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# What do teachers really want to know about assessment?

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**IATEFL Conference, Glasgow, 6 April 2017**

# Introduction

We gratefully acknowledge the support of British Council.

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

# Today's talk

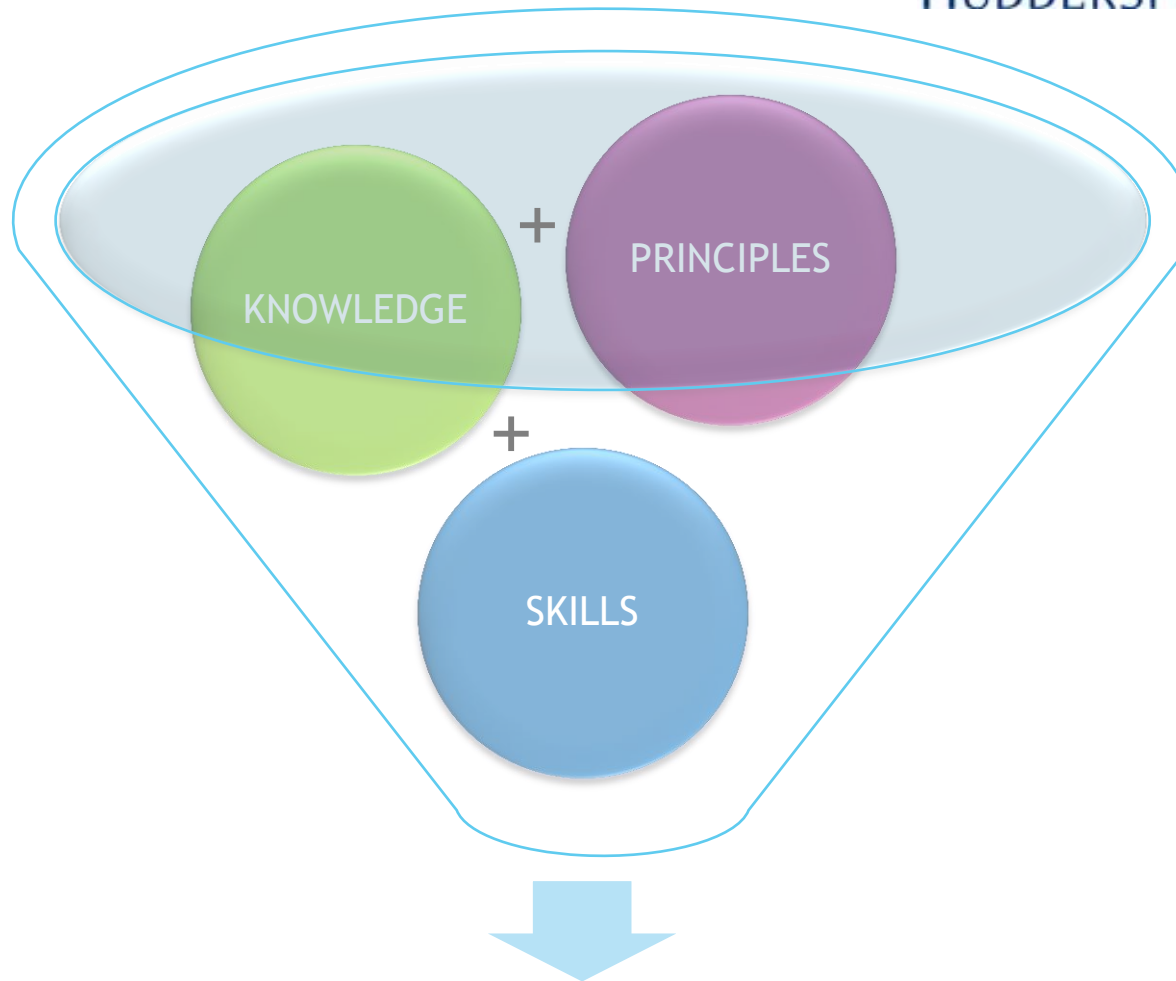
Today's talk will have 3 sections:

1. Introduction to language assessment literacy (LAL)
2. The British Council-University of Huddersfield LAL for teachers project
3. Conclusions

# 1. INTRODUCTION TO LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT LITERACY (LAL)

# Towards a Definition...

*For the purpose of this presentation, assessment literacy can be defined as the level of knowledge of assessment concepts required by individuals to interact with assessment in a meaningful way, depending on their situation.*



## ASSESSMENT LITERACY

Davies (2008)

## Skills + knowledge + principles

- ▶ 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

# BACKGROUND SURVEY OF BRITISH COUNCIL TEACHERS

## 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

## 10 topics most requested for further training:

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 analyze tests

## 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

## 2. 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 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. Testing was discussed more often than assessment.
3. Teachers used a range of effective assessment practices which they described as part of good teaching, rather than assessment
4. There was a request for practical ideas and activities. The teachers did not express an interest in theory.

# 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.”

## 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.”

# Findings 3

- ▶ 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.

- ▶ “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 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

# Assessing young learners

## A toolkit for teacher development



## Assessing young learners

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- This module provides an overview of the issues of assessing English as a foreign language for young learners.
- In this module we will explore why assessing young learners might be challenging and offer some practical suggestions.

## Assessing young learners

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This module is aimed at:

- Teachers of English as a foreign language to young learners
- In-service teachers

## Overview

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- English is taught to learners at an ever earlier stage of their education. Parents often attach a great deal of importance to how well their children are progressing in English. This situation presents teachers with the challenge of having to assess young learners.

## 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.

## How are young learners being assessed?

- 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.

## How are young learners being assessed?

- Two researchers asked teachers how they assessed their young learners (Rea-Dickins and Rixon, 1999).
- What methods do you think teachers used?
- Check your ideas against those found by the researchers. These are shown on the following slide.

## How are young learners being assessed?

Teachers said they used:

- Grammar and vocabulary tests
- Single sentence exercises
- Gap-filling
- Vocabulary matching
- Restricted dialogues to test speaking
  
- Listening skills were not mentioned

## Assessing the four language skills

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We often think about assessing the four language skills – speaking, listening, reading, writing.

- Listen to Claire talking about the challenges of testing the four skills. Do her points reflect your experiences?
- Play the audio:



## Commentary

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- Claire mentioned that she finds it hard think of interesting and age-appropriate tasks.
- She stated that she tended to use the same activities.
- She stated a desire to have tasks which integrated the four skills.

Now we will look at suggested techniques for testing the four skills both as individual skills and together.

## Reflection task

- 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?

## Other ways to assess: Self-assessment

- Children can be encouraged to assess themselves as part of a learner-centred approach.
- Read [this article](#) about how this teacher uses coursebook tests for self-assessment.
- [TeachingEnglish article: 'Ongoing assessment - fun not fear!'](#)



## Conclusions

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- In this module we have looked at the challenges of assessing young learners. We have also explored practical approaches to assessment. Finally, we have looked at an example of best practice. We hope you now feel better prepared to assess young learners.

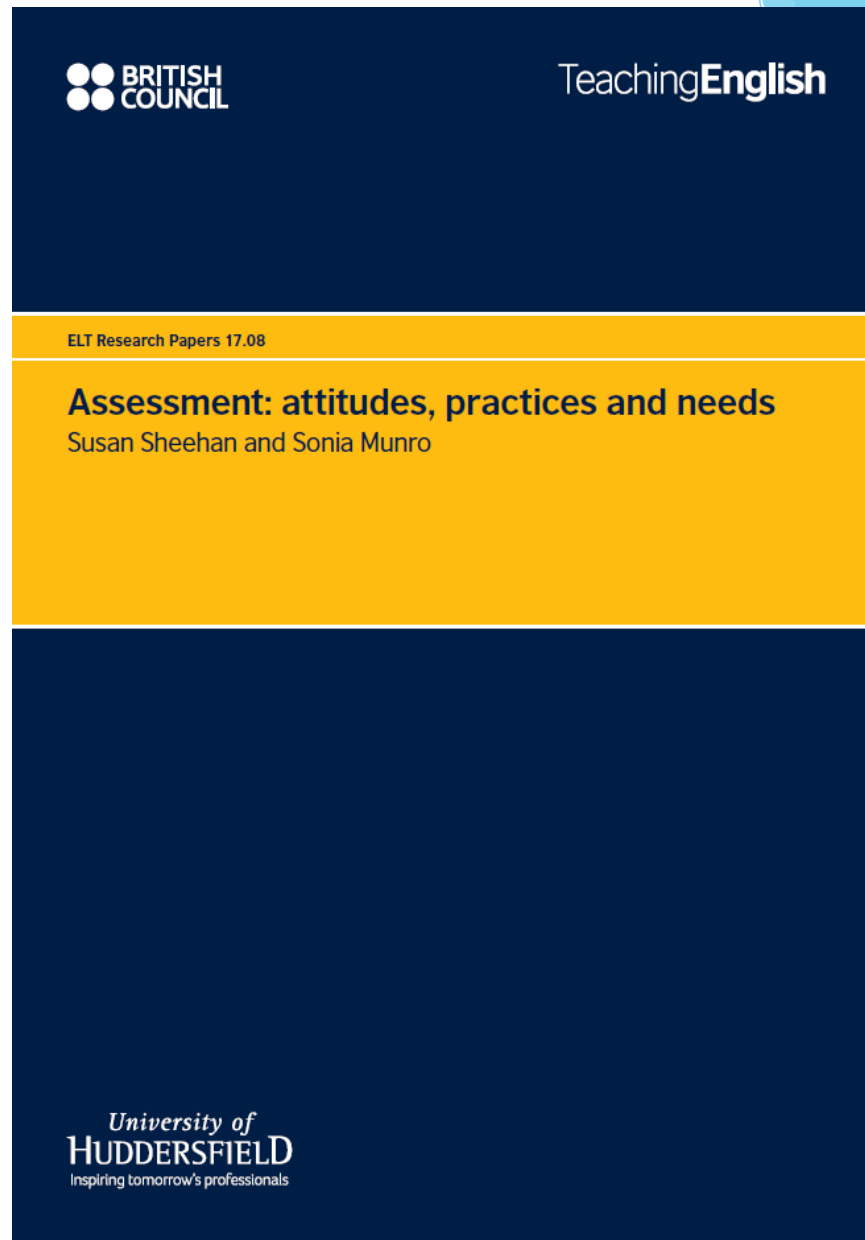
## What next?

You have now finished these materials on assessing young learners. We hope you have found them useful and enjoyable.

If you are interested in learning more about assessment, please look at our other materials on:

- Assessment for Learning
- CEFR and assessing level
- Language assessment for teachers
- Assessment resources

- ▶ A full report of the project, ‘**Assessment: attitudes, practices and needs**’, is available on the British Council’s English Agenda website



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# *Thank you*

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