Verifying criteria for standard setting: the Can Do Project (UK)

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The BALEAP CAN DO PROJECT

- Initiated in 2006

- Carried out by language specialists from the universities of **Glasgow, Manchester, Nottingham Trent & Reading**

- Funded by **BALEAP**

- Ongoing

Immediate aims (in 2006)

- Re-evaluation of **criteria and descriptors** for assessing international students entering pre-sessional programmes prior to joining academic courses in HE

- Compilation of a set of benchmark statements describing relevant **academic language and study skill** competencies

Longer term aims (from 2006)

- Informing:

    – Curriculum and syllabus design and specifications

    – Materials design and development

    – The development of formative and summative assessment task specifications

Context

- **Intuitively** developed assessment scales
- Possible **lack of standardisation** of:
  - assessment measures
  - assessment procedures
- Increasing number of **newly designed** UG and PG courses
- Corresponding **change of demands** on students:
  - group work
  - development of transferable skills
  - greater emphasis on critical thinking

Data collection and analysis

- Review of the literature

- Data collection through semi-structured interviews **across disciplines** at certain universities (economics, law, food science, Euro-Asian studies, engineering, applied linguistics, international management etc.)

- Comparison of BALEAP Can Do statements with '*A core inventory for General English'* (North, Ortega & Sheehan 2010) & CRELLA Can Do project (Green) in conjunction with ' *English Profile: Introducing the CEFR for English*' (Salamoura & Saville 2011)

Database of statements

- largely completed by 2013

- based on '*areas of competency [**needed**] within UK higher education at postgraduate level*'

- the academic context of these statements relates to:
  - *academic practices, values & conventions*
  - *cognitive & metacognitive strategies required to cope with courses in this environment*

The collected data

- List of **Can't do** rather than **Can do** statements
  - express themselves succinctly in writing
  - be actively engaged in group discussions
  - take effective notes
  - think or express ideas critically
  - read extensively or study effectively in English
  - avoid plagiarism
- + what international students 'can [often] do' which local students may not be able to do e.g. give presentations; lead seminars [benefits of pre-sessional experience]

Writing: specific competencies

- Area of competency: **approaching** academic tasks

  - *identify whether a **critical or analytical response** is required rather than a descriptive response* [**specific competency**]

  - *by deconstructing essay titles & producing list of response types required (e.g. descriptive, discursive, evaluative ....* [**sample task** to support competency development]

Writing: specific competencies

- Area of competency: **completing** academic tasks

  - *incorporate relevant literature to **create and support argument** [**specific competency**]*

  - *by identifying (1) evidence, comment on evidence, and viewpoint; (2) language used for comment, argumentation and cohesion in sample texts [**sample task** to support competency development]*

Writing: specific competencies

- Area of competency: **dissertation or project** writing

  - *being self critical by evaluating own work in relation to task requirements* [**specific competency**]

  - *by completing a reflective evaluation questionnaire or log recording self-evaluation of performance in tasks e.g. a study project*[**sample task** to support competency development]

Writing: specific competencies

- *Other areas of competency on the database are:*

  - **general** *e.g. understanding complexity & expressing this in writing*

  - **language specific** *e.g. demonstrating linguistic automaticity*

  - **genre specific** *e.g. referencing by using an appropriate system (APA, numeric, etc.)*

Writing: discipline related skills

- related to **recognising and exploring** students' disciplines and how they **influence** the way knowledge is expanded and communicated
  - *by using **discipline terminology accurately** with tasks which explore products & types of writing e.g. lab reports [and assessing student performance on such tasks]*

  - *By using **subject-related texts** for reading [into writing] assessment and/or placing students in dedicated discipline specific groups*

  - *By introducing & assessing **relevant language** related to the above e.g. passivisation and 'cautious' language*

Speaking, listening & reading competencies [sample tasks]

- Assessment of the effectiveness of individual and group presentations (including research & preparation, presentation techniques, oral delivery, language skills...)

- Students match PowerPoint headings with sections of a recorded lecture in their subject area

- Students given a range of texts of varying relevance to rank for relevance followed by reading into writing task justifying their choice

The Can Do Project & Portfolios

- Relevant to students with 'combined offers'

- Statements were utilised via **appropriate tasks** taken from the pre-sessional course books for all 4 skills [*up to 20 statements per language skill*]

- Statements need to be applied **judicially and selectively** i.e. the more teachers have to work with the more unwieldy the system can be i.e. difficulty of cramming too much into programmes of limited duration

The Can Do framework for syllabus design and assessment

- The BALEAP project has developed through a pragmatic approach carried out **by EAP practitioners**

- **'New' study needs and areas for assessment**, possibly not covered on many pre-sessional courses, have been identified

- Attempts made to use the framework as a **continuous assessment measure** have identified the **need for ongoing development**

References

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- Taylor, L & Geranpayeh, A. (2011). Assessing listening for academic purposes: defining and operationalising the test construct. JEAP (10:89-101)

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Thank you