

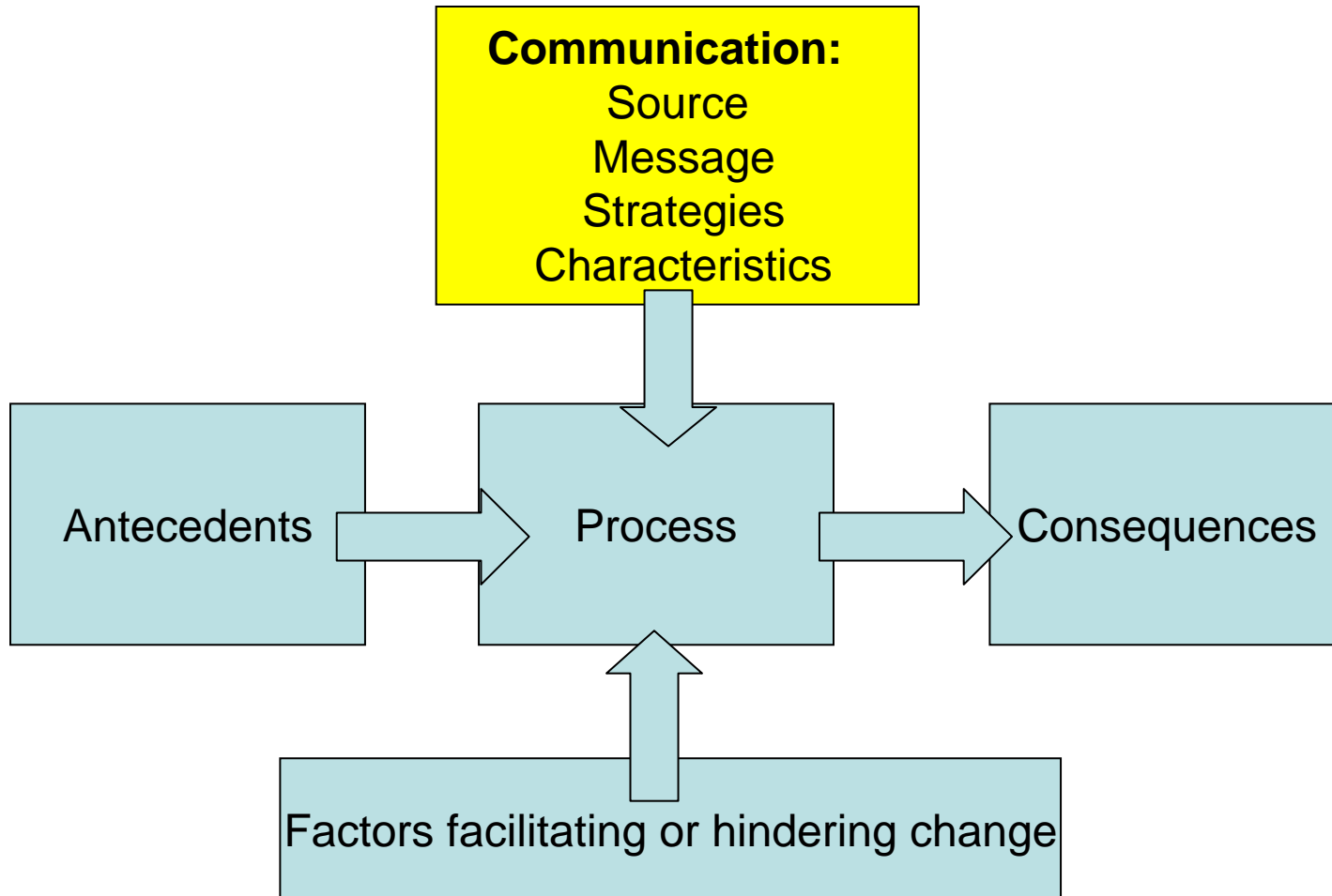
EALTA 2008

The Role of Communication in
Creating Positive Washback

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Communication in the Diffusion of Innovation



Purpose of Survey

- To find out what examination designers have to say about the role of communication in their efforts to promote positive washback
- To find out what teachers have to say about the success (or otherwise) of examination designers in communicating what they desire

Survey

- On-line questionnaire
- EALTA and ILTA communities
- 10 questions – variety of question formats
- Two separate questionnaires for two groups:
 - Examination designers
 - Teachers preparing students for examinations

Questions

- location of respondents
- scope (international, national, regional, institutional) of the exam
- respondents' understanding of 'high stakes'
- designers' intentions re washback
- teachers' awareness of designers' intentions
- designers' means of disseminating information about the exam and how to prepare for it
- teachers' perceptions of the success of this effort
- opinions re success of means used

Respondents

Scope of exam	Designers n = 50	Teachers N = 49
International	18%	53%
National	44%	33%
Regional	12%	6%
Institutional	26%	8%

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High stakes exams?

- Schools – promotion within system, school-leaving certificate
- University – entrance, exit, scholarships
- Employment – civil service, teacher qualifications, to get and keep jobs, promotion, bonuses, go abroad
- Monitoring of schools

Was washback intended?

Did you discuss creating positive washback?

Yes 82%

No 18%

What type of washback?

- Teaching – more communicative and varied
- Language – more use, authentic use
- Reading – more reading, authentic texts, different genres, higher order thinking, critical reading
- Listening – more listening, authentic texts
- Writing – authentic tasks, integrated tasks, appropriate to purpose and audience, awareness of discourse conventions, process approach
- Speaking – more speaking, more interactive oral work
- Grammar – less grammar
- Student independence
- Student interest in using the language outside the classroom

Documentation?

Did you document your intentions about exam washback?

Yes 78% (of 82% who wanted washback)

No 22%

Successful message?

To the teachers:

Did the examinations designers aim to use the high-stakes exam to produce positive washback?

Yes, they did	53%
I don't know	47%

Success of dissemination?

	Successful	Not Successful	No Dissemination
Principles underlying exam	D - 67 T - 38	D - 25 T - 44	D - 7 T - 19
Format of exam	D - 89 T - 81	D - 11 T - 13	D - 0 T - 6
Materials for exam practice	D - 68 T - 69	D - 7 T - 25	D - 25 T - 6
Materials for developing skills (not just exam practice)	D - 39 T - 31	D - 14 T - 50	D - 46 T - 19

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How do you evaluate success?

Questionnaires to teachers – after trials,
after seminars, after live exam

Questionnaires to candidates

Visit to schools

Letters of complaint

Examination results

How do you evaluate success?

BUT

- ‘Dissemination in process, so it’s hard to say...’.
- ‘It’s a subjective process...’.
- ‘Teachers were informed...’.

ALSO

- No dissemination – it’s not our job.
- Providing training materials is not our responsibility.

Most successful means?

Designers –

Websites

- Official documents
- Information about exam
- Specifications
- Sample tasks
- Needs to be interactive
- Needs continuous updating
- Teachers need to know it's there

Other successful means

- Seminar/workshops
- Training courses
- Teachers' conferences
- Video presentations
- CDs/ DVDs
- Mass media
- Visits to schools
- Sample tests for teachers
- Rating scales and benchmarks
- Handbooks for students
- Past papers
- Process of trialling

Advice from Designers

- Direct contact is best.
- Use multiple channels.
- Include teachers' unions in process
- Be persistent – it takes a long time.

Don't ...

- present too much theory.
- present materials with no theory.
- use unnecessary jargon.
- make the specifications too specific.
- focus on strategies for passing.
- delay dissemination.
- give out the questions!
- think that you've done enough.

The designers' own words...

- The absence of information gives room for the creation of rumours, horror stories, fear and frustration on the part of teachers who have to prepare students for the exam.
- From my own experience I know that test designers and teachers usually perceive each other as enemies instead of cooperating and discussing things.
- ...you have to be well prepared. You have to understand the underlying principles of the exam yourself (which is not always self-evident!) and you have to get the teachers on your side. They have to feel that the exam is theirs as much as yours.

Advice from Teachers

- Websites
- Seminars

General advice:

- Plan inset and materials at the start of the process
- Make sure the teachers understand the construct/principles
- Provide the information in suitable form
- Focus on language preparation (including pragmatics), not 'test-wiseness'
- Give a list of useful sources

- Use multiple means of communication
- Inform the teachers well in advance
- Encourage as many teachers as possible to train as raters and moderators.
- Make sure teachers apply what they are trained for.
- Have high expectations of learners.

Don't ...

- be secretive
- adopt a dictatorial approach or be prescriptive
- make teachers feel forced to teach to the exam
- give away content
- give hints about how to guess answers based on question format

The teachers' own words...

- **Avoid criticising the existing examination system. It's a very sensitive matter and it's better...to tactfully show deficiency of the existing exams instead of imposing a new system on the grounds that the old one was unprofessional and never worked properly.**
- **Information regarding test specifications should be in a form and format that teachers can use, which is often not the same as the form and format that students or candidates need.**
- **Avoid leaving the dissemination to publishers, who will use it for their own ends.**

- Avoid a 'cascade' approach to training disseminators, as beyond the first cohort there is a tendency for information to get modified. If a cascade approach is needed...vet which of the first cohort are able to train independently.
- Don't give up hope. It takes a long time to convince teachers to change their methods.

Summary

- Only 82% of designers discussed washback.
- Only 78% of these documented their intentions.
- 47% of teachers didn't know if the exam was meant to encourage washback.
- Agreement re success - exam format.
- Agreement re moderate success – materials to practise for exam.
- Agreement re lack of success – materials to practise necessary skills.

Summary (continued)

- Disagreement re principles underlying exam – 67% v 38%
- Disagreement about whether dissemination intended
- Not all exam designers monitor the success of dissemination.
- Much advice is available from exam designers and teachers, if only someone could collect it and organise it effectively.

'The single biggest problem with communication is the illusion that it has taken place.'

George Bernard Shaw

Thank you!

If you have any questions or comments
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