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Research Matters : 10

A CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT PUBLICATION

Foreword

While the articles in this edition of *Research Matters* again engage with highly analytic approaches to the understanding of the behaviour of specific assessments, a key issue shines from two pieces (see Beth Black's article and the one by Irenka Suto and Stuart Shaw). Much is made in national comment here – and international comparative work across the globe – about the tendency to narrow teaching and learning by focussing on 'that which is easy to assess'. I think that there are healthy contra-indications. In the United States, there continues to be considerable growth and interest in Advanced Placement qualifications – which are highly curriculum-based examinations resembling A levels – punching a hole in the common myth that the multiple-choice SAT reigns supreme in US HE entry. The extraordinary interest in England in Critical Thinking (see Black) and globally in CIE's 'Independent Research Report' (see Suto and Shaw) suggests that educationally-valuable assessments which are nonetheless highly demanding in terms of assessment administration and operation are not universally in decline – and are in fact alive and well. From this we can take a measure of comfort that – in some domains at least – educational value continues to be placed ahead of administrative convenience and drift towards more conservative, 'safe' assessment. Long may this continue.

Tim Oates *Group Director, Assessment Research and Development*

Editorial

This issue covers a wide range of themes including e-assessment, Critical Thinking, quality assurance and methods for studying comparability in vocational contexts. The variety illustrates the depth and breadth of research interests currently under investigation in relation to processes, technological developments and the assessment of new qualifications.

The first two articles concentrate on Critical Thinking. Beth Black reports on the introduction of AS level Critical Thinking for which the candidature has risen dramatically while grades have remained relatively low. This is followed by an article by Joe Chislett, a senior examiner in Critical Thinking. He provides an interesting account of a seminar organised by Cambridge Assessment on the role and value of Critical Thinking.

Suto and Shaw then consider the challenges of marking research reports written by students preparing for university. There are a number of challenges which arise when assessment schemes are designed to reward generic research skills rather than particular subject knowledge. Johnson and Shaw investigate the impact of annotations on teachers and candidates. Their research considers the effects of comments that examiners make on scripts, given that for the past few years centres and candidates have been able to request to see their examination scripts once they have been marked.

Three articles focus on quality assurance in assessment. Raikes, Fidler and Gill report on an experimental standardisation study and ask whether face to face standardisation affects marking accuracy; whether effects vary according to question type and/or the experience of the examiners; and to what extent examiners carry forward standardisation on one set of questions to a similar set of questions. Their work poses some interesting questions for awarding bodies about how they organise their procedures. The second article is a literature review on item level marker agreement. Curcin concentrates mainly on the inter-marker agreement aspect of marking reliability in the context of on-screen marking. She discusses the implications for marking monitoring research and practice in this very topical and challenging area. In the second literature review Matt Haigh examines the evidence around the claims made for the shift towards computer-based assessment (CBA) in educational settings. He highlights some important considerations for researchers undertaking empirical work on CBA in the future.

The final two articles outline the development of new research methods. Greatorex and Rushton investigate the use of a scale of cognitive demands, known as CRAS, which was developed using academic qualifications and ask whether it is suitable for use in comparability studies involving vocational qualifications. In their work on validity Shaw and Crisp address the difficulties of providing validity evidence to support the claims made about assessments. Their research aims to design a set of methods for validation that can be used routinely as part of an ongoing validation programme.

Sylvia Green *Director of Research*