TEACHERS OF ENGLISH
TO SPEAKERS OF
OTHER LANGUAGES

the JOURNAL

Evaluation and Assessment

Selected articles following the TESOL France Colloquium Focus on Evaluation, November 1998

Evaluation and Assessment

Selected articles following the TESOL France Colloquium
"Focus on Evaluation", November 1998

CONTENTS

Editorial
Vicki Moore, President 1998-1999

When the TESOL France Executive Committee chose "Focus on Evaluation - Pleins feux sur l'évaluation" for the association's 1998 colloquium, it immediately became apparent that the subject was of sufficient pertinence to merit the publication of a Journal on the same theme.

This vast domain is rife with ambiguous areas, apparent oppositions, schools of thought favoring one approach or another, questions, doubts, but very little certitude. The questions we asked ourselves at the time concerned such things as how to precisely define evaluation, testing and assessing and how - or if - they differ. What proportion or relation is there - or should there be - between the quantitative and qualitative aspects of evaluation? What criteria can be used to assess active skills such as oral expression as compared to the so-called "passive" skills like oral comprehension? How do placement, progress and achievement tests differ? Can levels of competency and skill in language really be described in an efficient way? Can evaluation ever be objective and neutral so long as being evaluated remains such a tense and emotion-charged experience for the learner?

A TESOL France Special Interest Group on evaluation and assessment also came into being and continued investigating the ramifications and implications of the theme for more than a year.

Through this Journal, we have tried to prolong the ripple effect from the forum of discussion that took place during our Colloquium and in the Special Interest Group, with the hopes that those of you who were unable to attend in person will find food for thought among the pages that follow.

THE JOURNAL of TESOL France

Manuscripts from members and non-members of TESOL France are welcome for consideration by the Editorial Board. In the preparation of manuscripts, prospective contributors should follow the guidelines at the back of this issue.

Essays and reviews in The JOURNAL can be reprinted, provided the source is acknowledged.

Manuscripts, editorial communications and queries about advertising should be addressed to:
The JOURNAL, TESOL France, Telecom Paris, 46 rue Barrault 75013 Paris.

TESOL France

Télécom Paris, 46 Rue Barrault, 75013 Paris, Tél/Fax (+33) 01 45 81 75 91

TESOL France, an affiliate of TESOL International and of IATEFL, is a non-profit organization of teachers of English in France. Its purposes are to stimulate professional development, to disseminate information about research, books and other materials related to English, and to strengthen instruction and research.

TESOL France organizes various events and a convention each year in Paris. Members receive *The News*, our newsletter and *The Journal*, the academic journal of the association.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 1998-1999

President: Vicki Moore	*Education Nationale:* Annie Gresle
Past President: Jacqueline Quéniart	*Formation continue:* Dilys Bone
Vice-President: Joan Sobota	*Special Interest Groups:*
Secretary: Preston Perluss	Barbara Tavares
Treasurer: Jean Cureau	*Regional Development:*
Publications: Sally Bosworth	Stéphane Dupuy
Publisher's Liaison: Michelle Masson	*Membership:* Susan Fries
Honorary Member: Denis Girard *(Education Nationale)*	

Introduction
Sally Bosworth Gérôme, Editor

TESOL France has always tried to bring together the two worlds of *l'Education Nationale* (the public school sector) and *Form Co* (the adult education sector). We all have a common goal: those of us who work with adults in companies are carrying on from where public school teachers left off, those of us who are working with public school children are trying to prepare our charges for the adult world. The theme of evaluation is a perfect meeting place because we all face the same problems. Teachers from *l'Education Nationale,* struggling with huge classes and the mass education system, have the same criteria for a good evaluation system as do teachers from the adult education sector, who might be working with smaller classes but are struggling to find fast and cost-effective ways to make their students become competent English language users.

Dermot Murphy introduces the broad subject of evaluation by showing how it leaves no one and no institution indifferent. He explains how it has the potential to be useful to individuals and institutions but how it may be perceived as being negative or harmful. The way evaluation is conceived, introduced and managed must be thought through carefully.

Marie-France Chen-Géré's description of secondary school testing echoes some of the principles laid down in Dermot Murphy's article. The *Education Nationale* system has developed a pioneer program that includes entry-level tests for all those going into secondary schools. This institution, which has to deal with mass education, manages to carry out continuous assessment throughout secondary studies.

Leaving the setting of an academic learning environment to situate the problem of evaluation in an industrial context, Peter Strutt discusses the importance of establishing clear testing procedures for in-company language training. Through effective testing the company can evaluate needs, set target language performance, assess progress throughout the course and determine the degree of attainment at the end of the program. Peter Strutt, by insisting that a good test should be valid and reliable, proposes clear guidelines while taking into consideration the "washback" effect.

Returning to the totally different environment of public secondary school teaching, Gilles Fériel establishes similar criteria for both progress testing (formative) and achievement testing (summative). The key words of reliability and validity are central to the new evaluation system being set up throughout France. In this new system, the clear criteria agreed on by both teachers and students include the notoriously difficult area of assessment of oral production. Instead of only focusing on form, it also takes into account communicative competence.

From still another perspective, Maurice Laurent proposes a permanent interactive assessment system. Inspired by the work of Caleb Gattegno, the originator of the Silent Way, this system gives assessment a central position in the course. By continually evaluating student needs and progression, the teacher constantly modifies classroom activities. However, in order for this system to work, the evaluation procedure must take into consideration emotional, perceptive and mental faculties of the students as well as the necessary processes involved in the learning procedure. If the activities are well adapted, students will develop personal learning strategies by analyzing their own errors.

The learner-centered error analysis proposed by Richard Duda is of a more targeted nature for language learning. He identifies three sources of defective discourse: interlingual or interlanguage errors, developmental errors and intralingual errors. By explicitly pointing out these types of errors, teachers help learners to become more aware of what they know or think they know about language and language learning. They can learn to accept their mistakes as part of their learning process, using them to progress.

By giving a mark, a teacher is quantifying a learning process that can only be judged in qualitative terms. Instead of helping students to become better language learners, the marking system can lead to a negative personal image and a negative feeling for the English language in general. Joëlle Aden tells about an experience in a secondary school where through enormous personal investment, students completely transform their negative perception into a positive representation. When a teacher fosters the desire to learn a foreign language, students gain a deeper self-awareness.

The theme of evaluation would not be complete without some practical activities

that could be used directly in the classroom. Peter May's exercises take into consideration learner motivation and the importance of learners taking charge of their learning process by analyzing the examinations themselves.

By attacking the difficult task of writing from another perspective, Lynne Rushton enables even the weakest students to have the satisfaction of producing a coherent document. When a piece of text is approached from the reader's point of view, the emphasis switches from grammatical accuracy to successful communication. In this way the learner can focus on things like layout, functional language, and organization of information, which are much easier to understand and reproduce than perfect spellings and tenses. Then, once a successful text is produced, students have the motivation and framework to improve their grammatical accuracy. This article includes many practical tips on how to implement these ideas in the classroom.

Reading and re-reading these articles will be extremely helpful for all teachers. When we are in the midst of working through an evaluation procedure, we can easily lose sight of long term objectives and higher level criteria. The similar views of authors from such different worlds as industrial in-company training and *Education Nationale* show how important it is to take into consideration both the learner as an individual and the language skills we are trying to assess.