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Authentic tasks and testing for university English literature classes

This presentation looked at issues connected with the assessment of students studying English literature in university courses which seek mainly to teach literature rather than EAP skills. The question of what kinds of assessment to use with L2 literature students was embedded within the context of the kinds of testing most commonly carried out in Japanese university language departments and the problems associated with a quantitative approach to testing.

Since the origins of EAP and L2 literature testing practices are traceable in part to language testing research, it has seemed natural to assume that methodologies that, for example, were used in the testing of vocabulary uptake be “brought over” to literature. This has meant that quantitative tests have appeared that are claimed to measure reading ability and knowledge of literature. An example of this, albeit extreme, can be found in the materials made available for students to practice for the ETS GRE Literature in English Test (2010). The quantification of student performance in summative testing was argued to be a misstep, and it was argued that a better approach is available that is more satisfying for teacher and students, but which fulfills the requirements of the fairly restrictive university grading system.

Based around Knowles’ (1968; Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2005) ideas on adult learners, and drawing on the discussion of Authentic Assessment (Mueller, 2014), the practice of linking rubrics to practical and relevant tasks was recommended as an approach which allows teachers to measure and assess student performance in a way which produces meaningful feedback and encourages students to see their learning as part of a lifelong project of engaging with English literature.

References

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