



## **PLENARY 3**

### ***Empowering Teachers as Testers***

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#### **Abstract**

As testers, our aim is to involve teachers in all phases of testing, at the very least to increase their understanding of the place of assessment in the teaching-learning process and to gain their cooperation in promoting transparency for all. This is crucial because testing, teaching and curriculum design are all intertwined and should be outcome-oriented. Both testing and teaching focus on skill development and should be guided by the cornerstones of good testing practice.

The presenter will set this topic in context by outlining her philosophy of assessment. She will stress that testing really means assessment in a broader sense and it includes all types, from informal classroom to large-scale high stakes tests. Useful techniques for developing teachers as testers will be described. Particular emphasis will be placed on the techniques that she has found useful in her experience as an assessment trainer.

Given the problems as well as successes, she will briefly discuss some of the challenges associated with involving teachers in assessment.

#### **Summary of the paper**

Testing means assessment in a broad sense and it encompasses all types of assessment. Assessment should always be guided by the cornerstones of good testing practices. Involvement in assessment is every teacher's responsibility and yet testing is one of the most misunderstood areas in ELT.

### ***How students view assessment***

Assessment is generally seen as something done to students by the teachers. Students see tests as threats to their competence. Due to this, they may feel panic and confusion when taking test as they see tests as something to be 'got through'. Most students feel anxious, worried and inadequate; some might suffer test anxiety especially when the tests are high-stakes. In addition, there is a great pressure on students to succeed, and if they don't, they are branded as 'failures'.

### ***How teachers view assessment***

The students' feeling towards assessment is shared by the teachers as teachers are often removed from the process of test development. Many teachers feel that tests are only useful as a way of motivating students. The common view held by teachers is that assessment occurs after learning has finished. There is also a gap between teaching and testing as testers is usually not in touch with classroom realities. Furthermore, assessment is the 'least fun area for teachers (Jacob and Chase 1992).

### ***The changing role of teachers***

Traditionally, testing is left to specialists; however, the view has changed. Alderson (1999) claimed that "Testing is too important to be left in the hands of testers". It is also inappropriate and even damaging as testers cannot work alone. They depend on the expertise, experience and cooperation of teachers. The aim is to involve teachers in all aspects of testing. The teachers' involvement will promote transparency for teachers and students and will also make feedback accessible and meaningful.

### ***Why involve teachers?***

Assessment and feedback are central to teaching (Alderson, 1999). Teachers are those who know best about what is happening in the classroom. They are needed so that tests are reflective of the curriculum and applicable to student levels. Tests must be close to curriculum and teaching and if there is no correspondence, test does not reflect the 'best practice'.

Teaching should also be close to the students. If tests are good, teachers do not need to change what they do and test preparation books will serve their purposes.

### ***Further rationale for teachers involvement***

Teachers must feel ownership of a test as 20% of their time as teachers is spent in testing/grading. Furthermore, involvement in assessment is every teacher's responsibility. Basically teachers must understand test purpose, nature and philosophy; however, there should be more involvement in test construction, piloting, reporting, etc.

### ***Why is testing left to teachers?***

Alderson (1999) listed several reasons why teachers are not involved in testing:

- 'Ivory Tower' belief; Field is arcane
  - journals is not accessible to the classroom teacher
- Teacher have inadequate or poor training
- Concerns close to teachers' daily lives
  - Feelings of insecurity or lack of confidence
- Insufficient resources allocated to assessment
  - Administrators pay lip service to importance of assessment; no release time or extra remuneration
- It is easier not to have to worry about assessment
- All these factors conspire against teacher involvement

**Four models of in-house test development**

	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>	<b>Model 4</b>
	Teachers write the test	Testing specialists write the test	Administration buys the test	Teachers and testers write the test
1	<p><b>Advantages:</b> Reduces gap between teaching and testing.</p> <p>Teachers feel ownership for the test.</p> <p>Administration feels it is saving money.</p>	<p><b>Advantages:</b> Increased reliability.</p> <p>Decreased teacher workload.</p> <p>Removes Ts from responsibility.</p>	<p><b>Advantages:</b> High status and reliability if test is internationally recognized.</p> <p>Saves time.</p> <p>No arguments about result.</p>	<p><b>Advantages:</b> Testers can share expertise with teachers.</p> <p>Teachers can give classroom insight to testers.</p> <p>Results in greater buy-in from teachers.</p> <p>Reduces teaching/testing gap.</p> <p>Seen by all to be an efficient of resources.</p>
2	<p><b>Disadvantages:</b> Tests are rarely reliable because of lack of training and expertise amongst teachers.</p> <p>Workload so heavy that Ts bow out of process</p>	<p><b>Disadvantages:</b> Gap between teaching/testing.</p> <p>Teacher feels alienated and left out.</p> <p>Most importantly, Ts don't have opportunity to develop/improve test writing skills.</p>	<p><b>Disadvantages:</b> Potential mismatch between teaching/learning</p> <p>Costly.</p> <p>Ts do not have opportunity to improve test development/writing skills.</p>	<p><b>Disadvantages:</b> Long lead in time-must start months in advance.</p> <p>Needs administration commitment to be successful - release time, extra remuneration &amp; PD support.</p>

**Assessment skills required by teachers**

In order to ensure valid and reliable tests, teachers need a wide range of skills (Brindley, 2000). The skills are:

1	Observing, interpreting and documenting students' language use
2	Designing classroom tests and assessment tasks
3	Analyzing test results
4	Providing diagnostic feedback to students
5	Evaluating the quality of test and task
6	Evaluating learner performance according to rating scales
7	Writing evaluative reports

***Continued threats to teacher involvement***

- There is no time for teachers to pursue much needed professional development
  - Developing expertise requires lots of hands-on experience, additional training/ coursework and formal degree programs
- Insufficient resources
  - No money to reduce teacher workload
- Trust issues
  - Feeling of whether teachers can be 'trusted' to write tests or contribute to test development
- Their students might have an unfair advantage

***The challenges***

1	Getting institutional or administrative support- No idea how time consuming assessment can be
2	Overcoming increased workloads
3	Testing 'baggage' that teachers bring from their own educational background or institutional context
4	Getting teachers to plan the whole cycle of test development
5	Program/curricular problems – Mismatch between teaching and testing
6	Slippery slopes of alternative assessment
7	Getting teachers to plan ahead
8	New areas of assessment –portfolio
9	High level of 'burn-out' in assessment

*The techniques for developing teachers as testers*

1	Variety of resources for development Teachers have different learning styles Importance of hand-on experience/ theoretical supportive environment
2	Workshops 'Assessment Awareness " course In-house JIT workshop on focal topics Model good practice, critique 'bad test'
3	Print Resources Creating effective classroom tests

***People resources: Team Approach***

- Peer mentoring
- Work groups
- On-going feedback during test writing process
  - Vetting and piloting service for teacher –designed tests
- Encourage professional development

***Electronic resources***

- EFL teachers are not remote now!
- Effective use of email
  - Drafting, critiquing, sharing
  - Mentoring when most needed
- Internet resources
  - Website (<http://taesig.com> or <http://clelt.com>)
  - Glenn Fulcher's 'Resources in Language Testing' website (<http://www.dundee.ac.uk/languagestudies/ltest/ltr.html>)
  - ERIC resources

***The requisites for teacher involvement***

1	Learn about and understand attitudes concerning assessment – reciprocal between teachers and testers.
2	If teachers are to assume greater responsibility for assessment, they require sufficient time/ resources and training
3	Provide evidence that increased teachers involvement has clear benefit for students

***Where do we go from here?***

1	Identify common issues for development, research and further PD
2	Use technology to develop online workshops and support groups
3	Make positive suggestions and critique in a positive way
4	Regional assessment PD



## Issues and concerns raised by participants

1. *How do we involve so many teachers (400,000) in centralized training programme?*

Teachers should start from the classroom level before going-up to the national level or reaching the ministry level.

Teachers are already involved in testing because every trainee has gone through testing in teacher training and somehow it is forgotten along the way. Therefore, in-service teacher development is very essential

Teachers are always nervous about testing and testers sometimes forget that they were teachers themselves before therefore it is important to bridge the gap between teachers and testers.

2. *How do we practically involve teachers in so many areas in such limited time?*  
Specialise in one area or build a team.

3. *What do you think of item bank?*

It is important to have an item bank to reuse the items in a secure way.