

# ResearchNotes

## Editorial Notes

Welcome to issue 14 of *Research Notes*, our quarterly publication reporting on matters relating to research, test development and validation within Cambridge ESOL.

This issue has a special focus on our Teaching Awards which are an important part of Cambridge ESOL's range of language testing products. A number of external authors have contributed to this issue, reflecting the range of expertise that Cambridge ESOL draws on in this area both within and outside the UK. In this issue we describe the range of teaching awards we offer and report on related research, both completed and ongoing, specifically the impact of Cambridge ESOL tests in classrooms and how we support teachers around the world through seminars and on-line teaching materials.

In the opening article Monica Poulter reports on current perspectives and future trends of Cambridge ESOL's Teaching Awards, in which she describes the background of these awards, the needs of award takers and what the future may hold for these awards. Tony Green summarises the ongoing monitoring of the careers of successful teaching awards candidates and other studies relating to Teaching Awards. The following two articles are concerned with the Distance DELTA award. David Albery describes the design, delivery and success of this award whilst Dave Russell evaluates a recent trial for the distance learning option and considers the pros and cons of this approach and its outcomes for the course takers and course designers. Craig Thaine presents and analyses a teacher educator's DELTA course training diary allowing us a rare insight into the trainer's view of a qualification, this time not through the distance mode described in the previous two articles. Craig looks at teacher education from a different perspective by focusing on the teacher educator as 'reflective practitioner'.

Continuing the strand of teacher education, Pauline Rea-Dickins suggests in her article on teacher awareness of language that a teacher's understanding of language in relation to assessment is as important as developing tests and ways of assessing students' performance. Lizika Goldchleger reports on a pilot study for ICELT that was run in Brazil in 2002, again concerning distance learning. The final article specifically focused on teaching awards is by Jill Grimshaw, who outlines the range of teacher support offered by Cambridge ESOL that includes print, web-delivered materials and face-to-face training through a wide-ranging seminar programme.

Evelina D.Galaczi reports on her PhD research into interaction patterns in the FCE speaking tests and the implications for testing. Her study describes various patterns of interaction in a two-way collaborative task and has implications for rating this exam. This research emphasizes the importance of adequate rater training to deal with unequal pairings of candidates and provides us with an extremely detailed insight into a number of live speaking tests, something which we cannot routinely achieve.

In our final section we include various news items on new Research and Validation staff, Cambridge ESOL's teacher support materials and a new learner dictionary.

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# Cambridge ESOL Teaching Awards: current perspectives, future trends

MONICA POULTER, EXAMINATIONS AND ASSESSMENT GROUP

## Introduction

Cambridge ESOL Teaching Awards is the latest umbrella title for the suite of awards for teachers which started out in the seventies as RSA awards, were transferred to UCLES EFL in 1988, and revised in turn from the mid-nineties onwards. CTEFLA, COTE and DTEFLA have metaphorphosed into CELTA, ICELT and DELTA respectively. CELTA – the Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults – is a pre-service award for new entrants to the profession whereas ICELT is an in-service award and DELTA (the Diploma in English Language Teaching to Adults) is an award for experienced teachers of English working in language schools or colleges. In addition to these awards, a new certificate award and an extension certificate for teachers of young learners have been introduced. The latest additions are certificated qualifications for ESOL teachers in the Further Adult and Community Education context within the UK. These new awards incorporate CELTA and although the qualifications are only relevant in England and Wales, the concept of adding to and building on CELTA is an interesting model which could be applied in other contexts where national requirements for qualified teachers necessitate extended training.

Historically the teaching awards were categorised rather simplistically according to the intended level (pre-service or in-service) and whether the teacher was considered to be a ‘native’ or a ‘non-native’ speaker of English – terms which have been problematic in a world where English is becoming a global language and the language of much international communication, raising questions about the purposes for which English is learned and the teaching models which may be appropriate.

The new awards which have been developed, and one which is under development, have taken account of a much broader range of questions, not only *who* is the award for, but what are (trainee) teachers’ real needs and motivations, what are the limitations within which they are teaching and do the awards sufficiently take account of those limitations? How can access to courses be facilitated where financial and geographical constraints exist?

## Needs and motivations

There are three main reasons for taking an award-bearing course: to get recognised training; for further professional development or to gain a recognised qualification. In some cases two or more of these needs apply such as in the case of the DELTA candidate, Lee, referred to in Craig Thaine’s article on page 10, who is clearly interested in her own professional development but at one point, under the stress of assessment, is only interested in what she has to do ‘to get through’, i.e. to get the qualifications. The risk of failure and the loss of status which would ensue have a powerful negative

effect on the developmental process when things are not going well. Another example from one of our emerging qualifications, where the rule for gaining a Merit was that two out of four assignments had to be at Merit standard, resulted in some teachers making no further efforts once they had the grades they wanted. They were evidently more interested in gaining the paper qualification required by their sponsors than developing as much as they could within the scope of the course. Clearly the concepts of instrumental and integrative motivation apply to teacher trainees as well as language learners!

The candidate profile analyses (see Tony Green’s summary on page 3) have provided useful data revealing that for most teachers, the gaining of a recognised qualification is as important as doing a course which fosters their professional development. In the UK ESOL sector there have been instances of teachers taking courses which don’t best meet their professional needs but which do lead to acceptance within their working context. The qualifications Cambridge ESOL has developed for this sector will, it is hoped, resolve this dilemma for a number of teachers.

## Limitations and constraints

It is clear that that many teachers work effectively within a specified often quite narrow working situation. For example, they may only teach learners at one level. If the assessment demands do not take these contextual limitations into account, teachers will inevitably fail. The COTE award required, for example, that teachers be assessed at two levels regardless of whether this was the reality of their working context. ICELT, the In-service Certificate in English Language Teaching (which replaces COTE) no longer has this requirement. Teachers may be assessed at one level only. They may also be assessed with two different types of learners, for example primary and adult, if they work across both sectors as many teachers do, often for reasons of supplementing income where teacher salaries are low.

Many teachers would undoubtedly welcome the opportunity for further professional development but cannot access courses either because of geographical constraints (there is no local course), financial constraints (the course is too expensive for the teacher or for the Ministry to sponsor), or time constraints (doing the course on top of a full timetable and family commitments is not an inviting prospect). These constraints are particularly evident in low-resourced contexts.

## Some solutions

Mindful of such restrictions to course access, ICELT allows centres to offer courses which include a distance element to reduce the

number of compulsory face-to-face contact hours. Teachers may also progress through ICELT following a modular pathway, starting with the *Language for Teachers* component and then at a later stage (but within three years of gaining the first component) progressing on to gain the full award. Lizika Goldchleger reports on both of these delivery options in her article on page 15.

Currently under development is a new test for teachers aimed at the many teachers who are teaching English while still very much on a language learning curve themselves – for example teachers with English at Council of Europe Level B1, many of whom are being asked to introduce English into the school curriculum. This will be a test of knowledge about the teaching of English as a second or additional language (pedagogical knowledge). Teachers will need to be familiar with basic concepts related to language, language use and the background to and practice of language teaching and learning. This new test does not aim to assess teachers' knowledge of the English language, nor their performance in classroom situations – one of the key features of other awards that inevitably raises the costs. This test is still in the process of development and will be reported on again in a later issue of *Research Notes*.

The Distance DELTA has widened access to a number of candidates who would otherwise have been unable to gain the award due to the non-availability of a local centre – though interestingly this is not the case for all candidates, some of whom have evidently chosen the distance course as a more convenient or perhaps a preferred mode of learning. This issue of *Research Notes* includes two articles about the Distance DELTA which indicate clearly that successful distance courses rely as much on the professionalism of the course deliverers and the quality of the course materials as face-to-face courses do. In other words distance delivery is not an easy option.

## Cambridge ESOL Teaching Awards – where next?

Jill Grimshaw's article on page 16 gives an overview of the channels of teacher support currently available. The teaching awards team has not been closely involved with the work of other colleagues involved in providing professional support for teachers. This is set to change with an internal restructuring which will allow us to develop a coherent picture and a rationalised approach to meeting teacher needs – whether through formal qualifications or through the provision of seminars and support materials. We also continue to work closely with the business support group to enhance the currency and recognition of our awards worldwide and to increase opportunities for progression – for example from DELTA onto MA courses, which is already possible at a number of institutions.

## Conclusion

At the beginning of this article I implied that old categorisations of the teaching awards no longer apply. However, a new categorisation seems to be emerging, with CELTA and DELTA drawing on multiple contexts, while ICELT and the certificates for teachers working in the Further Education sector are context specific and take on board the needs and professional values of those contexts. Future issues of *Research Notes* will report on the new certificate courses and the exciting delivery options which are being made possible through the introduction of modular routes and distance supported options.

**For further information on all of Cambridge ESOL's teaching awards see our website:**

[www.CambridgeESOL.org/teaching](http://www.CambridgeESOL.org/teaching)

## Studies relating to Teaching Awards

TONY GREEN, RESEARCH AND VALIDATION GROUP

The Research and Validation Group at Cambridge ESOL carries out routine monitoring of all ESOL examinations. We provide regular reports on the background of teaching awards candidates and their course results. These reports are used for a variety of purposes by other units within Cambridge ESOL to enhance the quality of the awards. Background questionnaires filled in by all teaching awards candidates ask for basic biographical details such as age and nationality, but also include details of previous ELT experience and career goals. From this we have learned, for example, that in the six months to May 2003 CELTA candidates came from 118 different countries with 58% reporting no previous teaching experience. 30% were under 25 years old and 21% were over 40.

In addition to this routine reporting, we also undertake special

research projects. One ongoing research study involving the teaching awards is the CELTA tracking study. This project is a two-year study tracking the career paths of CELTA candidates after they have obtained their certificates. The questions we are asking in this study are: Who do CELTA graduates work for? How long do they stay in one job? How does the qualification help them in their work? To date over 500 questionnaires have been returned and responses are still coming in. From these we are beginning to build up a picture of the impact of CELTA on the ELT community.

We would like to involve as many people as possible in this project and readers are invited to fill in our questionnaire, which can be found on-line at:

[www.CambridgeESOL.org/teaching/celta\\_tracking.cfm](http://www.CambridgeESOL.org/teaching/celta_tracking.cfm)

# The Distance DELTA

DAVID ALBERY, PROJECT MANAGER, THE DISTANCE DELTA

## Introduction

The Distance DELTA programme has been running for nearly three years and the sixth course has just opened with more than forty participants in twenty different countries. The programme has attracted well over 200 participants since the first course began in April 2001 and the success rates have consistently matched or exceeded the world average. This article sets out to describe the course design, how it is delivered and explain why so many DELTA candidates have chosen it and completed it successfully.

## Developments from 1980 to the present

Originally designed by International House and the British Council, the Distance DELTA course was based on ideas developed by the Distance Training Programme for the DTEFLA which was launched by International House London in the early 1980s. With the change in the Cambridge DELTA syllabus and assessment in the late 1990s, it became clear that the old course would have to change radically to meet the revised criteria and administrative demands. The course content was rewritten to reflect developments in the field of applied linguistics and changes and developments in pedagogical thinking in ELT, and redesigned in order to support participants in their work on the new Portfolio Assignments (PAs). At the same time, it was decided that the mode of delivery should change from paper-based to electronic materials with additional website support to take full advantage of the huge advances in ICT in the twenty years since the original course began.

The current course is staffed by a group of Course Tutors working 'distantly' from locations all over the world and administered by a team based at International House London with additional support from the British Council in London. The administrative systems, the design and the content of the course are constantly under revision to ensure that all those involved in the Distance DELTA receive the best possible service and are able to perform to the best of their abilities.

## Course design

The course is designed to allow teachers to study for the Cambridge DELTA qualification without having to commit to the extended period of contact hours typical of full or part-time face-to-face courses. The course begins with a two-week Orientation Course (Unit One) held in various locations around the world. In September 2003, there were courses in Tokyo, Bogotá, Budapest, London, Kuala Lumpur and Lisbon. The Orientation Course introduces participants to the criteria and demands set by Cambridge in terms of assessment and administration and 'benchmarks' the participants by requiring them to complete their

first language systems PA in the second week of the course. In this way, participants are prepared for the 'official' demands of the course in the same way that they would be on any face-to-face course and are fully aware of the assessment standards and requirements set by the DELTA scheme.

The Orientation Course also prepares participants for the mode of delivery of the remainder of the course by introducing them to strategies for developing their ability to study at a distance and by training them in the use of the dedicated website. The nature of the course delivery makes it essential that participants are fully prepared to cope with a mode of study that most of them will not have encountered before and it was considered important that this initial preparation take place on a face-to-face basis to prevent the almost vicious circle of training people in distance learning via distance learning. The problems for participants inherent in distance learning (lack of human/pastoral contact, lack of opportunity to initiate and develop personal relationships with peers, lack of defined and clearly demonstrated standards measured against the performance of peers and demands of tutors, lack of opportunity to ask questions with immediate response in real time etc.) are partly resolved by insisting on this face-to-face component of the course.

The other seven units of the course are delivered via materials on a CD-ROM, the Distance DELTA website and, on a limited number of occasions, email contact with a Course Tutor. The written materials cover all aspects of the Cambridge DELTA syllabus and guide participants through the formal assessments on the scheme while developing their knowledge and practice of ELT and related topics. Within each unit there are process tasks to provide self-monitored checks on the participants' understanding of the issues raised and to demonstrate the progress they are making in their own professional development. Guided work on the Extended Assignment and exam preparation and practice are developed throughout the course with sections in each unit revising and adding to the participant's expertise in these areas. In most units, participants submit a draft PA proposal, an exam practice essay and a final-version PA. The last PA in the course is assessed externally by a Cambridge appointed DELTA Assessor in exactly the same way as it would be on any DELTA course around the world.

## Distant and local support

The problems for participants inherent in distance learning described previously were a major factor when deciding on the support mechanisms necessary for the programme to operate effectively. After the Orientation Courses, the participants are divided into tutor groups (maximum 12 per group) for the remainder of the course. As far as possible, we attempt to keep

Orientation Course peers in the same tutor groups so that relationships and support mechanisms established at the beginning of the course can be maintained during the challenging distance component.

Each tutor group is assigned a Course Tutor who is responsible for monitoring and guiding the group usually for a period of two months (two units). The website has asynchronous forums where participants can exchange teaching ideas and discuss pedagogical and academic issues. These are also monitored by the Course Tutors who will give advice and guide the discussion if necessary while offering support on any other matters affecting the participants' performance on the course. Another feature of the website is synchronous 'chat' which is offered at pre-arranged times for participants interested in becoming involved in a more immediate interaction with their peers. We have found that the synchronous 'chat' option becomes very popular at more stressful points in the course, for example in the weeks before the final written examination or the externally assessed lessons.

In addition to the features described above, the website contains a resources section from which participants can download exam papers, a reading section including reviews of the recommended literature for any given unit and the abstracts for selected articles, and a 'people' section where they can read about the other people involved in the course. All of these features are designed to replace aspects of a face-to-face course; the abstracts and summaries, for example, give participants the guidance in selecting their reading material that a tutor would normally give on a course relying on direct contact hours.

Partly to alleviate the isolation of distance learning and partly to allow for observation of lessons, each participant is allocated a Local Tutor who is normally a Senior Teacher or Director of Studies at the participant's centre. Local Tutors are not necessarily full Cambridge DELTA approved tutors but all are experienced in observing and developing teachers at a post-CELTA level and are qualified to an appropriate level themselves. Before taking on the role, all Local Tutors must submit an application to gain approval from Cambridge ESOL. The Local Tutors are responsible for providing more immediate support to the participants through regular developmental observations and seminars. They are also ideally placed to provide immediate pastoral support should the participant need it, although we stress that Local Tutors' duties need to be limited whenever possible to those we consider absolutely essential (about 5 hours contact per month). This is because the course is primarily designed for delivery at a distance and participants should be drawing on the expertise of the Course Tutors and relying on the administrative skills of the team at International House London.

## Marking and assessment

All work submitted during the course is assessed by the Cambridge approved DELTA Course Tutors who comment on exam practice essays, provide guidance for participants on their draft PA

proposals and then formally assess their PAs. The Course Tutors change every two months to ensure that a balanced view of the participant's progress is maintained. For those PAs with a formally assessed lesson, participants are observed by the Local Tutor who writes a descriptive report of their performance which is then submitted to the Course Tutor along with all the necessary documentation for their final assessment. The Course Tutor is responsible for awarding the final grades for both the written assignment and the lesson, and the overall grade for each PA. The Local Tutor suggests an initial grade for the lesson component (which the Course Tutor may accept or modify) but has no responsibility for awarding grades for the written assignment or the final grade for the PA. It was felt that one of the most transparent ways of establishing and maintaining the standards of assessment required by the DELTA scheme was to allow only those tutors fully approved by Cambridge as DELTA tutors to allocate grades and to complete all official assessment documentation.

## Support for Local and Course Tutors

While potentially alleviating the problems caused for participants involved in distance learning, the Local Tutors and Course Tutors, we realised, would inevitably face similar problems themselves. Information packs were prepared for both groups to introduce them to the programme and to guide them through the administration and the demands placed on them by their role in the delivery of the course. All Local Tutors are standardised using Cambridge ESOL video materials and are offered feedback on their report writing skills via tasks available on the website. All Course Tutors are standardised at the beginning of each unit and are offered considerable support by the administrative team based at International House London.

In addition to the support and guidance offered in the hard-copy materials, the resources section on the website contains seminar packs and other support materials which tutors can download. There are also forums for the Local Tutors and for the Course Tutors on the website. These operate in exactly the same way as the forums for participants but are only accessible by the Local Tutors and Course Tutors giving them the opportunity to discuss problems within those groups, not including the course participants.

## Conclusion

Whilst it cannot be claimed that the design, modes of delivery and support mechanisms make the Distance DELTA programme a completely stress-free experience for participants and tutors, the course has been fairly successful to date, with more detailed analyses of this success presented in the following article. The Distance DELTA course has not solved all of the problems inherent in distance learning courses so that nobody on the course ever feels isolated. However, Cambridge ESOL and the Distance DELTA team have managed to decrease the negative reactions to distance learning and increase the level of motivation and commitment among participants and tutors. The course is a very popular option,

we have more candidates than any other centre in the world, the results are good and the drop-out rate extremely low.

Of course, the programme might be initially popular for prospective participants simply because of the fact that they can study for the Cambridge DELTA part-time, while living outside the UK and remain in their own place of employment. However, this does not account for the success and the low drop-out rates.

These, I believe, are explained by the time and effort spent designing the course initially and the constant revision of the design, materials and procedures to ensure that participants and tutors do not feel too 'distant' from the materials, their peers or the administrative team. The following article describes in more detail the advantages, disadvantages and outcomes of the Distance DELTA programme.

## DELTA by Distance Learning

DAVE RUSSELL, CHIEF MODERATOR, DELTA

### Introduction

This article summarises the results of a validation exercise concerning what is currently the only distance-delivered DELTA Course (namely, that run in partnership by International House and the British Council). Distance learning courses are beginning to rely increasingly heavily on e-based technologies both for the delivery of the course content and to administer the submission, marking and return of assignments. Three distinct modes of distance learning can be identified:

- **Internet-enhanced courses** in which some materials and links are available to participants via the Internet. These may also include dedicated websites, discussion sites, on-line tests and so on. Many 'traditional' courses include some web enhancement;
- **Internet-mediated courses** in which many of the materials and most of the assessment procedures are e-based;
- **Internet-delivered courses** in which no face-to-face contact between course providers and course participants is included.

The International House–British Council DELTA course falls into the second of these categories, an internet-mediated course. In relation to this type of course, this investigation set out to answer the following questions:

- What are the advantages and drawbacks of distance learning in this area?
- How does the course structure and methodology address these issues?
- What quality control and information gathering methods are used?
- What are the outcomes of the Distance DELTA course? Are candidates taking the Diploma through this method of delivery disadvantaged (or indeed advantaged) compared with their colleagues taking 'traditional' courses?

### Advantages and drawbacks of distance learning

Some of the advantages to be considered include:

- *Participants* – catering for participants who could not otherwise join a traditionally delivered course for reasons of the constraints of geography, time or finance.
- *Training* – providing an option for training for those who prefer to follow courses freed from the need to attend face-to-face training sessions.
- *Flexibility* – allowance can be made for non-lock-step learning and to permit individuals to work at their own pace.
- *Availability* – print-based and internet-facilitated materials are, in theory at least, available to all at all times and are not linked to a rigid course programme.
- *Autonomy* – it is arguable that such courses train participants in the skills needed to take responsibility independently for their own future and current professional development.
- *Individualised learning* – distance courses may, in some circumstances, allow for more one-to-one contact between tutorial staff and participants, permitting a better match between trainer and trainee concerns.
- *In-setting education* – distance delivery means that participants are not separated from their current professional environment and continue to enjoy the benefits of collegial support as well as the opportunity to test new ideas and procedures in familiar educational settings.

Disadvantages to be considered include:

- *Access* – internet and email access relies on machinery and systems outside the control of providers and participants. Any breakage in contact can seriously affect the effectiveness of training.
- *Recruitment* – all education programmes at this level need to ensure that participants are effectively screened for entry onto the course. On distance learning courses, this can pose serious logistical problems.
- *Isolation* – although e-conferencing and email facilities can lessen the effect, participants on distance learning programmes are essentially isolated from one another.
- *Asynchronous delivery* – distance learning is, in essence, delayed training. Course materials and delivery mechanisms

are designed in advance without prior knowledge of the participants. Adjustments that experienced face-to-face tutors and trainers make to their behaviour, the content of their teaching and their responsiveness to individuals are not available to anything like the same degree.

- *In-setting specificity* – while this appears above as an advantage, there is a negative aspect in that participants are not removed from their day-to-day professional environments, do not encounter, first-hand, experiences outside their normal teaching role and do not have the opportunity to reflect at leisure on their practice.

It was a central aim of the validation exercise to see how far a distance delivered course could manage to emphasise the advantages and ameliorate the disadvantages listed above.

## The structure of the Distance DELTA Course

The course begins with a two week, face-to-face Orientation Course (including all the materials for Unit 1). Thereafter, the syllabus is delivered using a mixture of text- and CD-ROM-based materials and an extensive reading and reference list of prescribed and recommended texts. In addition to the remaining seven Units of the course, two 'Threads' dealing with the demands of the examination and the extended case-study components are followed throughout the course. At the end of the course, the three components – coursework portfolio (including the externally-assessed teaching assignment), the extended case study and the examination are submitted or taken in the same way as on all courses.

While clearly not intended as the main purveyor of course content, the course website provides back-up material and is one of the main text-based ways in which participants are encouraged to engage purposefully with the materials through individual and co-operative ventures.

A comparison of the DELTA Syllabus (as set out in the Cambridge ESOL documentation on the website) with the course materials in the Orientation Course and on the CD-ROM shows that the syllabus areas are all covered in some detail.

Recruitment of suitable candidates on DELTA courses is partly ensured by the standard Cambridge ESOL entry qualifications set out in the Syllabus and Assessment Guidelines, 2nd Edition. As might be expected, the Distance DELTA scheme has strict and comprehensive measures in place with an extensive registration form. No system can be entirely foolproof, however, as tutors who have accepted unsuitable candidates even after a face-to-face interview will attest, and there is some evidence to imply that a few candidates on the distance scheme have performed very poorly and this may be due to a lack of sufficient experience.

Candidates are divided into Study Groups, each of which comes under the control of a Course Tutor. The Course Tutors are all DELTA-approved tutors and they:

- provide support for participants in their Study Group through commenting on draft assignments, responding to academic queries and moderating website discussions;

- assess Portfolio Assignments and ensure that the grades awarded for these are in line with the standards of the DELTA scheme;
- work with Local Tutors in agreeing the grades for assessment;
- liaise concerning Local Tutor and Candidate performance with the Course Co-ordinator.

Local Tutors are appointed for all candidates. These tutors are required to have substantial teaching experience, experience of conducting formal seminars and workshops for EL teachers and experience of formal evaluation by classroom observation. The Course Administrator's role is defined as being 'responsible for all aspects of administration'. These include dealing with enquiries, organising examination registration and notification of results. The Course Co-ordinator is responsible for the smooth running of the whole programme – effectively a combined role of senior tutor and course manager. The Distance DELTA also benefits from dedicated, full-time IT support.

## Quality control and methods of information gathering

Information is formally gathered via questionnaires from participants and Local Tutors on a wide range of topics appropriate to these informants. Course participants were asked their opinions on the extent to which:

- the Orientation Course prepared them for the rest of the course;
- the course content prepared them for the assignment programme, the extended assignment and the examination;
- the Course Tutors' comments on background assignments and lesson plans were useful;
- they felt supported by central administration etc. (excluding Local Tutor support);
- Local Tutors supported the participants;
- they found the administration of the course commendable;
- they found the course benefited their professional development.

Information from Local Tutors is collected on the extent to which:

- the standardisation tasks prepared them for assessing course participants' work;
- the Local Tutors' Handbook and course website prepared and supported their work;
- they found the Course Tutors' feedback on their grading of portfolio assessments useful;
- they found it useful to gain the experience of assessing Parts 1 and 2 of the assignments;
- they found the central support systems operated well;
- they were able to commend the administration of the programme;
- the course was beneficial to their professional development.

Information is also gathered specifically on the IT aspects of the course from both Local Tutors and course participants. The findings from this information gathering exercise are presented in the following section.

## Findings

The summary of findings presented below is based on a small sample and should be treated with caution regarding its generalisability. This is even truer of the feedback from Local Tutors who made up an even smaller sample. It must also be remembered that we have no data from any other DELTA courses, however delivered, which can be used to draw conclusions concerning the comparative success of this (or any) course. Whether such data should be gathered in a comparable form from all DELTA courses is an issue outside the scope of this article.

The first set of findings concern the course participants' views on the aspects of the course listed above:

1. *Orientation Course* – no participants reported that the course had prepared them 'poorly or 'very poorly'. The majority declared themselves 'adequately' or 'well' prepared but half as many again thought they had been only 'slightly' prepared by the course.
2. *Materials* – again, no respondent felt that they had been 'not at all' or 'very little' prepared for the course. Around a quarter felt that the course materials had prepared them only 'to some extent' for completion of their portfolios, fewer (a fifth) that this was true for the extended assignment and fewer still (18%) that this was the case for the examination.
3. *Course Tutors' comments* – the large majority stated that the comments were 'useful' or 'very useful'. Less satisfaction was shown concerning Course Tutors' comments on lesson plans, however, with around a fifth of participants stating that the comments were 'not very' or 'not at all useful'.
4. *Support systems* – just over three-quarters of respondents reported that they felt 'well' or 'very well' supported.
5. *Local support* – nearly a fifth of respondents felt that local support had been 'poor' or 'very poor', another fifth that it had been no more than 'satisfactory' and just over a quarter that it had been 'excellent'. It should be noted that, with such a small sample, it is possible that one or two poorly performing Local Tutors (or the same number of personality clashes) will distort the general picture.
6. *Administration* – 95% of respondents felt that this had been 'good', 'very good' or 'excellent'.

The second set of findings concerns the Local Tutors' views:

7. *Training and support* – the respondents were evenly split between being 'adequately' and 'well' prepared in grading the effectiveness of the standardisation tasks. The handbook and website scored less well, although respondents still felt in general that they had been 'quite well' or 'well' prepared.
8. *Course Tutors' feedback* – 40% felt this feedback on their grading of portfolio assignments was 'not at all' or 'not very'

useful. 30% felt that the comments were 'useful' or 'very useful'. Over two-thirds of Local Tutors felt that the experience of grading assignments had been useful to them.

9. *Support systems* – no Local Tutor felt that central support systems had failed them completely but only just over half felt that central support systems scored 'quite' to 'very' well.
10. *Administration* – again no Local Tutor felt that the administration of the programme was 'poor' or 'very poor' and over three-quarters felt that they could describe it as 'good', 'very good' or 'excellent'.

Finally there were some general findings from both groups about IT support and information available via the Web:

11. *IT support* – this was found by participants to be 'very useful' or 'indispensable' by two-thirds of participants and Local Tutors alike. Very few in either category were unhappy with IT support.
12. *Website ease of use* – 40% of Local Tutors but 100% of course participants found the website easy to use.
13. *Website content* – the Homepage was appreciated far less by Local Tutors than by course participants. Only one Local Tutor found it 'indispensable' but 70% of participants scored it at this level. News and Calendar sections were well received although by far the most popular section was the exam practice section; over 80% of participants found this 'indispensable' and the remainder ranked it as 'very useful'.

The following section considers the outcomes of this Distance DELTA course.

## Outcomes of the Distance DELTA Course

We were interested in whether candidates are in any *measurable* way disadvantaged by taking the course through the distance mode so we looked at measures such as overall pass rate, examination pass rate and coursework and extended case-study pass rates. In contrast to the results from the internal quality control questionnaires reported above, these results have some statistical validity inasmuch as the sample is larger and, crucially, comparable, because like-for-like data are available. Data were analysed for two full administrations of the DELTA which includes over 400 candidates who did not take the Distance DELTA and 74 candidates who did. The first analysis was of the overall pass rate for normal and Distance DELTA candidates.

### Overall pass rates

Excluding the Distance DELTA Course, overall Distinction, Pass, Fail Rates for the DELTA Course were:

% Distinction	% Pass	% Fail	% Pass + Distinction
0.34	63.36	36.30	63.70

The figures for the Distance DELTA only were:

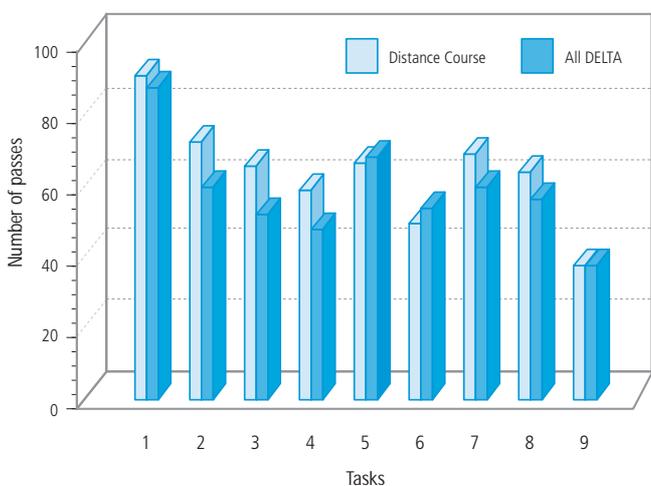
% Distinction	% Pass	% Fail	% Pass + Distinction
2.67	69.33	28.00	72.00

As can be seen, candidates on the Distance DELTA have a better pass rate overall than those on all other course types combined. Distance DELTA candidates also have a statistically better achievement of the Distinction grade. It should be noted, however, that Distinction grades are rarely awarded and one or two exceptional candidates from any centre will significantly affect the figures.

### Examination pass rates

The examination for DELTA consists of three questions, each with three tasks, weighted equally. The passes in numbers of tasks are shown in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1 : DELTA passes in numbers of tasks



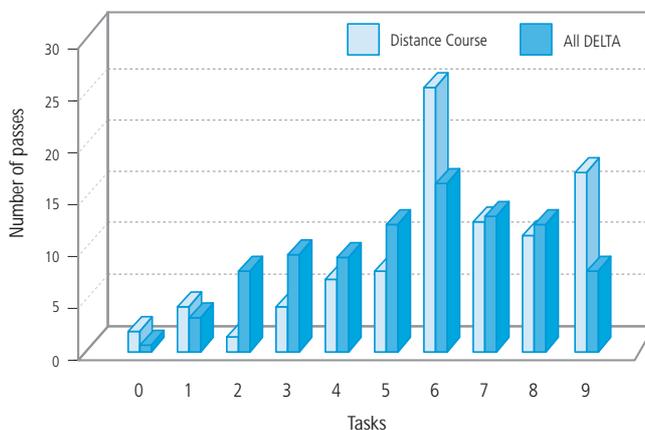
This figure shows that Distance DELTA candidates show a fairly typical spread of results, clustering between five and eight tasks successfully completed. The better pass rate achieved by Distance DELTA candidates is due mostly to their significantly better performance at achieving passes in six tasks. Distance DELTA candidates do, however, seem to score significantly better than the average in successfully attempting nine out of nine tasks. This is reflected in the Distinction figure. Unfortunately, this is balanced by the fact that Distance DELTA candidates also fail to pass any or only one task out of nine more often than those from other centres.

There are many possible reasons for poor performance in the examination. For example, insufficient or insufficiently varied experience (often noticeable in weak performing candidates) may be a cause.

### Performance by question

Pass numbers for each task in the examination are presented in Figure 2:

Figure 2: Pass numbers by examination question



There appears to be no significant difference in performance between candidates on traditional courses and those on the Distance DELTA. Distance DELTA candidates do slightly better overall but the trend, to perform less well as the examination goes on, is the same.

There is, therefore, no evidence to show that Distance DELTA candidates are either better or worse prepared for any examination task than their colleagues on other courses.

We now turn to the pass rates on the coursework and extended study elements of the DELTA course.

### Coursework pass rates

Overall figures excluding Distance DELTA candidates are:

% Distinction	% Pass	% Fail	% Pass + Distinction
2.07	84.83	12.64	87.36

Rates for Distance DELTA candidates are:

% Distinction	% Pass	% Fail	% Pass + Distinction
4.05	89.19	6.76	93.24

### Extended case-study pass rates

Overall figures excluding Distance DELTA candidates are:

% Distinction	% Pass	% Fail	% Pass + Distinction
3.01	82.37	14.62	85.38

Rates for Distance DELTA candidates are:

% Distinction	% Pass	% Fail	% Pass + Distinction
12.00	78.67	9.33	90.67

These figures indicate that Distance DELTA candidates are more successful in obtaining Distinction grades for the Extended Assignment and in their Coursework, which would seem to imply quite strongly that they are being well prepared for these components. The Distance DELTA Course includes 'Threads' for both the examination and the Extended Assignment and results would seem to support an assertion that these elements are performing well.

## Conclusion

The statistics concerning the performance of Distance DELTA candidates indicate that this form of course delivery does not disadvantage well-motivated candidates. There is a small amount of debatable evidence that weaker candidates may be less suited to courses with this kind of delivery mode. Further validation work will continue to assess the success and performance of all teaching award candidates, using both qualitative, questionnaire-based approaches and quantitative analysis of pass rates and other statistics.

The Distance DELTA Syllabus and Assessment Guidelines are available from:

[www.CambridgeESOL.org/support/dloads/DELTA\\_syllabus.pdf](http://www.CambridgeESOL.org/support/dloads/DELTA_syllabus.pdf)

# Diaries, theory, practice and assessment: the teacher educator as reflective practitioner<sup>1</sup>

CRAIG THAINE, JOINT CHIEF ASSESSOR FOR CAMBRIDGE TEACHING AWARDS, NEW ZEALAND

## Introduction

The practice of asking teachers at pre-service and in-service level to keep diaries or journals is well documented (Bailey 1990; Porter et al 1990; Thornbury 1991; Richards and Ho 1998). However, it is far less common to find studies where the teacher educator has kept a record of the training process. This report, therefore, aims to view teacher education from a different perspective by focusing on the teacher educator as 'reflective practitioner'.

Along with journals and field notes, Nunan (1989:55) sees diaries (the terms 'diary', 'journal' and 'log' will be used synonymously) as a useful 'interpretative-qualitative' research method. In this report, the diary is used as an introspective and reflective tool in the hope that it may offer some kind of insight about the teacher education process, or give some indication of a direction for further enquiry.

## The context

The context in which the diary was kept was during a part-time, pilot programme of the Cambridge Diploma in English Language Teaching to Adults (DELTA). This programme ran from June 1998 to June 1999 at a private English language school in Auckland, New Zealand.

## The method

Bailey's (1990:219) framework for conducting a diary study was followed with entries kept in a systematic way during the delivery of the programme. Comments were candid but sometimes made in haste. The excerpt below has been rewritten and edited for public display with the identity of the teacher concerned disguised. Following the entry is an interpretative analysis of some of the issues raised in the entry. The analysis was conducted a little more than a year after completion of the programme and the diary.

## The diary entry

### 8 February 1999

*Yesterday was difficult, but interesting. Lee failed her first assessed PTA<sup>2</sup>. The assignment focused on speaking skills, in particular, strategies and language that help sustain conversation. The background essay was solid enough and well written. However, as a result of inadequate planning, the lesson dissolved into a desultory and mechanistic dialogue build.*

*I conducted oral feedback this afternoon, suggesting that she should plan a similar lesson with a different group of learners. What was interesting to note was Lee's shift in 'position' during this feedback. The sense of enquiry that surrounded the feedback sessions when PTAs were unassessed had gone. She sat with pen and paper at the ready in order to note down anything I had to say. There was also a language shift away from the impersonal 'you' to 'I', while the questions she asked were specific to this lesson rather than extrapolating beyond it. I could feel myself*

1. A fuller version of this article originally appeared in the *EA Journal* 18/2 (2000) pp. 60–69.

2. Practical Teaching Assignment which comprises an essay, lesson and self-evaluation of the lesson.

being pulled gradually into the role of ‘trainer’ rather than ‘tutor on a teacher development course’. There was a look in this candidate’s eyes that said “just tell me what I have to do to get through”.

Another point arising from this tutorial is the gap between the essay and the lesson. Clearly, Lee had understood the theoretical elements of this PTA and could give brief, written descriptions of practice. However, the ‘doing of it’ was all together much more of a challenge. It seemed that she still needed more time to process the information she had found in order to reform it and make it hers to the extent that she could plan and deliver a lesson about it. Part of our feedback discussion involved talking through the theory and I could see that she was continuing to work with the information and take possession of it. It’s good to see that the practical aspects of the DELTA are still in the foreground. In other words, there is a good balance between theory and practice.

A final point concerning my role as ‘trainer’ and that as ‘developer’. I have a certain amount of guilt regarding the former role – but only a certain amount. I feel there are times when it is better for me to be a trainer and give candidates the easy fix they want. Lee may not learn at as deep a level as I would like, but I have to be realistic about the pressures of her life and job, and her desire to get this qualification. At a certain point, any notion of guiding the candidate in the hope that they will discover for themselves, and, as a result, learn in more depth begins to feel just a little sadistic, if it means their chances of failure are greatly increased, particularly when I see the frightened look in her eyes.

## Discussion

Richards and Lockhart (1994:7) suggest a framework for analyzing diary entries that focuses on teacher activity, learners’ roles and belief systems. The excerpt will be analyzed accordingly, taking into account that in this situation ‘teacher’ means ‘teacher educator’ and ‘learner’ means ‘teacher’.

## Activities

While being static, two key ‘activities’ that emerge in the feedback are *listening* and *showing awareness*. The change in pronoun and its implications are noted, as is the resulting change in roles and what this signifies in terms of the teacher’s approach to the course. While it is important that Lee continues to reflect and develop, there is a concession to her in terms of taking a more directive, ‘trainer’ role in terms of describing, and to some degree, prescribing an explicit model of teaching that will work for this particular lesson. This is a case of perhaps offering her a safety net given the assessment framework of the DELTA course. However, it appears that it is mostly the teacher who is driving this move towards a training-based model of teacher education.

It would seem that this is very close to what Schon (1983, cited in Zeichner & Liston 1996:14) terms *reflection-in-action*. These are spontaneous decisions and judgments made during interaction with learners (in this case, teachers), which, when described and made explicit, may add to a body of knowledge. The excerpt

above shows that teacher educators will need to change roles constantly when conducting feedback on teachers’ lessons.

The other prevalent activity in this session is talk through the theory. There is a sense of the teacher making progress in terms of internalising theoretical information surrounding the lesson and discussion appears to play a part in the process. Freeman (1996:236) emphasizes the need for a ‘*unified discourse ... which is made explicit in talk and action*’. He does so when discussing the problems that teachers have in conceiving, renaming and reconstructing practice. While it cannot be concluded that discussion and talk will result in change, *talking through theory* may, to some small degree, aid the process of reconstructing practice.

## Roles

Lee appears to take quite a passive role in the feedback session. She is sponge-like in her desire to absorb information rather than explore ideas. It is what Freeman (1990:107) calls the “Did I do it right?” relationship where the teacher is dependent on the teacher educator’s criteria. However, Lee’s shift from the neutral indefinite pronoun ‘you’ to the more self-aware ‘I’ indicates some degree of assertiveness, if not a sense of responsibility. While both participants in this discussion change roles throughout, the overall dynamic appears to be one of mentor–apprentice. Freeman (1996:227–8) notes the problematic nature of this socially-constructed relationship given the complex and differing nature of the discourses or languages that both participants speak. In this scenario, there is often a power imbalance which makes it easier for barriers to be erected than for practice to be reconceptualised.

Conversely, Zeichner & Liston (1996:18) suggest that teacher development can result from social practice that may include mentoring, or some kind of forum in which ideas can be discussed or debated. Citing Osterman & Kottkamp (1993), they stress the constructive and collaborative nature of this relationship. This returns to the notion of *talking theory through* and the desire to engage Lee in constructive discussion as a means of development.

## Beliefs

Richards (1998:46–7) outlines conceptions of teaching, and their underlying principles, that, in turn, signal beliefs about second language teaching. They are summarised here:

### Science-research conceptions

- Understand the principles;
- Develop tasks and activities based on learning principles;
- Monitor students’ performance on tasks to see that desired performance is achieved.

### Theory-philosophy conceptions

- Understand the theory and the principles;
- Select the syllabuses, materials, and tasks based on the theory;
- Monitor your teaching to see that it conforms to the theory.

### Art-craft conceptions

- Treat each teaching situation as unique;
- Identify the particular characteristics of each situation;
- Try out different teaching strategies;
- Develop personal approaches to teaching.

The conceptions of teaching that underpin beliefs expressed in the excerpt can be seen in the comment *the gap between the essay and the lesson*. The *essay* clearly represents a *theory-philosophy* conception of teaching, while the *lesson* represents an *art-craft* conception. It is clear that a closing of the gap is desirable so that Lee becomes an informed teacher who is an effective practitioner. Richards (1998:48) goes on to suggest that such a developmental approach to second language teacher education can equip teachers with a knowledge and skill base that allows for flexibility in the classroom.

### Assessment

The most striking image in the excerpt is the final one: *the frightened look in her eyes*. This image is linked to two problematic issues present in the excerpt and the discussion above. They concern the notion of ‘what is good teaching?’ and the question of assessment.

Gebhard (1990:156–8) clearly points out that definitions of ‘good’ teaching are subjective, fraught with power relationship problems and inevitably prescriptive. The decision on what is good or bad teaching is often articulated in the form of assessment criteria, which may or may not be explicit. Teachers, at both pre-service and in-service level, are assessed against these criteria in order to obtain a certificate, diploma or degree.

As a result of assessment, the behaviours of both the teacher educator and the teachers alter, as the excerpt above demonstrates. The tension between assessment and learning is also illustrated in the following comment made by an Italian teacher of English studying on a British Council teacher course that had become linked to a Masters Level Awards (MLA) Programme:

*I appreciate that the course content and assessment had to satisfy the requirements of an MLA Programme, but I think that more attention could have been given to our needs as “learners”.*  
(Bettinelli, Monticolo & Tropea 1998:13)

This observation tends to cast assessment in a negative light. However, Earl and LeMahieu (1997), cited in Fullan (1998:260), emphasise the usefulness of assessment as part of the learning process:

*If people learn by constructing their own understanding from their experiences, assessment is not only part of learning, it is the critical component that allows the learners and their teachers to check their understanding against the views of others, and against the collective wisdom of the culture as it has been recorded in the knowledge, theories, models, formulas, solutions, and stories that make up the curriculum and the disciplines.*

*The alternative is for learners to be passive and uncritical recipients of disconnected (and often conflicting ideas), without the skills to challenge or judge for themselves.*

Fullan then goes on to suggest that teachers should engage in a process of reflecting, describing and sharing. In the context of second language teacher education, this signals a need for further description. It is beyond the scope of this article to suggest how this should take place, but it would seem that the issue of assessing the practicum in teacher education at both pre-service and in-service level is worthy of further enquiry.

### Conclusion

Lee passed the DELTA course. In an oral communication about six months after the course, she noted how much she was enjoying teaching and how stimulated she felt as a result of following the DELTA course. There is no doubt that moments in which the teacher educator and the teacher have to face the problematic and challenging issue of assessment are uncomfortable. However, perhaps there is payback in the end.

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## Language Awareness and Assessment

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### Introduction

The development of language tests and examinations is well documented, as are the skills required to administer examinations and to assess students' language performance, whether this involves reading, writing, listening or speaking. There is a range of handbooks available for teachers to draw upon – whether they are novice or more experienced – to support their work as 'examiners'/ 'assessors'. Such texts inform on the overall process of developing and administering examinations (e.g. Alderson, Clapham and Wall 1995) or on ways in which an analysis of the students' 'target language use situation' can inform test development (Bachman & Palmer 1996). They also guide the development of specific items in different language skill areas (e.g. Weir 1990, 1993, Hughes 1989). Others take a somewhat different approach and include – for example – a detailed discussion of the nature of language proficiency, and test-taker characteristics (e.g. Bachman 1990, Bachman and Palmer 1996).

The above are important examples of the kinds of language testing handbooks that are available to teachers such as those who are training under schemes such as the CELTA and DELTA (see further information below). Overall, they provide a sound foundation for the would-be examiner/assessor in relation to, in particular, test development, administration, and marking activities. This, then, represents the conventional wisdom underpinning testing and examining processes. But, as clearly shown in the work of Bachman and Palmer (1996), teachers need to develop understandings in related areas and, for example, to reflect on the nature of language proficiency itself. This article considers some of the ways in which teachers can develop these understandings based on research into teachers' understanding of language in relation to assessment (Gardner and Rea-Dickins 2000).

### Investigating teacher awareness of assessment

At this point, I turn to the Cambridge ESOL mission statement (see website) which aims to:

*“provide language learners and teachers in a wide variety of situations with access to a range of high quality international*

*examinations, tests and teachers' awards, which will help them to achieve their life goals and have a positive impact on their learning and professional development experience.”*

I would argue that to achieve these goals, it is important that teachers themselves develop knowledge and insights in a number of interrelated areas. Without these understandings, it may be difficult for them, for example, to distinguish between good and more problematic examining processes and to achieve quality assessment in their own professional contexts. In this connection, it becomes relevant to ask:

*Why is it that in many teacher education and Continuing Professional Development programmes, issues around examining and assessment processes are either omitted altogether or given scant exposure, usually tagged on at the end?*

Teacher development programmes should, I believe, attend not only to aspects of test and examination development but they should also provide opportunities for teachers, and 'would-be' teachers, to develop knowledge about and insights into:

- the nature of language
- the nature of both examining (formal external assessment of language proficiency or achievement) and classroom-based assessment processes (embedded within instruction where the emphasis is on developing learners' language), and
- the nature of second language acquisition.

The example below from a recent research project of mine<sup>1</sup> illustrates the point I am making by shedding some light on teachers' understanding of language in relation to assessment. This part of the study involved an analysis of teacher discourse that focused on the representations implicit in teachers' use of language in the assessment of learners with English as an additional (second) language (Gardner & Rea-Dickins 2000).

The data were gathered through interviews with teachers about recent assessment activities (formal or classroom-embedded) that they had implemented in real class time. The teachers, we

<sup>1</sup> This research was funded by the ESRC (Major Grant No: R000238196), 1999–2002 and Sheena Gardner (University of Warwick) was a co-researcher.

observed, made frequent use of the terms *structure* and *structures*, and basic terminology such as *pronoun* and *question form* as well as talking about *tenses*, as illustrated below:

Terms used by Teacher	Teacher talking about an assessment
(i) Irregular past tense, subject and verb agreement	I think there are lots of things that ... <b>using irregular past tense, subject and verb agreement</b> . A lot of those things are already written down and structured and ... they're on the medium term plan and you do them that week
(ii) Question forms	... understanding different <b>question forms</b> . The 'what' particularly the 'how' they found very difficult. And there's lots of ... there's <i>tell me about ...</i> that's not so much a question, <i>did you enjoy?</i> , <i>would you like to?</i> <i>How?</i> <i>Why?</i> <i>What?</i> . Also <i>can you describe?</i> Which they find hard. That word <i>describe</i> (T1:98)

(from Gardner & Rea-Dickins, 2000:169)

Further, teachers following a Further Professional Studies Certificate in English as an additional language (University of Bristol) had the opportunity to develop their skills in analysing children's language in mainstream classrooms. As part of this programme, they completed a checklist survey of self-reported familiarity with and confidence in using metalanguage. This survey of teachers' declarative metalinguistic knowledge suggested that only a limited set of terms were available for confident use to teachers. Overall, most were confident in their ability to use *adjective*, *noun*, and *syllable*; fairly confident about *discourse*, *active voice*, *morphology*, and *phoneme*; and not so confident about *modality*, or *collocation*. For example, in extract (ii) above on question forms, the teacher appears to want to talk about the form rather than the content of her questions to her learners, but her lack of a clear distinction between form and function here suggests that she does not have a model of a question (function) being realised as an interrogative form (*did you enjoy?*) or an imperative form (*tell me about ...*). The comment: "that's not so much a question" again suggests that she is aware of the distinctions but lacks the explicit model of language and metalanguage to support it.

## Findings

In our study, we came to understand that teachers drew partially on many different models and views of language:

- from the analysis of language from a traditional grammar perspective – as in (i) above;
- of notional-functional grammar with its concepts of functions (e.g. compare, contrast, explain) and formal realisations thereof (e.g. different from, differs);

- of discourse (e.g. interaction, negotiation);
- of register (e.g. 'posh', as in "antonym is a posh word for opposite", and 'special words');
- of genre theory (e.g. recount, narrative) of written code (e.g. speech bubbles, text features);
- of phonics (e.g. two-letter phonemes, split digraphs);
- of semantics (e.g. antonyms); and of literature (e.g. characters, setting).

What this analysis showed quite poignantly is that teachers represent language as complex, amenable to analysis from a range of perspectives and for a variety of different assessment-related purposes.

## Conclusion

What is not clear from our findings is whether the teachers in our study – and it is a question to be asked more widely – have a detailed overall framework for their views. This, then, is where the importance of training comes in with specific reference to the analysis of language within assessment contexts. With an increasing number of assessment frameworks and standards, as well as examinations, teachers need to be enabled to make appropriate choices and to implement assessment effectively, whether of the formal and external variety or the classroom-based and instruction-embedded variety.

There are insights to be drawn from this research for Cambridge ESOL's teaching awards and these could also be linked to the findings from the diary study reported on in the previous article.

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www.CambridgeESOL.org/teaching/

# In-service language teaching in Brazil using ICELT

LIZIKA GOLDCHLEGER, CHIEF MODERATOR, ICELT

## Introduction

The Cultura Inglesa São Paulo has, since the late eighties, run face-to-face courses leading to the RSA/UCLES Certificate for Overseas Teachers of English (COTE). In the early nineties, the Cultura Inglesa launched the Open Learning COTE in response to the demand for similar training to be made available to teachers who were not able to attend the weekly/fortnightly sessions in São Paulo that made up the five months face-to-face course. Two Open Learning COTE courses per year involving 36 teachers on average have successfully run ever since for over ten years.

In 2002, the Cultura Inglesa piloted the first Cambridge ESOL In-service Certificate in English Language Teaching (ICELT) course in both full and Language for Teachers module formats. Three Language for Teachers modules and two full ICELT courses have already taken place.

## The full ICELT course

The course is offered from July to November and from January to June, and in order to make it feasible for teachers to follow the programme, it consists of three main elements – a three-week intensive face-to-face course, followed by a distance learning phase that extends over a period of four months, and four three-hour monthly meetings. ICELT candidates are practicing teachers who have had at least 500 hours experience teaching teenagers and/or young adults to adults.

Initially, participants on the ICELT course attend a three-week intensive face-to-face phase (96 hours) in São Paulo. In the distance phase of the course, the participants receive four written learning packages that are organised into monthly units. These learning packages cover core areas of language teaching methodology and are also designed to extend and review topics introduced in the three-week intensive course. We are also currently developing an on-line format for these modules, which will hopefully allow us to keep in closer contact during the distance phase. The packages provide a range of written exercises, together with a number of activities that form the basis of discussion work between participants and tutors.

During the four-month distance learning phase, the participants are required to observe eight classes taught by their peers in their own teaching situation and to complete a related observation sheet. They must also themselves be observed by their tutor as part of the assessment process. For each of the four teaching practice observations, participants prepare a lesson plan including the aims

of the lesson and procedures; a rationale outlining the profile of learners, the relationship between the learners' needs and the lesson aims and objectives; and a post-lesson evaluation where candidates discuss the lesson and present action points for development.

As well as the practical assessments noted above, participants write four 1000–1500 word classroom related assignments on the evaluation of teaching, evaluating and supplementing materials and learners and learning. Candidates must also complete four language tasks designed to improve the teacher's use of English for teaching purposes which are:

1. Production of a worksheet
2. Evaluation of learners' spoken language
3. Focus on learners' written language
4. Focus on teacher's language

The final task would draw to some extent on the concepts described by Pauline Rea-Dickins in the previous article.

Participants come to São Paulo once a month to participate in group-discussions, receive support for assignment writing and get feedback on their progress.

## The Language for Teachers module

A timely feature of the ICELT award is the opportunity for candidates to enter for a separately certified Language for Teachers module. This course comes in response to the institution's training and development needs and also serves as a benchmark for the internal teacher-promotion system.

At the Cultura Inglesa, those teachers who are interested primarily in improving their language competence in the classroom context and developing their professional language and communication skills in English follow a four-month course. Participants attend weekly four-hour lessons. Assessment is carried out by way of the same four language tasks as listed above as well as the following:

5. Reading and presentation
6. Assessment of teacher language in the classroom

## Benefits for teachers

After just two ICELT courses, it is still too soon to ascertain with any certainty the developmental outcomes of the ICELT programme, but what follows are some early visible benefits in relation to the former COTE.

The ICALT offers a much more practical perspective for teachers than the COTE, as the methodology assignments are directly linked to classroom teaching and teachers constantly have to systematically evaluate the learning implications of their planning choices, their pedagogic decisions, as well as plan for future action based on systematic reflection on practice, as referred to in Craig Thaine's article on page 10.

The Language for Teachers component offers a syllabus in which teachers focus on relevant linguistic areas pertaining to their practice as teachers. They are, therefore, required to analyse and correct students' written and spoken language; analyse their own language through recordings of lessons; prepare a worksheet to be used in class as well as the preparation of an oral summary of an article related to ELT.

## Teacher Support

JILL GRIMSHAW, BUSINESS SUPPORT GROUP

### Introduction

*Do you need to pass all the papers to pass the exam?*

*What are the set books for FCE in June?*

*What do you mean by Business English?*

*How is PET recognised in my country?*

... are some questions that teachers ask about Cambridge ESOL's exams, and that the Teacher Support programme seeks to answer.

In 1989, the UCLES EFL Teacher Support consisted of one booklet, covering all the (five) exams on offer at the time. Today, teachers can search an extensive website, read up about the exams in any of the handbooks and other materials available on-line and attend specially designed seminars held all round the world.

### WHY Teacher Support?

Teacher Support is integral to the Cambridge ESOL mission, that exams should have 'a positive impact' on language learners' development. But how can we go about achieving this positive impact?

As a member of ALTE (the Association of Language Testers in Europe), Cambridge ESOL follows a Code of Practice, which lists four principles, Validity, Reliability, Impact and Practicality, that must be addressed in the development and/or review of an exam (e.g. see Nick Saville's article in *Research Notes 9* on the development of the CELS suite).

### Conclusion

Our next challenge, which we have eagerly taken on board, is the development of a support system for reflection and learning through our on-line training format. Hopefully this will allow us to better cater for individual learning demands.

It is interesting to note both the similarities and differences between Cambridge ESOL's range of teaching awards in terms of their content, structure, course delivery and outcomes. Through reports such as this and the other evidence presented in this issue of *Research Notes* Cambridge ESOL is fully committed to continually improving and developing its teaching awards, alongside its perhaps better-known Main Suite and other exams of English for Speakers of Other Languages.

### The ALTE Code of Practice seeks to provide:

- properly-defined target communication levels and candidacies;
- comprehensive, transparent and fair test interpretation and reporting systems;
- continuous test validation and revision processes;
- a keener regard for the rights of candidates and other stakeholders.

The Code of Practice also gives details of the perceived responsibilities of examination users – covering the selection of appropriate examinations, interpreting examination results, striving for fairness, and communicating with examination providers – as well as a parallel set of actual responsibilities for the examination developers.

The *Validity* of an examination is affected by the extent to which it reflects its 'target-use contexts', i.e. the situations in which the test is intended to be used and the appropriate topics and themes for these contexts. Examinations must also consider *construct-related validity* whereby a test has interactional authenticity which reflects an underlying model of language ability and *concurrent validity* with other tests.

*Impact* is related to *Validity*, in that it addresses the effect that the test has, or will have, on its users. The term *Impact* is used in educational literature to describe the effects of (particularly) high stakes assessment on the classroom, but also more widely the effects it may have on school systems, on education and even

society as a whole. It is therefore crucial for an exam board to address impact in its design of tests, taking into consideration both the needs of the test users and also what the effect of the use of the tests will be.

Lynda Taylor (in *Research Notes 2*) has demonstrated the large number of possible test stakeholders, who may both contribute to the design of a test and also be affected by it. In a future issue Roger Hawkey reviews one of the first comprehensive investigations into the wide-ranging impact that exams may have, in relation to IELTS.

## Impact and washback

So, where exactly does Teacher Support fit in here? At Cambridge ESOL, Teacher Support is a key activity which primarily addresses the impact of the exams and assists in explaining their construct-related validity. In her article on the ethical concerns of washback and impact (Hamp-Lyons 1997), Liz Hamp-Lyons distinguishes between the terms *washback* and *impact*. *Washback*, she suggests, is a powerful metaphor for the negative effect tests have on learning. She claims that teachers generally will try to avoid formal tests and prefer classroom-based continuous assessment, precisely because of this perceived negative effect. Some research has shown this negative effect: the curriculum is narrowed to focus on the requirements of the test, rather than those of the learners; time is devoted to teaching test-taking skills. Teachers are made anxious; they feel that their students' performance equates to their own performance. So, as Kathy Bailey (1996) asks, 'How can we promote positive washback?'

It is the exam board's responsibility to address the effect of the exams on users, to 'promote positive washback'. Cambridge ESOL Teacher Support aims to do this by explaining the rationale of the tests (the test construct) to teachers, by showing how the exams reflect models of language ability and support the development of relevant linguistic skills.

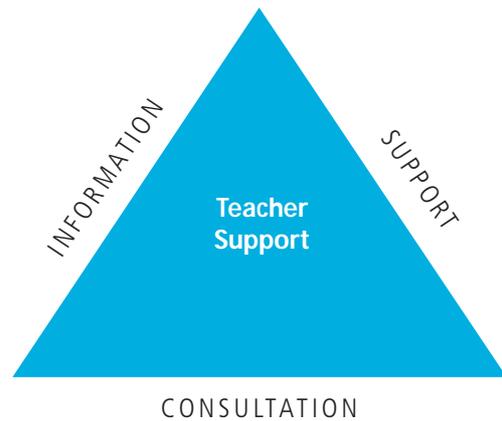
## HOW do they do that?

As Lynda Taylor has said, in her article about stakeholders in language testing (*Research Notes 2*), it is a responsibility of exam boards to provide support and information to stakeholders. An added benefit of the teacher support programme is that it also offers the opportunity for communication between Cambridge ESOL and the exams' stakeholders, to gather views and exchange opinions about the exams and assessment in general.

It is these three facets:

- Information
- Support
- Consultation

that form the comprehensive framework of Teacher Support on offer today.



## Information

The first priority of the Teacher Support is to ensure that users understand the assessment principles on which the exams are based, in order to help candidates achieve their goals. For example, the common question 'Do you have to pass all five papers?'. The answer to this is no, because the assessment principle of the Main Suite exams is based on the premise that a typical language learner has strengths and weaknesses in different areas: some will be stronger in listening comprehension, others in writing, others in speaking skills. A comprehensive test of all four skills has to take this into account, so the overall assessment is based on achievement in all these areas.

Another key piece of information is the utility of the exams, their currency in business and education, for example. The Teacher Support programme assists in providing information about this.

## Support

What we have called support here, is in effect the function of advice and guidance that the exam board has the responsibility to offer to users. This advice takes several forms, for example:

### How to link language development to testing

It may sometimes be difficult to see how the principles of language development, as laid out in a syllabus or followed in a course book, are assessed in an exam. Further, it may not be easy to see how classroom activities link to exam tasks. The Teacher Support programme explains the testing aims of a task, for example, to clarify how a cloze exercise assesses a knowledge of vocabulary and grammar. It can also discuss ways of preparing for this classic testing task which are relevant and appropriate to learners. Typically it is this very practical feature of teacher support which is most popular, especially with teachers who are new to the exams.

### Assessment principles

A key feature of the Teacher Support programme is to explain assessment methods. The three types of Support delivery each have a role to play here. Much of the methodology is transparently evident and can be read up in the handbooks or exam reports.

The Specifications for a new exam, for example, are routinely published at least two years in advance of the exam's launch, so that teachers can begin to think about the new exam's demands and how it will be relevant to their students' needs. However, a face-to-face seminar or video extract can also be effective, especially to explain and demonstrate the assessment of speaking and writing.

## Consultation

Teacher Support assists in facilitating communication between the exam board and the exam users. Seminars, for example, encourage discussion of the exams and are a source of constant feedback to Cambridge ESOL. A key way to assess impact in the development of an exam is to canvass feedback from stakeholders. Face-to-face meetings are used as a formal means of consulting teachers and other stakeholders. For example, when changes to an exam are being considered, such as happened recently in the revision of CPE, the plans are discussed in consultation seminars as well as through questionnaires. Teachers can review new task types or test methods and advise on the basis of their expertise in language development.

## Three kinds of support

Teacher Support consists of three aspects: information, support (advice and guidance) and consultation. It is currently delivered in three main ways: print, face-to-face and via the web, but may soon be supplemented by video conferences.

### 1. Print

As we mentioned in the introduction to this article, Teacher Support began as one large Handbook describing the exams. This has now developed into an extensive range of print materials for teachers listed below.

- **Exam handbooks**  
description of the exam, including its level according to the CEF, examples of what successful candidates are expected to be able to do at this level, sample question paper, advice on exam preparation
- **Exam reports**  
information on candidate performance in a specific exam administration, comments and advice from examiners
- **Past Papers**  
latest question papers, including answer keys, sample candidate answers, tapescripts
- **Sample Speaking Test Video packs**  
information about the Speaking Tests for teachers and students, with activities and video samples

More general information comes in the form of a newsletter, *Cambridge First*, which includes reports, features and news about the exams. This publication, *Research Notes*, is itself a form of Teacher Support, intended as it is to report on research activity relating to the exams, which can assist in deepening teachers' understanding of the exams' validity.

### 2. Face-to-face

A programme of Teachers Seminars is run in countries world-wide to ensure that teachers are well-informed about the exams and are helped in preparing their students.

The seminars provide information and advice about the content, format and aims of the exams, the assessment methods and candidate performance, and candidate preparation. They also serve as a channel of communication between Cambridge ESOL and the teachers who are using the exams.

#### Seminar facts & figures

- biggest Teachers Seminar: April 2001, Anthea Bazin led a CELS seminar in Montevideo  
*"we had to rent the Ball Room of the Radisson Victoria Plaza Hotel, Montevideo which was the only venue in town big enough for such a crowd. There were more than 650 chairs and they were all taken. We had a huge screen behind the speaker so everyone was able to see well."*
- most popular seminars? KET and PET
- where do they happen? almost everywhere! From Brazil to Cyprus, from Ukraine to Taiwan
- how many are there? about 500 this year

These face-to-face events may soon be supplemented by video conferencing, which will allow more teachers to benefit from seminars.

### 3. Web

The latest form of Teacher Support is via the web. The Cambridge ESOL public website has a wide range of information about the exams, but advice and guidance for teachers is specifically provided via the recently developed Teaching Resources website. The aim of this website is to supplement the face-to-face seminars and is a means for teachers who are unable to attend seminars to access similar support.

- Teaching Resources: [www.CambridgeESOL.org/teach](http://www.CambridgeESOL.org/teach)
- Live since April 2003
- Offers support for FCE, YLE and KET...
- ...with other exams all coming soon

## Summary

Teacher Support is a key activity in the Cambridge ESOL provision of exams. The board recognises that it has a responsibility to consider the needs of users and the consequences of exam use. The exams are produced according to the ALTE Code of Practice, which helps ensure positive impact and Teacher Support assists in implementing this Code.

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# Interaction in a paired speaking test: the case of the First Certificate in English

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## Introduction

This article reports on a dissertation study of speaking performance at FCE level conducted at Teachers College, Columbia University, New York City. It is an interdisciplinary study within the relatively young research trend of discourse-based studies in oral language assessment. As such, it tries to address two of the fundamental issues in these two fields: the STRUCTURE OF TALK and TEST VALIDATION. The general rationale behind the study is reflected in van Lier's (1989) now classic appeal for analysing language proficiency interviews from a discourse perspective in order to obtain a deeper and more sophisticated understanding of the interview *process* itself, and not just the final *product* (the score received). As such, this study is qualitative in nature and aims to provide evidence from a discourse perspective for the *construct* validation of a paired test. The research methodology employed was Conversation Analysis (henceforth CA) and the basic issues guiding the study were:

### 1. Patterns of Interaction

- What are the patterns of interaction in Part 3 ('two-way collaborative task') of the FCE?
- What are the salient discourse features of these interactional patterns?

### 2. Relationship between Patterns of Interaction and 'Interactive Communication' Score

- Is there a relationship between the patterns of interaction and the 'Interactive Communication' score received?
- How does the interactional pattern impact the 'Interactive Communication' score?

## Method

The database for the study consisted of 30 interactions taken from live FCE test administrations recorded in Italy, Taiwan, China,

Switzerland, and the UK. The test takers represented varied L1s, with the majority (75%) reporting Italian, Chinese, or French as their mother tongue. In terms of gender, 75% of the test takers were women, and the remaining 25% men.

Part 3 of the FCE was chosen for investigation as it is the only task providing opportunities for peer-peer negotiation of meaning and conversation management in the form of initiating turns, holding and yielding the floor, interrupting, and exercising speaker selection. This task, therefore, promised to provide valuable insights about the dynamics of peer-peer interaction in a testing event and its analysis seemed to be critical for a better understanding of the paired test format.

The interaction taking place during Part 3 was transcribed using CA transcription conventions following Atkinson and Heritage (1984). The choice of transcription conventions was dictated mainly by the need for an accurate transcript including micro-level features such as length of pauses, hesitations, overlaps, interruptions, and backchannels. In line with CA methodological guidelines (*TESOL Quarterly*, 2003, Guidelines) a 'data exploration strategy' (Lazaraton 2002; Pomerantz and Fehr 1997; ten Have 1999) was employed. The approach was inductive, as all the patterns of interaction were grounded in the data and emerged as a result of the analysis.

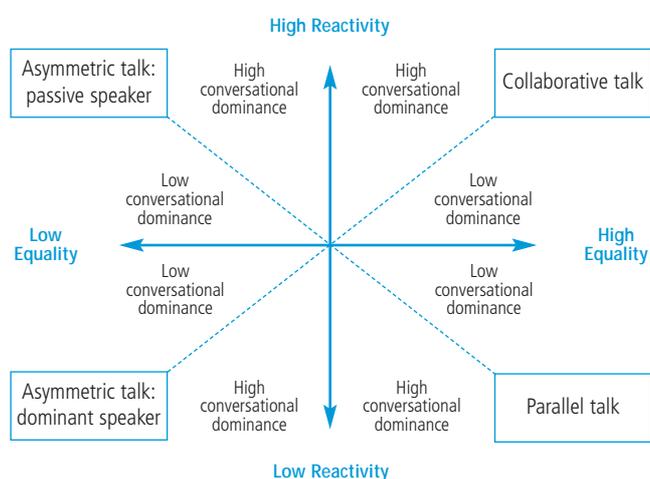
## Results and discussion

The CA analysis revealed that the test-taker dyads were 'producing topicality' (Maynard 1990) in different ways: some were working in a collaborative manner and sustaining topics over longer stretches of discourse, others were working in a 'solo vs. solo' fashion and still others emerged as asymmetrical in the amount of effort each dyad member put toward completion of the task. As such, three distinct patterns of interaction emerged, termed 'COLLABORATIVE', 'PARALLEL', and 'ASYMMETRIC'. They were distinguishable based on the dimensions of 'reactivity' (adopted from Jones and Gerard 1967) and 'equality' (adopted from Damon

and Phelps 1989). These two concepts referred to the creation of shared meaning from one turn to the next (reactivity), i.e. responding/reacting to the content of the previous turn and to the work distribution among the participants (equality).

The CA analysis also revealed that the dimension of conversational dominance intersected with the dimensions of reactivity and equality. Based on Itakura (2002) and Linell, Gustavsson, and Juvonen (1988), conversational dominance was operationalised as the quantity of talk, interruptions, topic initiations and questions. As such, each of the three interactional patterns was further subdivided into two sub-categories based on the overall presence or absence of conversational dominance. A schematic representation of the patterns is seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Patterns of Interaction and the Dimensions of Reactivity, Equality, and Conversational Dominance



NB. The layout of Figure 1 was inspired by Storch (2001).

## Collaborative talk

In dyads which oriented to 'collaborative talk' both speakers initiated topics (high equality) and reacted to the other person's topic by developing it further (high reactivity). In terms of topic development moves, the exchange in collaborative dyads often took the form of:

Speaker A	Topic initiation	or	Topic initiation + topic extension
Speaker B	Topic extension		Topic extension + topic initiation
Speaker A	Topic extension		Topic extension

The topic extension moves, which were the most salient distinguishing feature of the collaborative dyads, signalled engagement with the other speaker's ideas and less reliance on the task prompts. Interestingly, a quantitative analysis of the patterns of interaction (not reported here) revealed that the collaborative dyads used the lowest frequency of topic initiation moves and the highest frequency of topic extension moves, indicating their

relatively low dependence on the visual task prompts and more 'context-independence' (Young 1995) than any other interactional pattern.

The mutual engagement typical of collaborative dyads was also achieved through the use of questions which exercised speaker nomination (Sachs, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974), a feature not observed in the other patterns of interaction. In the high conversational dominance dyads the discourse was further characterised by supportive overlaps, short turns, rapid speaker change, avoidance of gaps between turns, and frequent backchannels, resembling a 'high-involvement' style of interaction (Tannen 1981).

## Parallel talk

The second pattern of peer-peer interaction found in the FCE oral tests resembled 'solo' vs. 'solo' interaction where both speakers initiated and developed topics (high equality) but engaged little with each other's ideas (low reactivity). In terms of topic management moves, the exchanges in parallel dyads often had the following makeup:

Speaker A	Topic initiation + topic extension
Speaker B	Minimal acknowledgement + topic initiation
Speaker A	Minimal acknowledgement + topic initiation

As the schematic representation of the exchange above shows, topic extension moves were rare in parallel talk and instead the speakers were much more concerned with developing their own contributions instead of engaging with the other speaker. Unlike the balance in the roles of speaker and listener observed in the collaborative dyads, the speaker role here was much stronger than the listener role.

In addition to the abovementioned discourse features characteristic of parallel dyads, an additional feature observed in the high conversational dominance dyads was the use of interruptions. In such cases, the speakers often violated each other's conversational rights by taking the floor through interruptions.

## Asymmetric talk

The third pattern of interaction found in the dataset involved dyads which oriented to different discourse roles, one dominant and one passive. The dominant dyad member contributed much more to the task (low equality) while the passive speaker oriented to a predominantly reacting role.

From the perspective of conversational dominance, this pattern included two different sub-styles of interaction: one with a dominant speaker who appropriated the task and took the floor with dominance moves such as competitive overlaps and interruptions and one in which a speaker oriented to a more dominant role as a result of the passive interactive behaviour of the

other dyad member. In such cases the dominant participant did not compete for the floor but was forced to take the floor as a result of the lack of uptake by the other speaker. In terms of topic management moves, the exchanges in asymmetric dyads often had the following form:

Speaker A	Topic initiation + topic extension
Speaker B	Minimal acknowledgement ('yes' or 'I agree')
Speaker A	Topic extension
Speaker B	Minimal acknowledgement ('yes' or 'I agree')

### Blended patterns of interaction

In addition to the three distinct interactional patterns, some of the dyads oriented to a 'blend' of two patterns of interaction, namely collaborative/parallel and collaborative/asymmetric. The interaction in these dyads was characterised by features from the two respective patterns of interaction. Typically, a dyad would alternate from one pattern to another. For example, part of the interaction would have features characteristic of collaborative interaction, such as extensions of the prior speaker's proposition, at the beginning of the discourse, and then they would switch to an asymmetrical distribution of interactional roles, with one interlocutor taking on the leading role. Alternatively, a dyad would begin the interaction in a parallel manner with little mutuality, and would then 'warm up' and orient to a collaborative discourse.

### Relationship between interactional patterns and Interactive Communication scores

The second question guiding this study was the focus on a possible relationship between the interactional patterns the CA analysis revealed and the IC scores given to the candidates in the respective dyads. The basic rationale behind investigating this issue was an attempt to provide validation evidence for the FCE 'interactive communication' scores from a conversation analytical perspective. Figure 2 represents the proportional distribution of the patterns of interaction in the dataset<sup>2</sup>.

As seen in Figure 2, the majority of patterns of interaction in the dataset were either collaborative or parallel or a blend. The asymmetric dyads, which are potentially the most problematic from an assessment perspective, comprised 10% of the dataset.

Figure 3 shows the mean IC score for the candidates orienting to each pattern of interaction. Two mean scores were calculated for the asymmetric dyads, one for each dyad member, due to the markedly different roles of the dominant and passive speaker.

As seen, the group with the highest mean (4.17) was the collaborative group, and the one with the lowest mean (3.39) was the parallel group. The score difference between these two means

Figure 2: Proportional distribution of patterns of interaction (N = 30 dyads)

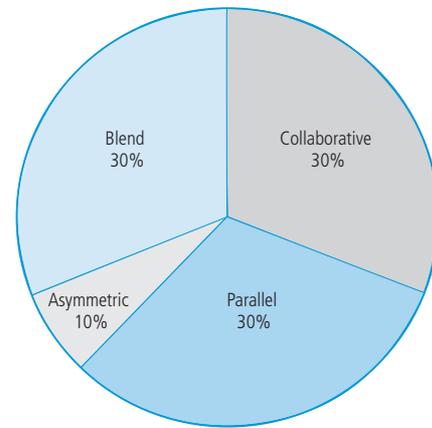
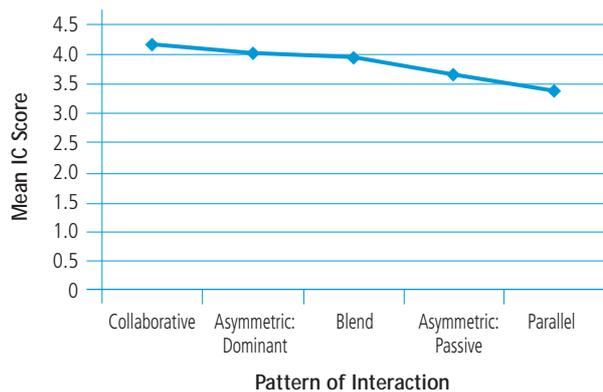


Figure 3: Mean IC score of test-takers in each group



was shown to be statistically significant by a t-test ( $t = -3.182$ ;  $p = .003$ ). The 'Blend' group had a mean which fell between the means of the above two groups (3.94). The mean score difference was not statistically significant for the collaborative and blend comparison of means ( $t = .944$ ;  $p = .352$ ), but was statistically significant for the parallel and blend comparison ( $t = -2.577$ ;  $p = .014$ ).

This finding is in agreement with the FCE scoring criteria for interactive communication and the CA analysis projection, i.e. that higher proficiency learners would orient to the collaborative pattern, which is most conversation-like, and lower proficiency learners to the parallel pattern. It is also in agreement with Young's contention that higher proficiency learners have the ability "to cooperatively manage the conversational floor, to talk at greater length, on a wider range of topics, and to be more reactive to topics introduced by an interlocutor" (Young 1995:36).

With regard to the asymmetric group, the mean IC score for the dominant interlocutor was slightly higher (4.00) than the mean IC score for the passive interlocutor (3.67). The difference was not statistically significant ( $t = -.459$ ;  $p = .670$ ). The fact that the difference in means is not larger is surprising, considering the

<sup>2</sup> Inter-coder agreement 91%.

different interactional roles of these two dyad participants. While the small number of test-takers in the two asymmetric sub-groups (N = 6) makes generalisations of this result difficult, the similar mean IC scores do signal a possible caveat to be considered in terms of the asymmetric dyads.

It is possible to hypothesise that the raters in this dataset had a clearer idea of how to score collaborative or parallel interactions, as they were distinct cases, but they were not so consistent with the scoring of asymmetric dyads. This indicates that some interactional patterns, such as the asymmetric one, are simply harder to rate than others because the reasons for the passive and dominant behaviour of the dyad members may not be straightforward. There is a strong possibility that factors other than language proficiency lead the asymmetric dyad participants to orient to one interactional pattern over another. It is possible, for example, to speculate that one of the speakers is interactionally passive either due to low L2 proficiency or due to cultural norms of conversation, a contention also projected by Young (1995). Similarly, the more dominant speaker in a dyad may be dominating due to inappropriate interactional behaviour or due to the lack of initiative of the interlocutor. Keeping the conversation going in such cases is to be rewarded. This result appears to be an indication of the need for more rater training on how to deal with asymmetric dyads.

The problematic nature of asymmetric dyads from an assessment perspective has been noted both in the literature (Weir 1990) and at professional meetings (*Cambridge ESOL Speaking Test Symposium*, Cambridge, February 2003). The caveats associated with the asymmetric dyads also mirror a concern of many critics of the paired interview format, namely that there may not be equal opportunities for both candidates to perform to the best of their ability (Foot 1999). This is a point also made by Saville and Hargreaves (1999), who rightly note that these concerns cannot be addressed with definitive answers. An awareness-raising endeavour, such as the present study, is a step in that direction as it will help to redress such a disbalance and allow raters to “conduct themselves in similar prescribed ways” (Lazaraton 1996:19). In other words, while the results in Figure 3 suggest that FCE raters may find asymmetric dyads problematic, they also open the path for an awareness of this issue and the potential to deal consistently with this interactional pattern.

## Conclusion

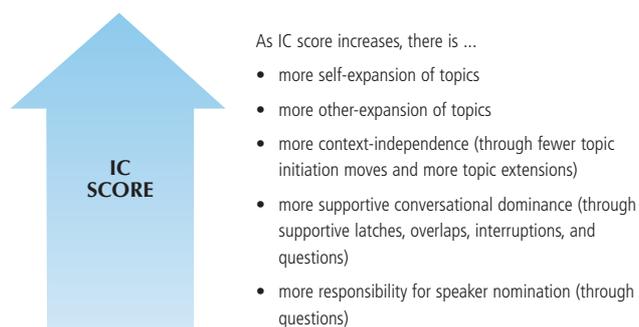
This study has shown a general agreement between interactional patterns and IC scores. This result serves as partial validation evidence for the FCE scoring of ‘interactive communication’, since it indicates that the interaction which is the most conversation-like from a discourse perspective (collaborative) was also graded the highest by the FCE examiners. The interaction pattern which violated conversational norms of mutuality the most (parallel) was graded the lowest. What was somewhat surprising was the distribution of means in the asymmetric dyads. It showed that

despite the markedly different interactional roles of the asymmetric dyad participants, their IC scores did not distinguish sufficiently between them. Possible explanations for this mismatch between the conversation analysis and the IC scores were the complex reasons behind the asymmetric patterns of interaction. It was suggested that in addition to L2 proficiency, test-takers may orient to an asymmetric style of talk due to a misunderstanding of the task, cultural expectations of a language proficiency interview, or cultural influence regarding conversational roles. One implication for testing is that, minimally, serious thought needs to be given to the most adequate and fair means of scoring asymmetric dyad members. Since tests are restrained by the need to balance test practicality, reliability, validity, and impact, this concern may not be solved in an ‘ideal-world’ manner, as Douglas and Smith (1997) note. However, a discourse study such as the present one can highlight potential problems and serve as a consciousness-raising exercise for test developers and raters.

In addition to providing empirical validation support for the IC scores given during the FCE and highlighting some potential caveats to be considered by the assessment community, the significance of this study further lies in the deeper understanding it provides of the paired interview process, which allows for higher control over the uncontrolled variability in peer-peer interview interaction. The present study also offers implications for FCE test developers as it provides a more accurate understanding of the two-way collaborative task and of the construct of conversation management. An understanding of this process is critical for assessment purposes since interaction is arguably more difficult to evaluate than grammar and pronunciation.

There are further implications for FCE rating scale construction as this study provides a better understanding of the relationship between task, language output, and scores. More specifically, the study confirmed the need for some terms in the assessment scale to be operationally defined (for example, ‘flow of language’, ‘hesitations’, ‘good/sufficient interactive ability’, ‘sensitivity to turn-taking’, ‘effective communication’) and other discourse features to be added, such as ‘listener support’, ‘collaborative’/‘competitive interruptions’, ‘overlap’, ‘topic continuity’, ‘topic decay’, ‘speaker selection’. Figure 4 provides a summary of the specific findings regarding salient discourse features and IC score, which can directly inform the assessment scale.

Figure 4: IC score and topic development



This study also holds implications for FCE examiner training as it provides insights which could lead to more accurate and consistent assessment of candidate output. Lastly, the present research endeavour has implications for the debate on test authenticity as it indirectly indicates the opportunities Part 3 of the FCE provides for test takers to display their conversation management skills.

The compilation of interactional style profiles is clearly a complex undertaking and the results of this qualitative analysis do not provide definitive answers but rather are exploratory steps towards a more comprehensive picture of patterns of interaction. Despite its limited scope, however, this initial step has provided partial validation evidence from a discourse perspective for the 'interactive communication' scores given in the FCE and has indicated the value of the FCE paired speaking test format.

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## Other News

### New staff in Research and Validation

The last nine months have seen considerable restructuring within the ESOL Research and Validation Group. In April the Performance Testing Unit (responsible for the quality assurance system underpinning the Cambridge Speaking Tests) moved across into the ESOL Operations Group leaving Dr Lynda Taylor to focus on her new Assistant Director role within the Group and Rowena

Akinyemi to focus on re-establishing the ESOL Library and Resource Centre. In May we welcomed Dr Hanan Khalifa Louhichi as a new Validation Officer with responsibility for pre-testing and Operations duties. Research and Validation staff now also include the ALTE Secretariat team (Barbara Stevens and Jacqui Wright) who service all enquiries from ALTE members and the general public.

The Research and Validation Group now has 20 permanent staff including 8 staff holding PhDs. As a team we continue to provide ongoing operational validation support for the Assessment and Operations Groups, and to conduct a comprehensive programme of research/validation activity across the full range of Cambridge ESOL examinations. In addition, we regularly profile the outcomes of our work in the public domain through conference presentations and publications.

### KET Teaching Resource on-line now

Comprehensive support for teachers preparing candidates for the Key English Test is now available. The new on-line resource gives in-depth coverage of these exams, provides support and advice, and gives plenty of hints, tips and ideas for classroom activities. Business English Certificates resources will be coming in December and other Cambridge ESOL exams will follow in 2004. Visit the site now at [www.CambridgeESOL.org/teach](http://www.CambridgeESOL.org/teach)

### Cambridge Placement Tests

Cambridge ESOL has a number of placement testing products available, some of which are focused on the language school and University market and others which test business language for recruitment and promotion purposes. To sample these products follow the links below.

BULATS is for business language testing:  
[www.bulats.org/](http://www.bulats.org/)

The Quick Placement Test is relevant to a learning environment:  
[www.oup.com/shockwave\\_flash/elt/qpt/qptdemo/](http://www.oup.com/shockwave_flash/elt/qpt/qptdemo/)

We also have a self-assessment product called Can Do which is based on the ALTE Can Do statements:  
[www.alte.org/can\\_do/index.cfm](http://www.alte.org/can_do/index.cfm)

For further information contact the Cambridge ESOL helpdesk:  
[ESOLhelpdesk@ucles.org.uk](mailto:ESOLhelpdesk@ucles.org.uk)

### New learner dictionary

In 2003 Cambridge University Press added to its existing range of teaching and learning support materials with the publication of the *Cambridge Advanced Learners' Dictionary*, with attached CD-ROM. In compiling the new dictionary, the authors have taken advantage of recent developments in the field of corpus linguistics, especially in relation to learner corpora.

The dictionary content has been directly informed by work done on the Cambridge International Corpus (CIC) – a computerised database which contains over 600 million words from contemporary British and American English, from spoken and written English, and from many specialised types of English, such as Law, Computers and Science. The CIC also incorporates the Cambridge Learner Corpus (CLC) – a 17-million word collection of learner English derived from students' written responses in our Cambridge ESOL examinations. The CLC has been developed over the past 10 years as a collaborative project between Cambridge ESOL and Cambridge University Press. Analysis of the CLC content makes it possible for both Cambridge ESOL and the Press to explore key features of learner English and to use the findings to inform the test validation/development process and the production of appropriate teaching/learning materials. For the *Cambridge Advanced Learners' Dictionary*, the publishers have used the CLC to inform the production of 'Common Learner Error' notes which will help learners to avoid common mistakes.

For more information on the new dictionary, go to the following Cambridge University Press website:  
<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/cald/>