Assessment for learning – assessment for becoming

John Pryor
This lecture

- Teaching grandmothers to suck eggs.
- Another English academic with a short grey beard – same but different!
- Tracing some ideas that have grown mostly within an English educational context through dialogue with teachers and learners.
- Talking in different terms that will have differential meanings, aiming make the ideas accessible to different constituencies.
- Asking you to relate this critically to own educational experience and interest.
Background

• English as a foreign language →
  Foreign languages to English learners

• Shock! Canaries in the mine.

• Learning as knowledge acquisition? Knowledge as possessive.

• Learning as doing? Knowledge as performative competence.

• Learning as becoming? Knowledge as competences, performances, dispositions.

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When you think of Assessment

You think of *summative* assessment:

the assessment that comes at the end of a piece of work and which sums up what has been learnt;

it measures, sorts, and makes decisions about success and failure.
Formative Assessment?

• Forming judgements about student performance and learning

BUT

• Takes place during the teaching and learning process

• Embedded in teaching and learning

• Aims to affect that process

• Assessment for learning or assessment for results?
Guiding Conceptualization

- All assessment is in some way formative in that it impacts on future performance.
- Formative Assessment attempts to have a positive effect.
- All assessment is a social process – this aspect is salient in FA.
• Relationship is problematic and shifting in practice
• The dual nature of judgement: Pronouncing judgement
  Exercising judgment
A Conceptual Continuum

| Convergent and Divergent Assessment | To find out *if* the student knows, understands, can do | To find out *what* the student knows, understands, can do |
CONVERGENT ASSESSMENT

- Teaching session goes according to plan;
- recording via check lists;
- closed questioning and tasks;
- Fixed, specific criteria closely related to official ones;
- contrasting errors with correct responses;
- authoritative judgmental or quantitative feedback;
- feedback focused on task completion;
- can follow I-R-F sequence;
- mainly accomplished by teacher.
Convergent IMPLICATIONS

- Learner as recipient of assessment
- Fitting learner to (linear) curriculum
- Strong classification and framing
- Learning as acquisition of knowledge
- Possibly constructivist but also might conform to behaviourist or ‘banking’ model
DIVERGENT ASSESSMENT

- flexible planning involving students;
- open forms of recording;
- open tasks with ‘helping’ questions;
- holistic view of criteria subject to debate and negotiation;
- focus on miscues;
- exploratory, provisional or provocative feedback;
- reflection on task and context;
- dialogue between and amongst learners - exploratory talk
- teachers accomplished by learners, peers and teacher - in the zone of proximal development.
Divergent IMPLICATIONS

• learners as initiators of assessments as well as recipients.
• view of assessment as collaboration between teachers and students;
• possibility of weak or oscillating framing and of minimization of asymmetry of power relations;
• accords with social constructivist, situated or sociocultural learning theories.
How does this ... 

... relate to the practice that you are familiar with?

... relate to different approaches to teaching and assessing languages?
Processes
Processes: Criteria

- Teacher communicates or negotiates task criteria (what has to be done in order to complete the task) or negotiates them with learners

- T communicates quality criteria (what has to be done to do the task well) or negotiates them with learners
Processes: Observation

- Teacher observes learners at work or asks them to observe (process)
- Teacher examines work done or asks them to examine it (product)
Processes: Questioning

- Teacher asks a principled question, (seeks to elicit evidence of what learners knows understand or can do) and learners respond
- Teacher asks for clarification about process: what has been done, is being done or will be done; learners reply
- Teacher questions learners about how and why specific actions have been taken (meta-process and metacognitive questioning). Learners respond.
Processes: Feedback

- Teacher critiques a particular aspect of the work or invites learners to do so.

- Teacher supplies or invites information, correction or a counter suggestion.

- Teacher gives and/or discusses evaluative feedback on work done with respect to: task, and/or effort and/or aptitude/capability (possibly with reference to past or future achievement).
Processes: Feed forward

• Teacher suggests or negotiates with learners what to do next.

• Teacher suggests or negotiates with learners what to do next time and discusses ways of recognizing similar contexts for knowledge in future.
• Teacher assigns mark, grade or summary judgement on the quality of this piece of work or negotiates an agreed one with learners.

• Teacher rewards or punishes learners or demonstrates approval/disapproval.
Questions

- What if knowledge is ‘an active engagement between the knowing subject and what is known … a kind of doing,’ (Gill 1993:68, cited in Delandshere 2002)?

- What if learning is a contextualized performance involving students engaging with prospective and current social identities, and therefore an ontological as well as an epistemological accomplishment?

- What if the differential personal risk and affects that this involves are acknowledged?

- What then is assessment for learning?
Negotiating understandings of task and quality criteria

But how does this relate to who I am and who I want to be?
REALIZATION THROUGH ACTION

COLLABORATIVELY

NARRATING

IDENTITIES

RECOGNITION THROUGH REFLECTION

NEGOTIATING UNDERSTANDINGS OF TASK AND QUALITY CRITERIA

QUESTIONING

OBSERVATION

FEEDBACK AND JUDGEMENT

META CONTEXTUAL REFLECTION
REALIZATION THROUGH ACTION

COLLABORATIVELY

NARRATING

IDENTITIES

RECOGNITION THROUGH REFLECTION

QUESTIONING/THINKING/MEANING

OBSERVATION/PRESENCE/PROCESS

FEEDBACK AND JUDGMENT
Completing task in hand

Thinking about improvement

Making sense of criteria

Developing the learner identity

Concrete

How can I get this done?
How can I get this done well?
How might I do this better
How did I do that?
What does better mean?
Who decides that?
Why do they think it is better?
How does this relate to power issues?
How am I implicated in this?
How does this relate to my identity?
Who am I? Who do I wish to be?

Reflective/discursive

Existential/discursive
Formative assessment

Convergent assessment
• Constraints of the field
• Disciplinary/discursive norms
• Institutional expectations
• Social structures

Divergent assessment
• Student habitus: dispositions, expectations, aspirations
• Student agency
Formative assessment

Convergent assessment
• Constraints of the field
• Disciplinary norms
• Institutional expectations
• Social structures
• Authoritative teacher identities

Divergent assessment
• Student habitus: dispositions, expectations, aspirations
• Student agency
• Student current and prospective identities
The discourses, educational texts and metadiscourses of formative assessment on socio-cultural context

The construction of texts, disciplinary, narrative and metacontextual

Learning – the renegotiation of identities

Between and amongst teachers and students

Institutional, disciplinary, familial and friendship communities as well as aspirational reference groups

What is legitimate in this context as the formative assessment is enacted and how this relates to wider social structures

Student identities: differing current and prospective identities

Educator identities: assessor, teacher, expert, learner

Mediating artefacts: Tools and Signs

Subject

Object

Outcome

Rules

Community

Division of Labour
So what then is assessment for learning?

Jones 2010:8 —

• first, the need to meet learners at their level of knowledge and to revisit prior learning;

• second, that learners must be active in their learning;

• third, that pupils need to know the learning objectives that will then provide a frame for the evaluation and improvement of their work;

• fourth, that learners need opportunities to think and talk about their work based on self- and peer-assessment, in order to develop critical judgement and improve the quality of their work

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But if it is really to engage with learning ...

- ‘Making explicit teachers’ positionality both within wider and more specific institutional/disciplinary cultures.
- Code-switching’ between different pedagogic repertoires reflecting different teacher ‘identities’
- Encouraging students to ‘read’ teacher discourses and actions as performances - a more visible part of pedagogy.
- Tasks which accommodate an iterative series of engagements between students and tutors allowing opportunities for engagement with wider disciplinary and institutional structures.
- Leaves both institutional, disciplinary and teachers’ personal / professional practices open to critique …
Institutions organized as if teaching is merely expounding.

Power relations unproblematised.

Sender-receiver model of communication inadequate assumption that inputs and outputs identical - not possible nor desirable.

**Teaching as responding**: accepted but not really organized for

Under-rated and hit or miss

Brings forward cultural contexts of teaching, learning and assessment - implicated in sociocultural learning theories.

Formative assessment
Sociocultural learning with a theory of communication

• Poststructural theorization of language asserting relational and dialogic nature of educational encounters
• Meaning-making arises through play of oppositions or negative relations between signifiers within power/knowledge configurations.
• Difference is a constitutive and necessary element involving dialogue with ‘the Other’
• This means that communication ‘works through difference and change and not through identity and stability’ (Biesta, 2004, p.17). Instead of attempting to erase differences, education is dependent upon the contingent spaces of meaning-making that can only arise in response to otherness.