

Innovation in Language Assessments – Sean McDonald from telc.

Transcript

My name is Sean McDonald, I come from telc Language Tests in Frankfurt, Germany. I've been with telc for about six years now, and spend most of my time developing tests. Our first venture into e-assessment was quite a few years ago, and we made a very careful first dip into the waters, so to speak. We chose a software back then that was a little bit more affordable I guess is the proper word, to start looking and start learning how to do assessment. Then we have the challenge of developing items and getting things to even work on the interface.

You can't use anything, you have to use a quality product that knows what you're doing. So we started looking around to find a different partner that could help us achieve those goals. What we're trying to do, with the help of Surpass and with the help of BTL, is to develop a new line of testing which will one day supplant the older forms.

Of course, the main thing was that it has an interface that allows us to develop fairly good tests – good-looking tests. It can allow us to do what they want, but also you have the psychometrics built in, right! We were particularly impressed because you were the only company – and we talked to several different people actually, and had them in for interviews – but you were the only ones that understood testing. You knew what you were doing. I really saw that you understood assessment, and that was quite impressive that you could talk about something and you knew what you were talking about. And it wasn't "yeah yeah yeah we'll build it" – but it was already there, it had a proven track record. You could talk about assessment, you could talk about psychometrics, you could talk about items etcetera.

With this test, which we haven't been able to do before at telc, is to have mixed types. So in a language test, with the way we develop tests, we look at four skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing, right. And what we've been able to do with our language tests, with the software that we've offered, is mix the skills. Somebody has to listen to something and have to write about what they've listened to. Somebody has to watch a video – we haven't been able to offer videos before. Being able to mix item types; being able to do two things at once, to read and write at the same time, to listen and speak at the same time, to really get people interactive, to get the students to feel they're doing much more than simply writing a test.

So yes, we have been able to do different things and innovative things with the tests that we're very excited about. It really has given us a wonderful opportunity to be more creative, to look at new ways of testing, and to look at new ways of achieving our goals, and making it more interesting for students and making it much more engaging, which in fact we've done. Our student testimonials with this new online test say: "hey, why can't all tests be like that?"