University language teaching against the backdrop of international certification.

Where are we heading?

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The facts, the story and the landscape

- Changes made to learner placement and grading for language major students at the University of Pisa in 2022

- How does this fit in with my professional understanding and role as a language teaching professional in higher education?

- How does the story inform the landscape?

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Change 1

- First year student placement by language proficiency levels and not by year of enrolment
- More efficient for students
- More effective teaching

Change 2

- Replacement of numerical grading with alphabetical grades (A, B, C)

- Greater international appeal

- Correct the imbalance in exam results for students with high proficiency levels

The professional story

- It all started with my **discomfort**

- I did a search for: is language certification necessary?

- Feedback from colleagues

- Case studies

- My unanswered questions

What did the foreign language classroom look like 30 years ago?

- Skills and competence (proficiency)
- explicit grammar knowlege
- intercultural awareness and competence
- culture
- translation
- the L1-L2 relationship
- language awareness
- Critical language awareness
- Language use/pragmatics

My professional obervations

- A significant portion of language proficiency development is *de facto* being outsorced: it is taking place in secondary school, in private education and outside of the higher educational context. **So, what is our role**?

- We are not building on the new student proficiency capital we have access to: we are pushing them up and out. **What is the purpose of a unversity education**?

- We are not using the freed-up space and time to provide students with additional and in-depth learning. **What are we doing with these freed-up resources**?

My concerns

- Are we shortchanging our students?
- Are we misleading our students?
- Are we penalising students with higher levels of proficiency?
- Are we actually just dumbing down the system?

General questions for you!

◢ What role does certification play within your context?

◢ What place does certification have within your testing and exam processes?

◢ What kind of language skills and knowledge should be provided by higher education?

◢ What is the distinction between proficiency and knowlege about language?

◢ What is the professional/educational profile of foriegn language graduates?

Thank you for your contribution!

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