Developing Assessment Literacy of English Teachers: A Workshop

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Introduction

In India, there has been little effort to develop separate and focused pre- and in-service training programmes for English teachers in schools. As a result, a large percentage of these teachers lack the skills, abilities and knowledge, etc., required for effective teaching of language skills. Assessment being one of the most important areas of teaching also gets ignored in the process. But this neglect may prove really costly in an educational scenario which is already considered to be examination-driven. So what is urgently required is professional training for in-service teachers, and a simultaneous effort to push for similar programmes to be part of in-service teacher education programmes across the country.

In light of the above background, this paper describes a workshop that was held in June 2012, with a group of eighteen English teachers from All Saints High School, Hyderabad. This workshop helps practising English teachers to identify the skills that are developed in their teaching, and to assess them. The main objective of the workshop was to sensitize the teachers around translating assessment objectives to sound assessment tasks. A few changes have been made to the workshop content presented in this paper so that it becomes applicable to a larger population. However, it is believed that the present form can be further tailored to suit the needs of teachers practicing in other specific English as Second Language (ESL) situations.

Pre-Workshop Preparations

Thorough and meticulous planning should be done before the actual workshop. This should include the following (in order):

1. Collecting information about the institution/s in which the participants work	How the institution management wants its teachers to work, whether it wants them to grow professionally, and whether some professional development programmes are provided to the teachers by the institution.
2. Collecting basic information about the participants	This includes qualification, teaching experience, proficiency in English, knowledge about assessment, current teaching and assessment responsibilities assigned by the institution.

After collecting this information, the trainer, in consultation with the institution management, should decide on the duration of the workshop. Ideally, the workshop should last four-six hours excluding breaks which should be taken at regular intervals. The number of participants should not be more than 30.

The next step involves preparing the hand-outs, worksheets and feedback forms, and gathering a variety of texts to be used during the workshop. The first hand-out should enunciate the objectives and schedule of the workshop. A sample of the hand-out has been given below:

Hand-out I

Objectives of the Workshop:

1. Familiarizing the participants with the objectives of teaching and assessment
2. Helping participants design sound assessment tasks that assess only target skills
3. Promoting mutual cooperation and group work among participants so that they help one another design assessments

Workshop Schedule:

Introduction (15 minutes): The trainer and the participants get introduced to each other

Session 1 (45 minutes): Finding teaching objectives from lessons

Session 2 (30 minutes): Teaching to testing

Session 3 (30 minutes): Deciding the skill/s and sub-skill/s to be assessed

Session 4 (2 hours): Designing tasks for testing what has been taught

Session 5 (15 minutes): Revisiting the workshop content

Session 6 (15 minutes): Feedback on the workshop

A copy of this hand-out should be provided to each participant just before the commencement of the workshop.

The Workshop

Session 1

The trainer divides the participants into groups of three or four. Each group is provided with a lesson from a well-designed English textbook used at the level taught by the participants. No two lessons should be the same. Also, the trainer should ensure that most of the language skills are covered in the lessons. The groups are asked to look at the activities and tasks provided in their respective lessons and state the objective/s of each activity and task. They should be allowed fifteen minutes to complete this. After this, each group should be asked to present their tasks and objectives to the class, and other groups should be asked to comment on the accuracy of the group's findings. Finally, the trainer gives his comments and feedback on the findings.

Session 2

The participants are randomly divided into groups of three or four. The lessons from the English textbook used in the first session are redistributed among the groups. Each group is asked to state the skills they will assess, and how they will assess them if they were to teach that lesson. The groups are given fifteen minutes for discussion with their group-mates before they present. After each presentation, the other groups give feedback on that group's proposal. The trainer monitors and guides the discussion.

Session 3

The third session is an extension of the second session. The trainer once again divides the participants into groups of three to four. He/she

gives each group two hand-outs: one containing a set of tasks and the other, a list of skills and sub-skills. He then asks each group to match the tasks with the skills and sub-skills they are assessing. The groups are given fifteen minutes to do this. Each group is then asked to talk about the tasks and their choice of skills and sub-skills. Though the trainer allows the other groups to make suggestions, he/she ensures that each group gets the correct answers and proper feedback.

Session 4

The trainer divides the participants into small groups and gives a list of skills and sub-skills to each group. The groups are given five minutes to go through this list. A large variety of articles, pictures, stories, poems, etc., are kept in different folders on a table in front of the participants. The groups are asked to choose relevant texts from these folders to design tasks for assessing the given set of skills and sub-skills. The groups are given ninety minutes to design the assessment tasks. The trainer helps the groups if they need his/her help. At the end of ninety minutes, each group presents its tasks before the other groups who give their feedback. The trainer also gives his/her feedback, which includes suggestions if required, for improving the tasks.

Session 5

The trainer asks the learners to talk about what they have learnt in the workshop and in the process, enables them to quickly revisit the workshop content and then winds up the workshop.

Session 6

Feedback on the workshop is collected from all the participants using a feedback form. The participants are requested to give suggestions, if any, for further improving the workshop. The trainer may analyse these forms and make necessary changes to the programme if required.

Conclusion

Language assessment is a vast field. The workshop described in this paper is a small attempt at addressing the assessment training needs of English teachers. Moreover, the programme confines itself to a small area of assessment. Other areas can also be addressed in similar or different ways. More efforts in this direction will benefit the field of English Language Education in India. In fact, such workshops are needed not just for English but for all the other languages being taught in the school.

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