

Chapter 2

Purpose, Theory, and Practice of Classroom L2 Writing Assessment

Introduction

Over the last decade or so, assessment in English language education has witnessed a major paradigm shift from traditional forms of testing to a stronger focus on outcome-based and standard-referenced assessment (Davison and Cummins 2006). Such a shift results in an increasing attention to a “substantive connection between assessment and meaningful instruction” (Shepard 2000a, p. 3), where teachers’ evaluation of student learning, their feedback, feedback from peers, and students’ self-assessment play an important role in mediating students’ learning and knowledge construction. This paradigm shift is evidenced in the assessment reform that has taken place in different parts of the world, including the United Kingdom where the Assessment Reform Group originated and Europe where the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) has laid a foundation for language assessment reform throughout the continent (Berchoud et al. 2011; North 2014). The crucial role of teachers and learners in classroom assessment; the interrelationships between teaching, learning, and assessment; and the use of classroom assessment for promoting student learning and for improving teaching are encapsulated in the notion of “assessment for learning,” which came into use in the late 1980s and early 1990s, originating from the UK Assessment Reform Group, as well as “assessment as learning” to denote the active role of the learner in taking charge of their learning during classroom assessment. Instead of having classroom writing assessment dictated by the traditional testing paradigm, where teachers design assessment activities that conform to high-stakes standardized tests, it is imperative to envision excellence in classroom writing assessment so that assessment can be better utilized to empower students, enhance learning, and improve teaching.

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The primary goal of this book is to explore how classroom writing assessment can be used to inform and improve learning and teaching. This chapter lays the theoretical and pedagogical foundations for the book by examining the purpose, theory, and practice of classroom writing assessment.

Different Purposes of Classroom Writing Assessment

Classroom assessment can serve different purposes. Traditional testing serves the purpose of “assessment of learning” (AoL), where students’ performance and progress are assessed against specified learning targets and objectives, often serving reporting and administrative purposes. In contrast, “assessment for learning” (AfL) focuses on the improvement of learning and teaching (Black and Wiliam 2009); it aims to identify students’ strengths and weaknesses through quality feedback to enhance learning and to help teachers review their teaching objectives and strategies to improve instruction (Berry 2008). While teachers dominate the assessment process in AoL, in AfL students share responsibility with teachers through participating actively in the assessment process, e.g., engaging in peer and/or self-assessment (Gardner 2006). “Assessment as learning” (AaL) reinforces and extends the role of AfL and is “a process through which pupil involvement in assessment can feature as part of learning” (Dann 2002, p. 153), with the learner being considered a critical connector between the assessment and learning process.

Pivotal to AfL is the role of the students, alongside that of the teacher and peers, as explicated in the definition of AfL provided by Klenowski (2009):

Assessment for learning is part of everyday practice by students, teachers, and peers that seeks, reflects upon and responds to information from dialogue, demonstration and observation in ways that enhance ongoing learning. (Klenowski 2009, p. 264)

As teachers implement AfL practices in the classroom (e.g., clarifying learning goals and success criteria and giving descriptive feedback), they hand down these strategies to students and empower them to engage with similar AfL practices to enable themselves and their peers to develop into self-regulated, self-monitoring, and autonomous learners. AfL therefore sees students play an active role in the classroom; it is a student-centered approach to assessment that “involves the active engagement of students in setting goals for their learning and growth, monitoring their progress toward these goals, and determining how to address any gaps” (Andrade et al. 2012, p. 8). Earl (2003, 2013) refers to such an assessment focus as AaL, which is “a subset of assessment for learning” (Earl 2013, p. 3) that puts an emphasis on using assessment to develop students’ metacognitive and self-monitoring abilities, putting them at the center of learning. In this book, AaL is used to emphasize students’ active involvement in AfL; hence AaL is part of AfL, specifically highlighting the student-centered dimension of AfL.

Although the above approaches to classroom assessment have their place in education and in the classroom, the extent to which they contribute to student learning differs markedly. AoL, focusing predominantly on measuring learning, streaming

students into different ability levels, and reporting judgments about the students' level of competence and achievement to other parties, places the teacher as the key assessor and isolates students from the assessment process. Occurring at the end of the learning process, AoL has relatively less effect on student learning than AfL/AaL. AfL shifts the focus from making judgments to diagnosing students' strengths and weaknesses, as well as enabling them to monitor their learning and progress on an ongoing basis. The assessment information gathered from AfL can improve the quality of both learning and teaching. Not only does the information provide students with an indication of where they are and how to proceed next, it also informs teaching and enables teachers to adapt their instruction to meet the learning needs of the students. AaL highlights the student-centered dimension of AfL and focuses specifically on the role of the students in connecting assessment and learning in an active manner. Emphasizing assessment as a process of metacognition (Earl and Katz 2006), AaL encourages students to monitor and exert self-regulation over their thinking processes and stresses the importance of fostering students' capacity over time to be their own assessors. Students take a proactive role in their learning, use assessment information to self-assess and self-monitor their learning progress, reflect on their learning, and make adjustments in their thinking so as to achieve deeper understanding and to advance their learning.

In the literature, AoL and AfL/AaL are often used interchangeably with summative assessment and formative assessment, respectively. While summative assessment (as with AoL) serves administrative and certification purposes (Genesee and Upshur 1996), formative assessment (as with AfL/AaL) contributes to students' learning through providing information about student performance (Black and Wiliam 2009; Yorke 2003). Unlike AoL and AfL/AaL which are mainly distinguished according to the different purposes they serve, summative assessment and formative assessment are also differentiated on the basis of the time of the assessment (Scriven 1967). Whereas summative assessment happens at the end of a unit of work or course, formative assessment takes place continuously during learning. Although the difference between AoL and AfL/AaL is often seen as parallel to the distinction between summative and formative assessment, the terms AoL and AfL/AaL are used in this book to denote the different purposes of assessment they serve (rather than the time of the assessment).

Despite the different purposes of classroom assessment as captured in AoL, AfL/AaL, the overlapping functions between the three assessment concepts must be noted. As delineated above, AaL is a subset of AfL, being singled out as an independent entity mainly to underline the important role of student-centered classroom assessment. AoL and AfL, though seemingly serving entirely different purposes, are not mutually exclusive since assessment can serve both AoL and AfL purposes (though it is possible for an assessment to stop at AoL). To give an example, a writing assessment that takes place at the end of the school term/year, which is traditionally associated with AoL (as it is used to measure what students have learnt in writing in that particular school year, with scores being used for administrative purposes – to report to parents about students' performance, to predict future performance, etc.), can also serve the purpose of AfL if the teacher makes use of the assessment information to inform students about their strengths and limitations in

writing and to further improve writing instruction. On the contrary, while regular, ongoing writing assessment is often said to serve the purpose of AfL, if the teacher fails to utilize the assessment to help students identify strengths and weaknesses and to bridge the gaps in their learning but instead focuses mainly on scores and providing judgments of student writing, such assessment is essentially AoL-oriented. These examples show that the timing in which assessment occurs does not define its function or purpose; instead it is the use to which assessment information is put that distinguishes AoL from AfL (Wiliam 2001).

Overall, AoL is fundamentally normative in purpose: to compare an individual's performance to that of others in the group. In contrast, AfL is oriented toward learning, teaching, and curricula. Instead of using assessment for ranking and certification purposes, classroom writing assessment should reflect a real, substantive focus on the improvement of learning and teaching. It is this purpose that guides the entire book.

Theoretical Tenets of Classroom Assessment

AoL and AfL/AaL are informed by different orientations to learning. AoL places an emphasis on objective, scientific measurement of learning, underpinned by a behaviorist theory of learning and influenced by the achievement-testing movement which is premised on the belief that student learning can be measured in terms of objective evidence (Shepard 2000a). Scores, therefore, play an important role in AoL; they provide objective evidence for student learning and suffice for feedback.

AfL/AaL, on the other hand, is informed by a social constructivist framework that combines the essence of cognitive, constructivist, and sociocultural theories (Shepard 2000b), which maintain that learning is socially and culturally constructed, with learners shouldering the responsibility of learning and the teacher playing the role of a facilitator. Through socially mediated learning experiences (Feuerstein 1990), students interact with teachers and more capable peers and develop their cognitive abilities. Sociocultural concepts such as zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky 1978) and scaffolding (Wood et al. 1976) are both central to AfL/AaL. ZPD is “the distance between the actual developmental level determined by independent problem solving and the higher level of potential development determined through problem solving in collaboration with more capable peers or seniors” (Vygotsky 1978, p. 86). Simply put, it refers to what a learner can learn and improve with the assistance of an adult or capable peer – i.e., the learner's current and potential level of competence. To be able to leverage the assistance provided, the assistance has to be tailored for the learner, responding to the learner's specific needs, being evolving and dynamic rather than static and predetermined – i.e., graduated and contingent assistance (Lantolf and Aljaafreh 1995). Assistance has to be graduated – e.g., too little assistance is undesirable, whereas too much assistance may be harmful. Assistance has to be contingent too because when the learner displays independence in learning, assistance may no longer be needed. Such dynamic assistance is referred to as “scaffolding” – namely, the social support provided to learners to “help them achieve more than would have been possible without aid” (Wette 2015, p. 72). Together ZPD and scaffolding underline the importance of social inter-

action and its role in assisting learning. Influenced by sociocultural perspectives, classroom assessment is dynamic (see “dynamic assessment” – Lantolf and Poehner 2014; Poehner 2009; Poehner and Lantolf 2013), which “integrates assessment and instruction into a seamless, unified activity aimed at promoting learner development through appropriate forms of mediation that are sensitive to the individual’s (or in some cases a group’s) current abilities” (Lantolf and Poehner 2004, p. 50). Dynamic assessment is “finding out what a student is able to do independently as well as what can be done with adult guidance” (Shepard 2000b, p. 10); it emphasizes how a learner can be helped, through mediation, to become what she/he not yet is (Lantolf and Poehner 2004). Such mediation can be facilitated by culturally constructed tools such as the provision of feedback.

Moreover, AfL/AaL is informed by the “cognitive revolution” (Shepard 2000a, p. 21) that emphasizes the role of metacognition in learning, i.e., cognition about cognition or thinking about thinking. Metacognition involves, according to Sternberg (1992), several processes: (1) recognizing a problem, (2) figuring out the nature of the problem, (3) developing strategies to tackle the problem, (4) monitoring the problem, and (5) evaluating after the problem is solved. During classroom assessment, students’ metacognitive abilities can be developed through socially mediated processes, which is a major goal of AaL (see Chap. 4 for a more detailed discussion of the theoretical foundations of AaL).

Recent development of classroom assessment is also framed by the theory of self-regulation (Clark 2012), which involves (1) goal setting, (2) self-monitoring with reference to the goal, (3) interpreting and utilizing feedback (e.g., from teacher and peers) that results from self-monitoring, and (4) modification of goal-directed action (e.g., adjusting or redefining the goal) (Andrade 2013). These self-regulatory processes align with the three *wh*- questions students ask during the assessment process: Where am I going? How am I going? Where to next? (Hattie and Timperley 2007), as illustrated in Chap. 1.

Finally, AfL/AaL is informed by a theory of motivation that emphasizes learning goals – that is, students are motivated by a desire to attain mastery of learning and to achieve competence, rather than performance goals that motivate them toward getting higher scores/better grades (as in AoL) (Shepard 2000a). AfL/AaL, therefore, results in enhanced intrinsic motivation. In the AfL/AaL-oriented classroom, teachers support student learning by treating mistakes as a natural part of learning. They take account of student motivation, playing the role of a resource, a guide, and a facilitator rather than an evaluator (Shepard 2000a). In short, classroom assessment and motivation are seen to “enjoy chicken-and-egg relationship” (Brookhart 2013, p. 35), i.e., while AfL/AaL enhances learner motivation, learner motivation contributes to effective AfL/AaL practice.

Effective Classroom Writing Assessment Practice

Having examined the purposes of classroom assessment as well as the underlying theoretical tenets, I discuss the implications and outline several important considerations that guide effective classroom writing assessment practice.

Assessment as Integral to Teaching and Learning: Aligning Instruction with Assessment

Classroom assessment should be integral to the teaching and learning process. Translated into the writing classroom, this means that the criteria used to assess student writing should be shared with students at the instructional stage, so that they are clear about what they are learning and how their writing is going to be assessed. Stiggins and Chappuis (2012) use the global positioning system (GPS) metaphor to signify the importance of giving students a clear sense of direction about where they are going. Before students start writing, e.g., a recount, they have to be taught what constitutes a “good” recount. Example 2.1 includes the features of a “good” recount, which inform the learning targets, instructional focuses, as well as assessment criteria – hence integrating learning, teaching, and assessment. By contrast, in traditional AoL practice, teachers simply assign the topic without providing specific learning targets; student writing is assessed against some general assessment criteria such as content, language, and organization, and teacher feedback is summative rather than formative, mainly comprising feedback on the language form.

Example 2.1 What Makes a Good Recount

A good recount:

- Begins with an orientation, establishing who was involved, where, and when the events happened
- Sequences the past events in a clear order
- Ends appropriately – e.g., with a feeling, a thought, or a comment
- Uses the past tense accurately
- Uses time words appropriately
- Uses a range of appropriate words to describe the events

Classroom Assessment as Formative: Importance of the Writing Process

Fundamental to good classroom writing assessment practice is a recognition of writing as a process, apart from it being a product to be judged for its quality. Given this, it is important that students are given time to write and to go through the different stages of the writing process, that is, brainstorming, planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. The timed impromptu model for external, standardized writing assessment is not suitable for classroom writing assessment when the main purpose is to help students improve their learning and enhance their writing. In a number of L2 school contexts (particularly examination-oriented contexts), however, a product-oriented approach to classroom writing assessment still predominates. Feedback, which lies at the heart of classroom writing assessment, is delivered

to single drafts, which obviates the need for students to take teacher feedback seriously as they do not have to use it to revise their writing.¹ In all likelihood, after receiving teacher feedback in single-draft writing classrooms, students will simply read the feedback (if they choose to) and then forget it. To realize the learning potential of classroom writing assessment, multiple drafting is essential.

Classroom Assessment Informed by Constructivist and Sociocultural Theories: Teacher Scaffolding and Role of Feedback

In classroom writing assessment, students engage in social interaction with the teacher and peers, obtain assistance from them, and develop their writing abilities accordingly. As such, teacher scaffolding and feedback (both from teacher and peers) have a key role to play in classroom writing assessment.

In the pre-writing stage, teachers can provide instructional scaffolding to prepare students for the writing. Using the criteria for the recount genre in Example 2.1 in the above, for instance, teachers can engage students in meaningful learning activities that help them better understand the features of a recount. With sample texts, teachers can design activities that require students to analyze various features of the texts, such as the text structure and typical language features (e.g., past tense verbs or time markers of the recount genre). The assistance provided to students will help them proceed in their ZPD and learn to write a better recount.

Feedback constitutes another form of socially mediated assistance. As mentioned in Chap. 1, feedback can be conceptualized in terms of three stages: (1) Where am I going – i.e., feed up; (2) How am I going – i.e., feedback; and (3) Where to next – i.e., feed forward (Hattie and Timperley 2007). In the “feed up” stage, teachers share learning goals and success criteria with students and provide instructional scaffolding, informing students of “where they are going.” In the “feedback” stage, clear, descriptive, and diagnostic feedback is provided to students in accordance with the set of success criteria established in the “feed up” stage. This not only helps the teacher integrate assessment with instruction but can also enhance students’ metacognitive awareness so that they know what criteria are used to evaluate their writing, what counts as “good” writing, and what they can do to improve their writing. Finally, in the “feedforward” stage, both teacher and students can make use of the available assessment information such as teacher feedback, peer feedback, and students’ self-assessment/reflection to further promote learning. Based on such information, students can set new learning goals, and, through negotiation and

¹In contexts where teacher feedback is primarily error focused (e.g., Hong Kong school contexts), after receiving teacher feedback, students are required to rewrite sentences that contain errors, oftentimes by copying the sentences with correct answers already provided by the teacher (Lee 2004).

consultation with the teacher, they can acquire new strategies to cope with what has not been fully understood or achieved (i.e., to bridge the gaps in their learning).

Classroom Assessment as Shared Responsibility Between Teacher and Learners: Teacher and Student Roles

In classroom writing assessment that emphasizes AfL/AaL, teachers involve students actively in learning and assessment. This does not mean that teachers relinquish their role in the classroom. They are still active in planning, designing assessment tasks, developing learning goals and success criteria, providing instructional scaffolding, delivering feedback, and facilitating student learning. However, students play an equally active role, using metacognition to self-regulate their learning. In addition to peer feedback, they engage in self-assessment and reflection; they play the role of active agents thinking about, understanding, and articulating learning goals/success criteria; they ask metacognitive questions about their writing, monitor their own learning and writing, and set further learning goals based on the assessment information available. In so doing, students engage with AfL/AaL strategies in the writing classroom and use them to improve learning and enhance their writing. Chapters 3 and 4 examine AfL and AaL, respectively, with Chap. 4 focusing particularly on the active role students play in connecting assessment and learning.

Quality Feedback as Central to Classroom Assessment: Mechanisms for Delivering Feedback

In AfL/AaL, feedback has to be descriptive and diagnostic in order to help students understand their strengths and weaknesses and to inform and improve student learning. To facilitate the delivery of such feedback, and to align assessment with instruction, feedback forms can be used to evaluate student writing. Example 2.2 gives an example of a simple feedback form that uses the success criteria outlined in Example 2.1 (recount genre). The form can be used for both teacher feedback and peer feedback. It can be simplified or modified to suit learners' needs at different stages of writing. For example, teachers can focus on "content and structure" of Example 2.2 in evaluating the first draft, and they can select specific focuses from Example 2.2 for peer evaluation and design a form accordingly. As a variant of Example 2.2, Example 2.3 includes a four-point rating scale. Example 2.4 provides a scoring rubric for the recount genre, which includes a concrete description for each level of performance based on the stated criteria. Example 2.5, as a variant of Example 2.4, includes an additional "remarks" column for teachers to enter qualitative comments.

These examples can be modified slightly to include “can do” descriptors (see Example 2.6), emphasizing what students can do rather than what they fail to do (Lee 2007).

Aside from written feedback, feedback can be delivered orally by the teacher during writing conferences (see Chap. 5) or by peers during peer feedback conducted in pairs or small groups (see Chap. 7). Example 4.3 in Chap. 4 on AfL provides an example to guide students’ oral peer feedback.

Example 2.2 A Feedback Form for Offering Descriptive Feedback for the Recount Genre

Recount – evaluation criteria	Comments
<i>Content and structure</i>	
Begins with an orientation, establishing who was involved, where, and when the events happened	
Sequences the past events in a clear order	
Ends the essay appropriately – e.g., with a feeling, a thought, or a comment	
<i>Language features</i>	
Uses the past tense accurately	
Uses time expressions appropriately	
Uses a range of appropriate words to describe the events	

Adapted from Appendix 1 in Lee (2014)

Example 2.3 A Feedback Form that Contains a Rating Scale for the Recount Genre

- 4: Excellent
- 3: Pretty good
- 2: Average
- 1: Needs improvement

Evaluation criteria – recount	4	3	2	1	Comments
<i>Content and structure</i>					
Begins with an orientation, establishing who was involved, where, and when the events happened					
Sequences the past events in a clear order					
Ends the essay appropriately – e.g., with a feeling, a thought, or a comment					
<i>Language features</i>					
Uses the past tense accurately					
Uses time expressions appropriately					
Uses a range of appropriate words to describe the events					

Adapted from Appendix 1 in Lee (2014)

Example 2.4 A Scoring Rubric for the Recount Genre

Evaluation criteria – recount	4	3	2	1
Content and structure	A very clear orientation, establishing who was involved, where, and when the events happened	A generally clear orientation which provides necessary background information	Some missing information in the orientation	Lots of missing information in the orientation
	Past events are sequenced in a very clear order	Past events are generally clearly sequenced	Some events not in the right order	Past events are all over the place; hard to figure out a clear sequence
	Very appropriate and impressive ending – ending with a feeling, a thought, or a reflection	Appropriate ending	An ending is provided, but it is not very appropriate	No ending is provided
Language features	Past tense verbs almost completely accurate	Tense generally accurate	Quite a number of tense errors	Full of tense errors
	Very appropriate and accurate use of time expressions to link up events	Generally good use of time expressions to link up events	Some time expressions to link up events	No time expressions to link up events
	A large range of appropriate words to describe events	A good range of words to describe events	Some good words to describe events	An extremely limited range of words to describe events

Example 2.5 A Scoring Rubric with a “Remarks” Column for the Recount Genre

Evaluation criteria – recount	4	3	2	1	Remarks
Content and structure	A very clear orientation, establishing who was involved, where, and when the events happened	A generally clear orientation which provides necessary background information	Some missing information in the orientation	Lots of missing information in the orientation	

(continued)

Evaluation criteria – recount	4	3	2	1	Remarks
	Past events are sequenced in a very clear order	Past events are generally clearly sequenced	Some events not in the right order	Past events are all over the place; hard to figure out a clear sequence	
	Very appropriate and impressive ending – ending with a feeling, a thought, or a reflection	Appropriate ending	An ending is provided, but it is not very appropriate	No ending is provided	
Language features	Past tense verbs almost completely accurate	Tense generally accurate	Quite a number of tense errors	Full of tense errors	
	Very appropriate and accurate use of time expressions to link up events	Generally good use of time expressions to link up events	Some time expressions to link up events	No time expressions to link up events	
	A large range of appropriate words to describe events	A good range of words to describe events	Some good words to describe events	An extremely limited range of words to describe events	

Example 2.6 A Feedback Form with “Can Do” Descriptors

Evaluation criteria – recount	4	3	2	1	Comments
<i>Content and structure</i>					
I can begin with an orientation, establishing who was involved, where, and when the events happened					
I can sequence the past events in a clear order					
I can end the essay appropriately – e.g., with a feeling, a thought, or a comment					
<i>Language features</i>					
I can use the past tense accurately					
I can use time expressions appropriately					
I can use a range of appropriate words to describe the events					

Classroom Assessment as Sensitive to Learner Motivation: The Place of Scores in Classroom Writing Assessment

It is pointed out in the AfL literature that comment-only feedback is more conducive to student learning than feedback given in tandem with scores (Black and Wiliam 1998; Brookhart 2001; Butler 1987; Crooks 1988). As observed in many L2 writing classrooms, when students receive teacher feedback alongside scores, they tend to focus much more on scores than comments, but then scores have a potentially damaging effect on student motivation. To maximize the potential of classroom writing assessment, a focus on comment-only feedback is helpful. The feedback forms shown in Examples 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, and 2.6 are intended to play down scores. Although a rating scale is used in most of these examples, student attention is directed to the success criteria and the extent to which the criteria have been met in their writing, rather than scores. In contexts where scores are required (e.g., where classroom writing assessment scores count toward the summative scores students receive at the end of the school year), teachers can easily work out the total score by adding up the points scored for each of the criteria stated in the feedback form. To reduce the possible negative impact of scores, teachers can withhold or delay the reporting of scores, so that when students receive the feedback forms their attention is focused on the extent to which they have attained the learning goals, as well as teachers' qualitative comments (especially in feedback forms that contain a "remarks" column for teachers to write commentary). Through de-emphasizing scores in classroom writing assessment, teachers are likely to build a supportive learning atmosphere where the focus is put on the quality of learning rather than scores.

Complementarity of AoL and AfL/AaL

Although AfL/AaL serves different purposes from AoL, they are not mutually exclusive. The complementary functions of AoL and AfL/AaL can be illustrated in classroom assessment of students' written accuracy. Traditionally, summative assessment of writing leads to evaluative feedback that focuses primarily on written errors (McGarrell and Verbeem 2007). But even with such an AoL-oriented practice that emphasizes teachers' judgment of students' performance in written accuracy, an additional focus on AfL is possible. To give an example, teachers can perform an analysis of students' written errors, using an error analysis sheet as in Example 2.7 to inform students of their error ratios for a selected range of error categories. Such assessment information can inform students of their strengths and weaknesses in their command of grammar in writing, serving the purpose of AfL. To further engage students in AaL, students can use the results of the error ratio analysis to set

goals for themselves (e.g., if “agreement” is found to be their severest error pattern, they may set a goal to make as few errors on “agreement” as possible) and to monitor their own writing accuracy development by keeping an error log (see Example 2.8). Depending on students’ abilities and motivations, students can use the error log to monitor their written accuracy for every piece of writing or only for some pieces – e.g., at different points of the writing course (like beginning, middle, and end of the course). The practical value of error logs can be increased if teachers adopt a selective approach to written corrective feedback (see Chap. 6), so that students’ attention is drawn to a small number of selected error types rather than all kinds of errors. Error logs can provide valuable assessment information for teachers to help them fine-tune their grammar instruction – e.g., planning post-writing grammar workshops based on students’ pervasive error patterns. Thus, insofar as written accuracy is concerned, AoL and AfL/AaL can be used in conjunction with each other without any conflict.

Although assessment of written accuracy is used to illustrate the complementarity of AoL and AfL/AaL, in AfL-focused writing practice, teachers should avoid giving meticulous feedback on errors since such “premature evaluation of their evolving texts leads writers to early closure, discouraging students from further revising the ideas and organization in their texts” (McGarrell and Verbeem 2007, p. 231). Hence, the suggested error analysis and error log activities should not replace formative feedback on content and organization.

Example 2.7 An Error Ratio Analysis Sheet

	Error type	Code	Number of errors made	Error ratio ^a	Error gravity ranking ^b
1	Verb (tense and form)	V	3	0.1	4
2	Articles	Art	2	0.07	5
3	Pronoun	Pron	1	0.03	6
4	Word choice	Wc	5	0.17	3
5	Number	Num	7	0.23	1
6	Spelling	Sp	3	0.1	4
7	Prepositions	Prep	6	0.2	2
8	Word form	Wf	1	0.03	6
9	Subject-verb agreement	Agr	2	0.07	5
Total number of errors			30		

Adapted from Appendix C in Ferris (2002)

^aError ratio = divide the number of errors in each category by the total errors (i.e., the larger the ratio, the more serious the error)

^bMark “1” for the most serious error type, then “2,” “3,” and so on

Example 2.8 An Error Log

Error type	Total number of errors								
	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date
Verb (tense and form)									
Articles									
Pronoun									
Word choice									
Number									
Spelling									
Preposition									
Word form									
Subject-verb agreement									

Adapted from Fig. 5.5 in Ferris (2011)

Another example to illustrate the overlapping functions of classroom writing assessment is portfolio assessment. Portfolios can serve the purpose of AfL/AaL and “make the learning process transparent, enabling language learners to be more aware of their process, to develop a capacity for self-assessment and reflection, and to take control of their own learning” (Yilmaz and Akcan 2012, p. 167). Through delayed evaluation (until the end of the entire portfolio collection and compilation), students’ attention is drawn to the writing and learning process. Hence, portfolio assessment is in line with the principles of AfL/AaL, where students play an active role in taking charge of their learning. At the same time, the portfolio product can provide judgments of student writing, serving the purpose of AoL (see Chap. 8 on portfolio assessment).

Conclusion

Traditional forms of classroom writing assessment put a premium on student performance evaluated on the basis of scores. Teachers play a dominant role, with students reduced as passive receptacles of learning. This chapter reconceptualizes a modern view of classroom writing assessment that takes the improvement of student learning as its starting point, considers the theoretical underpinnings of classroom writing assessment, and examines a number of basic considerations that inform the principles of sound classroom writing assessment practices. These will be revisited in the following two chapters on AfL (Chap. 3) and AaL (Chap. 4).

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