

Accountability issues in testing academic literacy: The case of the Test of Academic Literacy for Postgraduate Students (TALPS)

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Applied linguists should strive to ensure that the tests they design and use are not only fair and socially acceptable, but also have positive effects – this, in light of the fact that tests can sometimes have far-reaching and often detrimental effects on test-takers. What this paper will attempt to do, is highlight how this concern for responsible test design is articulated in an emerging framework for applied linguistics. The paper begins by questioning the role of applied linguists working within this framework before focusing specifically on the concepts of accountability, dual accountability, public accountability and academic accountability with particular reference to their use in language and academic literacy testing. The last part of this paper sees the practical application of the concept of (academic) accountability to the Test of Academic Literacy for Postgraduate Students (TALPS). With regard to the accountability of the test developers, which is the focus of this article, the intervention programme which follows the test must be considered.

Keywords: applied linguistics, language testing, academic literacy, accountability, academic accountability, intervention, public accountability, theoretical accountability

1. Responsible applied linguistics

Unfair tests, unfair testing methods and the use of tests to restrict and deny access have ensured a negative attitude to tests. In light of this, it is essential that, as applied linguists, we ensure that we design and use tests that are fair and socially acceptable. Weideman (2009) proposes a responsible agenda for applied linguistics, arguing

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that applied linguistic work should be backed by some foundational framework to ensure that the notions of responsibility and integrity can be articulated in a theoretically coherent and systematic way. The framework he refers to is based on a ‘representation of the relationship among a select number of fundamental concepts in language testing’ (Weideman, 2009: 241). This theoretical foundation or framework can be understood more easily when viewed in the form of a table:

Table 1: Fundamental concepts in language testing

<i>Applied linguistic design</i>	<i>Aspect/function/dimension/mode of experience</i>	<i>Kind of function</i>	<i>Retrociatory/anticipatory moment</i>
is founded upon	numerical	constitutive	unity within a multiplicity of sets of evidence and conditions for (test) design
	kinematic		internal consistency (technical reliability)
	physical		internal effect/power (validity)
	organic		technical differentiation
	feeling		technical perception and intention
	analytical	foundational	design rationale (construct validity or theoretical defensibility)
is qualified by	technical	qualifying/leading function (of the design)	
is disclosed by	lingual	regulative	articulation of design in a blueprint/plan
	social		implementation/administration
	economic		technical utility, frugality
	aesthetic		harmonisation of conflicts, resolving misalignment
	juridical		transparency, public defensibility, fairness, legitimacy
	ethical		accountability, care, service

(Weideman, 2007a: 602)

The table and the theoretical framework it articulates seem to suggest that, if conditions such as consistency, validity, theoretical and social defensibility, transparency, accountability and fairness are anticipated in the design of a test, then

that test will fulfil the requirements of being a (psychometrically and socially) good test. This framework highlights a number of important concepts in testing.

What, then, is the role of applied linguists working within this framework? How do we apply these concepts in our designs? Should we be active participants or passive observers, hiding behind the 'scientific' (Weideman, 2006: 80) justifications for our designs? Or are we, like members of other professions, responsible for the designs we create? If we are responsible for our work and to the people affected by it, how do we ensure that we undertake this responsibility with integrity, ethicality and professionalism? These are some of the questions this article will attempt to answer. In order to do this, the focus will be on the aspect of the accountability of the test developer. However, one of the main aims of the test developers of the Test of Academic Literacy for Postgraduate Students (TALPS) was to design, develop and administer a socially responsible test. For a detailed discussion of how other concepts in the framework have been applied to TALPS to satisfy the requirements of responsible and ethical test design and development see Rambiritch (2012; 2013; 2014a & 2014b).

2. Defining accountability

Explained simply, accountability has to do with taking responsibility for your actions. Accountability, however, does not stop there but requires, in addition to accounting for one's actions, that one be willing to face the consequences of these actions. According to Sinclair (1995: 220), accountability entails a relationship in which people are required to explain and take responsibility for their actions. Bovens (2005: 7) argues that accountability should be defined as a relationship between an actor and a forum, in which the actor has an obligation to explain and to justify his or her conduct to the forum, which then becomes a platform that can pose questions and pass judgment, and even sanction the actor.

The next section turns to the discussion of the following question: How does the concept of accountability, as defined above, relate to the field of testing?

2.1 Understanding accountability

In the field of (language) testing, emphasis seems to have revolved around two aspects of accountability: the need to 'professionalise' the field and the need for codes (ethics and practice). However, while codes (of ethics and practice) have been put in place to help regulate the profession and those associated with it, codes are not enough. They might help satisfy the need for accountability to the profession, but make no real contribution to public accountability. Because such testing is so closely linked to social issues, it is imperative that test developers also become publicly accountable for their designs. Often, however, language testers work in isolation. It is quite possible that there is little or no contact with the people who are most affected by their designs. Working in isolation, or relative isolation, means that it is much

easier not to be held accountable for your actions or designs. For real progress to be made in the field of language testing, test designers and developers cannot, and should not, ignore the voices of the lay communities they are serving. In addition, they need the input, advice and opinion not only of their peers, but also of those affected by the implementation of their designs.

In the field of language testing, Shohamy (1997; 2001) and others have stressed the need for dialogue between all those affected by the testing process. Professionals such as lawyers, doctors, social workers and language testers cannot function in isolation. They are accountable to the profession they belong to and to the people most affected by their practices. Bygate (2004: 19) refers to this as being 'doubly accountable'. He explains that applied linguists need to be accountable to the discipline within which they work, and to the communities that they serve. He also makes mention of the relationship between the 'scholarly apparatus of the academy and the social reality which is under scrutiny' Bygate (2004: 7), pointing once again to the fact that those working within a particular profession or discipline cannot function effectively without consideration for the very people they claim to serve.

Weideman (2007b: 43) is in agreement with Bygate's contention that applied linguists need to be doubly accountable. He explains that our applied linguistic designs must be accessible not just to experts, but also to users and the general public, and that we cannot only defend our designs by 'reference to other expert opinion' (Weideman, 2007b: 43). He states further that 'the technical defensibility of a design which links the technical and the juridical' (2007b: 43) (see table 1) does not depend only on its theoretical defensibility, and that, in addition to being able to defend the theory on which the design is based, we need to publicly defend the design. The design should be accessible and the defence understandable to the expert, the user and the lay public. It is, therefore, not enough that the test is based on a theoretically sound construct (that of academic literacy). This 'theoretical accountability' or 'theoretical justification' is only one part of the picture. This information needs to be available but, more importantly, understandable to those affected by the use of the test results.

Clearly, the concept of 'accountability,' as used by Weideman (2003; 2006; 2007b; 2009), moves beyond a concern with the need to account for something or account to someone. Accountability, according to Weideman (2006; 2007b; 2009), focuses on the element of responsibility without neglecting the need for fairness, care and concern for those who are affected by the use of the test results. What this means is that, in addition to ensuring that we design tests that are valid and reliable and based on theoretically sound constructs, our concerns should extend to the effects of our tests on test takers and others affected by the use of the test results. How do test designers, in becoming accountable for their designs, ensure that they work with integrity and that their tests do good and have positive effects?

A good starting point would be to look at the way the concept of accountability relates to these issues. At first glance, accountability has two dimensions: theoretical accountability or accountability to the profession, and public accountability. There is, however, one other kind of accountability that needs to be considered. It is the aspect of the academic accountability that the language tester must consider, which will be touched on later in this article.

2.2 Theoretical accountability

Theoretical accountability, as defined by Weideman (2007b: 43), refers to one's being able to defend the theory on which the design is based. A test designer cannot claim to be truly accountable if theoretical accountability has not been considered. Theoretical accountability is synonymous with construct validity (see Rambiritch, 2012). Nevertheless, theoretical accountability is often the one type of accountability least neglected. Experts in many fields have, almost always, felt the need to be accountable to their peers – by publishing their research in accredited journals and/or by presenting their research at national and international conferences.

In the case of the design of the Test of Academic Literacy Levels (TALL), research regarding the construct, blueprint, piloting and refinement of the test was presented by the designers to other experts at conferences and in published research papers – presenting a forum for other experts to comment, question and provide valuable input or critique. With TALL, this sharing of information led to other institutions' choosing to become partners in the design and use of the test. The same has been done with TALPS (see Rambiritch, 2012; 2013). For an overview of such discussion and scholarly debate, the 'Research' tab on the website of the Inter-institutional Centre for Language Development and Assessment (ICELDA) directs one to more than two dozen studies on these tests (<http://icelda.sun.ac.za>). One cannot deny that a first step in becoming accountable requires being accountable to those working within the profession. Theoretical accountability is crucial in the design process. It must, however, be followed closely by an accountability to the public who are affected by or interested in the use of the test.

2.3 Accountability to the public

The need for public accountability has been alluded to by many in the field. Boyd and Davies (2002: 312) call for the profession of language testing to have high standards, with members who are conscious of their responsibilities and open to the public. Rea-Dickins (1997: 304) argues for relationships between all stakeholders (learners, teachers, parents, testers and authorities) in the field of language testing. She states that 'a stakeholder approach to assessment has the effect of democratising assessment processes, of improving relationships between those involved, and promoting greater fairness' (Rea-Dickins, 1997: 304). As can be seen from these discussions, the accountability of the language tester must extend to the public who is being served. Defining public accountability, however, is a fairly easy task, ensuring

accountability to the public less so. Public accountability means exactly that – to be open to the public one serves, thus allowing the ‘open dialogue’ referred to above. It is not enough that test designers defend their designs to the experts or their peers in the field. Equally, if not more so, those affected by the use of the test scores must be well informed as well. This is where Bovens’s (2005) point becomes important – that one must be aware of the kind of information that is made available. It is not enough that the information is made available. The information must be understandable to the very people who need to understand it most and not a ‘...monologue without engagement. To qualify as public accountability there should be public accessibility of the account giving’ (Bovens, 2005: 10).

In the case of TALPS, the website and the pamphlets distributed to interested students will go a long way in ensuring that the public is provided with information regarding the test. Importantly, the test designers have ensured that the language used in both these mediums is understandable to the lay person. The point here is that care must be taken with the way information is dispensed to the public. What is available for the experts in the field may not be accessible to the lay person taking the test. The challenge, to a certain extent, is to translate technical concepts into more readily accessible, non-specialist language while, at the same time, relating their theoretical meaning to real or perceived social concerns. All the while, it is incumbent on the test designer to be mindful of the limitations inherent in theoretical explanations, and in the technical measuring instrument (the test) that is being employed.

2.4 Academic accountability

Strictly speaking, academic accountability may very well be a subset of public accountability, both of which (public and academic accountability) can be classified as being a part of social accountability. The concepts of public and academic accountability are separated here, despite the fine line between them, to allow us to ‘separate from each what is conceptually distinct’ (Weideman, 2009:249). The specific purpose here is to emphasise or highlight every aspect of accountability. What academic accountability has in common with certain other kinds of accountability is that it is an institutional kind of accountability. It is particularly relevant here, as will become clear below, because it relates strongly to the context – in this case an institutional context – in which the test under discussion is being employed.

2.4.1 Defining academic accountability

The main focus of academic accountability, according to Dill (1999: 127), is to ensure that universities maintain or improve the quality of their teaching and learning. He explains that universities should become ‘learning organisations’ where the focus should be on ‘creating knowledge for the improvement of teaching and learning’ (Dill, 1999: 127). According to Kearns (1998: 140), academic accountability has to do with a ‘strong institutional commitment to quality teaching’. He points out that

this should provide students with the 'prospect for gainful employment or other opportunities upon graduation' (Kearns, 1998: 140). Academic accountability, as used here, refers to the accountability of the language tester in respect of the teaching and learning that follows, or should follow, a test, with the specific aim of ensuring that this teaching and learning has some positive outcome.

Within academic accountability one needs to consider the 'public' versus 'private' aspect of accountability: 'public' referring to those outside of the institution, and 'private' referring to accountability within the institution. With regard to accounting to those within the institution there are two groups one needs to be concerned with: the one refers to the faculties, stakeholders and management of the institution. An effective method would be through seminars, presentations and workshops where information, as well as research conducted about the test, is shared. Another would be the standard set of routine meetings within the institution where such matters might be expected to form part of the agenda. The second group that needs to be considered are those who have the most at stake – our students who take the test. Does our responsibility end here? If it does, then what have we achieved, except perhaps to have made supervisors and students aware of the fact that the academic literacy levels of their students' places them at risk? How has testing these students really contributed to the care and concern for others that Weideman (2009: 235) makes reference to? Is it acceptable to be satisfied that we have designed and administered a socially acceptable test, yet have done nothing to assist those students who are shown to be at risk? Can the test be considered socially acceptable if this is the case? Have we at all prepared them for the responsible experience and outcomes that Kearns (1998: 140) mentions? The reality is that testing the academic literacy of students but doing nothing to help them might be considered a futile exercise. Issues of accountability dictate that, if we test students, we should do something to help them improve. The responsibility of ethical language testers extends into the teaching that follows.

This part of the study is aimed at determining the effects that the test could have, if any, on the intervention and the teaching that follow the test. With regard to the accountability of the test developers, which is the focus of this article, the intervention programme which follows the test must be considered. In the case of TALPS, the intervention or the course came first and had been in operation for a while before the test was designed and implemented. The test came about as a result of the course – the course is not an effect of the test. Despite this, the intervention provided to students who are shown to be at risk by the results of the test is still an important one here. Research has shown that testing (whether it comes before or after the intervention/course) causes people to behave differently or to do things differently (see Smith, 1991).

3. About TALPS

The Test of Academic Literacy for Postgraduate Students (TALPS) was developed because of the need to test the academic literacy of postgraduate students. In deciding on a construct on which to base the test, the test developers chose to base TALPS on the same construct as TALL (see Van Dyk & Weideman, 2004). TALL has, in many ways, been the sounding board for TALPS. Moreover, the success of TALL has, in part, been the justification for TALPS. TALL and TALPS are designed to test the same ability – the academic literacy of students – undergraduate in the case of TALL, and postgraduate in the case of TALPS. With regard to TALPS, it was decided to include a section on argumentative writing. At postgraduate level it is essential that students follow specific academic writing conventions and it is important to test whether students are equipped with this knowledge. In addition, there is a question that tests students' editing skills. TALPS was first piloted in May 2007, with the final draft version of TALPS being piloted in September 2007. Based on evidence collected at the a priori stage of test development, TALPS proved to be a highly valid and reliable test (see Rambiritch, 2013). The story of TALPS, i.e. its design and development, is also the focus of a doctoral study (Rambiritch, 2012).

4. The Postgraduate Academic Writing module (EOT 300)

The intervention that is relevant in this specific instance is the Postgraduate Academic Writing module (EOT 300), which was developed by the Unit for Academic Literacy, University of Pretoria, because of the need to assist postgraduate students with their academic writing problems. The module was offered to students from the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences, specifically the Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Development, as well as students from the Faculty of Humanities. Students from these faculties were taught separately, in their respective disciplines. Before the development and administration of TALPS, all honours and master's students were required to enrol for the module which was not credit-bearing. Students were also expected to pay for this additional module.

Butler's (2007) study highlights this and the fact that, in addition to the course, there was a need for a reliable testing instrument to determine students' academic literacy levels before they entered the module. The test and the course work hand in hand. The test is used to determine the academic literacy levels of postgraduate students. Students who are shown to be at risk could be expected by their faculties at the University of Pretoria to take the EOT 300 module. Having students take the test before the course means that students who are not at risk do not have to sit through a module they might not need. Already there are positive effects – without the test students might not be aware of their academic literacy levels. In addition to an awareness of their abilities, students who are required to take the course are provided with an intervention that could help them succeed in their studies. While the module remained non-credit bearing, and students still had to pay for the module, the test results served to indicate to students their academic literacy levels

and provided them with the opportunity to develop these abilities. Poor academic writing skills are bound to hamper their studies, and an intervention designed to help develop these skills could mean the difference between success and failure.

Writing, especially in the academic context, however, cannot function in isolation and is dependent on other abilities the student should acquire. A student who is a poor reader, for example, cannot be a good writer. Good writing depends on a student's being able to read critically, to be able to summarise effectively what was read, and to use what was learned in the reading/research process to construct a logical, well-argued piece of academic writing. In addition, it is essential that students' writing be free of spelling and vocabulary/grammatical errors, that they know how to use a dictionary to avoid these very errors, that they are aware of the conventions of academic writing and that this be evident in their work. As a result, the writing process must be taught in conjunction with these other abilities. Based on this, the designers of EOT 300 point out that the aim of the course is the 'further development and transfer of academic literacy' and that the 'skills acquired and developed during this course should be applied to the wider context of their studies' (Butler, Pretorius & Van Dyk, 2009: viii).

Butler's study (2007) is focused on a framework that should be employed when designing a writing course for tertiary-level students. This section will concentrate on the design and implementation of the course and specifically on determining whether there is alignment between the test and the course.

4.1 The design of a postgraduate academic writing course

Butler (2007: 42) identified 13 'requirements or conditions' that function as principles for writing course design in general. These are:

1. Include an accurate determination of students' current levels of academic literacy;
2. Include an accurate account of the understandings and requirements of lecturers/supervisors in specific departments or faculties regarding academic writing;
3. Engage students' prior knowledge and abilities in different literacies to connect with academic literacy in a positive way;
4. Consider learners' needs (and wants) as a central issue in academic writing;
5. Create a learning environment where students feel safe to explore and find their own voices in the academic context;
6. Give careful consideration to the most important mode for teaching and learning academic writing;

7. Determine whether primary and additional language users should be treated differently in writing interventions;
8. Provide ample opportunity to develop revision and editing skills;
9. Acknowledge assessment and feedback as central to course design;
10. Provide relevant, contextualised opportunities for engaging in academic writing tasks that students feel contribute towards their development as academic writers in the tertiary context;
11. Include productive strategies that achieve a focus on language form;
12. Support and encourage the use of technology in writing;
13. Focus on the interrelationship between different language abilities in the promotion of writing (Butler, 2007: 42-55).

The conditions above do not function in isolation but are a combination of factors affecting the course designer, the students and the supervisors in different faculties and departments. The first requirement, according to Butler (2007), is to determine the academic literacy levels of students. This is where TALPS features. In addition to the test, Butler (2007) suggests that, to determine the writing abilities of students, they should be required to write an essay. He states that, while this might not be as reliable as the empirical analyses from a test like TALPS, it entails a 'more credible and appealing' (Butler, 2007: 43) method. It is an excellent idea to combine both assessment types. Often students take a test but do not see or understand how this is related to the abilities they are expected to have, i.e. they might not see the correlation between the different sections in TALPS and how these are related to their academic literacy levels, especially their writing skills. These essays can be evaluated individually, in groups and with the lecturer and the supervisor concerned. This first writing exercise can generate discussion between the lecturer and students, and ties in directly with the need to create a learning environment where students are comfortable enough to voice their fears, struggles and concerns about their academic literacy, specifically academic writing. It also helps open up a dialogue about students' needs – if the lecturer knows what students need, it will be easier to help them.

The teaching and learning of academic writing is, of course, not limited to the classroom. The lecturer and the course designers accept that the students sitting in their lecture room will eventually be writing for someone else, in a different department or faculty. Furthermore, Butler (2007: 43) stresses the need to recognise the match between the texts that students produce and what their lecturers expect from such texts. He points out that it is important to be aware of the different conventions in different disciplines and to make students aware of this. It goes without saying that this requires a dialogue between the course designer and the supervisors in the different departments/faculties.

Lecturers will have to find ways to deal with a lecture hall filled with students with different language ability. Butler’s (2007: 49) advice is to have quicker learners assist struggling students. In terms of the writing course, there is a need to develop the revision and editing skill of students – this can be done by teaching writing as a process and encouraging students to revise their work as well as the work of their peers. Condition 9 above emphasises the need for assessment practices to be ‘transparent’ (Butler, 2007: 51) so that students are aware of the requirements of a task. Also, Butler (2007: 52) points out the need for, and importance of, the correct kind of feedback to students: He says that there is a ‘strong need to balance positive and negative feedback to students,’ that lecturers should maintain a careful balance, and not just criticise a piece for its ‘inadequacies’. Another consideration in the design of the academic writing course is the question of whether to teach using discipline- or subject-specific material. Butler points out that, in general, students have a negative attitude to such remedial courses – students need to see that the course is in some way related to their field of study. Material used should therefore be seen by students as ‘contributing purposefully to their studies’ (Butler, 2007: 54). Other considerations focus on productive ways of teaching grammar, using technology in writing and seeing the interrelationship between writing and other language abilities, such as reading (Butler, 2007: 42-55).

Have the other requirements been incorporated in the design of the course? To answer this question we need to take a closer look at the course and the tasks that students have to complete and then determine whether these are aligned with the test. The EOT 300 module is divided into two themes. Theme 1 presents students with *An introduction to academic discourse* (Butler *et al.*, 2009). The focus here is to ensure that students recognise the characteristics of academic writing, apply academic reading strategies, take effective notes, learn to deal with vocabulary difficulties, make functional use of a dictionary and recognise important principles of academic writing (Butler *et al.*, 2009). Below is a table for each theme indicating the tasks that students have to complete:

Table 2: Theme 1: An introduction to academic discourse

TASK	TOPIC
Task 1	Mind maps
Task 2	Componential structuring
Task 3	Interviews (to determine lecturer expectations regarding students’ academic writing)
Task 4	Style and register
Task 5	Scrambled text (general text structure)
Task 6	Text type
Task 7	Text type
Task 8	Scrambled text
Task 9	Facts and opinions
Task 10	Logical connectors
Task 11	Referencing/Bibliography
Task 12	Interpreting graphs and visual information
Task 13	Text editing

(Butler *et al.*, 2009)

Theme 2 focuses specifically on the writing process. Tasks in this part of the course are aligned with the steps in the writing process.

Table 3: Theme 2: The writing process applied

STEP	TASKS
Step 1: Identifying a research problem (+ pre-writing)	Students are given a topic by the lecturer. Tasks here focus on pre-writing activities where students are asked to write down everything they know about the topic/theme. They are asked to write down questions they have about the topic and these are discussed in groups.
Step 2: Gathering information (+ pre-writing)	Research skills Structuring a bibliography
Step 3: Synthesising and structuring information	In-text referencing Integration of information using mind maps Developing criteria for quality academic writing
Step 4: Writing the first draft	Tasks in Step 4, 5 and 6 focus on the writing, revision and editing of students drafts and those of their peers using the checklists/revision tables provided by the lecturer.
Step 5: Revision (+ subsequent drafts following from revision)	
Step 6: Editing and writing the final draft	

(Butler et al., 2009)

The table below highlights the alignment between the sub-tests in TALPS and the tasks that students have to complete in EOT 300:

Table 4: Aligning TALPS and EOT 300

Sub-tests in TALPS	What EACH SUB-TEST tests	Relation to Module CODE
1. Scrambled text	Recognising different parts of a text, forming a cohesive whole.	Task 5, 8
2. Academic vocabulary	Testing students knowledge of words used in a specific context.	Theme 1 and 2
3. Graphic and visual literacy	Interpreting information from a graph, summarising the data, doing numerical computations.	Task 12
4. Text type	Identifying/classifying different genres/text types.	Task 4, 6, 7
5. Comprehension	Reading, classifying and comparing, making inferences, recognising text relations, distinguishing between essential and non-essential information.	Task 1, 2, 9
6. Grammar and text relation	Sentence construction, word order, vocabulary, punctuation.	Task 8, 10, 13
7. Editing	Correction of errors in a text.	Task 13
8. Writing	Argumentative writing, structuring an argument, recognition of sources.	Task 3, 11 and Theme 2

Especially the tasks students are expected to complete, which were outlined above, demonstrate that there is alignment between the intervention and its outcomes, the tasks students have to complete, and the test. Important, also, is that the test and the course are based on the same definition of academic literacy (see Rambiritch, 2012). The abilities that are tested by the test are the same ones the course is designed to develop. The module strives to develop, in as much detail as is possible in one year, the academic literacy abilities a student would need to cope at postgraduate level.

Texts used in the course, as well as the topics for the major assignment relate directly to the field of study of students. The major assignment is to be discussed personally with the lecturer after it has been marked. The study component of the study guide outlines the focus of the course and points out that, while the course will address all four language abilities: listening, reading, writing and speaking, the emphasis is on developing ‘effective listening, reading and writing in an integrated manner in a postgraduate academic environment’ (Butler *et al.*, 2009: vi). The course has been designed to provide a number of different ways of learning – individual, small groups and one-on-one interaction with the lecturer, providing ample opportunity not only to share their opinions and ideas, but also to evaluate one another’s ideas (Butler *et al.*, 2009: vii). The workbook and the course are designed to be interactive. There is constant communication and discussion between the lecturer and the students.

Students meet with the lecturer once their assignment has been assessed. Such a meeting is valuable in helping the student understand where problems lie and what can be done to resolve them. It is not enough to address these problems generally when teaching. Because the academic literacy levels of students depend on individual students' abilities in language, as well as their background, schooling, family life, race or region, these problems are best addressed individually. The focus here, however, is not to critique the course, but to determine whether the test, which is written before the course but was developed as a result of the course, is aligned with the intervention. Testing students makes them aware of their academic literacy levels, and providing them with an effective intervention designed to help them improve, means that they might be able to graduate in the required time, which might not have been possible without the intervention. Weideman (2007b) sums this up effectively when he states that:

Our designs are done because we demonstrate through them the love we have for others: it derives from the relation between the technical artefact that is our design and the ethical dimension of our life. In a country such as ours, the desperate language needs of both adults and children to achieve a functional literacy that will enable them to function in the economy and partake more fully of its fruits, stands out as possibly the biggest responsibility of applied linguists (Weideman, 2007b: 53).

5. Conclusion

This article focused on the concept of accountability, asking, also, the all important question of how test designers can ensure that they become accountable for their designs. The detailed discussion of the different types of accountability has attempted to answer this question. In a nutshell, test designers can do this by:

- designing fair tests that can be justified, explained and defended publicly;
- being transparent and opening up a dialogue between all those involved in the testing process;
- designing tests that do good and that have positive effects;
- being committed to the test takers we serve and by ensuring that our responsibility does not end with a score on a sheet, but is followed by effective teaching and learning which will have potentially far-reaching, positive consequences for the society in which these test takers live and work.

This article has also considered the concept of accountability as it relates to the test designers and the process they followed in the development of TALPS. Clearly, accountability, as defined here, has many facets. Each of these, as explained, is a vital consideration in ensuring accountability. The article has shown through the practical application of the concept of (academic) accountability to the TALPS and the teaching that follows, that the test and the teaching are well aligned. Importantly, the article has highlighted important considerations for test developers who consider accountability a necessity in the field of (academic literacy) testing.

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