Application of Assessment Production Cycle to Curriculum Evaluation and Classroom Teaching

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to show how formative, classroom-based assessment (CBA) is an integral part of language teaching, and demonstrate the ways to capitalize on it effectively by the use of a new concept, the Assessment Production Cycle, so that the collective results will lead to better-informed curriculum improvements. Also, special attention is paid to integrative performance tests often used for CBA, followed by an explanation of each process of the Assessment Production Cycle in terms of Can-do checklists which can be used as a resource by teachers in accomplishing ideal CBA.

Keywords

Classroom-based Assessment (CBA), Assessment Production Cycle, integrative performance test, Can-do checklists

Introduction

One of the major goals of assessment (formal and informal) is to effectively gather information about the students' knowledge, skills or abilities in order to improve curriculum and classroom instruction. Recently, many institutions rely on standardized proficiency examinations such as TOEIC® to collect such data, but we all know that standardized external measurement cannot accurately capture the varied profiles of different students' abilities, not to mention whether a certain curriculum or program is effective or not. For this reason, formative classroom-based assessment (CBA) still plays an important role. Davidson and Leung (2009) have emphasized the many benefits of CBA over standardized examinations: improved authenticity, reliability, validity, feedback, and positive washback. If CBA is consistently used across a curriculum, more meaningful curriculum evaluation can be done than the rather one-dimensional statistical analysis of standardized test results. However, for many teachers, formative CBA can be daunting because of its ubiquitous, consequential, and complex nature (Cumming, 2009).

1 General instructions

With the new light shed on CBA, a model called the Assessment Production Cycle was proposed by Green (2014). It aligns with the new requirements posed on high school English teachers in Japan to do integrated-skills teaching and make corresponding performance integrated tests which combine multiple language skills, especially those connecting input and output skills. Of course, it has been a big challenge for these teacher to make these tests valid, reliable, and feasible (Murray, et al., 2013). In order to accomplish this task, one cannot merely look at assessment as products (outside measurement results) or events (interviews). Instead, assessment should be viewed as an integral part of the language teaching process because all test results must be reflected in teaching in order to increase its effectiveness (Black & Wiliam, 2010).

2 Purpose of this inquiry

The purpose of this inquiry is (a) to show how formative, classroom-based assessment (CBA) is an integral part of language teaching, (b) to introduce the Assessment Production Cycle and demonstrate how classroom teachers can use it in their classes, and (c) to show how the collective results will lead to better-informed curriculum improvements.

2.1 Assessment Production Cycle

The Assessment Production Cycle consists of the following stages: (a) specifications, (b) item writing, (c) item review, (d) piloting, (e) pilot review, (f) operational assessment, and (g) assessment review (Green, 2014).

The first stage is where decisions are made about

how the assessment is to be produced, administered, and replicated. It consists of three main components: design statement, assessment blueprint, and task specifications. In the next two stages, item writing and item review, the items (questions) for the test are created. For many teachers, item writing can be challenging because it is "a unique skill that must be learned and practiced" (Downing & Haladyna, 2006, p. 11). Green (2014) suggests that all test items should undergo at least one round of review. The next two stages, piloting and piloting review, are equally important for both CBA and formal summative tests. Also, more material (upwards of 50% more) needs to be trialed than what will be used in the actual test. Finally, in the operational assessment and assessment review stages, the "live" form of the test is evaluated.

3   Can-do Statements

At first glance, expecting individual classroom teachers to become proficient with the Assessment Production Cycle may appear to be an unrealistic demand. However, if this model is applied, it has a great potential to make their everyday teaching practice more systematically connected to formative or summative evaluation. Fortunately, the processes involved in this cycle can be simplified by the use of Can-Do statements (See Table 1) which highlight the activities and roles of the individuals in each stage. This will help teachers understand the value of using this process as well as what they should do in practical terms.

Some universities with testing experts have already applied this model in creating their standardized curricular and program assessments while other teachers have applied it to their own classroom teaching. The cycle itself is not totally new, so quite a few well-informed teachers have already been practicing at least a part of it without been aware of it. Still, this model, if it is more widely spread and shared with high school teachers, will improve practice at various levels; high-stakes assessment, school-wide assessment and classroom-based assessment.

Table 1: Can-Do Statements based on the Assessment Production Cycle

Role	Sample Statement
Designer	I can make clear specifications of the test with appropriate tasks that are suited to measure the skills & abilities (constructs) aimed at being measured.
Producer	I can create test items with appropriate forms and scoring methods based on the specifications.
Organiser	I can decide the way the test should be administered and managed, for which I can also create the guidelines and procedures.
Administrator	I can administer the test following the guidelines, solving unexpected problems if necessary.
Scorer	I can create a valid rating scale/rubric for the test, and evaluate test-takers' responses consistently.
User	I can interpret the scores to grasp each student's strengths and weaknesses, based on which I can also make decisions on what kind of feedback to be given.
Validator	I can review and analyze the test results for improvements for the next administration.

3.1   Applications

As an example, one university's attempt to incorporate this cycle in the creation and modification of the evaluation system for its unified curriculum will be presented, illustrating what is done at each stage.

4   Conclusions

The implementation of integrated-skills testing in Japanese high schools will likely be a long, challenging process, where both prospective and in-service teachers of English need a better understanding of CBA as well as an adequate level of language testing and assessment literacy. The model of the Assessment Production Cycle together with the Can-Do checklists will provide scaffolding to guide them in the right direction.

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