

Research Seminars in TESOL and Language Studies

The University of Sydney TESOL Research Network

Revising achievement exams – marrying them with CEFR proficiency levels

Claudia Harsch

Universität Bremen, Germany

Date: Tuesday 17 July 2018

Time: 15.00 – 17.00 pm

Venue: Education 323, The University of Sydney

When revising exams, one often has to reconcile traditional and intuitive grading systems with demands to employ standards-based assessment approaches. Furthermore, when teachers are to be involved in the revision, we need a solid basis of assessment literacy. In my talk, I will first outline the background of our languages centre that serves four universities in Bremen. I will then detail on our project to collaboratively develop our language assessment literacy, thereby involving teachers, course coordinators and researchers. Finally, I will exemplify the exam revision process, focusing on writing, where we had to map the traditional university grading system to the CEFR proficiency levels.

Traditionally, teachers used informal non-standardised exams, and scored them in a variety of ways. Results were reported on the university's 11point scale. Teachers and students demanded that the exams be revised in order to report in how far students reached the CEFR-derived learning goals. We started in 2016 with a combination of seminars, workshops, invited lectures and group work to address all relevant areas of assessment, to train our item writer skills, and to develop exam specifications and new assessment tasks and checklists. I will report on the design of the training programme and on its evaluation, which takes place via questionnaires and interviews on a regular basis. Furthermore, I will detail on the revision of the writing exams and the development of the checklists, with a particular focus on benchmarking the exams to the CEFR.

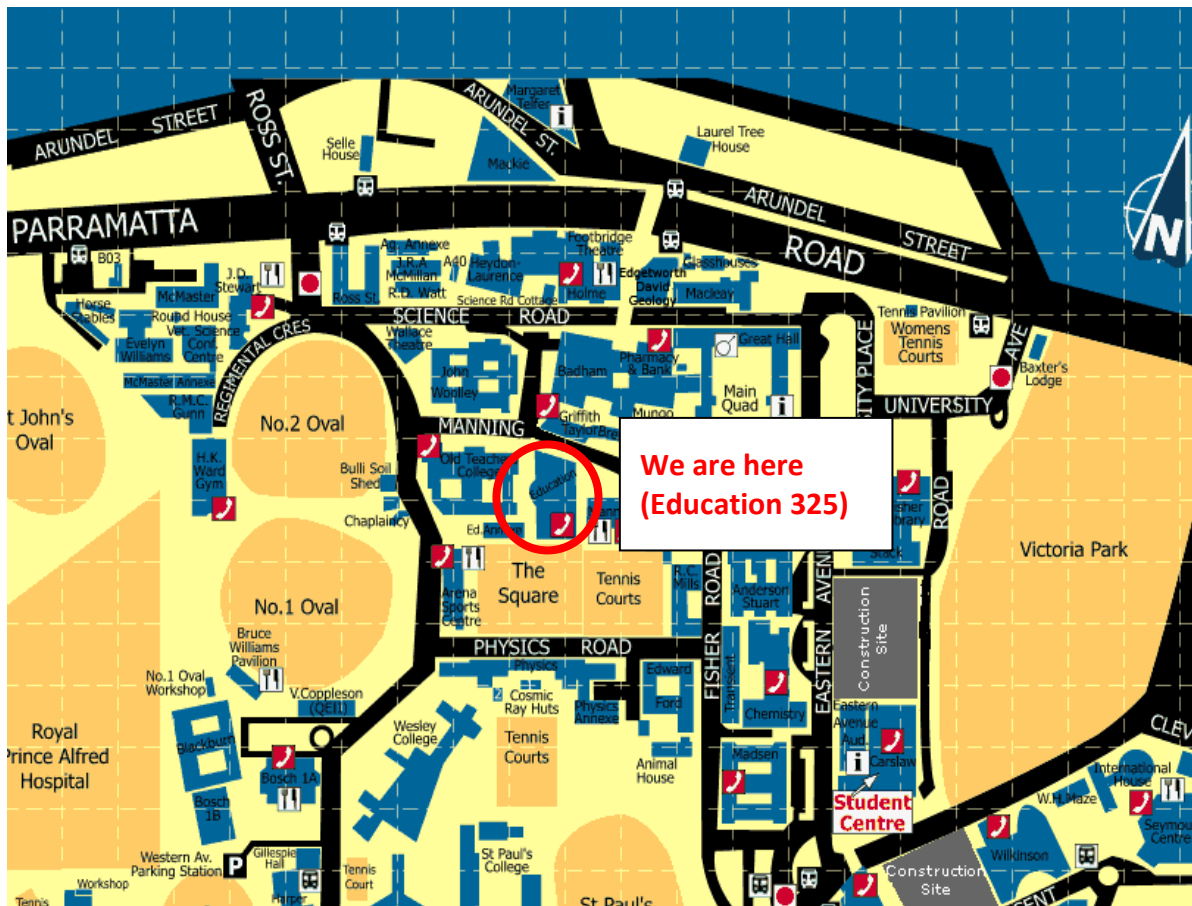
The insights we gained through our collaborative projects have implications beyond our local context. Many language course providers face the challenge to move from internal teacher-defined criteria to comparable standardised criteria that are aligned to an internationally recognised framework. In such contexts, our approach can illustrate how such a transition can be managed, and how the expertise of teachers, course organisers and researchers can be drawn upon in a synergetic endeavour.



Claudia Harsch is a professor at the University of Bremen, specialising in language learning, teaching and assessment. She is also the director of the Languages Centre of the four universities in Bremen. She has worked in Germany and in the UK, and is active in teacher training worldwide. Her research interests focus on areas such as language assessment, educational evaluation and measurement, intercultural communication, and the implementation of the CEFR. Claudia is the current president of the European Association of Language Testing and Assessment.

Enquiries: Aek Phakiti (aek.phakiti@sydney.edu.au). This is a free seminar.

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