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Assessment: attitudes, practices, needs

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Assessment: attitudes, practices, needs.

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Contents

Today's talk will cover 4 main areas:

- Project background
- Methodology
- Results
- Conclusions



Project background – Definition Language Assessment Literacy

Malone (2011) proposes the following definition:

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



Project background

- This project investigated language assessment literacy practices in the classroom. We sought to bring teachers more directly into the assessment literacy debate.
- We wanted to move away from survey based research into the topic (Vogt and Tsagari, 2014).



Project background

A teacher's ability to engage with a range of teaching, learning *and* assessment practices is essential as effective assessment can support and promote learning.

Many teachers receive little or no training in either the theory or practice of testing and/or assessment (Hasselgreen et al., 2004, Taylor, 2009).



Project background

Moreover, some teachers report feeling afraid of assessment or lacking the resources to engage effectively with it (Coombe et al., 2012).



The following research questions informed the project:

- What impact does testing have on the classroom?
- How confident do teachers feel to engage in assessment activities?
- What are teacher attitudes to assessment?



Methodology

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

4 stages of data collection

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



Participants

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

Spoke to a variety of teachers who entered teaching through a number of different routes.



What impact does testing have on the classroom?

- 'Everything I do in class, I'm conscious of how it will help them when they are tested and I always mention that to them as well.'
- 'You give exams out and all they are bothered about is the score ... they just fixate on the numbers and they're not looking at what they've done.'



How confident do teachers feel about engaging in assessment activities?

'I felt blindfolded when trying to create assessment tasks'
'I would have liked more practical elements in my training about testing and assessment – more situation based'



How confident do teachers feel about engaging in assessment activities?

- ‘When you make speaking assessments you guess the level and give the mark like a 7 or a 9.’
- This would seem to confirm Vogt and Tsagari’s (2014) finding that there can be an element of ‘fuzziness’ in teacher assessments.



How confident do teachers feel about engaging in assessment activities?

- One focus group participant stated that he felt: “...unconfident about creating test materials and so we defer to Cambridge.”
- Another participant described Cambridge as: “ a crutch to lean on”.



Results

Contradiction between a stated claim not to have had training in assessment in initial and in-service teacher training and yet being able to successfully deploy a range of assessment activities in the classroom.

Assessment would seem to be part of the classroom practice of most teachers even though they may choose not to classify it as assessment. They may prefer to consider it as part of teaching.



Results

‘You build up your own ideas of assessment just through experience of what your learners are doing – you form an image of levels like that.’

‘It’s experience in the classroom that has changed me, rather than [training] experiences.’



Results

Past learning experiences seem to play a role in the development of teacher assessment practice.

‘You bring conceptions of how you were tested at school and you apply them to language learning – a lot of them are not valid.’

Vogt and Tsagari (2014) make an analogy between teaching how you were taught and testing how you were tested.



What are teacher attitudes to assessment?

When OT2 wanted to obtain promotion he considered it necessary to engage with the topic of assessment: 'I would have really needed to be able to develop assessments.'

This suggests that the management of the institution creates the assessments, which the teachers then implement.



Results

‘In most places testing and assessment is out of the hands of teachers ... they are told this is the assessment you are using.’

This may lead to teachers’ disengagement with the topic. If the opinions of teachers are not listened to, there may be little incentive for teachers to spend time reading about assessment.

This echoes points made by Crusan et al. (2016) that teachers feel assessment is a top-down imposition.



Results

'a necessary evil' - classroom teachers are supportive, while managers and language testers are separated or removed from the classroom.



Conclusions

Teachers have had little training in issues related to assessment and do not report interest in the theoretical underpinnings of assessment.

In contrast to other studies, this study has focused on teacher knowledge and how teachers develop their assessment practices. There is evidence to suggest that assessment practices are rooted in past learning experiences, and through knowledge sharing with colleagues.



Conclusions

While some have characterised this approach as a brake on innovation (Vogt and Tsagari, 2014), we would argue that it could have the potential to have a positive impact on classroom practice, as teachers can learn strategies which have been successfully deployed



Conclusions

The teachers we observed used a range of assessment practices successfully.

This may suggest that teacher knowledge should not be underestimated despite a lack of training.



Conclusions

A last conclusion would be that anyone wishing to engage with teachers on the topic of assessment should avoid using the term language assessment literacy.



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