

The Art of Teaching Speaking

Chapter 6 Assessing Speaking (pp. 207-216)

- Teachers should consider assessment even as the initial class planning is started.
- The best quality of good assessment is that it should assess a skill in the same way in which the skill was taught. In short, a match between teaching and testing is important.

Revisiting Students' Speaking Needs

- Why do students take a speaking course?

It's important for all teachers to remember that the aspects depend on the student's specific purpose in taking the course. Is it for business dealing with native speakers, or conversation as with a tour leader?

The answers to the questions inform teachers of the way to set up a speaking course. Besides, this should guide them toward how they should assess what is taught in the course.

Three Stages of Speaking Assessment

The following three stages can provide both the teacher and the student with a more accurate and more objective picture of the learning and teaching experience.

1. Pre-Instruction

- The instruction can help teachers determine how much their students already know. Then teachers can move the student's initial point of knowledge to their learning objectives.

- The ways of the pre-instruction assessment

① Talking to directly students.

→ Their general fluency and pronunciation.

Based on the assessment of what teachers hear, they would emphasize certain areas of their course syllabus.

② Questionnaire

→ The number of years students have studied English

The areas students want to focus on in the class.

2. During Instruction

All good teachers constantly evaluate their students as the lesson is taking place.

· The most obvious feedback for the teacher is the student's performance.

Are they having trouble pronouncing certain words? Are they making excessive grammar mistakes that hinder communication? Based on the answer to these questions, the teacher would decide who needs more help with certain areas. Continued assessment during instruction helps the teacher know who is having problems.

· What should teachers do when they hear mistakes?

The author's advice is to avoid making a correction on the spot unless they have a very good reason to do so because they just stop students from speaking temporarily. Even if students are not stopped by their interruption, they usually don't notice that there has been a correction. (See pp.210.) In contrast, there are some students who can understand teacher's correction soon and also want immediate feedback. They can understand that 'go' and 'buy' are wrong here. However, there are few such students

3. Post-Instruction

· If you should not correct mistakes on the spot, what should you do?

The answer is to wait until the activity is complete to provide feedback to the group.

After the activity has been complete, you might go to the board and indicate some mistakes that you want to emphasize. (See pp.212.)

Formal Assessment

Achievement Assessment

· Its purpose is to assess how much students have achieved in a specific course. Teachers should test the content of the course in a manner similar to how the material was taught or practiced.

Pronunciation

· One way to assess student's ability to pronounce certain sounds is to devise a short paragraph or a series of sentences that include sounds which you want to assess. (See pp.215.)

· There are two advantages and a disadvantage of the assessment on pp.215.

Advantages

- ① You can make sure that every sound you taught and practiced is assessed.
- ② You know exactly what the student was trying to say.

Disadvantage

- ① This is reading, but we want to assess speaking here. Some students may be able to pronounce a word well until they see its spelling.

Discussion points

1. What is an effective way to let such a student notice his or her mistakes? (See pp. 210)

The answers:

- (1) Explaining the past tense using some words which indicate a past event.
- (2) Using two kinds of examples that show right and wrong answer.

2. What aspect of the speaking proficiency do you value most in teaching? For example, pronunciation, fluency and accuracy. Please give your idea and reason.

The answers:

- (1) Fluency is important because it is needed to deliver information quickly.
 - (2) Teachers should focus on pronunciation because students speak a lot if they have confidence on their pronunciation. Japanese people tend to have problems with it, so teachers should improve it.
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Observations

Teachers should assess their student's skill throughout their performance. Even though a class is taking place, teachers should focus on assessment. Thanks to the everyday observation, they can get to know who needs help with certain area and also what their lesson lacks. As a result, they can make their lesson more satisfying.