

ESRC MAJOR RESEARCH GRANT - R000238196

Understanding Classroom-based Assessment: New Territories for Language Testers

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1. Research Overview

- a broad socio-cultural approach
- assessment studied in depth within the ecology of the classroom
- a small number of schools
- assessment practices analysed from an interactional perspective through the analysis of classroom discourse

2. Research Aims

Phase 1:

- to identify and describe the range of assessment activities in support of learners with EAL
- to investigate how teachers: (a) perceive the purposes and focus of assessment; (b) design and implement assessment activities in preparing learners with EAL to access the National Curriculum; and (c) interpret and use the EAL language scales and the NC levels for English in their assessment practices

3. Research Aims

Phase 2:

Evolved in a number of different ways that augmented the original aims of the research:

- ❖ an intervention of four specifically designed assessment activities and extensive analysis of their contextualised classroom language use

4. Research Rationale: classroom assessment

- not an add-on activity
- embedded within routine instruction
- blurring of boundaries between teaching and learning and assessment
- nurturing language development rather than measuring language achievement
- assessment *as* or *for* learning rather than assessment of learning
- noticing, interpreting, and assisting rather than recording and reporting

5. Research Rationale: formative assessment

- inadequately articulated in the Applied Linguistics literature
- lack of appropriate frameworks through which to explore the complexities of the process of classroom assessment
- mainly through the lens of the teacher
- learner perspective missing: the ‘alternative’ assessment literature has failed to get to grips with learner perspectives
- insights from educational assessment

6. Research Rationale: EAL Context

- language support across the curriculum in mainstream contexts general agreement about the *distinctiveness* of EAL (NALDIC 1999)
- no officially recognised accreditation or training for language support
- teachers (mainstream & language support) come with range of experience and understanding from different training backgrounds
- many approaches to integrating language, content, learning and culture in the literature, particularly useful for *planning* language support (e.g. Mohan 1986, Gravelle 2000, Leung & Davison 2000)
- many approaches to EAL assessment, has been widely debated in UK contexts with introduction of EAL Steps (QCA 2000)
- research on EAL classroom interaction includes Gibbons (2002), Bourne (2001), Leung & Teasdale (2000), Leung (2001), Cameron (1999) but more needed - little on EAL formative assessment

7. Research Rationale: EAL Context

“Interactions between educators and students represent the direct determinant of bilingual students’ success or failure in school.”

(Cummins, 2000:6)

8. Research Phases

- Phase 1: Survey of classroom-based assessment practices:
 - across the curriculum
 - 2 target learners from Year 1 and Year 2 were observed and recorded in all lessons (literacy: plus extended writing and quiet reading, numeracy, science, 'topic', design, music, art, RE, computer)
 - in 3 schools for a full week each term, i.e. from January - December

8. Research Phases

- Phase 2: Implementation of specific assessment activities:
 - focus on targeted learners
 - in 4 curricula areas:
 - Literacy
 - Numeracy
 - Social Science
 - Science
 - in 2 Education Authorities:8 schools
 - Key Stage 1, Years 1 and 2 (6-7 years)

9. Methodology: data collection in intact classes

- sustained observation
- video and audio recordings of lessons
- field notes of lessons
- collection of children's written work
- collection of children's language development records
- detailed transcription of lessons
- interviews with individual teachers at various stages in the process
- some interviews with learners
- group meetings with teachers

10. Methodology: Phase 2 assessment activities

- Literacy: learners constructing alternative story endings in pairs
- Numeracy: exploration of properties of shapes
- Science: engaged learners in predicting then testing out and reporting how Forces work
- Social Science (history/geography): comparing settings (e.g., urban and rural)

11. Methodology: Phase 2 assessment activities

Different activities:

- length, staging, convergence and contextualisation (through a story in literacy, visuals in numeracy, realia in science and experience or general knowledge base in social science)

Implementation of activities:

- One school implemented the 4 activities in both years, but generally this was not possible
- A total of 15 lessons were implemented, observed and recorded in the original project schools, 4 in the monolingual school (literacy and numeracy in Years 1 and 2)
- 6 lessons from 4 additional ‘EAL’ schools in another LEA were added to enhance the data set and as a check on the validity and practicability of the activities.

12. Data Analysis: grounded approach focused on

- the processes of classroom assessment from primarily an ethnographic perspective
- the learner: how the learners are involved and engaged in the different activities
- learner interaction with teachers: how learner performance is assisted by teachers and educational assistants; in particular, on learner language awareness and development
- pair and small group work involving peer interaction: how learners collaborate and assist each other in working through the classroom activities
- WinMax (Kukartz 2000) software

13. Data Analysis: multi-layering technique

- Combining ethnography, discourse analysis and linguistic description:
 - *Layer 1:* used observations, interviews and demographic data to provide a rich *ethnographic* description of the ecology of the classroom in which the processes of assessment were implemented
 - *Layer 2:* adopted a *discourse analysis* approach for investigating the teacher interview
 - *Layer 3:* used classroom transcripts for the *linguistic and discourse analysis* of children's talk
 - *Layer 4:* used classroom transcripts to analyse the *interactional features* of lived assessment: (i) ways in which teachers assisted learner's linguistic performances , (ii) different modes of learner engagement at various levels of language proficiency, and (iii) peer interaction

14. Findings: How do teachers decide on the design and focus of their assessment activities to support the learners with EAL who are as yet unable to access the National Curriculum?

- Assessment cycle constructed around four central stages – delineated by *time* and teacher *purpose*:
 - Stage 1: *Planning*
 - Stage 2: *Implementation*
 - Stage 3: *Monitoring*
 - Stage 4: *Formal Recording and Dissemination*
(see Rea-Dickins, 2001)
- A typology of teacher decision making (Rea-Dickins, 2007)

15. Findings: What is the design and focus of the assessments teachers use to monitor the different aspects of English language development across a range of NC contexts?

Various influences on teacher assessment activities identified:

- draw upon the mainstream curriculum (i.e. subject knowledge, learning objectives and outcomes) to inform the content, and the design of the assessment activities
- influenced by high stakes Key Stage 1 national tests in terms of activities, content and criteria
- have ‘norm-related’ concerns, e.g.
 - (i) issues of ‘access’: Can the learners work independently?
Have they reached the required ‘standard’ - referenced to monolingual ‘norm’?
 - (ii) in relation to psychometric notions of reliability and norming: e.g. asking each child the same question under the same conditions; SATs exam practice; withdrawing a group of learners for norm-referenced spelling and reading assessment
- are aware of an interactional perspective on classroom formative assessment and the importance of creating ‘opportunities for sustained talk in the classroom’

16. Findings: What is the design and focus of the assessments teachers use to monitor the different aspects of English language development across a range of NC contexts?

- Teachers used a mix of convergent and divergent approaches to the design and implementation of classroom assessment, with a tendency towards the more convergent end of the spectrum and a concern with eliciting language ‘displays’ (attainment) rather than on developing insights into what a learner knows or understands.

17. Findings: participation in formative assessment - learner involvement

Children demonstrated their involvement by:

- directing a peer to do or say something
- encouraging a peer to do or say something
- evaluating and correcting a peer
- self-evaluating and correcting
- showing evidence of engagement in the activity
- checking of various kinds
- making analogies
- negotiating roles with a peer in working on an activity
- offering to do something within the activity

18. Findings: participation in formative assessment - learner involvement

- rehearsing and repeating
- requesting teacher or peer assistance
- using the L1
- using gestures
- articulating aloud what they are actually doing or are going to do
- proceeding alone and progressing through the activity
- waiting to be prompted
- watching others

19. Findings: participation in formative assessment - learner involvement

TEXT: Transcripts.L H Literacy Y2a (105/115);

CODE: Focus on Language (G:100)

LSC	excellent - it looks like a?
Sim/Ahm	oval
LSC	oval - not boval
Sim	hasn't bringed his brain today!
LSC	he has brought his brain!
Sim	but he keeps saying the wrong word
Ahm	a boval
Sim	a big one
LSC	a what?
Sim	an oval not a boval!
Ahm	I didn't say that! that's an oval

20. Findings: participation in formative assessment - learner involvement

TEXT: Transcripts.LH Literacy Y1c (237/248); CODE: Focus on Language (G:100)

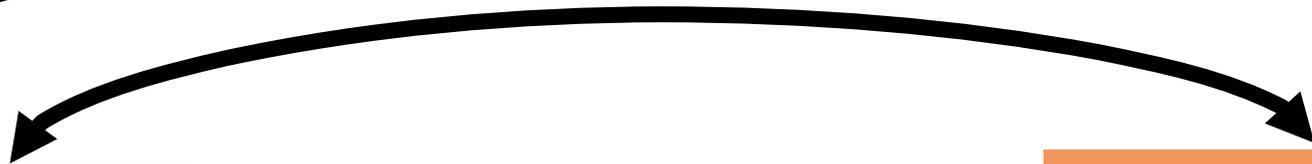
T what's another word for [pretty?
Px [gorgeous!
T a gorgeous one - that's another word (.) what's another word for
Px pretty?
Roh smart!
T smart - can we have a smart [butterfly?
Ez [Miss
Px yes
Px you can!
Ez can I write?
Jas lovely!
T a lovely one! a beautiful one

21. Further Findings

- Assessment conceptualised & defined by teachers largely in terms of formal summative assessment
- Evidence of assessment data being used formatively to plan instruction (teacher perspective)
- Some evidence of formative assessment in terms of pupil learning
- Formative assessment rather ‘hit or miss’

Teaching, Learning, Assessment

DISCOURSES OF ASSESSMENT



Peer-assisted
performance

**LEARNER
PERFORMANCES**

Teacher-assisted
performance:
e.g. cognitive &
linguistic structuring



Teacher as '**RATER**':
summative interpretation of
learner talk referenced to
standards & criteria

22. Some Conclusions

- Need for rich teacher scaffolding that ensures cognitive challenge is maintained alongside linguistic support
- Attempts to improve classroom language assessment to focus on:
 - (a) providing children with a range of activities for cognitive and language processing
 - (b) creating opportunities that promote meaningful and sustained interaction, not only with the teacher but also with peers.
- While classroom assessment has the potential to enhance language learning, it often fails to do so.
- The conceptualisation of language testing – as currently exemplified in this specialist literature – fails to capture the dynamics of classroom language assessment.