

IAEA sub theme: Evaluating the quality of assessment

A consideration of assessment validity in relation to classroom practice

High stakes assessment has the potential to promote misdirected effort by both test takers and their teachers. Teachers may spend a significant amount of time working through past test material to prepare their students for assessments.

Test focussed teaching can result in both meaningful gains in test scores, indicating a greater grasp of the subject content, and undesirable gains resulting from coaching in common question styles without an increase in content understanding. Any increase in test scores achieved through coaching without a sound understanding of the subject content presents a threat to the validity of the assessment.

If it is accepted that 'teaching to the test' is inevitable in a high stakes setting then it is important that we investigate the extent to which different item styles are susceptible to superficial coaching strategies as well as to consider the test context.

This paper looks at the validity of questions in relation to how they are used in the classroom for test preparation. The paper will explore the validity theory and classroom practice pertinent to test focussed teaching and will report on the development of a multi-item scale which aims to identify the extent to which a given question encourages the unproductive aspects of 'teaching to the test'.