

Chapter 10

Classroom Assessment Literacy for L2 Writing Teachers

Introduction

The turn of the twenty-first century has witnessed “a phenomenal increase in the testing and assessment responsibilities placed upon language teachers” (Fulcher 2012, p. 113), and as a result, teachers’ assessment literacy has been an important topic for discussion and research (Popham 2008; Vogt and Tsagari 2014). More than two decades ago, US assessment scholar Rick Stiggins sounded an alarm about teachers’ inability to conduct effective language assessment; he wrote: “we are a nation of assessment illiterates” (Stiggins 1991, p. 535). In the same decade, the UK assessment for learning reform (Black and Wiliam 1998) also triggered considerable interest in teacher assessment literacy. Since then, there has been an increasing realization throughout the world that teacher assessment literacy is underdeveloped (Jin 2010; Popham 2011; Volante and Fazio 2007) and that it warrants urgent attention on teachers’ professional development programs.

In L2 school contexts, teachers’ lack of assessment literacy is a cause for concern. Throughout schoolchildren’s more than 10 years of schooling, teachers administer assessment of different kinds on a regular basis, and assessment illiterate teachers are likely to fail their responsibility in designing sound and effective assessments, jeopardizing learning and teaching with dire consequences for students’ future learning. Therefore, examining how assessment literacy can be developed among L2 teachers in school contexts is of paramount importance. With a specific focus on classroom writing, this chapter examines the assessment literacy that L2 school teachers need for conducting effective classroom writing assessment. While the preceding nine chapters have addressed different aspects of classroom writing assessment geared toward helping writing teachers enhance their classroom assessment literacy, this final chapter provides a con-

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clusion to the book by discussing what it means for teachers to possess classroom assessment literacy to conduct effective classroom assessment in L2 school writing contexts.

Teacher Assessment Literacy

Assessment literacy refers to teachers' knowledge and understanding of the principles and practices of effective assessment (Carless 2011; Crusan et al. 2016; Popham 2004; Stiggins 2002; Volante and Fazio 2007; Xu and Brown 2016). Specifically, the term "language assessment literacy" is used (Inbar-Lourie 2008) to refer to assessment literacy for language teachers, comprising skills, knowledge, and principles of language testing and assessment (Davies 2008). Language assessment literacy is a multidimensional concept that encompasses "a repertoire of competences" (Pill and Harding 2013, p. 382); it enables teachers to create, develop, and evaluate language tests/assessments; analyze, interpret, and report assessment data accurately and appropriately for different purposes; and provide feedback to learners to help them improve learning (Inbar-Lourie 2008; Stiggins 1999). Assessment literacy, however, should not be examined in a vacuum but instead it is intertwined with the social and historical context in which assessment takes place (Davies 2008). As Scarino (2013) aptly puts, assessment is "situated in distinctive institutional and policy contexts that confer on the assessment process particular characteristics and requirements" (p. 311). As different educational systems around the world are witnessing a paradigm shift from summative to formative assessment, assessment literacy should take into consideration principles and practices relevant to classroom/formative assessment, in addition to skills and practices pertaining to large-scale standardized testing (Stiggins 1991). In the context of language learning, in different parts of the world, the local curriculum and assessment frameworks place a great deal of focus on assessment for learning (AfL) – e.g., Australia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and the UK. This new assessment culture necessitates language assessment training for teachers that enables them to use formative assessment practices to support learning and teaching. With a focus on classroom writing assessment and feedback, this book is concerned with classroom assessment literacy that entails knowledge of effective ways to assess student learning and writing and to give feedback in the writing classroom.

Recent research on teacher assessment literacy has shown that teachers in general lack assessment literacy (e.g., Campbell and Collins 2007; Coombe et al. 2012; Malone 2013; Mertler 2004; White 2009) and feel ill-equipped to assess students' performance (e.g., Mertler 2009; Zhu 2004). Volante and Fazio (2007) surveyed 69 preservice primary teachers to gauge their level of assessment literacy and found a low level of self-efficacy among them across each of the four years of the teacher education program. Similarly, the primary teachers in Yamtim and Wongwanich's

(2014) study demonstrated a low level of classroom assessment literacy. Vogt and Tsagari's (2014) study indicated that the assessment literacy of pre- and in-service teachers from six European countries was underdeveloped. Research about the impact of language assessment training has yielded mixed results. The experimental study by Fan et al. (2011) showed that after training the assessment knowledge of the 47 in-service secondary school teachers, especially those with low-level prior knowledge, had improved. However, the assessment training provided to the European preservice and inservice teachers in Vogt and Tsagari's (2014) study was found to be inadequate, and as a result the teachers had to turn to mentors and colleagues for advice, which ran the risk of "perpetuating inappropriate assessment methods" (p. 392) routinely used by experienced teachers. Many of the participants in the study expressed a need to receive further assessment training that catered to their needs in their own specific educational contexts. Lam's (2015) recent study about the language assessment training needs of Hong Kong preservice teachers showed that language assessment training in Hong Kong was insufficient; the language assessment courses scrutinized in the study were found to fall short in terms of helping preservice teachers bridge the gap between theory and practice in the context of assessment reform in Hong Kong. Overall, research suggests that teacher assessment literacy is not up to scratch and that quality assessment training is much needed.

Classroom Assessment Literacy for Writing Teachers

In L2 contexts, writing teachers also lack adequate assessment training (Crusan et al. 2016; Dempsey et al. 2009) and need assessment literacy to carry out effective writing assessments. This chapter focuses on classroom assessment literacy (rather than assessment knowledge about large-scale testing and summative tests), which enables L2 writing teachers to use classroom assessment "for effectively utilizing the assessment process and outcomes to develop and improve the quality of instruction of teachers and learning of students" (Yamtin and Wongwanich 2014, p. 2998). The relationship between classroom assessment and teaching and learning is underlined by Popham (2009): "the more importance that the teacher ascribes to classroom assessments, the more profound will be the impact of such assessments on a classroom's day-to-day instructional activities" (p. 7). Writing teachers' classroom assessment literacy is essential for "the development of quality of learning and instruction" (Yamtin and Wongwanich 2014, p. 2999), and hence one major goal of assessment training for L2 writing teachers is to help them become facilitators of learning (Fulcher 2012, p. 116). Simply put, classroom assessment literacy can "play a powerful role in teaching students better ... and markedly improve students' learning" (Popham 2011, p. 271).

Knowledge Base of Writing Teacher Classroom Assessment Literacy

Drawing on the teacher/language assessment literacy literature, the knowledge base of classroom assessment literacy for writing teachers is defined in terms of their ability to do the following (Chappuis et al. 2012; Inbar-Lourie 2008; Plake and Impara 1997; Popham 2004; Stiggins 1999, 2002; Volante and Fazio 2007):

- Understand the different purposes of classroom writing assessment and how they can be used to maximize student learning.
- Utilize feedback effectively to improve student learning.
- Involve students in self-assessment/peer assessment, goal setting, self-monitoring, and self-reflection.
- Employ different classroom writing assessment tools to maximize student learning, e.g., teacher feedback forms, error ratio analysis, the error log, peer feedback, and portfolio assessment.
- Design effective classroom writing assessment tasks to evaluate student writing, e.g., technology-enhanced writing tasks.
- Use assessment effectively to motivate students and help them learn.
- Make use of classroom assessment to improve instruction.

While the above is not intended as an exhaustive list of the components of classroom writing assessment literacy, it encapsulates the major competences L2 writing teachers need in order to develop their assessment abilities to conduct classroom writing assessment effectively.

Feedback Literacy as a Key Component of Classroom Writing Assessment Literacy

Feedback literacy is specifically highlighted as an indispensable part of writing teachers' classroom assessment literacy, defined as teachers' ability to use feedback effectively to support student learning. Although Sutton (2012) focuses on the students in his discussion of feedback literacy, referring to it as "the ability to read, interpret and use written feedback" (Sutton 2012, p. 31) and to "act upon, or feed-forward, the feedback given" (Sutton 2012, p. 37), I maintain that feedback literacy pertains to both teacher and learners. In order that students become feedback literate, teachers have to be feedback literate in the first place since they have to provide opportunities and support to facilitate students to read, interpret, and act upon teacher feedback. Although feedback literacy is still a nascent concept in the L2 writing literature, it has a vital role to play in helping teachers deliver useful feedback and in enabling students to utilize feedback productively. Therefore, feedback literacy should be accorded an important place in writing teachers' classroom assessment literacy development.

Amidst the limited literature about teachers' feedback literacy, there is research that shows that teachers lack feedback literacy – i.e., they are not using feedback effectively to promote student learning. The preservice ESL teachers in Guénette and Lyster's (2013) study were found to overuse direct corrections at the expense of indirect feedback strategies. The secondary teachers in Lee's (2004) survey study reported that they used a limited range of error feedback strategies, and the error correction task they completed showed that only slightly over half of their corrections were accurate. Bailey and Garner's (2010) study suggested that teacher feedback did not generally have the intended positive effect, and teachers themselves were ambivalent about the value of feedback. Also, when participating teachers provided feedback, they needed to conform to the institutional requirements, procedures, and priorities, which resulted in conflicts between their conceptions of the pedagogical purposes of feedback on the one hand and the demands of the system on the other. Similarly, the secondary teachers in Lee's (2011a) study felt that they were hamstrung by the constraints in their work contexts, which posed obstacles to both effective feedback practices and possible feedback innovations. Thus, teacher feedback literacy for L2 writing, as part of classroom assessment literacy, requires knowledge that is "contextualized in the realities of teachers' contexts of practice – as pedagogical or practical and experiential knowledge" (Scarino 2013, p. 316). At the core of teacher feedback literacy is an understanding of the social context which is enmeshed with teaching, learning, and assessment. As pointed out in Chap. 6, context plays a significant role in teacher feedback; therefore, the development of teachers' feedback literacy needs to take account of the multifarious contextual factors that influence their feedback practices. Just as teacher assessment literacies are understood as "contextualized and culturally responsive practices" (Yu and Brown, 2016, p. 154), teacher feedback literacy has to take into consideration a contextualized perspective.

Although feedback literacy is singled out in this section, I do not make a distinction between feedback literacy and classroom assessment literacy in this chapter because the former is part of the latter.

Research on L2 Teachers' Classroom Writing Assessment Literacy Development

In L2 writing, there is a dearth of research that addresses teachers' classroom assessment literacy development. The small body of research has demonstrated a few important factors that are crucial to teachers' development of effective classroom writing assessment practices. To begin with, lack of training has been highlighted as a critical factor to explain teachers' assessment illiteracy. In L2 writing, the fact that teachers have adhered to traditional, form-focused written corrective feedback practice for ages, despite its overall ineffectiveness in helping students improve their writing, is due to the fact that teachers' feedback practices are largely modelled on

their own teachers' previous practices (Lee 2008) – i.e., apprenticeship of observation (Lortie 1975). In her study of the development of four secondary teachers of English in Hong Kong, Lee (2010) explored the impact of training on teacher learning, including the ways they perceived writing assessment and feedback. It was found that through problematizing and challenging taken-for-granted assumptions about conventional practices (e.g., an error-focused and teacher-dominated approach to feedback) on a writing teacher education course, the teachers developed new perspectives on teacher feedback (i.e., the importance of a balanced approach that covers content, language, and organization in teacher feedback) and the importance of student involvement in the writing classroom (e.g., the role of peer feedback). Having undertaken small-scale classroom research (e.g., exploring peer feedback in their own classroom), the teachers deepened their understandings, changed their cognitions, and developed personalized theories that benefited teaching and learning in their own writing classroom. Lee (2010) also found that exposure to the professional/research literature was able to stimulate and inspire the teachers; through critically reflecting on the readings the teachers were able to connect theory and research to practice, and they also began to realize the importance of blending the idealism of good practice with the realities of the classroom. From Lee (2010), it is evident that training comprised of critical reflection, classroom inquiry, and relevant academic reading is critical to writing teachers' classroom assessment literacy development. Min's (2013) single-case study of a college teacher's self-study focused specifically on feedback literacy, demonstrating that teacher professional development in the area of feedback could take place in the form of self-reflection activities undertaken by teachers themselves. Through collecting and analyzing the teacher's own reflection journal entries, learning log, and written feedback on students' samples over time, it was found that the teacher developed new cognitions; enhanced her written feedback practice, e.g., changing from a prescriptive stance to a more probing and collaborative reader stance; and improved her procedural knowledge in giving written feedback. Min's (2013) findings echo those of Lee (2010), suggesting that teachers' critical reflection is central to their assessment literacy development.

Teachers' attempts at innovations are a crucial part of their classroom assessment literacy development. Research studies on L2 writing teachers' assessment innovations are, however, few and far between. Recent research by Lee and her coresearchers has focused on L2 school teachers' attempts to undertake assessment and feedback innovations (e.g., Lee 2011b, 2015; Lee and Coniam 2013; Mak and Lee 2014; Lee et al. 2015, 2016), which witnessed school teachers' adoption of AfL/AaL in writing and experimentation with a selective approach to written corrective feedback. A number of important implications have emerged from the findings of these studies. Firstly, all of the studies were based on some form of partnership between the university and schools, which was found to have an instrumental role to play in enhancing teachers' classroom writing assessment literacy. The ongoing support provided by external experts not only sharpened the participating teachers' knowledge and skills but also boosted their confidence in the AfL/AaL strategies they embraced in their writing classrooms. Thus, ongoing and sustained

professional development, rather than one-shot and short-lived workshops, is essential to help teachers develop their knowledge and skills for designing effective classroom assessments (Koh 2011). Additionally, teachers' isolated and piecemeal attempts at assessment innovations were found to be unproductive and unlikely to reap success (Lee et al. 2016). Communities of practice need to be established, and common visions at the school level have to be developed to help facilitate and sustain change in the writing classrooms. It is important that professional development is embedded within teachers' day-to-day work (Koh 2011) and that teacher collaboration takes place in professional learning communities at the workplace so that teachers can discuss issues and challenges relevant to them (Fullan 2005; Kristmanson et al. 2009; Plakans and Gebril 2015). Finally, but no less important, is the development of students' assessment literacy. Some of the participating students in Lee (2015) and Lee et al. (2015) expressed negative attitudes toward student-centered assessment activities such as peer evaluation. This is not surprising particularly in EFL contexts where students perceive the teacher as the key assessor and sole authority. The effective implementation of AfL/AaL, however, hinges largely on students' understanding of learning goals and success criteria and of what makes a good piece of writing. In AaL in particular, since students are key assessors during the assessment process, preparing them for effective AaL practice and changing their attitudes and expectations are essential. It takes time to effect change in the mind-sets and attitudes of students, but through targeted instruction and building a secure and supportive learning environment for students to experience success with alternative assessments in the writing classroom, new attitudes can be fostered and inculcated so that students can be helped to become assessment capable in L2 writing classrooms. An important goal of teachers' assessment literacy development, therefore, is to produce students who are assessment literate.

Future Directions

Teachers usually spend one quarter to one third or even as much as half of their teaching time in assessment activities (Stiggins 1991; White 2009). In the case of L2 writing, teachers may spend even a larger amount of time assessing and providing feedback on student writing. In different parts of the world, however, teachers conduct assessment activities without formal training (Hasselgreen et al. 2004), and there tends to be a lack of emphasis on assessment in teacher training or professional development programs (Stiggins 2002; Volante and Fazio 2007). This holds true for L2 writing, as writing teacher education is by and large underdeveloped (Hirvela and Belcher 2007), and writing teachers receive little training in assessment and feedback (Crusan et al. 2016; Lee 2008). Professional development for improving L2 writing teachers' classroom assessment literacy is indeed a high priority. Specifically, professional development should be scaled up to involve more schools and more teachers, including preservice teachers.

In addition to participation in professional development activities, pivotal to assessment literacy development is teachers' adoption of assessment initiatives (Inbar-Lourie 2008). As elaborated by Timperley and Alton-Lee (2008, p. 340):

To make a difference to their students' learning, however ... the content of what teachers learned needed to result in some changes to their practice, because it is teaching practice that influences the learning opportunities for students.

Teachers' assessment literacy and their assessment initiatives, however, are tied up with their professional practice in their own specific context (2013). Such context relates not only to the classroom but also the school and entire educational system. Admittedly, teachers play a significant role in designing effective classroom writing assessment and feedback, but the school and system factors (Carless 2005, 2011; Fullan 1982, 1991) cannot be overstated. At the school level, the school, school leadership, culture, curricula, assessment policy, etc. have to be supportive of the implementation of AfL/AaL as well as formative feedback in process-oriented writing classrooms. At the system level, although educational policies in many parts of the world do put a high premium on AfL, the intransigence of the public examination system which is in many ways incompatible with the principles of AfL presents a severe challenge to fully realizing the spirit of learning-oriented writing assessment. Professional development to help teachers with effective and feasible classroom writing assessment practices should, therefore, embrace a situated perspective (Koh 2011) and preferably a participatory mode of teacher learning, where teachers gather together in professional learning communities in the workplace to discuss ways to develop effective classroom writing assessments and feedback amidst all the challenges they face in their own work contexts.

Conclusion

It is more than fitting to conclude the book with a chapter on classroom assessment literacy as the primary goal of the book is to explore how classroom writing assessment and feedback can be used effectively to promote student learning in L2 school contexts. This book is written in the hopes of enhancing L2 writing teachers' classroom assessment literacy so that they can develop a strong grasp of effective assessment principles and practices in their day-to-day role as writing teacher-assessors, i.e., to design "instructionally relevant assessment" (Shepard 2000, p. 13), to utilize feedback appropriately and effectively, and, above all, to develop assessment skills to bring assessment and teaching into alignment so as to improve student learning. To recapitulate, L2 writing teachers' classroom assessment literacy development entails training and initiatives that enhance understanding of:

- The pivotal role of classroom assessment and feedback in enhancing student learning of writing (Chap. 1)
- The principles of classroom assessment designed to help students improve learning (Chap. 2)

- How assessment for and as learning can be implemented in the writing classroom (Chaps. 3 and 4)
- The critical role of feedback in classroom writing assessment (Chap. 5)
- How teacher feedback can be effectively used to maximize student learning (Chap. 6)
- How peer feedback can be employed to bring about effective learning (Chap. 7)
- Writing portfolios as a pedagogical and assessment tool for improving student learning (Chap. 8)
- The important role of technology in classroom writing assessment and feedback (Chap. 9)
- The centrality of teachers' classroom assessment literacy to effective teaching and learning of writing (Chap. 10)

Indeed, effective assessment practices are fundamental to the teaching of second language writing (Crusan et al. 2016). Assessment literacy for teachers is not a fad; it is a must (Popham 2009) – the lack of which is referred to as “professional suicide” (Popham 2004, p. 82). Ending on this note, I hope that my book will be taken seriously though, with all humbleness, it is but a small step toward developing L2 writing teachers' classroom assessment literacy.

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