

Improving Assessment through Student Involvement

Improving Assessment through Student Involvement: Practical Solutions for Aiding Learning in Higher and Further Education. By Nancy Falchikov. New York: NY: Routledge Falmer, 2005.

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Improving Assessment through Student Involvement is about how students **have been, are,** and **may be** involved in assessment. The author of the volume, Nancy Falchikov, a respected authority on assessment in higher education, firmly believes that the assessment process can be improved by student involvement and that student learning can also benefit from this involvement. The intended audience for this volume is anyone in further or higher education who wants to improve their assessment practices or teachers who want to provide their students with rich educational experience. In addition, I feel this volume is particularly relevant to those language teachers (like myself) who are interested in adding to their assessment repertoire.

The volume is broken down into 11 chapters each of which starts with objectives for the chapter. In Chapter 1, the author introduces what she calls the “Seven Pillars of Language Assessment”. These pillars are written in the form of questions such as 1) Why assess? 2) How to assess? 3) What to assess? 4) When to assess? 5) Who assesses? 6) How well do we assess? and 7) What next. The remainder of the chapter sets out to answer these important questions.

Chapter 2 poses the question “What’s wrong with traditional assessment”? In this chapter, Falchikov discusses limitations and the negative side of traditional assessment. What I found the most interesting in this chapter is the author’s treatment of bias in teacher and examiner marking and the discussion of the relationship between traditional assessment and academic dishonesty. A chart delineating the major studies (34 in total) in assessment and cheating is a very useful addition to this chapter as is the extensive list of advice to teachers on how to combat plagiarism and cheating.

The third chapter of this volume, “Changing definitions of assessment,” looks at what the author calls three paradigms of assessment: ‘assessment as measurement’, ‘assessment as procedure’, and ‘assessment as enquiry’. In addition to these three paradigms, the author proposes (based on the work of Pearson et al, 2001) a fourth paradigm—‘assessment as quality control.’

The question of why some teachers involve students in assessment is delved into in Chapter 4. The author examines the reasons given by teachers from an historical perspective beginning with studies from the 1950s. This chapter ends with a discussion of the benefits of student involvement in assessment.

Chapter 5 is central to why many teachers would want to read this book as it focuses on ‘how may teachers involve students in assessment.’ Falchikov describes five ways that students may be involved. She devotes considerable attention to peer and self assessment. A valuable part of the chapter is the list of recommendations to help combat bias in the marking of alternative assessments.

Chapter 6 delves more deeply into the areas of peer and self assessment. The chapter content revolves around responses to frequently asked questions like “isn’t it my job as a teacher to undertake assessment?” and “isn’t it the case that students lack the knowledge or experience to carry out the assessment task?”

Chapters 7 and 8 describe results of two meta-analytic studies on self and peer assessment and the ways in which we can maximize the agreement between teacher and student marks. In these chapters, Falchikov describes the process of conducting a meta-analytic study and discusses the results. She concludes with recommendations for teachers who want to conduct similar studies.

Chapter 9 addresses the assessment of groups by peers. In doing so, she examines an important technique used in many tertiary-level classrooms, group project work. This chapter begins with a survey of group peer assessment studies and continues on to discuss some of the problems associated with peer assessment in groups. I found Falchikov’s treatment of the various biases that have been found to exist in group peer marking as well as her strategies for designing and marking group assignments to be a particularly valuable part of this book.

Chapter 10 explores student involvement in the area of Computer Assisted Assessment (CAA). She starts with a brief introduction to CAA and provides some historical information as well as outlines the advantages associated with CAA.

The final chapter of this excellent volume reviews the past, present and future of student involvement in assessment and suggests areas for future research.

As a tester who frequently is called upon to deliver professional development in the area of language assessment, I have found the Falchikov volume to be invaluable. In fact, I have incorporated a lot of its content in my training materials. Of particular value to me as both a teacher and an academic were the detailed surveys of the studies in each of the chapters. I highly recommend *Improving Assessment through Student Involvement* for its good balance of theory and practice. This volume is a must in any teacher’s or tester’s professional library.