

**We Teach Languages Episode 138: IPAs, A Review of the Literature, and Steps to Move Forward with Stephanie Madison**

**Stacey Johnson**:  [0:00] This is "We Teach Languages," a podcast about language teaching from the diverse perspectives of teachers.

[0:07] [music]

**Stacey**:  [0:13] I'm Stacey Margarita Johnson, and today on episode 138, I get to speak with Dr. Stephanie Madison about an article she recently published in "Spanish and Portuguese Review" entitled "Integrated Performance Assessments: A Review of the Literature and Steps to Move Forward."

[0:34] Over the next four weeks, We Teach Languages will be featuring interviews with authors from Volume 5 of Spanish and Portuguese Review to highlight some of the really practical research that's available in academic journals. Specifically, the journal that I'm involved with which is the graduate student journal of the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese.

[1:01] A couple of things to get us started before we jump into the interview. First, if you are not familiar with Integrated Performance Assessments, they are a way of measuring your students' progress towards language proficiency, often abbreviated as IPA.

[1:21] They typically have three distinct steps. The first is the interpretive mode where students are either reading or listening and making sense of what they read or listen to. The second is the interpersonal mode where students are engaging in spontaneous communication around the resource that they just examined in the interpretive mode.

[1:44] Then there is the presentational mode where students either speak or write to communicate their own ideas. There are many different variations on how to do interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational communication well and how to do them in the context of an IPA.

[2:06] I'm really excited for this interview where we get to hear from someone who has a really good working knowledge of the research that informs this particular type of assessment.

[2:19] Also, as someone who has been a Spanish teacher for years, also has some really practical guidance and experience to share with us about how to make IPAs more accessible for our students and more feasible in our own classrooms.

[2:38] I'll also mention, before we jump into the interview, that if you are a graduate student who is currently conducting research or writing on topics that have to do with what happens in language classrooms, please check out the link in the show notes to this call for submissions for Volume 6 of Spanish and Portuguese Review.

[3:01] If you submit a paper and it goes through peer review, even if it doesn't get published, you'll still get some really great feedback about how your paper could be improved so it could be published somewhere in the future. There's always the possibility that your work will be featured in the 2020 Volume 6 of Spanish and Portuguese Review, and next year on the We Teach Languages podcast.

[3:27] All that said, let's jump into this interview.

[3:30] [music]

**Stacey**:  [3:30] I get to be here today with Stephanie Madison, who recently published an article in Spanish and Portuguese Review called Integrated Performance Assessments ‑‑ A Review of the Literature and Steps to Move Forward.

[3:50] Stephanie, thank you so much for chatting with me today.

**Stephanie Madison**:  [3:53] It's my pleasure. I'm so excited to be here.

**Stacey**:  [3:56] I personally, as a teacher, have used sort of my Frankenstein version of IPAs. I teach IPAs to my method students but I definitely haven't done the level of analysis you've done about what they are and how they work. I'm excited to chat with you today about your paper.

[4:15] Can we start just by you telling us a little bit about who you teach, what you do, what your context is?

**Stephanie**:  [4:21] Yeah. I taught high‑school Spanish for 10 years with some ESL thrown in here and there. I'm currently wrapping up my PhD at Clemson University, in the Literacy, Language, and Culture Program.

[4:36] My research interest focus largely on issues of language in power, issues of social justice in language classrooms, and digging deeper than just recommendations of what teachers can do, which is important, but also reflecting on all of the background that comes with that.

[4:57] That is also related to this paper. We all know what an IPA is but knowing the reasons for why different things are important is another aspect of my work.

[5:09] Stacey. Awesome. You're also a graduate student who's currently on the job market, right?

**Stephanie**:  [5:17] That is correct.

**Stacey**:  [5:18] I just want to put that out there so when people are impressed with this interview, they can give you a call.

**Stephanie**:  [5:23] 100 percent yes, that is correct.

[5:26] [laughter]

**Stacey**:  [5:27] Do you want to tell us a little bit about your article?

**Stephanie**:  [5:31] Sure. This article is a review of the literature, like you said, where I dug into the principles, got combined in order to form the IPA. One of those principles is called dynamic assessment. Dynamic assessment has been referred to...It's not just in language classes, but in any subject. It's an iterative approach to assessment, where students will produce something.

[6:01] You give them feedback. They come back with something else. See how they use the feedback. It's a really good way to provide equitable assessment, lower the stakes quite a bit. We all have students with anxiety, students who struggle with all different sorts of obstacles in their life and in school. It's, to me, a really humanizing way of approaching assessment. Those principles are a big part of it.

**Stacey**:  [6:27] Can I ask you a quick question?

**Stephanie**:  [6:28] Oh, yeah.

**Stacey**:  [6:29] I was not familiar with the term dynamic assessment before reading your paper. How is this related maybe to what I would call teaching for mastery?

**Stephanie**:  [6:40] I would say they're very similar. It's the opposite of the Gacha game working off points for every wrong error. You see where a student is at. Then you give them feedback to see how much they can improve. That's the main idea.

[6:55] Kristin Davon has written a lot about it if you're interested. She does a great job of explaining all the different ways it can work, all the different ways it can help.

**Stacey**:  [7:03] If you have suggestions for specific papers of Kristin's, then I'll include them in the show notes for people who like to keep reading. I guess they will be in your bibliography. If you'll just highlight them I will make sure they're in the show notes.

**Stephanie**:  [7:16] Sounds good. The other part of an integrated performance assessment is performance‑based assessment. That became a buzz word in the past decade or two, where it's all based on a real‑life context. I know real life is a contentious phrase because no, it's not real life. You're in a classroom.

[7:41] People will say pretend you're studying abroad and you're walking around the streets of Paris or whatever. That's also not reality for a lot of our students. To me, performance‑based context, I like to think of it as what a normal, average person in a different, whatever cultural context you're looking at, will be likely to encounter.

[8:03] It's not saying pretend that you're going to the bank. You're like, "OK, all these people in this picture, this video, whatever, they're going to the bank. Go and open an account," or whatever. You don't need to pretend the context is set because they're seeing real people in a real‑life context. To me, that's sufficient.

[8:22] There's no need to say pretend or whatever. The performance part comes out of what a person, a native speaker language might need to do in their life. When you put those two things together, you get the IPA where you're trying to promote growth through an iterative process and you want it housed under a real‑life context.

**Stacey**:  [8:45] This particular paper was a systematic review. How do you do a systematic review? What were your parameters for deciding which articles to choose for your review?

**Stephanie**:  [8:56] A literature review, which I did not know what that was until I got into this PhD program. It took me a long time to understand the point of it. I thought that's just how you write a paper. You read a bunch of stuff and you write what you think about it.

[9:10] [laughter]

**Stephanie**:  [9:11] Alas, that's not exactly what it is. A review of the literature means that you pick specific search terms of what you're going to include and not include. For example, dynamic assessment obviously was one of the search terms, performance‑based, language, foreign language, those types of terms.

[9:31] You just use them in different combinations, in different search engines, like Google Scholar or whatever your campus library has access to. I like to pick a cut date because you don't want to go all the way back to the beginning of time.

**Stacey**:  [9:47] With an IPA, that wouldn't be necessary, since it's a contemporary term.

**Stephanie**:  [9:54] I chose around the time when they started to be on the scene. From there, I've organized them by OK, what is this telling me about this particular aspect of dynamic assessment or about performance‑based assessment? You cluster them. After you read through them, for me personally, it's easier to read with my laptop open and take notes while I'm reading.

[10:22] A lot of people read the whole thing end to end, highlight, take notes, and then they think about it for a while. Then they sit down and write.

[10:30] My brain is...I got to get it down immediately or else it's gone. I take notes while I'm going. Then as I'm taking notes one article after another, patterns just naturally start to emerge. You'll see things in conflict. Like, "Huh, that's funny. In this one article, I saw this but this article they have that."

[10:48] Then you're like, "OK, what's different about it? Was it the context? Was it the age of the students?" and so on and so forth. After you got a nice bank of articles, then I take notes and just look for patterns and see what the story is.

**Stacey**:  [11:05] What you just describe is representative of what a lot of researches, whether they are qualitative researcher, a literary scholar or doing a literature review. You're trying to see what are the available connections and then find where people agreeing, where they disagreeing, how can you find insights in those spaces between articles.

[11:29] I really like your description. What did you discover about the IPA through your literature review?

**Stephanie**:  [11:35] Well, a disclaimer is I love an IPA and I did a session that [inaudible] a few years ago with Jennifer Reschly and Erin Gilreath Carlson, and Caitlin Howard. It's called "Kickback with a Cool IPA." Koozies were involved. It was a whole thing.

[11:56] We just loved them because...I love them because you're not...It's the opposite of a fill in a blank test. Fill in a blank have their place, sure, but I think for a test you want it to be holistic and housed and direct context.

[12:10] You're rewarding students for the more they give you, the more they show you, the more points you give them. It's like a self‑differentiating.

[12:19] What I learned from this literature review is the same thing that we were presenting on. Teachers love the idea. Who doesn't want to help their students grow but logistically, it is hard to do. It is really hard to do.

[12:34] Even teachers who say, "Yeah, I'm against straight [inaudible] all the time or circle the conjugation," all that type of stuff, teachers are busy more and more as we all know added to your plate that it's really hard to get that, the iterations for growth. Yeah, that's what [inaudible] with it. It's hard to stick to it.

**Stacey**:  [12:55] What does an IPA typically include and what are your recommendations for teachers?

**Stephanie**:  [13:00] Yeah, an IPA, Integrated Performance Assessment, is typically three parts. It could be more, if you wanted it to be, where you have a reading activity of some sort, a listening activity of some sort, preferably an authentic which is again another loaded word. A culturally appropriate, culturally embedded resource of some sort.

[13:22] From that, you can link to a writing activity, a speaking activity, all kind of related to the same topic. For example, if your context was that you needed to help your friend get ready for their soccer game or their band concert or whatever, you might read about different things that you might need to go shopping for.

[13:47] Might be you like an ad or a flyer. You might end with some questions about it. "Well, from my friend who play soccer, I would buy this or the other."

[13:55] For the reading and listening, that is a good place to give yourself some grace and cut yourself some slack due to circle the answer, true, false, complete this [inaudible] type of thing. From that, you want it to jump off to a writing. Maybe you're going to text your friend with the shopping list that you need them to get.

[14:16] Or convince them not to get that really ugly soccer jersey for the game because you don't want to be seen with them, whatever. Then that jumps off into a speaking. There's a lot of different ways to get that, the goal is to have kids engage or students engage either with you or with each other in some sort of impromptu conversation.

[14:38] Of course with novice level, you want to give them chunks of language and then more and more breakaway from that. So that's what it is. In an ideal world, where we all had teaching assistants who helped us with all of these, you would do one of the pieces first. You might start with the reading, the listening, the writing, whatever.

[14:58] Grade it, give feedback, give it back, and then do the next part so that way they take what they've worked and can improve and take that knowledge, apply it to the next piece.

**Stacey**:  [15:08] My understanding of the IPA also is that feedback would ideally be like in a one‑to‑one conference where you actually get to talk through your [laughs] feedback with the student.

**Stephanie**:  [15:19] Ideally, yeah. Notes, you can write notes on the paper. We all know how much students read our written feedback in such great detail. You, ideally, have a conversation. You'd be like, "You did really great with this but next time, I'd really like to see more of that. I know you can show me more of this. I've seen it in class."

[15:39] Of course, that's really difficult to do. My proposed solution and what we presented on the actual few years ago was you use class time to mimic this as much as possible. For example, stations. If you have students in stations doing different things.

[15:59] One of the stations can be speaking where you sit down with a clipboard and you just ask questions and have a group conversation with three or four kids. On your clipboard, you're going to do that, the note taking, and you're going to give the feedback as you said you want to give one‑on‑one.

[16:16] That can be done as an activity in class. You could even use those points and apply it to an IPA if you're doing a week‑long schematic thing. Writing, same thing. Grading, writing, and providing feedback is really hard. If you've got 30, 40 students in the class, you can have them write collaboratively.

[16:35] You can have them work on a tab together and then you can tag team and grade that, and get feedback on that. That serves several purposes. You can take these points and apply it to an IPA grade or it's just going to help them do a better job when they get to a different assessment.

[16:52] Then the reading and speaking, that can be done in class anytime. There's ways around it to integrate it into class. If you don't take that as the IPA points, it preps them to do a good job. Followed that idea either way.

**Stacey**:  [17:08] I am wondering if your kickback with a cool IPA slides or materials are out there somewhere where we can link to in the show notes? If people want to hear more specifics from you about how to do this well.

**Stephanie**:  [17:22] Yeah. I'll definitely get that to you. It's publicly available. What we talked about in the presentation was if you want to give it as a grade, like one chunk of a grade, instead of the collecting, the pieces during class time which is perfectly fine, we have a system in place.

[17:43] We do the dynamic assessments as formative assessments and then the summative is an IPA standalone. Because that way we don't lose the benefit of the constant feedback but we can logistically get through it.

[17:58] What we do, we had 90‑minute walks. We started with a reading activity ‑‑ flyer or ad or work story of some sort. We had multiple‑choice questions for that. That's where we've decided to cut ourselves some slack.

[18:12] From that, what we had them do was the writing activity. Everyone would work on the reading and the writing on their own. In the meantime, I would call the students one‑by‑one to my desk, and do a conversation with them there. By that time, they had seen the reading and writing. They understood the content and so whatever we talked about would make sense.

[18:33] How we did it is we would have...I had one desk at the back of the room and that was the on‑deck chair. I would be like, "OK, the Student A is sitting at my desk. Student B is on‑deck." Then when Student A is done, he goes and tap Student C.

[18:48] B is walking to my desk, C is getting on‑deck. That way, you're not like, "Hey, you on the back of the room. Hey, over here. It's your turn."

[18:55] You're never having to like coral the students. It's smooth and seamless. The IPAs are hard to cheat on because it's free writing. [laughs] They're all going to be different anyway.

[19:06] By having that kind of flow in just a couple of minute conversation per student, we were able to get through it in a class period and in the students I did not get to, I would just do it during the warm‑up the next day.

**Stacey**:  [19:18] That is great. There is a ton of information in your article and in this episode, and in the materials we're going to link to in the show notes. I guess is there anything else that you were hoping to let people know about IPAs before we wrap up?

**Stephanie**:  [19:32] Just that it is a huge time commitment to do them as...If we had all the time in the world, the best possible practice ever, but I would say cut yourselves some slack and do your very, very best to get the principals behind the IPA. I think that's more important than executing a perfect IPA with a perfect amount of feedback, and a feedback loop.

**Stacey**:  [19:56] It's not a religious text, right? It's guidelines for get assessment.

**Stephanie**:  [20:00] Precisely.

**Stacey**:  [20:01] Doing what you can do to the extent that you can do it.

**Stephanie**:  [20:05] Avoid saying, "Pretend that you are."

**Stacey**:  [20:08] Yes.

**Stephanie**:  [20:08] Just say, "Here's the thing we're reading. Here's the thing that you're going to do with the thing." They know. They can visualize themselves with that situation.

**Stacey**:  [20:17] Yeah. I know people have different opinions but I personally really dislike role play in the language classroom. I think imagining that I'm someone else takes my cognitive focus away from actually doing the difficult task that I've been given.

[20:32] I think that's really great. Well, thank you so much for walking me through this today. I hope people will see your paper in the show notes, and click on it, and start conversations with their colleagues about how to use an IPA.

[20:45] [music]

**Stephanie**:  [20:45] Thank you so much. I really appreciate it. This was fun.

**Stacey**:  [20:48] If you have questions or comments related to today's episode, we would love to hear from you. You can reach out to us multiple ways. All of them are available at our website, weteachlang.com/contact. You can also find us on Facebook and Twitter @weteachlang.

[21:10] We would like to say a very special thank you to the PEARLL Foreign Language Resource Center for partnering with us to provide transcripts and other professional development resources related to the episodes. You can learn more about PEARLL by going to PEARLL, P‑E‑A‑R‑L‑L.nflc.umd.edu.

[21:31] Thanks so much for listening. Bye‑bye.

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