

Vocabulary and reading comprehension in teacher education

Gabriella Agrusti, Valeria Damiani

It is widely recognized that vocabulary is closely tied to reading comprehension, and correlations between these two constructs, even if differently defined across studies, vary between .6 and .8. But correlation is not a causal relationship, and does not provide enough basis for a comprehensive conceptual explanation. Reversing the problem, it is still highly controversial whether specific interventions on vocabulary instruction can massively influence reading comprehension, and this particularly in adult learners, indicating that a lot remains to be investigated in the field of vocabulary knowledge transfer to other components of language proficiency. Recent studies showed that the weak link for understanding this apparent gap lies probably in the way vocabulary is assessed. This article shows the results of a two-year research project aimed at assessing future teachers' vocabulary related to school everyday life issues, focussing both on language for specific purposes and on general language. In particular, different typologies of reading comprehension tests, of vocabulary tests (receptive and productive), on paper and pencil and on computer-based administrations, were adopted and compared.

Keywords

Vocabulary, reading comprehension, teacher education, assessment, error analysis.

Precursors of Theory of Mind in children with disabilities

María Consuelo Sáiz-Manzanares, Miguel Ángel Carbonero-Martín, Valle Flores Lucas

Recent studies looking into the development of mental precursors link the acquisition of the Theory of Mind to the previous appearance of symbolic play. When performing symbolic play tasks, the development of causal reasoning skills represents a differential factor, which is essential to the subsequent acquisition of the Theory of Mind. A total of 45 children (24 boys and 21 girls), aged between 24 and 39 months (with a DQ of 58-69), diagnosed with different conditions (delayed cognitive development, delayed language development and/or Pervasive Developmental Disorder). The aim of the study is to analyse the relation between mental precursors and different disabilities. The results show that the most widely affected mental prerequisite was found to be the development of Symbolic Play, which is directly related to the development of causal reasoning. No significant differences based on the type of condition were detected. The evidence has shown that the development of mental precursors is not a uniform process. It would therefore be recommendable to offer specific training in the development of mental precursors related to the development of causal reasoning.

Keywords

Mental precursors, pre-verbal communication, Symbolic Play, socio-cognitive skills, training in premental skills.

A blending of computer-based assessment and performance-based assessment: Multimedia-Based Performance Assessment (MBPA). The introduction of a new method of assessment in Dutch Vocational Education and Training (VET)

Sebastiaan de Klerk, Theo J.H.M. Eggen, Bernard P. Veldkamp

Innovation in technology drives innovation in assessment. Since the introduction of computer-based assessment (CBA), a few decades ago, many formerly paper-and-pencil tests have transformed in a computer-based equivalent. CBAs are becoming more complex, including multimedia and simulative elements and even immersive virtual environments. In Vocational

Education and Training (VET), test developers may seize the opportunity provided by technology to create a multimedia-based equivalent of performance-based assessment (PBA), from here on defined as multimedia-based performance assessment (MBPA). MBPA in vocational education is an assessment method that incorporates multimedia (e.g. video, illustrations, graphs, virtual reality) for the purpose of simulating the work environment of the student and for creating tasks and assignments in the assessment. Furthermore, MBPA is characterized by a higher amount of interactivity between the student and the assessment than traditional computer-based tests. The focal constructs measured by MBPA are the same as are currently assessed by performance-based assessments. Compared to automated delivery of item-based tests, MBPA realizes the full power of ICT. In the present article we will therefore discuss the current status of MBPA, including examples of our own research on MBPA. We provide an argument for the use of MBPA in vocational education too.

Keywords

Assessment in vocational education and training, performance-based assessment, computer-based assessment, multimedia-based performance assessment.

Joint activities and the image grandchildren have about the grandparent-grandchild relationship: an intercultural perspective

Raquel de la Fuente Anuncibay, Jerónimo González Bernal, Josefa González Santos, Enrique Gonzalez Bernal

In this work we analyze grandparent-grandchild relationship as a support and as an educational and value system, the joint activities and the image grandchildren have about the relationship from an intercultural perspective. Samples from different cities of Central America (San Salvador, El Salvador and Guatemala City, Guatemala) have been compared with a sample of the Italian population (Fossano, Piedmont, in northern Italy). The aim of this comparison is to analyze the similarities and divergences between the different cultures which have been studied. The total sample consisted of 98 children aged 3 to 6.

The results show the strong involvement in the grandparent-grandchild relationship, which has important benefits: bonds of love without conditions, some differences in the family profile between Italian and Hispanic children,

as well as the great similarity in the kinds of activities and the image grandchildren have about the relationship.

Keywords

Grandparent-grandchildren relationship; intercultural perspective; leisure and cultural activities; grandparents' role.

Learning needs and professional problems in teachers' perceptions. A survey in state nursery and primary schools in Modena, Parma and Reggio Emilia

Luciano Cecconi, Andrea Pintus

The quality of the school system depends on the quality of the teachers' professional development. To improve the system quality professional development programs for teachers have been essentially important. This is proved to be true especially if these programs are based on knowledge of the teachers' actual needs. Therefore, we carried out a needs analysis with teachers in Modena, Parma and Reggio Emilia (Italy) and this article presents the results of this study. The study is focused on subjective needs, i.e. needs that derive from the teachers themselves. An online questionnaire has been administered to 1926 teachers in public preschools, primary schools, and first grade secondary schools. Key findings of this survey have valuable implications for curriculum design. Several needs emerged as particularly relevant for the teachers, such as special education professional development, learning how to cope with children with special needs and students with behavioral problems.

Keywords

Needs analysis, subjective needs, professional development, teachers, school system.

Technology in university teaching: an exploratory research into TPACK, proficiency, and beliefs of Education faculty

Laura Messina, Sara Tabone

This study addresses the issue of technology integration in higher education, with the aim to explore the level of integration of technology, pedagogy and content knowledge (TPACK) in university professors, and two specific factors affecting technology integration, namely: proficiency and beliefs on technology use.

Forty-seven participants – professors teaching in Primary Teacher Education courses at three universities, in the north, centre and south of Italy – were involved. They were surveyed through a questionnaire on self-evaluation of proficiency in technology use for academic purposes, TPACK, and beliefs on benefits of technology use.

The main results of the study reveal: professors' high proficiency in commonly used technologies, but low proficiency in new or dedicated technologies; some weaknesses in knowledge domains involving technology; positive beliefs on benefits regarding technology use in academic teaching, regardless of the degree of proficiency declared.

These findings suggest the need to train university professors, fostering proficiency, which is a prerequisite for technology integration, capitalizing on the positive beliefs on technology that affect integration process and giving them the opportunity to build their courses integrating technology, pedagogy and content. At the same time research results suggest a finer tuning of instruments to provide deeper insights into the problematic aspects that have emerged.

Keywords

Technology integration in higher education, faculty TPACK, faculty technological proficiency, faculty beliefs.