T EDITION

Classroom Assessment

PETER W. AIRASIAN

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THIRD EDITION

Peter W. Airasian
Boston College

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About the Author

Peter W. Airasian is Professor of Education at Boston College, where he is Chair of the Department of Counseling, Developmental Psychology, and Research Methods. His main teaching responsibilities are instructing pre- and in-service teachers in classroom assessment. He received his Ph.D. degree from the University of Chicago, with a concentration in assessment and evaluation. He is a former high school chemistry and biology teacher. He is co-author of *Minimal Competency Testing* (1979), *School Effectiveness: A Reassessment of the Evidence* (1980), *The Effects of Standardized Testing* (1982), *Assessment in the Classroom* (1996) and *Teacher Self-Evaluation Tool Kit* (in press), as well as many articles on classroom assessment and testing. He is past Chair of the American Educational Research Association's Special Interest Group on Classroom Assessment. Currently, he is studying the process classroom teachers use to assess themselves.

Preface

Classroom Assessment, third edition, is designed for students taking a first course in classroom assessment and measurement. Its special mission is to show how assessment principles apply to the full range of teacher decision making, not just to the formal evaluation of pupil learning. Thus the book has been organized in a manner that follows the natural progression of teacher decision making: from organizing the classroom as a social system, to planning and conducting instruction to the formal evaluation of learning, to grading, and finally to the ways teachers assess themselves. The goal is to show students that assessment is an everyday, ongoing part of teaching, not some esoteric affair that is divorced from the daily routine. They should realize that learning about assessment is the same as learning about teaching. With this in mind, the following features have been built into this text.

Realistic Assessment

The focus throughout is on the realities of classrooms and how assessment techniques can better serve those realities. Thus Chapter 1, *The Classroom as an Assessment Environment,* begins by describing a hypothetical teacher and her activities during a typical school day. These activities and the decisions they require set the stage for an ongoing discussion of assessment as an inevitable part of a teacher's routine decision making. This focus on the classroom realities which surround and shape teacher assessments is constantly being illustrated by examples and quotes from real classroom teachers. The teacher comments are particularly effective in capturing the many contextual considerations that impinge on classroom assessment decisions.

Specific Recommendations

A good portion of each chapter is devoted to practical guidelines for conducting the type of assessment under discussion. The dangers of ignoring recommendations are also described and emphasized.

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Validity and Reliability

Discussion of these central concepts is introduced in Chapter 1 and is then particularized in each chapter for each specific type of assessment practice introduced. In this way, the particular validity and reliability problems of informal assessment, performance rating, grading, and paper-and-pencil tests are identified, and practical strategies for avoiding these problems provided. Emphasis is placed on the practical, not technical, consequences of invalid and unreliable assessment for teachers and pupils.

CHANGES IN THIS EDITION

Among the principal changes in this edition are the following.

- **End-of-Chapter Materials**—End-of-chapter discussion questions, reflection pieces, activities, and review questions have been added to each chapter.
- **Consequential Assessment**—Greater emphasis is given to the consequences that good and bad classroom assessments can have for pupils, teachers, and parents and on instruction.
- **Assessing Pupils with Disabilities**—New sections have been added on assessment issues for pupils with disabilities. Chapter 7 contains a new section on planning and accommodating pupils with disabilities, including the required contents of an Individual Education Program, and Chapter 9 addresses the problems and methods of assigning grades to pupils with disabilities.
- **Performance Assessment**—The chapter on performance assessment contains more examples of the uses of performance assessment along with instruments and rubrics appropriate to varied grade levels. Suggestions for getting started with performance assessment are included and the section on portfolio assessment has been expanded.
- **Teacher Self-Assessment**—The final chapter looks at the need for teachers to self-assess their practices and beliefs and offers examples of different approaches to teacher self-assessment.

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Peter W. Airasian

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Some Definitions: Testing, Measurement, Assessment, and Evaluation
Purposes of Assessment
Behavior Domains Assessed
Methods of Collecting Assessment Information
Standardized and Unstandardized Assessments
Individual and Group Assessments
Characteristics of Good Assessment: Validity and Reliability
Ethical Issues and Responsibilities
Chapter Summary

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

THE STUDENT CAN

- define basic terms: e.g., assessment, testing, cognitive, affective, standardized, validity, reliability, etc.
- contrast the three main purposes of assessment and give examples of each
- explain what validity and reliability are and how they influence the use of assessment information
- state examples of teachers' ethical responsibilities in collecting and using assessment information

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Chapter 1

The Classroom as an Assessment Environment

Classrooms are busy places. Every day in every classroom, teachers make decisions about their pupils, the success of their instruction, and the classroom climate. Today was a typical day in Ms. Lopez's classroom. In addition to meeting the school buses in the morning, readying the room for the day's activities, putting up the work schedule on the blackboard, reviewing her lesson plans, taking attendance, distributing supplies, passing out new reading workbooks, reminding pupils of next Saturday's school fair, and monitoring the lunchroom, Ms. Lopez also did the following:

- Moved Jennifer from the middle to the high reading group
- Referred Aaron to the special education department to be screened for poor gross motor skills
- Completed the monthly school progress report on each pupil in the class
- Assigned grades to her pupils' science test on Chapter 2, "The Planets"
- Selected Martha, not Matt, to deliver a note to Mr. Henderson, the school principal
- Decided on topics to cover in tomorrow's math lesson
- Recommended that Robert spend extra time this weekend reviewing the different parts of speech
- Stopped the planned language lesson halfway through the period in order to review the previous day's lesson
- Placed pupils who were below the accepted cutoff scores on the state-mandated basic skills test in a special remedial group
- Rearranged the class seating plan to separate Bill from Leroy and to move Monroe to the front of the room so he could see the blackboard better
- Called on Kim twice even though her hand was not raised
- Praised Anne for her B grade, but encouraged Tim to work harder in order to improve his B grade

- Switched social studies instruction from discussion to seatwork when the class became bored and unruly
- Previewed and selected a filmstrip on astronomy for next week's science unit
- Encouraged Milo to redraft his English composition to correct spelling and grammar errors
- Sent Randy to the school nurse when he complained of a headache
- Selected pupils to work together on a cooperative learning exercise in math
- Decided to allow her pupils two more days to complete their poetry portfolios
- Judged that Rose's constant interruptions and speaking out in class warranted a note to her parents about the problem
- Assigned homework in science and social studies, but not in math and language
- Checked with the school counselor regarding possible reasons for Joshua's increasingly inattentive class behavior
- Paired Kim, a class isolate, with Mary, a class leader, for the project in social studies
- Sent Ralph to the principal because he swore at a teacher and threatened a classmate
- Held a parent-teacher conference with Tim's parents in which she told them that Tim was a capable student who could produce better work than he had thus far
- Consulted last year's standardized test scores to determine whether the class needed a review of the basic rules of capitalization

Ms. Lopez's day in the classroom, like those of all teachers, was filled with situations in which she had to make decisions. Some of the decisions were about individual pupils and some were about the class as a whole. Some were about instructional matters, some about classroom climate, some about pupil personalities, and some about pupil learning. Some, like the decision to change Jennifer's reading group or refer Aaron for screening, were made infrequently. Others, like planning topics for instruction, calling on pupils during class, and assigning grades to pupils, were made many times each day.

All Ms. Lopez's actions resulted from decisions, and all her decisions were based upon some form of evidence. Evidence gathering and decision making are necessary and ongoing aspects of life in all classrooms. Taken together, they serve to establish, organize, and monitor classroom qualities such as pupil learning, interpersonal relations, social adjustment, instructional content, and classroom climate.

Classroom decisions should be reflective and thoughtful, not impulsive and erratic. The decisions Ms. Lopez made were based upon many different kinds of evidence that she collected over time. Why, for example, did Ms. Lopez praise Anne for her B grade but encourage Tim, who attained the same grade, to do better next time? How did she know that the way to settle down her bored and unruly social studies class was to switch from discussion to seatwork? What made her decide to move Jennifer to the high reading group? Why did she think pairing Kim with Mary for the social studies project was better than pairing Kim with Martha, Rose, or Joshua? Why did she feel that spending two extra days working on the poetry portfolio would be more useful than using the time to introduce some other topic? Why was Martha, but not Matt, trusted to deliver a note to the principal? All of these decisions were based upon information that helped Ms. Lopez choose a course of action. Think of all the possible sources of evidence she might have used to help her make these decisions. It is the process of gathering, evaluating, and using such information that this book is about.

SOME DEFINITIONS: TESTING, MEASUREMENT, ASSESSMENT, AND EVALUATION

The process of collecting, synthesizing, and interpreting information to aid in decision making is called **assessment.** Assessment involves much more than scoring and grading paper-and-pencil tests. While such activities are important components of assessment, the preceding list of Ms. Lopez's decisions makes clear that there is much more to classroom assessment than administering, scoring, and grading tests. Assessment, as the term is used here, includes the full range of information teachers gather in their classrooms: information that helps them understand their pupils, monitor instruction, and establish a viable classroom community. It also includes the variety of ways teachers gather, synthesize, and interpret that information.

There are differences among assessments, tests, measurements, and evaluations. **Assessment** is a general term that includes all the ways teachers gather information in their classrooms. A **test** is a formal, systematic, usually paper-and-pencil procedure to gather information about pupils' learning. Tests are only one of the many types of assessment information teachers deal with, and thus only one of many different assessment approaches. Other assessment approaches include observations, interviews, oral questions, portfolios, and projects.

Measurement is the process of quantifying or assigning a number to performance. The most common example of measurement in the classroom occurs when a teacher scores a quiz or test. Scoring produces a numerical description of performance: Jackie got 17 out of 20 items correct on the science test; Dennis got a score of 65 percent on his math test; Rhonda's score

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