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Classroom Assessment

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1.1 Introduction and definitions

For a long time classroom-based assessment (CBA, i.e., assessment internal to the classroom and managed by the teacher) was only viewed as an offshoot of traditional large-scale testing (i.e., assessment external to the classroom such as school board exams, standardized international exams). This was reflected in the language testing literature, in the conference presentations concerning language testing and even in the language testing textbooks available to teachers. In other words it was taken for granted that the types/tasks of testing and the interpretation/use/reporting of results employed in large-scale testing also applied to classroom assessment. The field of language testing/assessment is evolving and is beginning to see the importance and uniqueness of the classroom learning context and the teacher factor in interpreting the true role of assessment in classroom settings (i.e., to provide information to help inform teaching and learning). In the 1990s, textbooks for pre-service and in-service teachers began to appear that considered CBA as a unique paradigm (e.g., Genesee and Upshur, 1996) and as time passed, research in such settings began creeping into the language testing literature (e.g., Leung, 2004; Rea-Dickins, 2006). Well-known language testing resources online also began to include references to CBA (Fulcher, 2010a). The assessment focusing on teaching and learning has increasingly become of interest to the research world and the teacher's role has been the focus. A research agenda separate from the paradigm of traditional large-scale testing remains to be identified, but a consensus is growing that more research is needed and that the "theorization" of CBA (Davison and Leung, 2009) is overdue.

Characteristics of CBA May involve strategies by teachers to plan and carry out the collection of multiple types of information concerning student language use, to analyze and interpret it, to provide feedback, and to use this information to help make decisions to enhance teaching and learning. Observable evidence of learning (or lack of learning) is collected through a variety of methods (e.g., observation, portfolios, conferencing, journals, questionnaires, interviews, projects, task sheets, quizzes/tests), and most often embedded in regular instructional activities. In other words, CBA comprises a repertoire of methods and the reflective procedures that teachers and students use for evidence to gauge student learning on an ongoing basis. In this way teaching is adjusted to meet student needs. In addition, CBA is a contextually bound and socially constructed activity involving different teachers in learning. Within the classroom it is mainly teachers and students working together (e.g., teacher, peer or self-assessment), but additional

participants can be parents, school administrators, and others in the educational context.

1.2 Historical Perspective

In order to make sense of CBA's emerging profile, it is important to situate it within a historical framework. Initially, such concepts as norm referencing, psychometrics, validity theory, reliability, generalizability (to only name a few) were also thought to be part of CBA in their current interpretations. In some situations, they were even imposed on teachers causing a gap between theory and actual classroom practice. There was no ill intention. It is just that in general and language education the focus had been on measurement theory for large-scale testing and little attention had been paid to CBA. This was partially due to the assumption that large-scale testing qualities also applied to CBA (Shephard, 2000). With the increased attention towards constructivist/socio-cultural theories of learning and the influence of Vygotsky's work (1978), the call to expand traditional educational measurement to view CBA as a different paradigm slowly began to gain momentum. The assessment approach internal to the classroom as opposed to the approach employed in large-scale testing has evolved into a current discussion of two distinct paradigms (Leung, 2004). Different terms have been used to describe the two approaches which can be confusing at times, but each term comes with a specific rationale. This chapter uses the terminology CBA versus large-scale assessment/testing (Pellegrino et al., 2001), but other examples are teacher assessment versus formal assessments (McNamara and Roever, 2006); formative and summative assessment (Brookhart, 2003); and assessment for learning (AFL) versus assessment of learning (AOL) (Black and Wiliam, 1998a, 1998b; Gardner, 2006).

1.3 Critical issues and topics

Since describing CBA is still in its initial stages, many aspects need investigating and clarification as with any new paradigm. Some of the salient issues will be mentioned here.

1-Terms: Do we need one umbrella term for assessment internal to the classroom?

There is much overlap among the terms that have evolved and one learns quickly that they are often used interchangeably in some of the literature. While having one umbrella term for assessment internal to the classroom might seem convenient, it's worth considering the diverse nature of assessments and their purposes. Different types of assessments serve different functions, such as formative assessments, summative assessments, diagnostic assessments, and so on. Each type has its own unique characteristics and objectives.

It is important to note here that parallel to the recognition of CBA, there is another discussion taking place in the literature which pits the traditional ‘testing culture’ against a new ‘assessment culture’ (Lynch, 2001); the latter overlapping with CBA. The two opposing perspectives argue as though there is only room for one paradigm. Others focusing on educational concerns (e.g., Pellegrino et al., 2001) provide a more pragmatic view in stating a variety of assessments are needed and it’s the purpose of the context that should dictate the type employed. (For an informative discussion of these opposing views, see Fox, 2008).

Some of the names found in the literature and used in conjunction with classroom assessment include: **alternative** (Fox, 2008), **authentic** (O’Malley and Valdez Pierce, 1996), **dynamic** (Lantolf and Poehner, 2008) (also see Antón, this volume), **diagnostic** (Alderson, 2005; also see Jang, this volume), **performance** (McNamara, 1996), **classroom-based** (Genesee and Upshur, 1996), **teacher based** (Davison and Leung, 2009), **school-based** (Davison, 2007), and **AFL** (Black and William, 2003). To date, several of these terms when related to classroom activity are used simultaneously with and considered to be an extension of the more general term formative evaluation (Brookhart, 2005). Scriven (1967) coined the term formative evaluation in education meaning that assessment could be used to form acquisition of learning through ongoing assessment procedures to support learning. In other words, in this role it could enhance learning rather than just being used to calculate final grades (i.e., as in summative evaluation). One of its main objectives was to cultivate greater learner responsibility through motivation, teacher feedback, self- and peer assessment. The most recent iteration of formative assessment and the one gaining attention in research and practice is AFL.

2-Reliability and validity: Do we need to revisit these qualities for CBA?

Another issue concerns reliability and validity and whether these qualities as they are known in the large-scale testing context (i.e., measurement paradigm) are relevant to CBA. The purpose of CBA is to support learning and through feedback to help learners understand where they are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there (ARG (Assessment Reform Group) as cited in Gardner, 2006: 2). This involves a very local context where teachers know their students and work with them, where student reflection and performance promote and encourage further learning via self, peer and teacher feedback. Awareness is growing in the literature that these phenomena in the CBA context unfold uniquely and that the assessment characteristics are different than traditional large-scale testing (Arkoudis and O’Loughlin, 2004; Moss, 2003). Fulcher and Davidson (2007: 24–25) explain that the main

difference between CBA and largescale testing is the “context of the classroom” which is a learning setting as described above. They state that this is not part of large-scale testing where context (e.g., the room, the invigilators) is considered construct-irrelevant variance (Messick, 1989), that is, the context is not relevant to the test. It’s the test taker’s ability in relation to the test construct that generates a score.

3-Alignment: In educational systems, what is needed to align internal and external- to-the-classroom assessment?

To align internal and external-to-the-classroom assessments in educational systems, several key elements are needed such as Clear Learning Objectives, Curriculum Alignment, Assessment Design, Assessment Practices, Professional Development, Communication and Collaboration. In support of alignment, there are increasing claims that “assessment can support learning as well as measure it” (Black and Wiliam, 2003: 623). Discussion on the benefits of aligning formative and summative assessment is increasing. For example, teachers’ formative work would not be undermined by summative pressures, and summative requirements might be better served by taking full advantage of improvements in teachers’ assessment work

4-Assessment literacy and teacher training: How do we reach a balance between CBA strategies and technical test development strategies?

With the burgeoning awareness of the need for diverse approaches to assessment contingent on purpose and for the complementary components of assessment internal and external to the classroom, there has also been an increasing consensus on the importance of assessment literacy for pre-service and in-service teachers at all levels. There are a few consideration to reach a balance between CBA and technical test such as understanding the purpose of assessment, teacher training, professional development and collaborative approach. This can include classroom assessment strategies, mediation between assessment activity internal and external to the classroom, and understanding of test development strategies and interpretation of test scores. Malone (2008) points out, however, that the scope of assessment literacy that is actually needed by teachers and/or specific groups of teachers still must be identified. There are varying perspectives throughout the literature (Davison and Leung, 2009; Pellegrino et al., 2001; Taylor, 2009) as to what this might encompass, and this would naturally vary across different contexts. Even though research is needed, Malone (2008) points out that an abundance of information sources have evolved and are now available to teachers (e.g., text-based materials, self-access materials including workshops and internet-based resources). Turner (2006) in exploring teachers’ “professionalism” in assessment learned that secondary level teachers displayed knowledge

concerning several important elements that abound in the language testing/assessment literature (e.g., method effect, the assessment bridge).

1.4 Current contributions :

AFL assessment for learning is a beneficial process but complex, 10 principles to serve the underpinning of it

- is part of effective planning;
- focuses on how students learn;
- is central to classroom practice;
- is a key professional skill;
- is sensitive and constructive;
- fosters motivations;
- promotes understanding of goals and criteria;
- helps learners know how to improve;
- develops the capacity for self-assessment;
- recognizes all education achievement (Gardner, 2006: 3).

The focus here is on language education contexts, but first one of the most salient contributions needs to be mentioned. It is that of the Assessment Reform Group (ARG) in the UK and its ongoing examination of the benefits of what is now labeled as assessment for learning (AFL) in the classroom. Gardner (2006) provides an in-depth view into the work of the ARG explaining the processes and international contexts that have contributed to the research.

Another contributions :

1-Teacher processes to support learning:As L2 studies examining CBA become increasingly visible in the literature, the line between formative assessment and SLA becomes blurred. This is apparent in studies from contexts around the world (e.g., Butler and Lee, 2010, in Korea at the elementary school level; Colby-Kelly and Turner, 2007, in Canada at the pre-university level; Davison, 2004, in Hong Kong and Australia at the secondary school level; Leung and Scott, 2009, in Wales and Scotland at the elementary school level; Rea-Dickins and Gardner, 2000, in England at the primary school level). The common thread across these studies is that teachers consider a wide range of evidence to inform their judgments on student ability. This happens in an ongoing manner within the instructional setting. The combination of information is drawn upon in order to determine what instruction is needed next so further learning can take place. Research designs generating these findings have drawn on multiple methods. Initially much of the research employed qualitative methods to examine teacher processes (e.g., observation, verbal protocol analysis, ethnography, discourse analysis, interviews). As studies continued, quantitative methods were added such as

surveys and the quantifying of data used with earlier procedures (Llosa, 2007). In conjunction with these findings comes the increasing recognition of the social character of assessment as it takes form in the classroom (McNamara and Roever, 2006; Rea-Dickins, 2008). When taken individually these contextualized studies may show variation in classroom activity, but when taken as a whole they have furthered our understanding of CBA by confirming the interface of SLA and language assessment and the importance of teacher and student interaction, feedback, uptake, and reflection to support learning.

2-Specific methods employed in CBA. Specific methods employed in CBA: Another area of research that has helped describe CBA pertains to the variety of methods employed by teachers in the instructional context. Brown and Hudson (1998) discuss the complexity of CBA in that teachers have an increasingly wide array of choices in terms of the methods they use. They suggest these “alternatives in assessment” are only tools and should be used in combination to support teacher decision making. In a comparative study across tertiary levels in Canada, Hong Kong, and China, Cheng et al. (2004), by way of a self-reporting survey, go further and identify the actual methods (in addition to purposes and procedures) that teachers use in their CBA. They conclude that even though there is diversity across methods, assessment plays a central role in classrooms, and once again it is the context that helps determine the type of assessment method. They, along with others, stress the challenges teachers have in terms of mediating between CBA and external high-stakes tests.

3-Teacher judgments and decision making and the contributing factors. The two areas of inquiry mentioned thus far could be labeled as precursors for this third area. Drawing on them and “teacher thinking” research, Yin (2010) studied teacher thought processes when assessing students. Using a case study approach with teachers at a UK university language center, she collected data through classroom observation, interviews, and simulated recalls. Her results demonstrate the importance of teacher agency (Rea-Dickins, 2004) as teachers “constantly make decisions related to assessment in the midst of conflicting demands and numerous considerations” (Yin, 2010: 193). Brindley (2001) and Leung and Lewkowicz (2006) discuss the concerns about teacher variability in decision making and in the diverse ways teachers interpret their students’ language abilities. “Unless greater attention is given to providing adequate time allocation and appropriate forms of professional development, the many potential benefits of involving teachers in assessment will not be realized” (Brindley, 2001: 403). In her study validating a standards-based classroom assessment of English language proficiency, Llosa (2007) provides a comprehensive literature review of the numerous factors