

Johnson, M. and Greatorex, J. (2007) *Assessors' holistic judgements about borderline performances: some influencing factors*. British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, University of London Institute of Education, September.

Consistency of assessor judgment is a key concern for those charged with accrediting vocationally-related learning outcomes. This is partly because these judgments can have very real consequences for learners' future employment or further education chances.

This study investigated the cognitive strategies that underpin assessors' holistic judgments of a vocationally-related portfolio performance. Using a portfolio already identified as containing borderline qualities, quantitative data were gathered about features that six assessors attended to as they holistically evaluated the portfolio. This information was gathered through verbal protocols and supplemented with information from a Kelly's Repertory Grid (KRG) type of interview technique. This elicited assessors' perceptions about the characteristics of the assessment criteria, allowing the influence of each factor to be ranked.

A final objective was to collect qualitative data about the socio-contextual features in which the assessors' practices were situated. The study used Activity Theory to explore the relationship between the factors that potentially influence assessors' judgments. This formed the basis of a theoretical position suggesting that assessor judgments are influenced or framed within the context of their experience and differing perspectives.

The project had two major research questions:

1. Which elements of holistic descriptors do assessors attend to when making judgments about borderline portfolio evidence?
2. What issues potentially affect the consistency of judgments made by different assessors who have distinct roles and work in diverse situations such as schools and colleges?