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Beyond surveys: An approach to understanding effective classroom assessment practices

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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

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Questions included:

- ▶ Was assessment included in your initial teacher training?

- ▶ If, yes, what kinds of topics were included?

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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*

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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*

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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

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- 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

Animations (12 videos):

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

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Thank you!

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