

**N. Jones & N. Saville. *Learning Oriented Assessment: A Systemic Approach* (Vol. 45). Cambridge University Press. 2016. Pp. 148.**

*Learning Oriented Assessment: A Systemic Approach* is another addition to the Studies in Language Testing series, which is jointly published by Cambridge English Language Assessment (CELA) and Cambridge University Press (CUP), and edited by Dr Nick Saville and Professor Cyril J Weir. This No. 45 volume of the series is authored by Dr Neil Jones and Dr Nick Saville, who are experienced language testing experts and have been involved in language testing and assessment projects for many years. To explore how assessment can bring a positive impact on learning, they present the Learning Oriented Assessment (LOA) model proposed by CELA by explicitly drawing upon their rich language teaching experience, and surveying the literature on learning and assessment. It is the foreground comment: "To all the learners we have taught from 1970 to 2015" that lays the foundation to this volume and the theory of LOA, that is, learners and learning.

This volume contains nine chapters dedicated to presenting readers with a clear understanding of the relationship between assessment and learning, and to elaborate on the question of the extent to which assessment promotes or hinders successful learning outcomes. The first chapter provides an overview of LOA, which opens the field to readers by addressing four worlds of learning: the personal world, the social world, the world of education, and the world of assessment. Besides, this overview chapter displays the general structure of the whole volume and key ideas in LOA.

In order to demonstrate the significance of LOA, Chapter 2 introduces the origins of learning-oriented approaches and several branches of learning-oriented development. To be specific, it encompasses Assessment for Learning by the Assessment Reform Group in England and psychometric testing in the United States, and teacher-based assessment (TBA) and school-based assessment (SAB) in Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, and Scotland. All those involvements draw scholars' attention to the need to rethink the role of classroom-based assessment (CBA), validity frameworks, sustainable assessment, and performance assessment. In addition, the LOA approaches so far include dynamic assessment, cognitive acceleration, and mastery learning, which are all categorised as formative assessment by Black and Wiliam (2003).

Following the first two overview chapters, in Chapters 3 to 7, the authors commence answering three fundamental questions, which are central to LOA theory: "What is learning? What is to be learned? And what is the role of assessment in learning?" (p. 5).

The first question is addressed in Chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 3 substantially addresses the personal world of developing individuals' cognition. It forwards that LOA in this volume takes on a social constructivist perspective and sees interaction as learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, it accentuates the importance of interaction to learning and to development, and leads readers to focus on the context of classrooms where the interactions happen and thus learning occurs. The broad literature review of learning and formative assessment presents definitions of key classroom concepts and summarises the conditions for actual learning to happen in a real classroom context. The authors argue that effective interaction requires good learners to be involved in self- and peer-assessment and to have positive as well as intrinsic motivation for learning, and good teachers need to consider different roles and duties in learning, classroom assessment as well as summative assessment.

Chapter 4 extends the first question by considering "What is language learning?" within the LOA framework. It lays the LOA model as the foundation for designing and validating English large-scale exams. Taking the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as an example, LOA is depicted as an action-oriented model which manifests social constructivist concepts of learning. Contrasting second language learning with the natural way that first languages are typically acquired, the importance of interaction and communication is emphasised through a review of a range of second language acquisition studies.

Henceforth, Chapter 5 provides an answer to "What is to be learned?" by focusing on the social and educational worlds. The authors first point out the desired social learning outcomes: acquiring the ability to carry on learning in future life and the specific language knowledge relevant to this. Linking back to Section 4.2 in the previous chapter, the CEFR's model of learning is further discussed, and the first aspect of personal development is clarified. However, there is a second aspect of the question of what is to be learned - the idea of a construct that defines high-order communicative language skills. The authors point out that the nature of these language skills is subject to debate, and different groups of stakeholders must try to reach an agreement. These tensions are, in turn, reflected in the effort of aligning teaching, assessment and social expectations, which requires that curricular objectives should be able to be interpreted from the results of construct-valid tests. Therefore, both the higher-level communicative language skills and the curricula stipulated learning objectives are the objects of learning for learners and thus become the aim of learning-oriented assessments.

Finally, Chapters 6 and 7 respond to the final question, "What is the role of assessment in learning?" from both large-scale assessment and classroom assessment perspectives. Taking the assessment work of CELA as the example, Chapter 6 relates the two key features of validity and reliability in assessment to the requirement of achieving better learning outcomes in LOA. Validity is first discussed by distinguishing achievement

tests and language proficiency tests. The Cambridge tests, categorised as language proficiency tests, aim to evaluate higher-order communicative learning objectives by treating language as a skill, and the authors specify that in the LOA realm, the evidence of validity includes both the reliability of measurement and the positive social impact of test use.

While Chapter 6 explains LOA in a large-scale assessment context, Chapter 7 situates LOA in the practical classroom context. The LOA cycle is visualised, and in the second part of the chapter, the implementation of LOA is rigorously discussed. First, 'interaction' is shown to be at the heart of learning-oriented classrooms, and why and how it produces learning are key to understanding LOA. Three kinds of learning outcomes: domain-specific higher-order outcomes, domain-specific curricular content and domain-independent, transferrable learning skills and dispositions are posited. Learning-centred versus content-centred activities in the classroom and classroom evidence of learning (test results) versus classroom evidence for learning (closing the feedback loop) are compared. As a result, the ecological LOA cycle with an external evaluation of higher-order objectives and an internal evaluation of task-centred classroom activities is presented and clarified to advance socially valued outcomes.

Subsequently, Chapter 8 brings the three questions addressed in chapters 3 to 7 together into a conclusion and summarises LOA theory. It combines the twin goals of LOA (providing evidence of and for learning) and aligns these to a descriptive framework of standards (Can Do statements from the CEFR) to interpret learners' performance. To conclude, Chapter 9 addresses pertinent issues in practical LOA implementation. Growing out of the impact studies of Cambridge English tests, LOA is then explained by reviewing exemplary impact studies to prove that it "may be seen as a theory of action aimed at achieving positive impact by design." (p.113) Furthermore, concerning its implementation, a strong theoretical base (p.117) is provided for stakeholders to reflect on how to monitor as well as evaluate LOA. The last section brings the whole volume to a close by re-emphasising that a good learning or education is all about achieving the skills which enable learners to continue learning beyond school context.

Generally speaking, this volume leaves readers a deep impression of how assessment can act to promote learning, particularly language learning. It revisits the frequently discussed topics of validity and reliability in the field of language testing and assessment, and endeavours to find a synergy between large-scale assessment and classroom learning-oriented assessment. However, although key elements of LOA have been explicitly identified and the origins, as well as the evolution of the theory, have been well-documented, key ideas such as "feedback", which is only briefly touched upon in the context of task-based interactions in section 3.3.3 (p.38), could have received more attention. Further, as no specific education context is assigned to

LOA theory, more specific comments on different contexts such as secondary or primary education would have added to the value of the book.

To conclude, as the authors claimed in Chapter 1, this volume is neither aiming to prescribe classroom activities nor to promote teaching for test preparation. Rather, it emphasises an LOA model to shed light on how assessment can be used to provide evidence of learning and for learning. Therefore, theoretically, this book is suitable for academics in the field of language testing and assessment; and practically, it is of relevance to educational specialists (e.g., educational policy-makers, curriculum designers, test designers, and examination boards) who are involved in test design and test result use phases. Additionally, language teachers, who may benefit from understanding the theoretical base of LOA, can also refer to the examples given in Chapter 9 in their teaching. Needless to say, the conclusion of practical considerations and suggestions of LOA implementation stands alone and gives the possibility of using this book as a good resource for test designer and teacher training programs.

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### **References**

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