

Foreword

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As readers may already know, the previous *Shiken* editorial team found themselves overcommitted with other projects and were not able to continue beyond the publication of *Shiken Research Bulletin 17*, leaving our SIG without a permanent Publications Chair and *Shiken* editor. Therefore the TEVAL SIG executive committee appointed acting editors until a permanent editor can be found. One of the legal requirements of a JALT SIG is to publish a newsletter three times per year, reporting on SIG activities and other issues of interest to members. We have not met this requirement for several years now, primarily because of a lack of submissions to *Shiken*. It is our hope that this issue of *Shiken* will mark a reversal of this and that the contributions to this issue will illustrate the important place of testing and evaluation in language education.

In addition to losing our *Shiken* editorial team, two executive members with many years of service, Jeffrey Hubbell and Ed Schaefer, are also retiring this year, leaving us in desperate need of officers. The TEVAL SIG has a steady membership, indicating that many JALT members consider issues of testing and assessment important enough to pay membership dues, but we are struggling to attract more active participation. This is becoming a serious matter because if we cannot maintain the minimum number of officers required under the JALT constitution, we face the possibility of the TEVAL SIG being disbanded by JALT for not meeting legally binding obligations.

Talking with Jeffrey Hubbell, Ed Schaefer and other veterans of both TEVAL and the Japan Language Testing Association (JLTA) raised the point that a major concern when TEVAL was established in 1997 was the harmful effects of high-stakes tests, notably university entrance exams. Test misuse is still a major concern, but TEVAL has important positive contributions to make beyond raising issues of the negative consequences of test misuse. As the name suggests, JALT is an organization concerned with language education. Although many of our members conduct research, it is rare to meet a JALT member who is not primarily a language teacher, with research a secondary focus. Most teachers are required to assess their students and assign grades that often determine eligibility to graduate. However, many language teachers have little or no formal training in language assessment, so one of the key contributions that *Shiken* can make is helping teachers improve the quality of their classroom assessment, an area where much of the psychometric research on large-scale tests is not directly applicable. In many classroom situations, the psychometric properties of tests may be subservient to pedagogical issues such as the effects of high-stake tests on motivation, integration of classroom tasks and content into assessment, and the formative effects of assessment. In some ways, this makes classroom assessment more technically challenging than large scale proficiency tests, where the sole purpose is to measure a well-defined trait of ability as quickly and efficiently as possible. Unfortunately, classroom assessments generally do not meet the standards of replicability and generalizability demanded by research journals, so issues of classroom assessment are underrepresented in the literature.

All of the contributors to this issue of *Shiken* addressed issues of concern for classroom assessment. Trace and Janssen provide a tentative investigation of the relationship between item difficulty on two variations of cloze tests and measures of word association derived from corpus analysis, finding support for the view that the contextual information provided by analysis of word associations compared with simple word frequency can improve the selection of words for deletion. Crucially, the techniques used by Trace and Janssen are accessible to teachers with moderate technical ability who need to develop integrated assessment and instructional materials. Marshall documents the development of an assessment rubric for classroom use, illustrating the many difficulties inherent in the integration of criterion referenced

assessment in the classroom, especially of the difficulty of providing meaningful formative feedback to students. Cubilo provides an accessible discussion of the frequently misunderstood concept of validity and the nature of validity arguments. Given that language tests can determine entry into a school or program, or whether students are eligible to graduate, the implication that a validity argument presented for a test in one context may be irrelevant in another highlights our responsibility to gather evidence and present an argument justifying the interpretation and use of assessments beyond the citing of reliability coefficients or descriptions of test content. Dunkley interviews Dr Meg Malone of the Center for Applied Linguists (CAL) whose experiences with assessment literacy for language teachers highlighted differences in the information that language testers and language teachers considered important, leading to improvements to CAL's directory of language tests to make relevant information more accessible to teachers and administrators. Brown, continuing his *Statistics Corner* contributions that date back to the very first issue of *Shiken*, discusses the differences between norm-referenced and criterion-referenced tests from the perspective of classroom assessment, providing a practical introductory guide for teachers wishing to develop classroom assessments.

Finally, we are very happy to introduce *My Tests*, a new column developed at the initiative of Jeffrey Durand, the TEVAL treasurer and long serving member of the *Shiken* editorial board. The first installment of *My Tests* deals with the problem of designing a judging plan in rated performance tests, an issue that should be of concern for anyone trying to implement such tests on a program-wide basis. *My Tests* is a forum for our members to share experiences with tests and to seek and provide advice. In test development we often encounter problems that must have been encountered before, but are forced to reinvent solutions because there is no forum to share our experiences. This forum is thus intended to help our members, both through the answers that you share and in the questions that you ask.

Thank you to all our contributors and our readers, we hope you find this issue of *Shiken* valuable and look forward to seeing you all at the TEVAL booth in the SIG area at the upcoming JALT International Conference in November.

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