Review: Assessment Myths

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Plakans, L., & Gebril, A. (2015). *Assessment Myths***. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan.**

It would be difficult to say with certainty that some myths are false without analyzing them first. Because myths may have originally been based on some truth, concrete evidence is required to disprove them. The concept of myths has been adopted as a genesis to a pedagogy-generated book series of myths ranging from the application of second language research to classroom teaching. *Assessment Myths*, authored by Lia Plakans and Atta Gebril, is the latest volume of the *Myths* series, which has previously released books from various authors about myths on pronunciation, second language acquisition, listening, writing, and vocabulary. *Assessment Myths* discusses eight myths on assessment by exploring relevant studies and postulating practices based on research and the authors' experience. *Assessment Myths* is composed of three main sections: 1) introduction, 2) eight chapters on assessment myths, and 3) conclusion.

Apart from defining language assessment and justifying why eight myths were selected, the introduction section accommodates readers with key terms in language testing which are divided into three groups: 1) testing purposes, 2) paired terms, and 3) development and use of assessment in the educational

context. The authors have chosen the basic key terms that can provide a clear frame of reference for the assessment novice. Newer key terms are mentioned in later chapters when the readers have absorbed some more testing knowledge. This introduction section is particularly beneficial to those who are new to the assessment discussion.

Eight chapters on myths follow the same organization: real world experience, research, and recommendations. The authors broach each myth on real experiences in second language assessment through the eyes of both instructors and learners. The result of the research is then presented along with recommendations based on pedagogy at the end of each chapter.

The first myth, *Assessment is just writing tests and using statistics*, deals mainly with assessment literacy. This chapter offers an overview of assessment knowledge concerning what content instructors should be equipped with, the research on how the content is taught, and suggestions on what instructors can do including terms involving types of assessment.

A comprehensive final exam is the best way to evaluate students is the second myth the authors experienced as learners. In terms of the discussion on final exams, formative and summative assessments are investigated. The chapter concludes by recommending two approaches for the classroom setting: assessment for learning and dynamic assessment.

The third myth, *Scores on performance assessments are preferable because of their accuracy and authenticity*, examines communicative competence, the meaning of scores, how to develop rubrics concerning raters, authentic tasks, and real-world applications.

Multiple choice tests are inaccurate measures of language but are easy to write is the fourth myth that explores the benefit of multiple choice questions by referring to construct validity and descriptive detail on how multiple choice questions are developed.

The fifth myth, *We should test only one skill at a time*, examines the practicality of testing one skill at a time in contrast

to testing integrated skills. The authors then suggest methods and examples in developing integrated tasks for assessment.

Myth six, *A test's validity can be determined by looking at it*, defines five forms of validity and analyzes methods in gathering validity evidence. The authors also introduce *communicative adequacy* and *discourse synthesis*, two new terms relevant to the construct.

The seventh myth, *'Issues of fairness are not a concern with standardized testing.'* tackles the problem of test fairness as an opportunity to learn. While the authors examine several types of fairness and situations in which its effects exist, they also note areas in which practitioners should take caution.

Many more terms regarding test preparation are defined in myth number eight, *Teachers should not be involved in preparing students for tests.* The dichotomy between teaching to the test and teaching for the test is explored with emphasis placed on validity and ethics.

Lastly, the conclusion summarizes the research results of the eight myths, justifies why other myths are not discussed in this volume and indicates the future direction for assessment researchers and educators with respect to the eight myths.

Personally speaking, although my teaching experience has disapproved the latter section of myth four, *'Multiple choice... are easy to write*, the authors dispelled all eight myths with the support of concrete proof from research. Presenting the myths from the most fundamental to the most specific is not easy. The sequence of the chapters is organized in a way where the general topics on assessment are mentioned first and, where necessary, these topics are embellished in subsequent chapters. Where a sophisticated topic such as differential item functioning (DIF) is mentioned, the authors provide web links and references for additional information. The compelling point is that the issue of assessment literacy is mentioned in the first myth and continued to the last, indicating that inadequate knowledge of language assessment is somehow the reason why these assessment myths exist.

One shortcoming of this book is the lack of sufficient evidence to support some of the recommendations made at the end of certain chapters. There is also inadequate reference to the empirical studies and theories used to convince the readers that the authors' suggestions, which seem to mainly stem from their teaching experience, are practical and effective. This book, thus, may not benefit advanced researchers or experts in this field.

Assessment can be confusing to people who do not have in-depth assessment literacy. This book can be a valuable asset to their assessment foundation. The definition of terms, examples and charts provided make this reader-friendly book. I would highly recommend this book to high school teachers, graduate students in the field of language testing, and assessment stakeholders, including staff administration. The pedagogy-based practices and references can aid the expected groups of readers in understanding and conducting better language testing.

The Reviewer

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