Enhancing Teacher Assessment Literacy: Practising what we Preach

Chris Davison,
School of Education,
University of New South Wales
The School of Education at the University of New South Wales, in partnership with Educational Assessment Australia (EAA), has developed an innovative e-based set of assessment tools and advice to assist teachers in developing pedagogically sound and useful approaches to assess the English language development of students across all years in Victorian schools as part of an international push to better develop teacher assessment literacy (TAL).

This presentation will first describe what is meant by assessment literacy, and how it can be developed, then outline the aims and rationale for the TEAL project and its theoretical underpinnings in assessment for learning. Participants will be shown a range of activities designed to help develop teacher assessment literacy as well as to enhance the trustworthiness of their assessments. The various challenges involved in supporting teacher-assessors with variable levels of subject knowledge and skills and assessment literacy will also be explored.
Overview

1. What is teacher assessment literacy (TAL) and why is it important?
2. How can teacher assessment literacy be developed (more effectively)?
3. An example: The TEAL project
4. What are the implications of these developments for teachers, educational leaders, schools and systems? For you?
What is teacher assessment literacy (and why is it important)?

• Rising international concerns about the perceived inadequacy of teachers’ assessment literacy, defined as a teacher's familiarity with those “measurement basics related directly to what goes on in classrooms”:

"[A]ssessment-literate teachers will typically make better decisions, and because we want students to be better taught, it should be obvious that today's teachers must acquire more assessment literacy" (Popham, 2009, p. 4, 6).
Worldwide there has been a concern to increase teachers’ assessment literacy, as well as that of other stakeholders (Taylor, 2009), in part due to concerns that teachers may lack sufficient training in what educational assessment entails (Malone, 2011; Stiggins, 1991, 2008, 2009b; Taylor, 2009) and/or may lack the confidence or skills required to perform their assessment duties in a competent manner (Stiggins, 2008, September, p. 8).

• This raises the question of what kind of “assessment” we want teachers to be literate in?

Researchers do not agree on how assessment literacy should be defined (Walters, 2010) nor what it might comprise (Fulcher, 2012, p. 115). Although many have attempted to define this construct (Fulcher, 2012; Malone, 2011; Popham, 2009), no existing definitions suit the Australian school context, in which teacher-based assessment accounts for most evaluation that takes place.

Stiggins (1991) argues that the meaning of assessment literacy varies due to “the needs of the decision maker and the practical realities of the decision context” (p.537).
In terms of its assessment demands and practices, Australia is very different from USA and from Asia, see http://www.cese.nsw.gov.au/images/stories/PDF/Re-assessing_Assessment_v6.pdf

“Australia tends to sit in the middle when comparisons are made between it and other countries, both in terms of the performance on international assessments; and in terms of an assessment system which is balanced between classroom level assessment and standardised assessment, with a reasonably strong focus on classroom assessment …
For example, student survey data suggests that NSW teachers are more inclined to use formative assessment (including feedback to students) than the average of OECD teachers (CESE 2015)…Teachers are encouraged to use a variety of assessment techniques that are valid, reliable and appropriate to the age and stage of learning. The development of these teaching skills has been a major focus of teacher professional learning opportunities in NSW schools over the past decade. Teacher survey data from OECD’s Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) indicates that 80 per cent of NSW teachers who participated in professional development relating to student evaluation and assessment practices reported that it had a moderate to large impact on their teaching (CESE 2015).
Nonetheless, there is evidence that Australia has some way to go to ensure that teachers understand how to interpret and understand assessment data and effectively embed assessment within a framework of teaching and learning. For example, an OECD review of Australian assessment practices undertaken in 2011 found that when teachers graded against national A-E standards, the consistency of their judgements within a school was weak (Goss et al 2015). A 2013 Staff in Australia’s Schools (SiAS) survey reported that 25.7 per cent of primary teachers identified the need for more professional learning in ‘making effective use of student assessment information’. The findings were similar for secondary teachers (CESE 2014)” (p.13)
• So in Australia, in the era of NAPLAN and accountability, concerns are raised on one hand, about the trustworthiness and reliability of teacher assessment decision-making processes and teachers’ ability to be both “accurate” and “fair”; on the other hand, about teachers’ capacity to be able to collect and use appropriate information to improve learning.

• However, they are not mutually exclusive – both are important for effective assessment, with the teacher equally, if not more, accountable to individual learners, not just systems, and systems highly motivated to improve learning.
In NSW …

“The new Years 7-10 syllabuses advocate assessment for learning, as this is a type of quality assessment that has had world-wide success in enhancing teaching and improving student learning. Assessment for learning gives students opportunities to produce work that leads to development of their knowledge, understanding and skills. Teachers decide how and when to assess student achievement, as they plan the work students will do, using a range of appropriate assessment strategies including self-assessment and peer assessment.”

http://arc.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/go/7-8/assessment-for-learning-in-years-7-10/
“Assessment for learning:
– emphasises the interactions between learning and manageable assessment strategies that promote learning
– clearly expresses for the student and teacher the goals of the learning activity
– reflects a view of learning in which assessment helps students learn better, not just achieve a better mark
– provides ways for students to use feedback from assessment
– helps students take responsibility for their own learning
– is inclusive of all learners”
• In fact, high quality assessment decision–making depends on:
  – Our knowledge and assumptions about what is involved in assessment decision-making
    (i.e. how trusting we are)
  – Our access to trustworthy tools for assessment (e.g. criteria, exemplars) and opportunities for benchmarking and self and peer reflection
    (i.e. how trustworthy we are)
  – The role and status of our assessment decision making
    (i.e. how trusted we are)
Teacher assessment reform as an activity system

**Means/tools/instruments**
- Contingent scaffolding (just-in-time support)
  - prompts, questions
  - modeling, demonstration
  - synthesizing, integrating
  - discursive pressure
  - positioning
- ‘Designed in’ scaffolding
  - mediating tools, texts
  - meta-language
  - procedural/conceptual/social

**Agent**
- teachers, leaders, parents, students

**Rules**
- task ownership
- task challenge
- task completion
- success criteria

**Community**
- system
- institution
- classroom
- teacher networks

**Division of labour**
- expert/novice
- leader/led
- insider/outsider??

**Object**
- Full assessment reform & mastery of task operations

**Outcome(s)**
- learner and teacher independence and confidence
- transfer of skills to other (like?) tasks
- Improvement in learning, teaching and assessment

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School of Education

UNSW
A dialectic model of teacher assessment judgement (Michell, in preparation)

Global judgement

Analytical judgement

Mediating tools
- constructs
- standards
- relations
- community

Cognition
- tacit knowledge
- intuition

‘on balance’ judgement

Explicit knowledge
- logic

Texts
- rubrics
- criteria
- procedures
Some key changes needed in terms of teachers’ reported and actual practices (Davison, 2012)

1. Need **a focus on learners and their needs**, although balanced attention to more informal, contingent assessment vs. more formal assessment, eg. “There has been a major change in my role as a teacher. I've been actively involved in helping my students to improve their learning, helping them to understand the assessment criteria and providing feedback on how they can do better”

2. Need **a focus on “making the time”** for feedback, particularly through the integration of formative assessments into the regular curriculum, eg “We know we have to give feedback though we are busy - it’s really teaching, not assessment”
3. Need a **focus on teachers helping students improve**, with a particular emphasis on students **sharing and evaluating success criteria and taking responsibility for their own learning**, eg.

   “We now have an awareness of levels in assessing students so we can help them improve”

   “We support each student individually, to learn more about how to help students improve”

   “The assessment gives me more confidence in assessing my student and guiding them in self and peer assessment”
4. Need a focus on building an assessment for learning community so can develop **better learning and teaching**, and make more **more trustworthy assessment decisions**, eg.

   “Jointly assessing the students' performances ... is useful as we can discuss the criteria, the task and the score”

   “Now I'm able to compare my students’ (work) with their counterparts and can help/improve my teaching”

5. Other changes needed?

   eg. What about statistical literacy?
How can teacher assessment literacy be developed more effectively?

By practising what we preach, by following the same principles and developing the same practices among our teachers that we want them to implement with students …
Thus, system and school-wide processes for change in the implementation of assessment reform must

• strive to be theoretically and philosophically consistent,

• **begin** by finding out where teachers are in terms of their assessment literacy

• share learning intentions, set clear and coherent success criteria and achievable timelines, model desired outcomes and lead - by example - to sustainable improvements in assessment, learning and teaching,

• put the learners and teachers at the centre of the change process,

• involve students, parents and the wider school community in understanding and supporting reforms,

• maintain confidence in the assessment system.
Five key steps for developing effective assessment literacy ….

1. First, teachers (and school leaders) need sufficient models, scaffolding and time to understand and embrace
   – the change in the **purposes of assessment** (enhancing learning and teaching) and
   – the change in **teacher and student roles** (involving learners more actively in evaluating and improving their own learning)

… i.e., ensure assessment reform goes beyond superficial adjustments in assessment format, frequency and feedback (Davison, 2007)
2. Second, teachers (and school leaders) need to learn how to develop assessment tasks and activities and assessment criteria/rubrics which are appropriate for range of individual needs

“It’s a good piece of assessment, but it’s not a good piece of….ah….it doesn’t actually help them. It helps us to assess them, but it doesn’t help them to progress.” (Hong Kong English teacher, 2006)

Although such instruments can be difficult to construct and more time-consuming than traditional testing and/or impressionistic marking (Fox, 2008), investment in system-wide change can make huge differences to student outcomes.
3. Third, teachers (and school leaders) need to develop more effective and dialogue-based feedback practices which scaffold and support less confident learners and engage and challenge higher level learners, so all are able to take responsibility for their learning and achieve their best **BUT** ... this means not just changing the assessment practice, **but changing the assessment culture** (Davison & Leung, 2009), and this again takes **time** (7-10 years).
4. Fourth, teachers (and school leaders) need to ensure the reliability, i.e. trustworthiness, of teacher-based assessments, thus it is critical to incorporate mechanisms to ensure teachers (and students) are making consistent and trustworthy assessment decisions, e.g. through widespread use of exemplars of performance expectations/levels, recording and reviewing of data, benchmarking with other classes (and educational systems) and developing online communities of practice
e.g.. Queensland Assessment Authority, http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/3162.html
5. Most importantly, teachers and school leaders need to align all the key elements of assessment and professional support to form a coherent whole so the educational system and processes enable teachers, students and schools to focus on using assessment to improve learning.
An example: The TEAL project (2013-2016)

• Development and validation of an assessment ‘toolkit’ for use by all teachers to help them assess the stage of development for a student in speaking and listening, reading and writing, and the implications for learning and teaching, see http://teal.global2.vic.edu.au/

• Assessment and identification of entry and exit points for new arrival students in English Language Schools and Centres, and assessment of students on enrolment in mainstream schools.

• Alignment of the tools against the Victorian EAL Standards (VELS) and EAL Developmental Continuum, with potential for alignment to other standards by other jurisdictions.
Establishing the research questions

Significance of the study

Literature search

Workshop with teachers and principals

Experts' validation

Pilot testing

Item analysis

Exploratory factor analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis

Parametisation (Item response theory application)

Rationale for choosing the construct

Defining the construct

Indicators

Performance criteria

AfL competency performance instrument

Item characteristics

Hierarchy of AfL indicators

Stage 1

• Validation by 60 EAL Teachers in NSW

Stage 2

• Validation by 32 EAL Teachers in Victoria

Stage 3

• Tested with 98 EAL Teachers/ Analysis

The findings of the EAL Teachers’ Assessment for Learning Competency Framework (Alonzo & Davison, 2014)
## Teacher self-perceptions of assessment literacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Mean</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conducts assessment with consideration of student background and culture</td>
<td>4.36</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participates in professional development related to assessment</td>
<td>4.36</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demonstrates belief in the ability of every student to improve</td>
<td>4.14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identifies appropriate teaching methods</td>
<td>3.94</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintains confidentiality in dealing with assessment results (norm referencing, inappropriate disclosure of assessment results and ranking students)</td>
<td>3.93</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develops an environment of trust</td>
<td>3.93</td>
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<tr>
<td>Undertakes further education/ training in assessment</td>
<td>3.93</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tailors lessons to available resources</td>
<td>3.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses assessment to build students’ interest to learn</td>
<td>3.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinforces positive learning attitude of students</td>
<td>3.79</td>
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<th>Indicators</th>
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<tr>
<td>Gathers a range of evidence of student learning</td>
<td>2.36</td>
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<tr>
<td>Designs English language assessment tasks</td>
<td>2.45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engages students in peer-assessment</td>
<td>2.45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engages in self-assessment/ reflection</td>
<td>2.68</td>
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<tr>
<td>Involves students in the development of learning outcomes</td>
<td>2.87</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gives feedback related to criteria</td>
<td>2.87</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assists students in using feedback to feed forward</td>
<td>2.98</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaborates with family to establish home activities to support students</td>
<td>2.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informs community of school’s assessment practices</td>
<td>3.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develops appropriate English language assessment strategies</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderates feedback and results of self and peer assessment</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engages in peer-review of teaching performance</td>
<td>3.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifies key assessment and teaching issues for review</td>
<td>3.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involves students in the development of success criteria/ rubrics</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explains the success criteria/ rubrics</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engages students in self-assessment</td>
<td>3.4</td>
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Welcome to Tools to Enhance Assessment Literacy

The TEAL web project, launched in June, is an online resource for teachers of primary and secondary level children who are learning English as a second (ESL) or additional (EAL) language in Australia. It brings together a range of tools and advice for the assessment and reporting of the English language proficiency and progress of students.

For more information on the TEAL web project, its contents and its intended use, please follow the links below to read more. If you have any further questions or comments, don’t hesitate to visit our...
An online ESL Assessment Resource Centre, consisting of four key components:

1. **Teacher professional learning modules** - containing activities and background material about assessment principles and processes, with video and text-based resources.

2. **An assessment tools bank** – containing a range of assessment tools and tasks cross-referenced according to language mode, macro-function (i.e., informative, narrative, persuasive), VELS EAL stages and Year levels.
The common assessments tools include

• A prototype teacher-based assessment system
  • for the collection and analysis of oral and written language samples and exemplars aligned with the ESL Continuum to provide information on students’ English language and literacy development.
  • including strategies for evaluating students’ L1 language and literacy development.
• A calibrated item bank of reading and vocabulary items linked to texts
  • to be used in a computer adaptive testing (CAT) system aligned with ESL continuum to provide information on students’ English and L1 language and literacy development at the four NAPLAN assessment points Years 3, 5, 7 and 9.
  • undertaken with Educational Assessment Australia, UNSW Global.
3. Assessment for teaching and learning exemplars –

containing a selection of annotated units of work across a range of subject areas and year levels showing assessment tasks with formative feedback embedded within a teaching/learning cycle.

4. An online teacher discussion forum –

for teachers to share problems, strategies and work samples

ESL teacher participation

• Within each stage, the project has drawn on the specific professional knowledge of EAL teachers in:
  • designing, collecting, recording, trialling and evaluating assessment materials, tasks and strategies with real students;
  • providing feedback on suitability of assessment tools and processes.
The theoretical framework

controlled  scaffolding  independent

other regulated activity  

self regulated activity

Students/teachers

Teacher/TEAL

participation

time
‘Scaffolding is the timely, temporary and partial assistance provided by experts to novices to enable their successful participation or performance on new and difficult intellectual tasks.’
Implications

What are the implications of these developments for

• teachers?
• educational leaders?
• schools?
• systems?
• you?
Alternative definition of TAL:

“Teacher **assessment for learning** literacy accounts for knowledge and skills in making highly contextualised, fair, consistent and trustworthy assessment decisions to inform learning and teaching to effectively support both students and teachers’ professional learning. The aim of teachers is to build students and other stakeholders’ capabilities and confidence to take an active role in assessment, learning and teaching activities to enable and provide the needed support for more effective learning”

(Alonzo, 2015, p. 58)
Ask yourselves - in your class/school/institution/system

• is assessment embedded in curriculum and assessment institutionally and pedagogically?
• are assessment goals are explicitly shared with all stakeholders and do stakeholders together work to identify how to know and to recognize the standards they are aiming for?
• are all stakeholders are engaged in continuous peer and self-assessment?
• is constructive qualitative feedback used to help stakeholders to recognize the next steps needed for improvement and how to take them?
• do all stakeholders regularly review and reflect on assessment data?
• is it assumed every school, teacher and student can improve?

If so, cutting-edge assessment practice is not just a target of assessment reform but in fact the driver of how to achieve such reform