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# Singing from the same hymn sheet? What language assessment literacy means to teachers

Vivien Berry Sonia Munro Susan Sheehan

# Introduction

We gratefully acknowledge the support of the British Council. The views expressed in this presentation are those of the presenters and do not represent those of the British Council.

- ▶ Vivien Berry - British Council
- ▶ Sonia Munro - University of Huddersfield
- ▶ Susan Sheehan - University of Huddersfield

# Today's talk

Today's talk will have 3 sections

- ▶ The Project
- ▶ Selected Findings
- ▶ Toolkit materials

# What is LAL?

- ▶ Various definitions been offered. Here are 3 commonly cited definitions:

# Definitions

Language Testing Assessment (LTA) literacy has been defined as:

- ▶ “The ability to design, develop, and critically evaluate tests and other assessment procedures, as well as the ability to monitor, evaluate, grade and score assessments on the basis of theoretical knowledge.” (Vogt & Tzagari, 2014:377)

# Definitions

Fulcher (2012:125) defined language assessment literacy as:

- ▶ The knowledge, skills and abilities required to design, develop, maintain or evaluate large-scale standardised and/or classroom based tests, familiarity with test processes, and awareness of principles and concepts that guide and underpin practice, including ethics and codes of practice.

# Definition

Inbar-Lourie (2008:389) writes of assessment literacy as:

- ▶ “having the capacity to ask and answer critical questions about the purpose for assessment, about the fitness of the tool being used, about testing conditions, and about what is going to happen on the basis of the results.”



# Teacher perspective

There appears to be 2 common strands running across the definitions.

- ▶ Firstly, they include references to theory. There seems to be an implication that being assessment literate involves/requires/is based on an understanding of the relevant theory.
- ▶ Secondly, there seems to be an absence of the learner in these definitions. The role of the teacher in developing learner assessment literacy seems to be under acknowledged.

# The teacher perspective

- ▶ The project which is the focus of today's talk explores teacher attitudes to testing and assessment.
- ▶ To briefly anticipate the findings of the project which will be discussed later in the talk we can say at this point the term language assessment literacy did not resonate with the participants. It was not a term which was familiar to the participants.

# Definitions

Following Vogt and Tsagari (2014:377) we have adopted this definition of teacher:

- ▶ Someone who is a practising EFL teacher who has undergone regular training to teach English as a foreign language at state or private tertiary institutions, colleges or schools

# The Project

- ▶ Multi-method qualitatively orientated study of teacher knowledge of assessment and training needs.
- ▶ Project aim - to develop a toolkit for teachers which covers 5 areas identified by participants as being of importance.

# The Project

4 stages of data collection

- ▶ Interviews
- ▶ Observation and interviews
- ▶ Focus group interviews
- ▶ Workshop

# Data analysis

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

# The Findings

4 main findings presented here today

1. Lack of interest in the topic of language testing and assessment and associated theory
2. Assessment defined as testing and the term was not used in any broader senses
3. Lack of training acknowledged but this lack was not considered to be problematical
4. The term language assessment literacy means nothing to teachers.

# The findings 1

- ▶ In terms of Davies' (2008) components, *skills + knowledge + principles* was used as a data code on only 12 occasions
- ▶ “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.”



# The findings 1

Here is a range of typical answers in response to questions about the toolkit.

- ▶ “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”

# The findings 1

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

# The findings 2

In discussion the participants tended to discuss 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.”

# The findings 3

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”
- ▶ “In most places testing and assessment is out of the hands of teachers... They are told this is the assessment you are using.”

# The findings 3

- ▶ “The focus of CELTA was on planning and teaching a lesson.”
- ▶ “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.”

# The findings 4

- ▶ Me: “ What does the term language assessment literacy mean to you?”



# Findings 4

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



# The materials

- ▶ The presentation now turns to the on-line toolkit.
- ▶ The workshop confirmed the results of the previous rounds of data collection. Theory and guided readings were not requested.

# Overview

- ▶ The session is an introduction to Assessment for Learning (AfL). It will help you to develop your knowledge of the principles of Assessment for Learning and also provide an overview of practical strategies which can be used in language learning classrooms.
- ▶ It assumes little or know knowledge of Assessment for Learning

# Assessment for Learning?

Look at the assessment practice below. Are they examples of ‘assessment *OF* learning’ or ‘assessment *FOR* learning’?

state or national exam

In class Q & A

end of chapter test

self assessment

quizzes

peer assessment

detailed comments on a piece of written homework

# The benefits of assessment for learning

- ▶ What are the benefits of assessment for learning? Take a few minutes to think about this and make notes.
- ▶ Listen to some English teachers talking about the benefits of Assessment for Learning. Compare your answers.
- ▶ Click [here](#) for feedback.

# What Makes Effective Feedback?

Good feedback should:

- ▶ focus on the task and successful task completion
- ▶ be positive about the current performance
- ▶ make the learner aware of specific actions to take to improve performance
- ▶ give feedback the learner can process and use effectively in the next stage of learning

# Giving Feedback: Practical Task

Click here to review two pieces of written work which have been marked by a teacher.

- ▶ What is the difference in feedback strategies used by each teacher?
- ▶ What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?

Click [here](#) for feedback

# AfL: Practical Techniques

Click on the picture to listen to a description of each technique.

Think

Pair

Share



Aims and  
Objectives

# Reflection

Think about the different aspects of Assessment for Learning which you have learned about in this module.

- ▶ What could you do to promote AFL with your learners? Make a short action plan of 4-5 points which you can introduce into your own teaching.



# Conclusions

## Singing from the same hymn sheet?

- ▶ Answer would seem to be no. It would seem to be the case that there is something of a disconnect between teachers and testers.
- ▶ Assessment is considered to be somewhat of a separate activity from teaching.
- ▶ The role of teachers in developing learner assessment literacy seems to be missing.

# References

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