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Aspects of Writing: challenges and benefits of longitudinal research

Conference Paper Abstract

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Abstract

Aspects of Writing is a cross-sectional study, investigating features of candidates' written English as seen in examination scripts. Script samples have been amassed from 1980, 1993, 1994, 2004, 2007 and 2014 and major studies completed on three occasions over two decades, the most recent of which was completed between 2014 and 2016 and reported just under a year ago (Massey and Elliott, 1996; Massey, Elliott and Johnson, 2005; Elliott et.al. 2016).

This paper focuses upon four key questions surrounding the methodology and the long-term viability of this type of research.

- Why, and to whom, is research over time based upon evidence from examination scripts valuable?
- What are the expected, and the unexpected, hazards of longitudinal research using examination scripts?
- How can a consistent, robust method be ensured at each repetition?
- As researchers, what lessons have we learned from the experience?

This presentation will discuss the history of the project and explain how a one-off study has continued, and expanded, over the years. The provenance of the research method will be described and time will be taken to explore the research issues that threaten to derail longitudinal projects in general, and to consider specific concerns which have impacted upon the planning of this study in particular.

The importance of this type of work should never be underestimated. This presentation explains how we have overcome significant challenges to produce the most recent update in the *Aspects of Writing* series of studies; a study which has been of enormous interest to a wide audience.

References

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