Chapter 1
Introduction

Aims of the Book

Writing plays an important role in all stages of life from early education to college and beyond. It allows students to communicate ideas, develop creativity and critical thinking, and build confidence. Effective writing skills contribute to academic success and are considered a useful asset in the workplace. In second and/or foreign language (L2) contexts, as a result of globalization and the worldwide trend toward learning English as an L2 at an early age, writing has begun to play an increasingly significant role in the teaching and learning of English for younger learners. The growing importance of written communications, ranging from informal writing for social networking to more formal writing for academic studies, has made the acquisition of writing skills an important priority for young L2 learners. Since "developing language competence inevitably requires assessment" (Berchoud et al. 2011, p. 9), how teachers should conduct classroom assessment to help L2 students improve their writing is of critical importance.

Traditional classroom writing assessment in L2 school contexts is dominated by a summative orientation, which sees teachers administer writing tasks in the form of tests that focus primarily on writing performance and scores. This summative focus is referred to as assessment of learning (AoL), where scores suffice for feedback. A predominant emphasis on AoL, however, is not conducive to effective learning. For students, while they complete classroom writing tasks on a regular basis, a primarily summative emphasis and lack of formative feedback are unlikely to lead to effective learning, also making it hard for students to develop motivation, confidence, and autonomy in writing. For teachers, when classroom writing tasks are administered summatively, they tend to treat writing as a terminal product and pay little attention to the writing and learning process; they also spend a huge amount of time responding to errors in student writing and suffer from burnout as a result. This lose-lose situation is a cause for concern since time and efforts, on the part of both teachers

and students, are not sufficiently rewarded and that a vicious cycle damaging to teaching and learning ensues.

   The main aim of the book is to explore how classroom writing assessment and feedback can be utilized effectively to enhance student learning in the second language writing classroom in the school context. In the book, the term "second language" refers to both second and foreign languages, where English is taught and learnt as a second/foreign language – i.e., ESL/EFL. The "school context" refers to the precollege/university context, i.e., from primary to secondary, though the book can also have relevance for contexts beyond the secondary. Currently, there is an overall lack of school representation in the L2 writing literature. With increasing importance to equip school learners for college, university, and workplace writing in the globalized world, and with earlier starting ages of writing – e.g., in European and Asian countries (Reichelt 2009), a focus on classroom writing assessment and feedback in the L2 school context can redress the current imbalance in the literature. It can also provide practical ideas for writing teachers to help young learners enhance their learning of writing early on and for teacher educators to facilitate the effective design of classroom writing assessment and feedback training for L2 school teachers. For L2 writing researchers, the book can provide suggestions on new directions for future research on classroom assessment and feedback, which are germane to the field of L2 writing.

Classroom Writing Assessment in L2 School Contexts

Classroom assessment in this book refers to "the kind of assessment that can be used as a part of instruction to support and enhance learning" (Shepard 2000, p. 4), rather than assessment "used to give grades or to satisfy the accountability demands of an external authority" (Shepard 2000, p. 4). Instead of treating assessment and instruction as "curiously separate" (Graue 1993, p. 291), classroom assessment emphasizes "the crucial link between assessment, as carried out in the classroom, and learning and teaching" (Assessment Reform Group 1999, p. 1). Such assessment is also referred to as "instructionally relevant assessment" (Shepard 2000, p. 13) or "learning-oriented assessment" (Carless 2007, p. 57). Simply put, classroom assessment serves to find out what students have learnt (and have not yet learnt), and such information is used by teachers to promote student learning. This is referred to as assessment for learning (AfL) – i.e., using assessment to inform and improve learning. Although AfL and AoL are not mutually exclusive, "when classroom assessments are conceived as assessments for learning, rather than assessments of learning, students will learn better what their teacher wants them to learn" (Popham 2009, p. 11). Additionally, assessment as learning (AaL), a subset of AfL (Earl 2013) that highlights the role of the learner as a critical connector between assessment and learning, has a crucial role to play in classroom assessment. The

focus of this book is on AfL/AaL[1] rather than AoL because, as asserted by Stiggins (2002), the latter is in place but not the former.

Applied to L2 school contexts, classroom assessment of writing has been heavily influenced by traditional views of testing with assessment being used to dole out grades and to serve as accountability measures (Lee 2007). It has a heavy summative orientation, focusing on the written product, student performance, and scores (Lee and Coniam 2013). Such a phenomenon is particularly common in certain L2 contexts such as EFL contexts dominated by an examination culture and influenced by the Confucian heritage culture, where teaching and learning tends to be polarized as imparting knowledge and passive reception of knowledge, respectively, with teachers playing a dominant role as authorities and students being passive recipients rather than active participants and co-learners in the classroom (Biggs 1998; Carless 2011). Take Hong Kong as an example. Despite the espoused aim to promote AfL, writing in schools is treated primarily as a product within an examination-dominant culture (Hamp-Lyons 2007), where the primacy of scores is never gainsaid. To maximize the potential of classroom writing for improving student learning, classroom writing assessment should be reconceptualized to include AfL as its central pillar.

Reframing the purpose of classroom assessment has clear ramifications for the teacher and student roles in the L2 writing classroom. In classroom writing assessment that emphasizes AfL/AaL, the teacher does not dominate the assessment process, nor does he/she merely play the role of the tester/evaluator. Instead the teacher is "working toward the ultimate success of the student" (Lantolf and Poehner 2004, p. 58) through interacting with and offering mediated assistance. Such assistance is given in the form of feedback – in the written, oral, and/or online mode – not only by the teacher but also by peers.

Throughout the book, a prominent role is accorded to the learners – e.g., they set goals, engage in peer assessment, and monitor their learning. Through participating in classroom writing assessment activities such as peer feedback and compiling portfolios, students enhance their motivation to learn and to write, develop self-regulation, and improve their writing performance. Students become assessment capable and develop assessment literacy to take charge of their learning. The ultimate goal of classroom writing assessment is to help students become autonomous and self-regulated learners and writers.

While student learning is pivotal to classroom writing assessment, the problem is that many teachers are ill prepared to provide productive assessment experiences for students. The large majority of L2 teachers in particular, have little training in alternative writing assessment practices that are geared toward AfL/AaL (see Crusan et al. 2016). Also, as classroom assessment based on AfL/AaL is likely to be at variance with conventional assessment practice, teachers will need to develop assessment literacy to bring classroom assessment more in line with teaching and learning,

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[1] In the book references are made to AfL, AfL/AaL, and AaL. When a reference is made to AfL, AaL (though not mentioned) is implied as part of AfL. A reference to AfL/AaL is intended to emphasize both the AfL and AaL functions of classroom assessment. A reference to AaL alone focuses specifically on the AaL aspect of AfL.

use it to create a classroom culture that puts learning at the center, and develop "a vision of assessment in the service of learning" (Shepard 2000, p. 12).

Feedback in Classroom L2 Writing Assessment

Classroom assessment that is oriented toward AfL lays a strong emphasis on quality feedback and active student involvement (Brookhart 2011); specifically, classroom assessment includes teacher, peer, and self-feedback, i.e., "all those activities undertaken by teachers and by students in assessing themselves – that provide information to be used as feedback to modify teaching and learning activities" (Black and Wiliam 1998, p. 140). As a crucial component of classroom assessment, feedback provides information about students' learning, performance, knowledge, or understanding and is often referred to as one of the most powerful sources of influence on student learning (Hattie and Timperley 2007). However, we often "take it for granted that providing feedback to the learner about performance will lead to self-correction and improvement" (Shepard 2000, p. 11), which is not necessarily the case.

Research on educational assessment has provided positive evidence in support of the role of feedback in classroom assessment. As shown in the synthesis of 500 meta-analyses conducted by Hattie (1999) as reported in Hattie and Timperley (2007), feedback in the classroom is found to be in the top five to ten most influential factors affecting student achievement, though the results reveal huge variability in the feedback types and their impact on learning. For instance, feedback that relates to learning goals provides incentives and cues to help students improve learning, and instructional feedback that is technology enhanced (e.g., delivered in the audio, video, and/or online mode) is found to be particularly powerful. In Kluger and DeNisi's (1996) meta-analysis, also reported in Hattie and Timperley (2007), it is found that feedback is effective when the goals are specific and challenging and when feedback is perceived as nonthreatening.

In L2 writing, existing feedback research has cast doubt on the effectiveness of teacher feedback in helping students improve their writing, and hence a fundamental question that has driven research on feedback in writing, including written corrective feedback, is whether feedback does make a difference to students' writing (Hyland 2010; Hyland and Hyland 2006; Truscott 1996). In many L2 writing classrooms, feedback tends to be treated as an entity that exists independently of teaching and learning, when, in fact, feedback is best conceptualized with reference to three stages of learning: (1) where I am going, i.e., feed up; (2) how I am going, i.e., feed back; and (3) where to next, i.e., feed forward (Hattie and Timperley 2007). In the "feed up" (where the learner is going) stage, concrete learning goals are provided to students so that they know where they are going. Effective feedback is information about students' performance or understanding in relation to these goals. Such an alignment between goal-oriented instruction and goal-specific feedback is pivotal to effective learning. In a number of L2 writing contexts, however, feedback is not geared toward the learning goals, resulting in a misalignment between

assessment, teaching, and learning. Students receive generic feedback on content, language, and organization rather than specific feedback that relates to the writing topic, genre, or learning goals. In story writing, for example, when feedback is given in isolation of teaching and learning, students may receive generic commentary such as "interesting content" instead of specific commentary that relates to the learning goals of story writing, such as "an engaging story opening." In the "feed back" stage (how the learner is progressing), feedback should be given with a view to bridging the gap between the current level of understanding and the desired outcome (also in relation to the learning goals). Such feedback is descriptive and diagnostic, yielding specific information about progress (i.e., what students did well) and how to proceed (i.e., how to improve their learning). A specific and concrete comment like the following can provide useful information to help the learner move forward: "The story opening is fine, but you could revise it to grab the readers' attention – e.g., by putting a short dialogue at the beginning." In many L2 writing classrooms, however, the "feed back" stage often serves the purpose of AoL, consisting in detailed error feedback and relying on scores instead of descriptive, diagnostic feedback to show how learners are progressing. Teacher commentary tends to be general (e.g., "You've made a lot of grammatical mistakes"), providing judgment of student writing rather than informing them of strengths and weaknesses in relation to the learning goals. Finally, in the "feed forward" (where to next) stage, even though students have completed the classroom writing assessment task, learning should continue through the teacher's provision of information that further promotes learning. For example, the teacher may provide opportunities for further challenges (e.g., asking students to set new learning goals based on the feedback received), encourage critical reflection on the learning process (e.g., asking students to write reflections in their learning log), or teach additional strategies to help students cope with what they have not fully understood or mastered in the writing process (e.g., reinforcement of the use of dialogue to enrich story writing).

In a nutshell, classroom assessment refers to "activities that provide teachers and/or students with feedback information relating to one or more of the three feedback questions" (Hattie and Timperley 2007, p. 101) – i.e., feed up (where am I going), feed back (how am I going), and feed forward (where to next). Classroom writing assessment explored in this book is assessment that brings improvement to student learning, with teacher, peer, and self-feedback playing a pivotal role to make this happen. While traditional assessment has focused a great deal on AoL, a paradigm shift from AoL to AfL means that teachers have to learn how to use classroom assessment and feedback to inform and improve learning and to enhance their own teaching[2] (Black and Wiliam 1998; Sadler 1989). As teachers provide better classroom assessment (Popham 2009), more productive feedback, and more effective instruction, students are likely to improve their learning.

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[2] Classroom assessment serves as a pedagogical tool to improve both learning and teaching. Although the book puts an explicit emphasis on classroom L2 writing assessment that informs and promotes student learning, its role in improving teaching is also vital.

Outline of the Book

Following this introductory chapter, Chap. 2 examines the purpose, theory, and practice of classroom L2 writing assessment. The chapter clarifies the different purposes that classroom writing assessment serves, highlighting AfL/AaL as the cornerstone of classroom writing assessment. It reviews the major theoretical tenets that underlie classroom assessment, highlighting the social-constructivist framework that sees learning as socially and culturally constructed and learners as active agents taking charge of their learning. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the principles that guide effective classroom writing assessment practice.

Chapter 3 examines AfL in the L2 writing classroom. It begins by unpacking the notion of AfL and then reports salient findings from AfL in writing research. The chapter also discusses the issues arising from the implementation of AfL in writing in L2 school contexts as well as the pedagogical implications for classroom L2 writing assessment.

Chapter 4 focuses on AaL in writing. The chapter begins with a review of the theoretical foundations of AaL and examines the pedagogical principles by outlining the AaL strategies that teachers can use in the writing classroom. It then highlights findings from the currently limited research on AaL in L2 writing and concludes with recommendations for further research.

Chapter 5 provides an introduction to the various chapters on feedback in writing. It begins by examining the theoretical perspectives that undergird feedback in L2 writing. Situating feedback within AfL/AaL, the chapter highlights the contribution of sociocultural theory in advancing our understanding of feedback as a form of mediation and its role in influencing teachers' implementation of effective feedback practices. It also provides a brief introduction to teacher feedback (Chap. 6), peer feedback (Chap. 7), and technology-enhanced feedback (Chap. 9).

Chapter 6 addresses teacher feedback. It begins by reviewing salient research findings about feedback in L2 writing and then discusses the discrepancies between research and practice by drawing upon studies conducted in some L2 secondary classrooms. The chapter underscores the significant role context plays in teacher feedback and concludes with some guiding principles for effective teacher feedback.

Chapter 7 examines the role of peer feedback in classroom L2 writing assessment. The chapter begins with a discussion of the theoretical perspectives that inform peer feedback in L2 writing. Then it addresses a number of frequently asked questions about the use of peer feedback in L2 school writing based on salient findings from peer feedback research. Finally, the chapter provides some tips to help teachers organize peer feedback activities in L2 writing contexts.

Chapter 8 examines the role of portfolio assessment in L2 writing classrooms. The chapter begins with a discussion of the features and types of portfolios and how they are used in the writing classrooms. It then relates portfolios to the different purposes of assessment, namely, AoL and AfL/AaL, and clarifies the dual-purpose portfolios can serve in the writing classroom. After that, the chapter focuses on the

portfolio process and illustrates the intertwined relationships between instruction, learning, and assessment in the portfolio-based writing classroom. As feedback plays a pivotal role in portfolio assessment, the chapter also examines how feedback can be utilized at different stages of the portfolio process. Finally, it concludes with an evaluation of writing portfolios as a pedagogical and assessment tool in L2 school contexts.

Chapter 9 turns to the use of technology in classroom assessment and feedback in L2 writing. The chapter begins with a brief introduction to the use of technology-enhanced tasks in L2 classroom writing assessment – namely, digital storytelling, blog-based writing, and collaborative writing on wikis. It then examines the use of technology in teacher evaluation of student writing by discussing the pros and cons of automated writing evaluation and screencast feedback. After that, the chapter examines the use of technology in self-/peer evaluation with reference to Microsoft Word language check functions, concordancing, and screencasting. To illustrate how technology can be exploited to leverage the potential of AfL/AaL, the chapter provides an overview of a new Writing ePlatform developed by the Hong Kong Education Bureau for upper primary and lower secondary students to promote AfL/AaL, with potential relevance for similar contexts. Through describing the features of the Writing ePlatform, the chapter illustrates how students can be helped to take an active role in classroom writing assessment.

Chapter 10, the final chapter, provides a closure to the book by examining the knowledge base of classroom assessment literacy for L2 writing teachers. It also highlights the importance of feedback literacy as a critical component of classroom assessment literacy. The chapter underlines the importance of professional development for L2 writing teachers and the need for them to undertake assessment innovations to improve the teaching, learning, and assessment of writing. It concludes with a call for teachers to undertake continuing professional development so as to enhance their classroom assessment literacy and bring improvement to student learning of writing.

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