Key Questions in EAP Assessment

DIANE SCHMITT
NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY
BALEAP
Who do you know?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ken Hyland</th>
<th>Helen Basturkmen</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Averil Coxhead</td>
<td>Christine Feak</td>
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<td>Olwyn Alexander</td>
<td>Sheena Gardner</td>
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<td>Ian Bruce</td>
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<td>Edward de Chazal</td>
<td>Andy Gillett</td>
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The research/practice loop

practice

theory

teaching implications

research
The research/practice loop

- practice
- theory
- teaching
- implications
- research
Where are EAP practitioners in the testing loop?
Where are EAP practitioners in the testing loop?

practice

theory

testing

implications
Questions for the Audience

◦ How many people here today have taken a course on language testing?
◦ How many of you read books on language testing? Or journal articles?
◦ How many of you have attended a testing conference?
◦ How many of you lurk on L-Test?
◦ Have you ever published anything relating to your EAP assessments? If yes, where?
Closing the loop
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Who do you know?

Assessment Community
- Carol Chapelle
- Uta Knoch
- Cyril Weir
- Lia Plakans
- Glenn Fulcher

EAP Community
- Tony Green
- Gad Lim
- John Read
- Sara Weigle

ealta_sig_seminar_2015_programme.pdf
Issues

- Should students who fail pre-sessionals be offered resits?
- Should our assessments be mapped to IELTS?
- How much assessment is needed? Complex EAP assessment is difficult to manage and teachers really suffer from the workload.
- Working for authenticity, e.g. integration of skills, creates complications, especially when we are required to report scores for the 4 skills
Global vs Local

“In almost all circumstances, local tests are more likely to allow us to make valid assumptions about test-takers.”

Opportunities for test developers to focus on specific domains and contexts and to offer tests that more closely fit local requirements

Increased threats to test quality and claims relating to test level

O’Sullivan (2011:265 & 270)
EAP teacher development

Test Writer

Experienced teacher with additional strings to her bow.

Novice
EAP Assessment in your unit

- Who looks after EAP assessment? Individuals or is there a designated team?
- How much release time from teaching these teachers get?
- Do these teachers have access to specific staff development for assessment?
- What is the timeline for the development of assessments? Is there time for pre and post-review of the quality of your assessments?
- How does size of your unit affect assessment development?
5.6.1 Assessment content and procedures will be linked to the academic needs of the students and to their future studies.

5.6.2 Students will be informed in advance of assessment procedures to be used on the Course.

5.6.3 Students will receive timely and useful feedback on their progress and on their strengths and weaknesses.

5.6.4 On intensive courses of more than one month, formal assessment of students’ progress will be carried out at regular intervals with feedback given and records kept.

5.6.5 Students will be encouraged to monitor and take responsibility for their own progress.

5.6.6 Exit assessment procedures and reports will be comprehensible and useful to both the student and the recipient subject-specialist department.

5.6.7 All student placement and assessment procedures will be related to explicit criteria and measures will be taken to ensure standardisation, fairness and consistency in these procedures across teachers and tasks.

5.6.8 Information on well-established external examinations in English for Academic Purposes will be available for students who wish to take such an examination. Students requiring external certification of general English Language Proficiency will receive advice regarding availability of such tests.

ASSESSMENT

- Information on entrance requirements for course(s) to be accredited.

- Information given to students on placement procedures and assessment procedures (including any testing).

- Account of procedures for record keeping, reporting to sponsors, departments, etc. and sample documents.

- Sample of test reports or certificates that are given to students.

- Account of procedures for ensuring fairness and equivalency of assessment procedures.

- Information regarding any external examinations for which students are entered.
5.6.1 The overall course design will link explicitly to summative assessments, providing clear routes of progression. These will be made known to both teachers and students, taking into account those students joining at later entry points.

5.6.2 Assessment will be as closely linked to receiving departments’ academic expectations as possible, in terms of both content and procedures. This might be achieved by dialogue with academic staff, analysis of sample coursework and exams and/or access to sample scripts.

5.6.3 Students will be informed in advance of assessment procedures and criteria to be used on the Course, including any opportunities for resubmitting coursework or resitting exams for students who failed to meet the required level.

5.6.4 Students will receive timely and useful feedback on their progress and on their strengths and weaknesses.

5.6.5 On intensive courses of more than one month, formal assessment of students’ progress will be carried out at regular intervals with feedback given and records kept.

5.6.6 Measures will be taken to ensure standardisation, fairness and consistency in all student placement and assessment procedures across teachers and tasks.

5.6.7 Students will be encouraged to monitor and take responsibility for their own progress, with particular attention paid to the take up of feedback from their teachers.

5.6.8 Exit assessment procedures and reports will be clear and well documented, and will be comprehensible and relevant to students and receiving departments.
## C2. ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK PRACTICE

An EAP practitioner will be able assess academic language and skills competence using appropriate formative and summative assessment and provide appropriate feedback:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Professional Knowledge &amp; Values: C2</th>
<th>Example CPD Tasks and Indicative Evidence: C2</th>
<th>Core Professional Area of Activity competence in:</th>
<th>Indicative Evidence: C2</th>
<th>Range requirement:</th>
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<td>a. A critical comparison of several international test specifications and their uses</td>
<td>i. delivering appropriate modes of assessment</td>
<td>i. Personal statement justifying assessment instrument</td>
<td>Types:</td>
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<td>b. the range of assessment required in tertiary institution academic subject contexts</td>
<td>b. Sample assessments and descriptive statement</td>
<td>ii. linking assessment outcomes to inform teaching and learning in EAP</td>
<td>ii. 2 lesson plans with statement on assessment alignment</td>
<td>Any 3 of:</td>
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<td>c. different modes and purposes of EAP-specific assessment</td>
<td>c. Comparison of example EAP assessments with statement on uses</td>
<td>iii. implementing principles of standardization, moderation, exam administration and invigilation</td>
<td>iv. Samples of graded assessments</td>
<td>Writing</td>
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<td>d. principles of valid and reliable EAP assessment design and marking criteria</td>
<td>d. Comparison and critique of example assessments</td>
<td>iv. applying marking criteria consistently and to agreed standards</td>
<td>v. Feedback samples and critique</td>
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<td>e. Learner group profile and test specification statement</td>
<td>v. giving appropriate feedback and feed-forward on student assessed performance</td>
<td>vi. Example evaluation</td>
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<td>f. Institutional feedback policy guidelines and personal statement on own practice.</td>
<td>vii. evaluating assessment instruments</td>
<td>vii. Sample results and evidence of action</td>
<td>Reading</td>
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<td>g. The range of and use of learning technologies in assessment and feedback</td>
<td>g. Comparative evaluation of learning technology options or Recognised Prior Learning</td>
<td>vii. using the results of assessment to inform teaching</td>
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<td>Study Skills</td>
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Key Questions

◦ What are we assessing?
  ◦ Should we be assessing proficiency or achievement?
◦ Has the quest for authenticity in EAP programme assessment compromised the reliability of our assessments?
  ◦ How do we ensure equivalence across administrations?
◦ How generalizable are the results from students’ performances on our assessments?
  ◦ Is the teaching testing/mix right?
◦ Does all EAP programme assessment have to be high stakes?
What are we assessing?

- IELTS, TOEFL and other similar exams assess whether or not a student knows enough English to benefit from instruction.
- Assessment on pre-sessional, foundation or pre-masters programme should tell us whether or not students have benefited from our instructional programmes.
Routes into university

- Direct Entry
- Language Test
- Pre-sessional English Course
- Foundation or Pre-masters Course
- Degree Courses
The conditional offer

Why are students given conditional offers?

- They have not met the entry requirements for the university
  - i.e. their language level is lower than required
Value Added

EAP courses

◦ teach students how to apply language to specific academic situations
◦ provide multiple opportunities for students to engage with both language and academic content
◦ teach more than language
  ◦ In fact, language learning may be incidental to learning how to take notes in lectures, write essays and give presentations.
Multiple Observations

EAP Exam
◦ 3-4 hours

EAP Course
◦ 5-weeks – 100 hours
◦ 10 weeks – 200 hours
Different types of assessment

Proficiency tests
Not linked to a particular syllabus
A point in time snapshot of student ability
Limited range of assessments tasks

Achievement Assessment
Linked to a particular syllabus
Multiple observations of student ability at different dates and times
Wider range of assessment tasks
Score gains on IELTS Writing (Green, 2005:57)

Fig. 3. Mean score gains on IELTS Writing component for learners on EAP courses.
(de Jong, 2009)
Proficiency or Achievement

IELTS/TOEFL/PTE are language proficiency tests, and...

research by Green (2005) shows that students on EAP courses do not demonstrate much gain on IELTS writing scores. Tonkyn (2012) provides similar results for speaking, albeit with a small sample size.

Should we surmise that students on EAP programmes are not learning anything or recognise that proficiency tests are not capturing the learning that does occur?
Proficiency or Achievement

Pre-university EAP courses follow syllabi with specific aims and objectives, and...

they focus primarily on academic skills and academic literacy development (e.g. writing an academic essay; giving an oral presentation; participating in a seminar; finding/selecting/using appropriate source material for essay or presentations) rather than developing proficiency in grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, and...

EAP programmes regularly use coursework assessments that require students to demonstrate that they attained the course objectives.

Isn’t this achievement testing?
Proficiency or Achievement

Since proficiency tests (e.g. IELTS/TOEFL) are not able to tell us about students’ ability to meet the British HE academic requirements of their discipline (e.g. writing up a case study for an MSc in Management) and...

Since tracking studies indicate that the performance on degree coursework of students who successfully complete short pre-university EAP courses is on par with that of direct entry students, then...

Aren’t the two types of assessments telling us different things?
Proficiency or Achievement

If proficiency tests tell us that students have sufficient English to benefit from instruction (but may need additional support adapting to the academic requirements of UK HE delivery modes and assignment requirements) and...

If local EAP achievement-based assessment tells us that students with lower than direct-entry level English proficiency can learn through the medium of English and manage UK HE delivery methods and assignment requirements (the degree to which they can do this should be noted), then

Should the outcomes of local assessments be reported using the same performance level descriptors as IELTS? Or should they be reported using descriptors that relate to the local course aims and objectives?
Authenticity at the expense of reliability?

- Use of live lectures
- Different topics for different disciplines
- Selection of reading passages
- Choice of writing prompts
How generalizable are the results from our students’ performances?

Test type: A “take home” coursework essay which students work on for around 10 weeks.

Length: 1,000 words (+/- 10%) excluding references.

Title: Four possible titles, assigned to students according to their prospective degree.

Other input: A reading list is provided, and students are encouraged to mainly use this list for their sources. The student’s EAP tutor gives formative feedback on drafts of the essay.

Skills assessed: Skills emphasised by the course include critical evaluation of a theory, synthesis of a range of sources, and general rhetorical and ideational organisation.
Key Questions
Thank you for your attention!

DIANE.SCHMITT@NTU.AC.UK
References


Green, A.B (2005). EAP study recommendations and score gains on the IELTS Academic Writing test, Assessing Writing, 10(1), 44-60