Assessment: attitudes, practices and needs

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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

INTRODUCTION

Today's talk will have 4 sections:

1. Introduction to language assessment literacy (LAL)

2. Previous research into LAL

   ▶ survey studies

   ▶ mixed-methods and classroom observations

3. British Council – University of Huddersfield study

4. Findings and conclusions

1. INTRODUCTION TO LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT LITERACY (LAL)

What is Language Assessment Literacy?

Malone (2011) proposes the following definitions:

Assessment literacy is an understanding of the measurement basics related directly to classroom learning; language assessment literacy extends this definition to issues specific to language classrooms

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

Assessment literacy for teachers involves developing...

▶ **Skills** in identifying and evaluating appropriate assessments for specific purposes within specific contexts

▶ **Skills** in analysing empirical data in order to improve one's own instructional and assessment practices

▶ The **knowledge** required to assess learners effectively and maximise learning

▶ The **knowledge** and understanding to interpret and apply assessment results in appropriate ways

▶ An understanding of the **principles** and practice of sound assessment

▶ The wisdom to be able to integrate assessment and its outcomes into the overall pedagogic process

2. RESEARCH INTO LAL: Survey studies

Berry & O'Sullivan (2014); Brown & Bailey (2008); Crusan, Plakans & Gebril (2016); Fulcher (2012); Hasselgreen, Carlsen & Helness (2004); Jin (2010); Malone (2013)

Limitations of survey studies:

▶ Respondents to online surveys are probably self-selected as those interested in the topic

▶ Responses may reflect what teachers think they should say, rather than what they actually believe

▶ Training needs may be exaggerated in the belief it would appear unprofessional to state they had no interest in a topic

▶ Answers may be in the affirmative out of curiosity rather than genuine interest or need to know

▶ Interpretation of responses may rely too heavily on quantitative analysis

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# 2.	RESEARCH INTO LAL: Mixed-methods and classroom observation studies

Colby-Kelly & Turner (2007; Gu (2014); Jeong (2014); Lam (2015); Leong (2014); Scarino (2014); Vogt & Tsagari (2014); Xu & Liu (2009); Xu & Carless (2016); Yin (2010)

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Limitations of mixed-methods and classroom observation studies:

- ▶ Mixed-methods generally include initial questionnaire/survey responses, often with a follow-up interview

- ▶ Follow-up interviews usually aim to gain further insights into responses to questionnaires/surveys

- ▶ Therefore all limitations of survey studies also apply to mixed-methods studies

- ▶ Responses may be constrained by the questions asked

- ▶ Qualitative aspects of mixed-methods and classroom observation studies are generally very small-scale

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BACKGROUND SURVEY OF BRITISH COUNCIL TEACHERS

Survey Sections

1. Personal information

2. Purposes of assessment

3. Classroom focused activities

4. General language assessment activities

5. Additional language assessment topics

Basic Survey Question:

Do you need more training in these activities?

- ☑ Yes, I need more training
- ☒ No, I have adequate training
- ☒ No, it is irrelevant to my job

10 topics most requested for further training:

1. Defining assessment criteria
2. Writing items for tests
3. Developing core skills tests
4. Developing basic skills tests
5. Developing integrated skills tests
6. Developing rating scales
7. Establishing the reliability of tests
8. Collecting validity evidence for tests
9. Evaluating language tests
10. Using basic statistics to analyse tests

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Additional assessment topics most teachers are interested in:

▶ Standard setting

▶ Ethical considerations in language testing

▶ Washback in the classroom

▶ The use of tests in society

▶ Principles of educational measurement

▶ Affective factors in language testing

▶ The effect of local learning cultures

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Topics they are NOT interested in:

- History of language testing
- Use of advanced statistics
- Large-scale testing
- Test administration

3. THE BRITISH COUNCIL-UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD LAL FOR TEACHERS PROJECT

The Project

- ▶ Multi-method qualitatively orientated study of teacher knowledge of assessment, and training needs.

- ▶ Project aim - to develop training materials for teachers which covers 5 areas identified by participants as being of importance.

The Participants

- EFL teachers working in Europe.

- Many of the participants also discussed experiences working beyond Europe.

- Teachers worked in a variety of contexts with students of different ages.

- The teachers had entered the profession through a variety of routes and had a range of qualifications.

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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. Teachers discussed the lack of training in assessment but felt the topics they had studied were of greater relevance to them in the classroom.

2. Teachers used a range of effective assessment practices which they described as part of good teaching, rather than assessment

3. Testing was discussed more often than assessment.

4. There was a request for practical ideas and activities. The teachers did not express an interest in theory.

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The findings 1

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."

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Findings 2

▶ In observations teachers demonstrated a range of assessment techniques including peer- and self-assessment, explicit sharing of criteria, using test papers for formative assessment and reflection.

▶ Teachers used on-the-fly assessment techniques (McKay, 2006) to respond to students needs and adapt the pace and content of the lesson.

▶ In follow up interviews the teachers did not categorise these activities as assessment, but as good teaching.

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Findings 2

- "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 3

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 4

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

▶ "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"

▶ "I would have liked more practical elements in my training and assessment – more situation based."

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.

Topics

5 sets of materials:

▶ Assessment for Learning,

▶ CEFR and levelness,

▶ Testing Young Learners,

▶ Language testing and assessment   for teachers,

▶ Resources

Available at: http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/assessment-attitudes-practices-needs

Learning outcomes

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By the end of this module you will have developed:

- an awareness of the characteristics of assessing young learners.

- an awareness of research projects which suggest best practice in assessing young learners.

- an awareness of some suggestions to try in your practice.

Assessing young learners - video

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Watch this video, which introduces the topic of assessing young learners.

As you watch, answer the following questions:

- Young learners are divided into three age groups – what are they?

- What are the different ways to assess the three groups?

- Why is fun important for all ages?

- Watch the video.

Commentary

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- So, we have seen that young learners can be viewed as being made up of three groups. Each group has its own strengths and challenges.

- Fun is important for learners of all ages and we should think very carefully before using assessments created for adults with young learners.

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How are young learners being assessed?

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- How do you assess the young learners you teach?

- Make a list of all the ways you assess young learners.

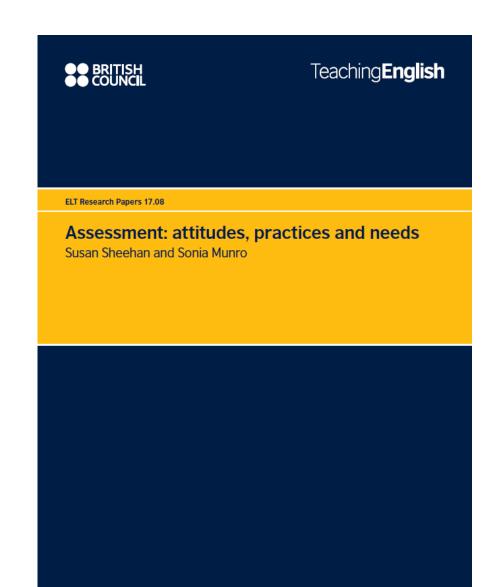Think about both classroom tests and those created by an external authority.

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Reflection task

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- Develop an oral assessment task for a group of 7 year old children who have been learning English as foreign language for 1 year.

- Think about the following points:

  - Level of language proficiency
  - Level of confidence with the language
  - Topics which have been recently covered in class
  - How long the task should take
  - How will the task be marked?
  - Will the task be completed in groups or individually?
  - How will the results of the assessment be used?
  - What scaffolding (support) will the children need to complete the task?

- A full report of the project, '**Assessment: attitudes, practices and needs',** is available on the British Council's English Agenda website, together with the toolkit resources:

- https://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/research-publications/research-papers

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Teaching**English**

ELT Research Papers 17.08

Assessment: attitudes, practices and needs
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Introducing Language Assessment
Barry O'Sullivan and Vivien Berry

Video animations, transcripts, worksheets and answer keys available at:

https://www.britishcouncil.org/exam/aptis/research/projects/assessment-literacy

Topics

- Test Development
- Assessing Reading
- Assessing Writing
- Assessing Listening
- Assessing Speaking
- Assessing General Language Proficiency
- Assessing Young Learners
- Assessing English for Specific Purposes
- Validity
- CEFR and Language Assessment
- Technology and language Assessment
- British Council and Assessment

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Thank you!

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