Using language tests for upgrading knowledge: The phenomenon, source and consequences
Elana Shohamy

Exit-tests: Is there an alternative?
Vivien Berry and Jo Lewkowicz

Conflicting perspectives on the role of test preparation in relation to learning
Tom Lumley and Bernadette Stoneman

Investigating the views of teachers on assessment of English language learning in the Singapore education system
Christine Parimala Pelly and Desmond Allison

English language standards for schools in Australia and China: Finding the ‘third place’
Penny McKay and Rebecca Ferguson

Establishing writing benchmarks for primary and secondary English language teachers in Hong Kong
Peter Falvey and David Coniam

Testing oral English on a mass scale: Is it feasible? - The oral component of the MET in China
Li Xiajou and Wang Li

The influence of subject knowledge and second language proficiency on the reading comprehension of scientific and technical discourse
Tim Chung and Vivien Berry

Review

Language Testing and Evaluation by Desmond Allison
Reviewed by Jo Lewkowicz

Conference Reports

Eva Poon Scott
The Third International Conference on English Language Testing in Asia

Liz Hamp-Lyons and Tom Lumley
The Asian Language Assessment Research Forum (ALARF)

Abstracts

Using language tests for upgrading knowledge: The phenomenon, source and consequences

Elana Shohamy
Tel Aviv University

Abstract
This paper is divided into two sections. The first part looks at the way in which many high stakes tests have been introduced for reasons of political expediency rather than educational benefit. It examines the consequences of using tests in this way and suggests that when tests are used as disciplinary tools their introduction leads to a narrowing of the curriculum rather than an improvement in learning. The second part of the paper examines the introduction in Hong Kong of the Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers in light of the earlier discussion and suggests that a number of questions need to be addressed if the assessment is not to have the reverse effect to that intended by the Education Department.
Exit-tests: Is there an alternative?

Vivien Berry and Jo Lewkowicz
The University of Hong Kong

Abstract
This paper examines the major issues relating to the introduction of an assessment of English language proficiency for students prior to graduation from tertiary education. It looks at the on-going debate relating to the introduction of an exit language test and considers possible alternatives to formal standardized tests for reporting on language proficiency. It then describes a small-scale pilot study, carried out at the University of Hong Kong, which set out to discover students’ views on the introduction of such an exit mechanism. The paper goes on to caution against introducing any mechanism of assessment without full consultation with the primary stakeholders of the test, that is, the students and employers who are eager to see language standards of graduating students improved. It concludes by suggesting how a valid and reliable reporting mechanism can be developed for students in Hong Kong, drawing on the current work being done on the assessment of Core Competencies and on the European Portfolio Project.

Conflicting perspectives on the role of test preparation in relation to learning

Tom Lumley and Bernadette Stoneman
Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Abstract
This paper reports on the development of a Learning Package for a newly introduced test in Hong Kong, the Graduating Students’ Language Proficiency Assessment (GSLPA)-English. This Learning Package which was designed for self-access use or for classroom teaching, aims to go beyond merely providing practice materials in the form of samples of test tasks. Instead it is intended to encourage students to take some level of responsibility for their learning, and view the test not merely as a barrier to be passed but as an opportunity to improve their proficiency in English. This paper examines reactions of students and teachers to the Learning Package during the piloting of the materials. Preliminary feedback suggests that while teachers are both supportive of the package and consider that the materials developed have excellent potential for use as teaching materials, students have a more complex set of reactions. These seem to be related partly to their level of English proficiency (cf. Lewkowicz, 2000), but have clear messages about their expectations of test preparation materials, as well as their attitudes to learning.

Investigating the views of teachers on assessment of English language learning in the Singapore education system

Christine Parimala Pelly and Desmond Allison
National University of Singapore

Abstract
This study sets out to explore and characterise an important insider perspective, that of primary school teachers, on assessment in English language in Singapore and the impact of assessment on their experiences of teaching. A review of related literature focuses on the importance of research into teachers’ views on curriculum and assessment issues, in addition to – and in the light of – their own classroom experiences. The present exploratory study elicits teachers’ views on assessment in the form of questionnaire responses (n=58) and semi-structured in-depth interviews with four participants. Findings indicate, at least typically for this sample, that teachers are strongly aware of the prevailing examination culture; that they are not against formal tests in principle, but see the need to supplement them with other kinds of assessment; and that they are markedly divided and uncertain in their views of the efficacy of current tests. Besides pointing to the need for further research, the discussion brings out implications for teacher education, the role of assessment in the school and the wider culture, and participant involvement in initiatives for educational change.
English language standards for schools in Australia and China: Finding the ‘third place’

Penny McKay and Rebecca Ferguson
Queensland University of Technology

Abstract
The authors explore the possibilities for the application of principles that informed the construction of a set of ESL (English as a Second Language) standards for schools in Australia to the development of English Language standards for an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context. The specific EFL context under consideration is mainland China. Drawing on Kramsch’s (1993) notion of the ‘third place’, and recognising the presence of cultural values and perspectives in all educational materials, the authors offer principles gained from experience in the construction of the NLLIA (National Languages and Literacy Institute in Australia) ESL Bandscales, for consideration in the development of EFL standards for the Chinese context. They recognise the need for professionals from mainland China to take up the principles, rather than the Australian materials, to develop EFL standards for the Chinese educational and cultural context.

Establishing writing benchmarks for primary and secondary English language teachers in Hong Kong

Peter Falvey and David Coniam
The University of Hong Kong and The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Abstract
Concerns relating to the English language proficiency of teachers in Hong Kong, expressed in Education Commission Report Number 6 (ECR6, 1995), provided the impetus for what has become commonly known as the Benchmarks Test.¹ Within the context of the overall development of a range of assessment instruments for setting standards (language benchmarks) for primary and secondary teachers in Hong Kong, this paper first describes the origins of the project. It then goes on to look at the four and a half year process of piloting, moderating, ratifying and implementing the test of writing skills for English language teachers.

Testing oral English on a mass scale: Is it feasible? - The oral component of the MET in China

Li Xiajou and Wang Li
Guangzhou Foreign Languages University

Abstract
The MET is the English test required nationwide for enrolment to universities in China. This paper reports on the development of the MET oral subtest (METOS). The work on the METOS was subject to many constraints, including the huge size of the candidature and the rigid limitations on human and time resources, which are particularly acute in China. Having undergone repeated piloting and moderation, the METOS format has attained validity on the strength of its being a message-based test of the interactive and contextualised use of spoken English. It has developed a number of unique features, such as a balance between control and spontaneity in the output, a union of the analytical and the holistic approach in the rating, and a combination of the single-examiner method in the testing and the double-marking method in the scoring. It is argued that the METOS is not just a test that suits the conditions and meets the needs of China. In the field of language testing it can claim to be a successful innovation in mass-scale oral testing.
The influence of subject knowledge and second language proficiency on the reading comprehension of scientific and technical discourse

Tim Chung and Vivien Berry
Vocational Training Council and The University of Hong Kong

Abstract
The effect of background knowledge and second language proficiency were examined in relation to the comprehension of two sets of specific reading materials. One came from an IELTS reading module related to science and technology; the other was a highly specific popular science text. Three groups of Hong Kong sixth-form students studying in different academic streams participated in the study. Correlation and multiple regression analyses showed that both language proficiency and background knowledge predicted reading comprehension, with their relative importance depending on subject specificity of the reading materials and nature of the tests. Students with low linguistic proficiency were found to be unable or less able to use their background knowledge for reading comprehension.
Volume 5, Number 2, December, 2000

Articles

A survey of learner training for junior secondary school students of English in Hong Kong
David Gardner and Jacky Hon Ming Yuen

An examination of teacher-student and student-student interaction in an EFL classroom
Ma Rong

An empirical study of the use of the mother tongue in the L2 reading class
Jinlan Tang

A survey of language use in the professional workplace in Hong Kong
Christopher Green and Stephen Evans

ELT curriculum design in Hong Kong workplaces -- interdisciplinary implications for ESP teacher education
Jane Lockwood

Abstracts

A survey of learner training for junior secondary school students of English in Hong Kong
David Gardner and Jacky Hon Ming Yuen
The University of Hong Kong and Pooi To Middle School

Abstract
This paper reports the findings of an investigation of the ways 60 teachers of English in Hong Kong public secondary schools perceive and implement learner training. Results indicate that even though these teachers have generally positive attitudes towards learner training they do not always help their students develop learning strategies in the classroom. This is largely because either they find there is inadequate classroom time available to deliver strategy instruction, or because they tend to follow rigidly the set textbooks which contain no learner training. This paper recommends the need for incorporating learner training into the existing syllabus, the inclusion of learning skills in public examinations, and the formation of a network of teachers to share learner training materials and knowledge.

An examination of teacher-student and student-student interaction in an EFL classroom
Ma Rong
The University of Leicester, U.K.

Abstract
The current trend in EFL is towards a more informal approach to teaching in order to allow for a higher proportion of what Widdowson (1978) termed ‘natural language use’ in the classroom. In defining the trend, Sinclair and Brazil (1982) stated that the exploitation of the classroom as a flexible arena for talk of all kinds was likely to be an increasing concern and that it started with an understanding of the nature of classroom interaction. The present study examined the dynamics of classroom interaction through an analysis of interactive patterns which emerged during an English conversation class. It explored the potentials and constraints of the identified patterns.

An empirical study of the use of the mother tongue in the L2 reading class
Jinlan Tang
Beijing Foreign Studies University

Abstract
In this article, the author argues that students’ mother tongue should be allowed in the L2 language classroom, sometimes and for certain purposes. To support her assumption, the author conducted an empirical study within the context of tertiary level English reading classes in China to see whether the students’ mother tongue is used and the purposes for using it, and to discover the attitudes of both teachers
and students toward its use. The results indicate that the mother tongue is indeed employed by the majority of teachers in the study and it is used mainly for pedagogical purposes: language work and classroom management. The research also reveals that both the teachers and the students respond positively toward some use of the mother tongue in their English classrooms.

A survey of language use in the professional workplace in Hong Kong

**Christopher Green and Stephen Evans**  
*Hong Kong Polytechnic University*

**Abstract**  
The data reported here represent the initial stage in a large-scale, multi-method survey of the current use of Chinese (Cantonese and standard written Chinese) and English in the professional workplace in Hong Kong. The survey involving 1,475 respondents drawn from five key occupational sectors, was motivated by the paucity of large-scale, macro-level research into the languages of workplace communication in Hong Kong. Previous studies have tended to focus on single professions, or are small-scale in nature. The baseline data presented here offer demographic information on the respondents and discusses descriptive statistical data derived from the questionnaire survey. Reference is also made to focus group feedback to help interpret the quantitative data. Results indicate that reading and writing in English are demanded frequently in the professional Hong Kong workplace, but that English appears to play a less important role in spoken workplace communication; predictably, in informal situations but also in more formal ones, such as negotiating on the telephone and participating in job interviews in which Cantonese is as likely to be used as English.

ELT curriculum design in Hong Kong workplaces -- interdisciplinary implications for ESP teacher education

**Jane Lockwood**  
*Hong Kong Polytechnic University*

**Abstract**  
With the launch of the Workplace English Campaign by the Hong Kong Government in early 2000, there has been particular focus on the English language needs of employees in Hong Kong workplaces. Whilst millions of dollars are being spent on English language training, what evidence is there that the training has any kind of impact? This paper explores the curriculum issues in design and evaluation of on-site and tailor-made workplace English language training programs and considers some of the implications of this study for English for Special Purposes teacher education.