

2. The principle of face validity

Face validity means that the students, as they perceive the test, feel that it is valid. Teacher can help to foster that perception with:

- a well constructed format
- clear and uncomplicated items
- clear directions
- familiar tasks, that relate to the course work
- an appropriate difficulty level
- test conditions that bring out students' best performance

3. The principle of authenticity

Teacher must be sure that the language in the test is as natural and authentic as possible. Teacher should try to give language context so that items aren't just a string of unrelated language samples. The tasks themselves need to be tasks that students feel comfortable with.



4. "The principle of "washback".

"Washback" is the benefit that tests offer to learning. When students take a test, they should be able to utilize the information about their competence that test feedback offers. Formal tests must be learning devices through which students can receive a diagnosis of areas of strength and weakness.

To enhance washback is to provide narrative evaluation of test performance. Teacher should consider giving more than grade as the feedback. Praise should be given for shengths as well as constructive criticism of weaknesses. Teacher should take some time to make the test performance an intrinsically motivating experience through which a student will feel a sense of accomplishment and challenge.

And washback also implies that students have access to their teacher to discuss the feedback and evaluation they have been given.

So, tests have a useful place in an interactive curriculum. They can aid learning in a number of ways:

- tests can increase motivation
- tests can spur learners to set goals for themselves
- tests can promote student autonomy as they confirm areas of strength and areas needing further work
- tests can aid in evaluating teaching effectiveness
- tests can encourage students' self-evaluation of their progress

Self and peer-assessment can also help to develop the independence that students require for their continued progress. Peer and self-assessment are used to supplement teacher assessments and have most value as an aid to learning. As a contribution to formal measures, they will only be valid if they are consistent.

As a learning device peer and self-assessment is increasingly recognized as effective. "Experience of trying out this form of evaluation makes

us want to persevere with it. We believe it has a marked effect on the extent to which speakers take their audience into account" (Lynch 1988:124).

There can be good reasons for introducing peer assessment. If constructive peer assessment procedures are developed,

these can reduce the burden on the teacher and contribute to effective study techniques for the learners. Peer and self-assessment help learners to become more self-directed.

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