

Cinderella's sister - fitting Activity Theory to classroom-based assessment data.

This paper describes an attempt to use Activity Theory to identify constructions of 'success' in primary and secondary languages (LOTE) classes.

The motivation for this study is a growing body of research to suggest that the teaching of languages from primary school does not necessarily make a substantial difference to attainments at secondary school level (Johnstone 1999:198; Brown, Hill and Iwashita 2000; Hill 2001; Hill, Davies, Oldfield and Watson 1997). Previous research has identified 'discontinuities', e.g., in content and approach, between primary and secondary school programs as a key factor in explaining these unsatisfactory outcomes (Hill et al 1997, Hill 2001; Kubanek-German 1998). This study will explore the issue continuity by investigating whether constructions of competence remain constant across the two school sectors.

Jacoby and McNamara suggest that, "naturally occurring "indigenous" socialization and assessment practices... can provide more direct access to what counts as communicative competence in particular contexts." (1999: 214). They define indigenous assessment as "evaluations of performance and recommendations for improvement from all participants in a given context" (Jacoby and McNamara 1999: 214). Thus, here the notion of 'success' is examined through the lens of assessment as "... accomplished by teachers and pupils through social and pedagogic interaction" (Torrance and Prior 1998: 20).

Data for the study include participant observation, classroom recordings, interviews and document analysis based on a group of students tracked from their last year of primary school (Year 6) to their first year of high school (Year 7) where they continue to study the same language (Indonesian).