

PEST issues in implementing effective learning-oriented language assessment

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PEST= political, economic, social and technological



Learning oriented language assessment (LOLA)

- Innovative assessment approaches have emerged in assessment of language learning and language in use
- Terminology is fluid and contested
- ‘Learning-oriented language assessment’ – **LOLA** – provides a self-explanatory umbrella term.

Learning oriented language assessment (LOLA)

Assessments (including high stakes tests) are learning opportunities

- Test tasks *can* also be useful learning tasks

Well-informed teaching depends on assessment

- Teaching insights depend on good quality – revealing – assessment tasks

Interactive ‘dynamic’ assessments have the potential to be more informative than ‘static’ tests

New technology opens up new opportunities for more interactive approaches

Learning oriented language assessment (LOLA)

While I was getting ready to go to town one morning last week, my wife handed me a little piece of red cloth and asked if I would have time during the day to buy her two yards of cloth like that. I told her I would be glad to do it. Putting the piece of cloth into my pocket, I took the train to town.

Question: The person telling the story is....

- a) a married lady
- b) an unmarried lady
- c) a married man
- d) an unmarried man

(The Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency)

LOLA: Task authenticity

Connection between assessment, educational world and social reality of target language use:

- Social context
- Actors
- Interactivity



LOLA: Learner engagement

Learners understand and are involved in setting the direction of travel

- Shared criteria for success
- Goal setting
- Peer assessment
- Self assessment



LOLA: Feedback loops

Feedback is only valuable if it leads to action:

Opportunities for...

Self-correction

Remediation

Extension

Exploration



Foundational principles

- Teachers/ assessors have a key role in **diagnosing** learners' needs for – and giving – instruction
- Learning should be **integral to** every assessment experience
- LOLA tasks **engage** students in their own learning
- Learner engagement spurs learners to consciously **assess their own learning** and to work with peers to **assess together**
- LOLA-oriented feedback means **acting on feedback**

Promise, projects and goals

In projects, we have worked to find ways to make language assessment more *learning-oriented* and *interactional*

Three projects:

SBA in Hong Kong implementing LOLA concepts in a large scale examination

ProSET incorporating LOLA into teacher training in assessment

Cambridge LOA exploring LOLA potential in a large scale international testing context

Political Economic Social Technological issues

- Alderson (2000) suggested assessment innovations need to take more account of the impact of PEST issues or 'antecedent' conditions (Wall 2004): school, education system, state, society as a whole

The pesky PEST issues

When we language educators and assessment experts turn attention from focusing on learners to look at political, economic, social and technological issues, things can get difficult

We...

Draw on three projects to illustrate how PEST issues impacted/ have potential to impact outcomes: mainly negative, but sometimes positive

Suggest further thinking around possible principled approaches to address these issues

Project A: School-based assessment in Hong Kong

Project A—School-based assessment in Hong Kong

2006: team of researchers at University of Hong Kong, led by Chris Davison and Liz Hamp-Lyons, contracted by Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) to develop teacher-assessed student speaking component for the senior secondary school system

Aligned with HK Education Bureau terminology, this is called a ‘School-based Assessment’ (SBA).

For more details see:

- Davison & Hamp-Lyons (2010); Hamp-Lyons (2016)

Project Aims

In deciding to implement School-based Assessment of oral English, the HKEAA aimed to focus attention on the need to improve Hong Kong students' ability to *use* spoken English with confidence and accuracy in future situations—workplace and advanced education

But they also aimed to incorporate aspects of assessment for learning within the formal examination system

Tasks

There were two broad task types for assessment: individual presentation (IP) and group interaction (GI): obviously, the GI format lent the most opportunities for LOLA behaviours

Therefore, a key issue for the team was to ensure that teachers would understand and value the kinds of speaking that are **effective**, and not only accurate

Group Interaction (GI) in Hong Kong SBA

Comparatively short and informal turns

Typical aspects of oral language performance are assessed, such as pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar

But – effective performance in GI needs attention to requirements of group behaviour:

- ensuring one can be heard and understood by other group members
- turn-taking skills
- initiating and maintaining the interaction through suggestions, questions and expansion of ideas.

These interactive skills are rewarded in assessment domains, criteria and levels

Scoring—Domain 4 example

IV. Ideas & Organisation

Can **express a wide range** of relevant information and ideas without any signs of difficulty.

Can consistently **respond effectively** to others, **sustaining and extending a conversational exchange**.

Can use the **full range of questioning and response levels** (see Framework of Guiding Questions) to engage with peers.

Can express relevant information and ideas clearly and fluently.

Can **respond appropriately** to others to **sustain and extend** a conversational exchange.

Can use a **good variety of questioning and response levels** (see Framework of Guiding Questions).

Can present relevant literal ideas clearly with well-organised structure.

Can **often respond appropriately** to others; **can sustain and may extend** some conversational exchanges

However: Can do these things less well when attempting to respond to interpretive or critical questions, or **can** interpret information and present elaborated ideas, but at these questioning levels coherence is not always fully controlled.

Working with teachers

In this project Chris Davison and Liz Hamp-Lyons worked with 40 teachers for a year

- developing materials and having teachers trial them and feed back
- developing scoring structures and have teachers bring in student samples for discussion, group scoring, and revisions
- building assessment literacy materials specific to the SBA context

Weakness of whole project was need to embed LOLA set of values in summative assessment environment

Working with teachers

THESE 40 teachers were enthusiastic early adopters

Full support from HKEAA and Education Bureau of HK

BUT after 6 years working with c.7,000 teachers in PD courses and in schools:

- At best half of teachers fully convinced of the value and values of this approach
- A third of teachers have found a way to 'work the system' which follows the letter but not the spirit of the innovation
- Remainder do not engage with SBA process

PEST factors

- Expectations and practices of the HK education system and attitudes to learning/'knowledge'
- Power residing in the hands of school principals, not in teaching teams
- Teachers severely overworked, constrained by higher forces, lacking support in school
- Dominant 'cram school' system
- Parents heavily acculturated to credentialism
- Positivist understanding of 'fairness'

Project B: ProSET - Russian Federation

Project B: Russian Federation

Teachers must be equipped, through pre- and in-service programs to both assess educational outcomes and monitor progress in skills development (World Bank 2013)

Three-year EU funded project (www.proset-tempus.net)

4 EU partners, 11 Russian Universities, Ministry of Education, NATE Russia, Cambridge University Press

- Develop and introduce new curricula in testing and assessment of English for teachers (pre- and in-service) embedding LOLA principles
- Transfer expertise in assessment literacy training: build centres for professional development

Political context

Assessment reform and introduction of State Unified Exam (EGE) Единый государственный экзамен (ЕГЭ)

2009 (promoted by OECD, World Bank) mandatory matriculation test - replaced assessment by teachers: standardize expectations, reduce corruption, but controversial

Negative connotations: *standardization* (стандартизация) as dehumanizing, destructive of individuality and originality

Bologna Process in Higher Education

From 5 year *Specialist* to US style *Bachelors* plus *Masters*; from *input* curriculum to *outcomes* standards; modular courses, transferable credits - unfamiliar and viewed with ambivalence or suspicion by many

Public debate over standards

Don't the pedagogical elite understand that the so-called 'standardization' of Russian education to meet global requirements only strives to facilitate the brain drain to Europe and the USA?

(uchportal.ru, accessed October 10, 2012)

Could someone please tell me, what exactly was wrong with Soviet education and why it was necessary to trade it in for the American system?

(kid.ru, accessed October 10, 2012)

(quoted in Minina, 2014)

Priority for project to build understanding of external testing

Economic context

Before introduction of EGE

According to various sources, Russian citizens pay annually up to US\$520 million in bribes for places in HEIs (Hallak and Poisson 2007)

After introduction of EGE

Corruption persists: Violations include disseminating exam questions before the examination, using mobile phones (for Internet searches or SMS), receiving help from onsite proctors, and re-opening sealed test envelopes to correct mistakes (Denisova-Schmidt and Leontyeva 2014)

Economic context

Economics of teacher training

Universities (and schools) under-resourced: lack language assessment books, software, infrastructure

English language proficiency has economic value, pedagogic skills less so

teachers salaries are low – according to the World Bank 75% of the national average or c. £150 per month in 2009

Teacher trainee graduate attrition rates are high, few incentives for professional development

But, student: teacher ratios are low – 8.8 in 2009 (World Bank 2012)

Social context

Skills base

No testing and assessment component in teacher training provision

Lack of know-how among teacher trainers

Lack of experience among current secondary school teachers in developing assessment tools for classroom learning

Pedagogic culture of memorization, prioritising knowledge over inquiry

Lack of awareness of principles underlying assessment design

Prospects for LOLA

PEST context not favourable, but...

- Russian heritage of developmental education
- Training and PD programmes established through the project now include formative models that incorporate interactivity
- Special Interest Group for language assessment established within NATE Russia

Project C: Learning oriented language assessment in large-scale speaking tests

Investigate learning oriented language assessment applied to large-scale speaking tests

Liz Hamp-Lyons and Tony Green carried out a Cambridge Assessment-funded project to:

- develop a concept model for LOLA
- try out the model with one Cambridge English test and a small sample of First/FCE Speaking test events
- consider how far a LOLA approach is seen in teaching materials for Cambridge English: First preparation
- consider the potential for application of the model to both classroom and exam contexts

<i>Learning-oriented language assessment</i>	<i>Large-scale testing</i>
Learning-focused tasks	Judgement-focused tasks
Scaffolded task completion	Support not permitted
Interactive/exploratory questioning	Interlocutor/assessor questioning
Learner-involved assessment	Learner-excluded assessment
Self-assessment	Authority assessment
Peer evaluation	Authority assessment
Learning-focused feedback	Judgement-focused feedback
Interlocutor/assessor scaffolding	Summary decision reporting
Immediate feedback	Delayed or no feedback
Focus on feed-forward	No feed-forward
Assessment is contingent	Assessment is absolute
Learning-oriented language assessment is inherently interactive	Large-scale testing inevitably under-represents the constructs of language

In Speaking tests

Standardising conditions requires speaking examiners to restrict interaction with the candidates

BUT the effect is to limit behaviours that facilitate ease of communication, such as

- eye contact, smiling, nodding
- possible feedback-implying activity
- initiation sequencing; turn management

Speaking examiners might be trained to set up 'bias for the best' opportunities prior to beginning formal assessing

Support Resources for Teachers

Contemporary teacher support resources had relatively few LOLA features

But learner engagement and effective feedback could be presented as essential tools for the Cambridge English test preparation classroom:

- Task authenticity: Emphasize links to local curriculum, learner needs and longer term-learning goals
- Learner engagement: Involve learners in assessment: make this a systematic element in preparing for test
- Feedback: Guidance to teachers on feedback mechanisms

These three projects illustrate:

innovative assessment types are unlikely to be successfully introduced

until

quality professional development for teachers in assessment literacy becomes the **norm** in pre-service and in-service teacher education

These three projects illustrate:

innovative assessment types unlikely to be successfully bedded into a learning and assessing environment

unless

Large scale assessment agencies, publishers embrace a LOLA vision (requires large-scale commitment of resources and pioneering spirit)

Learning-potential becomes a key assessment quality - part of an assessment use case/ validation argument