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# Beyond surveys: An approach to understanding effective classroom assessment practices

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**IATEFL TEASIG/CRELLA seminar,  
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# Acknowledgements

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The views expressed in this presentation are those of the presenters and do not represent those of the British Council or the University of Huddersfield

# Outline of the presentation

Today's talk will have 4 sections:

1. Introduction to the project
2. Teachers' needs
3. Materials development
4. Conclusions

# 1. The Project

- ▶ Purpose of the research
- ▶ Qualitatively orientated study of teachers' knowledge of assessment and training needs
- ▶ 3 stages of data collection
  - Initial baseline interviews
  - Observations and follow-up interviews
  - Focus group interviews

## Initial baseline interviews:

- ▶ Conducted in School of Education of British University with 3 experienced EFL teachers, 1 female + 2 male, age range 30-50 years
- ▶ Asked teachers about their experiences of assessment and how they had developed their assessment practices
- ▶ Discussed initial teacher training and other training opportunities they had had

## Questions included:

- ▶ Was assessment included in your initial teacher training?
- ▶ If, yes, what kinds of topics were included?

# Classroom observations and follow-up interviews:

- ▶ Conducted in International Study Centre of British University with 3 different experienced teachers, 2 female + 1 male, age range 30-40 years
- ▶ Checklist of 16 observations, every 3 minutes.
- ▶ Teachers reflected on why they had used particular assessment techniques in class



## Focus group discussions:

- ▶ Conducted in teaching centres in Madrid and Paris with 48 experienced teachers, 25 female + 23 male, age range 25-60 years
- ▶ Taught general English and EAP to all proficiency levels; all ages of students from kindergarten to adults
- ▶ Teachers discussed how they used assessment in their classes

## 2. Teachers' needs

- ▶ The analysis of teachers' comments drew on Davies' (2008) components of assessment literacy: *Skills, Knowledge, Principles*

# Components of Assessment Literacy

## Skills + Knowledge + Principles (Davies 2008)

- ▶ Technical skills
- ▶ Scores and decision-making
- ▶ Language pedagogy
- ▶ Local practices
- ▶ Knowledge of theory
- ▶ Principles and concepts
- ▶ Socio-cultural values
- ▶ Personal beliefs/attitudes

## Analysis of teachers' comments

3 main themes emerged:

1. Teachers discussed their lack of training in assessment but felt the topics they **had** studied were of greater relevance to them in the classroom.
2. Testing was discussed more often than assessment.
3. There was a need for practical ideas and activities - teachers did not express an interest in theory.

## Findings (1):

In terms of Davies' (2008) components, *skills + knowledge + principles* was used as a data code on only 12 occasions. In discussion teachers acknowledged their lack of training:

- ▶ *There are so many things that I didn't have a clue about how to do so I wouldn't put assessment at the top of the list*
- ▶ *We were not planning and designing assessments we were planning and delivering lessons*
- ▶ *We didn't do it (assessment) in practice on the CELTA*

## Findings (1- cont.):

- ▶ *You build up your own ideas of assessment just through experience of what your students are capable of doing*
- ▶ *You bring conceptions of how **you** were tested at school and you apply them to the language classroom*

## Findings (1- cont.):

- ▶ *In most places testing and assessment is out of the hands of teachers... They are told this is the assessment you are using*
- ▶ *Assessment requires some level of experience with students*
- ▶ *If I have read any books about language testing it was from the perspective of being interested in researching the language classroom and sometimes in classroom research you need tests*

## Findings (2):

In discussion participants tended to refer to testing rather than assessment:

- ▶ *None of my experiences of teaching had any focus on any kind of qualification at the end of it*
- ▶ *The idea of grading someone isn't that important*
- ▶ *You need to understand the exam techniques to prepare students to take exams*



## Findings (3):

Teachers commented on the types of training materials they would like:

- ▶ *We'd like speaking tasks - task and criteria*
- ▶ *We'd like clear criteria for marking speaking and writing*
- ▶ *Examples of level - recording or writings for non-exam classes*
- ▶ *Video examples of people in everyday situations using the language*

## Findings (3 - cont.):

- ▶ *I would have liked more practical elements in my training and assessment - more situation based*

## Overall finding:

The term **Language Assessment Literacy** was not popular with teachers and many were not even familiar with the term:

- ▶ *I had never heard of it before I was asked to do the interview*
- ▶ *I have no idea what it means*

## 3. Materials development

5 topics chosen

- ▶ Language Assessment for Teachers
- ▶ Assessing Level and CEFR
- ▶ Assessing Young Learners
- ▶ Assessment for Learning
- ▶ Language Assessment Resources

### 3. Materials development

In response to questions about the contents of the toolkit we received the following comment:

- ▶ *We'd like materials to train ourselves to understand the theory better and good examples for a proper understanding of everything*

This comment was not typical

### 3. Materials development

In response to questions about the contents of the toolkit we received the following comments:

- ▶ *Examples for non-exam levels*
- ▶ *A recording of a student and say why this student was assessed at this level*
- ▶ *Videos of people in everyday situations with analysis where they break down and what they do well*

### 3. Materials development

Here are examples of responses to questions about what should not be included in the toolkit

- ▶ *We don't want mountains of materials - not like a bombardment of information*
- ▶ *I'm not interested in reams and reams of reading*
- ▶ *We don't want lots and lots of slides - how about videos?*

### 3. Materials development

Practicality was stressed by the participants as can be seen in the following quotations

- ▶ *Some teachers want something that is efficient and easy to use because they have a full timetable and they cannot possibly devote any more time than what they have already given*
- ▶ *Good examples of assessments that work - something that is tried and tested*
- ▶ *To find out what other people have found to be a reliable procedure*



# Assessing level and CEFR

A toolkit for teacher development



## Overview

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This module provides an introduction to issues surrounding level and how to create assessment tasks at a particular level. Level is discussed in the context of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

## Learning outcomes

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By the end of this module you will have developed:

- an awareness of the CEFR
- an understanding of an approach to creating assessment tasks
- an appreciation of the challenges of establishing level

## The CEFR

- The CEFR describes foreign language proficiency at six levels: A1 and A2, B1 and B2, C1 and C2
- The scale starts at A1 and finishes at C2
- More information about the CEFR can be found [here](#)
- A good introductory video to the CEFR can be found [here](#)



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## 4. Conclusions

- ▶ Teachers have minimal training in assessment and have little interest in the theoretical underpinnings of assessment
- ▶ There is evidence that assessment practices are rooted in teachers' own past learning experiences
- ▶ Teachers also engage in developing their assessment practices by learning from each other
- ▶ There may be a disconnect between teachers' interests and beliefs and those of language assessment professionals and researchers

## URLs

### Materials (5 modules):

- ▶ [www.teachingenglish.org.uk](http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk)

### Animations (12 videos):

- ▶ <https://www.britishcouncil.org/exam/aptis/research/assessment-literacy>

*Thank you!*

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