

Proximal Formative Assessment and Learning of English Language Learners

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Challenge of Making Assessment Meaningful to Learning

- Common Approach is to Separate Assessment from Authentic Learning Activity--this introduces a fundamental validity problem
- Formative Assessment Approaches Suggest the Possibility of Looking at Skill Acquisition Developmentally in Ways that Might Inform Instruction
- What if We Considered Formative Assessment as Part of Instructional Learning Activity...as Present in the *In Situ* Interactions Among Learning Participants?

Assessments Embedded in Classroom Learning Activity Following Erickson 2007 [p. 187]

- “*Proximal assessment* is consonant with a notion of teaching and learning as continuous and open-ended; a process that can be seen in the ongoing course of the interaction between students, classroom materials, and the teacher.”
- “By *proximal formative assessment*, I mean the continual ‘taking stock’ that teachers engage in by paying firsthand observational attention to students during the ongoing course of instruction—careful attention focused upon specific aspects of a student’s developing understanding and mastery of skills, as instruction is taking place in real time.”

And From the Students' Perspective We Can Modify Proximal Formative Assessment to Include

- The continual “taking stock” that *students* engage in by paying firsthand observational attention to teachers and other students during the ongoing course of instruction — careful attention focused upon specific aspects of a student’s developing understanding and mastery of skills, as instruction is taking place in real time.

Need Conceptual Models of Proximal Formative Assessment that Start with Treating Learning as Situated

- in Classroom Cultural Contexts
- with Clear Learning Goals
- and Instructional Activity Targeted at Attaining Goals
- Providing Evidence of Learning Uptake and Generalization/Transfer

Activity Theory and Proximal Assessment Hypothesis

- Students need to understand their role as learners of target skills in classroom instructional practice
- Acquiring target skills in learning activity requires learning to enact the roles and identity of a skill-user in the making
- Requires actions on the part of learners responsive to continuous shared assessment and self-assessment of performance

Learning and Self-Assessment in *Wh Question Answering* in a 4th Grade Bilingual Cooperative Group (Durán and Syzmanski, 1997)

- Teacher Schematizes and Models Question Answering for Students in a Whole Class Mode
- Has Students Work in Small Groups to Discuss How They Answer a Question Based on a Story Passage
- Students Discuss How to Go About Answering the Question and their Interactions Reveal their Mutual Assessment of their Mastery at Answering the Question Based on Emulating the Teacher's Schema
- The Teacher Monitors Group Interactions and Provides Formative Assessment Feedback

Instructional Schema for Written Wh Question Answering

- Teacher explains difference between answering written as opposed to spoken questions
- After whole class reads a text passage, teacher models process for whole class with an example question
 - Underlining the Wh portion of the question that will serve as the initial part of the grammatical frame for the written answer
 - Determining the semantic answer response
 - Creating a fuller grammatical frame for the answer
 - Fitting the answer response to the grammatical frame
- Students undertake process in cooperative groups with new questions, teacher moves among groups to monitor

Study Approach and Select Findings

- Analyzed Video Recorded Teacher and Student Interaction in Wh Question Activities
- Students Negotiated Written Answers w/out (or with) Teacher Immediately Present
- Students Used Teacher Model as Scaffold and as a Reference Point for Group and Self-Assessment--e.g., students “echoed” teacher talk about how to analyze question meaning and grammar and how to answer questions given question
- Sometimes Spanish was Used as a Resource to Answer in English

Concluding Comments

- Findings compatible with a Vygotskian account of assisted performance (Tharp and Gallimore, 1988) and Activity Theory account of mediation (Wertsch, 1991)
- We might do well to reframe what we mean by “performance” in “performance” assessment so as to capture *dramaturgical* sense of “performance”
- Acting like a competent learner means self-regulation and self-assessment as a competent learner as envisioned both idiosyncratically and collectively by participants in a classroom
- Should maintain research and practice momentum for proximal formative assessment to understand/improve ELL students’ acquisition of academic language skills
- Approach can inform evidence centered design of assessments

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