

## Chapter 3

# Assessment for Learning in the L2 Writing Classroom

### Introduction

Assessment for learning (AfL), i.e., using assessment to promote learning and improve teaching, has gained wide currency in the educational policy in different parts of the world. In the United Kingdom, the Assessment Reform Group (2002), with which the notion of AfL is closely affiliated, has played a pivotal role in bringing about positive change to assessment practice, policy, and research in not only the United Kingdom (see Black and Wiliam 2003) but also other parts of the world. In Australia, for instance, AfL has now become a central plank of curriculum reform. The national curriculum framework has put the improvement of learning and teaching as the primary function of assessment (Australian Capital Territory 2005; Queensland Studies Authority 2005). Research conducted on AfL in Queensland schools has demonstrated the beneficial outcomes of AfL practices in Australian secondary education (Sebba 2006; Sebba and Maxwell 2005). In the United States, more than a decade ago, there has already been a clarion call for a more balanced approach to assessment that comprises not only standardized achievement tests but also learning-oriented assessment that informs instructional decision-making and turns learners into assessors (Stiggins 1999, 2007). Currently, AfL is an integral part of professional development initiatives that address classroom assessment in US schools. The Formative Assessment for Students and Teachers (FAST), for example, has promoted the implementation of AfL in classrooms to positively influence teaching and learning nationwide. In Hong Kong, AfL has been identified as one of the most important items on the English language education reform agenda (Curriculum Development Council 2004, 2007; Curriculum Development Institute 2004). The oral assessment innovation in school-based assessment at Secondary 4 and 5 (Grades 10 and 11) is a recent initiative to promote AfL in English (Davison 2007). In 2001, Taiwan introduced a nationwide curriculum reform in primary and secondary education, advocating a variety of assessment strategies to promote student learning. In China, “The Outlines for Basic Educational Reform (Pilot)” issued

by the Education Department of China in 2001 refers to assessment as a means to promote learning, and teachers are encouraged to integrate self- and peer assessment into the curriculum. In brief, AfL has become a priority in the educational reform policy worldwide.

Against this backdrop, this chapter begins with an attempt to unpack the notion of AfL, which is often contrasted with assessment of learning (AoL) – i.e., using assessment to provide judgment of student learning and utilizing the assessment information for administrative and reporting purposes (Wiliam 2001). It then highlights salient findings in AfL in writing research and discusses issues arising from the implementation of AfL in L2 school contexts. Finally, the chapter concludes with an examination of the pedagogical principles that underlie effective AfL practices in L2 writing classrooms.

## What Does Assessment for Learning Entail?

There is a plenitude of definitions about AfL in the literature, though Black et al. (2004) provide a comprehensive one as follows:

Assessment for learning is any assessment for which the first priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting students' learning. It thus differs from assessment designed primarily to serve the purposes of accountability, or of ranking, or of certifying competence. An assessment activity can help learning if it provides information that teachers and their students can use as feedback in assessing themselves and one another and in modifying the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged. Such assessment becomes "formative assessment" when the evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching work to meet learning needs. (Black et al. 2004, p. 10)

From this definition, it is evident that the top priority of AfL lies in using assessment to promote student learning (Black and Wiliam 1998); it is also used to help the teacher fine-tune and improve their teaching (Rea-Dickins 2006). AfL refers to "the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where learners are in their learning, where they need to go, and how best to get there" (Assessment Reform Group 2002, p. 2). Feedback, in particular, has a pivotal role to play in AfL. Through formative feedback, teachers show learners their strengths and weaknesses and what they can do to close the gap between their current performance and desired performance – i.e., the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky 1978). Teachers also make use of the assessment information to improve teaching. AfL is, therefore, akin to diagnostic language assessment (DLA), which has garnered immense interest in language testing in recent years. Like AfL, DLA is "both backward-looking and forward-looking" (Lee 2015, p. 306), in which "feedback" and "feedforward" have crucial roles to play.

To elaborate, the following AfL principles are useful in guiding classroom assessment practices (Assessment Reform Group 1999):

- Giving students effective feedback

- Involving students actively in the learning process
- Using assessment information to modify teaching
- Classroom practice that takes cognizance of the significant impact of assessment on students' motivation and self-esteem
- Fostering students' ability to self-assess and monitor their own learning

Worthy of note is that AfL draws attention to the process of learning, during which students develop their capacity to manage their own learning and learn how to learn. Thus, AfL involves student-centered learning, as underscored by Jones (2010):

- It is important to “meet learners at their level of knowledge and to revisit prior learning” (Jones 2010, p. 176).
- Learners take part actively in their learning.
- Learners are clear about the learning goals they are working toward, the criteria they are evaluated against, and how to improve on their work.
- Learners develop critical awareness of what is required of them and improve their work through self- and peer assessment.

Such a focus on the learners' active role in learning and assessment is encapsulated in the notion of assessment as learning (AaL), seen as a subset of AfL (Earl 2013), which will be examined closely in Chap. 4.

To sum up, AfL is a huge contrast to the traditional paradigm (i.e., AoL) where, as stated earlier, assessment serves as a means to test and grade students and to differentiate stronger from weaker learners. AfL serves students and teachers directly, benefitting both learning and teaching; it is something teachers do “with” students. Conversely, AoL is something teachers “do ‘to’ students rather than ‘with’ students” (Serafini 2000/2001, p. 390). It is this realization that has provided an impetus for curriculum and assessment reform in different parts of the world, where AfL is being systematically promoted in the classroom and in school.

## Insights from Assessment for Learning Research in Writing Classrooms

Both AoL and AfL are crucial to assessment, but traditionally the focus of L2 assessment has been put on AoL, with AfL only beginning to draw the attention of researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in the 1990s. Thanks to the groundbreaking research by Black and Wiliam (1998), there is now clear evidence that AfL can lead to substantial gains in student learning, enhanced student motivation, and more effective classroom practices. Research that applies AfL to writing is scarce, however. In L1 writing contexts, Graham et al.' (2015) meta-analysis of formative assessment of Grades 1–8 students showed that AfL that emphasized classroom-based feedback from teachers, peers, self, and computers could enhance students' writing quality. In other L1 contexts, such as New Zealand, research by Parr and

Timperley (2010) in primary classrooms has shown a strong relationship between the quality of teacher feedback and student improvement in writing, demonstrating the role of formative feedback in AfL in writing. Exploring AfL in writing practices in primary classrooms in greater depth, Howe and Parr (2014) have found that when teachers fail to maximize students' role in taking charge of their learning – e.g., through self- and peer evaluation, the full potential of AfL cannot be fully realized. Their study has underscored the unitary nature of AfL – i.e., AfL strategies being interdependent, with “each feeding into and from the others in an iterative manner” (Howe and Parr 2014, p. 212). In other words, the mere presence of AfL strategies is insufficient to engender positive student learning outcomes, and when teachers simply follow the letter rather than the spirit of AfL (Marshall and Drummond 2006), AfL cannot be completely realized. It is, therefore, imperative that teachers understand, interpret, and apply AfL as a unitary or holistic concept, putting students at the center of learning and making them take charge of their own learning. To this end, a change in the classroom culture and development of expansive learning on the part of the teachers are necessary (Parr and Timperley 2010; Webb and Jones 2009).

There is a dearth of research on AfL in L2 writing contexts. As rightly pointed out by Evans (2013), Hattie and Timperley (2007), and Huang (2016), the theoretical development in AfL has not been paralleled by a concomitant growth in empirical research. The limited research on AfL in L2 writing has mainly been conducted in secondary and college EFL contexts in Hong Kong and Taiwan, in which a number of research focuses are evident. First, research has examined teachers' motivations for AfL innovation in writing and how they implemented AfL in the writing classroom. In Lee's (2011) study, the participating secondary teachers embraced the AfL initiative in their writing classrooms as they felt that conventional assessment and feedback practices, being teacher dominated and error focused, were ineffective and unproductive. The teachers hoped that through AfL students could play a more active role in learning and make progress in their writing. To implement AfL in writing, the secondary teachers in Lee and Coniam (2013) made an attempt to integrate planning, instruction, and assessment. They began with planning of genre-specific units of work for writing, followed by explicit instruction using a genre approach, and then genre-based assessment that used the same success criteria shared with students in the instructional stage. Similarly, in Lee and Falvey (2014), the secondary teachers used a range of strategies to promote AfL in writing: (1) collaborative planning and material development, (2) pre-writing instructional scaffolding to bring assessment in line with instruction, (3) process writing during which students produced multiple drafts and engaged with feedback to improve their writing, (4) selective error feedback, and (5) peer evaluation. Briefly, the AfL strategies adopted by the teachers included a strong focus on planning and teaching, an explicit link between instruction and assessment, active involvement of students through peer evaluation, and delivery of feedback through feedback forms that outlined the success criteria shared at the pre-writing stage.

Another strand of AfL in L2 writing research has focused on the effects of AfL on students' writing, as well as students' receptiveness to such an assessment

initiative. Huang's (2012) survey revealed that EFL college students were generally positive toward the AfL strategies adopted by their writing teacher. Huang's (2016) more recent study, drawing on Yang and Carless' (2013) feedback framework (cognitive, affective, and structural dimensions of feedback), showed that integrating AfL into EFL college writing classes could help students make progress in their writing. Through providing ongoing learning and assessment activities, encouraging learner response to teacher feedback, and gradually removing teacher scaffolding, students exhibited stronger abilities to reflect on and take charge of their learning. While Huang's (2012, 2016) research was conducted in college contexts, Lee's (2011) study has addressed L2 secondary writing contexts. Similar to Huang's findings, in Lee (2011), as a result of the teachers' implementation of AfL in writing, students became more motivated toward writing, demonstrating that classroom assessment can be "one of the key factors that affect motivation" (Harlen 2006, p. 61). Students also began to acquire some new attitudes toward AfL strategies, such as peer evaluation and multiple drafting. However, the survey results in Lee (2011) were mixed in terms of the congruence between students' beliefs and the AfL principles. For example, at the end of the study, students still attached a lot of importance to the written product (more than the process) and grammatical accuracy in particular.

The last strand of research on AfL in L2 writing has addressed the factors that facilitate and restrain the implementation of AfL in L2 writing. In Lee and Falvey's (2014) study, the secondary teachers' enthusiasm, commitment, and strong beliefs about the benefits of AfL, their concerted efforts and shared vision, and their developing assessment capacity (Seong 2011) were found to facilitate their AfL in writing practices. On the other hand, research has also uncovered some challenges that writing teachers face in their AfL practices. In EFL college contexts in Taiwan, Huang (2016) found three obstacles that hindered the implementation of AfL in higher education: (1) marginal and terminal role of assessments; (2) teacher-dominated talk in the classroom, resulting in a lack of productive teacher-learner dialogues; and (3) paucity of empirical research to shed light on the implementation and feasibility of AfL. These impediments to AfL practices were also found in L2 school writing contexts – e.g., Lee and Coniam (2013) and Mak and Lee (2014). More specifically, Lee and Falvey (2014) uncovered a number of challenges that posed obstacles to secondary teachers' implementation of AfL in Hong Kong writing classrooms. These include a mandatory policy to follow the conventional practice of detailed marking of students' written errors, causing exhaustion, frustration, and burnout among teachers, as well as deleterious effects on students psychologically. Additional challenges in Lee and Falvey (2014) stemmed from the examination culture, the need for teachers to prepare students for high-stakes public examinations, as well as the primacy of scores (i.e., AoL). Other problems were found to relate to practical constraints like the lack of time (but AfL required teachers to spend more time on planning and material development), large class sizes (making it difficult to carry out peer evaluation), and inadequate support from the school management in terms of additional resources and manpower to alleviate teachers' increased workloads incurred by the assessment innovation. In Mak and

Lee (2014), the primary teachers faced similar challenges in AfL in writing practices. A major threat that emerged relates to the contradictions within the school system that posed threats to the implementation and development of AfL in writing. It was found that the incongruous beliefs between the participating teachers and their colleagues regarding how best to go about responding to written errors made it hard for the teachers to implement a focused approach to error feedback, which is more in line with AfL than comprehensive error feedback. Another contradiction pertains to the school administrators' concern with the impact of innovation on students' immediate writing performance as shown in public examinations, when in reality AfL in writing innovation would need time to accomplish and take root and that it would probably take a long time to witness improvement in students' writing. Related to this contradiction is that the teachers had to cover the jam-packed syllabus at school, and due to the time constraint, they found it necessary to adjust their original AfL plan, and hence they adopted some of the AfL strategies less regularly as planned (e.g., student self-reflection and peer assessment). This impacted adversely on the effects of AfL because, as advocated by Hawe and Parr (2014), AfL is a unitary concept and successful implementation requires attention to all key AfL strategies.

## **AfL and Implementation Issues for L2 School Writing**

Insights from AfL in writing research have demonstrated that successful implementation of AfL is dependent on a host of factors, ranging from teachers' personal beliefs and understandings of principles and practices of AfL to wider issues of school culture and reform climate (Carless 2005; Yung 2002). Even though teachers are positively inclined toward AfL, they may have difficulties putting it into practice in the classroom (Antonious and James 2014) as they are influenced by both internal and external factors (Box et al. 2015) that can detrimentally influence the practice of AfL. These include the lack of time, the pressure to cover all curriculum materials (because of high-stakes examinations), as well as teachers' lack of understanding of what makes "good" assessment practice and their inadequate mastery of techniques to carry out effective assessment (e.g., self-/peer assessment) (Antonious and James 2014; Box et al. 2015). In certain contexts, the potential of AfL can be easily eroded due to the influence of certain cultural values (e.g., a high premium on examination performance in Confucian heritage contexts), as well as institutional and historical conditions that attach enormous value to examination scores and summative performance (Chen et al. 2013; Cross and O'Loughlin 2013). To enable school teachers to implement AfL successfully, therefore, it is important that they are given a reduced assessment load (Cross and O'Loughlin 2013) so that they are freed up to provide formative, diagnostic feedback to support student learning. Besides, the implementation of AfL would require engagement and symbiosis among the various parties that interact within the context of teachers' work – i.e., not only teachers but also key stakeholders like the school administrators (Cross and O'Loughlin

2013; Moss et al. 2013). If AfL is to be successfully implemented, four important factors (teacher, student, school, and system), as suggested by Fullan (1982, 1991) and more recently Carless (2005, 2011), need to be taken on board (see Lee and Coniam 2013).

### ***Teacher Factor***

Teachers play a pivotal role in the implementation of AfL in the writing classroom, which requires not only professional knowledge and skills on the part of the teachers but also their commitment and collaborative efforts. Effective AfL practices are underpinned by a clear vision of what AfL in writing entails, a focus on the quality of student learning, and a common vision shared by teachers in the same professional community. Such a vision has to be in line with teacher beliefs and instructional and assessment practices, so that teachers are able to translate their beliefs into practice.

Effective AfL practices also hinge upon teachers' careful planning that fosters close connections between teaching, learning, and assessment in the writing classroom (e.g., laying out success criteria that inform assessment, instruction, and learning) and consistent application of AfL strategies (such as peer assessment). The teachers in Mak and Lee's (2014) study were unable to implement AfL strategies regularly, and this impacted negatively on their innovation. Thus, it is important that AfL strategies are integrated into the writing classroom and adopted consistently. More importantly, teachers' awareness of the potential debilitating factors and their concerted efforts to combat them are crucial. Without such awareness and collaborative efforts to battle the realities of the classroom, it is hard to sustain and develop AfL practices. One suggestion is for teachers to work in concert, share their experiences and concerns, and jointly come up with strategies which they can present to the school management for discussion and negotiation. For example, in school contexts where school administrators are keen on having students write a large number of essays using a product approach (i.e., single drafting) and adopt recalcitrant attitude toward process writing (as it will result in fewer writing assignments), teachers can present the benefits of multiple drafting to their school administrators and negotiate an acceptable number of writing assignments. In brief, teachers have to be proactive and take a bottom-up approach to change, taking into account the specificities of their work contexts.

### ***Student Factor***

The student factor pertains to students' understanding of AfL in writing and the role they play during the process. For AfL to work, students need a clear understanding of the learning goals and success criteria of the writing tasks. Teachers have to



prepare students adequately by teaching what they assess and make process writing and self-evaluation and peer evaluation an integral part of students' writing experience. Unfortunately, in a number of L2 school contexts, a product approach to writing is prevalent, where students produce single rather than multiple drafts; peer evaluation is, more often than not, a peripheral feature of the writing classroom. While the pre-writing phase of instructional scaffolding is useful to help students understand the learning goals and assessment criteria of the writing tasks, the follow-through phases of redrafting, self-evaluation, and peer evaluation are equally, if not more, essential to the writing curriculum. In order that students are actively involved in the pre-writing, during, and after writing stages, AfL strategies such as multiple drafting and peer/self-evaluation have to be established within the culture of schools and implemented across the board, and preferably as early as in primary schools, so that process writing and active student involvement become the norm rather than the exception.

### *School and System Factors*

AfL in writing research has demonstrated that there are entrenched school practices that constitute the main stumbling block to the full uptake of AfL in writing – namely, the school's assessment policy and practice that place a heavy emphasis on detailed error feedback and scores, which are incongruent with AfL and not conducive to student motivation. To implement AfL effectively, teachers need to negotiate with school leaders and administrators, garner their support, and find ways to change the school culture that emphasizes error-focused feedback, summative scores, and a product approach to writing. Also, schools have to understand that to bring about students' long-term writing improvement, one-off or short-term attempts at AfL are insufficient. The implementation of AfL has to be consistent, persistent, and school based, involving teachers' concerted efforts in communities of practice.

Although AfL in L2 writing research has not dealt with issues arising from the parents, they play an important role in influencing AfL practices in the school community. To ensure the smooth implementation of AfL in writing, therefore, parents need to be involved. For example, parent meetings or forums can be held to explain the rationales and principles of AfL, and in particular, alternative practices like selective error feedback and delayed reporting of scores have to be explained to convince parents of the merits of AfL. Indeed, assessment innovation cannot be pursued in a vacuum, and the school factor, though complex, is essential to effective AfL practices.

The school factor is related to and influenced by the system factor, which poses a considerable challenge to the implementation of AfL in writing. In many L2 contexts, school writing practice is seen as an important preparation for high-stakes public examinations. And since public examinations are based on the impromptu writing model, classroom writing assessment in schools tends to adopt a similar model, which in fact need not be so. In classroom writing assessment, students



should be given time to write and learn to write within a process writing model. While the examination-driven system cannot be easily changed, it is important to foster awareness of the distinction between the public examination impromptu writing model on the one hand and the classroom multiple-drafting process writing model on the other. Admittedly, systemic issues are not easily amenable to change, but it is possible to change mind-sets of stakeholders so as to facilitate and sustain AfL practices.

## **Assessment for Learning for L2 School Writing: Pedagogical Principles**

Drawing upon insights from AfL in writing research and the broader AfL literature, I provide a summary of the pedagogical principles that underlie effective AfL practices.

### ***Pre-writing Instructional Scaffolding***

Effective AfL practice starts with teachers' collaborative planning, realized in a strong focus on instructional scaffolding that is intertwined with assessment. This means that teachers should think about how to assess the writing they are going to assign and use those criteria to inform their teaching. Like the teachers in Lee and Coniam (2013), a genre approach can be adopted to integrate teaching and assessment. Teachers can first establish the genre-specific goals of writing (see Example 3.1 for the genre-specific goals for story writing) and help students understand the learning goals by engaging them in a range of learning activities. For instance, to help students come to grips with the story structure (i.e., orientation, complication, and resolution), a jumbled text can be given to students, and through engaging students in mini-text analysis, students will learn about the structure of a story. Apart from the text structure, teachers can design a variety of learning activities to familiarize students with the language features typical of the target genre. These activities can take the form of analyzing sample texts and performing text improvement tasks, where students apply the success criteria to evaluate or improve the quality of the texts provided. For example, students can be given an imperfect story with incorrect verb tenses, or a plain story with few descriptive details, and using their understanding of the success criteria, they work on improving the grammatical accuracy with regard to verb tenses or expanding the vocabulary to enrich the descriptive details in the text. Through engaging in these activities, students can gain a clear understanding of the assessment criteria that will be used by their teachers to assess their own writing, while also preparing themselves for self- and peer assessment at a later stage of writing.

**Example 3.1 Genre-Specific Goals for Story Writing***Content/structure goals*

- The story opening is able to grab the readers' attention.
- The story begins with a clear orientation, establishing who was involved, where, and when the events happened.
- There is a complication/problem that arouses interest.
- As the story develops, the complication/problem is resolved.
- The past events are sequenced in a very clear order.
- The story has an appropriate and impressive ending.

*Language goals*

- Past tense verbs are used accurately.
- Time expressions are appropriately and accurately used to link up the events.
- The story uses an appropriate range of words to describe the characters and events.
- Dialogues are used appropriately to make the story interesting.

***Involving Students in Self-/Peer Assessment and Self-Reflection***

AfL develops students' abilities to self-assess so that they can become reflective and independent in learning; it is therefore important to engage students in self- and peer evaluation, as well as self-reflection. In L2 school writing contexts that involve younger learners, and often learners with little experience with self-/peer evaluation, training provided by teachers is essential (see Chap. 7 about the role of peer feedback training). Self-evaluation of writing can take different forms, such as (1) self-assessment based on the assessment criteria shared at the pre-writing stage (e.g., see Example 3.1), (2) self-editing which focuses mainly on language, (3) and self-inquiry where students not only reflect on their strengths and weaknesses in writing but also formulate their own goals, set further goals based on teacher/peer feedback, and take initiatives to improve their own writing. It is worth noting that such student-centered assessment activities should be an integral part of the writing classroom, rather than implemented only once in a while (see Chap. 4 on AaL in writing for a more detailed discussion of the student role in classroom writing assessment).

***Teachers Providing Descriptive, Diagnostic Feedback***

In the AfL-focused writing classroom, it is crucial that teachers provide quality feedback so that students learn about their strengths and weaknesses in writing (see Chap. 6 on teacher feedback). According to Williams (2005), effective feedback is

focused, stimulates thinking, consists of comments only, refers explicitly to success criteria, and provides concrete guidance on how to improve (rather than giving complete solutions). As such, feedback forms that make explicit reference to the success criteria are highly recommended. With spaces for written commentary in the feedback forms (e.g., Examples 2.2, 2.3, 2.5, and 2.6 in Chap. 2), and with the success criteria clearly laid out, teachers can avoid giving vague comments that are not directly linked to the learning goals/success criteria – e.g., “the story is not interesting.” Instead teacher feedback can be concrete and directly linked to the success criteria – e.g., “You could make the story more interesting by including some dialogues. See X marked in the story where dialogues could be used.” Descriptive, diagnostic teacher feedback can be delivered through teacher-student conferences too, during which students can ask questions and seek clarifications from teachers, and teachers can offer advice and help students think of ways to close the gaps in their writing.

### *Creating a Supportive Classroom Culture*

While traditional writing assessment practices tend to have detrimental effects on student motivation (Huot 2002), effective AfL practices result in enhanced learner motivation. To implement AfL in the writing classroom, it is important for teachers to provide a secure and supportive learning atmosphere and to make students feel that making mistakes is a natural part of learning. This is particularly crucial for L2 school learners who are learning to write and hence bound to make a lot of mistakes in writing. Instead of giving feedback to all written errors, teachers could consider giving selective error feedback. Responding to errors selectively does not mean that teachers turn a blind eye to students’ written errors and do nothing about them. Using information gathered from classroom writing assessments, teachers can devise strategies and design materials that help students work on different aspects of grammar. For example, if assessment has revealed certain trouble spots in students’ use of grammar in writing, teachers can adjust their teaching by designing additional learning activities or exercises on these specific grammar areas. Furthermore, to establish a positive learning atmosphere and to help L2 students overcome apprehensions about writing, assessment criteria can be phrased in positive terms – for example, in the form of “can-do” statements, emphasizing what students can achieve instead of what they fail to do (e.g., I can provide an attention-grabbing story opening) (see Example 2.6 in Chap. 2 for a feedback form with “can-do” statements).

## *Disengaging Scores from Feedback*

Research on AfL has shown that students are very likely to ignore teacher feedback when they receive a grade/score alongside teachers' comments (Black and Wiliam 1998). In AfL, if feedback is to produce positive impact on students, scores have to be de-emphasized. As suggested in Chap. 2, in educational contexts where scores are required for classroom writing assessment, teachers can consider de-emphasizing scores by using feedback forms that draw students' attention to their qualitative comments, or they can record scores but report to students only after revisions have been submitted or even at the end of a school term or school year. In other words, if scores have to be involved, they can be released after students have engaged teacher feedback to improve their work (Lafren and Smith 2017). Of course, if such alternatives are adopted, it is important that teachers inform students and parents and explain the rationales for doing so.

## **Conclusion**

AfL is not only about assessment but also about teaching and learning; through AfL, teaching, learning, and assessment form a symbiotic relationship. In writing classrooms, AfL is about how teachers design writing assessment tasks, how they establish learning goals and success criteria, and how they align teaching with assessment and how students learn from playing an active role in the assessment process (e.g., through multiple drafting and peer/self-evaluation). Therefore, "rather than a final step, assessment is an intermediate, or even initial, step in a continuous process of teaching and learning" (Berchoud et al. 2011, p. 9). AfL should also take account of learner motivation (Assessment Reform Group 2002), and teachers should avoid AfL practices "becoming mechanistic, ritualized and ultimately meaningless and boring to pupils" (James 2011, p. 29). Teachers can work on enhancing student motivation through using more interesting writing tasks, adopting a more engaging pedagogical approach, and playing down errors and scores. Most important of all, AfL is a unitary concept (Hawe and Parr 2014) with all key AfL strategies interrelated with and interdependent on each other. If teachers share learning goals with students without engaging them in self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and peer evaluation, for example, AfL cannot be fully realized. Thus, teachers have to develop a strong grasp of AfL and apply it as a unitary or holistic concept.

For a lot of teachers in L2 school contexts, implementing AfL in writing may present a steep learning curve, and hence teacher education is necessary to enhance teachers' assessment literacy (Stiggins 1999) and to equip them with the professional knowledge and skills to implement AfL in writing classrooms (see Chap. 10). Since AfL differs hugely from traditional AoL practices, both in spirit and practice, implementing AfL entails a significant shift in the way teachers conceptualize assessment, design instructional and assessment tasks, and evaluate learning.

Fundamentally, AfL involves a “culture change in the classroom and expansive learning on the part of the teacher” (Parr and Timperley 2010, p. 71). To implement the principles of AfL requires significant change in teacher and student behaviors, as well as the mind-sets of key stakeholders such as parents, administrators, and policymakers. More importantly, as assessment is a social practice, it is crucial to recognize the interactive nature of AfL and the multiplicity of contexts in which the assessment is situated, such as the social realities and power relations within the educational contexts that characterize teachers’ work (Arkoudis and O’Loughin 2004). Future research on AfL should take account of the myriads of contextual variables (e.g., the teacher, student, school, and system factors) necessary for the successful implementation of AfL – i.e., teachers trained in AfL principles and practices, fully briefed and prepared students and parents, and dedicated support from school management. Classroom-based research of longitudinal nature can yield insights into how teachers can implement and sustain AfL practices – e.g., through engaging in communities of practice.

The next chapter turns to AaL and examines specifically how it, as a subset of AfL, can be promoted in L2 school writing contexts.

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