



BEST OF TEASIG

Volume 1

IATEFL Testing, Evaluation and Assessment Special Interest Group

NEWSLETTERS 1992—2001



Edited by
Maggi Lussi Bell and Judith Mader

BEST OF TEASIG 1992-2001

© IATEFL Testing, Evaluation and Assessment SIG 2019

The articles in this collection are reprinted from the IATEFL TEASIG (formerly IATEFL Special Interest Group in Testing) publication archives from 1992 to 2001. Articles from a joint publication with the Pronunciation SIG (Summer 1997) and a joint publication with the Young Learners SIG (October 2001) are included. Some articles have been edited for reprinting. The views expressed in this book are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of IATEFL, TEASIG or any other SIG unless expressly stated as such.

Contributions to this publication remain the intellectual property of the authors.

Articles which have first appeared in TEASIG publications must acknowledge the TEASIG publication as the original source of the article if reprinted elsewhere.

ISBN Digital 978-1-912588-15-2

ISBN Printed 978-1-912588-19-0

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations.

Published by IATEFL TEASIG, 2-3 The Foundry, Seager Road, Faversham, ME13 7FD, UK

For more information about TEASIG, visit <https://tea.iatefl.org/>

This collection is dedicated to all TEASIG members, both past and present, with special thanks to those who have contributed to this book and other TEASIG publications.

IATEFL TEASIG Committee 2018/9

The articles included in this collection were chosen by the current TEASIG Committee members.



Ceyda Mutlu

TEASIG Coordinator



Neil Bullock

TEASIG Coordinator &
Webinar Coordinator



Sharon Hartle

TEASIG Webinar
Coordinator



Mehtap Ince

TEASIG Events
Coordinator



Thom Kiddle

TEASIG
Webmaster



Mehvar Ergun Turkan

TEASIG Membership
Secretary



Saeede Ide Haghi

TEASIG Social Media
Coordinator



Maggi Lussi Bell

TEASIG
Editor-in-Chief



Judith Mader

TEASIG Sub-Editor



Dave Allan

TEASIG Member without
Portfolio

Contents

	FOREWORD	Dave Allan	5
	EDITORIAL	Maggi Lussi Bell & Judith Mader	6
1992			
	Self-evaluation in foreign language learning	Kari Smith	9
	Evaluating communicative tests	Keith Morrow	12
	Evaluating communicative tests: a response	Jo A. Lewkowicz	16
1993			
	Report on the setting up of an association of language testers in Europe	Michael Milanovic & Nick Saville	24
	Testing — a positive experience	Andrzej Stesik	26
	Learner gender and language testing: any connections? Preliminary explorations	Jane Sunderland	27
1994			
	Evaluation – assessment – testing – What? How? Who?	Kari Smith	33
1995			
	To correct or self-correct?	Nadezda Rozholdova	41
1996			
	Action research on the use of portfolio for assessing foreign language learners	Kari Smith	50
1997			
	Testing primary learners: when? how?	Marina Dossena	58
	Promoting perception: the role of phonetics in diagnosing and rectifying breakdowns of communication	John Field	62
	Crosslinguistic influence: an issue to be addressed or ignored in multiple choice testing	Carol Spoettl & Ulrike Jessner	69
1998			
	Learner self-assessment of language skills	Mats Oscarson	71
1999			
	Teach and test in the same way?	Ewa Chojnacka	81
	Assessing adult learning: Tensions between philosophy and practice	Linda Leach, Guyon Neutze, Nick Zepke	86
	Assessment of pre-service training at Fontys Faculty of Education	Carel Burghout	96
	Taking stock: mid-course evaluation	Richard Kiely	102
2000			
	Testing and assessment in ELT	Dave Allan	107
	Can partial dictation be used to test listening comprehension?	John Dermo	110
	Assessing the literary competence of future EFL teachers	Claudia Ferradas	112
2001			
	Can do project	Neil Jones – a report by Carel Burghout	127
	Current issues in performance assessment: from theory to practice	Kari Smith – a report by Carel Burghout	131
	How do we know how well the children are learning?	Barbara Roosken	134

TESTING SIG NEWSLETTER, OCTOBER 1997

Dear TEA SIG members

Indeed, I am pleased to greet you in this Newsletter as a TEA (Testing, Evaluation and Assessment) member. Members voted in favour of our new name, which I hope will mean that new content is added to the SIG in order to represent areas of teacher appraisal, curriculum, design and institutional evaluation. Hopefully you will take account of this wider area of the SIG in your contributions to the Newsletter. I take this opportunity to ask you to encourage colleagues who are not directly involved in testing, but are involved in EFL teaching (teachers, programme developers as well as directors of studies and heads of institutions) to join the TEA SIG.

Increased membership was stated as one of the goals in my plan of action presented in the previous Newsletter. A small, but steady increase (about twenty new members) has taken place over the summer, and I welcome each one of you personally to the TEA SIG. We hope many more will follow.

Creating a web-site was another issue listed in the plan of action which has become a fact. The TEA SIG has its own Web page which you will find by using IATEFL's address: [Http://www.man.ac.uk/IATEFL/](http://www.man.ac.uk/IATEFL/). At present the page is mainly factual, describing the TEA SIG and its activities, but we hope to include articles from previous Newsletters so more people will benefit from the material. Any ideas you may have will be highly appreciated!

The Pre-Conference Event of the TEA SIG in Manchester is definitely on, and registration is via the head office of IATEFL. The forms are included in the general registration forms for the Manchester conference. The topic for our SIG event is **Designing Classroom Tests** and all committee members will give workshops. The keynote speaker is **Keith Morrow**, so don't

miss out on this opportunity to learn more about classroom test design. Any further information about the pre-conference event can be obtained from me directly. The programme will be finalised in the very near future.

The TEA SIG has begun working with TESOL research SIG and ILTA. We hope to have a joint pre-conference event at TESOL, 1999, and maybe have some representatives in the 'assessment track' of that conference. We hope that TESOL members will attend IATEFL's annual conference and participate in some of the "smaller" events.

One of these, which is not a small event, is the Bavaria event for which I am leaving tonight (18/09/97). I shall report on the event elsewhere in the Newsletter. Other upcoming events can be found in the list of events presented by IATEFL head office at the end of their newsletter.

We are still waiting for your contribution to the Newsletter, your tips, your comments, your book review and your thoughts. Please send them to the editor Tricia Aspinall, so we can achieve our goal of three newsletters per year. We need your help.

In the meantime, some tips from me:

Student Education

I strongly believe in student feed-back on my teaching. This provides me with a springboard for improving my teaching and for professional development. It is a kind of student evaluation of my teaching. I do this in various ways and shall hopefully be talking in more depth about this in Manchester. However, I would like to share an idea with you: In the middle of the course I ask my students to take blank pages and write as headings a +, a -, and a ?. Then they are asked to list the plusses of the course,

Testing primary learners: when? how?

Marina Dossena, Università degli Studi di Bergamo

Original publication date: IATEFL Special Interest Group in Testing, Newsletter April 1997

The importance of different aspects of assessment and testing cannot be overestimated. Whether it is timing, content, procedure, or feedback, all of these facets contribute to the making of successful means of evaluation. As regards timing, for instance, we assume that testing activities should be constant and regular, so that learners may feel that their progress is monitored with care, but it is also important that the timing of these activities should be flexible, since each learner has different needs and requirements. The acceptability of assessment and testing procedures, then, is based on their consistency with the previous stages of the teaching unit and of the overall framework of the teaching process. Consequently, a certain variety of tasks allows different uses in different scenarios: more traditional tasks are used alongside others whose testing function may be less apparent, but which are extremely valuable for this very reason. Such tasks are set in a more general context in which various procedures have been followed in order to promote the acquisition of new language. Finally, it is also important to consider the way in which learners find out about their results – whether the teacher tells them, or if it is based on peer-assessment, whether the feedback is immediate or delayed, and whether the remedial work that may ensue is directly connected with the actual activities that have highlighted its necessity.

In the case of beginners this is all the more important, because it is crucial that they should have as favourable an approach to testing as possible. This is due to the fact that beginners should get used to tests and other assessment procedures as a natural part of the learning process: if we are to find out how much we have learnt, we can only test ourselves – after all, the proof of the pudding is not in leaving it on the table! Unluckily, for many teachers (and, consequently, learners) tests are still a form of punishment: some unavoidable drudgery that depresses everybody and the avoidance of which could change the teaching-learning process into a dream. This perspective, however, places too much emphasis on the negative aspects of assessment (let's count the mistakes, see how many words have been mispronounced, how much remedial work needs to be done, etc.). Instead, the focus should be on what has been acquired (let's see how many things we can say, how much we can understand, etc.). This would be invaluable encouragement for everybody and would promote new learning.

If we consider primary learners, we can't help observing the extent to which all of these factors may influence the outcome of the learning experience itself. As we know, children seldom perceive the practical usefulness of learning a foreign language; while certain second-language learners are somehow driven to the acquisition of the new language, other young learners may appear to have only their parents' pressure as the original source of their motivation. And yet, a short visit to a classroom may show that this is not quite the case; most frequently, the main source of motivation is to be found in the very activities that take place among the children. We normally find ourselves dealing with games, which are fun and have a purpose in themselves, but we also use songs and rhymes, practical activities such as drawing and colouring, or even play-acting¹. All these activities focus on the learners, their specific interests and their requirements. Besides, these activities appeal to different learning styles, being based on different strategies. They are varied, allowing for connections between different subjects, and between the foreign language and whatever knowledge the child has already acquired. In this way activities typical of certain subjects (such as problem-solving, singing or drawing) are extended to the foreign language as well, thus leading the child to realize that the foreign language is not an isolated episode of the week's activities, but links itself to what is already familiar, so it is easier to acquire whatever is 'new'.

Ideally, the materials used in the classroom ought to consider all these facets of different learning strategies and cater for situations in which teaching techniques need to be as varied as possible without being confusing. The L2 materials provided ought to capture the children's interest as well as be consistent, so that they are easy to use. In fact, they should be designed in such a way as to be comprehensible for the learners and able to guide them through the various phases of the teaching unit. Moreover, children should also be able to use some of these materials without any specific guidance: board-games, for instance, should be played without any difficulty even when the teacher is not present – once the rules are clear, the children should be able to play at any time, not only at school, but also at home, thus ensuring constant practice. Besides, games may be given names in which alliteration and assonance may help the acquisition of correct pronunciation without specific phonological practice. It is also worth remembering that games generally have a very important cultural relevance: some games are much more popular in one country than in another, others are virtually unknown in a particular country, and certain games are international. The same applies to rhymes, songs, and even conventional non-linguistic behaviour, as in the case of ritualized gestures that accompany the chanting of rhymes to show whose turn it is or who is 'it'.

1. Testing procedures at primary level

If we agree that learning can be fun, then we should not allow tests to spoil everything. But the only way to do this is to make sure that the phase of testing and evaluation is as consistent as possible with the previous stages of the teaching unit: there need not be (in fact, there should not be) a clear-cut boundary between tests and all other activities, and games can bridge this gap with positive consequences both on learners' motivation and on learners' performance. However, it is only recently that materials writers seem to have become aware of this concept: text-books have only recently begun to introduce testing procedures among the suggestions for the various teaching units, although it was always crucial that teachers knew ways in which the acquisition of new content could be checked which were consistent with what had been done up to then. In addition, it was also important that evaluation grids were introduced, so that the reliability of the tests could be increased (see Dossena, 1996).

When we focus on testing procedures, we see that both traditional and more innovative tasks are suggested, so that a variety of techniques may be employed to suit different needs at different levels of competence. A brief inventory of these tasks may indeed provide valuable insights into the kind of connections that may be set up with the rest of a standard teaching unit, through the similarity of activities². Multiple-choice, true-false, matching, colouring, sequencing, completing and describing pictures are activities through which the acquisition of vocabulary, listening and reading comprehension may be improved and assessed. As regards production, cloze tests (with cues provided by pictures, diagrams, etc.), parallel letters, and guided descriptions are typical written exercises, while oral production may be encouraged through the use of pictures (both photographs and drawings), sounds, and even games, which are favoured choices at the lower levels.

2. Considering games as acceptable and reliable tests

Games may prove very popular and very valuable as tests, especially in monolingual classes (see Coonan, 1987 and Dossena, 1995 & 1996). Whether they are played in pairs or in teams, in the classroom, in the gym or outdoors, based on the use of cards as prompts, or on practical activities, they are always welcome. It may be useful to analyze some examples in greater detail³.

The SSSsmiling SSSsnake

This is a board game with penalties, prizes (extra turns) and card symbols. When the player lands on a card symbol, he picks a card and says what it suggests (an item of vocabulary or a sentence). If he is right, he may go on; otherwise, he misses a turn. This game may also be played in teams: for instance, a child from one team asks a child from the other team a question, and if the exchange is correct, the team scores a point.

Touch and guess

Various objects are placed in a box or covered with a piece of cloth. Each player should feel an object and say what it is.

Whose shoe?

Like the previous game, this is useful to test vocabulary acquisition. One player leaves the room for two minutes, while all the other players put various objects on a desk. When the first player returns, he or she must say to whom the various objects belong.

Treasure island

A treasure hunt need not be too competitive; instead, the various teams may be given two or three clues each, so that members of each team need to work together to find the pirates' treasure. As a matter of fact, this, like other co-operation games, may be highly formative, since it may teach the children to work with one another towards a common goal.

Even when games are used as tests with groups, the teacher may set up a personalized form of assessment. We should remember that games may involve complex skills, so everybody can perform according to their actual capabilities. Besides, since the focus is constantly on formative evaluation, by emphasizing positive aspects ('what the learner CAN do'), the learner's self-confidence and trust is enhanced. Finally, the active role that the children are allotted in a communicative approach is certainly very prominent in games and this, together with the other features that have been outlined, certainly contributes to the development of a very interesting form of assessment, the contents of which are easily made acceptable to the learners and whose structure is familiar to them. This form of assessment can be timed in a very flexible way, according to the actual needs of the learners, which allows a group to become aware of the quality of its own performance and helps learners to become more responsible for their own learning, an aim that goes far beyond linguistic skills alone.

Back on a linguistic level, we should consider that, when learners play games, everybody should speak the target language, so there is a real need to use it communicatively, no matter what the language of the interlocutor may be. If this is taken to be the principal rule of the game, the children will listen to one another more carefully and speak more freely, since involvement in the game lowers any level of anxiety that may otherwise arise from their awareness of being tested, and thus the test becomes more reliable. In addition, the context of the game sets up a situation of peer assessment: given that it is so important to be fair and 'stick to the rules', the players become both players and referees, i.e. both testees and testers.

3. A time to practise and a time to test?

The ease of use and high acceptability of games may cause the boundary between practice and assessment activities to become blurred, which may be a welcome result. If learners just use the language as spontaneously as possible, forgetting that they are being tested, their production can only get closer to what is actually expected in natural discourse. The counter-argument to this is that the intrinsic interest in the game may cause the children to be so involved that their linguistic performance becomes less accurate, but an increase in motivation to use the foreign language may be valued as a positive result in itself.

However, a word of caution should be given to the teacher: they need to pay specific attention to the formation of groups, pairs, or teams, so that everybody gets equal opportunities to participate (and therefore be tested!), otherwise some children may get fewer opportunities to speak if they are in the same team as others whose linguistic competence and/or whose willingness to communicate is greater. A certain balance in mixed-ability groups is also crucial. Rather than interference on the part of the adult, there ought to be a kind of guidance that also favours the children's personal growth through socialisation and the acceptance of others.

From what we have been saying, it is clear that games are very useful in improving fluency and awareness of appropriacy to context, topic and interlocutor, but this raises the question of error correction. Since fluency and appropriacy seem to be the main targets, error correction ought to be avoided till the end of the task; otherwise the teacher's comments might influence the learner's subsequent performance, either by improving it through the suggestions given or inhibiting it by causing fear of making more mistakes. Accuracy should be encouraged through other forms of practice and assessment, which allow closer monitoring of the learners' performance and which may actually take this as their main focus. However, even in this case, we find that playfulness may be of great help: some games do require extreme accuracy, so we may adapt them to our linguistic aims while safeguarding the psychological and methodological principles that are outlined in the previous paragraphs. For instance, rhymes that should be repeated without forgetting anything or problem-solving activities, in which all the clues need to be considered carefully, provide contexts in which the various players perform both freely and as accurately as possible.

As can be seen, different types of activities may be used alternatively, so that both fluency and accuracy, meaningful practice and careful self-monitoring may be the focus of the learning process in a balanced structure of methodological principles. In this framework, the two questions that were posed at the beginning of this paper (when and how are primary learners to be tested?) somehow prove to be more closely connected than we might expect, since the similarity between practice and testing activities may provide the basis for constant assessment of the learners' progress.

Notes

¹ A very clear overview of activities normally used with young learners is provided in Gotti (1986); numerous practical examples may also be found in the video package *English for Beginners* (Allan et al., 1996).

² On the methodological relationship between practice and testing tasks, see Dossena (1990) and Dossena (1992).

³ The games are taken from Benedetti, P. & Dossena, M. *Bubbles* (Teacher's Book), Bergamo, Juvenilia (1989), and Benedetti, P. & Dossena, M. *Sparkling Bubbles* (Teacher's Book), Milano, Juvenilia (1995).

References

- Allan, D. et al. (1996). *English for Beginners*. Dillingen, Akademie für Lehrerfortbildung, *Akademiebericht Nr. 284*; Institut für Schulpädagogik und Grundschuldidaktik - Unterrichtsmitschau - Universität München.
- Coonan, C. M. (1987). 'Il gioco nel testing, ii testing come gioco'. In Balboni, P. e Gotti, M. (eds.), *Glottodidattica: aspetti e prospettive*. Bergamo: Juvenilia, pp. 156-164.
- Dossena, M. (1990). 'Dai codice orale alla scrittura: gradualità ed integrazione nel curriculum della seconda lingua'. In *La Vita Scolastica*, anno XLIV, 16 marzo 1990, n. 13, pp. 9-11.
- Dossena, M. (1992). 'Dialogo, drammatizzazione e animazione nell'insegnamento delle lingue alla scuola elementare', in *Scuola e Lingue Moderne*, anno XXX, n. 1, febbraio 1992, pp.12 -15.
- Dossena, M. (1995). 'Using games in testing activities: some experiences in Italian primary schools', in Allan, D. (ed.), *Entry Points: Papers from a Symposium of the Research, Testing and Young Learners SIGs*, IATEFL, Cambridge, pp. 29-33.
- Dossena, M. (1996). 'Testing oral production at primary level: what means for what ends?', *IATEFL Testing SIG Newsletter*, April 1996, pp. 3-9.
- Gotti, M. (1986). *Insegnare le lingue straniere nella scuola elementare*. Bologna: Zanichelli.