Self- and Peer-assessment to Promote Students’ Learning Autonomy

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Abstract

Self- and peer-assessment can be an alternative way to assess students learning. This type of assessment places the students at the central part of learning process. Learning can take place when students are actively involved in the process. Hence, they are encouraged to set their learning goals, self-assess or monitor their own learning progress, and also help assess their friends’ performance. This way can arouse students’ intrinsic motivation, build student cooperativeness, increase students’ language awareness, and build students’ learning responsibility that lead to successful learning.

Keywords: self, peer, assessment, autonomy

A. Introduction

Learners are the active agent in the process of learning. Learning takes place when the learners make meaning what they see and hear. Jordan et al. (2008: 59) state that based on constructivism, the acquisition of knowledge is an individual process with individual outcomes which depend on personal mental frameworks and processes, but it is still possible for people to have shared meanings and understandings because knowledge is constructed in context of the environment in which it is constructed. From this view, it is very crucial to place the learners at the central part of the teaching and learning process, and to place them in an environment in which they can interact to one another to build shared meanings and understandings. Many ways can be done by teachers to help learners become active agents of the learning process, and one of which is through certain types of assessment, self- and peer-assessment.

How is it possible that learners who are still in the process of acquisition, especially the early process, are capable of rendering the accurate assessment of their own performance? Brown (2004: 270) states that acquisition of any skill reveals the importance of self-assessment and the benefit of peer-assessment. Most successful learners extend the learning process well beyond the classroom and the presence of a teacher or tutor, autonomously mastering the art of self assessment. Where peer are available to render assessment, the advantage of such additional input is obvious.

B. Self- and peer-assessment

Self- and peer-assessment belong to the alternative assessment. It is a kind of assessment that consists of any method of finding out what a student knows or can do that is intended to show growth and inform instruction, and is an alternative to traditional forms of testing, namely multiple choice tests (Stiggins, 1991 in O’Malley and Pierce, 1996). Alternative assessment is by definition criterion-referenced and is typically authentic because it is based on activities that represent classroom and real-life settings (O’Malley and Pierce, 1996: 1-2).
Self-assessment is a kind of assessment in which students monitor their own learning. By providing learners with the skills needed to independently monitor their learning, teachers enable them to take greater responsibility for their learning. Students can be given opportunities to listen to good and poor performance and asked to describe characteristics of good performance. Self-assessment can be a part of portfolio in which students are asked to reflect on a specific performance or on language development over time. The primary foundation of self-assessment is the students’ learning autonomy, and this is considered as the key to successful learning. The ability to set one’s own goals both within and beyond the structure of a classroom curriculum, to pursue them without the presence of external prod, and to independently monitor that pursuit are all keys to success. Developing intrinsic motivation that comes from a self-propelled desire to excel is at the top of the list of successful acquisition of any set of skills (Brown, 2004: 270).

Peer-assessment is a kind of assessment in which students are asked to rate their friends’ performance as well as their functioning as a group. Peer-assessment can be done as a part of oral performance. When a student is performing something in front of the class, the other students are asked to fill in a rating scale and to give some comment. By doing this, the students can be more attentive and critical to other student’s performance. According to Brown (2004: 270), peer-assessment is based on cooperative learning principles, and it is an arm of a plethora of tasks and procedures within the domain learner-centered and collaborative education.

According to Brown (2004: 271-276) there are five types of self- and peer-assessment. They are 1) direct assessment of performance, 2) indirect assessment of performance, 3) metacognitive assessment, 4) assessment of socioaffective factors, and 5) student self generated tests.

Direct self- and peer-assessment of performance is a type of assessment in which students give evaluation immediately or very soon after the performance. Thus, having made an oral presentation, the student (or a peer) fills out a checklist that rates performance on a defined scale.

Indirect assessment of performance is targeted to view general ability, and thus it is done after the students have completed the whole course. The distinction between direct and indirect assessment is the classic performance-competence distinction. Self- and peer-assessments of performance are limited in time and focus to a relatively short performance. Assessments of competence may encompass a lesson over several days, a module, or even a whole term of course work, and the objective is to ignore minor or non repeating performance flaws and thus to evaluate general ability.

Metacognitive assessment is meant for setting goals. Personal goal setting has the advantage of fostering intrinsic motivation and of providing learners with that extra special impetus from having set and accomplished one’s own goals. Strategic planning and self monitoring can take the form of journal entries, choices from a list of possibilities, questionnaires, or cooperative (oral) pair or group planning.

Socioaffective assessment is for examining affective factors in learning. Such assessment is quite different from looking at and planning linguistic aspects of acquisition. It requires looking at oneself through a psychological lens and may not differ greatly from self-assessment across a number of subject-matter areas or for any set of personal skills. When learners resolve to assess and improve motivation, to gauge and lower their own anxiety, to find mental or emotional obstacles to learning and then plan to overcome these barriers, an all important socioaffective domain is invoked.
Student generated tests is a technique of engaging students in the process of constructing tests. In constructing test items, students are unconsciously made to review the material they have learned, which is exactly the primary purpose of administering tests. Though it is not in line with traditional view of testing, it is quite productive, intrinsically motivating, and autonomy building processes.

Brown (2004: 277) proposes guidelines to conduct self- and peer-assessment as follows:

1. *Tell the students the purpose of the assessment.* Students may find it uncomfortable to do self-assessment for the first time. That is why they need to be told on the concept. It is therefore essential to carefully analyze the need that will be met in offering both self- and peer-assessment opportunities, and then convey this information to students.

2. *Define the tasks clearly.* Make sure the students know exactly what they are supposed to do. Guidelines or models will be of great help in clarifying the procedures.

3. *Encourage impartial evaluation of performance or ability.* One of the great drawbacks of self-assessment is the threat of subjectivity. By showing the students the advantage of honest, objective opinion, we can maximize the washback of self assessment. Peer assessments are also vulnerable to unreliability, as students apply varying standards to their peers. Clear assessment criteria can go a long way toward encouraging objectivity.

4. *Ensure beneficial washback through follow-up tasks.* It is not enough to simply toss a self-checklist at students and then walk away. Systematic follow-up can be accomplished through further self-analysis, journal reflection, written feed-back from the teacher, conferencing with the teacher, purposeful goal-setting by the students, or any combination of the above.

C. How to apply self- and peer-assessment in a class

To discuss the application of self- and peer-assessment in a class, let me use a Pronunciation class as an example.

From the beginning, students are informed of the criteria of good pronunciation. Good pronunciation of English is indicated by 1) accurate sounds of English use, 2) accurate syllable stressed in words, 3) accurate words stressed in phrases and sentences, 4) accurate intonation use, and 5) fluency.

Based on these criteria, students are trained on how to achieve the micro-skills of pronunciation. They are trained how to produce English sounds correctly, how to place stress in words, in phrases, how to link sounds, and how to use correct intonation for various utterances. Outside the classroom, they are asked to do a lot of practice. To facilitate them in the practice, they are provided with a module completed with recorded materials. During the practice, students do self-assessment, by recording their own pronunciation, and then compare them with the recorded models from the module. To record the progress of their practice, they are asked to write notes or reflection of what they have done and what progress they have made. In this phase, students conduct direct self-assessment of performances.

To show the result of their practice, the students periodically do oral performance in front of the class. When a student is doing an oral performance, the other students fill out a rating skill, and make notes on strengths and weaknesses of their friend’s performance. In this phase, students do a direct peer-assessment of performance.
After performance, feedback and comments are given to the performer, and this is an example of a follow-up activity. From the feedback and comments from the peer, the students are expected to realize and be aware of weaknesses they still have and make a target of achievement to pursue. Here, the students do a metacognitive assessment.

The self- and peer-assessments are done continually from time to time and this can arouse students’ awareness in accurate pronunciation. This can form a good learning habit, such as, that they have to be careful and not to be sloppy in using language in general or in pronunciation in particular. They become accustomed to correcting classmates’ mistakes in pronunciation, and those who are corrected can understand and accept their friend’s correction without being irritated.

At the end of the course time, students are asked to fill out a self-assessment checklist to evaluate their achievement, what they have mastered and what they have not. Doing this activity means that the students conduct an indirect self-assessment, or competence evaluation. The instrument can be such as this:

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<tr>
<td>I can produce all English sounds accurately</td>
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<td>I can place stress on syllable in words accurately</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can place stress on words in sentences accurately</td>
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<td>I can use accurate intonation for various utterances</td>
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<td>I can read aloud a passage/dialogue fluently</td>
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D. Conclusion

Self- and peer-assessment can be used as an alternative in assessment. The various types of self- and peer-assessment can be used in combination to support one another. This alternative in assessment functions as formative evaluation, meaning that it informs the learners, as well as the teacher, what they have to do and how to improve the learning process and reach the learning goals. The use of self- and peer-assessments in the learning process trains students to take greater responsibility in their learning and makes them to be autonomous.

References


