

INSITES

This section highlights some useful learning and teaching websites that can help with planning, teaching and professional development. This time we look at assessment-related resources.

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LANGUAGE TESTING RESOURCES WEBSITE

languagetesting.info

The Language Testing Resources website is a reference guide to resources related to language assessment. The site is designed and maintained by Glenn Fulcher (University of Leicester), who is widely published in the field, and is co-editor of the journal *Language Testing*. A range of resources covering a wide variety of language assessment related topics is provided: links, articles, a bookstore, videos, podcasts, feature topics, scenarios and statistics.

Launched in 1995, the site continues to be regularly updated. On the homepage, news feeds are updated every four hours with worldwide language testing news. The “most visited websites” in assessment are displayed, based on results from major search engines. A list of upcoming conferences also enables users to stay up to date with the latest research. The job listings section, in cooperation with the International Language Testing Association (ILTA), is updated regularly with opportunities in the field of testing and assessment. At the time of this review, about 30 jobs were featured, mainly in the US but also including opportunities in China.

The “articles” and “links” sections are well-organised and extensive. All the articles are from a range of sources including over thirty respected language and teaching journals, and are freely available and hyperlinked. At the bottom of the articles page, a list of online collections and journals covering assessment issues may also be

helpful for researchers. The links page includes language testing associations and providers, specific tests, models, frameworks, statistics and online tests. Further reading is available on the bookstore page, with books available for purchase via Amazon categorized by topic.

Users can also watch recent videos made by speakers from various institutions via YouTube (requiring access to a VPN within China). Additionally, twenty videos have been produced specifically for the site. These are mostly less than ten minutes long, and although looking rather outdated and with poor video quality in the early versions, do provide a brief introduction to assessment issues such as validity and reliability, and to specific assessment types such as integrated assessment. These materials are designed as an introduction for students of language testing, and may be too general for experienced practitioners in the field. More in-depth discussions are available through *Language Testing Bytes*, a podcast series from the journal *Language Testing* and available on the site, as well as on iTunes. Programmes are released 3 - 4 times a year, although from 2016, they will be reduced to biannually. The July 2015 podcast discusses diagnostic language testing.

The “features” and “scenarios” sections are designed for classroom use with students of language testing to encourage consideration of particular testing situations. For example, the High stakes testing feature provides a video and discussion questions about the high pressure Gaokao examination in China.

Of more interest to those working

in assessment may be Excel spreadsheets for classical test analysis; five spreadsheets are available for download, including Cronbach’s alpha, a statistical formula for calculating test reliability.

Although the site design could be improved to be less cluttered, the menus and search facility make the site generally easy to navigate. Information alert services also allow users to stay up-to-date with language testing issues by subscribing to feeds on news, articles, YouTube videos, podcasts and job postings. The breadth of materials provided means much can be found relevant to both ELT and EAP. This is a useful resource guide for both those new to language testing and for more experienced test designers and assessors.

SEMINARS FOCUSING ON ASSESSMENT

englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/seminars

The British Council’s Continuing Professional Development website has a number of seminars, some of which focus on assessment. Many seminars are subdivided into shorter bite-sized recordings which are easy to access and digest.

Some of the seminar recordings contain “session notes” which give some background to the speaker and content. There may also be tasks for the viewer to complete before watching, or follow-up tasks, and there may be the option of joining a discussion forum. Print versions of the training session and links to appropriate articles, supplementary information and further reading are all useful additions. The seminars



are filmed in such a way that they focus on the presenter, but cutaways to the PowerPoint slides help the viewer follow the presentation more easily.

Many of the seminars which focus on assessment and testing deal specifically with IELTS testing. A good example is that by Sam McCarter, an author and presenter. One of his listed presentations, *Teaching IELTS: Producing materials for the academic reading and writing modules*, recommends strategies for teaching IELTS and takes a functional approach to IELTS teaching material. His presentation is clear, easy to follow and offers a number of practical ideas that can be implemented immediately. An example is students paraphrasing exam questions in order to get greater understanding of the task. Overall his approach focuses on student awareness and self-evaluation of learning.

Other presentations focusing on testing include one by Fiona Aish and Jo Tomlinson on the topic of preparing lower-level students for IELTS. This is well-resourced and includes slides and a hand-out.

Barry O’Sullivan gives an overview of the development of assessment and language testing from its origins up to the present day and looks at how it may develop in the future. His presentation is entertaining and gives an insight into how tasks in exams were developed, particularly within the context of the teaching approaches popular at the time.

Overall, the training sessions give an insight into various aspects of testing and possible approaches when teaching. While the seminars mostly focus on IELTS preparation, they offer ideas of how to maximise learning which may be used in EAP or EFL classes. There is a good balance of theory and practice with a variety of topics and presenters. The website is well-designed and easy to access and navigate. The side bar containing details of upcoming seminars is a useful addition. The inclusion of preparation tasks, an online discussion forum, and further resources gives the user a great deal of choice on this website and is well worth investigating further by individuals and can be incorporated into an institution’s continuing professional development programme. ○

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