# Participation and Control in EAP Writing Assessment

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## Introduction: Comparing assessment paradigms

| Traditional Assessment | Alternative assessment |
|---|---|
| • Objective measurement (Popham,1987) <br> • External Standardisation <br> • Language Proficiency only (Weir, 2005, Paran, 2010) <br> • Assessment of learning ( Leug and Mohan, 2004) <br> • Individual ( based on liberal philosophical traditions) ( Broadfoot, 1996 Madaus,1993) <br> • Product only <br> • One shot, one sample ( Weigle, 2002) <br> • Test taker as object ( Friere,1970 Boud, 2000) <br> • Measurement experts as decision makers (Shohamy, 2001) <br> • Construct Validity <br><br> • Statistical Reliability <br> • Grades and numbers – one way feedback  (Madaus ,1990) <br> • Sees washback in terms of effect on classroom teaching and learning <br> • Fairness and equity e.g: timed conditions ( Leung and Lewkowicz , 2006) | • Hermeneutic ( Moss, 1996) <br> • Localised and particular to the context ( Bachman and Palmer, 2010) <br> • Integrating proficiency , achievement and academic literacies <br> • Assessment for learning and learning for life (Boud, 2000, Black and Wiliam, 1998) <br> • Collaborative – acknowledges assessment and language as social practices ( (Fox, 2008) <br> • Process and product ( Hamp- Lyons and Condon, 2000) <br> • Multiple sources of evidence of development ( Weigle, 2002) <br> • Test taker as agent <br> • Multiplicity of voices ( Shohamy 2001) <br> • Responsibility of the learner as evaluator of their own work ( Falchikov,  2006) <br> • Authenticity of the context and target use domain ( Hamayan, 1995, Huot, 1996) <br> • Consistency ( Moss, 1996) <br> • Dialogic feedback and feed forward ( Torrance and Prior, 1998) <br> • Sees washback in terms of **impact** , encompassing more than the classroom but of wider social power relations ( McNamara, 2001, Shohamy, 2001 Gipps 1994, Broadfoot, 1994) |

## Research Aims

1. What are the impacts of processfolio writing assessment on students' sense of agency in the assessment process?
2. What are the impacts of processfolio writing assessment on students' sense of  development as writers?
3. What are the impacts of processfolio writing assessment on students' writing ability?

## Processsfolio Assessment

Students will produce a portfolio but due to time constraints, will not include several pieces of different genres, but will document the **process** of a 2000 word research essay over 4 weeks. The essay will be graded in two ways:
1.As a product, using the King's College criteria ( weighted 70%)
2.As a process, using teacher and student negotiated criteria ( weighted 30%)
The weightings are admittedly arbitrary. The objective is to have the process weighted as highly as possible in order to demonstrate its importance while representing the need for a product writing assessment that Kings College admissions would require for university entry.
This must include at least 4 of the following:
( to be negotiated with the student during tutorials)
✓Self assessment using criteria
✓Peer assessment using criteria
✓Reflective piece of writing
✓Notes made on sources
✓Essay plan/ outline
✓Time management charts/ study plans
✓Full drafts ( One first draft with teacher feedback must be included)
✓Draft sections e.g. introduction
✓Summaries or paraphrases of particular sources
✓Turnitin sandbox report
✓Tutorial records

Students will have three recorded tutorials, the focus of which will be the essay. Students will be encouraged to  prepare questions prior to the tutorial and to fill in a form following it: one copy of which will be retained by the students and one by the tutor.

## Impact- Beyond washback

• Misappropriation of large scale language testing onto EAP courses and using tests as a basis for designing curricula (Fulcher, 2009)
• Move to 'effects driven 'testing (Fulcher and Davidson( 2007) and 'use oriented 'testing ( Shohamy, 2001)
• Test impact as an *a priori* consideration in test writing (Messick, 1996)
• Uncertainty of tests as performance indicators ( Spolsky, 1995)
• All constructs of knowledge are subjective and this should be explicit in testing ( Gipps and Murphy, 1994)
• Formative assessment as good practice in EAP but its effects are negated by the impact of Summative assessment ( Brindley, 1998; Harlen and Deakin Crick, 2002)
• Less appreciation for the complexities of academic discourse acquisition ( Saltmarsh and Saltmarsh, 2008)
• Plagiarism as a consequence of lack of agency and  feeling of ownership ( Lillis, 2003; Zamel 1998)
• "I'll be a nothing" ( Reay and Wiliam 1999 )  " I am IELTS 6" ( Pearson, in press) identification of the self as defined by grades and test performance

## Action for change



Test taker as object of writing assessment → Processsfolio assessment, Sustainable assessment, Assessment for learning → Empowerment of the test taker in management of the assessment process, development of writing ability and self efficacy

Action Research Cycles: implementing the assessment on a pre sessional course from June- September over three years

### Planning
2013- reflecting on the students' and practitioner experiences
2014- reflecting on the challenges and benefits of the assessment – coding, and data interpretation
2015- reflecting on the challenges and benefits of the adjusted assessment – coding and data interpretation

2013- identifying a rationale for alternative assessment by investigating the impact of current assessment practice
2014- planning the implementation of processfolio assessment with colleagues, selecting 3 students for deeper case study analysis
2015- planning and discussing the assessment in light of what was learned

### Action
2013- gathering students' experiences through **interviews** ( 6 students); practitioner journals
2014- implementing the assessment 1.0 ( see Processfolio Assessment text) with one class as a formative trial and  3 students as case studies
2015- implementing version 2.0 of the assessment with adjustments and with a second trial class (es)

### Observation
2013 – analysing the data from interviews and practitioner observations
2014-  Mixed Methods: data analysis of **interviews** with 3 case students after the course and 3 months into their degree; **observation**s and discourse analysis of tutorials in assessing student participation and dialogue ( 3 case students); analysis of folios (3 case students ); grades on finished product compared to other classes without processfolio ( all students)
2015- as above

### Reflection

## Challenges and limitations

• Cooperation with staff and students required. This is an inherent problem in AR and of implementing assessment change.
• Assessment for learning may have limited short term impact on grades.
• Processfolio will require some teacher and student training, and time, which is limited on a pre sessional course.
• Potential for extra burden on teachers, although as the assessment is formalising the classroom process, it can potentially reduce some of the turn around making time as the majority of the work has already been completed.
• Do students actually want the agency and if not, should it be imposed?
• Lack of statistical rigour and subjectivity of process testing. But reliability is reconceptualised as consistency and validity as authenticity. Double marking of folio in same way as other writing assessment.
• AR is measured by the change that tales place and institutional change can be subtle and take time.
• Other variables may affect students' opinions about the test such as motivation, and the relationship with the teacher, including the levels of feedback which may induce bias.
• Case study approach limits the generalisability to a wider population. Further studies would involve other stakeholders such as admissions staff and faculty members.

## EAP writing assessment at King's College London

### Read to write Exam
• Summative
• Students receive two unseen texts in an exam and answer questions. Students use the texts to write a response to a question under timed conditions
• Product oriented, high stakes testing, integration of skills, integration of achievement and proficiency testing,
• Graded according to criteria benchmarked to IELTS band scores and also to King's College standard assessment criteria

### Research Essay
• Summative
• 2000 words continuous piece of writing on a topic of their choice. Based on sources
• Ss receive one tutorial and in class input
• Process <u>and</u> product oriented but only product graded, high incidences of plagiarism and use of paper mills, some student autonomy in choice of topic
• Graded as above, also benchmarked to IELTS criteria

## Why Action Research?

AR coheres with the ideology of alternative assessment literature and research ( Black and Wiliam, 1998) in its emphasis on agency and empowerment. In attempting to affect change on something which is has been identified as an issue ( Burns ,1999), the AR unification of theory and practice (praxis) in the tradition of Habermas, to critically  inform change  is also a tenet of Critical Applied Linguistics  ( Pennycook, 2001), from which tradition Critical Language Testing (Shohamy, 2001) derives.
AR is collaborative and requires the researcher to cooperate with other people in the research context rather than impose their own needs (Carr and Kemis, 1986). As in this case, the researcher is a participant and the process of research and is not an objective or detached observer.  Alternative assessment and Critical Language Testing traditions also emphasise the nature of participation and the need for a range of stakeholders' voices to be heard.
The AR cycle mirrors the typical assessment cycle in it most basic form: Plan, Implement, Validate / Observe /Monitor, Reflect.
Practitioner research is hermeneutic and data requires a more in depth analysis acknowledging complexities of context and locality that other research traditions can gloss over. The alternative assessment paradigm emphasises the inseparable nature of assessment, curriculum and pedagogy,  and AR can explore these issues in a way that other research traditions are unable.
AR emphasises the long term and the complexities of research where the cycles are never really completed. Although this project will have an end point, the refinement and continual learning from experience and reflection is never completed, and this is the concept of learning that students need in order to be successful. This is a central concept in sustainable assessment.
As all paradigms, whether research traditions or assessment traditions, are human constructions (Guba and Lincoln, 1994) and in this respect, AR is the most honest and authentic approach in acknowledging the ontological subjectivity and the nature of truth. This coheres with the limitations of objective measurement in language testing and the attempt to widen the discourse of assessment to take more into account than psychometric concerns of validity and reliability, while adhering to concepts such as rigour and consistency.