3. Assessment (1020 words)

4.1 Application of Principles

Assessment programme design requires consideration of diagnostic, formative and summative assessment (Graves, 2000) and how these will combine to form a coherent plan, aligning assessment with teaching pedagogy and curricula (Stoynoff, 2012). For my course, a bespoke assessment plan (C1) is cross-referenced to the CM, in which assessment procedure is embedded: ensuring practicality (Hall, 2011), alignment, and coherent connection between assessment and other elements of course design (Nation and Macalister, 2010). A specifications document (C2), based on Luoma(2004)'s modular model, supports this and will also become an evaluative tool.

Learner familiarity with assessment task type is essential, as this affects test reliability (Hughes, 2003; Cohen, 1994). Equally importantly, an assessment programme must reflect course goals to avoid negative wash back (Prodomou, 1995) through goal/content incompatibility, and to generate helpful, formative assessment results (Knight, 1992). Furthermore, valid assessment content must reflect and be relevant to learning outcomes (Hughes, 2003). Accordingly, assessment tasks on this course are consistent with tasks completed throughout it. (e.g. C.M.L3+C3.i)

Speaking is particularly challenging to assess (Luoma, 2004; Perrin, 2010; Knight, 1992). Scoring reliability is a big issue: oral tests can be negatively affected by subjectivity (Hughes, 2003) and performance may not reflect competence. However, steps can be taken to address these challenges. This course allows learners a warm-up period prior to assessment, minimizing the effect of nerves on performance (Cohen,
1994), while scoring issues are alleviated through double marking, using a pre-planned holistic rating scale \((B2.i)\), with criteria and weightings that reflect characteristics specific to interactivity and spoken grammar (Luoma, 2004).

Self-assessment is key for promotion of learner autonomy (Harris, 1997) but requires procedural training for learners, and clear scaffolding, to increase validity and reliability (Patri, 2002). \(CM.L1\) introduces learners to self-assessment, and this generates scaffolding, in the form of self-assessment forms, for each self-assessment phase.

Finally, effective assessment requires both qualitative and quantitative data (Richards, 2001). Thus, learner self-assessment forms based on speaking performance provide qualitative data, a holistic grading scale is used by the teacher to measure performance, and a quantitatively graded set of listening tasks is also used \((D2.ii,iv)\).

### 4.2 Monitoring learning progress

Integral to the teaching and learning process, assessment will take place at regular intervals (Hedge, 2001), using a range of assessment tools, with the intention of helping learners upgrade their language skills (Cohen, 1994) sufficiently for course goals \((3.2)\) to be met:

#### 4.2.i Formative assessment:

“Formative assessment” generally occurs at regular intervals, offering ‘ongoing feedback to students’ (Murray & Christison, 2011: 181) and teachers alike, by measuring learners’ progress and understanding relative to course goals.
With this in mind, learners’ listening levels were diagnosed in lesson one (CM.L1;2.4). A set of similar activities will be administered midway through the course (CM.L4). Similarly, for speaking, the teacher discreetly assessed learners performing a speaking task repetition (CM.L1), to be repeated at the course midpoint (CM.L4). Learners will compare their performances in each of these assessments, identifying improvements and prioritising weaknesses, scaffolded by self-assessment sheets (E1.iv).

Continuous self-assessment, a “key learning strategy” (Harris, 1997) provided validity is ensured through learner training (Patri, 2002), is encouraged through regular use of a listening/speaking logbook (Kemp, 2010) guided and monitored by the teacher (E1.i). This cultivates autonomy through focus on goals and criteria for judging quality of learning (Black, 2009:519), additionally promoting critical consideration of learners’ own target language usage as well as that of diverse interlocutors.

4.2.ii Summative assessment:

“Summative assessment” generally occurs in the final stages of a course, with the purpose of measuring the learning that has occurred, establishing learners’ grades and, where applicable, whether learners are ready to proceed to a higher level (Murray & Christison, 2011:181).

Summative assessment combined with constructive feedback can become an important formative learning tool (Davison & Leung, 2009:397). Therefore, CM.L10 allows learners to benefit by using feedback to map a plan for progression beyond the course conclusion.

**Assessment tools (D3)** used are as follows:
**Speaking:** Learners’ performance across a range of tasks of varying formality (Luoma, 2004:103), similar to those encountered throughout the course and used in formative assessment, will be assessed in the penultimate class *(CM.L9)*, the teacher and a second marker using a holistic rating scale for this *(D3.iii)*. To ensure fairness, pre-decided criteria will be used. Additionally, learners will complete a self-assessment form, rating their own performance for each task *(E1.iv)*.

**Listening:** Learners will complete gist- and detailed listening tasks, also typical of those used during the course and in formative assessment. *(D3.ii)*

**Learning outcomes** will be assessed using these continuous, formative and summative assessment tools, generating data that will enable the teacher to verify achievement of course goals and identify areas of weakness.

**4.3 Constraints**

Being a private language school of limited means, direct testing (Hughes 2003) of learners’ language is impossible. Therefore, in-classroom language assessment must be utilised. Care has been taken, however, to ensure that “assessment tasks adequately sample and represent the content, processes, and complexity of what students are learning.” (Stoynoff 2012)

With regards to formative assessment procedures, time constraints are imposed by course length. Therefore, rather than individual tutorials at mid-course stage, learners will participate in scaffolded reflection, discussion and action-planning following assessment.
4.4 Suitability justification

Designed to meet learners’ needs and goals (N.A;3.2), the assessment plan systematically integrates assessment into the language learning process (Stoynoff, 2012) using continuous assessment via listening/speaking logs; formative assessment in initial and mid-course assessments; and summative assessment using a range of assessment tools in order to collect qualitative and quantitative data (Richards, 2001) to measure learners’ progress on the course.

4.5 Course Evaluation

Evaluation is essential for continuous development in quality of course delivery and its suitability to learner needs (Richards, 2005; Hedge, 2001), and must consider planning, delivery and assessment (Nation and Macalister, 2010). A student-chaired meeting, set up but not attended by the teacher, will be held in the final lesson of this course. Enabling freedom of expression, this will increase validity and reliability of feedback through removal of the teacher’s influence (Hedge, 2001). Assessment performances will be reviewed against the test specification document and course goals, while progress will be mapped through comparison of learner performances throughout the assessment process.

References – Assessment Section


**Teacher-Based Assessment.** TESOL Quarterly, Vol.43, No. 3: 393-415, September.


