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As we roll out this 35th but otherwise second issue of *Fortell* in its new avatar with many more research articles, and more voluminous than before, we continue to remain committed as always to matters that concern English teachers and pedagogy. Above all, we are focused on the contemporary debates that rage and enrage English academia at all levels. In the educational context, assessment is one such unease. The judgments made by teachers about what their students have learnt can be described using three different terms: evaluation, assessment and testing. Evaluation can happen in the look of an eye, a shift in body language or a variation in facial expression. Assessment is the attempt to get information about students’ language proficiency through graded assignments or projects. Testing is the use of an instrument (a test/examination paper) administered to students. The current special edition of *Fortell* on **Assessment: Issues and Challenges** deals with the some of the contestations and experiments that surround this rubric and in many ways, is a significant intervention in this direction.

Teachers face many challenges when they attempt to appraise the proficiency of their students either by using calibrated fine-tuned instruments or assignments. The evaluation of such capability through observation or teacher reflection is even more problematic. When such assessment has to capture growth in students, the difficulties are multiplied. The assessment tools take into account the most intricate nuances of what their students have gained and also detect differences across students. The nature of feedback in formative assessment has to be learner centric and scaffolded to enable progression.

This ‘problematisation’ does not imply that teachers are not competent or do not have the resources to carry out such assessment. As passionately stated by Prof. Jacob Tharu in the lead article, “In Teachers’ Hands: Where Formative Assessment Comes to Life in Unforeseen Ways”, only teachers can carry out such formative assessment. He engages in a systematic review of policy documents to justify his stance. This standpoint is further echoed by Prof. Rama Mathew in her interview with Dr. Lina Mukhopadhyay. Both these entries in this issue will be well remembered by several practitioners engaged in the pedagogy of English for many years from now.

Ten other articles in this issue have attempted to confront this problem in three different ways. They make three thrust areas to be precise and are good examples of theory complemented by experiential research and field work. Anil and Ravindra have reflected on test creation practices, in “The Effect of Varied Task Prompts on Critically Reflective Argumentative Essays at the Tertiary Level” and “Question Words in Essay-Type Examinations and their Interpretations by Advanced Learners and their Teachers”, while Sajida has critiqued her own feedback methods in “Synchronous versus Asynchronous Computer Mediated Feedback: A Case Study”. In “Exploring Diversity in Knowledge Co-construction in Day-to-day Classroom Transactions”, Deepesh has examined student responses with very interesting

data on the co-construction of knowledge, proving that teachers modify and individualise evaluation. Sruti, Vikas, and Ravinarayan have ventured into the area of alternative assessment practices; Ravinarayan has looped portfolio assessment as input into his teacher training course to enable teachers to learn through doing in his research article, “Monitoring Growth in Writing through Portfolios”, while Sruti and Vikas have forayed into ‘assessment as learning’ by getting their students to assess their own work thereby proving that such reflection can enable language growth in “Tracking Students’ Varied Growth Patterns in the Use of Linkers to Fine-tune Teacher Feedback” and “Effect of self-assessment: Justifications for Students’ Subsequent Writing” respectively. The evaluation of speaking ability, particularly in group discussions is an under-researched area: Pankaj and Shravasti have used their own observations to show how nuanced progress in verbal and non-verbal use can be encapsulated, in their research, “Capturing Individual Growth in Group Discussions through Teacher Observations” and “Tapping Toes and Dancing Eyebrows: Providing Feedback on Non-Verbal Parameters in Group Discussions”. Assignments to be done every day in class or at home at the tertiary level are practically unheard of, but Malvika has been able to provide valuable documentation of one such implementation in her article, “Daily Home Assignments at the Tertiary Level of Education.” The last two articles in this issue do not deal with assessment directly, but in, “From a Monolingual to a Multilingual Approach in Language Teaching”, Susanna assesses monolingual language practices and argues for a multilingual approach, and Chhaaya uses data from student assignments to reflect on and expose the hidden imperialism in Indian education in her article, “Learning of English: There is a Hole in the Bucket”.

With a generous sprinkling of reports, book reviews and language activities, this issue of *Fortell* is no mean reading! The research articles make one reflect upon the teacher’s role as an assessor, her pedagogical strategies, students’ evolution and varied instruments of assessment. In all, this special issue of *Fortell* is indeed for that English teacher who considers teaching of English serious business indeed!

We hope that you not just enjoy reading this issue but also take away some assessment tools for use in your classrooms. We would like to acknowledge the help rendered by Deepesh C. for his careful proofreading

Geetha and Prem

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In Teachers’ Hands: Where Formative Assessment Comes to Life in Unforeseen Ways

Jacob Tharu

ABSTRACT

This essay seeks to locate Formative Assessment, often seen as a plug-in panacea for the defects of conventional evaluation, within the larger and ongoing process of school based formal instruction. Its articulation as one of many strands related to evaluation in reform oriented educational policy discourse of the post-independence decades is highlighted. Despite its many contradictions CCE has helped create a hospitable setting for carrying FA more purposefully into classroom practice. Yet progress on the ground does not match the enthusiasm in conveying its virtues to teachers in service. An analysis of factors influencing the realisation of FA as practice points to the need to address teacher autonomy seriously. The fundamental principle that all non-summative, non-external assessment is primarily the responsibility (duty and initiative space) of individual teachers is reiterated. There has been a tendency to overlook the complexity of the process of ‘assessment integrated with teaching’. The need for pursuing conceptual clarity about assessment and related processes with greater vigour than campaign style communication calls for is emphasised.

Keywords: Assessment FOR Learning, scholastic, continuous evaluation, Formative Assessment, Summative Assessment

INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades or more, there has been active discussion in India around the notions of *comprehensive* (more holistic) assessment of learners’ progress, conducted *continuously* (during lessons flexibly and fairly unobtrusively) and *formatively* with its potential for enhancing progress. Against the wearying backdrop of examination reform that is always almost but never actually there, this vision of joyful testing quite understandably generates hope, even excitement. In seminar and conference presentations and journal articles in the broad ELT field, numerous papers have extolled the potential of formative assessment especially when expressed as Assessment FOR Learning (AfL hereafter).

However, there is some ambiguity regarding the curriculum transaction processes providing the base or housing for this new/happier strand in educational evaluation. The post NCF 2005 syllabus and related textbooks prepared by the NCERT are followed in CBSE affiliated schools. This scheme has been directly adopted by some states, while other states have made minor modifications and adaptations. The guiding principles of NCF 2005 have been accepted all across the nation, even if the gap between precept and practice remains wide. This gap has as much to do with the idealism of a worthy vision statement as with a lack of commitment and sincerity on the part of those seeking to carry the ideas forward. It is possible to say without being too naively romantic that now there is wider and more varied learner participation during lessons as compared with what was typical at the beginning of the this century. This direction of change in the nature of classroom transaction has been supported by child-friendly and attractive textbooks that invite spontaneous engagement with at least some of their contents even if they are not solemnly and seriously *scholastic*. The emphasis on ‘activities’, many of them, open ended in nature, lead to some measure of collaboration among learners. This has led irrevocably to reduced scope for didactic teacher talk. Even if there is more classroom management talk, these messages do have an element of genuine communication in that they arise in real time. Many instructions are more complex than ‘open page xx’, write neatly, pay attention, etc. They *need to be understood* in the here and the now, and not memorised for reproduction later. They can thus involve some negotiation. Most heartening perhaps is that something *other than* standard explanations and a single correct answer is heard in classrooms. This is because there is space for such unrehearsed utterances to come up, however small this be.

The dark downside of this rosy picture is the ubiquitous mandated CCE package of elaborate cumbersome procedures, widely experienced as heavily time consuming and alas! pointless. The criticisms of CCE as a set of rules to comply with are sharp and varied, and have been embarrassingly persistent over years now. Serious rethinking – clearly an urgent matter – has yet to be initiated. All these negative aspects notwithstanding, ‘cce’ has also come to represent the methodology associated with the more wholesome classroom process described above. This is only symbolic; but it is a new point of reference that has brought vocabulary associated with a broadly constructivist pedagogy into everyday use. Discussions clarifying and promoting FA or AfL generally invoke a helpful classroom setting provided by the ‘spirit of cce’.

The present article was planned initially as a search for a possible explanation of the quite visible mismatch between the appeal of FA within CCE to ELT specialists/experts and the lack of interest, even coldness, on the part of teachers being alerted to this new aspect of classroom transaction. No one seems to have reported *from the field* that teachers who have been told about this new ‘technique’ are keen on trying it out or learning more. All aspects of evaluation apply to the whole curriculum, not only to ELT—a point sometimes forgotten by the more vocal

members of the ELT community. If FA is good, it must be good for all subjects. The main promoters of the new (improved) pedagogic practices are official bodies (like the SCERTs) that utilize the permanent in-service training channel. There is usually a strand of sermonising as exhortation to teachers to go beyond the prescribed procedures and be committed, proactive even creative. In most subjects there is not much professional input outside the standard and limited official refresher course type programmes as channels. ELT is unique in that there is a lively and proactive nationwide professional community of experts/resource persons who see their role as supporting curriculum and evaluation reform. This role is elegantly captured in the title of a recent major national/international conference –TEC 11 Starting, Stimulating and Sustaining English Language Teacher Education and Development. The ELT community thus has an advantage in the availability of personnel who can mediate the transfer to teachers of relevant advances in knowledge. This facility and opportunity could be exploited more purposefully for exploratory and even speculative discussion. The tendency in much ELT public talk at conferences and such fora has been to stay safely with specific and limited problems leading to apparently neat solutions.

Any discussion of teachers’ practice must recognise that it is situated in real social-cultural settings where a complex mix of desirables and imperatives exert pulls in different directions creating tensions for the teacher to negotiate. What they do in class as subject teachers is only one aspect of their practice or performances as persons. We need to remain aware of this wider context, when we focus, quite rightly, on their subject linked instructional activities. This applies to *all* teachers including those in ELT: a fact that is sometimes overlooked. The prescribed syllabus – evaluation scheme (though limited in its reach in an overall sense) exerts a powerful influence on what teachers do, feel they can do in the classroom. But thankfully not everything is *wholly determined by external forces*. Teachers do ‘hear’ messages about improving their practice (themselves too?) and in their own ways try to make sense, except perhaps when they are totally burnt out. This is the zone of possibilities the present discussion seeks to shed some light on. One commonly heard complaint (among many) relating to teachers’ professionalism is poor receptivity on their part to good news beamed at them. The good news is invariably about improved pedagogy which they have to bring to life by retooling themselves. So, this retooling is ultimately what innovation is all about. Recognizing this point about improving instruction suggests the question we need to ask about resistance to innovation. Does the problem lie in the nature of the supposed good news, the manner of telling, or both? It makes sense to extend the scope of the discussion of responses of teachers to innovations in general, and not limit it to FA though most examples used will lie within the evaluation-assessment sphere.

THE FRAMING OF THE SCHOOL TEACHER’S WORK SPACE

The earlier remark about teachers constantly negotiating conflicting pulls and

pushes in real settings is an allusion to their agency. This element has much to do with receiving and acting on inputs calling for changes in practices. A key premise of the present discussion is that innovations in pedagogy calling for teacher adaptability are tied critically to teacher autonomy. The term ‘teacher autonomy’ has long been a cliché that has received little serious attention: neither in curriculum design nor in teacher preparation and support. Autonomy as posited here is the *felt sense of autonomy* of the teacher: something experienced, sustained and renewed over time, and building in part on what they feel makes them more free. Autonomy cannot be bestowed from outside, least of by higher authority in a once and for all promulgation.

As noted above, any meaningful exploration of the realisation of hoped for innovations in the classroom must take into account and engage with the external forces that teachers cope with. This is an area in which outsiders/experts might play a small and helpful role. Trying to make sense of the system as it operates in the schooling process is where we need to begin, before getting at teachers and finding fault with them.

A fuller consideration of the wider factors affecting teachers’ practice is beyond the scope of this article. A sense of the complexity of this wider setting is found in Vasavi (2015). Though this deals mainly with government elementary schools (run by state governments), its many references are highly informative. Bypassing this domain is acknowledged as a limitation of the discussion. Turning to our system founded on centralised control over the curriculum, the implicit logic appears to be that micromanagement of instruction ensures compliance in instruction and hence quality in education. The curriculum package includes an elaborate apparatus of rules and regulations around knowledge (subject matter) specifying what the teacher should do. The concern here is not on documenting teachers’ compliance but on factors that might influence their ways of receiving and interpreting messages bearing on quality via desirable changes. From this perspective, details of syllabus prescriptions (syllabus, lesson elements, evaluation) are not of relevance. What is of interest is the nature of messages pointing to changes—towards improvement. This strand in official discourse, (especially the evaluation area) is more likely to be found in occasional vision statements than in regular notifications. A very small archival search is taken up covering the general recommendations of national level education commissions and similar bodies. These would be pointing in new directions as against specifying practical procedures to follow. If located, such statements would represent the relatively hidden aspirational dimension of the system’s conventionally tough-minded manner of laying out results oriented programme(s) of actions.

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT: SOME CLARIFICATIONS OF RELATED TERMS

Before proceeding to this archival matter, certain basic terms related to instruction and evaluation in the school need to be clarified, Firstly, the term *evaluation* will

be used rather than *assessment*. This is only to stay in line with what is more current in official use, e.g., CCE. [However, in the concluding section of the essay the advantages of making a distinction between evaluation and assessment will be considered.] The terms, “examination” and “test” are used interchangeably in our system. Both are examples of the achievement test – an instrument aligned with a notified syllabus segment and administered after it has been completed. The alignment with the syllabus (supposedly objectives, but in effect content) is required by the content validity criterion of goodness. For high stakes public examinations this has become a legal requirement. The conceptually no less significant additional condition, namely that the syllabus *has been* implemented in the intended manner is not treated seriously at all . It is only a matter of formal declaration: when the pre-set end date for teaching is reached it means that the portions *have been* covered. Satisfying the condition is that simple. However, the teacher (if viewed as a thinking person) is caught up in the contradiction here; and this becomes significant when messages about improving instruction are conveyed to them. The syllabus segment for an achievement test can be a course book unit, syllabus for a term or year or the whole two year syllabus for the matriculation examination. The syllabus bound nature of the achievement test is its defining characteristic. Its location after providing instruction makes it an overall stocktaking device. The summative aspect lies here.

There are many different dimensions on which a test (as an actual entity/event) can be described and categorised. Two of relevance to the present discussion are considered. They are represented as two *independent* axes in the diagram

Axis/Dimension	Levels	
Temporal	Final (after instruction)	Sessional (instructional term)
Agency (designer)	External authority	Teacher or local team

Any test can have any of the four possible combinations of levels: final – teacher made, external – sessional, etc. The binary levels do not necessarily mean clear and firm boundaries: they are, rather, ends of a continuum. Even so, the categorisation is broadly valid, and useful for the discussion here. As mentioned, there are other dimensions on which tests can be categorised. written – oral, essay type – objective type, fixed – flexible time allowance, etc. These are related to the internal structure or administration arrangements of tests, that are not of concern here.

PRECURSORS OF THE FORMATIVE-SUMMATIVE DISTINCTION IN EXAMINATION REFORM DISCOURSE

The voicing of serious concerns about the negative features of examinations in comprehensive national reviews of public education began in the late 19th century, for example the Hunter Commission. (GOI, 1992). The *only* recognised and relevant examination in that era was the Matriculation examination used as a device for selecting candidates for admission to highly restricted tertiary education

programmes. The report also recommends the setting up of boards of secondary education. It can be inferred from this that the matriculation examination was *the* effective syllabus. The ominous similarities between the role of the Matriculation examination then, and of the IITJEE, NEET in the second millennium later are worth reflecting on. The wholly external final examination instituted then remains the steel frame of our examination (education) system, quite stubbornly. The post-Independence national reviews of education and unavoidably examinations reflect policy perspectives that have influenced current views.

EXTRACTS FROM THE MAJOR REVIEW REPORTS

Under the title and reference details of each report(source) a few relevant statements, sometimes only phrases are listed as they are. Comments on them are given in the Findings section that follows:

Government of India (1966): *Report of the Education Commission (1964-66): Educational and National Development.* (New Delhi: Ministry of Education).

- i. Sec. 9.61 Evaluation helps not only to measure educational achievement, but also to improve it.
- ii. Sec. 9.71 (For the primary stage.) Due importance must be given to oral tests which should form part of the internal assessment. Teachers should be helped... with a rich supply of evaluation materials... Diagnostic testing is necessary for this and the entire school stage.
- iii. Sec. 9.84 [The] internal assessment or evaluation conducted by schools... should be given increasing importance. It should be comprehensive, evaluating all those aspects of students' growth that are measured by the external examination and also those personality traits, interests and attitudes which cannot be assessed by it. Internal assessment should be built into the total education process, and it should be used for improvement rather than for certifying the level of achievement of the student.

I. GOI (1986): *National Policy on Education* (New Delhi: MHRD, Department of Education) (amended in 1992)

- i. Sec.8.24 (iii) Continuous and comprehensive evaluation that incorporates both scholastic and non-scholastic aspects of education spread over the total span of instructional time.
 - (iv) As part of a sound educational strategy examinations should be employed to bring about qualitative improvements in education.
- ii. Sec. 8.3 As part of a sound educational strategy examinations

should be employed to bring about qualitative improvements in education.

II. NCERT (1988) *National Curriculum for Elementary and Secondary Education: A framework.* New Delhi: NCERT

Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation

[To] remedy the defects lying in the reliance on a one-shot end of year impact evaluation...recommends that evaluation should be treated as an integral part of the classroom teaching learning process. Evaluation, conducted periodically, should provide the type of feedback on student achievement that enables teachers to improve their methodology, if required.

III. GOI (2000) *National Curriculum Framework 2000.* New Delhi: MHRD, Department of Education.

i. Sec. 2.4 Minimum levels of learning

These have been called the Minimum Levels of Learning. The MLLs are expected to be achieved by one and all. Since the MLLs provide a sense of direction and a certain amount of accountability, these are considered to be an effective tool for programme formulation for school improvement. The quality of a school or educational system, in real sense, has to be defined in terms of the performance capabilities of its students. Learning has to be seen as a 'continuum' in which units are sequenced in a functional manner.

- ii. Sec 2.10 Receiving regular feedback from teachers and learners should be an inbuilt component... Continuous and comprehensive evaluation plays an important role in providing feedback. It should be used for remediation.

FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY

The prominent and possibly most significant theme running through the observations and recommendations beginning with SEC 1966 is the importance of bringing many more dimensions of students' growth and development into the scope of pupil evaluation to making it more comprehensive. This brings in an entirely new dimension, since the conventional examination dealt (and still deals) only with the scholastic domain. The less obvious but truly significant corollary of this is the explicit recognition of the need to bring opportunities for the child's development in co-scholastic areas into the scope of systematic planning of the curriculum. Such planning entails the identification of specific areas, formulation of objectives, evaluation modalities and criteria for awards. This makes it more likely that all children are in some manner covered or reached. Until the co-scholastic was brought into the 'main' curriculum, all-round development applied only to the few children who took active part in cultural activities and sports and

earned certificates or commendations, while the majority remained on the sidelines in spectator mode. Their development – and surely this must have happened in varied and satisfying small ways for many, even if many others found little or no stimulation and encouragement. The latter remained hidden and taken for granted in proclamations about the culture or ethos of the school.

The second major theme is the emphasis on evaluation that is *spread over the total span* of instructional time, so that the final examination result is not the only recognized or valued measure of progress or achievement. Thus, *continuous evaluation* becomes a specific policy. It should be noted that the premise for this much reiterated assertion is not clear. After all, unit tests, monthly tests and the like have always been there; the school teacher's burden of marking goes back to the dim distant past. One explanation is that the intended comprehensive scope of evaluation was feasible only when it was conducted during the ongoing instructional process. This is where learning activities generate *numerous occasions* for exploiting as evaluation 'events'. The scope of performances that can be elicited through separate structured tests even if inserted frequently is highly limited. From a different perspective, references to report cards that should incorporate progress related information from 'interim' evaluations and not be restricted to the final examination results, appear to reflect a developmental view of learning. How various state directorates of education and national boards (CBSE, ICSE) spelt out operational details (rules and regulations) for handling the co-scholastic area is not considered here.

A third theme related to the continuous and the comprehensive modes of evaluation is the formal recognition of *school based evaluation*. This move enables and accords official status to evaluation conducted in the *locally managed* setting of the school: something that internal and sessional evaluation lacked earlier. Recall that sessional and internal are independent. The promotion of the sessional component is easy to accommodate in the prescription from above regime. The extent of a move towards truly internal evaluation — the essence of which is *relaxing control from above* — is incorporated in the school based evaluation provision is unclear. School based evaluation can be based on question papers set at a block or district or state level sent to the school for administration: clearly not a meaningful mode of school based evaluation. This locus of control factor is a major issue, and will be picked up again.

Finally there are observations that appear to be moves towards recognising the basic notion of formative evaluation as the *utilization* of test based information for pedagogic purposes. One point — more an expression of hope than descriptions of tangible processes — is the proposition that evaluation can/should play a *supportive role* in the instructional process. This is stated in varied ways: evaluation helps to measure and also to improve achievement, examinations should be employed to bring about qualitative improvements in education, successful learning cannot occur without high quality evaluation. At a more practical level there is mention

of the need to provide feedback (to learners, teachers, parents). Finally, there is the specifically identified and often reiterated stress on the use of tests for diagnosis and remediation. This heavy focus on remediation is problematic, and it will be returned to.

A fact to note in passing is that it is in the NCF 2000 that the terms formative and summative are first explicitly defined and used. The definitions given are: 'done during the course of instruction with a view to improving students' learning' (formative) and 'done at the end of the year to promote students to the next grade'(summative). Soon thereafter a team at the NCERT produced a handbook or manual for conducting continuous and comprehensive (Rajput et al 2003) It is surprising, or maybe not, that in the entire introductory chapter setting out the concept of the scheme the word 'formative' does not occur even once! Around this time various states began to add a continuous comprehensive component to conventional evaluation schemes in varied forms, the prominent feature being the inclusion of co-scholastic areas. It is not clear when the practice emerged and whether there was any specific proposal as its source. But some states implementing CCE had evaluation schemes with Formative 1 (FA1) and Formative Assessment 2 (FA2) as descriptive labels for the summary of a series of awards for achievement in scholastic and co-scholastic areas during terms 1 and 2 respectively. Summative Assessment (SA) quite logically represents the consolidated final award. The notification by the CBSE of its scheme for CCE (CBSE 2009) endorses (and given its national status also sanctifies) the equation of 'formative' with 'end of term' where the year has multiple terms in the national lexicon of out the labels FE1, FE2 are used in this manner.

Thus we have in India an official definition of 'formative' as 'consolidated evaluation awards for a part of the academic year'. It is a static descriptive label. Fortunately, we can go beyond this and explore the many meanings of the word.

TAKING STOCK OF WHERE WE ARE NOW

What are the prospects of moving forward to translate the potential of FA into feasible and meaningful practice in the classroom setting? Three issues need to be addressed. Firstly, the confusion arising from the different interpretations of the term in the present 'policy discourse' needs to be resolved in some sensible manner. Secondly, the process of change in teachers' everyday practice needs to be better understood and appreciated. Thirdly, there is the need for more close study of the plurality of perspectives and meanings associated with notions such as formative uses/responses and feedback in the teaching learning process, and of bringing teaching and assessment seamlessly together.

USES OF THE TERM FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT IN EVERYDAY INSTRUCTION

This matter relating to official terminology cannot be tackled directly. However, active discussions highlighting the process aspect of FA can help to promote appropriate practices related to it. The illogical nature of labels FA1, FA2 do not in

themselves prevent this as they are more a distraction than a disruptive intrusion. The really serious matter is to avoid letting diagnosis and remediation (always seen as a sound and useful practice) become the effective and sole meaning of FA. This would close off further exploration of possibilities by focusing solely on what Vygotsky (1978, p. 89) calls teaching “toward yesterday’s development”. There is a twofold problem with this narrowing down of the purpose of diagnosis: 1) it fails to stretch learners’ current understanding and thus lose the developmental edge of the teaching learning process and 2) it reinforces in the learner a sense of failure (focusing on their inability to learn)

This loss of focus on the breadth and richness of the notion of FA is pointed out by Stobbart (2009) who stresses the need to keep the process creative. It is important to keep images from NCF 2005 like ‘going beyond the textbook’ ‘relating school knowledge to life outside’ which point to learning that *is not predefined* in a unit or lesson plan. It is as a means of fostering learning that is not pre-specified that we need to preserve and promote FA.

ADDRESSING TEACHERS AS PROFESSIONALS

The need to understand change processes better (before trying to accelerate them) is the central theme of the present discussion. The basic principle is that *all* reforms, improvements, innovations in education ultimately call for changes (minor or major) in day to day practice in schools. And necessarily the major responsibility for making innovations work falls on individual teachers in their physically isolated work sites. It is also true that ideas and processes grounding supposed innovations are found or generated outside the school. Once an item is selected for broadcast, it is a matter of ‘getting the good news’ to teachers. With the focus on practice – what teachers do – it seems wise/efficient to present the message as a ready to use formula: steps to follow, sometimes with material to use as a base or medium. In the large government sector the mode of conveying the message is the mandated in-service training programme, sometimes aided by supplements to manuals. It is worth noting teachers are by law available for such inputs for about 15 days each year. In the private sector enrichment or orientation workshops are organized by managements – sometimes required and sometimes by invitation gilded with incentives. The former programmes have been frozen in a dull routine for years. The need to revamp in-service education has perhaps generated as much official verbiage as teacher absenteeism, though the latter seems far more newsworthy. In the latter category, the relative heaviness and dullness of communication in government training programmes is generally softened cleverly by the suave sales talk of the ubiquitous resource person. ELT is surely the area where the largest pool of expert resource persons or consultants is available and find employment. What is easily overlooked in all such orientation/upgrading programmes is the unwaveringly *one way* nature of communication. Since what is to be conveyed to teachers is something finished and ready for implementation as just noted, it follows logically that teachers should listen and take in what is given.

Even the most skilled and manipulative communication style (“we are going to learn together”) cannot hide the total *absence of negotiation* built into such training packages.

The apparently major and easy to identify problem is teachers’ resistance to change. Professionals in certain other fields (especially those dealing with teacher training, education, continuing professional development and the like) seem to show much more openness in adopting new ideas and techniques. The somewhat ungenerous term ‘jumping onto the bandwagon’ does not wholly obliterate the versatility demonstrated here. Perhaps we need to give more weight to the material constraints lying in the classroom teacher’s actual work setting, and the mode of thoughtful, cautious response.

A shift in focus to external impediments as distinct from internal closed mindedness redefines the problem. Recall that elsewhere in the discussion of education, the change in terminology from school *dropout* to *pushout* drastically reframed and made complex a problem long described and handled in a simple/simplistic way. It is true that teachers find it difficult to understand, accept and implement recommended or demanded changes, but for a *variety of quite valid reasons*. Some of these might be related to the ‘staying in ones comfort zone’ predilection. But there is scant evidence that professionals *as persons* in other fields tend to move happily and decidedly from comfort to the discomfort signalled by the new and unfamiliar. The challenge of changing practice in the domain of ‘typical behaviour’ as in the register of psychometrics is far greater than change instigators typically assume.

This is not a strikingly original insight. It is embarrassing to acknowledge. It takes us back to a ten year old articulation of the problem. One of the early and powerful critiques of the NCF 2005 (from an insider with regard to the underlying philosophy) is found in Batra (2006), who notes that

While the NCF questions a dominant contemporary Indian narrative of education as a model of information transmission and ‘banking’, it fights shy of addressing an equally dominant narrative in education: the teacher as a passive agent of state-instituted change. It is unable to address a central challenge of quality education – that of transforming the role and performance of teachers

(Batra, 2006, p.95)

Responding adequately to this issue will undoubtedly have to be an extended exercise. A very obvious first is to recognize teachers even those at the lower primary stage as professionals. Education provided through schools where teachers interact face to face with a group of learners places a certain responsibility on the teacher. The traditional role of the teacher in ‘conventional’ education has been changing and certainly should continue changing. The essence of this model is entirely different from that underlying self-instructional programmes, distance education, and e-learning courses. In the latter there is *absolutely no role* for the

real time social learning setting—teacher and students in a classroom. The apparent efficiency and claimed effectiveness of these programmes is tempting. But whittling down the teacher's role hoping to accommodate more teacher proof components is not a purposeful and defensible *educational* strategy.

The teacher is there because she needs to be there. She needs to use her *judgement* to make decisions in emerging (this means *unpredictable*) situations in day to day curriculum transactions. Trying to program and control this process very closely through design (with the best of intentions) will indeed be, counterproductive. Recognizing the need for teachers' decision making is a common sense interpretation of 'agency': good enough to start. What it entails is shedding our not always hidden yearning for teacher proof materials. N.S. Prabhu's insightful observation implied in the phrase 'materials as resource and materials as constraint' merits thoughtful revisiting. There is no sensible option to holding a dialogue with the teacher. This does not mean only friendly face to face interactions. Open-endedness and scope for questions in what is 'given' to teachers and thence discussion/dialogue is the basic principle. One good way of starting would be to find opportunities to listen to practicing teachers – what they find interesting, satisfying and invitingly challenging as things stand as against problems we can solve for them. The first morning of a 5 or 8 day in-service programme could be devoted to this, for example. Where does the challenge in such common sense suggestions lie?

The third task noted above is related to the growing academic-scholarly knowledge base. Keeping abreast of advances in this base is important for our (experts') continued professional development. There must be something new and possibly interesting to include as the content base of future training, education, professional development programmes for teachers. For those interested in evaluation, measurement, assessment, there is much to learn: for instance about the term assessment relating to *assessment as it* is realised as practice in varied ways in numerous unique settings for learning teaching. Thus plurality keeps raising questions about the meaning(s) of terms such as 'formative use of information relating to progress', 'feedback' (who gives/receives it? what makes it usable? how?), 'bringing teaching and assessment seamlessly together'.

These conceptual issues are challenging. They invite vigorous and rigorous analysis of models *and of* delicately garnered empirical data. This is for us to respond to. As a first step a few references are listed that should help readers gain a sense of the complexity of the discussion and debate around the seemingly simple terms this essay started with. These articles are based on reviews of sizeable numbers of primary studies. They point to the types of field studies we need to take up in the vast landscape of Indian ELT. Assessment for Learning is an appealing notion. Exploring its potential could lead to unique contributions towards the larger quest for curriculum renewal.

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Exploring Diversity in Knowledge Co-construction in Day-to-day Classroom Transactions

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ABSTRACT

The idea of co-construction of knowledge jointly by the students and the teacher in the classroom has recently gained prominence in education policy. In this paper, I report the findings of a study conducted in a secondary school classroom. While the texts used in the classes were common for all students, and the discussions were also the same, individual students brought different ideas to the classroom discussion and grew in different ways. This difference in understanding shown by individual students is proof that knowledge is constructed differently. For this paper, I have selected two themes—gender and language politics. I have focused on the responses (as captured in written responses and during classroom discussions) of two students for the former theme and three students for the latter. Changes in gender relations were interpreted, by the two students selected for this study, either as an urgent need or as a result of deprivation. For the theme of language politics, the three selected students saw the politics of languages from their own situated contexts and emerged from the class with different perspectives and understandings. Hence, this paper discusses the implications of these findings for teachers as well as policymakers with regard to varied individual growth and the need for more nuanced formative assessment practices.

Keywords: co-construction of knowledge, gender, language politics, formative assessment

BACKGROUND

Formal teaching practices in classrooms are based on the philosophical beliefs and theoretical understandings of educational policymakers, school administrators and teachers in the classroom. With time, however, new theories of education emerge, and an acceptance of these leads to new classroom teaching practices. When one considers the history of education generally, these changed beliefs can be broadly divided into three phases—behaviourism, cognitivism and social constructivism.

Behaviourists believe that all learning is change in behaviour, brought into effect by

stimuli and responses, by positively reinforcing “correct” or “desirable” behaviour and negatively reinforcing “incorrect” or “undesirable” behaviour. The learner’s mind is considered to be a clean slate, a “tabula rasa” and the teacher the “all-knowing”, “all-powerful” agent of change.

Cognitivists believe that the brain’s development is the crux of the learning processes. All education is geared towards making changes in learner cognition that would lead to information getting stored in the long-term memory. The human brain, like a computer, is meant to process all the information that is available and use it for predictable situations. Learners are treated as isolated individuals in the classroom using individual styles and strategies.

Social constructivists, on the other hand, believe that all learning happens through social interactions. The learner lives in an interconnected web of life and what each individual does has an impact on every other being. Learning happens through a dialogue between existing and new knowledge inside the learner’s mind. The knowledge that aids such individual learning is constructed collaboratively and creatively in the environment. A few underlying principles of social constructivism are:

- Learners construct knowledge on the basis of their previous knowledge.
- Learning is an active process as new understanding is created.
- There is learner reflection involved in this process, even though it is in collaboration with their peers.
- Learning is inquiry-based as learners ask questions and investigate a topic or theme using a variety of resources and perspectives.
- No idea is considered absolute as knowledge is considered to be evolving.

Vygotsky’s idea of the Zone of Proximal Development (1978) aptly captures this idea of learning through social interactions with peers and more capable elders and care-givers. Also useful in this context is Bruner’s concept of scaffolding (Bruner, 1985) which refers to the support given by these more-enabled individuals for learning to happen.

In terms of the education policy in India, the National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2005) clearly mentions this understanding of the teaching-learning process and considers teachers as co-creators of knowledge. The teacher is therefore expected to use the learners’ ‘knowledges’ to enable co-construction and interpretation of such knowledges in the classrooms.

If the principles of this social constructivist paradigm are to be applied, there are several implications for the teacher in the classroom. Teachers and learners have to be perceived as collaborators in the construction of new knowledges. Teachers can no longer assume that they know it all, but need to create an opportunity in the classroom for a churning of ideas using various perspectives. They also have to

encourage open and candid discussions using critical thinking to question existing knowledges and co-create/co-construct new knowledges as new perspectives are formed after considerable thought. In terms of educational practice, the ideas of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1972) hold great value for the teacher in this context. Learning is not seen as following the banking model, but as an empowering tool.

In the specific context of language teaching, language was considered to be a system of rules under the behaviourist paradigm. For cognitivists, language was viewed simply as a means of or as a tool for communication. Now, within the social constructivist paradigm, language is seen as a social construct and needs to be viewed as a social semiotic.

The use of language is focussed on social interactions, emulated within the classroom. A conscientious and empathetic teacher is capable of creating an environment for open discussions on themes that have rich possibilities for debate and diverse perspectives. Such discussions of different perspectives form a fertile ground for the co-construction of new knowledges. The teacher is strategically placed in the education chain (from policymakers, planners, syllabus designers, textbook writers, school administrators, and teacher-educators to the classroom teacher) as the person most capable of perceiving the myriad ways in which learners co-create new knowledges in the classroom, as she/he is the involved observer in the scheme of things and is most able to sense even tiny changes in learner understanding. However, conventional evaluation techniques that involve end-of-term, one-shot, paper-pen testing can fall dismally short as tools to capture such “small-gains” (Tharu, 1981) in knowledge creation.

Each individual student contributes to the co-creation of new knowledge on the basis of her/his own unique experiences. Each student’s experience of comprehending the texts and contributing to classroom discussions held around their content depends on their sense of themselves, their life experiences and the identity groups they consider themselves part of. In this study, the texts and themes have been selected by the teacher so that enriching and informed discussions can be held in the classroom. As explained later, two representative themes are focussed on, in this paper.

THE STUDY

As part of my Ph.D. research, I taught English at a secondary school (class VIII) in a Kendriya Vidyalaya (Central School) for a period of four months. The school used Hindi and English as the curricular media of instruction, and Tamizh¹ was generally used outside the “gaze” of the authorities (in corridors and playgrounds, for example). Being a centrally governed school, the curricular details were carried out as per the instructions of the KV Sangathan head office in Delhi or the regional office in Chennai from time to time. The sense of being rooted in the here and now,

¹ I have preferred to use in the paper, the more authentic representation “Tamizh” over the anglicised term “Tamil”.

amongst the Principal and the teachers of this school, was limited as they were in jobs where they could be transferred. Additionally, since the school largely catered to children of defence personnel (it is situated inside the Airforce station campus at Tambaram in Chennai), a national outlook overpowered any regional identities. Students largely belonged to families with at least one parent as a serving member of the Indian Airforce and most of them had attended at least two other schools (KVs) before being transferred to this school. Of the 43 students in the class, boys and girls were roughly equal in number. Between them, they had 11 mother tongues. There were 17 Tamizh speakers and 5 mother-tongue speakers each of Hindi (one Haryanvi, Marwari and Bihari speaker each identified themselves as such, not as Hindi mother-tongue speakers) and Telugu. A large majority of these students voiced their inability to write in their mother tongues, and were mostly capable of writing only in English and Hindi. This was a clear sign of the prevalence of subtractive bilingualism. A few could write in German as it was their third language (most students had taken Sanskrit as the third language).

Around ten broad themes (stereotyping, naming, advertising, reporting, gender, language politics, etc.) were taken up in class as they were considered age-appropriate and had great potential for diverse perspectives, and therefore for engaging the students in discussions. Authentic texts such as newspaper articles, which gave diverse opinions and tilts, were used as texts. Open discussions were held around these themes and texts, often with me as the teacher-researcher leading the learners with open-ended questions and asking them for their opinions. Free and frank discussions were held and nobody was allowed to make fun of anybody in the class. This allowed the students to freely express their opinions without the fear of being judged. What the students felt and how they changed through these classes was documented in the form of audio recordings, written responses to questions in tasks and summative individual interviews at the end of the teaching-intervention period.

THE FINDINGS

For the purpose of this paper, as mentioned earlier, I will focus on two of the themes taken up in the class—gender and language politics. Three periods of 35 minutes each were spent on discussing issues of gender and language use, and five periods were spent on issues relating to language politics in India.

The themes used in the “teaching experiment” had a different impact on different students, which was indicative of their divergent paces and paths of growth. Their sense of identities in terms of their gender and language, and the way these clashed with the realities of language use and the covert tussles for power in the real world, represented in the classroom, in a small way, made it clear to them that language was a site of conflict and the assignment of gender roles are complicated by societal attitudes.

GENDER

There was a lively discussion on gender-related issues, where different sides of the argument were taken up. However, broadly speaking, boys were mostly chauvinistic in their views and most girls had feminist-leaning views. For example, several boys gloated over the fact that “we are allowed to go anywhere, girls are not” and JYO, a girl said “we don’t fight like boys” to indicate that boys have violent physical fights (Extracts from classroom discussion held on 15 October). In contrast, a few girls believed that women are somewhat inferior to men, and accepted the idea of female subservience to the male.

I will give the examples of two students to bring out the diversity in the way the learners responded to the discussions in class. Both students responded to the theme based on their life experiences, situated context and ideological understanding. They had different reasons for this varied responses.

The two students are DIA² and HIM. DIA is a Manipuri girl who has a twin brother and faces a daily battle at home because of the special privileges that her brother enjoys, as a male child. To give an example, her brother is allowed to stay out late and she is not. In the discussions in the class and the personal interview at the end of the four-month period, DIA was vociferous with regard to the rights of women. Referring to the specific incident of sexual violence in Bengaluru, which was in the news at the time, she said that the women were not to blame for having gone to the store late at night. The society must ensure women are safe even at midnight, instead of restricting their movement by imposing a curfew in the evening. In her summative interview, DIA said:

...girls are not allowed to do things that boys are allowed to like riding a bike, going to friends’ houses. My brother can go at any time. They think that girls shouldn’t go outside when it is dark. It is not the women’s fault that they do not feel secure. It is not right to say it is the women’s fault. We should change society to make women feel secure.

DIA complained about her parents not letting her leave the house after sunset even though her twin brother faced no such restriction. In her response to the written task on gender, she used questions to express her anguish “...Women are always busy with household chores whereas men sit like a king in the house. Can’t men do a bit of work? Are only women having hands and legs to work [*sic*]? And not men?”(excerpt from DIA’s response to task 14). In another task, she explained that society treated boys and girls differently and had different expectations from them. She pointed out that this was unfair. She expressed this sarcastically through a simile. “...because that’s what society wants us to do.... The difference between men and women (is) equal to the difference between heaven and earth” (excerpt from DIA’s response to task 11).

² The first three letters of the learners’ first names have been used here to lend anonymity on the one hand, and to not dehumanize them on the other.

For the same theme and discussion, another student, HIM, a boy, had a different response from that of every other male student. HIM had a brother and a sister. However, unlike DIA’s twin brother who enjoyed special privileges by virtue of being a male child and was probably unaware of it, HIM came across as being extremely aware of the privileges he enjoyed as a male child.

HIM had the courage to speak out despite the divided class that he felt there was nothing inherently different between boys and girls and that the differences we saw were the result of the disparity in the upbringing of boys and girls. He added that society had different expectations from boys and girls—the fact that boys are given guns and cars to play with, and girls Barbie dolls—which made them grow up believing the different roles assigned to them as reality. Boys think they have to be tough and girls think they should be sensitive, he said. To say this in a class full of vociferous boys who would not tolerate any opinion that came across as feminist, is no mean feat. In his response to task 11, HIM wrote, “...Men are treated in such a way that they grow up to become tough and strong and women are treated in such a way that they become sensitive...” (HIM’s response to task 11). In the summative interview, when asked to clarify what he had said in the class about the way boys and girls are brought up, he said,

Why boys and girls behave differently is because we are associated with such tasks—for boys they give us transformers and such toys and for girls, they give Barbie dolls, etc., and so they are made to be sensitive, and boys are made fun of if they are sensitive....(HIM’s response to a question in the summative interview).

This is a clear case of knowledge being constructed differently by different students in the class. Both DIA and HIM agreed that the society favoured the male and discriminated against the female. However, the contours of their learning took different shapes. The texts and the discussions were the same for all of them in class. However, the ways in which different students responded differed on the basis of their sense of identity as well as their experiences in life. The varied knowledges they went away with from the class were also different, even though we may have seen DIA and HIM sharing similar opinions after the classes. However, many boys may simply have become sensitive to the fact that women face discrimination and may not understand the issue with the clarity that HIM showed.

LANGUAGE POLITICS

The second theme used in this “teaching experiment” was that of language politics. The students were given handouts on the politics of language, which included aspects of the VIII Schedule of the Indian Constitution (with the inclusion and exclusion of languages in the list). The handouts also had information from the Census of India on how the varying definitions of the concepts of language and dialect, and the census enumerator’s personal judgment on what a language is could lead to gross misrepresentations. Further, it gave aggregations of several

valid languages as dialects under a major language in the census, etc. Finally, it included information on language movements, linguistic reorganization of states, suicides based on linguistic identity, etc. The handouts led to discussions around language politics in which many students voiced their points of view which were shaped by their linguistic identity and unique life experiences.

In this paper I will include three students' responses as examples of varied instances of knowledge construction/co-construction along this theme.

Even though HAR came across as a diffident student, miraculously, he opened up during the discussions on the politics of language. As a Mother Tongue³ speaker of Braj, which is considered to be a dialect of KhaRi (the standard variety of Hindi), he was uniquely positioned to understand this issue. During the course of the discussion, it came to light that the word Braj commonly collocates with the word *bhasha*, meaning language, and the word KhaRi collocates with the word *boli*, meaning dialect. This suggests that historically, Braj was considered to be the standard language and KhaRi was its dialect, but today the roles have been reversed due to political reasons. As the discussion progressed, HAR became more emphatic in his opinion. In the first few classes (task 3), he had identified himself as a Mother Tongue speaker of Hindi, but by the time we reached task 9, he identified himself as a Mother Tongue speaker of Braj, which he now recognized as a legitimate language and not merely as a dialect of Hindi. In the summative interview, he spoke animatedly about language death and said:

...languages die because people use a particular language less and less. In my village, no one uses Braj nowadays. They use Hindi only...that way, languages die because of other languages increasing (in use) day by day, but we can encourage them to use their own language.... (HAR's response in the summative interview).

As a Mother Tongue speaker of Braj, HAR now perceived the "blind" promotion of Hindi as problematic.

In contrast, DIA, the Manipuri girl referred to earlier, identified herself even in the earliest classes as a Mother Tongue speaker of ThaDou Kuki, which is classified as a tribal language even in her village in Manipur. Manipur recognizes Meitei/Manipuri as its official language (included in the VIII Schedule of the Indian constitution in 1992). For her, Hindi or English were not the problems but Meitei was. Unlike HAR, who saw the promotion of Hindi as the problem, she saw the promotion of Manipuri/Meitei as unfair. She even recommended that Hindi be officially made India's National Language.

Another student, MAY, a Mother Tongue speaker of MarwaRi, presented a totally different case. He had been a victim of discrimination in his class and school because of his fluency in Hindi and his lack of proficiency in English. In the

³ I have avoided the term "Native speaker" in this paper and have preferred to use the term "Mother Tongue speaker"

summative interview, MAY expressed how he was dismayed by the fact that his peers made fun of him since he participated only debates, elocution, etc., that were held in Hindi and not those that were held in English. However, when I had made it clear that it was perfectly alright to use Hindi (or Tamizh) in the classroom, and that I would not insist on the exclusive use of English, he became more self-confident and began to feel at ease with the fact that his strength lay in speaking Hindi and not English. Just for perspective, I may add here that MAY continuously strived to speak in English all the time in class, and used Hindi only when he felt a dire need to do so. This was driven partly by his dogged determination to improve his English, and also by his sensitivity to the needs of his audience in being able to comprehend him. Even as a Mother Tongue speaker of MarwaRi, whose interests can be deemed to be harmed by the promotion of Hindi (as HAR perceived it), MAY supported the cause of Hindi being declared as India's national language.

Clearly, this was an example of individual students' partaking of ideas from animated discussions using their existing knowledge, beliefs and sense of identity. HAR did not agree with the viewpoint that Hindi should be India's national language. DIA on the other hand, like MAY (but for different reasons), heartily expressed her preference for Hindi as the recommended national language for India even though she was not as fluent a speaker of Hindi as MAY or even HAR was. Moreover, she would probably be at a disadvantage if fluency in Hindi was considered to be a criterion for any opportunities in life.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ASSESSMENT

The fact that knowledge is not acquired in a uniform manner by individuals holds great importance for the people involved in assessment. A uniform, non-nuanced approach that tests all students through written tests and exams administered at regular intervals will fail to capture the individual paths and shapes of growth that students take as a result of their individual life journeys.

The themes used in the "teaching experiment" impacted students differently. They grew in unique ways and followed diverse growth trajectories. The clash between their sense of identity, their lived realities of language use and the often covert tussles for power in the real world made it clear to them that language is a coveted site of conflict. The three "victims" of language based discrimination displayed a deeper understanding of how identity struggles are manifested through language. The Braj speaker learnt to value his mother tongue as a valid language unlike earlier, when he was a diffident speaker of Hindi. The shy MarwaRi speaker of Hindi whose fluency in a language was greatly de-valued in a setting that he had been transported to because of his father's job began to see that no language is by itself more or less valuable. He understood that "value labels" are assigned as a result of the politics that play out in the linguistic landscape (Chandrasekharan, 2016). He became more comfortable with his linguistic capabilities and this was reflected in him becoming a more confident person with better abilities in English.

Lastly, the ability of a male in the heavily “gendered” classroom to stand up and declare that girls are not innately meek or sensitive, or boys strong and tough, and instead that they are victims of an unfair socialization process, stood out as a courageous manifestation against the workings of power in society.

Every student uses her/his personal experiences and sense of identity to construct knowledge about the self and the world differently. Peers and enablers are equally involved in this co-construction of new knowledges. The markers of individual growth as well as their growth trajectories are therefore unique and need to be incorporated in any evaluation that happens in the educational environment. Outside of formal educational contexts, the more enabled peers and care-givers enable language learning in more democratic ways and such an evaluation is convivial (Durairajan, 2003) in nature. If the knowledges that students bring to the class have to be valued and cherished and the wide diversity that is visible in terms of individual students’ language experiences is to be celebrated, the teacher needs to make careful and empathetic observations of the students’ progress.

In this “teaching-experiment” that lasted four months, I was able to, as an insider teacher-researcher, capture a range of “small gains” (Tharu, 1981). A continuous, comprehensive and “knowledge co-construction recognizing” evaluation provides a conscientious teacher with the space to take into account the personal histories of the students and capture their growth in manifold ways. For this, the teacher can record the necessary information in a journal/diary/notebook. However, there is an even more crucial need to tap into evidence that provides insights into the varied growths and growth trajectories of students. This evidence could be gleaned from student responses, classroom transactions and interviews. For this, the teacher needs to use varied tools, and evaluation has to be sensitive to the small changes that are perceived in the learners. For example, even as a conscientious teacher, I was not able to understand certain aspects of MAY’s growth until the summative interview at the end, in which he felt the need to reveal some personal details to me. The lesson for the teacher is that system-driven testing can never capture this growth. We therefore need to search for democratic and empathetic ways to capture the growth of individual students.

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The Effect of Varied Task Prompts on Critically Reflective Argumentative Essays at the Tertiary Level

Anil Kumar Nayak

ABSTRACT

In India, ESL learners at the tertiary level who have been exposed to English for more than ten years, as part of their English course requirements, are expected to, but are often not able to write argumentative essays which reflect their critical thinking skills. Despite this inability, many of them are able to write essays with a critical perspective as part of their course requirements. This implies that their non-ability to write essays that reflect critical thinking could probably be because of the nature of the task prompt. Essay questions in English examinations are worded in varied ways, from the very simple to the very specific. Writing prompts that expect students to write critically reflective argumentative essays therefore need to be worded carefully. The cognitive steps that learners have to take could either be explicitly stated, or the prompt itself could be such that it triggers critical thinking.

In this paper, I will attempt to explore how different task-prompt-stimuli influence the written responses of learners at the tertiary level. A set of three writing tasks (simply worded, complex task with stipulations and complex task without stipulations), were given to forty ESL undergraduate second year B.Sc. students. Their responses were evaluated and to enable comparisons across tasks, can-do descriptors, based on these responses, were created. These descriptions focused on argument development, the nature of support in the form of examples, and the nature of counter-arguments, logical reasoning and rebuttals provided. The written responses of the learners who were identified as advanced were coded and categorised to identify the prompts that enabled better construction of arguments in the response.

Keywords: Argumentative essay, critical thinking, nature of task prompts, variation in responses

INTRODUCTION

Indian learners, especially those who are from regional medium backgrounds, and also first generation learners, are underprivileged in terms of the availability of

opportunities to use their analytical skills to the best of their abilities. This is largely due to poor instruction and an examination-focused instruction. Consequently, such learners lack the higher order thinking skills which will enable them to go beyond the mere memorisation or understanding of content and provide them with the capability to actually apply that content in real life. As such, developing critical thinking skills in learners is one of the most significant goals of any educational program. Critical thinking is defined as “asking vital questions,” “gathering relevant information,” “testing well reasoned conclusions and solutions,” “thinking open mindedly,” “recognizing and assessing” ... “their assumptions, implications, and practical consequences” and “communicating effectively” (Paul & Elder, 2001, p.1). The ability to think objectively, rationally and logically is a much-desired skill for any professional or student. In India, the National Curriculum Framework (NCF 2005) recommends that the aim of curricula at all stages of education should be to develop learners’ critical thinking, among other skills. Research in this area suggests numerous ways in which learners’ thinking skills can be developed or assessed. There are studies which have used classroom activities such as debates, group discussions, questioning and role-plays to enable critical thinking (Goodwin, 2003; Dickson, 2004; Proulx, 2004; Osborne, 2005; Roy & Macchiette, 2005). However, in the Indian context, since essay-writing is pre-dominant in examination writing tasks in general, and argumentative writing tasks in particular, it seems to be the best modality that could be exploited to develop learners’ critical thinking skills.

Argumentative writing, as a genre, requires learners to use higher order thinking skills, as suggested in the Bloom’s taxonomy (revised) of mental processes crucial during the course of learning or thinking (Stapleton & Wu, 2015; Anderson & Karthwohl, 2001; Bloom, 1956). When learners respond to argumentative writing tasks, they need to *understand* and *analyse* the problem given in the writing prompt, relate it to their knowledge and experiences (*apply*), collate and evaluate the information from their schema (*evaluate*), take a stance, and justify their stance through a logical presentation of related arguments, claims and examples in the best convincing way (*create*). In the Indian education scenario however, since our learners of English are usually more proficient in reading and writing rather than in listening and speaking, argumentative writing tasks are likely to prove more constructive for developing learners’ thinking skills than the other domains mentioned earlier.

However, even though argumentative writing as a genre has the potential to trigger and develop learners’ higher order thinking skills, the nature of tasks given to the learners and learners’ interpretation of them influences both the quality of mental processing that happens while they attempt the tasks and the final outcome of these tasks. The ways in which writing tasks are worded, the subject domain involved, the task-familiarity of the learners, the nature of contexts provided and the type of instructions have a direct influence on learners’ performance in

those tasks in the context of their background knowledge, cognitive abilities and language proficiency. In the Indian context, there are writing tasks, which require learners to take a stance and justify it with succinct and cogent argumentation. Such tasks are generally part of entrance tests, summative examination question papers, public examinations and various international standardized tests such as IELTS and TOEFL. One outcome of such widespread use is that these tasks have a huge influence on the kind of argumentative tasks prompts used in classrooms by teachers to develop learners' argumentation and writing skills. In fact, English teachers usually draw on these tasks and even use them as they appear in these examinations. However, it is important to understand that at micro level mere imitation of standardize task prompts would not be a fit or suitable for our learners' need or they may not understand at all. Therefore, classroom teachers need to design, select, adapt or modify argumentative writing prompts in order to communicate the demands of the task to the learners in a language that they understand, while at the same time providing them with enough opportunities to use their critical thinking abilities optimally.

THE STUDY

The present study is an attempt to examine the impact of three different argumentative task-prompt-stimuli on learners' thinking skills, as gleaned from their written scripts. Through this study, I will attempt to answer the following research question.

RESEARCH QUESTION

To what extent does the nature of task prompt in essay writing affect the quality of written responses produced by learners?

METHODOLOGY

Forty tertiary level students from a semi-urban area in Odisha were administered a set of three argumentative tasks with three different task prompts. All the students had a minimum of 10 years exposure to English. Most of them had done their schooling (from first to twelfth grade) from Odiya (L1) medium schools. The tasks were different from each other in terms of their subject matter, the instructions given and the cognitive challenge that they posed. The tasks prompts, along with a short description of the task demands are presented in Table 1 below:

Task Prompts	Description
Task1 What is your favorite colour? Why?	This is a 'wh' type simple task; it requires learners to engage in lower order cognitive skills. Learners were required to state reasons for selecting a stance, thereby giving them scope for creativity.

Task2 Imagine that your college has banned mobile phones in the college premises. What do you think of the decision of your college administration? Write an essay of about 150 words stating the advantages and disadvantages of using mobile phones on the college campus and also give your opinion on the issue.	This task is an adapted form of a standardized proficiency test; it requires learners to engage in higher order thinking skills. The task demands are clear and the prompts are also clearly articulated. Learners are familiar with the topic and instructions for organization of the essay is given in the prompt itself.
Task3 State your opinion for or against the common belief, "Black is Beautiful". Write an essay in about 100 words.	This task demands cognitive complexity, but that is not explicitly mentioned; it also demands creativity because learners need to figure out their perspective and then decide how to write the essay. Unfamiliarity with the topic makes the task complex, both cognitively and task-wise.

When one looks at the descriptions of the three tasks, we find that task 1 can be accomplished with relatively lower level cognitive abilities. It requires learners to choose a colour they think is their favourite based on their preference, symbolism connected with that colour and their emotional and psychological attachment with it. After that, they have to state the reasons for liking that particular colour, either in the form of opinions, facts or arguments supported by suitable examples, evidence or logical and reasonable explanations. This could be described as a one-sided task as it does not involve opposing views.

By contrast, in task 2, learners are expected to exercise higher cognitive abilities. They need to hypothesise on a situation, analyse the possible causes and effects, and compare and contrast the advantages and disadvantages. This task requires learners to evaluate their decision and to write about it with the help of some examples or evidence. The task stipulations are clearly stated, making it easy for the student to write the essay.

The third, task, on the other hand, is carefully designed to include minimum stipulations. It requires cognitive complexity, but this is not stated explicitly. The task prompt can be interpreted in many ways, and a range of personal experiences and examples may be provided by the learner. This task is more complex because learners also have to provide a justification for the stance taken by them. Unlike the first task, this task involves learners in a two-sided argument which they need to compare and contrast, and then provide a plausible outcome.

The responses of the students across the three tasks were analysed to find patterns. Coding and categorisation was attempted wherever possible.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Although the tasks were administered to 40 students, for this article, the responses of only 10 students who completed all three tasks were analysed in-depth. A qualitative analysis of the ten responses to the first task showed that there was a common pattern across all learners. All of them were able to:

- State their favourite colour
- Give a philosophical reason/explanation
- Connect it to personal experience/habits/ environmental factors/humanitarian grounds, but,
- None of them were able to provide a conclusion

An in-depth analysis of some relevant excerpts from their answer scripts showed that all ten learners, without exception, were able to state their favourite colour “My favourite colour is green/white/pink/...) based on their preference. To substantiate their preferences/choice of colour, they gave a philosophical reason or an explanation and they all were able to attach a form of symbolism to their choice. The actual references used by them and excerpts from their responses are provided in the table below, Table 2:

Coding and Categorisation Task 1		
Philosophical reasons/ explanations/personal preferences	Learner number	Excerpt
Symbol of peace/ caring relationship	1, 2 and 3	-“Green is a good mark of relationship.” -“It is a sign of peace/good and caring relationship-friendship.” -“Friends are the lovely companions with whom we can share our feelings and emotions.”
Point of view on the reasons/provide relevant examples/ personal experiences and choices	4, 5,8, 10	-“Black is a heart touching color, that is why I have black dresses.”-“I personally prefer white colour for parties because it creates a decent and good impression in others’ mind.” -“I love green and I have green dresses.” -“With my point of view, all human beings will love white and black not to hate the black colour [sic].”

Global view perspective/ Environmental factors/ Humanitarian grounds	7, 2, 8,	-“The red indicates to [sic] danger but in this world all objects or things have positive and negative thinking.” -“It is a sign of peace, I like to be in a peaceful environment because when we do violence most of the thing gets wrong and mostly destroyed in every case.” “It represents a funny, and peace [sic] environment.”
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The range of explanations provided in column three of the table, under ‘excerpts; suggests that learners are able to state reasons for their choice in the form of opinions, facts or arguments, and support them with the help of suitable examples or evidence of logical and reasonable explanations. In all these examples, the students were engaged in tasks that involved remembering, understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating and even a little bit of creating. However, although the task required learners to argue and justify, it did not ask them to frame an opinion or a point of view on a controversial topic. It involved learners in one-sided argument as there was no opposite side to create a contrast.

The demands of the second task were slightly different from that of the first task. However, it leads the learners through the same cognitive processes such as remembering and recalling an experience, retrieving and reflecting on their preferences in life, collating information and classifying it into categories, analysing the categories to arrive at a decision, constructing arguments and using the collated information as evidence or examples to justify or support the arguments. The difference between task one and task two was that there was a lot of guidance provided in task two to the student by way of the instructions. A qualitative analysis of the second task suggested the following pattern across the learners. All of them had:

- One or two points of view
- One point of view with data and conclusion
- Two points of views with a good and strong rebuttal, or a
- Flat description of both the sides

In this task, learners were expected to exercise their higher cognitive abilities. The majority of the students were able to take a stand. Learners were required to hypothesize a situation and apply it to themselves. Learner1 stated: “I totally agree with the decision of college banning the mobiles in the college premises.” A similar statement was made by learner 4 who wrote: “It is a good decision of our administrator that our college had banned the mobile phone.” This signifies that the subject domain, familiarity with the topic, and wording of the task had an impact on the learners’ interpretation of the task. Some of the learners were able to

state both points of view. Learner 2 stated: “I agree with this decision of the college administration, because the students are using mobile phones in the classroom (first point of view). So in [sic] my opinion on this issue is administration should allow students but with some instruction”(second point of view). Some learners were able to state a point of view and support it with examples and a conclusion. Learner 3 stated that in her writing “In my point of view;[sic] the college administration has taken a very good decision, because mobile phone has[sic] so many merits and demerits, we can contact easily the person (first example to support the stance), book a train ticket (second example to support the stance).So, students must abide by the rules and regulation[sic]of[sic]college. Because[sic]it would be beneficial for their future” (relevant conclusion in support of the stance).

Other learners who could not take a stance were able to provide flat descriptions of both sides of the argument without favouring either one. Learner 5 stated in her essay: “Through internet they can know lot of things and also we contact with people through social networks(support for the stance), allow the mobile phones to college campus then the students can contact the parents to say about their problems when they late arrival to home” (support for the stance). Overall, the task required that learners argue and justify their opinion or point of view on a controversial topic. This kind of task involves learners in a two-sided argument, and they have to compare and contrast both sides of the argument to draw a plausible outcome.

The third task was carefully designed and yet had the minimum stipulations. It required cognitive complexity but this was not made explicit. The demands of the task would in all likelihood lead the learners through the same cognitive processes as in tasks one and two, but unlike the previous tasks it is open ended, less guided, can accommodate multiple interpretations, scope for creativity and demands learners to have both local /global understanding on the topic..A qualitative analysis of the third task suggested the following pattern across the learners. All of them were able to:

- State their stance
- Distinguish between with pertinent philosophical reasoning with examples
- Analyse cultural differences with relevant explanations and examples
- Give an analytical reasoning of both sides with philosophical and real life examples
- Enunciate a global perspective
- Give examples from across the globe

In the third task, learners are expected to not only engage higher cognitive abilities, but also reflect on the perspective or stance adopted by them. The nature of the task prompt is very different from the first two tasks. The stipulations are not explicitly stated; moreover, it is difficult because most of learners may/may not have any prior concept/knowledge of the topic. From the perspective of the subject

domain or familiarity with the topic, almost all the forty learners have attempted the first two tasks. However most likely the numbers dropped for the third task. In the case of this task, the ration was 10:3. The ratio of the number of learners who attempted the task versus those who completed it was 40:10. Task 3 was evidently much more cognitively challenging than the other two tasks, not only in terms of the sheer number of learners who attempted it, but also in terms of the change in the nature of written responses it received. . Creativity is something that is evident in their responses, made cross-cultural comparisons, contrasted with existing beliefs or system of beliefs, and showed local/global understanding of whatever prior knowledge they have, drawn examples and explanations from personal, professional, ethical, spiritual and mythical grounds, evaluated multiple perspectives, some of the learners have concluded with relevant justification.

In the first task, the majority of the learners were able to state their stance clearly. This is evident from this excerpt from learner1: “I assure [sic] black is beautiful.” Learner3 stated: “In my opinion black is beautiful.”Learner9,taking a stance against the argument stated: “Our elders say that black is unlucky for us.” In this task, therefore, learners were at a higher cognitive level to justify their stance. For this they used stereotypes, myths and even commented on culture. Learner 2 actually used philosophical reasoning in response to the question: “When a person is good [sic]? At that time my answer it always the thinking capacity, understanding, knowledge in him makes him or her beautiful [sic].” Learner 6 substantiated her stand by using a quote: “Every blackboard makes students life.” She drew from the philosophical reasoning “Every man has some thinking we must always be positive way should be in god minded [sic].”Learner 2 used culture as an analytical base and stated: “We can never judge a person on the basis of colour, we should never think that black people are wrong and we should judge on his right attitude and correctness in work.” He then added some relevant examples to further explain his point: “We like the black jeans to wear [sic], like to use black *kajol* to look beautiful, black belt is given to the karate winners.” Learner 2 was able to provide analytical reasoning from both perspectives and supported her stance by stating, “The [sic] black coloured things are nice and pleasant see [sic] or watch”. She then backed it up with philosophical, real life examples “then why not the black people are respected in our society [sic]. Why there should be any discrimination at all.” To authenticate their stance and make it more comprehensive, some of the learners added a global perspective by quoting examples from across the border.Learner4stated:“We take an example of West Indies they are not good looking means their soul is not good [sic]”. Learner 2 stated: “Respect each and everyone in this society irrespective of colour, creed, nationality, etc.”

Overall, the task required learners to not only remember, understand, apply, and analyse the question, but also to evaluate their own stance, justify it and provide examples. This pushed them into the highest cognitive ability of creation. Learners had to argue and justify their opinion and present their viewpoint on a controversial

topic. Being a controversial topic, it was two-sided; therefore learners had to compare and contrast both sides of the argument and then arrive at a conclusion.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, through this study, I was able to successfully establish a link between the nature of task prompts and learner performances, as is reflected in the critical responses of the learners. When tasks do not use the appropriate prompts or words, it diminishes the chances of the learners engaging in the much required critical thinking, analysis and reflection about their own knowledge, skills, and abilities. In contrast, for some learners, task prompts do not make any difference as far as their critical thinking is concerned. They consistently deliver a high level of performance, producing critical and rich content across the task responses; learner 2 is an example of one such learner.

In this study, the majority of learners struggled to write their responses to the second and third task. The second task was the second most attempted task among the three tasks because of the nature of the task prompts and familiarity with the subject domain. It was also more guided and organized, and carried clear stipulations. Therefore, the written responses were more organized in terms of focus, planning, content development, argument, reasoning and logical presentation.

The third task was the most challenging task for all the learners. Here, the learners' inability to understand the task became a crucial factor in making it the least attempted task among the three. Even those who attempted and completed it, showed signs of a struggle in terms of their organization, content development, reasoning, logical arrangement, rebuttal and most importantly conclusion. The majority of the learners across all three tasks did not include a conclusion in their responses.

Finally, I would like to conclude by saying that if the prompts of the tasks are cautiously worded, it will certainly help in validating the required skills i.e. remembering and recalling the experience; retrieving and reflecting on their preferences in life; collating the information and then classifying it into categories; analyzing those categories to reach judgments; constructing arguments and using the collated information as evidences or examples to justify or support the arguments. In other words, if tasks are worded carefully to reflect the demands of the task, the nature of responses would be more accurate.

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Question Words in Essay-Type Examinations and their Interpretations by Advanced Learners and their Teachers

Ravindra B Tasildar

ABSTRACT

Study skills like note-taking, note-making and summarizing, introduced to learners of English as a Second Language, (L2) learners, are part of English for Academic Purposes (EAP), one of the branches of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), a sub-discipline of English Language Teaching (ELT). Nevertheless, one of the important study skills, preparing for examination has not received the required attention. The question words in essay-type questions have also failed to find a place in the books on study skills (Wallace, 1998). The rubric of question papers is one of the under-researched topics in ELT. This paper is an attempt to examine whether monolingual (here English) learners' dictionaries (LDs) provide any help to advanced learners in preparing for examinations. Taking into account the context of Indian learners, the paper studies the ways in which question words are understood by students and teachers and then examines the meanings of question words in advanced learners' dictionaries, EAP dictionaries and Indian editions of mini dictionaries. The paper tries to find out whether the entries of some question words in the advanced learners' dictionaries help students to comprehend questions in Indian university question papers at the postgraduate level. It was observed that entries in the LDs are inadequate to meet the needs of Indian advanced learners. The paper concludes by stressing the need to append a comprehensive list of question words with illustrations from question papers and contextual meanings to the LDs to help advanced learners in India to prepare for examinations.

Keywords: EAP, Study skills, Dictionaries, Question words, Indian Universities

INTRODUCTION

Note-taking, note-making and summarising are three study skills that are introduced to the learners of English as Second Language (L2). These study skills are part of English for Academic Purposes (EAP), one of the branches of English for Specific Purposes (ESP)—a sub-discipline of English Language Teaching (ELT).

Preparing for examinations is also a study skill which has not received enough attention, though in some ELT books we find chapters such as “Preparing for the Examination” (Forrester, 1968, pp. 106-109) and “Preparing to Pass Examinations” (Yorkey, 1970, pp. 209-219). Teacher's handbooks and Indian ELT books with units on study skills, assessment and evaluation such as Saraswathi (2004), Krishnaswamy & Lalitha (2006) and Kaushik & Bajwa (2009), to name a few, neglect the study skill of preparing for examinations. In fact, the rubric of question papers is one of the most under-researched topics in ELT. Wallace (1998), has a separate unit on assessment, study techniques and examination but there is no mention of question words. Besides, the aforesaid Indian books on ELT fail to consider the importance of question words for Indian L2 learners. Thus, question words fail to find a place in the available literature on preparing for examinations.

THE STUDY OF QUESTION WORDS

In the global academia, the term “question words” is known by different labels such as “Common essay terms” - Saint Mary's University (SMU); “Exam terms” - University of Manchester (UoM); “Instruction verbs” - University of Kent (UoK); “Instruction words” - Newcastle University (NU); and “Task words” - University of New South Wales (UNSW). Indian scholar Alemelu (1988, p. 112) refers to them as “imperative” words. For uniformity and consistency, in this article, I will use the term “question words”.

As mentioned earlier, in the Indian ELT scenario, use of question words in essay-type questions in question papers is one of the least discussed issues. One may come across the use of question words such as “parse” and “copy out” in the question paper of English Grammar and Idioms dated 16 November 1863 of the University of Mumbai (Patankar, 1999, p. 140). Alemelu (1988) reports the use of “imperative” words in 289 questions in 22 M.A. (English) question papers at the University of Madras during 1985 and 1986. In these papers the word “discuss” appears 69 times, “consider” is used 28 times and “comment” is used 22 times (Alemelu, 1988, p. 112). After an analysis of 228 questions in 19 M.A. (English) question papers of the University of Mumbai, Tasildar (2016) found that “discuss” was the most frequent question word with 58 instances. This was followed by 29 instances of “comment on” and 15 instances of “comment”. Tasildar (2016) also noted the incomprehension of question words such as “state”, “explain”, “elucidate”, “furnish”, “outline” and “trace” by Indian L2 learners. However, although a range of question words have been used in these papers, there does not seem to be any clarity regarding the difference between these words. This issue has bothered me for a long time; I felt that students seem to be writing the same essays regardless of the question word prompt, and teachers, paper setters and evaluators also seem to expect the same answers/essays regardless of the change in the question word used. The words seem to be interpreted in a similar manner. To find out whether this hunch of mine was correct I decided to carry out a small research study.

INTERPRETATIONS OF QUESTION WORDS

A survey on the interpretation of question words was undertaken on a small group of respondents—six teachers and fourteen M.A. (English) students. The respondents were requested to respond to eight questions that had eight different question words with the same stem. The questions were :

1. Analyse the plot-structure of *King Lear*.
2. Assess the plot-structure of *King Lear*.
3. Comment on the plot-structure of *King Lear*.
4. Describe the plot-structure of *King Lear*.
5. Discuss the plot-structure of *King Lear*.
6. Examine the plot-structure of *King Lear*.
7. Explain the plot-structure of *King Lear*.
8. Evaluate the plot-structure of *King Lear*.

The task given to them was as follows:

Dear Student

Read carefully the following questions on a Shakespearean tragedy. (the 8 questions given above were listed here).

What answers would you write to these questions?

I request you to write the points in brief in the space provided.

Nearly all the students provided somewhat similar answers to these prompts, irrespective of the question words. They focused only on the aspects of the “plot structure”. Representative responses to two question words, “describe” and “explain” are reproduced in Table 1 as follows:

Table 1

<i>Responses of two participants to question words</i>	
Describe the plot-structure of <i>King Lear</i> .	
Respondent 1 (S1)	Respondent 2 (S14)
It has beginning, middle and end. It is divided into five acts; scenes are interrelated to each other.	This tragedy is divided into five acts. It is conflict between King Lear and his daughters.
Explain the plot-structure of <i>King Lear</i> .	
The main reason behind this tragedy Tragic flaw. Internal conflict in mind of King Lear goes mad at the end.	Division of acts. Conflict between characters. Reason of King Lear’s madness.

A quick look at the two sets of responses (to describe and explain) makes it clear that the students did not pay any attention to the question words. The answers they thought they needed to write, (stated by them in point form) are nearly identical.

The interpretation of the question words by the teachers was not very different from what had been written by the students. The teachers were also given the same eight questions but their task was differently worded. Their task read:

Dear Teacher,

Read carefully the following questions on a Shakespearean tragedy. (the 8 questions given above were listed here).

What answers would you expect from MA (English) Part II students to these questions?

I request you to write the points in brief in the space provided.

The teachers also did not find any difference in the focus of the answers despite the substitution of question words. The expectations of the respondents for the two words, “describe” and “explain” are reproduced in Table 2.

Table 2

<i>Representative expectations of the teachers</i>	
Describe the plot-structure of <i>King Lear</i> .	
Respondent 1 (T5)	Respondent 2 (T3)
Students should tell what the plot structure is, and need not necessarily take a position for or against or elaborate on a particular point of view. They should write what meets to their eyes and not interpret the plot.	It is expected to describe the storyline and the movement of the plot from beginning to the end.
Explain the plot structure of <i>King Lear</i> .	
Students should make clear the plot structure of the play. They should reveal the hidden aspects of the plot. Students should make things easy to understand so that what is not immediately obvious about the plot becomes obvious.	One has to explain the plot as it is. For example, it begins with the flash-back and at the end the circle completes (not in this case).

It is clear from the table that the respondents (teachers in classrooms) treated the question words in the following questions as synonymous.

1. Assess the plot structure of *King Lear*.
2. Evaluate the plot structure of *King Lear*.
3. Examine the plot structure of *King Lear*,

In order to find out whether those teachers who became paper setters know the meanings of question words, a few representative samples of question words used by them, are examined. These have been extracted from actual question papers of B.A. Examination (2013 Pattern) of Savitribai Phule Pune University (SPPU) held in April 2017.

- i. *Answer* a character sketch of Rosie in the novel *The Guide*. (Q. 4 (i) Third Year B.A. (External) Examination, 2017 English Special Paper III (Appreciating Novel)
- ii. *Enlist* the important elements of drama found in ‘The Merchant of Venice’ (Q. 5 (4) Second Year B.A. (Regular) Examination, 2017 Special English S-1 (Appreciating Drama)

If this is the case with students, teachers and paper setters alike, it is necessary to find out whether these question words are actually similar. As dictionaries are the last resort for nuances in meanings, a quick check with any learners’ dictionary (LD) will help us to know if these different words are synonyms or not, and if we, teachers, have to educate ourselves and help our students perceive the differences in these question words. Taking into account the context of Indian learners, I will study the meanings of some question words from advanced learners’ dictionaries, EAP dictionaries and mini dictionaries. I will also try to understand whether the entries of these question words will help them comprehend questions better.

LEARNER’S DICTIONARIES AND MEANINGS OF QUESTION WORDS

Advanced learners’ dictionaries

It is well known that LDs offer a lot of additional help on many aspects of highly frequent words. This new information specifically addresses the needs of foreign students (Tickoo, 2003, p. 281). For the purposes of this paper, I consulted the following dictionaries to check and compare the meanings of some question words:

Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (CALD) (2013),

Collins Cobuild English dictionary for Advanced Learners (COBUILD) (2001),

Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE) (2009),

Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners (MEDAL) (2009),

Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English (OALD) (1989) and (2015).

To see if the dictionary entries for some question words can help in locating appropriate meanings, as would be needed if the question words are expected to have different focuses, and entries. Here are the dictionary entries for the question word “assess” in *OALD* (1989) and *OALD* (2015).

Table 3

Dictionary entries of word “assess” in OALD (1989) and OALD (2015)		
	OALD, 1989, p. 60	OALD, 2015, p. 78
i.	decide or fix the amount of sth: assess sb’s taxes/income, assess the damage of £ 350	to make a judgement about the nature and quality of sb /sth: It is difficult to assess the effects of these changes.
ii	decide or fix the value of (sth), evaluate: have you a house assessed by a valuer	to calculate the amount or value of sth syn- estimate: They have assessed the amount of compensation to be paid.
iii.	estimate the quality of sth: It’s difficult to assess the impact of the President’s speech. I’d assess your chances as extremely low.	

These entries reveal two things.

Firstly, quite a few question words seem to be synonymous. For instance, *OALD* (1989) mentions “evaluate” and “assess” as synonyms, and *OALD* (2015) mentions “assess” and “estimate” as synonyms. Given below are the meanings of word “evaluate” in these two editions.

1. Evaluate: Find out or form an idea of the amount or value of (sb/sh), assess (*OALD*, 1989, p. 411)
2. Evaluate: To form an opinion of the amount, value or quality of sth after thinking about it carefully syn- assess. (*OALD*, 2015, p. 525)

Though superficially, the word “examine” appears to be similar to “assess” and “evaluate”, it is synonymous with “analyse”, “review”, “study” and “discuss” (*OALD*, 2015, p. 529). Thus the entries of the question words in *OALD* (2015) add to the confusion. The synonymous nature of question words makes one wonder about the selection of different question words in a question paper. A close scrutiny of the M.A. (English) question papers (April 2009) of the University of Mumbai indicated that paper setters use different question words in order to avoid repetition and bring variety into the questions.

Secondly, according to the advanced learners’ dictionaries, the meaning of one (question) word is explained by another (question) word. The following table 4 exemplifies this.

Table 4

Dictionary meanings of the question word “outline”	
Dictionary	Meanings
<i>CALD</i> (2013)	describe, to give the main facts about something (p. 1090)
<i>COBUILD</i> (2001)	if you outline an idea or a plan, you explain it in a general way (p. 1094)

Dictionary meanings of the question word “outline”	
Dictionary	Meanings
<i>LDOCE</i> (2009)	to describe something in a general way, giving the main points but not the details (p. 1239)
<i>MEDAL</i> (2009)	to give the main ideas of a plan or a piece of writing without giving all the details (p.1008)
<i>OALD</i> (2015)	to give a description of the main facts or points involved in something (p.1093)

Here the meanings of the word “outline” are defined by words such as “describe” and “explain”. Hence, it is left to the learner to choose the appropriate meaning of the word in the question: “Outline the narrative pattern of detective fiction” from the third year B.A. question paper of “Popular Culture” (Old course) in the April 2010 exam held at the University of Mumbai.

THE EAP DICTIONARIES

The EAP dictionaries are made primarily for research students in the United Kingdom and the United States and not meant for learners in South Asian countries. Kosem (2010) has already pointed out the limitations of EAP dictionaries such as the *Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary* (2009), *Compact Oxford English Dictionary for University and College Students* (2006) and *Longman Exams Dictionary* (LED) (2006). Such dictionaries also do not focus on question words in their supplements. For example, LED (2006) specially prepared for examination purposes, does not include a separate list of question words. Similarly, in the supplement *Oxford Academic Writing Tutor*, information related to eleven question words (p. 5) provided under “Answering the Question” in Oxford Learner’s Dictionary of Academic English (OLDAE) (2014) is not congruent with the meanings of these question words provided in the main dictionary. For instance, the entries for the word “examine” reveals that these EAP dictionaries do not provide any special meaning of the word. LED (2006) gives the meaning of the verb “examine” as to look at something carefully and thoroughly because you want to find out more about it (p. 509). Similarly, in OLDAE (2014) the word “examine” means to consider or study an idea or subject very carefully (p. 292).

EXPLORING OTHER OPTIONS

It is clear that the entries in LDs appear to be inadequate to meet the needs of Indian advanced learners, hence I have made an attempt to explore other options. I will now survey some glossaries of question words in books and by educational institutes.

GLOSSARIES IN BOOKS

Anderson et al. (1970), Yorkey (1970) and Schlegel (1995) provide meanings of

some commonly used question words in their glossaries, but the number of words given in each glossary differs. Anderson, Durston & Poole (1970) include twelve words, Yorkey (1970) includes nine words and Schlegel (1995) includes nineteen words. I found that not only do the meanings of the question words differ from glossary to glossary, but the meaning of one (question) word is defined by other (question) word, as in dictionaries. For example, in Anderson et al. (1970) the word “examine” is used to define the meaning of the question words “compare”, “evaluate” and “summarize”. The entries in these glossaries promote subjectivity instead of minimizing it.

GLOSSARIES BY UNIVERSITIES

Some educational institutes outside India such as the University of Leicester (UoL) and UoM assist learners in developing their study skills by providing tips related to note-taking, note-making and preparing for examinations. Along with these two universities, NU, San Jose State University (SJSU), SMU, University of Hawaii (UoH), UoK and UNSW to name a few, also provide glossaries of question words. Generally, “wh-” words are not part of these glossaries. The number of question words provided in these glossaries range from five to thirty-six.

Table 5

The number of question words in glossaries								
Universities	NU	SJSU	SMU	UoH	UoK	UoL	UoM	UNSW
Number of Question words	21	05	13	25	36	28	21	29

The entries in these glossaries are lengthy and sometimes provide contrasting meanings for the question words. For instance, the SMU glossary mentions “defend” as a synonym of “justify” and “review” as synonym of “summarize”. It also mentions “explain” as the opposite of “describe” (see Table 7).

Table 6

Glossary meanings of the question word “explain”	
University	Meanings
NU	Give reasons; describe how something happens
SJSU	Requires essays which are fully thought out and developed in as much detail as you have time for. Ask yourself: “Why is this the case?” and “What are the main points?”
SMU	In many ways “Explain” is the opposite of a “Describe” essay, and this assignment requires you to present a “reasons” associated with a topic rather than just facts. You should focus on the “how” of a subject and analyse a cause-and-effect relationship. This essay should get at the deeper meaning behind your topic, often including historical and cultural influences.

UoH	Give reasons for what is asked. Make plain or clear; tell “how” to do; provide the causes.
UoK	Make plain and clear; give reasons for.
UoL	Clarify a topic by giving a detailed account of how and why it occurs, or what is meant by the use of this term in a particular context. Your writing should have clarity so that complex procedures or sequences of events can be understood, defining key terms where appropriate, and be substantiated with relevant research.
UoM	In explanatory answers it is imperative that you clarify and interpret the material you present. In such an answer it is best to state the “how or why,” reconcile any differences in opinion or experimental results, and, where possible, state causes. The aim is to make plain the conditions which give rise to whatever you are examining.
UNSW	Tell how things work or how they came to be the way they are, including perhaps some need to “describe” and to “analyse”.

The words selected by these universities are not frequently seen in the question papers of Indian universities. For instance, the question word “substantiate”, found nine times in nineteen M.A. (English) question papers (April 2009) of the University of Mumbai is not included in the glossaries of the universities abroad considered here. Thus, it seems difficult to replicate these glossaries for Indian L2 learners.

Unlike the aforementioned universities located in native speakers’ countries, Indian universities do not provide any assistance to L2 learners in this regard.

ARE THESE SOURCES RELIABLE?

As the list of commonly confused words or the usage notes in LDs do not include question words such as “provide”, “furnish”, “give”, “distinguish between” and “difference between”, I decided to scrutinize the supplement section “Commonly Confused Pair of Words” of 2004 and 2007 in the Indian editions of the *Oxford Mini Dictionary*. In the 2004 edition, “imply” means “suggest strongly” and “infer” means “deduce or conclude” (2004, p. 658). In the 2007 edition “imply” means “suggest indirectly” and “infer” means “work out from suggestions” (2007, p. 7). Thus the meanings of “imply” and “infer” in the two editions of *Oxford Mini Dictionary* provide different meanings.

Besides, there is very little possibility that an advanced learner studies comparative meanings of a question word from different sources (see the following table).

Table 7

Meaning of the question word “describe” found in different sources	
Sources	Meanings
COBUILD (2001)	If you describe a person, object, event, or situation, you say what they are like or what happened (p. 411)

LDOCE (2009)	to say what something or someone is like by giving details about them (p. 456)
Anderson et al. (1970)	give an account of (p. 8).
SMU	This term calls for you to present an account of a topic with emphasis on description rather than analysis. An instructor who assigns this essay question with this term is likely interested in hearing more about the “what” and the “how”, rather than the “why” of a topic.
UoM	In a descriptive answer you should recount, characterize, sketch or relate in narrative form.

It is evident from this table, that if a learner refers to a particular source or a specific edition, their comprehension of the question word will be limited to that source or edition. This may result in different interpretations of the question word. Though the source may provide inadequate definition of a question word, the learner will consider the meaning he/she comes across as the only appropriate definition of that question word.

CONCLUSION

The synonymous nature of question words and the ignorance of learners coupled with the inadequacy of the reference sources including LDs makes the issue of question words complicated. Some of the teachers / paper setters are aware of the nuances of the question words. They expect different answers from students and use question words accordingly. However, the responses of the students raise doubts about the fulfilment of the educational objectives of using different question words to test different cognitive abilities of learners (for revised Bloom’s Taxonomy see Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001).

In light of these observations, in order to help the Indian advanced learners in preparing for examinations, it is imperative to have a comprehensive list of question words and their meanings with examples from question papers. The list can be in the form of a separate supplement appended to the Indian editions of LDs. English being the medium of instruction from primary to tertiary levels in educational institutes across India, such a list is essential for teachers and learners of English and other subjects. Moreover, in the Indian context, such a list would be useful to understand question words in documents related to teaching profession like *Manual for Self-Study Report* by National Assessment and Accreditation Council (2013).

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Daily Home Assignments at the Tertiary Level of Education

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ABSTRACT

The Dayalbagh Educational Institute (DEI) has recently included two new components in its semester-cum-continuous evaluation system, called Daily Home Assignments or DHAs and Class Assignments or CAs. Professor Dutta Roy introduced a version of the DHA, in the form of daily quizzes, as part of his teaching methodology during his tenure at IIT-Delhi. This was to initiate self-realisation in students to “the benefits of continuous preparation and serious attention to the class material” causing “them [to] learn the concepts behind every development and enjoy the subject”. In the same light and in Professor Dutta Roy’s words regarding daily quizzes, the aim of the DHA is to initiate self-realisation in students for “the benefits of continuous preparation and serious attention to the class material”, which causes “them [to] learn the concepts behind every development and enjoy the subject”. In this article, I will offer an analysis of the value of Daily Home Assignments at the tertiary level of education.

Keywords: Dayalbagh Educational Institute, Daily Home Assignment, tertiary level of education

INTRODUCTION

In the words of Jacob Tharu (2011),

Our responsibility as teachers is to discover/understand where our learners are initially and help them move forward. Only hardened autocrats will fail to see the possibilities of collaboration (learner participation) here. In this frame, teaching and assessment become mutually dependent and supportive (p. 30).

It is in this spirit that the Dayalbagh Educational Institute introduced DHAs. Professor Dutta Roy recalls that he came up with the idea of giving his students daily quizzes from his studies abroad in the United States. In his memoirs, *Glimpses From a Lifetime in Teaching and Research*, he recounts his experiences of attending lectures of a few reputed teachers at the University of Minnesota, US, which broadened his horizons of knowledge, while at the same time, helped him learn “novel methods of teaching and evaluation”, which ultimately greatly benefitted the students and teacher. As he narrates,

In every class, the first thing the Professor did was to pose a problem on the board and ask the students to solve it in a given span of time, typically ten minutes or less. While the students were busy in tackling the problem, the Professor would distribute the graded answer papers of the previous quiz and any handout he or she wished to give to the students. The daily quiz problem was not a routine one, but could be solved easily if the student had followed the previous class lecture seriously. This practice could be implemented in a small class of ten to thirty students, because a large class would mean loss of some more time in collecting the answer scripts (typically a single page, which every student was expected to keep ready); also grading them before the next lecture may pose a burden on the teacher. (2015, p. 5).

Later, in a very interesting manner, Dutta Roy recounts the benefits he experienced when he implemented this novel practice in his own classes at IIT Delhi,

I practiced this daily quiz routine in small classes later at IIT Delhi with very satisfactory results. Initially, the students did not like it, but as the semester progressed, they came to realize the benefits of continuous preparation and serious attention to the class material made them learn the concepts behind every development and enjoy the subject. For the teacher, it is a boon because it gives instant feedback and almost 100 per cent attendance. Nobody can afford to miss a lecture because the daily quizzes carried 15-20 per cent weight in the final grading of the course (2015, p. 5).

DAILY HOME ASSIGNMENT AT DEI

At DEI both the DHA and the CA have been implemented with the aim of achieving two goals: firstly, to motivate students to become active, involved and participatory learners; and secondly, to offer students a chance to improve their overall performance on an ongoing basis instead of being evaluated on the basis of a few tests and examinations. This continuous engagement, learning and participation, combined with regular feedback and evaluation, helps the student understand where she or he stands and where more effort and attention is needed for further improvement. The CA is a weekly quiz which tests the students on the topics covered in class during that week, which have already been explored and understood in the DHAs done during that week. To better understand this, the DEI scheme for theory courses is presented as follows:

SEMESTER-CUM-CONTINUOUS EVALUATION SYSTEM

1.1 This is the soul of our innovative programme and radically alters the learning process to the benefit of the students. The result of a single examination does not determine the fate of the students. Examination and evaluation is a continuous and convenient exercise. 75% weightage is assigned to continuous evaluation while 25% weightage is assigned to external end semester evaluation in each major and half course.

1.2 Course: Each course is identified by a course number which contains three letters and three integers. The syllabus of each programme is divided into a convenient number of courses spread over the various semesters.

1.3. Continuous Evaluation: The academic progress of students registered under different programmes is evaluated continuously through a series of periodic evaluation comprising the following:

Table 1

Components of Grading and Evaluation at DEI

Theory Courses
(i) Class Tests
(ii) Daily Home Assignments
(iii) Additional Assignments
(iv) Seminars & Group Discussions
(v) Attendance
(vi) Semester/Module End-Semester Examination

Source: "SEMESTER-CUM-CONTINUOUS EVALUATION SYSTEM." DEI Admission Portal. Web. 20 Apr. 2017.

<<http://www.dei.ac.in/dei/admission/index.php/important-links/118-semester-cum-continuous-evaluation-system>>.

The educational development and progress of students is further enhanced when they are encouraged to think, read and write about what they have learned in the class and outside of it. The concepts learned by them are strengthened, while they also explore, critically analyse and evaluate newer interlinked ones, thereby stimulating higher order thinking skills. For the student to benefit, however, the DHA necessarily has to be such that the student achieves the aforementioned objectives. For that, the engagement of both teacher and student determines how well the DHA system works. Such an engagement implies that the teacher needs to reflect on what is taught and design the DHAs accordingly.

My experiences, along with students' and teachers' reflections are presented below, which are drawn from teaching one semester of Research Methodology to M. Phil. and Ph.D. students, two semesters of teaching English to Bachelor of Business Management students and Bachelor of Architecture students. In the Research Methodology class, I gave the research scholars daily home assignments to encourage them to do further research on the topics covered in class, thereby strengthening their understanding of it. In an assignment covering qualitative research and quantitative research, for example, in addition to the standard definitions, I introduced the students to new interdisciplinary developments in

their field of study—English Literature and Theory—and encouraged them to reflect on how these two approaches to research can be combined, rather than only using the qualitative approach, as has been generally employed by English literature researchers up to date. The students were asked to research further on a theorist introduced to them in class—Franco Moretti. Moretti follows a quantitative approach in his study of English literature, in which he advocates using distant reading. The students were asked to think about how close reading and qualitative methods could be combined with quantitative research methods (distant reading), as occurs when a systems approach is employed in their research and writing to unearth new discoveries and results. The students were then asked to prepare a DHA on this. In fact, throughout the course, students were asked to go a step further and write assignments on the topics covered in class. They were also encouraged to think beyond the subject matter taught in class and make further interconnections in their DHAs.

Regarding the same class, I found that the students often did not submit original written work. To tackle this problem, I put into place the following strategy:

- Submission of original work (to eliminate sharing, copying and cut and pasting)
- Practice in oral presentation
- Initiate class discussion
- Allow students to see what and how other students (their peers) were doing in class

I found that student apathy and disinterest in written assignments began to wane and finally disappear altogether when I incorporated oral presentations of the DHAs. Out of the four classes per week, I set aside one class or half a class depending on the assignment, to make the students present their assignment orally. While each student still brought the assignment in written form, she/he had to share her/his work with the class. To initiate a discussion, I would ask the class if they had any questions. I would then give my feedback and evaluate the assignment on a five-point scale and inform them of their marks immediately. I noticed a change in the performance of the students as compared to the earlier written-only assignments: not only were they more enthusiastic about their assignments, but their performance also improved. They now had a healthy sense of competition and worked with an aim to excel. Thus, a variety or balanced mix of written and oral DHA assignments served the students well.

Another strategy I came up with was to convert a few DHAs into group DHAs (but with each student evaluated individually) similar to the Seminar-Group-Discussions (SGDs), which are a component of grading and evaluation at DEI. I conducted group DHAs for B.B.M. students (1st year Business Management students) as I

was teaching them phonetics in the first half of the course and, in the second half of the course, speaking (speeches, extempore, debates etc.) and listening skills.

In the second half of the semester, to make the course more contemporary and interesting, I asked the students to watch an episode of a popular television show “Shark Tank”, related to their chosen field of study—business. In this show, entrepreneur-contestants make business presentations of their products to a panel of “Shark” Investors, who then decide whether they will invest in their company or not. We watched one episode of the show in class, and then I explained to them how the show was set up. I divided the students into groups of 4 shark investors and 4 entrepreneur-contestants and asked them to recreate the show and present it in front of the class in turn.

The students were motivated to put in a lot of effort, including written preparation, rehearsal and props. They presented the show in a lively, interesting and professional manner. Not only was this assignment relevant to their academic area of study, it also helped them put into practice what they had learned in theory about speaking skills in English. The assignment required them to be good and powerful orators, public speakers, or a presenters. I gave them instant feedback on where to improve and also told them where they had performed well.

Debate is another component of their syllabus. So, again, I gave them the freedom to organise their own teams—in favour of the topic and against. I came up with topics which interested and stimulated them. They organised their written material and presented in front of the class.

In the B.Arch. (Bachelor of Architecture) class, narrative and dialogue writing are a part of the course syllabus. In order to make the DHA interesting, I asked the students to once again organize themselves in groups and prepare a skit, including the characters and dialogues, and to present it as a group in front of the class. The students were enthusiastic as they had a chance to work on the skit together, with each character writing their own lines, practicing their English speaking skills, and then performing and also entertaining the class. There was dynamic interaction and synergy in the class and once again they got immediate feedback on their performance from me. This was very different from individually preparing a dialogue in written form that would be submitted to the teacher, and returned with no interactive feedback, which is what they would have done in the traditional method of instruction.

For “Correction of Errors in Grammar”, another syllabus component, I assigned a written DHA in which the students had to compose five sentences with grammatical errors in the usage of various parts of speech (noun, verb, adjective, adverb, article etc.) and then present the corrected sentences, pointing out the errors, in front of the class and teacher. I also gave the students incorrect sentences and asked them to identify the errors and present the correct sentence in class. I then called upon another student to verify that the sentence was indeed correct and if not, where the error (s) lay.

TEACHER OBSERVATIONS

My observations and those of the teachers I spoke with and surveyed informally (through a very short questionnaire), generally agreed that submission of original work was an issue. So, I tried to intersperse oral DHAs with written ones, which solved that problem in small to medium sized classes. However, this was not very practical in large classes, as more time was needed to conduct the oral DHAs and holding the interest of students who were not presenting was another issue I had to contend with.

In all the classes, I deducted marks as a means to penalise students who were handing in shared or copied work. I would write the name of the offending student(s) on the work of the student from whom I believed they had copied. I announced in the class that I would have zero tolerance for submission of copied or shared work and a “0” would be given to students who handed in un-original work. If there was an inkling of originality, then a 1 or 2 out of a total of 5 marks would be given for effort. Those, who submitted original work would be evaluated in the 4-5 range. I observed that, after the submission of DHAs was done for each week, on C.A. days (held once a week in the form of a quiz), student attendance would be higher than other days because, as S.C. Dutta Roy had mentioned, most students did not want to miss a quiz.

There were, however, some problems in this system of DHAs: Many teachers faced the problem of unoriginal submissions from students, in which assignments had often been put together using information copied off the internet. Also, in large class sizes, it was difficult for teachers to grade assignments. Students, on the other hand, experienced the daily submission pressure of DHAs.

As far as the strengths of the system of DHAs were concerned: Students were encouraged to do further research on the concepts they had learned in class. Not only did this reinforce their learning, but they also enlarged their knowledge and understanding of the subject matter. DHAs also gave the students who did not do well on tests and examinations a chance to improve their marks. The weekly CAs gave the students an idea of where they stood ahead of the Class Tests 1 and 2. They had an opportunity therefore to work harder and improve their performance. As for the teachers, DHAs and CAs helped them keep track of the performance of the students throughout the semester. This, in turn, allowed teachers to create lesson plans according to student performance and needs.

I conducted an informal survey of the students in the classes where I was teaching as well as of the teachers in the Department of English. Most teachers and students who responded to the questionnaire agreed that: DHAs are beneficial.

- DHAs are beneficial.
- DHAs reinforce and strengthen students' concepts

- The current format of DHAs was fine for most students, while some students said that the format and number of assignments could be revised.
- Class size is important.
- Submission of original work is an issue and has to be constantly monitored.

CONCLUSION

The introduction of Daily Home Assignments and Class Assignments at the tertiary level of education at the Dayalbagh Educational Institute is an innovative step and effort in the pursuit of evolving an educational system which benefits students by empowering them to become active and participatory learners and offering them the alternative of not being graded on the basis of a few select tests and examinations but on the basis of continuous evaluation.

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Effect of Self-Assessment: Justifications for Students' Subsequent Writing

Vikas Kadam

ABSTRACT

The main role of self-assessment in a language classroom is to raise learners' awareness of their still developing language features, enable them to reflect on their own learning process, and also self-correct their mistakes in subsequent language use. Effective self-assessment should provide learners with enough opportunities not only for such reflections, but also to monitor and improve their learning processes. In ESL writing classrooms, teachers sometimes give learners an assessment grid or can-do statements and ask them to score or grade their own written performance. Very often, however, such grading and scoring does not enable learners to use their analytical power to their optimum level to reflect on the problems in their writing capability or to find the loopholes in their existing knowledge. In the present study, I attempted to provide learners with such opportunities by asking them to first score their own writing and then give a written justification for their scoring. A week after the self-assessment, a parallel writing task was administered to the students. A detailed analysis of the students' written responses (to task one and two) and their justification for self-scoring was done to determine the influence of these justifications on their second writing task. The findings suggested that some issues discussed by the students in their justification regarding some of the aspects of their writing such as content and organisation were resolved in their second writing task.

Keywords: Self-assessment; assessing writing; awareness raising; self-regulated learning; assessment as learning; classroom based assessment

INTRODUCTION

The pedagogic assessment of learners' continually developing knowledge, skills and abilities, which is what aids the learning and the teaching that happens in classroom situations, has been the prime concern of researchers in the area of classroom based assessment over the past two decades (Durairajan, 2015; Cizek, 2010; William, 2010; Black et al., 2004; ARG, 2002; Black and William, 1998). The two ways in which such classroom assessments have pedagogical benefits are "assessment for learning" and "assessment as learning" (Black & William, 1998). Both these concepts are examples of formative assessment procedures. The former

refers to the process of collecting evidence of students' learning and development several times during an educational programme and using that data as feedback to modify if needed the concurrent plans of instruction, while the latter gets learners to learn by assessing their own or others' performance. Self-assessment as a formative assessment tool in classroom contexts is an example of "assessment as learning". It is a form of reflective assessment that involves learners in the process of assessment as an integral part of the learning activity. This process of self-assessment brings about changes in the students' learning experiences in the classroom by enabling them to assess their own knowledge learning and abilities. Such an assessment also makes them reflect on their strengths and weaknesses, which in turn enables them to monitor their own progress and set learning goals for themselves to match the stipulated curricular objectives or in some contexts, even go beyond the stated objectives.

The terms "self-evaluation" and "self-assessment" are used interchangeably in research and hence teachers consider them as synonymous. However, there is a distinction: "self-evaluation" refers to the process of involving students in grading or scoring their own work, whereas with "self-assessment", merely assigning grades or scores is not sufficient. Self-assessment requires learners to reflect on their performance and gauge their capabilities against the given criteria (Andrade & Valtcheva, 2009). In a second language classroom, this process of reflection and assessment against the given criteria raises learners' awareness about their own progress and helps them understand the features of their still-developing language abilities. Hence, an effective self-assessment of learners' L2 abilities should give them enough opportunities to not only reflect on their still-developing knowledge and skills, but also to monitor and improve their own learning and performance.

In ESL writing classrooms, teachers usually give learners an assessment grid or "can do statements" (Moeller, A. & Yu, F., 2015) and ask them to score or grade their own written performance by using these statements as a base. Although such grading and scoring involves learners in the process of making judgements about the quality of their written performance using the given criteria, in most cases, learners jump to conclusions without making the necessary links between the criteria and their writing, as they are not able to understand the criteria and apply it to their writing to make the best possible accurate assessment of their own capabilities. This happens because, for most learners, the act of understanding the assessment criteria and applying it to their writing is a cognitively challenging endeavour. Consequently, since usually students are only required to submit their grades or the scores as the end product of such self-assessment tasks, they tend to just assign some random score or grade, which is often inaccurate and thereby becomes an unreliable assessment. Such assessment may help a few learners in some ways to improve their writing skills but it is unlikely to enable the majority of the learners in the classroom to use their analytical power to the optimum level to reflect on the problems in their writing capability or to find the loopholes in their existing knowledge.

THE STUDY

In the present study, I will attempt to provide learners with opportunities to reflect on their writing capabilities and find the loopholes in their knowledge and skills by enabling them first to score their narrative essays against the given self-assessment criteria and then provide a written justification for their scoring. Through this study I will attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. How far do the self-assessment justifications enable learners to reflect on their writing abilities?
2. What is the effect of students' self-assessment-justification for their scoring on their subsequent writing?

A class of forty women undergraduate learners of English studying in a Telangana State Government Residential college for the students of Backward Classes were given a narrative writing task (Task 1, Appendix 1) as part of their usual communicative English classroom activity. Next, the teacher prepared self-assessment criteria focusing on the content of their essays. The criteria included sub-features of content such as content development, content relevance and content organisation. A week later, the teacher-researcher asked ten students from the same class to assess their written essays using the criteria they had been given. The students were given their written scripts and the self-assessment criteria, and were asked to read and discuss the criteria in pairs in order to understand it better. After ten minutes, the teacher-researcher explained the criteria and the self-assessment tasks to the students and asked them to complete the task individually (Appendix 2). As they were sitting in pairs, they were encouraged to either ask the teacher, or discuss and clear their doubts with each other. As the teacher, I walked around the class, observed each pair and provided help or clarifications as required.

The self-assessment task involved asking the students to first read and discuss the criteria, interpret it for themselves, and finally read and score their own written essays based on the criteria. According to the criteria and the teacher-researcher's explanation, they were expected to score their essays for the following features of writing. The teacher-researcher's version of the criteria has been reproduced here (students used Telugu, whenever needed, to help them understand these features):

- Whether they have used and generated sufficient amount of information or used enough ideas to develop the essay. Whether there are repetitions or unnecessary details in the essay.
- Whether the essay is relevant to the given task or the quality of the information provided in the essay—the teacher asked the learners to check if the information given in the essay was relevant to the given topic and that there was no fake or irrelevant information.
- Whether they have presented their ideas in a logical and sequential manner. Whether the essay has a proper introduction, development and logical conclusion.

After they finished scoring, they were asked to give reasons for their scoring in the form of written justifications. As most of the students did not know what they were supposed to write as justifications, I had to take the help of another teacher to explain the task in their mother tongue. Apart from this I also went around and explained the task to each pair separately with the help of examples.

A week after self-assessment, the teacher-researcher gave the learners another narrative writing task (Task 2, Appendix 1) parallel to task 1, to check how the process of self-assessment had helped them in self-reflecting and monitoring their learning in the subsequent written piece.

The data gained through learner written essays (tasks 1 and 2), their scores, their written justification for their scoring and the teacher-researcher's reflective notes were analysed qualitatively to assess the quality and effect of their self-assessment-justification on their subsequent writing performance in task 2.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

A gap between scoring and assessment

When the teacher asked the learners to write their justifications, most of the students did not understand what they were supposed to do. They were able to give themselves marks, but they could not justify them. They all looked puzzled even after the teacher explained the concept of justification to them in their mother tongue (Telugu). All of them did try to re-read the criteria and their own answer script to figure out what to write as justification or the rationale behind their scoring, but they still looked lost. After a while, I stepped in and went to each pair and asked them a few questions based on the scores they had assigned. If some student had given a three out of five, I asked that student: "What is there in your essay that made you give it three marks and not five or one?" or "What do you think you will have to do in order to get five out of five?" Following this fine-tuned, learner-centred assistance consisting of a range of strategies, on what to write in the justification, almost half the students changed their initial scores. They reassessed and scored their essays after reading them once again and then went on to write self-reflective justification for their scores.

REFLECTIVE JUSTIFICATIONS

Given here is a list of the relevant excerpts from the students' justifications for their scoring:

1. "I did not give conclusion. I did not explain completely about the day. I know simple past but I did not use."
2. "I did not understand I wrote small essay. Grammatically mistakes. Sentence formation."
3. "I did not give proper introduction. I know past tense but I got confused."
4. "I did not mention the problem faced. I did not mention my experience in new campus."

5. "I not mention the complete information so 4 marks and my opinion is not complete. Conclusion is not mentioned and starting sentence is not correct."
6. "In this essay, I explain only problem faced. I cannot write anything. So I give 2 marks for this reason. I can't write impression about the building, time spent entire day so given 2 marks."
7. "Neither she was not able to asses accurately nor she could give any justification. She just wrote a few sentences."
8. "No repeated sentences. And so many mistakes their essay and not get the 5 marks. And better this essay and not bad so not less marks. And so many grammar mistakes and not used correct sentence formation."
9. "I will give marks 4 only because I will mention problems and reason. The most be problems is water if, factory smell also that why I will give four marks only."
10. "I am not given the conclusion about this campus. I was not explained completely about that day."

These justifications given by the students for the score they had given themselves is proof that even though they had never attempted such a task before, they were capable of both reflection and analysis. In fact, they may not even have thought about these justifications if they had been asked to merely score their essays. A qualitative analysis of the relevant excerpts of the students' justifications suggests that most students commented on the content of their essay. Student-1 stated, "I did not explain completely about the day", which suggests that she could self-reflect and realise that she could have included some more details about how she had spent that day. A similar type of reflection and realisation can be seen in Student 2's statement, "I not mention the complete information so 4 marks and my opinion is not complete"; Student 4 stated: "I did not mention the problem faced, I did not mention my experience in new campus"; Student 5 added "I not mention the complete information so 4 marks and my opinion is not complete."; Student 6 wrote, "I explain only problem faced. I cannot write anything I can't write impression about the building, time spent entire day". In all these examples, the students were able to analyse their own writing and were able to notice the loop holes in the content of their writing. These students realised that there were very few of ideas in their essays and they could have used more ideas and provided more information to get full marks. If a teacher was to assess these scripts, he/she would also give similar reasons about the content development in the essay. A few students also talked about the content organization (3 and 5) and accuracy of the essays (1, 2, and 8).

QUALITY AND RELEVANCE OF THE CONTENT

When we look at the second set of essays written by the students (task 2), it becomes clear that they showed improvement in different ways, but for all of them,

the act of writing a justification for their scores helped them reflect on their writing skills. In task 1, out of 10 students, 3 students had not written an essay appropriate to the topic. Instead of narrating the events that took place on the particular day and mentioning their experience, they had written a description of the college building. Two of them were able to see this problem and write about it in their justification; both of them attempted to write an actual narration instead of a description in their response to task 2. Their justification of the self-scoring suggests that they had realised the problem with their writing. This was also evident in their response to task 2. An excerpt from their justification is given below:

1. I did not understand I wrote small essay. Grammatically mistakes. Sentence formation.
2. In this essay I explain only problem faced. I can not write anything. So I give 2 marks for this reason. I can't write impression about the building, time spent entire day so given 2 marks.

Organisation of the content

Three students had referred to the organisation of their essay in their justification following task 1. All of them had better content organisation in task 2, with a clear introduction, body, etc. A few sample comments are given below.

1. "I did not give conclusion. I did not explain completely about the day."
2. "I did not give proper introduction. I know past tense but I got confused."
3. "Conclusion is not mentioned and starting sentence is not correct."
4. "I am not given the conclusion about this campus."

Student 1 had written a description of the college building in her response to task one. Moreover, there was no proper conclusion in her essay and the beginning was abrupt. She had also written the entire essay in a single paragraph. In task 2, not only did she write a narration instead of a description, but she had a good introduction and a logical conclusion to her essay. Similarly, students 3 and 4 also noticed that the conclusion was missing in their essays which they wrote in response to task 1, and they have made an attempt to add it in task 2. Student 2 had stated that her introduction was not good. Actually, she had a very abrupt beginning in task 1, but in task 2 she was able to introduce the topic by making an effective opening statement.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the present study has established that a self-assessment task is incomplete without demands being made on students to think, analyse and reflect on their own knowledge, skills and abilities. Self-scoring based on certain criteria, coupled with written justifications for that scoring generates more opportunities for learners to reflect on their own learning process and find the loopholes in their still-developing knowledge. The process of self-assessment is complex and

cognitively demanding, but with proper help from the teacher, peer support, use of the first or more enabled language and more importantly, the embedding of the self-assessment task in a rich context, learners will be able to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses in the process of learning.

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APPENDIX 1: WRITING PROMPTS

Task-1

Recently your college has shifted from the old building to a new building. Narrate your experience of the first day on this new campus. Mention the time of each event or action you mention in your essay and your experience of travelling to this

place. Also write about the things you did, the people you met, the problems you faced and how you dealt with them.

Task 2

Write a short narration of your experience of your first day in college after your 12th standard.

You should include the following details in your narration—

- The things you did throughout the day
- People you met and your experience with them
- Your impression of the college and the building
- Your learning experience of that day

APPENDIX 2: SELF-ASSESSMENT CRITERIA FOR THE LEARNERS

Self-assessment Criteria				
Name of the Student: _____		Name of the Assessor _____		
Instruction: Read and analyze the essay and score it according to the following scoring criteria.				
Sl. No	Focus	Description of the best performance	Scoring scale	
1.	Content	The essay is well planned and there are enough ideas or points that are used for developing the essay. The essay is relevant and appropriate to the given topic. The essay includes enough details or information related to the given topic. There are no instances of irrelevant details in the essay.	5	4 3 2 1

Self-assessment-justification Form		
Name of the student: _____		Name of the Assessor _____
Instruction: Write the reasons for the marks you have given. Mention the strong areas and the weaker areas that need improvement.		
Sl. No	Criteria	Justification for your scores
1.	Content	

Monitoring Growth in Writing through Portfolios

Ravinarayan Chakrakodi

ABSTRACT

Portfolios are widely used nowadays in schools, colleges, universities and teacher education contexts in many different countries. One of the key advantages of portfolio assessment is that it integrates instruction and assessment. This study has been conducted in the context of an in-service teacher education programme. The teachers in this programme put together a portfolio that included all the essays, self-assessment reports and reflective pieces they had written over a period of two months as part of their course. The reasons for asking these teachers to maintain this portfolio was to develop their writing abilities, to monitor their growth in writing and to also to use assessment for developmental purposes. In this study, I will examine how teachers have grown in different ways through this portfolio project.

Keywords: Portfolio, teacher education, self-assessment reports, reflective pieces

INTRODUCTION

In the Indian education system, the term evaluation is associated with examination, stress and anxiety. As stated in the National Curriculum Framework (2005), current procedures of evaluation which measure and assess a very limited range of learner faculties, are highly inadequate for measuring and assessing the skills and competencies involved in language reception and production. Moreover, they do not provide the complete picture of an individual's abilities or progress towards fulfilling the aims of education in general and second language learning in particular.

As far as writing in a second language is concerned, it is a common practice to collect and evaluate individual writing pieces as single performances, and make inferences from these performances about the writing ability of the students. However, this method of assessment has several limitations. As pointed out by Weigle (2002), two of the most serious limitations are: (1) writing done under timed conditions on an unfamiliar topic does not accurately reflect the conditions under which most writing is done in non-testing situations, or writing as it is

taught and practised in the classroom, and (2) it is difficult to generalize from a single writing sample to a much broader universe of writing in different genres and for different purposes and audiences. Durairajan (2015) points out that when we assess students, we need to assess “three aspects of capability, called the three p’s; progress, product and whenever possible, some of the learning processes”. She feels that alternative assessments can evaluate not only the product but also progress in learning. Portfolio assessment is an alternative approach to writing assessment that allows broader inferences about writing ability than are possible with single-shot approaches to evaluating writing (Weigle, 2002). Such an assessment is therefore assessment for and not of learning. Assessment for learning must find a way of capturing the writer’s growth in writing. This is possible with a “progress portfolio”. A progress portfolio gives us information about the ways in which the writing of a learner has improved. This kind of a portfolio, also becomes a good record of continuous assessment (Durairajan, 2015).

A portfolio may be broadly defined as “a purposeful collection of student work that exhibits to the student (and/or others) the student’s efforts, progress, or achievement in (a) given area(s)” (Northwest Evaluation Association, 1991; cited in Weigle, 2002). In terms of writing assessment, a portfolio is a collection of written texts written for different purposes over a period of time, evaluated to assess the process the writer undergoes while writing, the product and also the growth in writing. This way, the continuous and comprehensive evaluation of writing skills can be carried out in the classroom, which helps in capturing individual growth trajectories of students (Durairajan, 2016).

In India however, portfolios have not gained much currency. This is because teachers themselves are not aware of the potential benefits of portfolios. They are not sure about using them for developing students’ language proficiency, especially their writing skills. The National Curriculum Framework (2005) as well as the National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (2010) place greater emphasis on the use of portfolios in schools and teacher education contexts. As teachers teaching English in primary schools are not so proficient in English, this study is an attempt to serve a dual purpose. Teachers will improve their own proficiency by writing and reflecting on their writing and also learn to work with portfolios by experiencing it themselves first hand.

THE CONTEXT

The context for the study was an in-service teacher development programme. The teachers involved in the study belonged to a single cohort (67 in number). They taught English along with other subjects in primary schools. They had varied teaching experiences but limited proficiency in English. In fact, enhancing their English language proficiency was one of the challenges of the training programme.

The teachers assembled portfolios in their writing classes during a two-month in-service teacher development programme at the Regional Institute of English

South India, Bangalore. The writing programme was based on portfolio theory and the pedagogical practice related to this theory. In teaching writing, the process-oriented approach was followed. Each week, one writing task was administered to the teachers. The task was completed using the process-oriented approach, which involved various stages such as free writing, prompted discussion, brainstorming, peer assessment, revising and editing. Teachers produced the final piece using these process strategies. The process data such as initial drafts, comments from peers and feedback from trainers were kept in individual portfolios along with the final products. Teachers carried out self-assessment regularly using the self-assessment checklists provided to them. After the completion of all the tasks, teachers recorded their reflections on the writing processes they had followed and on their own development in writing over a period of time.

The portfolio included texts in a variety of forms or genres, written for a variety of audiences and for a variety of different purposes. It consisted of the following tasks:

- Introducing a co-learner
- A diary entry
- A personal letter
- An official letter
- A report of an event
- My philosophy of teaching writing
- A self-assessment report of a practise teaching session
- A reflective essay on their experience of maintaining a portfolio

In the following discussion, I will focus on one of these tasks—interviewing and introducing a co-learner—and analyse the texts developed by the teacher participants to show how the process writing methodology was followed, how this approach helped teacher participants enhance their writing skills and also how it helped the trainer monitor the teacher participants' growth in writing.

MONITORING GROWTH IN WRITING

Task: Interview your co-participant and collect the following information about him/her (name, address, place of work, family, friends, likes and dislikes, favourite person/place, book, achievements, ambition in life, etc.). Write a text of about 100 to 120 words to describe him/her.

This was the initial task given to the teachers. The teachers collected information about their co-participants by asking questions and discussing their answers with them. Once the ideas were generated, they selected the most useful information and arranged it in a sequence.

The writers moved from this “pre-writing stage” to writing the first draft by developing the ideas further. The first draft was subjected to peer evaluation. The

teachers worked with a partner and got them to read what they had drafted. The partner made a positive remark on the draft and commented that some points be deleted. This was in line with the process approach as in the initial draft, the focus was on content and meaning and not on grammar and other aspects of language.

The second draft was an improved version of the first draft. The trainer gave feedback to the teachers on their second draft by commenting on their ideas and organization as well as errors in grammar and mechanics. Based on the trainer's feedback, the third and final draft was prepared by the teachers.

Let us now look at the texts developed by one of the teacher participants, namely, Kalaivani.

TEACHER PARTICIPANT 1: KALAIVANI

First draft

I met my co-learner on 02.07.2015. I talked with her. I collected some interests informations. That persons name is P S Mahalakshmi belongs to Coimbatore district in Tamilnadu. She works in an elementary school at Pommanan Palayam. Her husband loganathan is doing business in Erode. She has only one son who's name is Elango. She is the devotee of St Elango. So, she named her son Elango. Mrs Sankari is her close friend, who is working with her. Both of them had no secrets.

She likes to sing songs. Her voice is very sweet. Always she likes to hum songs. She doesn't like to cheat others as well as she hates cheating also. Her lovely voice is her strength and she is very pleasing and friendly to speak. She is MA literature and passed all the type writing exams. She send articles to magazines also.

Her ambition is to become a member in Tamilnadu ministry.

Third and Final draft

My dear friend...

I met my co-learner on 02.07.2015. I talked with her. I collected some interesting information. That person's name is P S Mahalakshmi who belongs to Coimbatore district in Tamilnadu. She works in an elementary school at Pommanan Palayam. Her husband Loganathan is doing business in Erode. She has only one son whose name is Elango. She is the devotee of St Elango. So, she named her son Elango. Mrs Sankari is her close friend, who is working with her. Both of them keep no secrets.

She likes to sing songs because her voice is very sweet. She likes to hum songs always. She doesn't like to cheat others. Her lovely voice is her strength and she is very pleasing and friendly to speak. She has qualified MA literature and passed all the type writing exams. She sends articles to magazines also. Her ambition is to become a member in Tamilnadu ministry. I wish her all the best.

Table 1

Progress in writing (T1)

First draft	Revisions made in the third/final draft	Growth in writing
There is an abrupt ending. No title She doesn't like to cheat others as well as she hates cheating also.	There is a concluding line, "I wish her all the best." Has added a title. She doesn't like to cheat others.	The teacher trainee has revised the content by adding a title, a concluding line and deleting irrelevant details.
Both of them had no secrets	Both of them keep no secrets.	The teacher trainee has learnt to use the appropriate tense form.
Task 1: I collected some interests informations. She has only one son who's name is... She sends article to magazines...	I collected some interesting information. She has only one son whose name is... She sends articles to magazines...	The trainee has learnt to use the correct word forms.
That persons name is P S Mahalakshmi belongs to Coimbatore district in Tamilnadu. She likes to sing songs. Her voice is very sweet.	That person's name is P S Mahalakshmi who belongs to Coimbatore district in Tamilnadu. She likes to sing songs because her voice is very sweet.	The trainee has learnt to use conjunctions to combine two parts of the sentence.
Always she likes to hum songs.	She likes to hum songs always.	Word order has been changed.

Looking at Kalaivani's drafts, we can see that she has shown improvement in different aspects of writing such as enrichment of the content by addition of additional details, organization of ideas, word choice, word form, use of tenses, punctuation, etc. In the third draft, Kalaivani has organized the ideas in a more logical way. The details related to her co-participant's family have been mentioned in the first paragraph and information about likes, hobbies, etc., have been given in the next paragraph. She has also included more details such as the reasons for liking her co-participant and the book.

Let us now look at the texts developed by another teacher participant, namely Siddharuda Gogi.

TEACHER PARTICIPANT 2: SIDDHARUDA GOGI**First draft**

I have met with a friend at RIE. His name was Sharanappa. He is a Assistant teacher at Bevur in Bagalkot district. He joined the service in June 1990. His qualification is BA, TCH.

He has three children. He is enjoying with his family members.

He like to read holy books, GK books and he also likes to visit calm places, hill stations, etc. he dislikes wasting time.

His ambition is to become a good teacher and to serve the nation with utmost sincerity.

Third and Final draft

Here is my friend Mr Sharanappa. He is an Assistant Teacher at Bevur in Bagalkot district, Karnataka. His qualification is BA, TCH. He joined the service in 1990. He has three children. He is leading a happy life with his family members. He likes to read holy books, GK books and he also likes to visit holy places, hill stations, etc. he dislikes wasting time in useless discussions because it produces no fruitful result. His favourite person is Mahathma Gandhi. He likes him because of his simplicity.

He was awarded 'Jana Mechida Shikshaka'(a teacher who is loved by people) by the Government of Karnataka. His ambition is to become a good teacher and to serve the nation with utmost sincerity.

Table 2

Progress in writing (T2)

First draft	Revisions made in the third/final draft	Growth in writing
I have met with a friend at RIE.	Here is my friend Mr Sharanappa.	The teacher trainee has learnt to use a more appropriate form to introduce another person.
He is enjoying with his family members.	He is leading a happy life with his family members.	The trainee is able to rephrase the sentence to convey meaning in a better manner.
a Assistant teacher	an Assistant teacher	The trainee has learnt to use the correct word.
He like to read holy books	He likes to read holy books	Has used the correct word form.
sincerity	sincerity	Used the correct spelling.

It is clear from the final draft that the participant added more details, and has more appropriate paragraphing. The final draft also shows improvement in the use of structure, choice of words and style of writing.

Let us now look at the work of one more teacher participant, Manju.

TEACHER PARTICIPANT 3: MANJU M.

First draft

In RIE training I met my beloved very diligence, straneous, person in Dept of Education in Kerala. I feel very proud of him, he rendered his dedicated service to his citizens. He did his education in his residence, at Cheruvadi, in the meanwhile he picked very adventure step towards university to grab all his degrees TTC, B Ed, M Ed. To his efforts shows always gratitude.

He's been working as a teacher still in front all the eyes of Kerala's citizen. If God permits he is completing his Dignified service with his Dept exactly twenty years.

He has a very good short and sweet family. He always interested in reading. His major task is to have PG Diploma in CIEFL.

He's written a book in 1999. He published his views on the 'An Enquiry in Child Centred Education'.

Third and final draft

Do you want to know Mr Rahiman...?

This is Rahiman. I met him in RIE training. I feel very proud of him as he rendered his dedicated service to his trainees. He did his education at Cheruwadi. He completed his TTC, B Ed ad M Ed courses in Kerala. He is very fond of teaching. If God permits, he is going to complete his 20 years of service in the Dept by coming August.

He has a small and sweet family. He is always interested in reading books, especially stories, language games, puzzles and literature of great writers. He published a book in 1999 titled as 'An Enquiry into Child-centred Education'. His major goal is to have P G Diploma from EFL University.

Lastly, I would like to say 'I won't miss this friend until my heartbeat stops.'

Table 3

Progress in writing (T3)

First draft	Revisions made in the third/final draft	Growth in writing
In RIE training I met my beloved very diligence, straneous, person in Dept of Education in Kerala.	This is Rahiman. I met him...	The teacher trainee has used a more appropriate expression to introduce his friend.

No title, no concluding sentence.	A title and a concluding line have been added.	
If God permits he is completing his Dignified service with his Dept exactly twenty years.	If God permits, he is going to complete his 20 years of service in the Dept by coming August.	The teacher trainee has learnt to rephrase the sentence to convey meaning in a better manner.
He has a very good short and sweet family	He has a small and sweet family	The trainee has learnt to use a more appropriate word.
He's written a book in 1999.	He published a book in 1999...	Has used appropriate tense form.
I feel very proud of him, he rendered his dedicated service to his trainees.	I feel very proud of him as he rendered his dedicated service to his trainees.	A conjunction is used to combine two parts of the sentence.
He always interested in reading.	He is always interested in reading...	Is able to use auxiliary verb.

If we look at the third column in all the three tables, it is clear that teachers made "small qualitative gains" (Tharu,1981, as cited in Durairajan, 2015) in their writing. All three teachers demonstrated growth in writing by enriching their content in the final draft. This was achieved by: using conjunctions and linkers, using appropriate language expressions to introduce their co-learners, rephrasing sentences to convey meanings better and being more aware of tense forms. However, growth was varied across teachers. T1 learnt to use the correct word form and word order in sentences, whereas T2 learnt to use appropriate articles and correct spellings. T3 learnt to use more suitable vocabulary and auxiliary verbs. Thus, it may be concluded that growth will always be varied and hence needs to be captured differently for different learners (Tharu,1981, as cited in Durairajan, 2015) .

It is also evident from the final drafts that peer evaluation helped the teacher participants to focus on the content, revise the first draft and prepare an improved version of it. The trainer responded to the teacher participants' ideas and organization, as well as errors in grammar and mechanics. This helped the teacher participants to pay attention to and value feedback on all aspects of the writing. The trainer used a special set of symbols for drawing attention to grammatical features, such as "P" for error in punctuation and "WW" for wrong word.

The final step of process writing was carried out by the teachers themselves. They added more information, rearranged ideas and looked at grammatical accuracy and correctness of form. If we compare the first and the third drafts, we can clearly see

that the writers worked hard on the content and detail of the text. Evaluation was thus a continuous process and the teacher/writer received feedback at every stage of the writing process.

One of the virtues of process writing and the portfolio approach as identified by several scholars is that the writer tries to express her/his thoughts more clearly and appropriately and as a result, the language of the final product as well as its overall coherence and effectiveness improves. The texts we have discussed so far provide evidence of the growth in teachers' writing abilities.

The teachers, initially, seemed to have difficulty in choosing the right words and structures, organizing the content and deciding on the format. They were also not sure of the correct spelling of a few words. However, they used different strategies such as discussing their problems with their peers and the instructor, consulting dictionaries, reading aloud their pieces to others and doing a lot of reference work, to overcome their difficulties. The result was that the final draft showed considerable improvement as compared to the first and second draft. This approach of creating teacher portfolios helped the trainer in capturing individual growth trajectories with regard to the teachers' writing skills.

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Tracking Students' Varied Growth Patterns in the use of Linkers to Fine-tune Teacher Feedback

Sruti Akula

ABSTRACT

Appropriate and adequate use of linkers is a crucial element of any good written text. In ESL contexts, students need to learn to move from using only coordinate linkers to also using subordinate linkers and markers for sign posting. These aspects of language are a part of scoring criteria and therefore become the basis for teacher feedback. However, one size cannot fit all as everyone's learning curves and writing patterns are different. If teaching is to be learner centred, there is a need to find out what kinds of linkers are used by each student, and track their individual growth patterns so that feedback can also be suitably modified. In this paper, there has been an attempt to use standardised analytic criteria to make assessment more objective and to offer specific feedback. However, using standard criteria to place students on a learning curve might not be beneficial to them, because the criteria will be too general and therefore will not incorporate significant individual details that could better inform the teaching-learning process. In fact, the class teacher is the only person who can observe the "small gains" of the learners and individualize feedback. In this paper, the writing samples of four students are examined to capture instances of their growth in the use of linkers in argumentative essay writing in response to individualised teacher feedback at the higher secondary level. The findings suggest that the growth patterns in terms of the type, variety, and level (sentence, discourse) of linkers used vary across proficiency levels, implying that there is a need for individualized teacher feedback.

Keywords: Argumentative writing, assessment for learning, CCE (Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation), individualised teacher feedback, small gains

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of evaluation is to provide both certification and feedback, but in mainstream classrooms the focus is more on certification. Examining the existing state of evaluation, the National Curriculum Framework stated that the "current

processes of evaluation, which measure and assess a very limited range of faculties, are highly inadequate and do not provide a complete picture of an individual's abilities or progress towards fulfilling the aims of education" (2005:72). Formative assessment was therefore introduced in the Indian school curriculum to maximize learning opportunities by making assessment and learning complementary to each other. "Assessment for learning" aims to provide ample opportunities for diagnosis, feedback, self-assessment and peer-assessment, thus effectively supporting learning. However, teachers often tend to simply score learners' performance and not go beyond the scores. Research on the other hand clearly shows the need to go beyond the scores to capture the "small gains" (Tharu, 1981) of the learners, which can better inform the teaching-learning process. Lee (2011) suggests giving scores for instance, only for the final drafts and providing only feedback for the other drafts as the author observed that giving scores distracts the learners' attention from feedback and often demotivates them or makes them complacent.

"Summative feedback, designed to evaluate writing as a product, has generally been replaced by formative feedback that points forward to the student's future writing and the development of his or her writing processes" (Hyland & Hyland, 2006:1). According to Nicole & Dick (2006), formative feedback needs to clarify what good performance is, facilitate self-assessment, inform learners about their learning, encourage discussions around learning, motivate learners, create opportunities to bridge the gap between current and desired performance, and shape subsequent teaching. Saito (1994), stated that from the different kinds of feedback such as teacher correction, commentary, error identification, peer-correction, self-correction, teacher-student conferencing, and feedback using prompts, learners preferred teacher feedback over self and peer correction. Further, teacher-student conferences, especially collaborative sessions during writing conferences were found to be the most effective in helping learners become aware of the important aspects of writing (Goldstein & Conrad, 1990; Zamel, 1985).

These findings imply that formative assessment should not be seen merely as a formal mode of assessment that happens during the academic year. On the contrary, it needs to be viewed as an informal, ongoing mode of assessment where the teacher can track and evaluate the growth of learners to help them learn better. Such feedback, however, will have to fulfil the dual purpose of capturing overall student growth in that particular class, and also document individual variations. Criterion-referenced assessment (Glaser & Klaus, 1962, cited in Bachman, 1990) can be used to fulfil these dual purposes but the criteria need to be learner-centred and task specific. Using such criteria makes learners collaborate rather than compete with one another as they are motivated to reach the same goal, and all those who reach the goal are rewarded uniformly. Scoring criteria are usually used as fair assessment tools but with modifications, they can also be used as effective pedagogic tools.

They have been used to raise learners' awareness about task requirements and genre features (Andrade, 2000, 2005; Cresswell, 2000; Dyer, 1996; Flynn, 2004; Hillocks, 1995). Thus, task-specific assessment criteria can play a dual role; they can make assessment more valid and objective; when used as pedagogic tools they can inform learners about the task requirements.

NATURE OF THE STUDY

The data for this study has been collected from a Kendriya Vidyalaya in Hyderabad, which follows the CBSE syllabus. The writing samples of 4 learners (part of a larger study, comprising 51 learners, which is part of an ongoing doctoral work) were analysed. These learners' pre-test and post-test scripts (mixed levels of proficiency within the group) were analysed to track their growth in terms of the linkers used in their writing.

In this twenty-five hour study that was spread over 2 months, students wrote multiple drafts of three argumentative writing tasks. Awareness raising strategies such as sharing assessment criteria and the use of self-evaluation checklists were explained to the learners. The assessment criteria were given to the learners in a simplified learner friendly form to enable them to become aware of the specific features of argumentative writing. When required, the criteria were also explained orally to the students. Learner writers also got inputs on the different types of linkers (how linkers are divided into types such as additive and contrastive with examples and usage), structure of a paragraph (topic sentence, supporting statements, and concluding sentence), examples of thesis statements, and the general to specific pyramid (for instance, in an essay that discusses social networking sites, progressing from a general concept like communication to specific details like social networks as platforms for the same) They were encouraged to use at least two new linkers in their writing each day. They received analytic scores for their final drafts as well as individualised feedback for drafts. In addition, teacher-student discussions were conducted to clarify issues and elaborate on suggestions whenever needed. The feedback focused on aspects such as organization, appropriateness of linkers, argumentation and style. The feedback was modified according to the proficiency of each learner, his/her cognitive level and specific needs.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The pre-test and post-test scripts of 4 learners were analyzed to capture growth in linker use.

The pre-test scores of these learners ranged from 5 to 10, with a maximum score of 15. However, their organisation scores ranged from 2 to 1, where 4 was the maximum they could receive. Though the total scores of the learners are widespread, there were minute differences in their organization scores and thus

these scores did not capture the learners' organization skills accurately. In other words, the organization scores per se cannot inform the stakeholders about the aspects of organisation that the learner has mastered, or is yet to master, or is not aware of. This information is better provided by an examination of the number of linkers used in the essay, along with their correct and incorrect use (table 1).

Table 1

Pre-test scores showing the organization score and the number of linkers used

Student	Pre-test score 15	Organization score 4	Linkers used
Vishnu	10	2	6 (Correct use)/335 1-Incorrect use (causative)
Debraj	7.5	1.5	4 correct use/304 1-Incorrect use (conclusive)
Raviteja	5	1	1 correct use/131 1- incorrect use (Contrastive)
Abroar	5	1	Pre 5 correct use/184 3- incorrect use(additive)

POST-TEST SCORES WITH ORGANISATION SCORE AND NUMBER OF LINKERS USED

The post-test scores of the learners showed an improvement in the overall writing proficiency of the learners with regard to argumentative essays. The organization scores also showed a similar improvement. However, neither the total scores nor the organization scores are able to inform us about the kind of improvement that the learners have achieved. The numbers of the linkers simply indicate that the learner used more linkers compared to the pre-test.

Table 2

Post-Test Scores

Student	Post-test score 15	Organization score 4	Linkers used/word length
Vishnu	12	3	10 (correct use) / 350 1-Incorrect use (pronominal)
Debraj	12	3.5	15Correct use/335
Raviteja	8.5	2	17 correct use / 226
Abroar	6.5	1.5	16 correct use / 264

Compared to the information we got by examining the number of linkers used in

Table 1, when we examine the types of linkers used as presented in Table 2, we find that although Vishnu's pre-test score was 10 (organization-2), the range of linkers used in his essay was limited to basic linkers such as "so, but, such and these". This indicates a lack of awareness of different types of cohesive devices. Similarly, Abroar, who scored 5 (organization-1) in his pre-test, also used basic linkers such as "and, which, it, so". Raviteja, who scored 5 in his pre-test (organization-1) used only one linker "this" in his essay. By contrast, Debraj, who scored 7.5 (organization-1.5) in his pre-test used a relatively better set of cohesive devices, namely, "for example, so, this, but on the other hand". It is clear from this pattern that written proficiency need not always be directly proportional to the knowledge of linkers. The organization scores of the 4 students in this study range from 2 to 1. Nevertheless, since organization gets manifested not only through cohesive devices but also through paragraphing and logical progression of propositions, this organization score might not be representative of the learners' knowledge of linkers. Thus, the scores, though analytic, might not provide appropriate guidance to the stakeholders (learners, teachers, parents) in the teaching-learning process. For example, if a teacher wants to observe the scores and give feedback, the teacher might not focus on organisation and more specifically on linker use for these four learners, whereas all of them need feedback on linker use.

Pre-Test

Student	Additive	Pronominal	Causative	Contrastive	Illustrative
Vishnu		Such questions-1 These-1	So-1	But-3	
Debraj		This device-1	So-1	But on the other hand-1	For example-1
Raviteja		This-1			
Abroar	And-2	Which-1 It-1	So-1		

The linkers used in the pre-test fall into five categories—additive (1), pronominal (6), contrastive (2), causative (3) and illustrative (1). The number against the category indicates the number of occurrences of that type in the four pre-test texts (not counting more than one occurrence of the same linker in the learner's text). It is evident from table 3 that pronominal linkers were used the most, followed by causative, then contrastive, then additive, and illustrative linkers were used the least.

Table 4

<i>Types of Linkers Used by Learners in the Post-Test With the Linker and Number of Occurrences</i>								
Student	Additive	Pronominal	Causative	Contrastive	Illustrative	Conclusive	Sequential linking phrase	Opinion
Vishnu	And-1 In addition-1	These sites-1	Through social media-1	However-1 Nevertheless-1		What this all ends up in-1 To sum up-1	Every coin has two faces-1 Looking at the other side of the coin-1	
Debraj	Also-1 In addition-1 Moreover-1	This peculiar way-1 These very websites-1 They-1 These networks-1 These viruses-1 This-1	As-1	But on the other side-1, But-1 Though-1	For example-1	To sum up-1		
Raviteja	And-5	Such websites-2 They-1 These websites-3	So-1 Because-1		For example-1 Some examples of such viruses- 1	We conclude-1		In my opinion-1
Abroar	And-6 In addition-2 Also-1	They-4 Their performance-1	As a result-1		For example-1			

Table 4 captures the growth of the learners with regard to the use of linkers. The linkers used in the post-test fall into the following categories: additive (9), pronominal (12), contrastive (5), causative (5), sequential (2), conclusive (4), illustrative (4), and opinion (1). The number against the category indicates the number of occurrences of that type (not considering more than one occurrence of a linker in the learner's text) in the four post-test texts.

If we observe the growth of the learners in terms of linkers, there are some interesting patterns. All the learners used more types of linkers in the post-test when compared to the pre-test. Pronominal, causative and additive linkers, which were used in the pre-test, were used by all 4 learners in the post-test. However, contrastive linkers were used only by Vishnu and Debraj in the post-test. Vishnu and Debraj also used conclusive linkers effectively (e.g. to sum up). Raviteja attempted to use conclusive linkers but was not very successful (e.g. we conclude-relatively less formal). Abroar did not use any conclusive linkers at all. While 3 learners used intra-paragraph linkers, Vishnu was the only learner to use inter-paragraph sequential linkers. Among the 4 learners who had incorrect linker uses in the pre-test, 3 learners did not have even one incorrect use in the post-test.

Furthermore, Debraj used the most varied types of linkers effectively in the post-test. The variety of words used under each type of linker also gives us relevant data about the growth of the learners. While Vishnu and Debraj showed variety in the use of linkers, Abroar and Raviteja repeatedly used some of the basic additive and pronominal linkers in the post-test (see table 4). It is important to note that, while the number of occurrences of a linker is indicative of the growth of the learner, the range and variety of linker use can be captured only through the analysis of the actual linkers used, along with number of occurrences. One needs to remember, though, that the growth of the learners in terms of their use of linkers also depended on their entry level knowledge of linkers, their cognitive abilities and their written proficiency. Nevertheless, learners exhibited significant growth in their writing in terms of linkers.

Such growth, in a short span of time, can be attributed to the individualisation of feedback. For instance, Vishnu was advised that he should use illustrative linkers and better contrastive linkers; for this he was introduced to advance level linkers within the types that he was already using. Debraj was asked to use additive linkers and to use them in a varied manner. Raviteja was told to use a variety of contrastive linkers and was even provided with examples of appropriate linkers that could be used in his draft. Abroar was asked to use contrastive linkers with examples from the draft.

Such individualised and fine-tuned feedback was accompanied by a one-on-one discussion, where clarifications and explanations were provided, with varied discussion focuses. The variations in focus were either because of the kinds of questions raised by the learners, or because of what they had written and what I, as the teacher-researcher felt they needed to be taught. For instance, Vishnu sought

reasons for the suggestions made to him and wanted to understand the logic behind them. Debraj on the other hand, needed to be motivated to edit the draft by being told the reasons for the improvements. Abroar needed clarifications in L1 and could better articulate his doubts in L1 probably because of the metadiscoursal nature of the discussions. Thus, So, although the content of feedback that the learners received had a similar focus, (use of linkers) it was varied in terms of the depth of feedback given, the number of examples provided and the revisions made by the teacher. The high proficiency learners were given suggestions and indications while the low proficiency learners were given suggestions and more examples so as to make the feedback relevant and comprehensible to each learner.

This study has demonstrated that students with different capability levels and growth (within the same class), may have similar gaps in their awareness of linkers. Nevertheless, when they receive tailor-made inputs and individualised feedback, all of them gain in different ways. Furthermore, the scoring criteria, though analytic, might not capture the “small gains” of the learners in terms of specific aspects such as linkers. Teacher observations, an element of formative assessment, accompanied by task specific criteria, and learner focused feedback can capture these kinds of gains so that learners’ attempts (whether successful or not) can guide subsequent learning sessions.

CONCLUSION

Individualised feedback in the form of analytic scores, teacher comments, conferences and whole class or group discussions at various stages of the writing process are invaluable in the learners’ writing development. While task-specific criteria can guide feedback to an extent, they cannot become the sole means of assessing growth. When learners’ cognitive abilities and growth patterns are different, the amount and kind of feedback relevant to them also varies. Teachers’ observations of learners’ growth patterns can help make feedback more specific and thus more effective.

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Tapping Toes and Dancing Eyebrows: Providing Feedback on Non-Verbal Parameters in Group Discussions

Shravasti Chakravarty

ABSTRACT

Group discussions are used as a means of shortlisting candidates in most campus recruitments. Many professional courses, therefore, incorporate orientation programmes to develop group discussion skills within their English syllabus. These programmes however focus on the verbal aspects of language use, while non-verbal parameters are rarely given importance. However, non-verbal parameters play an important part during the selection process of candidates. Hence, the English teacher needs to focus on these as well when teaching group discussion skills.

In this paper, I will attempt to capture the progress of three first year engineering students with regard to four non-verbal parameters in communication—facial expressions, gestures, eye contact and posture. One male and two female students were observed during five rounds of group discussions across ten weeks. The data gathered from these observations was analysed qualitatively to identify emerging trends in non-verbal parameters. The findings suggest that progress was manifested not only in the form of increased use of certain parameters but also as a decrease in the use of certain elements which form part of these parameters. This study has implications for the nature of teacher feedback on non-verbal aspects of communicative speaking tasks in the context of formative assessment.

Keywords: Non-verbal communication, engineering students, group discussions, formative assessment

INTRODUCTION

Engineering students generally get job offers even before the completion of their four-year course. This happens through a campus recruitment drive conducted at the engineering institutes during the third year of the programme. Group discussions form an integral part of this selection procedure as it gives the selection committee an idea about the language proficiency of the prospective candidates as well as their personality traits. Consequently, it helps them to gauge the appropriateness of the candidate for the company. Therefore, it is imperative to develop group discussion skills in students. This may be done by training the

students as part of the *Language for Communication* course, which is aimed at improving communication skills. Communication skills, however, include but are not limited to the participants' ability to communicate face to face, think creatively, respect the views and contributions of others, solve problems logically, and adapt to changes easily. While the orientation programme focuses on verbal aspects of communication, often, the equally important but understated non-verbal aspects of communication are pushed to the periphery. This is especially true in case of speaking tasks such as group discussions, where the focus of teaching and feedback is usually only on the content matter and not on body language.

DEFINING NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Over the years, non-verbal communication has been defined in various ways by theorists in different fields, ranging from mechanical sciences to individual psychology, social psychology, linguistics, general cultural theory and even medical science. However, in this paper, I have looked at non-verbal communication in terms of its origin in the theoretical aspects of person perception and presentation of self, as propagated by Goffman (1969) and Birdwhistell (1952). Nowicki & Duke (1992) categorize non-verbal communication under six different channels. The first is rhythm and the use of time, which includes being able to understand others in terms of turn-taking in conversation. The second is spatial distance, which looks into the acceptable norms of physical distance between individuals. A person's physical appearance forms the third channel and is known as objectics. The fourth is gestures and postures—better known as kinesics—adopted consciously or unconsciously while interacting with people. The fifth channel is facial expressions, including maintaining eye contact (Argyle, 1975; Bromley & Livesley, 1973; Goffman, 1959). Last but not the least is paralanguage. This covers all those emotions which are expressed through voice modulation. Garner and Acklen (1980), stated that non-verbal communication was used to contradict, support, and replace verbal behaviour.

Studies in non-verbal communication have been carried out across various disciplines such as law (White, 1978), music (Ford, 2001), leadership (Gentry, & Kuhnert, 2007) and political analysis (Gentry & Duke, 2009). In language teaching, most of the research on non-verbal communication has focused on teachers' non-verbal behaviour in class and its impact on the learners' performance (Quirk, 1975; Chaudhry & Arif, 2012). Hodge (1971) claimed that training in non-verbal communication helped to improve use of arms and hands being directed towards students, smiling, and increasing facial expressions while teaching. Surkamp (2014), extolled the benefits of non-verbal communication in drama activities, especially in foreign language classrooms. The importance of non-verbal communication has also been studied in interviews (Lauer, 2005). Martikainen (1972), observed the non-verbal behaviour of pupils during group work. In this study, I have attempted to look non-verbal communication in a specialized format of group work namely, group discussions. My focus here is to identify the growth patterns of four non-verbal communication markers—facial expression, eye contact, gesture and posture—based on teacher feedback.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question which drives this study is: How does teacher feedback affect growth patterns of non-verbal communication in group discussions?

Participants

The three participants in the study were first year electrical engineering students between the ages of seventeen and nineteen years from a private college in Kolkata. They have been referred to as DB, DM, and PRI in this article.

Tools

The principal tool for data collection included video recordings of the group discussions and teacher notes for individual participants.

Methodology

Data for this study was collected over a period of ten weeks. The researcher met the participants over twenty sessions of roughly ninety minutes each. Participants took part in five rounds of group discussions during that time. All group discussions were video recorded. The video was replayed to the participants before as well as during the feedback. Participants were first asked to comment on their performance. This was followed by a detailed feedback by the researcher on both content as well as non-verbal components of communication, which include facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, and posture of the participants. It is imperative to mention here that for pragmatic reasons, the data presented herein has been limited only to the researcher's observations and notes.

Data analysis and Discussion

The aim of the study was to identify the elements of facial expression, eye contact, gesture, and posture which were most recurrent among the participants during group discussions, and to assess the effect of feedback on them. During the course of ten weeks, the participants were given instructions on how to improve three of these non-verbal parameters—facial expressions, eye contact and posture. Although they were also asked to use more gestures, not much instruction was given to them on its use. It was observed that across the three participants, progress was seen not only in the form of increased use of certain aspects but also in the decreased use of some other elements of the aforementioned nonverbal parameters.

Facial Expressions

During the group discussions, it was observed that participant DB was of a nervous disposition. He was also not in control of his facial expressions, as evidenced from the unconscious pursing of his lips and his blank expression observed in the video recording of the first round of group discussions. However, by the third round, we noticed that he had an intent look on his face when listening to others during the discussion. However, he was still not very expressive when putting his point across. By the fifth round, unconscious gestures which could be misinterpreted as

lack of attention had reduced to a large extent.

DM also pursed her lips when listening to other participants. In addition, on account of her nervousness she also bit her lip after making a point. The pursing of lips continued even during the third round of group discussions. By the fifth round, the nervousness on her face had reduced considerably. Also, she seemed to be concentrating more intently on what the other participants had to say. The confused expression further reduced by this fifth round of group discussions.

PRI's facial expressions were well defined from the beginning itself. She made good use of her smile to help her get through difficult situations during the group discussions. She smiled to indicate agreement with others and also to avoid confrontational situations while the discussion was underway, as evidenced even in the third round. By round five, she had a relaxed expression right through the course of the discussion.

The kind of feedback given to the participants with regard to their facial expressions included phrases such as: "Try to look more interested when others are talking."; "Why do you purse your lips after completing your point?"; "You have a nice smile. Use it more often, especially when something is not to your liking during the discussion."; "If you keep dancing your eyebrows [*sic*], it shows that you are bored and not listening to the discussion."

Such focused feedback helped students to modify their facial expressions appropriately. Overall, with regard to the facial expressions of the three participants, decrease in pursed lips after completing a turn was indicative of growth. At the same time, developing a look of intensity when a discussion was underway and smiling more often to dissipate a difficult situation during the discussion was also seen as indicative of growth.

Eye Contact

When observing the non-verbal parameter of maintaining eye contact, DB often looked ill at ease when others were making their points. During the first round of group discussions, he seldom maintained eye contact when the others were talking. By the third round, he had started looking attentively at others when they were voicing their opinion. However, he was yet to develop the confidence to look at the other participants when presenting his own points. Evidence of DB's increased confidence presented itself during the fifth round, in which he started looking at the participants when trying to make them see his point of view. He was also maintaining eye contact with many more participants.

DM did not maintain eye contact during the first round of group discussions. More often than not, she looked down at her feet to avoid confrontation or interaction with the other members of the group. This was on account of her unease in participating in the group discussion. During the third round, she started maintaining eye contact with the participants she was familiar with; but even then, when putting across her own points, she would not look at the others. There was a distinct improvement in maintaining eye contact by the fifth round of group discussions. She now looked

at the other participants when they presented their viewpoint. She also stopped looking down at her feet to avoid eye contact. Further, she started maintaining eye contact when trying to refute others during the group discussion.

PRI did not maintain much eye contact when making her points during the first round of group discussions. If at all, her focus was on a single person alone. By the third round of group discussions, she had started maintaining eye contact with both participants. Yet, her eye contact was not sustained since immediately after completing her point, she would look down. Also, she lacked the ability to focus on a single person when he/she was presenting a point. During the fifth round of group discussions, a distinct improvement in her ability to make eye contact was noticed. Although she still looked only at specific people while making her point, her shiftiness had reduced considerably. Looking down at the floor had also decreased. Nevertheless, she would still not consistently look at participants who were making their points.

Some of the feedback provided to the participants for improving eye contact included, “If you don’t look at others when talking, they will not be convinced with your argument.”; “If you look only at your friends, the others might feel offended, thinking that they are being neglected.”; “The moment you look at others while talking, you will feel more confident and appear more passionate about your stance.”

With regard to eye contact, growth was represented by a reduction in looking away from others and looking towards the floor to avoid confrontation. The growth through increased use of the parameter was represented by maintaining more eye contact, both while making a point as well as when others were talking. Thus, this is one example of feedback aiding both decrease and increase of use.

Gesture

The use of gestures or hand movements appeared to be rather tricky for all the participants during the first round of group discussions. By the third round of group discussions, some participants used gestures but there was a lot of confusion around their use, especially in the case of participant DM. By the fifth round, a marked increase in the use of gestures was observed for all three participants. This was particularly interesting, considering the fact that not much focused training had been given to the participants in terms of what kind of gestures to use when the discussion was underway.

The minimal feedback which was provided included phrases such as “Why don’t you try using your hands when talking?”; “You can indicate increase by moving your hand up and decrease by moving it down.”; “If you use gestures, it becomes easier for the others to visualize what you are trying to say.”

The most common gesture observed was the turning of the hands in a circular motion with the open palm facing the speaker’s body. From no hand movement at all in the beginning, most of the participants progressed to doing jazz hands, which are indicative of a rather confused use of gestures. With more time and focused

feedback, it is expected that this parameter of non-verbal communication will also show improvements.

Posture

While observing the non-verbal parameter of posture among the participants, DB’s body language during the first round of group discussions showed him to be a fidgety and inattentive person. None of his actions suggested that he was focused on the discussion. He kept shuffling his feet, scratching his face, and playing with his hair, which was indicative of his nervousness. Nevertheless, his body language suggested that he did not barricade himself with a defensive stance while the discussion was underway. DB’s fidgetiness persisted even in the third round of group discussions although it had reduced. While making a point, he leaned forward, which was indicative of greater involvement in the discussion. His stance was open and friendly. By the fifth round of group discussions, DB sat upright and leaned forward only when making a point. He also started nodding in agreement with the opinions of other participants. He was not at all defensive as evidenced by his open posture, with legs apart and shoulders relaxed during the course of the discussion.

DM showed a certain amount of fidgetiness during the first round of group discussions. She also had a tendency to slouch forward, which made her appear uninterested in the ongoing discussion. However, she tilted her head to one side when listening intently to the others, which compensated for her slouch. Her fidgetiness continued even during the third round of the group discussions and was manifested through various mannerisms. She kept fixing her hair, or scratching her face, shaking her legs, biting her nails, playing with her pen, or talking on the sly with other participants, to name a few. By the fifth round, many of her unconscious movements had reduced. The tilting of her head to one side when listening intently was however retained. The slouching forward had also diminished. Therefore, it can be concurred that her posture had improved over the course of the five rounds of group discussions.

PRI also seemed to be fidgety during the first and third rounds of group discussions. Moreover, she did not seem to be very relaxed when the discussions were underway. However, by the fifth round, she developed an erect posture and looked intent during the discussion. She also started nodding in agreement with the points made by the other participants. This was clearly indicative of a growth in PRI’s posture.

Some of the comments during feedback which helped to bring about an improvement in the participants included: “Playing with your hair and tapping your pen indicate that you are very impatient and uninterested in the discussion.”; “If you keep shuffling or tapping your feet it might be distracting for the others. Also, it indicates your nervousness.”; “If you sit up straight you will feel more awake, look more professional, and also appear to be interested in the discussion.”

Yet again, feedback proved beneficial in the non-verbal parameter of posture. The participants exhibited growth by reduced fidgeting and slouching by the participants.

The growth through increase was manifested in the actions of leaning forward to listen better, tilting head to one side (which indicated increased attentiveness) and nodding in agreement when others were speaking.

NATURE OF GROWTH IN THE NON-VERBAL PARAMETERS

The results of this study has provided evidence that teacher feedback on non-verbal parameters has a positive effect on the group discussion performance. However, as has been delineated earlier, in the case of all four non-verbal parameters, growth is evidenced both in the increase as well as decrease of specific elements as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Points of growth across the three participants

Aspect	By decrease of elements	By increase of elements
Facial Expressions	Reduced pursing of lips after completing speech	Developing an intent look when others are making their point
	Reduction in blank expressions	Smiling at appropriate times
	Reduced nervousness	Looking more relaxed
Gesture	(No participant was in the habit of using gestures)	Increasing use of gestures while making their points, almost bordering on jazz hands
Eye contact	Decrease in looking away from others	Looking towards others when they are making a point
	Reduction in looking towards the floor when others are making a point	Looking towards participants when making own point
Posture	Reduced fidgeting with hands, pen, and playing with hair, touching face	Leaning forward to listen better
	Reduced slouching	Nodding to others' points occasionally
		Tilting head to one side to listen carefully

Note. Jazz hand refers to the confused use of gestures which novice participants of the group discussion exhibited (adapted from dramatics).

In three aspects namely, facial expressions, eye contact, and posture, the participants showed an improvement where adequate feedback was given. In the case of gestures however, feedback resulted in overuse as well wrong usage by the participants, as evidenced by their jazz hands. Therefore, adequate and timely feedback needs to be given after each round to improve the non-verbal communication of participants during group discussions, especially in the areas of facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, and posture. Moreover, the nature of the feedback is such that it can be

provided by the teacher to individual students while going around the class, thereby adding to the ease of the process.

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Synchronous Versus Asynchronous Computer Mediated Feedback: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

In many post-graduate courses, students are expected to write term papers, assignments, book/journal reviews, reports and dissertations. Very often, the language teacher is required to provide feedback to learners on two or three drafts of these writings to enable them to revise and rewrite primarily because English is not a core subject for these students. This feedback, when the draft is submitted as a soft copy, could either be face to face (synchronous), or through online review (asynchronous). Although there is a lot of research on the nature and focus of teacher feedback, there is very little research on the differences between these two kinds of computer mediated feedback. This study attempts to compare the first level of review of the written work of two post-graduate students registered for a course in a reputed social sciences institute. One feedback involved highlighting the areas of improvement and a face-to-face discussion with the student. The second feedback was completely online in which comments/corrections were made on the soft copy and emailed to the student. The two types of feedback given by the teacher researcher were compared to identify whether they provided similar or different information to the students. An in-depth qualitative analysis of the comments indicated that the two modes of feedback impacted the superficial or deeper nature of rewriting guidance provided.

Keywords: written feedback, synchronous and asynchronous feedback, nature and modality of written feedback, computer mediated feedback.

INTRODUCTION

Computers are becoming an integral part of the teaching and learning of academic skills in most higher levels of education. They are especially useful for improving the written skills of students and to help them successfully accomplish tasks such as writing reviews and responses to journal articles, subject specific books, reports and dissertations. A language teacher however needs to provide constant feedback on such written work to assist the student in the development of academic writing skills. Also, the feedback must be given on the draft of the students' writing so that the entire process is meaningful and effective. The nature of this feedback could be

oral, written, face-to-face or by using the computer.

Nearly 20 years ago, reviews of written work were usually done on paper, where the teacher's comments on the drafts were hand-written, resulting in a huge amount of paper use and a considerable effort on the part of the teacher. It was also demanding for the teacher to maintain a record, or monitor the review comments to assess the student's progress.

With the advancements in technology, there are some in-built features in processing programs such as MS Word, that may be utilized by the teacher to teach a second or foreign language, or for evaluation and providing feedback. The MS Word "Review" is one such feature that the teacher researcher used in two ways. In the first instance, the teacher met the student to discuss the feedback given in the soft copy and in the second instance, the teacher-researcher added comments using the "review" feature. These comments had to be self-sufficient. The first method of feedback could be termed synchronous and the second one as asynchronous.

In general, synchronous feedback takes place when the student is physically present to receive feedback. In such a scenario, the feedback and its related discussion happen at the same time. Asynchronous feedback occurs when the teacher provides feedback at one point in time and the discussion with the student *may* happen at a later point. In some cases, there may not be a post feedback discussion at all. For this reason, the teacher needs to ensure that the feedback given is self-explanatory.

Studies in the area of computer-mediated/generated feedback have attracted the attention of many academicians. Rodina (2008), advocates a step-by-step application of the MS word review tool, to provide feedback and for peer editing in a French class for those teachers who have an inclination to incorporate computers in their feedback process. According to her, not only would this reduce the time taken for feedback, but it would also make the classroom paperless. Other studies in the area of computer mediated/generated feedback are those of Ware (2011) and Nagata (1993). In both these studies, the authors focused on computer assisted language programmes such as Natural Language Processing to facilitate language learning and to enhance writing programmes. In another interesting study, Matsumura & Hann (2004), try to co-relate students' levels of computer anxiety with the feedback method they chose for the assignment review thereby resulting in effective learning. Krucli (2004), demonstrated the benefits of using a computer to improve the drafts of student writing by incorporating interactive feedback. This included using voice comments to speak to the students, providing hyperlinks, and inserting pre-written comments on the mechanics of writing with the help of the "AutoText" function of MS word.

These studies make us aware of the various discourses available in the area of computer-generated/mediated feedback. Furthermore, the discussions highlight the role of computers in improving students' performance in writing, and in second or foreign language learning. There is however a need to look at the feasibility of such feedback. The computer must allow for an effective review process for the

teacher, especially where the class strength exceeds 50 students and the students come from varied social and cultural backgrounds. The present study, where two types of feedback are used by the teacher researcher to reflect on and arrive at the most efficient feedback process, is therefore different .

In this study, I will attempt to investigate:

- Whether there is a difference in focus between written comments and highlighted areas of improvement, and
- whether one mode is more conducive to individual writing development than the other.

BACKGROUND

Post-graduate students gain the required knowledge in their subject areas from what they read and from the teaching done by the core faculty members of those subjects. The guidance that they get on their language use takes place after the student has read the required subject literature and noted down her/his ideas, done the planning for the essay and also written the first draft. For this reason, the formative assessment done by the language teacher is usually more focused on language and less on the content of the actual paper itself. The most important and valuable method of formative assessment is when the teacher provides on-going and systematic feedback to students on written assignments such as report writing, responding to/critiquing various articles, writing dissertations and academic writing documents. These writing assignments usually undergo a minimum of three rounds of feedback between the teacher and the student. More often than not, the feedback and review is done on soft copies of the written text. Having the students' work available and accessible for feedback on the computer helps the teacher track the learning growth of that student. The teacher who uses the review feature can 'key' in feedback and the student can read the suggestions at leisure and modify accordingly. But this requires time to send, time to read and time to modify. On some occasions, for pragmatic reasons, (usually lack of time) some students receive face-to-face (synchronous) feedback.

METHODOLOGY

In this qualitative study, the teacher–researcher investigated the first level of review of the written work of two post-graduate students from a reputed social sciences institute in India. In the synchronous feedback session, the teacher–researcher highlighted the areas of improvement in the text using the inbuilt “Text Highlight Color” in MS Word 2010 (under the tab “Home”). There was no need to write any comments as this was accompanied by a discussion with the student to make him understand his errors.

For the asynchronous feedback, the teacher–researcher added comments, and made changes in the text using the “Track Changes” feature of MS Word. The teacher researcher had to be more careful while providing this feedback because in case the student would not be able to come for a post feedback face-to-face discussion, he/she would need to understand the comments so as to make the necessary

corrections. Ambiguity in these asynchronous feedback comments would result in no learning, thereby leading to non-achievement of the desired goal. As teachers, we provide the feedback that suits the context, and rarely reflect either on the differences in the nature of feedback, or the quantity and quality of feedback given. Such an analysis is attempted in the next section of this paper.

DATA ANALYSIS

As the teacher–researcher reviewed the first draft of the two written samples, certain questions arose about the nature and modality of feedback given in these written samples. These questions form the basis of the investigation mentioned in the “Introduction” section of the paper.

The data of the two students has been analysed on three broad levels and 17 sub-levels. The broad levels were: accuracy (with 7 sub-features), content (2 sub-features) and mechanics (8 sub-features). The sub-levels are listed under the heading “Focus of feedback” in the following table. The details are presented below:

Table 1

Analysis of Feedback given to the 2 students

Broad areas of feedback	Focus of feedback	Synchronous feedback (Student 1)	Asynchronous feedback (Student 2)
Accuracy	Organization of a sentence/ structure of a sentence	✓	✓
	Use of linkers/connectors between paragraphs or sentences	✓	✓
	Use of articles	✓	✓
	Correct form of tense	✓	✓
	Use of preposition	✓	✓
	Vocabulary use	✓	✓
	Use of modal verbs		✓
Content	Elaborate content/explaining terms	✓	✓
	Relevant data is provided		✓
Mechanics	Longer sentences to be broken down	✓	✓
	Appropriate reference/citation	✓	✓
	Structure of report		✓
	Capitalization		✓
	Spelling		✓
	Punctuation		✓
	Line spacing		✓
	Use of neutral language		✓

A quick look at Table 1 reveals that the broad focus of the two different kinds of feedback was similar. However, there were some areas that were identified and commented upon more in asynchronous feedback. These were: use of modal verbs, capitalization, punctuation, spelling, line spacing, and using neutral language in writing. These are only five areas and except for two features, 'structure of the report' and 'use of neutral language', all the others deal with the mechanics of language. One could consider these as not important, and conclude that the two types of feedback are quite similar and that there is no major difference between the two kinds of feedback. However, before coming to that conclusion, I decided to also take a look at the number of times I had pointed out or marked or corrected an area of language in the two types of feedback. This information is provided in Table 2. For ease of reference, I have numbered the relevant columns as A, B, C and D.

Table 2

Analysis of the quantity of feedback given to the two students

		A	B	C	D
Broad Areas of Feedback	Focus of feedback	Synchronous Feedback (Student 1)	No. of Occurrences – Highlights	Asynchronous Feedback (Student 2)	No. of Occurrences – Review comments
Accuracy	Organisation of a sentence/structure of a sentence	✓	2	✓	8
	Use of linkers/connectors between paragraphs or sentences	✓	1	✓	4
	Use of articles	✓	2	✓	7
	Correct form of tense	✓	1	✓	4
	Use of preposition	✓	2	✓	5
	Vocabulary use	✓	1	✓	8
	Use of modal verbs	-	0	✓	3
Content	Elaborate content/explaining terms	✓	2	✓	4
	Relevant data is provided	-	0	✓	2
Mechanics	Longer sentences to be broken down	✓	1	✓	2
	Appropriate reference/citation	✓	1	✓	3
	Structure of report	-	0	✓	1
	Capitalization	-	0	✓	7
	Spelling	-	0	✓	5
	Punctuation	-	0	✓	9
	Line spacing	-	0	✓	1
	Use of neutral language	-	0	✓	2

A quick comparison of the numbers in columns B and D particularly with reference to accuracy, 2 versus 8, for sentence structure, 1 versus 4 with reference to linkers, 2 versus 7 comments on the use of articles, 1 versus 4 statements on the use of the correct tense form, 2 versus 5 markings on the use of prepositions and a significant 1 versus 8 comments on vocabulary use shows that there is indeed a significant difference between the two types of feedback. When highlighting areas that the student needs to correct or modify, (while providing synchronous feedback) as a teacher, I stopped with highlighting the most visible mistakes, discussed these with the student, and assumed that he would, with such awareness, correct the other instances on his own. But, by contrast, when using the review comments option in MS Word, (providing asynchronous feedback), as a teacher, I seem to have done what all teachers are told not to do! I have pointed out and even corrected every incorrect use of tense, article, verb and even content words. If the same mistake has been repeated five times in an essay, (wrong use of tense for example), as teachers we are told to mark one of them, and also, make sure that only one mark be deducted (if such deduction has to happen) for that 'error'. But when providing asynchronous feedback, by using the MS Word review option, I seem to have gone overboard with my corrections, modifications and comments.

This is reflected not only in the quantity but also in the quality of feedback provided. Some relevant examples of feedback are provided in Table 3. Three different areas on which feedback was given to both students, one dealing with accuracy, in this case, articles, the second dealing with the length of sentences and the third with content have been selected for analysis.

Table 3

Samples of feedback given to the two students

Example				
Focus area	Student 1	Feedback - highlighted	Student 2	Feedback - comment provided
Articles	1. nature of soil	The sentences/ phrases are highlighted	the small farmer	Please use "a" in place of "the" because you (the student) are introducing this text.
	2. get profits in first few years	so as to identify that an article is needed	...version of supporting non-farm activity by government of India is that Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana.	Always use "the" before Government. Also delete "that" and add "the". "that" is not the appropriate word here.

Longer sentences	1. As we know over use of fertilizers will lead to reduce the natural fertility of soil and also increase environmental pollution in various aspects creates health problems for consumers	Discussed and highlighted. Explained the areas that need to be revised.	1. This integrated farming (crop + livestock) system provides an open ended framework, the residues of one component is the source of another component and its vis-versa, like, the waste product or the by-product of crops are the source of food of the animal and the waste product of the animal (organic manure) is an good source of nutrients for the crops which enhance the productivity of the crop	This is a very long sentence. Please try to break this into two sentences. Check spelling of “vis-versa”.
Content	1. I recently visited XYZ village.	Discussed that along with this, the purpose of visit and other details need to come along with it .	1. As eye witnessed, a farmer...	First, eye witnessed is one word and not two words. You may use a - hyphen. Second, who is the eye witness and for what? Clarity is needed. Third, please use another word instead of eyewitness. Fourth, in the Introduction you (the student) are bringing what has been observed. It is better to move it to the Methodology section.

A quick look at the two columns where the areas highlighted and the comments provided are given, shows that there seems to be a lot of prescriptiveness on my

part while commenting using the review option. The contrasting nature of the comments and the areas identified for improvement have been discussed in the following section.

DISCUSSION

Before we move to the details on the nature and modality of the computer mediated feedback discussed in this study, it could be argued that the nature of feedback is determined mainly by the language proficiency of the student, thereby resulting in more work for the teacher to correct inadequately drafted work. Although this holds true, it is equally true that irrespective of the English proficiency level of the student, the modality of providing feedback, the impact of learning and the effort put in by the teacher during the review stage are related.

Looking at the first version of the two drafts, it is clear that except for a few similarities, there were differences in most of the sub-levels. The language areas that were focused on include:

1. Organization of a sentence/structure of a sentence
2. Elaborate content/explaining terms
3. Appropriate data
4. Use of linkers/connectors between paragraphs or sentences
5. Use of articles
6. Longer sentences to be broken down
7. Correct form of tense
8. Appropriate reference/citation
9. Use of prepositions
10. Capitalization
11. Vocabulary use
12. Spelling
13. Punctuation
14. Tone of a sentence/neutral language
15. Use of modal verbs
16. Spacing between lines

It is evident from the data that student 1 (who received synchronous feedback) has fewer comments as compared to student 2, but this does not imply that student 1 performed better than student 2 in the first draft of the assignment. It reflects less teacher effort to review a student's written work without compromising on effectiveness. In the case of the second student, the focus of review moved to the

mechanics of writing rather than the content.

To substantiate these arguments, let us look at the parameter “use/non-use of linkers or connectors” in the text of student 1. The mechanics of report writing were explained to the student who had received synchronous feedback along with a handout on common linkers used in academic writing. The placement of linkers/connectors was highlighted in the first two paragraphs of the text and the student was asked to go through the remaining text independently, keeping the handout for quick reference. The same parameter in asynchronous feedback required the teacher researcher to highlight all the areas where linkers/connectors were needed.

Similarly, incorrect use of articles may not seem to be a critical error in academic writing, but while giving feedback it is much easier for a teacher to explain to students with examples (synchronously) and ask them to make the revisions on their own, rather than to point out and write in a comment box, “‘the’ needs to be deleted” or “‘the’ needs to be added” because the student is talking about “the village” and not any “village”.

To reiterate, the modality of the two ways of feedback impacts the nature of comments as seen from the data. Synchronous feedback focused on explaining the structure of a report—the aim of the written work, getting clarification from the student on the nature of data the student has collected to support their argument(s), and the relevance of the content provided. This space for interaction is crucial for the teacher and the student in order to fulfill the writing objective. It also helps the teacher researcher to clarify the writing issues then and there, instantaneously as it were, including queries related to the points that are mentioned by the student or are “picked up” by the teacher by correctly interpreting puzzled expressions on students’ faces. Synchronous feedback may also be viewed as a platform for the students to present their ideas and to learn about their areas of improvement so as to not repeat their “errors”. During feedback, the teacher researcher, after explaining the areas of improvement may ask the students to check the remaining text on their own. This allows the students to take ownership of their work resulting in more meticulous writing in the future. Overall, the feedback becomes interactive and effective with this modality.

During asynchronous feedback the teacher–researcher focused on the aspects that are mentioned in the previous paragraphs in the essay, but considering the learning/teaching that happens during the feedback stage, certain technical issues arise (as the teacher researcher is not the subject teacher of the course for which the student has drafted). These issues could range from usage of technical words to the capitalization of a certain term. The situation becomes more complex when the student gradually moves to giving their opinion (by using ‘should’) when the requirement is to simply state the facts. Anticipating that the student would read and learn from the comment in the comment box, the teacher–researcher tends to write an explanation of the concept thereby spending more time on the document.

This explanation of each occurrence of “error” in the comment box gradually morphs into the teacher–researcher making some of the actual corrections (instead of simply pointing them out), especially the minor ones dealing with the mechanics of language like adding or deleting unnecessary commas, or inserting or deleting articles. Such additions or deletions become counter-productive, for the student does not learn or understand the rule. The student can only tell himself: “my teacher made this change: it must therefore be right. The reasons for the change are rarely explained and therefore, learning does not take place. The outcome of such focused, but sometimes ‘prescriptive’ feedback results in:

- 1) a 1500-word report “loaded” with comments, not a sight that the student expected from a teacher who was supposed to provide support
- 2) low student motivation and
- 3) the teacher–researcher having to put in a lot of extra effort accompanied by having to leave a few issues still lacking clarity.

From this discussion, it is clear that a face-to-face conversation/synchronous feedback is definitely a more efficient way to provide feedback to ensure that the student has learnt the concept, and that a similar strategy of review and discussion needs to be applied to asynchronous feedback. There is a possibility of spending more time and giving more comments during asynchronous feedback that may or may not be directly related to the learning goals.

CONCLUSION

The reflections in this study demonstrate that the feedback provided by the teacher is scaffolded according to the student’s needs and goals. But this scaffolding does not happen to the same extent with asynchronous feedback as it does with synchronous feedback. The aim of a teacher while providing computer-mediated feedback needs to be more of a facilitative nature than directive. Using computers to provide language feedback is an effective way to provide support to students to help them improve their writing. But this does not mean that teachers become either the pseudo writers for their students, or harsh critics who correct the work of their students with a red pen. It is not always possible for teachers to have feedback discussions with their students. More often than not, time and distance are factors. The MS Word review option is a feature that ought to be manipulatable in such a way that it enables scaffolded, learner centered, and non-prescriptive feedback. But for this to happen, teachers need to reflect on the kind of feedback they provide when working asynchronously. The option of using only comment or comment along with track changes exists in MS Word. If we teachers could restrict ourselves to only using comments in the review option, (and also consciously hold back from correcting accuracy errors), the online review mode/asynchronous feedback could be utilized in a more productive manner. It is likely to then become as useful as synchronous feedback.

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Capturing Individual Growth in Group Discussions Through Teacher Observations

Pankaj Narke

ABSTRACT

Human interaction requires a great deal of collaboration and one of the ways in which this can be taught in ESL contexts is through group discussions (GDs). GDs are a part of many proficiency courses and ongoing assessments, and they have specific criteria for evaluating the performance of the participants, but these are applied in a uniform manner. Therefore, such criteria are not able to capture the varied growth of individuals on parameters such complexity in speech, accuracy, participation, time management and use of different communicative strategies. In this paper, I will attempt to capture the individual growth of learners in the use of communicative strategies with a focus on language. This will be done through in-class teacher observations, accompanied by retrospective teacher notes. For my paper, I observed the performance of three tertiary level ESL learners across six rounds of GDs. The results showed that these three participants grew consistently, yet differently.

Keywords: evaluation, formative assessment, ESL, collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

Group discussion is one of the most effective tasks in the communicative approach as it is highly meaning-focused and requires learners to interact and negotiate meaning in order to reach the desired goal. Among the many prominent reasons for using GDs in ESL classrooms, one is that it gives enough space for learner-learner interaction unlike one-way speaking tasks. However, the literature available on this issue views both sides of the coin. One view is that student-student interaction can only lead to the exchange and eventual fossilization of errors (James, 1994). Therefore, it is commonly believed by the majority of language teachers that real learning happens only through teacher-learner interaction. Peer group work is at best considered as a social exercise and good only for project work. Its implications for language learning and teaching have therefore not been explored enough. In contrast with this view, a majority of research in recent years has attempted to find out the effectiveness of task types in second language acquisition. It was observed that in group tasks, a lot of meaning negotiation takes place as it demands high levels of learner-learner interaction, which in turn leads to language acquisition

(Courtney,1995).

However, considering the nature of a group discussion, the output produced by the learners is bound to be extremely complex compared to a one-way or a dialogue task. Also, since 5-6 participants perform a GD task simultaneously, it becomes difficult for the teacher to set common criteria to assess their individual language development. Another difficulty is in eliciting the expected output from the learners in a discussion task even if they are exposed to the targeted forms of language (Ellis, 2005). One of the major reasons for this is that learners' response in group discussions cannot be predicted and controlled, unlike in a solitary or dialogic task. Therefore, it will not be feasible to assess learners' performances in discussion tasks on pre-decided language forms or functions. This suggests that the traditional model of summative assessment will not be of great help in tracking learners' growth in group discussions, as there may not be any definite predictable areas of growth.

Formative assessment, in contrast, helps teachers to track learners' ongoing growth through observation. It provides information to the teachers or learners, about strategies used, which can be used to modify teaching and improve learning (Cizek, 2010). Researchers have ranked formative assessment as the best among all the methods of language assessment for its effectiveness not only in measuring learners' growth but also for contributing to learning. William (2011), tried to establish the connection between classroom instruction and assessment to foreground the importance of formative assessment. In one of the studies that he reviewed, the teachers studied recorded videos of learners' performance in an oral problem-solving discussion task and identified the strategies that the learners used for problem solving. Teachers accordingly modified their instructions on the basis of this evidence, resulting in significant improvement in the learners' problem solving skills, which is a crucial aspect of GDs.

Another factor that affects student performance in GDs is the use of appropriate communication strategies (CS). Faerch and Kasper (1983) define CS as potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal. A group of researchers conducted studies in which they compared the CS of L2 learners with that of native speakers and found differences in their proficiency levels. Therefore, they advocated the teaching of CS in the L2 context, in order to gain native-like proficiency. Another group of researchers who compared L2 learners' performance in the target language with their own L1 performance, found many similarities (Kellerman, 1991). They believed that strategy transfer is an obvious process and it will happen without much conscious effort. Therefore, this group of researchers did not advocate the teaching of CS in the classroom, rather they believed in teaching the language itself. However, in the Indian context, including CS in classroom instruction is required not to achieve native-like proficiency but to help learners become better communicators; and for this purpose, GDs are ideal tasks.

Though there have been ongoing debates around the use of CS in L2, not much has

been discussed about its role in evaluating learners' individual performance. This evaluation can be achieved through teacher observations and retrospective notes for self-reference.

THE STUDY

In the present study, GD tasks were used as vehicles for speech production. Out of the 24 tertiary level engineering students, who took part in the study, the speech samples of three students have been analyzed. The data in this article comprises an assessment of their performance in three alternate rounds of GDs out of a total of six rounds to try and find markers of growth, for it was felt that it would be difficult to find actual growth in consecutive rounds. However, the qualitative analysis of the data, to identify learners' gradual growth in language, was done across all six rounds. Since investigating learners' varied individual growth was the major objective of the study, no inter-student comparison has been attempted. Through the study, I attempted to answer the following question:

What are the different kinds of growths that can be identified in ESL learners when they participate in group discussions? How can these growths be recorded by the teacher?

METHODOLOGY

Nature of participants and tasks

The participants in this study comprised three third year engineering (CSE) students of the twenty-four in the original study which is a part of my ongoing doctoral study. All three participants had communicative English as one of the courses in their syllabus, which included communicative language functions such as group discussions, report writing, interview skills and presentation skills. The participants had to take part in online synchronous discussion (OSD) at least one day before they took part in the face-to-face group discussions. Six rounds of OSD and face-to-face group discussions were conducted over a period of two months. The OSDs were conducted using Facebook chat outside the classroom (at a time and place convenient to the learners). In these OSDs, the participants had to discuss a topic which was part of a broader topic that was debated in the face-to-face discussion. OSDs were meant to make the GD task familiar to the participants, as well as to initiate their thinking on the schema (content and language) related to the topic. There were 3-4 groups comprising 5-6 participants in every round of discussion. While forming groups, I, as the teacher-researcher, made sure that every group was a mixed ability group (based on the results of a proficiency test conducted at the beginning of the study) and for each GD, the group members were shuffled. This was done in order to avoid repetition of content. Though the researcher was not a part of these discussions, he was a close observer and made notes to mark instances that showed an improvement or deterioration in the learners' performance. Every face-to-face discussion was video recorded and posted on a common Facebook page (created especially for this study); all participants had access to this page. Participants were encouraged to reflect on their performance and to give peer

feedback which was posted along with the researcher's written and oral feedback. Since this feedback is not a part of this study, that data is not provided.

The data gathered from these face-to-face discussions was closely examined. The remarks of the observer with regard to the performance of the three participants during the three rounds (first, third and fifth) were also analyzed. Finally, these observations were corroborated with the researcher's notes and video recordings.

Data Analysis

First participant (P1)

In the first round, the researcher observed that the first participant (P1) faced problems while interacting, which included lack of appropriate words, uncertainty with grammatical forms, insufficient content, and hesitation in taking turns. In order to cope with these issues, the participant used certain CS, of which three were consistent across all the three GD rounds. These strategies were: use of fillers, repetition and self-correction. Though these three strategies were used by the participant in all three rounds, they were modified in each round and their communicative function increased remarkably.

The fillers used by P1 in the first round seem to have helped him in recalling the content or vocabulary and in maintaining his turn. However, they did not fulfill any interactional function as they were just sounds such as "aaa". Therefore, in the context of the group discussion, they could be disregarded as meaningless language units.

"so as Kaleem said, arranged marriages are good, it is a prediction [sic].
Aaa... if aa couple is aaa... doing [sic] a love marriage then aaa... the parents may be anti... so they have to start a new life, there is no back up to..."

In the third round of the GD, P1 made use of different fillers to cope with fluency issues. The fillers used in this round had a communicative function unlike in the previous rounds.

"Yeah but physically they are not as strong as men..."
"Yeah, I would like to make a comment here..."

P1 used these fillers at the beginning of his comments so he could get enough time to structure his sentences. Also, the fillers acknowledged the earlier participant's view by showing acceptance.

The fillers used in the last round by P1 fulfilled an even more complex communicative function for not only did they acknowledge the earlier participants' comments but they were also used to appeal to the other participants to consider his perspective.

"See if we go deep into this topic, this reservation might go...it mean [sic] deviate...it shows inequality [sic] some times. See if we give reservations to the particular people..."

This change in the use of fillers shows a clear growth in the participants' use of

CS, from simple to complex. The first filler ("aaa") is merely a sound, whereas the latter two ("yeah" and "see") are meaningful words and they perform a complex communicative function during the GD.

Another commonly used CS by P1 across all GDs was repetition of words, phrases and sentences in order to gain time to organize language or content related knowledge. The participant exhibited growth in this strategy as well. His improvement could be traced from merely repeating words/phrases to restructuring sentences. In the first round, P1 simply repeated certain phrases, but he could not complete the sentence and lost his turn:

"So there will be, there will be aaa a backup"

By the third round, he progressed from simply repeating phrases, to repeating them to restructure the sentence and make it more meaningful in the context of the GD:

"First we have to change the... I think we have to change the mindset of the men."

"Yeah, it's a very good point that aaa women... I agree with Shanthi. So it's a very good point that many people are killing before the woman has [sic] born".

Similarly, in the last round P1 did not just repeat the phrases but also restructured his sentences and made them communicatively more significant:

"Government should mainly...the main purpose of this reservation is to help the people financially..."

The progression in the use of repetition, from merely repeating phrases to repeating and restructuring arguments shows the development in the participant's use of CS.

The third most commonly used CS by P1 in all rounds of GD was self-correction (the other two being fillers and repetition). P1 used self-correction when he realized his mistakes in grammar or vocabulary, which shows that he was aware of his mistakes. In the first round, self-correction was restricted to a syntactic level:

"they have to start a new life, there is no back up to... backup for them, no supports [sic] for them..."

In the next round, it was at a semantic level:

"So I think reservations can be provided in some restricted areas, can't be provided in restricted areas."

These observations reflected the growing use of CS by the first participant. P1 used a few other strategies as well (such as, paraphrasing, word appropriation, use of fixed expression, etc.), but as these were not consistent across the GDs, they were not considered as good representative samples.

Second participant (P2)

Group discussions being the most uncommon and least practiced task, all participants had communication related issues. The two most significant

communication related issues faced by the second participant (P2) were lack of content/vocabulary and uncertainty with regard to sentence structure. To cope with these problems, P2 used different CS, out of which restructuring of sentences and self-correction were observed consistently across all rounds of GD. Both these strategies helped the participant in dealing with the above communication related problems.

In the first round of the GD, the participant used restructuring, which was very close to repetition. Through the restructuring strategy, P2 did not change the argument but presented it in a more organized manner:

“So in that, what is my opinion is, in that time period the [sic] we can betterly [sic] understand our partner in that time.”

However, in the fifth round, P2 used the same strategy for a different communicative function, which may be graded higher on the scale of communicative complexity. P2 restructured the agreement in order to not to show absolute disagreement with another participant and to maintain the flow of the GD:

“You are saying that reservation is good. But the people... yeah I will also agree for [sic] that. But reservation ...”

The two different instances of using restructuring as a CS is indicative of P2’s progress—being able to modify the statement according to the context and also the use for a simple to more complex function, namely, from restructuring as repetition to using restructuring to maintain the flow of the argument. Use of self-correction as a CS is also evidence of P2’s progress in GD performances across the three rounds. In fact, his progress can be traced from the complete absence of self-correction in the first round to its advanced use in the last round. In the first round, P2 seemed to be unaware of his mistakes. Therefore, even though he had the opportunity to correct an adverb form, he did not do so. For example:

“...we can betterly [sic] understand our partner...”

In contrast, in the last round, P2 corrected himself to avoid wrong usage of a word. He was aware of the inappropriate use of a word category and he corrected himself immediately.

“Reservations are like **politicals...politicians...they want votes...**”

“He can’t get a **good...better** college compare to...”

These examples of self-correction illustrate the growth in the participant’s communicative ability in GD tasks. Along with restructuring and self-correction, P2 used a few other CS, such as hedging markers and coining words.

Third participant (P3)

The third participant (P3) also exhibited excellent use of CS to tackle communication related problems. He consistently used word appropriation, paraphrasing, and restructuring across all rounds of GDs.

In the initial round of GD, P3 was not aware about the usage of context specific

words. Therefore, no instances of word appropriation were observed in his performance. However, in the later rounds, P3 attempted to use low frequency words. To avoid ambiguity of meaning as the participant was using these words for the first time, he used the strategy of word appropriation. For example:

“we give most of our **property...what...our income** to the govt...”

P3 also had a tendency to coin new words/phrases that were grammatically inaccurate. To overcome this problem, he used the strategy of paraphrasing in the later rounds of the GD. Though this strategy was missing in the first round, to avoid the risk of inaccuracy he chose to adopt it the later rounds:

“people of lower caste which [sic] are thought to be **less money, the people who have less money.**”

P3 used the strategy of restructuring sentences to avoid syntactic accuracy and semantic ambiguity. Like the earlier CS of paraphrasing, this strategy was also used at a later stage of the study, when the participant was more familiar with the task and also more competent. For example:

“**And the reservation when the... actually I feel is**, when the food is given to all the people...”

DISCUSSION

The data analysis reveals that there was an observable growth in the participants across the rounds of GD and with a conscious effort on the part of the teacher, this growth can be recorded and tracked. For this, teachers, can maintain an observation diary/observation portfolio for individual learners. They can mark the progress of the participants in the use of CS from time to time, and provide instructions to them for more advanced CS on the basis of their observations.

As observed in the analysis section, the participants did not use CS in a uniform way; rather they used them in varied ways. The difference in the choice of CS of the three participants was discernible. P1 made use of fillers, restructuring and self-correction. Analysis reveals the existence of all these strategies in the participant’s performance right from the first round. However, the participant made advanced use of these strategies as the GDs progressed. For example, the strategy of self-correction was used at a syntactic level in the first round, whereas the same strategy was used at a semantic level in the last round.

P2 used different CS—self-correction and restructuring—which were consistent in his performance across all the rounds of GD. Restructuring, which was very close to repetition in the first round was later used to indicate a change of opinion. Though this strategy was used by P1 as well, the cause and effect of use was different.

Completely different from P1 and P2, P3 made use of a new strategy—word appropriation—which helped him avoiding unintended meanings. This strategy was a completely new addition to the set of strategies used by the other two participants. However, P3 did not make use of self-correction unlike the other

two participants. It is evident from these observations, that different learners grow differently irrespective of the same environment.

CONCLUSION

This study showed that though there are no prescribed parameters to track individual learners' growth in GD tasks, this can be achieved through careful observations in the class and retrospective teacher notes. Such a study, though carried out with a small number of participants, has implications for language teaching. The teacher can observe the pattern of CS used by the learners and use the data to tackle communication related problems. He/she can accordingly modify classroom instructions and train learners to use CS at an advanced level. However, certain modifications will have to be made to the kinds of observations possible, if such a method had to be applied to large classes.

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From a Monolingual to a Multilingual Approach in Language Teaching

Susanna Schwab

ABSTRACT

Traditionally, foreign language teaching has been based on second language acquisition theories that mostly disregard learners' prior (and simultaneous) language learning experiences and resources. In this article, I will introduce the readers to an approach in language teaching that is based on third language learning theories. The approach—a multilingual approach to language learning and teaching—is being implemented in Switzerland following the Council of Europe's recommendations of introducing two additional languages besides the local language into the school curriculum. The introduction of two additional (foreign) languages as well as the new approach required the development of new course materials. An evaluation of the pilot version of the materials revealed that only a small majority of teachers seemed to have implemented some aspects of a multilingual approach. To ensure that the teachers embraced this concept, it was recommended that teacher development programmes put more emphasis on teacher beliefs and the teachers' own language learning experiences.

Keywords: multilingual approach, third language acquisition theories, prior language learning experiences and resources.

INTRODUCTION

To follow one of the major aims of the Council of Europe—the promotion of mutual understanding and thus encouraging the learning of two other languages alongside the local language—the Swiss voted for a National Language Strategy (Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education, 2004) that stipulated that by 2015, two foreign languages¹ had to be taught at primary schools. The resulting educational reform in language teaching with the introduction and implementation of two foreign languages in primary school also included a change in teaching methods and approaches.

Language learning has had an important role in federally structured Switzerland, not least due to its four statutory official languages: German, French, Italian, and

¹ Two foreign languages: despite French being an official language, the term foreign is used when French is discussed in the German-speaking regions of Switzerland.

Romansh. To implement the language strategy, six cantons along the language border between the Swiss-German and French-speaking regions decided on a joint venture that they named *Passepartout*² (n.d.). The policy makers—the six cantonal ministers of education—agreed that French was to be the first foreign language to be taught from Year 3 onwards, followed by English two years later (Year 5). The *Passepartout* project was launched in 2007 and had five major aims: (1) developing a new curriculum for foreign languages (Years 3 – 9); (2) designing a methodology concept for foreign language teaching; (3) designing new course materials for French and English; (4) the requirements for language teacher profiles; and (5) starting a professional development programme (PDP) for pre-service and in-service language teachers.

In this article, I will examine the second aim of the *Passepartout* project—designing a methodology concept for foreign language teaching, in particular, the change from a monolingual to a multilingual approach in language teaching. Although *Passepartout* decided to use the term “Didactic of Plurilingualism” as a translation for the German “*Didaktik der Mehrsprachigkeit*”, and the Council of Europe mostly uses the term plurilingual approach, I prefer the term “multilingual approach”. After this brief presentation of the context, I will outline the new methodology concept in more detail, including the theoretical framework it is based on, i.e. third language acquisition theories.

PASSEPARTOUT METHODOLOGY CONCEPT

The paper on didactic principles (2008, available in English on the *Passepartout* website) listed some requirements and emphasized the importance of the “transfer of linguistic knowledge, language and learning experience, learning techniques and strategies, linguistic activity and language comparisons and reflections” (*Passepartout*, 2008, p. 7). It highlighted the definition of a plurilingual approach that was introduced by the Council of Europe (2001) and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR):

The plurilingual approach emphasises the fact that as an individual person’s experience of language in its cultural contexts expands,...he or she does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact. (p. 4)

Passepartout based the multilingual approach on models and theories of third language acquisition (TLA).

THIRD LANGUAGE ACQUISITION THEORIES AND MODELS

Traditionally, the study of multilingualism was subsumed in second language acquisition (SLA) and its theories. Many scholars (De Angelis & Dewaele,

² *Passepartout* has its own website. Most documents are only available in German but there are some in English that I will refer to in this article.

2011; Gibson, Hufeisen, & Personne, 2008; Hufeisen, 2000; Jessner, 2008, 2014; Neuner, 2008) considered TLA as a discipline on its own and separated it from SLA, while other scholars regarded TLA as an aspect of SLA. Yet others subsumed multilingualism in bilingualism (Bialystok, Craik, Green, & Gollan, 2009). Comparing SLA with TLA, Schumann (1997) stated that TLA needed to be regarded as:

...a more complex process, whose complexity derives from the more diversified patterns of acquisition: various sequences of languages learnt, different ages of acquisition, different contexts and functions/domains of language use, varied motivations and attitudes, as well as different linguistic, learning and communicative sensitivity and awareness. (Schumann, 1997, p. 26)

Jessner (2008) presented and discussed seven models of TLA research: (1) Levelt’s Bilingual and Multilingual production Models; (2) Green’s Activation/Inhibition Model; (3) Grosjean’s Language Mode Hypothesis; (4) Hufeisen’s Factor Model; (5) Herdina and Jessner’s Dynamic Systems Theory Model of Multilingualism; (6) Meissner’s Multilingual Processing Model; and (7) Aronin and O Laoire’s Model of Multilinguality. In accordance with Hutterli, Stotz, and Zappatore (2008), only Hufeisen’s factor model is outlined here because it is widely regarded as the most adequate model for language teaching in school settings. Hufeisen and Marx (2007) explained the additional resources learners have available when learning an L3:

Whereas at the beginning of the L2 learning process the learner is a complete novice in the learning process of a second language, the L3 learner already knows what it feels like to approach a new language. She has developed (consciously or unconsciously) certain techniques of learning new words. She knows that a new text is often unclear, and is able to cope with the insecurity of having knowledge gaps. (Hufeisen & Marx, 2007, p. 313)

Table 1
Factors involved in learning foreign languages in a school setting

Factors	L1	L2	L3
Neuro-physiological Factors	General language learning ability, age, etc.	General language learning ability, age, etc.	General language learning ability, age, etc.
Learner External Factors	Socio-cultural and socio-economic surroundings, plus type and amount of exposure/input	Socio-cultural and socio-economic surroundings, plus type and amount of exposure/input	Socio-cultural and socio-economic surroundings, plus type and amount of exposure/input

Emotional/ Affective Factors	-	Anxiety, motivation, attitude, perceived language typology/ proximity	Anxiety, motivation, attitude, perceived language typology/ proximity
Cognitive Factors	-	Language awareness, metalinguistic awareness, learning awareness, learning strategies, individual learning experiences	Language awareness, metalinguistic awareness, learning awareness, learning strategies, individual learning experiences
Foreign Language Specific Factors	-	-	Individual language learning experiences and language learning strategies, interlanguage L2, interlanguage L3
Linguistic Factors	-	L1	L1, L2

Note. Based on Hufeisen and Gibson (2003) and Hutterli, Stotz and Zappatore (2008)

Table 1 illustrates the additional resources available to learners when learning an L2, L3 or a second foreign language. Hufeisen's model shows that "L3 learners have language specific knowledge and competencies at their disposal that L2 learners do not" (Jessner, 2008, p. 23). However, they need to be made aware of those resources. By getting them to compare and contrast languages that are in their repertoire, teachers can help promote metalinguistic awareness in learners. In addition, by discussing and focusing on the factors listed in Hufeisen's foreign language specific group such as language learning experiences and language learning strategies, teachers can help raise the learners' awareness of the resources available to them from learning L1, L2, L3, etc.

DEVELOPING NEW TEACHING METHODS BASED ON THIRD LANGUAGE ACQUISITION RESEARCH

Jessner (2008) suggested that TLA research should lead to the development of new teaching methods for a multilingual approach and that only by "leaving traditional concepts and boundaries behind will new perspectives be able to emerge along with a holistic understanding of the phenomena in question" (p. 45). Table 2 provides a simplified overview of popular methods and approaches for second, foreign language teaching used so far.

Table 2

Overview: Popular methods and approaches in second (foreign) language teaching

Time	Methods/ Approaches; Aspects	Learning Theories	Protagonists/ Theorists	Manifestation
- ?	Grammar- Translation Direct Method	Classicist	Ahn, Ollendorff Victor, Berlitz	Written language Spoken language
1950s - ?	Audiolingual Audiovisual PPP (Presentation, Practice, and Production)	Behaviourism	Pavlov, Skinner	Pattern drill
1960s - ?	Community Language Learning; The Silent Way; Total Physical Response	Cognitive Code	Bruner, Chomsky, Learning to Gattegno, Asher	learn
1970s - ?	CLT/Communicative Approach, Content- Based, Task-Based- Learning (TBL), etc.	Constructivism	Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky, Canale & Swain, Prabhu, Willis	Experiential learning; Reflective practice
21 st C - ?	Multilingual Approach, Didactic of Plurilingualism	Constructivism/ Third Language Acquisition	Neuner; Jessner; Grossenbacher, Sauer, & Wolff	Multilingual ≠ Monolingual; Functional plurilingualism

Note. Based on Celce-Murcia (2001) and Howatt (1984)

In Table 2, the multilingual approach is separated from other methods and approaches in second language teaching popular throughout the twentieth century because new perspectives have emerged (Jessner, 2008). Howatt (1984) maintained that the monolingual principle was a unique contribution of the twentieth century to English language teaching and concluded that:

...the monolingual principle, the unique contribution of the twentieth century to classroom language teaching, remains the bedrock notion from which the others ultimately derive. If there is another 'language teaching revolution' around the corner, it will have to assemble a convincing set of arguments to support some alternative (bilingual?) principle of equal power. (Howatt, 1984, p. 289)

Since the publication of Howatt's book in 1984, enough convincing sets of arguments and new perspectives along with a holistic understanding of language teaching and learning have been assembled to develop and launch new methods and approaches for plurilingual practices.

In her literature review on European integrated multilingual curricula, Meier (2014) identified four proposals or prototypes that could be connected with multilingual approaches in mainstream education: (1) Candelier, 2008: *Approches plurielles, didactiques du plurilinguisme: Le même et l'autre*; (2) Coyle, Holmes, and King, 2009: *Towards an integrated curriculum – CLIL national statements and guidelines*; (3) Hufeisen, 2011: *Gesamtsprachencurriculum: Weitere Überlegungen zu einem prototypischen Modell*; and (4) Reich and Krumm, 2013: *Sprachbildung und Mehrsprachigkeit: Ein Curriculum zur Wahrnehmung und Bewältigung sprachlicher Vielfalt im Unterricht*. Meier also presented two concrete plans for the implementation of a multilingual curriculum. While one plan was for Luxembourg, the second plan was for Switzerland and the Passepartout project.

FROM MONO- TO MULTILINGUAL: FOUR MAJOR DIFFERENCES

To introduce the new approaches and methods, Passepartout emphasised four major differences between a monolingual and a multilingual approach: (1) the integration of all languages, including home languages the learners have at their disposal, became important; (2) metalinguistic awareness became one of the key factors; (3) the emphasis changed from interference to crosslinguistic influence and positive transfer; and (4) teachers and learners learn to exploit languages that belong to the same language family. Besides highlighting the four major differences and mentioning some tools such as ELBE³, the Passepartout papers did not contain any further details. In a short article Schwab (2016), highlighted some metalinguistic and cross-linguistic activities to illustrate the four major differences and how synergies could be used between German (language of instruction), the two foreign languages French and English as well as heritage language(s).

CHALLENGES

External evaluations during the pilot phase of the new course materials

Pilot versions of the locally produced and mandated course materials for French named *Mille Feuilles* (Bertschy, Grossenbacher, & Sauer, 2011) and for English named *New World* (Arnet-Clark, Frank Schmid, Grimes, Ritter, & Rüdiger-Harper, 2013) were tested by a small group of teachers and learners two years before its

³ Important elements of the didactic of plurilingualism are methodological approach to linguistic and cultural encounters, to sensitisation, to language and to language reflection, known as ELBE. The acronym ELBE stands for Eveil aux langues (Language Awareness) (BEgegnung mit Sprachen und Kulturen). ELBE activities can ... stimulate interest in and draw attention to dialects, languages and linguistic phenomena and through language comparisons, encourage reflection on language, the finding of differences and parallels, and the detection of language mechanisms and rules. (Passepartout, 2008, p. 14)

official implementation. Passepartout contracted external evaluators who used focus group interviews, and questionnaires for teachers and learners to collect data. Singh and Elmiger (2013) conducted the fourth Passepartout pilot study in the school year 2012/2013 when English materials were piloted for Year 6—the second year of English language teaching. Their analysis of the topic of multilingual approach revealed that only a small majority seemed to have adopted a multilingual approach to language teaching. Five of the eleven teachers who were interviewed, either did not draw learners' awareness to already existing resources when learning a language, or seemed to doubt the usefulness of a multilingual approach (Singh & Elmiger, 2013). Moreover, the research findings indicated that more work by textbook writers would be required to better link the teaching and learning materials for French and English. Unfortunately, no further research has been conducted for the final version of the new materials for French and English.

While Singh and Elmiger (2013) conducted research during the pilot phase of the course materials, Schwab-Berger (2015) investigated teachers' perceptions with regard to the implementation of multilingual approach to language teaching during the first year of the implementation phase, when teaching English as a second foreign language. She collected data from interviews with eight teachers and also observed them in the classroom. Her analysis indicates that teachers needed more time to conceptualize the new course materials, collaborate with other language teachers, and for reflective practice. Without collaboration between language teachers and a better (languages) integration of the new course materials for French and for English, the multilingual approach might be condemned to failure. Teachers might continue to ignore learners' resources as detailed in Hufeisen's factor model, thus the tendency to teach a second foreign language as if learners had no previous language learning experiences might not be replaced with metalinguistic and crosslinguistic activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure the acceptance and adaptation of the multilingual approach, teacher education programmes should put more emphasis on the discussion of teacher beliefs and the teachers' own language learning experiences. Studies on teachers' beliefs and experiences with educational reforms revealed that teachers are only too often influenced by their own experiences (Brown, 2009; De Angelis, 2011; Edwards, 2013; Farrell & Kun, 2007). When teachers are influenced by their own learning experiences based on a monolingual approach, a great deal of work and professional development is required so that they eventually transfer the knowledge and insights gained by them into their classrooms.

Teachers not only have to understand the new philosophy but also accept it and adapt their own teaching to it (Criblez & Nägeli, 2011). Hyland and Wong (2013) underscored Criblez and Nägeli's words with "if teachers have not fully embraced the concepts, then the innovation will die" (p. 2). Further research is also required

to explore how, and to what extent teachers have accepted, adapted, and transferred the multilingual approach into their practice. Moreover, research into the final versions of the new course materials for French and English would provide better insights and understanding into how the materials are linked and interrelated as well as how these materials support teachers and learners' integration of languages.

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Learning of English: There is a Hole in the Bucket

Chhaya Sawhney

ABSTRACT

This article examines and highlights the reflections of 44 second year students of Bachelor of Elementary Education program about their relationship with English. It focuses on their journeys of English at home and at school, its impact and why they continue to be reluctant speakers of the language despite so many years of exposure to the language. It also locates the discussion in the larger socio-political context of our country and why it is imperative that our education system rethinks curriculum to equip learners with mastery over languages, English in particular. It also emphasises the potential of multilingualism as a tool and resource in language classrooms.

Keywords: multilingualism, curriculum, Bachelor of Elementary Education, language classrooms.

INTRODUCTION

I hum the song, “There is a hole in my bucket, dear Liza¹” as I sit down to write this article. I am reminded of my post-graduation days, way back in the late 1980s, when Professor K.V. Subbarao (from the Department of Linguistics) would sing this song by Harry Belafonte at all our department functions. It is almost as if I see my students playing the role of Henry in the song, making an emotional plea to dear Liza to help fix the bucket so that it stops leaking. My students, in their four-year journey of the Bachelor of Elementary Education (B.El.Ed) Teacher Training Programme, seem to be most concerned and troubled about their “leaky buckets”—their lack of proficiency in the English language.

Over the last 20 years, classroom discussions while teaching the “Language Acquisition” paper in the second year, have invariably centred around my students sharing their experiences of learning languages, especially English. I have always sensed their pain as they narrate their personal stories and share anecdotes from their school life about the teaching and learning of English. Most of these students aspire to be fluent speakers of English despite their constant struggle with it. I have often asked myself, “Why are they so keen to become proficient in it?”; “Why do

¹ A song that describes a deadlock situation in which Liza tells Henry to fix a leaky bucket and he keeps seeking a solution from her for the constant crisis he faces.

they lack confidence and call themselves *reluctant speakers*?”; “Why have years of learning English at school failed them?”. In order to better understand the reasons for their discomfort and dismay with the language, I asked 44 of them to reflect on their relationship with English, its role in their lives, and the challenges and concerns faced by them with regard to English. In this article, I will attempt to examine and highlight some extracts of their reflections from their assignments. In the first section of the article, I will focus on their journeys with English both at home and in school. Next, I will discuss how they perceive their relationship with English and its impact on them. Then, in the final section, I will locate this discussion in the larger socio-political context of our country and include some suggestions from them.

THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF ENGLISH

A quick look at the schooling background of these students shows that a majority of them attended public schools across Delhi, Rajasthan, Haryana and Jammu & Kashmir, that had a “convent”, “public”, or “international” tag attached to the name. English was the medium of instruction in these schools and it was also studied as a subject from class I onwards. A handful of them had done their schooling from government schools—Sarvodaya schools or rural schools run by the state boards on the outskirts of Delhi. The curriculum was transacted in Hindi in these schools, though the medium of instruction was English. Only two students out of the 44 attended Hindi medium schools, where English was a subject, and its exposure was in any case “limited” and it was only in that class.

Classroom teaching in all these schools followed the bottom-up-approach—from letters to words, and words to sentences, gradually moving from “simple” to “complex” through the primary classes 1-5. Learning English in school meant memorising word-meanings, practicing sentence structures and later memorising the rules of grammar. Reading meant decoding words and repeating after the teacher. Writing meant good cursive handwriting, copying from the blackboard, and memorizing to reproduce short essays on topics such as “My School”, “My Mother”, “My Favorite Animal”. Teachers provided ready-made answers to comprehension questions in a structured way that had to be copied from the blackboard. Only a few students remember writing answers in their own words.

Although the thrust was primarily on developing mechanical skills in reading and writing, most schools expected their students to speak in English. There was an underlying assumption that speaking would follow from reading and writing (or should I say, copying) of English. Schools imposed fines or teachers gave black stars if a student was found talking in any other language besides English. Students remember paying huge amounts of fine when caught speaking in Hindi. Not only that, these students were humiliated and mocked, if they were unable to talk in English. A few of them figured out that if they kept quiet, they would escape the sharp eye of the teachers inside the classroom. A student lamented, “There was

just no pleasure in learning English in the class.” Another wrote, “How could our schools expect us to learn and talk in English when there was hardly any activity that engaged us with the language in a meaningful or purposeful way?” Speaking the language was confined to stock sentences, such as, “May I go to the toilet?” or “May I come in?”, or to reciting English poems with accompanying actions. The situation in government schools within and outside Delhi was similar, if not worse. Exposure to English was restricted to textbooks and teachers.

The home environment in most cases, was also not English-speaking, even though parents expected their children to learn and speak in English. They bought them cursive writing books, alphabet books, and books to learn names of colours, fruits and vegetables, all of which they hoped would support English “speaking”. Later, in the middle school years, they invested in dictionaries and grammar practice books so that their children could learn by self-practice. Only three students had opportunities to read stories and picture books at home. Another parent demanded that his daughter read sections of the *Hindustan Times* to build her vocabulary. As my students moved to college, they became a little independent. Equipped with smart phones and the internet, they began to watch Hollywood movies, English TV serials, youtube videos and read novels that their friends recommended—an exposure that they had never experienced before.

RELATIONSHIP WITH ENGLISH AND ITS IMPACT

Most of my students, as is evident, are from backgrounds that did not support English language learning at home or in school.

Here are some reflections from their written assignment:

- “My relationship with English gives me a heartache. I see myself as a poor girl who dreams of a young prince but fears that he will never come for her because she is so poor and imperfect. I dream of speaking English fluently one day but fear that I am so poor in the language that I am dreaming for the impossible.”
- “My relationship with English can be best described as deeply fearful. My school teacher scolded me endlessly for not being to speak in English. My class mates laughed at me as I struggled to answer a question in English. Over the last few years, English has become my enemy. It is such a forced relationship. I have no one in my surrounding that I can practice it with.”
- “Since my English was poor, my teachers never paid attention to me. They only worked with the ones who knew the language. Why did they do that? They brought down my confidence.”
- “I have realized that I am part of a social construct that decides what is important. I have to make my relationship better with English. While I am not so bad at writing in the language, I am not able to speak it with confidence. I often stand in front of the mirror and talk to myself to become fluent.”

- “I can describe it as a comfortable one. I am trying to make a stronger bond with it. After all, it is a global language and it will empower me to connect with people, books, science and technology. I am constantly trying to nurture it because it will help me to write well on social media, and get a good job in the future.”

While these reflections are self-explanatory, most of them express strong emotions of fear, restlessness and helplessness. One can infer that lack of command over English has been extremely damaging to the students’ self-esteem and confidence. Even though they are proficient in 2-3 Indian languages, their aspiration to be proficient in English and their belief that it is that one language that they cannot do without has to be understood from the larger perspective of the status and role of English in our social context. Advani (2004) writes, “The classroom realities of the learning of English thus reflect multifarious pressures.... English in the classroom reflects all the configurations of class power in which it enables urban, westernized students and disempowers all others” (p. 110).

Despite the frustration, humiliation and anxiety that many children experience all through their school years and beyond, English continues to be desirable for personal and professional growth, personality development, upward social mobility and prestige in social circles. The English medium schools in our country have flourished because of this reason and have consolidated their hold on the premise of a “deeply exploitative, and elitist notion of useful knowledge” (Advani 2009). It is, therefore, not surprising that my students were also under the magic spell of English. They saw it as “the language” that cannot be ignored as it was likely to open up a plethora of opportunities for them.

THE STATUS AND ROLE OF ENGLISH

In 1950, the constitution of India designated English as the associate official language thus establishing its use for all official purposes of the Union. Despite opposition to this, the constituent assembly extended its use for another 15 years until in 1963, the official languages act provided for its use for an indefinite period of time.

National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 described English as “a global language in a multilingual country” (p. 38). It recognized English as a symbol of the people’s aspirations for quality in education and participation in national and international life. The visible impact of its presence was in its demand in the initial stages of schooling. Given this context, the NCF 2005 defined the goals for a second language curriculum as “attainment of a basic proficiency, such as is acquired in natural language learning, and the development of language into an instrument for abstract thought and knowledge acquisition through (for example) literacy” (p. 39). This role envisaged an across-the-curriculum approach, particularly in primary education, that would break down the barriers between English and other subjects, and English and other Indian languages.

The reality of our classrooms has unfortunately been quite different from what was envisaged. A vast majority of students in our country do not attain basic proficiency in the language, much less English becoming an instrument for their abstract thought and knowledge acquisition. Perceptions about English being the language of power have certainly not formed overnight. Agnihotri (2010) states,

The political economy of English in India is quite a different matter.... It is on the one hand the language of opportunity, social status and upward social mobility and on the other hand, in glove with the processes that consistently enlarge the distance between the elite and the marginalised (p. 7).

In addition, many people accord greater importance to English than to Indian languages. This is quite evident from the baggage of myths that my students carry with them with regard to their own or other regional languages, popularly referred to as *bolis* (dialects). These myths are so deeply rooted, that they call their own languages impure, lacking literature and grammar, and therefore not worthy of getting any importance in the classrooms. In comparison, English is seen as a powerful and prestigious language. These myths have been nurtured and promoted by the people in power to create class hierarchies and boundaries for their own benefit. That these differences between language and dialects have their roots in politics and are not linguistic differences is understood much later, by the end of first year.

SUGGESTIONS FROM STUDENTS

Studying courses in Linguistics and the Pedagogy of Language in the B.El.Ed program helped my students form a theoretical understanding about the nature, structure and pedagogy of literacy in a socio-cultural context. Reflecting deeply on their relationship with English gave them an opportunity to go back in time to their school days, and think objectively about their English curriculum, its transaction, the role of their parents and teachers and examinations. It also helped them to situate their classroom and outside experiences of learning English in a context and establish linkages between theory and practice.

One voice that clearly emerged from their reflections was that our education system must rethink the curriculum to equip children to develop mastery over languages, English in particular. This should include emphasis not just on developing reading and writing skills, but also on speaking skills. They believed that this can only be achieved if the teaching and learning of English is planned better to create an acquisition rich environment. This implies that certain measures need to be inbuilt in the curriculum so that the focus shifts from using just the textbook to using other interesting resources as well. One example could be including children’s literature from around the world that they could read/listen to and respond to.

The teaching and learning of English will need to move away from mechanics of language or the form of language to its substance. Spending months and years

on memorizing and writing meaningless alphabets in isolation, or learning to read words by decoding, or learning the rules of grammar in later years without understanding their usage, could be replaced by exposure to more engaging opportunities, where children could participate and express themselves freely. Classroom transactions will therefore need to become more enabling so that students feel a “transformative and liberating power of education” that Paulo Freire (2000) spoke about. For this to become a reality, we need to pay more attention to our language teachers, as they are central to our education system. Regular training in pedagogy in general and content pedagogy in particular can empower teachers to create a classroom environment for real communicative use of language.

Jim Cummins (2001) wrote,

Individual educators are never powerless, although they frequently work in conditions that are oppressive for both them and their students. While they operate under many constraints with respect to curriculum and working conditions, educators do have choices in the way they structure classroom interactions and in the messages about identity they communicate to their students. Educators are capable of determining for themselves the social and educational goals they want to achieve with their students because they are responsible for the role definitions they adopt in relation to culturally diverse students and communities. Even in the context of English-only instruction, educators have options in the orientation they adopt to students’ languages and cultures, in the forms of parent and community participation they encourage, and in the ways they implement pedagogy and assessment (p. 653).

If we agree with Cummins, we would also agree that our teachers, instead of making their classes absolutely English-centric, could explore using multilingualism as a classroom resource.

In fact, this suggestion was recommended by many students in their reflections. They seemed to have developed a belief in multilingualism as a resource in linguistically diverse classrooms after studying “Nature of Language” in the first year of the program. As they looked more closely at their own languages in the first year, they discovered patterns that they had never paid attention to earlier. It was interesting for them to learn, for example, that in most Indian languages, the question word begins with “-k” or that the answers to questions fall right beneath the question word. They realized that while Indian languages were similar because of their word order characteristic, they were quite different from English. Discovering and learning about other Indian languages besides their own and contrasting them with English in this new-found way, they understood the potential of multilingualism as a powerful tool and resource in a language classroom.

If as potential teachers, these students truly adopt this multilingual pedagogical approach, it could help create contexts of empowerment for both teachers and the

students that Cummins spoke about. This approach could potentially also facilitate positive perceptions about self-identity, as the space for and the role of regional languages gets redefined in classrooms, appropriating some segments of power from English (Agnihotri and Khanna 1997).

Textbooks too need to incorporate interesting themes and use language that children can relate to. They need to have exercises that are not just content based and therefore close-ended. We need to include tasks and activities that are open-ended so that there is no one right or wrong answer. This would help children think critically, especially as they see their responses being valued. Further, we also need to have resources that look beyond textbooks, exams that look beyond memorized answers and exposure that looks beyond classrooms. Schools need to nurture a facilitative environment so that students have a voice in the construction of their knowledge.

Those students who defined their relationship with English as “comfortable” felt that exposure is the key to building a positive self-image. They recommended reading as much as—newspapers, magazines, fiction novels, various types of blogs; watching movies, documentaries, videos; writing journals or random thoughts freely in a diary without worrying too much about correct grammar usage; listening to songs; speaking to family members, friends, strangers without worrying about their opinion. These small measures helped them build self-confidence and have a positive self-image. Some of them have begun to read English novels by Indian writers, some are reading food and travel blogs, some have got addicted to watching wildlife documentaries on TV, etc. As their exposure increases in many different ways, they feel empowered and confident, and are able to use the English language in many real life situations. We certainly need to work on creating such contexts of empowerment at multiple levels so that the buckets that leak while learning English get fixed in the process.

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Interview

Dr Lina Mukhopadhyay in conversation with Professor Rama Mathew

In this interview Professor Rama Mathew, retired from the Department of Education, University of Delhi, shares her views on formative assessment, a challenging yet very crucial dimension of evaluation within education. In her discussion, she includes both, the secondary and tertiary education assessment systems. She further suggests several examples of assessment from which teachers can draw on to capture ‘growth’ of ESL learners.

Lina Mukhopadhyay: Thank you, Professor Rama Mathew, for agreeing to share your views on language assessment for this special issue of *Fortell* on Assessment. What according to you, is assessment and how can it be carried out in class to support learning?

Rama Mathew: The topic is close to my heart and I’m very happy to talk about it. Assessment within the school/college curriculum deals broadly with summative assessment (SA) and formative assessment (FA). SA is assessment of the sum-total of learning in a given year, i.e. the ‘product’ of learning while FA reflects a commitment to understand and support learning during the ‘process’ of learning. SA could also be seen as externally conducted in that the Board/university takes responsibility to conduct a common test(s) across schools/colleges for purposes of comparability and certification. FA falls under the purview of teachers and students. In this sense we can contrast the two modes in terms of the *purpose* of assessment and also in terms of *who* is involved in conducting the assessment.

LM: Formative assessment, more often than not, seems to be imitating the summative assessment format. Do you think that teachers are allowed to design formative assessments independently?

RM: Probably this perception, more common in schools than at the tertiary level, arises because school boards are increasingly ‘fixing’ test formats to such an extent that teachers need to hardly think or work on their own about what to test and how to test; it’s all pre-determined by the board. This probably is because it is believed that teachers are not capable of designing their own assessment tools let alone construct suitable questions/test items.

LM: Is this the reason why we focus a lot on content-based assessment in language classrooms in India?

RM: Content-based assessment, i.e. asking questions on already taught content

(when the content is supposed to be only the means for fine-tuning your language in a language classroom) emanates from a prescribed textbook (PTB) approach. There is no easy escape from content based testing in a PTB system: whenever the prescribed texts (poems, stories, plays etc.) are not overtly tested, it is seen as 'outside' the PTB and is considered a waste of time and resources. I remember, when CBSE implemented the communicative approach and introduced the 'Interact in English' series, the Board desperately resisted too much of outside content in the exam papers. The plea, then, was: how are the weak learners going to pass the exam? And interestingly, even teachers, at least those who did not receive adequate orientation to the approach, saw teaching the 'Main Course Book' as a waste of time, as there were not too many 'direct' questions students could prepare for from the exam point of view. No one saw the value of practicing all the four skills in engaging ways and sharpening their skills in the process, which this book provided ample opportunities for; parents understandably opposed unnecessary emphasis on listening and speaking skills which were not formally tested then. Clearly the high-stakes final exam had a powerful washback on what happened in the classroom.

LM: Making language tests based on the prescribed textbook seems to be the norm. Is it in anyway related to the idea of maintaining uniformity in test formats across schools?

RM: The answer is multifold and is also intertwined: PTBs allow uniformity across schools and define the limits of the syllabus which is otherwise elusive for a teacher. This way teachers are held accountable: exams that are based on a given PTB can be easily seen to be within or outside the syllabus. Further, teachers do not have to select materials on a daily basis for which most of them would not have the necessary skills. We know that critiquing a set of materials, adapting them and using them according to varying student levels and interests is a highly specialized area and needs training. Therefore, PTBs actually serve as shortcuts to the otherwise complex task that every teacher is not ready for. There is also the issue of access to good and authentic materials; not every teacher has the time or the ability to find appropriate materials for the given syllabus. So what we have in essence is a standardised system where 'experts' put together a textbook based on the syllabus and the exam stems out of that and given these two fixed entities, the teacher ensures that students are prepared to answer exam questions so that they score high marks/grades.

LM: What is the role of the teacher in all this preparation – is it only to ensure that students answer questions?

RM: The teacher is merely an assembly line worker and students 'products' that emerge at the end of the assembly line: the more uniform (all high scorers with a few exceptions) they are, the better for the system to justify the whole process. I know I'm presenting a very gloomy picture and not all teachers are assembly-line functionaries. But given that the system is based on an input-output model, there is very little we can do about what happens in the classroom, 'black-box' as it is often called. That explains why we do not interrogate what teachers and students

actually do inside the classroom.

LM: As part of this 'gloomy' scenario are we also not undermining the potential of assessment in addition to treating teachers as 'assembly line workers'?

RM: Assessment often fulfils a *fait-accompli* function. Although it has enormous possibilities to give ample evidence of *where* one is at a given stage, *what* one wants to achieve and *how* one can go *where* they wish to, we seldom exploit it to the full. CCE (Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation) for example, that CBSE introduced (and has now withdrawn) is an example of how something that has a huge potential is under-utilised or even distorted quite often.

LM: How did CCE influence teachers and what kind of tests were they required to create?

RM: For the first time probably the term *formative assessment* became part of teachers' active vocabulary in this scheme and it intended to break away from the typical 'unit test' concept and provided for assessing students' learning continually through not just a paper-pencil test but a variety of methods such as quizzes, assignments, projects, portfolios, pair and group work and so forth. Given the magnitude of operations and the need to maintain some sort of uniformity for purposes of comparability across schools, the Board required every school to follow the scheme of four FAs and two SAs during the two terms in an academic year. The SAs are typically paper-pencil tests with a given break-up for reading, writing and grammar and literature, which is based on a PTB. CBSE also set aside 20 marks for assessing listening and speaking carried out at the school level, for which guidelines and very often actual tasks were provided.

LM: Given this fantastic structure proposed through the concept of CCE, are there no doubts regarding its implementation?

RM: Actually many questions arise in this context: Are teachers using a variety of assessment tools as part of FA? If so, how well are they being designed and used? What skill(s) do they focus on? We know from experience that good assessment requires a lot of training and practice. Are teachers equipped to handle this with a reasonable level of sophistication? Even as they learn on the job, is continuing support provided? The short (3-5 days) training in assessment that some teachers might have received is definitely not adequate. Therefore what appears as a 'modern' scheme, while it is definitely an improvement over the earlier traditional unit-test model, is not achieving its full potential. I don't have any research evidence to claim its efficacy one way or other, but from what teachers report generally, there seems to be a range of 'not satisfactory' to 'quite good' practice that exists. And this seems to depend on whether a given school expects its teachers to follow sound assessment practices or not. I can say one thing with some certainty: I have met many teachers who admit to their 'ignorance' of how FA should be carried out; worse still, they are not aware of what actually FA is all about. The very impressive scheme and the teachers' manual for CCE seem to be just a policy document that outlines everything that is desirable, but what happens in reality is a far cry from what is envisaged.

Having said that, I must now mention that CBSE has withdrawn the CCE scheme and introduced what they call 'Uniform Scheme of Assessment' which does not anymore talk about FA and SA but Periodic Assessment (20%) comprising periodic tests worth 10 marks, note book submission and enrichment activities for 5 marks each. The yearly exam gets a weight of 80 %. I'd call this move regressive, if only to maintain uniformity across 18,000 odd schools across the country.

The situation I described earlier about not entrusting the teacher with any responsibility and supporting him/her with adequate training is now further strengthened. The entire concern seems to be about making report cards comparable across schools for easy mobility of children from one school/state to another. I'm quite concerned that other states will now whole-heartedly or half-heartedly follow this pattern.

LM: Let me move to a slightly different but related area now. What about the assessment systems in colleges and universities in India? Are there similar problems to what we face at the school level?

RM: It is actually a different story with college / University teachers. There are in my view two types available: one, a very traditional category where 'old type' paper-pencil tests are used that usually test knowledge and understanding of prescribed texts and some 'stock' essay/paragraph questions peppered with some discrete grammar and vocabulary items. The more recent or new ones are those that try to make it as communicatively oriented as possible; this is available in some more recently set up progressive universities or engineering colleges/universities where students are assessed on reading, writing, vocabulary and grammar items. To what extent such tests manage to test students' ability in those skills they claim to, varies from one situation to another. It can vary from *not at all/hardly* to *quite well* on a validity or effectiveness scale.

LM: So does that mean that in the more progressive universities listening and speaking also get assessed, given that they are an integral part of everyday communication?

RM: Almost invariably students are not tested on speaking and listening skills in a formal way as they are tested on reading and writing skills in a test-situation. However, they are assessed on these skills especially in the more progressive contexts in a seminar mode through PPTs, group presentations, and so forth. This then is tested internally, by their teachers and usually counts towards their final grade. The English proficiency courses offered to undergraduate students at Ambedkar University, Delhi is an example.

LM: Can we say that these communicative modes of assessment help teachers capture 'growth' in learning the second language?

RM: Well, I would say that teachers can see 'growth' in students' performance if they wish to. Because put simply, whatever the criteria for assessment, if student X is making progress from assessment 1 to 2 to 3, then it is clearly visible in terms of marks or grades. Also teachers have a good sense of how their students are doing,

through their observations and interactions with students. But very often, this goes unrecorded or unacknowledged. It's even better if their performance is described qualitatively: Did the student(s) make fewer grammatical errors, or was their presentation more coherent? In what way? Did it have a more effective introduction and conclusion and so forth. One can clearly see a progression, in the context of the criteria used. More importantly this change in their performance should be perceptible to students, provided we decide to involve them in the assessment design and process, i.e. what tasks to use, what criteria and the assessing process itself.

LM: Can you give us some more examples of formative assessment you have used in your courses?

RM: I would like to share my experience of teaching the course on Evaluation at the B.Ed. level and also the course on Qualitative Research Methods to M.Phil and Ph.D. scholars at CIE (Delhi University) where I worked. With B.Ed. students, we spent the beginning several hours examining critically what assessment practices they had been subjected to as students, both in school and college. This provided the basis for thinking of and practicing 'new' approaches such as portfolios, open book exams, writing as a process, etc. What made the course effective was that they, as students, experienced first-hand all the 'new' approaches that we were learning about, to be used with their students later on.

LM: Give us some more details of how the students were supported.

RM: On the research methodology course, the M.Phil and Ph.D. scholars worked in teams of 2-3 on a small research study, and wrote it up with continuous support from each other and me, the tutor, and learnt about researching, collaboration, academic writing which involved 2-3 drafts with peer- feedback and all of that. Peer review involved looking for a good introduction and a conclusion, coherence, hedging, the rationale for headings and subheadings, the language used and other features that they found relevant. By the end of the entire process, they produced a 'paper' that in 50 % of the cases could be considered for publication. They found the writing part quite tough but enjoyable as they could see progress towards a full-fledged paper. Peer-review, editing, giving and receiving feedback and doing at least 3 drafts were all required for a satisfactory grade for this assignment. That was the only way I could ensure everyone went through the process to understand what academic writing involved. During the final 'test' they critiqued their own assignment from the early stages to the end and graded themselves on it. I couldn't have taught a course on Academic Writing without the mini-research study providing the base. On the whole it was very satisfying and a huge learning experience for all of us.

LM: You must have guided quite a few doctoral dissertations on assessment. Does any example come to your mind where growth is systematically captured and reported?

RM: Nupur Samuel from the University of Delhi did a research study that involved young adults in learning to write. Students refined a set of criteria for assessing

writing tasks and in fact it was when they understood what those criteria actually meant did they start making improvement. Of course the research study was set up in such a way that it enabled involvement of students gradually and empowered them to take responsibility for their learning.

LM: You have told us a lot about assessment at the school and college level, and also a little bit about research that you have guided in the area. Can I take you back to formative assessment and link that with training? Would you say that teachers can practise formative assessment only if they are trained?

RM: Assessment is all about practice: a good scheme can only go up to a point. Whether teachers who have to concretise it in live classroom contexts are equipped to handle it, including self/peer-assessment and how they feed the evidence back to their future teaching work to improve learning are all easily said than practised. Therefore, FA which is the teacher's responsibility is much more complex and demanding than SA which can be externally designed and managed. For this to happen the single most important component is training in assessment. We know that training programmes that offer courses or modules on classroom methodology seldom have a full module on assessment. CIEFL (EFL University now) where I worked for several years, had a course on assessment as an optional course that teachers could opt out of. But a teacher is by default an assessor and can't opt out of it. Even the most famous B.Ed. programme had the course on Evaluation as an elective and now on the two-year programme I understand it has half the weight of a methodology course. But why? What is the rationale? My colleague who teaches courses on assessment at the Central institute of Education in Delhi University remarked quite seriously: 'Where is the need for teachers to learn about assessment? Anyway students have to pass!' We have trivialised this field so much that we will have to work quite hard to redeem it.

LM: I agree that it has been trivialised. Any way out of this problem?

RM: We will need to professionalise assessment in a way we have not done so far. We will need to spend our time, effort and money on assessment training. When we shy away from it, the results are dangerous and harm the education system totally. A last comment on this issue: at the tertiary level, no training of any sort exists and we can imagine how teachers stumble and learn things on the job. A recent thesis on how college teachers conceptualise learning and assessment throws light on many of these issues (see Violet Macwan's thesis from Delhi University).

LM: Undoubtedly formative assessment design and practice is challenging. What are your suggestions for teachers?

RM: First of all as I said earlier, teachers need one thing for which there is no substitute or short cut possible i.e. training in assessment. While it doesn't have to be face to face for a given number of days, it will have to be a planned, structured and a hands-on programme where teachers can together read about, discuss, design and construct assessments for different levels of learners. There are many MOOCs available, for example: Designing Assessments to Measure Student Outcomes (<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/assessments-student-outcomes>). Teachers in

a school or college can form a friendly group and decide what they want to learn in assessment: is it about how they can monitor student progress in the classroom; or developing test items to assess different skills, i.e. listening, reading, writing and speaking; or developing appropriate criteria for marking productive skills, i.e. speaking and writing? The area is pretty large and one has to go about it in small steps. A very important dimension about teachers making such efforts together is that they can try out new ideas in their classroom and share their experience with others and this way engage in action research. I would like to re-emphasise that assessment is all about practice. All the theoretical concepts come alive in practice; knowing 'theory' will not automatically ensure quality assessment.

LM: Do learners have a role in formative assessment as well?

RM: Yes, a crucial dimension is to involve learners. When you ask them about what kind of assessments they like, and how they would like to be assessed, you will be amazed at how much they know and how well they can assess themselves or their peers; of course you will need to monitor them unobtrusively and guide them as they progress. We often feel that when we leave assessment to students, they might cheat or inflate their marks or they don't know enough to be able to assess which is in fact the teacher's job. Some of it might even be true, but when you create an atmosphere of mutual trust and bonhomie, part of what we call 'learner-centred pedagogy', you will see that children of all age groups can be ethical, trustworthy, and honest and more importantly competent. In one study that I carried out long ago, I found that students of Grade 9 were more 'critical' of their writing than me and they always gave themselves at least one score less than what I did.

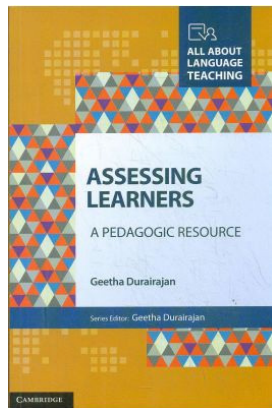
LM: If teachers decide to get help from assessment experts in training, will that help?

RM: I'd say that when teachers get together and decide how they might want to go about training themselves, they might want an assessment 'expert' to guide or mentor them: it's always possible to call them in, but be very sure of what you want them to do and at what stage of your group's work you want their inputs. Given a chance, experts will give you good lectures on how to do credible assessment but it is seldom useful for actual work. And these days 'experts' are available with a click on the mouse – there is so much help available in the form of youtubes, TED talks, PPTs and articles that we just need to spend some time on the computer. But one thing – I've found that it's fun to learn together and share.

LM: Many thanks, Professor Mathew for sparing your valuable time for this interaction and sharing your thoughts and suggestions on this significant area of assessment.

Dr. Lina Mukhopadhyay, an Associate Professor in the Department of Training and Development, The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, has taught, researched, and held workshops in the area of language assessment. She can be reached at linamukhoapdhyay@efluniversity.ac.in

Professor Rama Mathew can be contacted for any questions/comments at ramamathew@yahoo.co.in



Assessing learners: A pedagogic resource

Durairajan, Geetha (2015)

New Delhi: Cambridge University Press.

(Pages 114) ISBN 978-1-107-54328-7 (Paperback)
₹130.00

Reviewed by Kalyanee Rajan

Geetha Durairajan brings together several decades of research and scholarship in the areas of evaluation and materials development in her latest book entitled *Assessing Learners: A Pedagogic Resource*. The book is aimed at not just English Language teachers, but also other teachers who use English as a medium of instruction. The epigraph to the book contains a pertinent and pivotal quote in Tamil, written by Vazhikatti, laying the roadmap and emphasizing the crucial role of a teacher who needs to strike a balance between reward and punishment, and the significance of evaluation. "... To decide whether feedback should be/the stick that raps or the hand that guides".

The book is part of a series called *All About Language Teaching*, which aims to fill the gap for teachers who have limited or no access to in-service or online courses. The books in this series are designed to be authentic "self-help books", as each book has an easy-to-grasp conversational style, garnished with a number of practical examples. In an average Indian classroom, most teachers tend to fall back on traditional methods of summative evaluation, with a very low degree or complete absence of constructive feedback to the students. In *Assessing Learners*, Durairajan, who is also the series editor, offers reasonable solutions to fruitfully traverse the perpetually tricky fields of testing and assessment.

Divided into nine chapters, the book specifically addresses significant concerns of testing and evaluation at various levels of learning. The first chapter titled "Evaluation Outside Formal Education" covers aspects such as evaluation implied in likes and dislikes, judgmental evaluation of others and evaluation that enables learning. This is followed by a section titled "Something to think about/do", which is common across all chapters. This chapter assumes added significance by virtue of the fact that it clarifies the very notion of evaluation and situates the term in its broader context in the real world, even outside the classroom. Peppered with amusing illustrations which accompany apt examples, the jargon-free language of the book is a refreshing feature, meant to make the average teacher comfortable about using the book to enhance their knowledge and testing methods. The activities/questions suggested in the "Something to think about/do" section stand out as they encourage associations with everyday life and act as gentle prompts to explore the various aspects of effective learning.

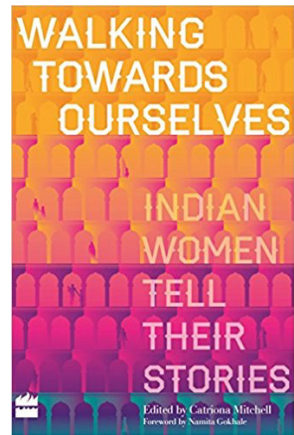
The third chapter titled "Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation" delves into an area generally viewed with suspicion and disinterest by the average teacher, perhaps owing to little or no familiarity with proper and simple methods to administer and record CCE. Apart from explicating the scope and methodology of CCE, Durairajan manages to demystify the role and applicability of CCE in various contexts. Chapter five onwards, the book moves into more practical aspects of testing and evaluation. Talking about the "Purposes and Types of Tests" in chapter five, Durairajan liberally shares examples from other subjects such as geography, mathematics and history to illustrate the different types of tests—diagnostic, achievement, proficiency, entrance and placement. The seventh chapter titled "Evaluating Student Progress Using Tests and Examinations" reiterates the necessity to create balanced tests by striking just the right balance between different areas that have been taught, keeping in view the varying levels of difficulty. Dealing with the setting, administration and evaluation of public and school-level examinations in particular, this chapter explores the finer nuances and methodology of testing in these cases.

The last two chapters seek to negotiate perhaps the two most ambitious areas of evaluation—"Qualities of a Good Test: Validity, Reliability and Practicality" and "Alternative Assessment Possibilities". In the current context of an average Indian classroom, where the actual teaching time is shrinking, where a greater emphasis is laid upon industry exposure and co-curricular activities, the question paper becomes a site of contestation if it is unable to strike the right note with respect to the difficulty level. A case in point is the extensive media coverage given to the question papers administered at the class X, XII and undergraduate levels in which the headlines in mainstream dailies report news such as "students unhappy with the (subject) paper". It is clear that the focus seems to have decisively shifted from testing effective learning to mere "doability", for want of a better word, of the question paper, and how "scoring" the paper is!

In the final chapter, Durairajan suggests more meaningful modes of alternative assessment such as short presentations and seminars, open book tests/examinations, assignments and projects, portfolios and peer-assessment as the way forward. According to her, this would not only reduce stress with regards to the high stakes, end of term summative assessment, but also offer a more creative and interesting way of keeping both the learner and the teacher engaged in improving the quality of the teaching-learning process. "Assessing Learners", with its attractive yet simple layout, interesting illustrations, and easy-to-understand conversational style deserves kudos for bringing home and demystifying vital aspects of testing and evaluation.

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Walking towards ourselves: Indian women tell their stories

Mitchell, Catrina (Ed.) (2016)

New Delhi: Harpercollins Publishers (266 pages) ISBN 978-93-5177-792-2 ₹399.00

Reviewed by C. Nisha Singh

Experiential narratives have basic authenticity about them and hence have greater potential to engage the reader. *Walking Towards Self* has in addition, the

foregrounding of a plethora of questions and innumerable contrasting realities that make answers more complex, unavoidable social issues that evolve out of gender, class, caste and generational gaps. Each narrative is a personal account and yet it engages with a different subtext involving Indian women. The writer's subjectivity blends with contextual realities, to cross check her commitments, beliefs and angst.

Although *Walking Towards Ourselves* is an anthology of autobiographical narratives based on the real, lived experiences of educated, urban Indian women; it is not pitched against any paradigm or model, feminist or otherwise. It is simply a compilation of individual voices of 18 women writers, aesthetes and intellectuals, whose radicalism generates collective consciousness and perhaps, consciously avoids the feminist tag. Catriona Mitchell has put together the voices of writers, film stars, judges, journalists and publishers, most of who are very articulate and highly educated. Some of them represent marginalized communities and religious minorities. They write either in English or in their own vernaculars, but they already have powerful literary identities.

The narratives are short and therefore only touch upon the subject; but in that short space they develop hard hitting explorations of Indian woman in all possible predicaments, with glaring vignettes of societal taboos, prejudices and gender discrimination. Although spatially short, the narratives represent temporally vast landscapes of regional, geographical Indian realities. These women tell their stories to abandon the myths that imprison them and to unload the flesh and bone individuals on their own terms.

The contributors have written on issues such as love, sexuality, sexual exploitation, taboos, marriage, motherhood, literacy, career choices and definitions of what constitutes success. Leila Seth, the first woman judge in the Delhi High Court and the first Chief justice of a State High Court, speaks poignantly from personal experience of the common expectation from women to carry the guilt and shame of what others do to her. "I kept silent"—every girl is indoctrinated to observe silence

for the perpetrator and the violator is often a member of the family. He could be an uncle or a cousin and the family reputation cannot be jeopardized. As a member of the three-member anti-rape commission constituted by the Government after the brutal Nirbhaya case, Leila Seth highlights two things—the need "to build a more equal society", and "the importance of sex education in schools". It must be noted that the Nirbhaya case became the catalyst that kindled "India's gender revolution" and "provided the impetus for this book" (Catriona Mitchell).

In "Rearranged Marriages" Ira Trivedi focuses on the well-organized commercial market of arranged marriages, where the most highly rated virtue in a woman is her fair skin. Rosalyn D'Mell gives a shocking account of life when dark skin fragments one's sense of self-worth and desirability. "I hated wearing my skin like a cloak of shame." She declares decisively and confidently "my body will continue to be my instrument, my blackness my deliverance, my skin my muse."

Tishani Joshi debunks motherhood in "Tick Tock". "I had an epiphany about children", she says mockingly and comments, "'Actually babies are not for me' is to unleash a minor tsunami.'" So deeply entrenched is a woman's life in motherhood.

However, although motherhood is restrictive, mothers are companions, friends and guides. Urvashi Butalia recalls the powerfully positive influence of her mother and her definite impact on her in a battle to empower women and to fight for their rights in a subversive society. Nirupama Dutt contrasts the life of her sister with her own in a changing time span, and rues the rigidity and hostility that her sister had to endure.

In an extremely blunt and explicit description, a writer under anonymity exposes the irony of domestic rape: "the man who rapes me is not a stranger.... He is the husband for whom I have to make the morning coffee." Tamil writer Salma (pseudonym) interrogates society on the ambiguity of its so-called reforms. A Muslim poet and novelist Salma had to hide her books and her writings from her husband in order to save her skin. Has anything changed since the times of Rassundari Debi, the first Bengali housewife to write her autobiography in 19th century Bengal, who hid little scraps of paper in the loft of her kitchen lest she be thrown out; or since Mary Ann Evans in Victorian Britain, who had no choice but to take a male name, George Eliot, in order to get published! Therefore, acts of speaking up and those that demonstrate courage, as and when women do so, are momentous and crucial.

Women are trying to claim their "own voice" and are beginning a new gender revolution through education, economic self-reliance or brash bohemian choices, as does Mitali Saran in "Square peg, Round Hole". She ends her article on a positive note: "...the impulse to freedom and self-expression is as fundamentally human as the impulse to live with social acceptance. And women are fighters."

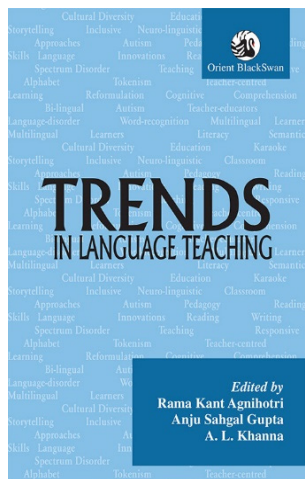
Walking Towards Ourselves is a strong indictment of a judgemental society, its conflicting moral codes and the calculated lasciviousness of the male eye that uses

rape as a tool to preserve male dominance in power equations. At the same time, it takes into account society's intense diversity and upheavals and the new vistas, says Deepti Kapoor in "Life was Loosening in the Cities". There is a new gender fluidity and freshness in the air. Women may exercise choices and enjoy sexual liberty, professional equality and safety in spaces. According to Mital Saran, "The conversation has begun". Turbulence promises freedom; patriarchal structures can be overturned. The questioning remains within the confines of overall social sensitivity. The pieces explore what it means for a woman through multiple perspectives.

Walking Towards Ourselves, must be introduced in classrooms, either as a whole or in parts. Each text is a complete book in itself. Some of the narratives will make excellent reading texts in upper middle/senior/undergraduate level classrooms to introduce discussions around gender discrimination and Indian women's efforts to survive against the unfathomable Indian ethos. Red and yellow—the bright hues of sunshine and fire used on the cover page reflect the tone of the book. The brief sketches of the authors at the end serve as an introduction to 18 women writers who have a strong place in their own languages; and their mini self-notes are a good entry point into contemporary Indian literature.

Chandra Nisha Singh has retired as Associate Professor of English from Lakshmi Bai College, University of Delhi. Her research interests are gender and disability issues. She has served as O.S.D. for Delhi University's Equal Opportunity Cell for about 4 years.

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Trends in language teaching

Agnihotri, Ramakant, Gupta, Anju Sahgal & Khanna, A.L. (Eds.). (2017)

New Delhi: Orient Blackswan (240 pages). ISBN 10: [938629687X](#) ISBN 13: 9789386296870 ₹450.00

Reviewed by Nupur Samuel

What does it mean to teach and learn a language? How can we make languages more accessible to our learners and how do we cope with the challenges of the changing world? How do we reach out to all learners, irrespective of their background, abilities or challenges and home languages? These questions continue to engage academia and researchers all around the globe. In our endeavour to reach out to the most marginalized groups, to enable all those who have been confined to the periphery of the mainstream, we continue to try and make sense of the trends that influence

the field of language teaching. *Trends in Language Teaching* edited by Agnihotri, Seghal Gupta and Khanna (2017), is one such attempt to capture the latest trends in language education. This book is the latest addition to a series of books on similar topics by this team of experienced experts who have devoted their life to the teaching of languages. New research, new approaches and the ever-changing structure of our society has prompted them to look anew at what is happening in classrooms and how pedagogy is changing to adapt to the needs of the learners.

The editors clearly state they have deliberately kept away from dividing the book into sections because they believe "there is a kind of seamlessness between theory and practice" (p. 11). This movement away from conforming to old, archaic boundaries is also visible in the majority of the 14 chapters which discuss how multilingualism and cultural diversity are more normal than have been thought of previously. New, innovative techniques for the teaching of languages include bringing in food (Bhattacharya) and languages of the learners into the classroom (Heugh, Saxena, Kumar & Jayaram); rethinking techniques for teaching reading, writing and grammar (Jayaram, Lukmani & Samal; Kohli); making the classroom a truly inclusive place where everyone learns at their own pace (Kumar, S., Vaidya & Barua); learning fun with karaoke (Punjabi & Lukmani) and storytelling (Ray). The only area that has escaped the attention of the authors and editors is assessment, but probably that was beyond the scope of this book. The chapters celebrate the unique individuality and diversity of the learners, making sure that all discussions centre around the learners. The editors acknowledge the linguistic, cultural and geographical diversity in the classroom and make it inclusive by bringing together learners with diverse challenges and strengths, while using innovative technology to appeal to the modern-day learner.

The collection of essays is written in a clear, lucid style, free from jargon that may intimidate the practitioner and stop him/her from adopting the techniques or methods suggested by the authors. Each essay reflects the real-life experiences of the authors as the examples have been drawn from the classroom and illustrations and appendices have been supplied to help illustrate a particular point. These may act as reference points for teachers planning to adopt/adapt the ideas as they act only as indicators of what might be done in the classroom. The easy prose, without being didactic, encourages the reader to consider how they might use these suggestions/ideas in their classrooms. Since it deals with the latest trends and approaches in language teaching, this book is very relevant today. It is also very handy, has a reader-friendly font and is reasonably priced, making it a useful addition to one's collection on language teaching.

Nupur Samuel is interested in assessment of English language skills, teacher training and English language teaching. She has a Ph.D. in Education from the Department of Education, University of Delhi. She teaches English language at Ambedkar University, Delhi. She holds workshops for teachers and students, and also develops teaching-learning materials and tests.

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LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES

Nivedita Bedadur

QUESTION FORMATION IN ENGLISH

Game 1: Find Your Partner

Objective: To practice asking questions and answering

Level: Grades V to VII

Materials: rectangular slips of paper big enough to write a question or an answer

Time needed: 1 hour

- Procedure:**
- Step 1. The facilitator prepares many slips each containing either a question or an answer and distributes them randomly to children.
 - Step 2. Children move around the classroom with their slips and try to find their partners; they have to match the question on their slip with the answer and vice versa.
 - Step 3. The game comes to an end when all the questions find their answers, i.e. all the children have paired up.
 - Step 4. Each pair reads out their question and answer, and then asks one more question.
 - Step 5. The facilitator simultaneously writes the questions and answers on the board and invites the children to deduce the rules of question formation from the data on the board.
 - Step 6. The children write down the rules that they have deduced.

Game 2: Twenty Questions

Objective: To practice “yes/no” questions in a meaningful situation

Level: V to VIII

Materials: Enough sheets of paper with photographs of well-known personalities printed on them, safety pins for the participants

Time: 1 hour

- Procedure**
- Step 1. The facilitator pins the photographs to the backs of the children. The child cannot see the photograph pinned on his/her back but can see the photographs on others’ backs. The task is to guess the name of the personality whose photograph is pinned on your back by asking questions

from other children.

- Step 2. The children have to move around the classroom asking “yes/no” questions and from whosoever they meet. For example: Am I a man or woman? Am I living or dead ?
- Step 3. The facilitator has to write down the “yes/no” questions that the children are asking on the board (as many as possible).
- Step 4. After all the participants have guessed their identity, the facilitator will ask everybody to sit down and read the “yes/no” questions written on the board.
- Step 5. The facilitator has to ask the children to deduce the rules for “yes/no” questions in English. This discussion can be extended to a comparison of rules for question formation in other languages.

Game 3: Stop That Story

Objective: To practice “wh” questions in a meaningful situation

Level: V to VIII

Materials: Four slips with four different unconnected phrases or words

- Procedure**
- Step 1. (For four groups) The facilitator prepares four slips with four phrases for writing a story. The phrases should be unconnected with each other so that it is challenging to put them in a story.
 - Step 2. The facilitator gives one slip to each group.
 - Step 3. All four groups have to create a story using all four phrases on their slip.
 - Step 4. The facilitator gives the following instructions to the groups:
 - Each group has to use all the phrases in the story.
 - Each group gets five minutes in which to tell the story.
 - As one group begins the narration, another group tries to stop the narration by asking “wh” questions. For example: Why was he named Raju?; Where did he go?; What did he do?, etc.
 - The group that is narrating the story has to answer the questions and continue the story making sure that they use all the phrases in the narration.

Step 5. Each group gets to tell their story in turns. The facilitator writes down as many questions as possible on the board.

Step 6. After all the groups have narrated their stories, the facilitator asks them to examine the data on the board and deduce the rules for the formation of “wh” questions. The rules are then discussed and refined.

Debrief: The purpose of these games was to help teachers understand how to teach grammar in a non-abrasive and fun manner. Moreover, teachers need to know how to support the development of grammatical awareness. Teachers also need to understand how to develop processes for deducing the rules of grammar.

Game 4: A Survey on Cartoon Viewing

Objective: Assessment of questioning

Level: VI to VIII

Materials: paper, pens

Procedure

Step 1. Ensure that students have a background knowledge of a survey and pie charts or bar diagrams.

Step 2. Divide the class into groups of five.

Step 3. Ask each group to write five “yes/no” questions and five “wh” questions to gather the following information:

- How many cartoon films or TV programs do children watch?
- Which is their favourite program?

Step 4. Once the questions are ready, the facilitator goes around and checks whether the questions are correct and asks each child in the group if he/she would like to add any more questions.

Step 5. Once this is done, the facilitator explains how to prepare a four to five-point scale questionnaire using yes, no, always, sometimes, never, etc.

Step 6. The groups collect the information from 20 students, i.e. ask the questions and mark the rating scale.

Step 7. The groups come back to class, and discuss and share their experiences with the whole class.

Step 8. The groups prepare a report with the questions and a summary of the answers. They also draw a pie chart or bar chart to enhance the summary.

Debrief The students and facilitator discuss the different forms of questions used in the survey. The grammar of questions and its relationship with meaning is discussed. Look at the following “yes/no” questions:

- Are you driving down?
- Do you eat a heavy breakfast?
- Have you a pen?

What is the structure of the questions? How are they formed? Let the students make deductions regarding the form and structure of the questions.

Auxiliary + N + V + complement

Do + N + V + object/complement

V + N + object

What is the general structure of a “yes/no” question? What is the structure of a “wh” question? Ask the students to infer from the data they have generated and arrive at a conclusion.

Outcome

- The students are able to use “yes/no” and “wh” questions in daily conversations, and for special purposes.
- The students have a fair idea of the rules of question formation.

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Le gràdh à Glaschuv (With love from Glasgow)

Kirti Kapur

I represented Fortell India, an associate of IATEFL, at the 51st IATEFL Conference held in Glasgow, Scotland from 3 to 7 April 2017. The representatives of associates from across the world congregated on 3 April for Associates' Day, to interact and network with their global counterparts.

The day began with a warm welcome by Lou McLaughlin, IATEFL associates' Chair. This was followed by a presentation of the report for the year 2016-2017 highlighting the role of project awards. Set up in 2014, IATEFL Projects offers grants of up to £ 3,000 to one teaching association every year. The grants have to be used to finance a project that will result in an improvement in language teaching and learning in the local community and give an opportunity to less experienced teachers to take on an active role. Besides this, the project conducts two workshops for a minimum of 40 teachers in blended sessions (online and face-to-face). Attending associates were also encouraged to apply for these awards. IATEFL online events were highlighted and members were asked to motivate other members to participate. In the afternoon session, the representatives displayed their posters, materials, etc., and engaged in an interactive discussion. Many representatives evinced a keen interest in getting their article published in the journal *Fortell*. In the evening, there was a presentation on the Hornby scholarship. The day came to a close with the vote of thanks.

During the conference, each representative of the member associations under the IATEFL umbrella was given a dedicated slot to interact with participants at the conference and the wider audience. These sessions were held in the Exhibition Section of the conference. Fortell India was allocated a dedicated slot on 05 April from 10:15 a.m. to 12:20 p.m. Attendees were very keen to learn about ELT in India and how Fortell contributes to the professional and academic development of its members. There were several inquiries about membership to Fortell and the journal was also widely appreciated. It was indeed a proud moment for me as the ambassador for Fortell India.

The conference provided a space for exchange of ideas, approaches and strategies. It was enriching to learn from my peer's experiences and also to share perspectives from India. As always, coming from a multi-lingual country with many "Englishes" enables one to connect with and appreciate diverse cultural nuances. At the conference, I learnt some new and interesting things about the Gaelic language too. I was pleased to see signage in Gaelic and English on my way to the conference and back and was reminded of real life examples being incorporated in task based activities back home. While conversing with Les Kirkham, former chair, I had the opportunity to learn that Highland Scottish Gaelic is distinct from the Lowlands'

old English. At present, the Scots English—also known as "Lallans"—spoken in the Lowlands is closer to the original English than the English spoken in England. Before the 15th century, these dialects were known as *Inglis* (English) by its own speakers, with Gaelic being called *Scottis* (Scottish). Today, Scottish Gaelic is recognized as a separate language from Irish Gaelic. Scottish Gaelic co-existed with English for a long time in Scotland, and bilingualism was common during a certain period of history. I found the Scots people to be very polite and welcoming. Their understanding of socio-political history and its impact on education and society was inspiring.

The conference had a wonderful air of camaraderie and passionate engagement with ELT. Practitioners' concerns about incorporating cultural history and local contexts in the teaching and learning spaces were shared across the board. It was stimulating to see the range of work and the strategies adopted by the co-participants towards enhancing learner abilities. Colleagues from Scotland, Ireland, England, Romania, Spain, Japan, Korea, Egypt, Nepal, Pakistan, China, Saudi Arabia and Mexico also stopped by the Fortell display area and discussed ideas and local initiatives. I spoke at a forum on the topic "Listening effectively: Teaching and Learning Through Task Based Activities" and enjoyed interacting with the audiences afterwards. The Scottish saying "Learn young, learn fair; learn old, learn more", could not have been more apt!

Kirti Kapur, Professor of English at NCERT, India, has 29 years of teaching experience in the areas of English Language and Literature. Kirti is a recipient of the Ray Tongue scholarship awarded by IATEFL and the TESOL award for Professional Development. Her expertise lies in curriculum and syllabi design, textbook development, teacher training and research consultancy.

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A Report on the 3rd National Interdisciplinary Conference "Reading Migrations: Fractured Histories, Forged Narratives" at Maharaja Agrasen College, University of Delhi

Anupama Jaidev and Guntasha Tulsi

The department of English at Maharaja Agrasen College hosted its 3rd National Interdisciplinary Conference "Reading Migrations: Fractured Histories, Forged Narratives" on 20-21 March 2017. The accent of the conference was on the complex and myriad narratives of migrations and migrants. Professor Saugata Bhaduri, the Guest Speaker for the Inaugural Session, offered intriguing insights into the linkages between migration and the mandate of literature. His presentation "Migratory Bards: Of Narration and Itineration", traced etymological roots of words such as "sahitya" and illustrated how unlike "sa-hitya" which is suggestive of peace and harmony, literature is born from conflict. Professor Kalpana Sahni in her

plenary talk “Home and Away”, chaired by Professor Simi Malhotra, interrogated the representation and ethos of a migrant. She also deliberated about the constant intermingling of populations, languages and cultures.

The special session “Writers Speak” had three writers Professor Sukrita Paul Kumar, Professor T. N. Dhar and Mr Tenzin Tsundue, who talked about creativity, exile, and belonging. Tenzin Tsundue narrated his experience of being a Tibetan refugee in India and about the movement “Free Tibet”. He also recited some of his poems on related themes. Professor T. N. Dhar, in his talk titled “I am a Migrant” spoke of his experience as an ousted Kashmiri pandit, and also of the predicament of the community in general. Professor Sukrita Paul Kumar read out some poems in which migration was explored as a metaphor for modern predicament. Dr. Punita G. Singh and Dr. Nidhi Trehan explored the notions of identity and persecution with regard to the travails of the historically dispossessed Roma people in the session “The Roma Question”. Dr. Mujibur Rehman, in his presentation, talked of the implications of the majoritarian politics of the diaspora.

Day 2 of the conference began with Professor Harish Trivedi’s keynote address on “Reading Beyond English: Migration, Translation, and Languages”. Professor Chandra Mohan chaired the session. Professor Trivedi questioned the much ado about the relatively small subsections of communities that migrate, stressing that “migration” per se is not a crucial factor within the subcontinent. He then focused on the often ignored creative output by diasporic writers, who write in their own languages instead of the language of the adopted country. Professor Rana Nayar in his plenary talk titled “Post-colonial *Katha*: Continuities and Ruptures in *Videshi* Punjabi fiction” highlighted the pre and post-colonial flux in Punjab, and the specificities of the Punjabi short story by writers of the diaspora. This session was chaired by Professor H. C. Narang. Brati Biswas in her presentation focused on the plight of the Bangla Dalit refugee and the ministrations of the state. Indira Prasad talked about the *Bidesia* tradition of performance in Bhojpuri folk theatre with special reference to the work of Bhikhari Thakur. Madhuri Chawla spoke of the construction of the diasporic self in Punjabi diaspora literature. Gitanjali Chawla presented her views on “Bhangra Rap” as a hybrid form of music evolved by South Asian immigrants. Monica Zutshi in her presentation focused on the distress of Afghan refugees as played out in Khaled Hosseini’s *And the Mountain Echoed*. Aishwarya Babu looked at the representation of Afghan diaspora in Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner*. Abhinaba Chatterjee talked about re-evaluating the idea of the diaspora in the context of contemporary migration literature. Giraj M. Sharma spoke of the shifting dynamics of the city as a space to be claimed and reclaimed. Charu Arya’s presentation dealt with the migration from Libya to Italy. Indrani Das Gupta pitched the idea of science as “diaspora-ization” in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Calcutta Chromosome*. Debosmita Paul deliberated on the Bengali identity in the wake of the Partition of Bengal and subsequent migrations.

The final session, chaired by Dr. Tapan Basu, had an interactive performative

presentation by social activist and theatre person Jaya Iyer and the world renowned magician from Kathputli colony, Ishamuddin Khan. Jaya dealt with issues of stereotyping and social construction, while Ishamuddin threw light on the desperate plight of the traditional performing communities in India. Professor Vijaya Ramaswamy delivered the valedictory address titled “Mobility, Migration, Memories: Some Reflections”. Dr. Diamond Oberoi chaired the session. She explored the relationship between migration and oral traditions, and the syncretic, shared spaces inhabited by people/communities.

Anupama Jaidev is Assistant professor of English at Maharaja Agrasen College. She holds a Ph.D. in English Literature from University of Delhi. Her areas of interest are Romani studies, narratives of the emergency, tribal narratives and migration studies.

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Guntasha Tulsii has done her doctoral studies from the Centre of English Studies, JNU. She has also completed a Post Graduate Certificate in ELT from EFLU, Hyderabad. She is currently an Assistant Professor at Maharaja Agrasen College with several research papers, books and national and international conferences to her credit.

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Report on the National Conference on English Language Teaching-Learning in Rural Areas and English as Medium of Instruction at NCERT

Zareena J M and Vikas Kadam

The four-day national conference (20 to 23 March 2017) that was organised by the Department of Education in Languages, NCERT, New Delhi, focused on two major themes: “Teaching English in Rural Areas” and “English as a Medium of Instruction”. It was attended by a wide range of delegates, from schoolteachers, to administrators, curriculum planners, materials designers, educationists and research scholars from across the country. For us as budding researchers, the four-day period was an amazing learning and awareness raising experience. We got a chance to discuss, understand and internalize the practical problems related to English language education not only through the discussions during the conference, but also from our long chats over lunch, at the dinner table and our post dinner late night walks.

The conference began with an overview of the programme by the conference coordinators, Dr. R. Meghanathan and Dr. Meenakshi Khar, followed by the inaugural address by Professor Hrushikesh Senapaty, Director, NCERT. Professor Senapaty spoke about the hegemony of English over Indian languages and hoped that the deliberations of the conference would guide future policy making by triggering a critical discourse on these issues. The key note address was delivered by

Professor Amritavalli, formerly Professor of Linguistics at the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. Interestingly, she made her talk interactive and responded to questions from the audience triggered by the data that she presented. She argued that a learner's non-success in learning English that fulfils curricular objectives may be because of systemic failures and not individual incapacities or social demands, as English is still a second or even a foreign language for many school children. The systemic failure was the inability to see language learning as a process and mistakes as stepping stones. She further suggested that the English performance of Grade X school children should not impact their final certificate. She asserted that premature emphasis on accuracy led to examination oriented practices, resulting in a complete absence of language learning experiences. The system therefore should create learning opportunities where English does not function as a gatekeeper. Most importantly, she asserted that English as a subject is as important as Mathematics or Science, and each child in India has a right to get exposed to all the opportunities that English has to offer.

There were two plenaries in the conference. In the first plenary session, the speaker Ms. Amy Lightfoot (Assistant Director-English Partnerships, Academic Quality Assurance, British Council, India) spoke about the issues related to English medium instruction in India and the problems associated with it. She argued that English may be the language of opportunities, but Indian languages could not be abandoned for that would affect the quality of education. In the second plenary, the speaker Professor Anju Seghal Gupta, Head, School of Foreign Languages, IGNOU, New Delhi, spoke about the issues related to disadvantaged learners and English. She specifically spoke about the lack of opportunities in English language education, and said that these were not specific to any geographical location, caste or religion, although certain groups of people from rural areas remained noticeably underprivileged. Both sessions resulted in an interesting exchange of ideas.

The speakers presented papers on a range of topics, which carried a mix of theoretical articulations and reflections based on their practical experiences from across the country. The papers focused primarily on the problems of English/bilingual medium instruction, teaching English to rural and other underprivileged learners and pedagogical and assessment practices.

On day two and day three, the sessions were preceded by workshops. The first workshop run by Dr. R. Meganathan, was on "Classroom Research and Ethnography of Schooling". Beginning with an orientation, Dr. Meganathan demonstrated how to select a topic and decide the appropriate research approach for it. The second workshop, was run by Dr. M. V. Srinivasan, who guided the teacher-researchers on "Doing Ethnography in the School Context". He shared his experiences as an ethnographer and talked about the problems he had faced during data collection. His sharing of actual field notes was the highlight of this workshop.

The valedictory address was delivered by Dr. Srinivas Rao from the Zakir Husain Centre for Education Studies, School of Social Sciences, JNU. He spoke about how

English has been perceived in India over the past 50 years, from a perspective of English as the primary language, to it now being one of the many languages that we need to enable in a grassroots multilingual country.

The conference ended with the consensus that multilingual or mother tongue based education is the only way to address the current reality of rural as well as urban students, in not just language but also subject classrooms. English may be taught as a subject, but introducing it as a medium of instruction even before the child's first/home language is developed would be suicidal.

Zareena. J. M. is a doctoral research scholar at the English and Foreign Languages University (EFL-U), Hyderabad. She is currently working on the pedagogical implications of consciousness-raising (C-R) tasks in developing basic English tenses.

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Vikas Kadam is a Ph.D. research scholar. He is doing his doctoral research on "Dynamic Assessment of English Writing Skills" at The School of English Lang at The School of English Language Education, The EFL University, Hyderabad.

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Forthcoming Events

- **AINET International Teacher Research Conference** at Nagpur, from 14-15 September 2017
For more details, see <http://theainet.net/ainet-international-teacher-research-conference-14-15-sept-2017-nagpur/>
- **4th AINET International Conference** at Mumbai, from 12-13 January 2018
For more details, see <http://theainet.net>
- **53rd RELC International Conference** on 50 Years of English Language Teaching and Assessment - Reflections, Insights and Possibilities, from 12-14 March 2018, at SEAMEO RELC, Singapore
For more details, see <http://www.relc.org.sg/Conference2018/>
- **52nd IATEFL Conference at Brighton**, England from 10-13 April, 2018
For more details, see <https://conference.iatefl.org/>
- **40th Language Testing Research Colloquium (LTRC)** at in Auckland, New Zealand from July 2-6, 2018 on 'Language assessment in times of movement, transition, and change'
For more details, see <http://www.iltaonline.com/page/LTRC2018SaveTheDate>
- **20th International Conference on English Language and Literature**, Dubai from September 24 - 25, 2018
For more details, see <https://www.waset.org/conference/2018/09/dubai/ICELL>
- **20th International Conference on English Literature and Linguistics**, Dubai from November 26 - 27, 2018
For more details, see <https://www.waset.org/conference/2018/11/dubai/ICELL>

ANNOUNCEMENT

Call for papers

for

FORTELL, Issue 36 (January 2018)

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SPECIAL ISSUE on

CRITICAL THINKING AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

Critical Pedagogy and Critical Thinking have led to a sensitised understanding of pluralities and diversities, enabled us to disentangle texts from the dominant discourse, reveal multifarious perspectives, go beyond the printed word, read meaning from one's own vantage point, interrogate majoritarian ideology and to see the world from a political lens.

The key question that needs to be addressed is how effectively these intellectual competencies can be taught and nurtured in a language and/or literature classroom. Furthermore, we need to question whether these sensitivities are addressed while framing curriculum or revising syllabi. We need to equally ask whether the cultural dichotomy is factored in classroom pedagogy and assessment. These questions amongst several others are just indicators of the importance of critical thinking and critical pedagogy in a multi-cultural world.

Teachers and research scholars working in this field are invited to share their research and experience dealing with varied aspects of critical thinking and critical pedagogy. As always, articles of general interest to teachers of English Language and Literature are also welcome.

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Each article should include an abstract of 100-150 words, and 5-6 keywords.

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Guest Editors: Dr. Gitanjali Chawla & Dr. Aarati Mujumdar

Dr. Gitanjali Chawla is Associate Professor in English, Maharaja Agrasen College, University of Delhi, Delhi.

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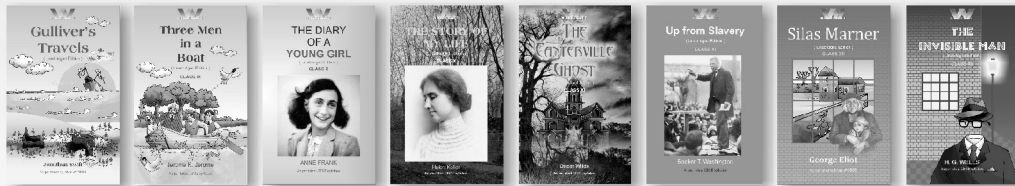
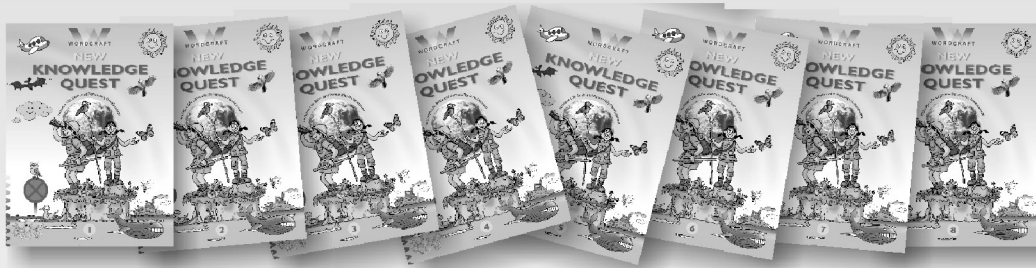
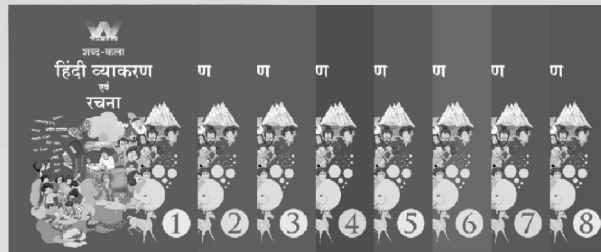
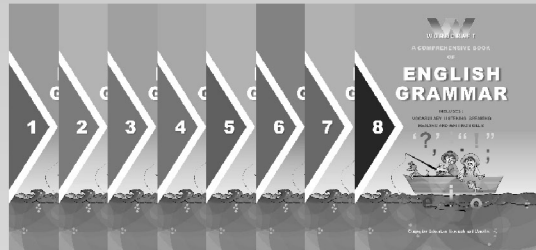
FORTELL (Forum for Teachers of English Language and Literature), an autonomous organization was set up in 1989 in Delhi by about a hundred teachers of English. From its humble beginnings almost three decades ago, it has grown to nearly 500 members from schools and colleges across the country. It is an internationally recognised body and is an affiliate of TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages), USA and an associate of IATEFL (International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language), UK.

FORTELL has organized numerous workshops and seminars over the years in areas of teaching methodology, materials development and curriculum design for professional development of teachers of English. Its resource persons are academically recognised for training programmes in English Studies. Moreover the journal published by **FORTELL** is its most visually recognised face in academia. *Fortell* journal is a bi-annual, peer-reviewed journal available in both print (ISSN 2229-6557) and online (ISSN 2394-9244) versions. It has published 34 issues so far, and the entire archive through its open access policy is available on the website (www.fortell.org). The journal, with its thrust on pedagogical issues, is a pioneer in attempting to bridge the fields of literature and language and in linking theoretical concerns with classroom practices. Catering to both college and school teachers, it plays a significant role as an interface between school teaching and higher education.

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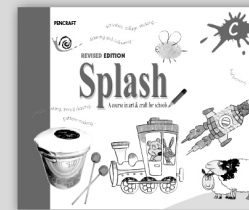
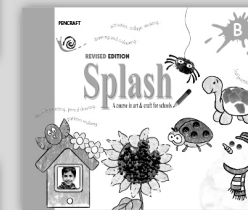
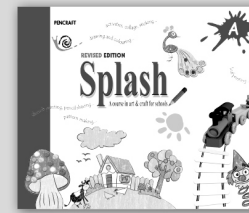
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Each manuscript should include an abstract of 100-150 words on a separate page.

Consistency in the style used for writing numerical expressions should be maintained throughout the manuscript.

All notes should appear at the end of the text and before the references. Footnotes are not permitted. Each endnote used in the article should contain more than a mere reference.

Double quotes should be used throughout

the article. Single quotes should be used only within double quotes.

All references must be cited in text and in endnotes.

Contributions must follow the style specified in APA style sheet (6th edition).

A detailed list of references in alphabetical order must be provided at the end of the article following the endnotes.

References should include the author's name, name of the book/name of the journal with issue number, publisher, place of publication, year and page range/number (in case of chapter from an edited book, journal, magazine, weekly, periodicals, newspapers).

Examples

Book

Strunk, W., Jr., & White, E. B. (1979). *The guide to everything and then some more stuff*. New York, NY: Macmillan.

Chapter of a Book

Bergquist, J. M. (1992). German Americans. In J. D. Buenker & L. A. Ratner (Eds.), *Multiculturalism in the United States: A comparative guide to acculturation and ethnicity* (pp. 53-76). New York: Greenwood.

Journal Article

Becker, L. J., & Seligman, C. (1981). Welcome to the energy crisis. *Journal of Social Issues*, 37(2), 1-7.

Page numbers for all direct quotations should be provided. Direct quotations of 45 words or more should be indented.

Tables and figures should be completely understandable, independent of the text and must be cited in the text. Tables and figures should be attached at the end of the manuscript following the list of references.

Book reviews must contain details like name of the author/editor and book reviewed, place of publication and publisher, year of publication, scanned copy of the cover page and number of pages.

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