

Bringing Classroom-Based Assessment into the EFL classroom

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(Received: 27.11.2011, Accepted: 09.02.2012)

Abstract

This paper describes how English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers can bring reliable, valid, user-friendly assessment into their classrooms, and thus improve the quality of learning that occurs there. Based on the experience of the author as a an EFL teacher and teacher-trainer, it is suggested that the promotion and development of autonomy, intrinsic motivation, and self-esteem that takes place in a Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA) environment facilitates an holistic approach to language learning and prepares the students for the high-stakes tests that often determine their motivation for learning English. Rather than relying on the memorization of language code, form, lexis, and prepared answers, students who have learned in a CBA environment are able to self-assess, peer-assess, build portfolios, and edit their own work. Not only does this reduce the assessment burden on the teacher, but it also develops the skills of problem-solving, critical thinking, and summarization in the students, in addition to a heightened awareness of the language-learning process. By learning how to set goals, assess their achievements, and reflect on their future learning needs, students become more efficient language learners. While acknowledging the place of standardized, summative tests in contemporary society, it is suggested that CBA in the EFL classroom can enhance long-term learning and consequently enable and empower students to prepare for their future learning needs.

Keywords: EFL; Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA); long-term learning; empowerment; holistic language learning.

Introduction

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors of secondary, tertiary, and adult students in East Asia and Korea in

particular, face a common dilemma posed by standardized, high-stakes tests such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) and

the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), as well as local university entrance exams and end-of-semester tests, all of which promote extrinsic motivation, intensive study over short periods of time, last-minute cramming, and memorization of prepared answers. While these tests all serve a well-defined purpose, their effect in the EFL classroom can be deleterious in terms of real learning, in that the attention of all the stakeholders in the learning process (parents, students, principals, and teachers) is directed to the passing of these tests and the associated rewards that go with this, rather than the lifelong learning process itself. Language instructors who are aware of the benefits of long-term learning strategies and the development of autonomy, intrinsic motivation, and self-esteem, can find themselves caught in the test-preparation trap, rather than promote lifelong-learning strategies in their students. Despite the extensive research findings against the use of high-stakes, one-off tests as sole determiners of the students' future careers (Hout & Elliott, 2011), the practice of short-term test-preparation continues to overwhelm language-learning curricula in Korea¹, even in teacher-training institutes, where the national Teachers' Test dominates all pedagogical considerations, in apparent contradiction to the humanistic "Principles and general objectives of education" (UNESCO 2010/2011) as set out in the National Curriculum (KEDI, 2007). This is an indication of the seriousness of the current situation, in that the very institutes that should be leading the field by advocating and producing alternative, pedagogically sound methods of language

¹ This paper refers to English language education in Korea. However, the content is largely applicable to the EFL contexts in many parts of East Asia.

teaching and assessment, are caught in the same test-preparation paradigm, in effect teaching future language teachers how to prepare their students for high stakes tests, and ignoring the effects that this approach is having on students (Nathan, 2002).²

In view of these considerations, this paper attempts to show that Classroom-Based Assessment offers an effective, bottom-up approach to the problem of extrinsically motivated language learning and can be effective in developing the higher-order thinking skills that students need when preparing for high-stakes tests. However, it will be appropriate at this point to take a brief look at the current situation facing TEFL practitioners, with regard to assessment:

1. Teachers of English need to assess their students' learning needs and achievements. This is an important part of their daily work, whether at elementary, secondary (middle school, high school) or tertiary (university, college) level.
2. Assessment of language learning is a topic in which TEFL professionals in Korea rarely receive tuition (teacher-training) or opportunities for professional development (seminars, workshops and conferences).
3. ELT Textbooks used in secondary and tertiary education in Korea typically contain no assessment materials. Middle school and high-school books in particular provide

² The 'test-hell' has already claimed eight student suicides in the city of Daegu alone this year (Korea Herald, 2012).

very basic content matter for the national university entrance exam, but they offer no feedback for teachers and students in terms of assessment content and practice. Because of this:

- If teachers want to review Chapters in the school textbook, they must make their own assessment materials.
 - If teachers want to perform pre-course needs analyses and post-course reviews of learning based on the syllabus in the textbook, they must make their own materials.
 - If high school teachers want to prepare students more effectively for the university entrance test (government-approved textbooks are typically too narrow in their focus), they must use independently published test-preparation books, or the government-subsidized Educational Broadcasting Service (EBS) test-preparation books.
4. Most secondary EFL teaching in Korea is test-driven:
- Many teachers are under pressure to teach test-taking skills rather than linguistic competence or the intrinsic love of language learning.
 - Students who have to acquire large amounts of vocabulary and grammar for the College Scholastic Achievement Test (CSAT), the TOEFL, or the TOEIC are not interested in language activities which (however enjoyable and motivational) do not appear to be related to the test for which they are studying.
5. High-stakes, standardized tests offer

little or no feedback to teachers regarding test-construction criteria and test-item results. This makes it even more difficult to prepare students for these tests.

It is evident from this list that the EFL teacher in Korea is largely on his/her own in terms of developing test-design skills and finding ways to check on comprehension and acquisition of syllabus content. This paper therefore aims to help teachers and students to develop the skills they need for realistic evaluation of learning achievements and needs. In order to do this, it focuses on CBA, with its various learning-centered methods of investigating the events occurring in the language classroom. These methods include:

- Investigating the learning environment;
- gathering information;
- teacher-designed and student-designed formative tests;
- self- and peer-assessment;
- performance assessment;
- language portfolios;
- learner journals and diaries;
- projects;
- web-based assessment;
- comprehensive tests; and
- grade-negotiation.

What is CBA?

Classroom-Based Assessment deals with *internal* testing – the assessment events that occur in the EFL classroom. This assessment focuses on the immediate learning needs of the students, providing

appropriate feedback for each class, helping the teacher to prepare learning materials for future lessons, and helping students learn how to learn. CBA has a number of characteristics:

- CBA is part of the learning content (the means is the end);
- CBA examines student development over a period of time (rather than taking a summative snapshot at one point in time);
- CBA focuses on what students can do (not on what they can't do);
- Students are evaluated on their performance (rather than on their memory);
- CBA is concerned with the process of learning (though product can be present in forms of CBA such as journals, portfolios and projects);
- CBA is absolute (looking at individual growth) rather than relative (comparing students with each other); and
- CBA recognizes the complexity of factors affecting learning in the EFL classroom (learning styles, language proficiencies, cultural and educational backgrounds, emotional management, social skills, etc.).

CBA thus aims to make language evaluation more authentic, meaningful and relevant to the students and the teacher. In addition to being an integral part of the learning cycle in the classroom, it also helps students to become aware of the language learning process, to examine their learning needs, to make realistic learning goals, to assess their achievement of those goals, to reflect on their achievements, and to make new goals.

CBA takes evaluation to the learner, and gives him/her the information he/she needs in order to take responsibility for his/her learning. CBA focuses on the immediate learning needs of the students, providing feedback specific to each class, helping the teacher to prepare learning materials for future lessons, and helping students to learn how to learn. The affective and social benefits of this approach extend far beyond the classroom, since students who learn how to set realistic goals and how to evaluate their achievement of those goals are acquiring a valuable life skill. CBA is not simply an item of theoretical debate. It is a valuable learning tool.

CBA in the EFL context has a number of characteristics that differentiate it from other types of assessment. These can be effectively described by adapting and expanding Kohonen's table (1999, p. 285) from his paper on authentic assessment (Table 1):

Table 1: Comparison of standardized and classroom-based assessment (based on Kohonen, 1999, p. 285)

Standardized testing	Authentic classroom-based assessment
Testing and instruction are regarded as separate activities. Students are treated in a uniform way.	Assessment is an integral part of instruction (the means is the end). Each learner is treated as a unique person, in recognition of the many factors affecting learning (learning styles, proficiency, cultural and educational background, emotional management, social skills, etc.).
Emphasis is on weaknesses and failures: what students cannot do. Decisions are based on single sets of data (test scores)	Emphasis is on strengths and progress: what learners can do. Multiple sources of data provide a more informative view.
One-shot, “summative” exams are used.	Ongoing, “formative” assessment provides a fuller picture.
Judgment is given, without suggestions for improvement. There is a socio-economic status bias (test-scores reflect parents’ wealth). There is a focus on one “correct answer.” There is a focus on the product (<u>what</u>) of learning. The focus is on lower-order knowledge (facts) and skills (rote-learning). There is a focus on language <u>usage</u> (knowledge of rules and structures). Language-learning is seen as linear, predictable and measurable. Teachers are pressured to teach only what is tested. Students are forbidden to interact. Passive learning is promoted. Mutually exclusive competition is promoted (“You win, I lose.”). Students are compared with each other (normative assessment). Motivation is extrinsic (learning for a grade). Students learn how to fail (it is impossible for everyone to pass standardized tests). Continued “failure” results in low self-esteem.	Useful information for improving/guiding learning is provided. CBA is more socio-economically fair. The possibility of several perspectives is accepted. The main focus is on the process (<u>how</u>) of learning. The emphasis is on higher-order learning outcomes and thinking skills The focus is on language <u>use</u> (ability to apply rules and structures in real situations). Language-learning is seen as complex, cyclic and unpredictable. Teachers are allowed to develop meaningful curricula. Collaborative interaction is encouraged. Active awareness of learning is promoted. Collaborative learning is promoted (“We all learn together”). Learners are assessed according to their own performances (absolute assessment). Motivation is intrinsic (learning for its own sake). Students are all allowed to be successful. Effort and motivation produce results at every level. Confidence is enhanced through continued success.

If we look closely at these basic principles of CBA (Table 1), we can see that they involve and require a student-centered, non-threatening learning environment. According to this approach, assessment is an integral part of instruction, each learner is treated as a unique person, the emphasis is on strengths and progress (finding out and building on: what learners can do), assessment is used for improving and

guiding learning, the emphasis is on higher-order learning outcomes and thinking skills, and collaborative learning enables learners to help each other and work as teams. Finally, learning is seen as valuable for its own sake (intrinsic learning).

CBA thus aims to make language evaluation more authentic, meaningful and relevant to the students and the teacher, and it presents

an effective means of investigating and improving learning in the secondary language classroom, despite any restrictions concerning syllabus and lesson content. Not only does this approach make students more aware of the learning process, but it also reduces the assessment burden on the teacher (by involving students in the evaluation process), giving him/her more time to manage the learning environment. If such considerations seem idealistic, especially in the test-driven language classroom, we must ask ourselves, as educators, why it is that “ideal” conditions are lacking in the education system or in our classes. If ministerial educational objectives aim to promote “the ability to achieve an independent life and acquire the qualifications of democratic citizens, and to be able to participate in the building of a democratic state and promoting the prosperity of all humankind” (Park, 2001, p. 3), then it is the responsibility of teachers to produce learning environments that realize that goal.

The current high-stakes testing cloud appears to have a silver lining, however, and there are signs of change in terms of educational reform in Asia. In Korea, for example, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources has initiated development of a National English Ability Test (NEAT) that tests all four skills (instead of just reading and listening as in the CSAT) and will begin in 2015. High school class work will also be given more weight when students apply for university (Jin, 2004). If these changes become reality, then teachers will be empowered to focus on intrinsic motivation and development of performance skills and learning strategies in their

classrooms, and CBA will become a powerful tool for enhancing that learning.

Why should we use CBA?

Before considering the topic of assessing language learning, it is necessary first to ask how language learning occurs. The solution to this question continues to evade researchers, though certain factors can be identified:

1. construction of meaning;
2. sharing of experiences;
3. identification of needs and purposes;
4. critical evaluation of performance strategies; and
5. awareness of this process
(Harri-Augstein & Thomas, 1991, p. 7).

CBA pays attention to these factors, using reflective forms of assessment in instructionally relevant classroom activities (communicative performance assessment, language portfolios and self-assessment) and focusing on curriculum goals, enhancement of individual competence, and integration of instruction and assessment. In this two-way process, “the essentially interactive nature of learning is extended to the process of assessment” (Williams & Burden, 1997, p. 42). This approach to assessment examines what learners can do with their language, through real-life language-use tasks (cf. Weir, 1998, p. 9). The result is a process-oriented means of evaluating communicative competence, cognitive abilities and affective learning (Hart, 1994, p. 9; O’Malley & Pierce, 1996, pp. x-6; Kohonen, 1999, p. 284).

The principles behind CBA are largely concerned with promoting effective learning, to the benefit of everyone concerned. At this point, therefore, it is relevant to refer to the “Ten considerations crucial for language teachers” offered by Williams & Burden (1997).

1. There is a difference between learning and education.
2. Learners learn what is meaningful to them.
3. Learners learn in ways that are meaningful to them.
4. Learners learn better if they feel in control of what they are learning.
5. Learning is closely linked to how people feel about themselves.
6. Learning takes place in a social context through interactions with other people.
7. What teachers do in the classroom reflects their own beliefs and attitudes.
8. There is a significant role for the teacher as mediator in the language classroom.
9. Learning tasks represent an interface between teachers and learners.
10. Learning is influenced by the situation in which it occurs. (Williams & Burden, 1997, p. 204)

How can we use CBA?

Despite the restrictions of the test-driven classroom and other localized (specific to individual schools) demands on the teacher, the author has found that there are a number of ways in which principles and practices of CBA can be introduced into the EFL classroom.

1. **USE GROUPWORK IN CLASS.** Learners in groups learn more than they do as individuals (Vygotsky, 1978). This is true for all members of the group. Not only do the weaker members benefit from being instructed by someone who shares their zone of proximal development (ZPD), but the stronger members also benefit, since the best way to learn something is to teach it to someone else.
2. **INTRODUCE REGULAR NEEDS ANALYSES (PRE-COURSE, POST-COURSE) AND ONGOING SELF-ASSESSMENTS.** Allow the students to complete these themselves, using an interview format (exchange worksheets and write the partner’s responses on his/her sheet). The worksheets can be stored in individual portfolios.
3. **USE PORTFOLIOS.** Portfolios combine process and product, giving students and teachers an ongoing view of the learning that takes place. These can be either collection portfolios (including everything that has happened in class) or showcase portfolios (including only the work which the student wants others to see).
4. **USE LEARNER JOURNALS OR DIARIES.** Writing is a skill that improves with practice, and diaries encourage students to write regularly and meaningfully. Learner journals also help them to reflect on the learning process and to become more effective learners.
5. **USE COLLABORATION RATHER THAN COMPETITION.** The “Mutually Exclusive Goal

Attainment” (MEGA) (Kohn, 1992, p. 4) approach of competitive language learning encourages “learned helplessness” and demotivation. Even if groups compete against each other, there can be only one winner, and the focus of work tends towards competing rather than learning. For an excellent description of the dangers of using competition in the classroom, the reader is referred to Kohn’s book *No contest: The case against competition* (1992).

6. **MOTIVATE STUDENTS INTRINSICALLY.** Rewards are a two-edged sword, and can quickly become meaningless. If they are given to the “winners” then other students become demotivated. If they are given to everyone, then the hierarchical function of the rewards is lost and the teacher becomes a dispenser of candies and gold stars. Readers who are interested in pursuing this topic further are recommended to read another exceptional book by Alfie Kohn: *Punished by rewards* (1999).
7. **USE ABSOLUTE ASSESSMENT RATHER THAN RELATIVE ASSESSMENT.** Even if end-of-term exams are relative (comparing students with each other and therefore defining many students as losers), absolute assessment can be used in class during the semester. This allows teachers to encourage individual (and group) growth rather than pitting students against each other. Slow learners can be confident that their development is seen as valid by the teacher, and quick

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learners (including those who have lived in an English-speaking country) must also understand that they have to show evidence of continuous improvement in order to receive good grades.

8. **USE PROJECT-BASED LEARNING WHEN POSSIBLE.** Projects (e.g. a class newspaper) enable learners to work in groups, to define objectives (goal setting), to work on individual tasks (allocation of responsibility and accountability), to reflect on what still needs to be done (formative assessment) and to work together on a finished product (achievement). Projects can also promote intrinsic learning and are effectively assessed through peer-assessment. For an excellent discussion of the advantages of using projects, the reader is referred to Legukte & Thomas’ book *Process and experience in the language classroom* (1991).

Naturalistic enquiry

In addition to performing needs analyses, EFL teachers acquire a great deal of information about their students based on observations and personal instincts, and this information can be used to improve learning and the learning environment. Naturalistic teacher insights are not to be dismissed as “subjective” impressions, but should be seen as valuable, professional judgments:

The status of evaluation in the twentieth century represents one of the most striking paradoxes in the history of thought: An

essential - and perhaps the most important - ingredient in all intellectual and practical activity has been explicitly banned or implicitly excluded from discussion or acknowledgement in most of its natural territory. (Scriven, 1991, p. 10)

This “most important ingredient” referred to by Scriven is the professional, informed opinion of the teacher, which has been defined as worthless by “objective” evaluation. Such an impersonal approach ignores the fact that the classroom is “the social-psychological and material environment in which students and teachers work together” (Parlett & Hamilton, 1975, p. 145) and represents a network of cultural, social, institutional and psychological variables that interact in complex ways. Because of this, assessment must be transparent, non-threatening, student-centered and formative (feeding back into the course to improve it). It must also consider every aspect of learning (linguistic, cognitive, affective, emotional, cultural, and social). Qualitative methods of assessment are therefore appropriate for CBA, though this is not to exclude quantitative methods when appropriate. If learning and growth are examined qualitatively (through interviews, journals, learning conversations, etc.) it is possible to get an overall picture and then make quantitative questionnaires and tests to investigate in more detail. It should also be remembered that the student is at the center of the learning process, and should be in the same place in terms of assessment.

A variety of information-gathering techniques are used in naturalistic enquiry: i)

interviews; ii) questionnaires; iii) observation; iv) diaries; v) student records; and vi) portfolios. We might also add self/peer-assessment and learning conversations to this list, bringing us back to the fact that the best way to improve the learning environment is to get the students actively involved in assessing and improving their learning. The process of continuous self/peer-assessment and consequent raised awareness is in itself a beneficial reflection on and use of data. The construction of a learner-centered, non-threatening, environment, in which assessment is an integral part of instruction, is therefore an end in itself, and will produce its own positive results (Finch, 2001).

Naturalistic enquiry can thus provide important information to the most important people in the learning process – the students and the teacher. From the point of view of the students, there can be attention to product as well as process, in that they can have a learning journal (diary) and one or more portfolios as evidence of the growth that has occurred during the language course. They might also have videos of projects designed and performed by them. These will all assist in the formation of positive attitudes to learning, and will therefore improve the quality of learning itself (success breeds success).

Naturalistic data analysis happens all the time. The teacher sets up a non-threatening CBA environment, with portfolios, journals, self-assessment, etc., and then observes the results and the process. As time passes, trends appear, and it becomes evident that certain aspects of learning need extra

attention. At that time, the teacher can adjust his/her teaching accordingly, and repair the learning process at first hand, without delay, and on an individual, group or class basis. If we acknowledge the teacher as a professional, an expert who can make informed decisions, then we can see that CBA (and naturalistic enquiry) provide the personalized data upon which those decisions can be made. The answer to how to use the data is left in the hands of the teacher.

CBA produces a wealth of naturalistic (deep, rich, personal) data that can be examined and used as appropriate. Rather than an impersonalized set of numbers, this data comes *from* the students and is *about* the students. It is important that this assessment information comes from various sources. Just as a single test can only give the information it is designed to give, so the use of only one method of CBA can produce misleading results. Teachers therefore need to “triangulate.” This means using different methods of assessment and comparing them with each other as follows:

- Learning journals can uncover anxieties and emotional problems that are interfering with learning;
- portfolios can show that organizational and time-management skills have been acquired;
- observations can bring interaction issues to light; and
- semi-structured or open-ended interviews can reveal concerns previously unimagined by the teacher³.

³ It must be remembered that questionnaires only tell us what we want to know. They do not expose

CBA in practice

It is not possible to describe in depth the results of CBA in the author’s EFL classroom, since i) this is largely a theory-based paper, and ii) there is a lack of space for descriptions of methodology and classroom practice. However, reference to the author’s language-learning website (www.finchpark.com/courses/) will confirm that he has been using CBA for more than ten years, and that it is now an integral part of his teacher-training courses and seminars. This can be seen in particular in the Learning Journal, *English Reflections* (<http://www.finchpark.com/books/lj/index2.htm>), which introduces a number of self-assessment instruments, discussion activities (about language learning), and peer-assessment activities. By working through this learning journal, undergraduate English Education students in particular have opportunities to learn how to set their own language learning goals, assess their achievements, discuss their learning needs, and reflect on the learning process. Contrary to the received truth that Korean students prefer passive learning⁴, examination of these journals over the past 10 years (Finch, 2008) has shown that these students quickly

problems that we have not identified or imagined. There are also many reasons for not answering questionnaires sincerely. This provides another reason for triangulation of results.

⁴ Such received truths often use circular logic. For example, it is often claimed that Korean students prefer rote learning, simply because they have experienced nothing else. However, the author’s experience is that Korean students are very quick to develop learning strategies and to take on autonomous, task-based learning when given the chance to do this. Just because they have never experienced effective learning strategies and methods, this does not mean that they do not like such approaches.

become adept in self- and peer-assessment and consequently in learning how to learn – a skill that is vital for the 21st century, when everyone can expect to reskill during their careers.

Further implementation of the CBA concept has recently been carried out by the author in the Freshman English program of his university in Korea. Having been invited to design and implement a Freshman English program that would provide essential academic and career-oriented English language skills to freshman students in all disciplines, the author of this paper designed and wrote the textbooks for an integrated-skills program (Finch, 2012a; 2012b) that promoted English speaking and writing. Each Unit of this program made use of self-assessment, peer-assessment, and peer editing - three skills that students typically did not possess when they entered the university Freshman English program, having experienced only memory-based test-preparation in high school. Despite this fact, the first year of implementation of this program has shown that students of all levels and all disciplines are able to learn the skills associated with self/peer-assessment of language skills, and of peer-editing (in a process-writing context) in particular. They have also shown an ability to quickly acquire the organizational skills involved in keeping a portfolio of their assignments and their written drafts.

While CBA has been shown by the author and other researchers to be a viable and practical method of empowering language learners in this part of Asia, it is important to remember that students and teachers new to

CBA need to acquire and develop the appropriate skills. Rather than blaming students for not knowing how to set goals, how to perform a needs analysis, how to make a portfolio, how to assess themselves and each other, and how to critically reflect on their achievements, it is important to take into account the fact that they have never had any tuition in this field and that problems such as peer-pressure and unwillingness to criticize each other are bound to arise. However, when the classroom is seen as a microcosm of society it is possible to deal with such problems as they arise and to work them through in a democratic and sensitive manner. Given the opportunity to think about the issues involved and to learn about the vital importance of self-assessment in their lives, students are typically quick to acquire the necessary critical-thinking skills and to become effective learners.

Conclusion

Knowledge of the elements of a language in fact counts for nothing unless the user is able to combine them in new and appropriate ways to meet the linguistic demands of the situation in which he wishes to use the language. (Morrow, 1979, p. 145)

Educational theory is currently addressing the problems associated with an under-performing education system by revisiting ideas that Rogers, Dewey, Bruner, Frière and Vygotsky were expressing even before Applied Linguistics was born, in 1961. Indeed, a holistic view of education, which

can be traced back to Aristotle, Plato, and early oriental philosophers, represents a return to basic principles, rather than simply another fashionable trend. In Korea, the ideal of *Hongik-Ingan* (contributing to the overall benefit of humankind) has always been at the heart of education (UNESCO, 2010/2011; KEDI, 2007). Such an emphasis must be given utmost urgency in these times of natural and man-made disasters; times in which society, in its deification of monetary gain, has neglected moral education; times in which an ethical awareness must extend to every aspect of life.

Stevick (1976) identifies four forms of alienation which have resulted in the failure of modern language teaching:

1. alienation of the learners from the materials;
2. alienation of the learners from themselves;
3. alienation of the learners from the class; and
4. alienation of the learners from the teacher. (Stevick, 1976, p. 225)

These alienations result from an impersonal education system which values intellect over emotion, and behaviorist learning over moral responsibility. However, changes that occurred in the 20th century in social science, psychology, philosophy, and political science, indicate that in modern society, learning and understanding meta-skills (problem-solving, critical thinking, etc.) is more important than knowledge. Furthermore, the various kinds of social awareness (minority rights, the status of women, rights of patients, etc.) that have arisen have helped to make quality of life

the new marker of social progress. A radical rethinking of education is therefore necessary, since the present model would be unsatisfactory even if it worked! Imagine a society full of A⁺ students as defined by traditional education. Who would drive the trains, clean the streets, grow the food, and deliver the newspapers? Such roles are integral to society, yet their artisans are seen (and perceive themselves) as unsuccessful products of the school system. Young people who possess practical skills are forced to attend institutions that tell them they are failures. They then move on to Technical and Vocational Colleges, learning skills that are the lifeblood of the community, but which are not taught in high-level institutions.

Language education is typically poor in producing learners who can be termed successful, even within the narrow criterion of linguistic proficiency. Because of this, the question “How can language be taught effectively?” must be exchanged for “How can the language classroom become an instrument of positive attitude change?” In other words, “How can language classrooms mirror changes in social development, and produce future citizens equipped to take on the challenges of a century in which the only constant factor will be change?” Legutke & Thomas (1991, pp. 7-10) pose a number of questions that are relevant at this point:

Question 1: Is it possible and feasible to turn learners’ classrooms into whole-person events, where body and soul, intellect and feeling, head, hand and heart converge in action?

Question 2: Can second-language (L2) learning be a satisfying activity

in itself, in the here and now of the classroom? What adventures and challenges are possible under the very conditions of L2 learning?

Question 3: What needs to be done to regain some of this creative potential in the L2 classroom? Do we have to consider individual and cultural differences?

Question 4: What needs to be done to create situations and scenarios where communication in the target language could be more meaningful? What are the roles of teacher, learners, topic and input in such scenarios? Could even inter- and intra-student discourse be carried out in the target language?

Question 5: What needs to be done to develop in learners such a capacity for critique? How can they become co-managers of their learning and participate in their own teaching? How do we create the learning space so that learners can take initiatives to pursue their own learning for their own benefit, and to discover their own learning styles? (Legutke & Thomas, 1991, pp. 7-10)

These questions highlight both the problem and a means of addressing it. It is no longer defensible to use discrete-item testing of dubious constructs. Instead, the need to understand performance itself and the processing (and affective) factors that influence it, suggests the use of reflective forms of assessment in instructionally relevant classroom activities (communicative performance assessment, language portfolios and self-assessment), which focus on integration of instruction and assessment. In this two-way process, the essentially interactive nature of learning can

be extended to the process of assessment (Williams & Burden, 1997, p. 42), examining what learners can do with their language, through real-life language use tasks (cf. Weir, 1998, p. 9).

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