

Incorporating Assessment for Learning into an EAP Course Design

Abstract

In recent research on classroom assessment, the traditionally distinctive concepts of diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment have been frequently re-examined within the broader, more integrated framework of “assessment *for learning*” (Berry, 2008; Black & Wiliam, 2009; Chappuis et al., 2011; Wiliam, 2001). Within this framework, classroom assessment is considered as an iterative process in which teachers provide diagnostic feedback at various stages of the course to inform students of their strengths and weaknesses in relation to the curricular goals, and, more importantly, work in partnership with the students on progress toward the goals.

This paper describes an initiative to incorporate assessment-for-learning practices into the design of an intensive course in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) taught in Taiwan. The course is part of an EAP program jointly developed by a language institute in Taiwan and a university in the UK. Most of the students were about to embark on postgraduate studies or attend scholarly exchange programs in English-speaking countries. To support their immediate learning needs, several ideas based on the assessment-for-learning theory were applied: (1) Assessment plans were developed for the two major components of the course (i.e., reading and writing; listening and speaking). Integral to the design of these plans were interconnected assessment tasks and marking criteria that reflected both the objectives and content of the course. (2) The assessment tasks and criteria were introduced to the students at the start of the course to indicate the expected learning outcomes. (3) Diagnostic feedback was provided continuously during the course to inform the students of their strengths and weaknesses in relation to the expected learning outcomes. (4) Individual tutorials and group discussion activities were arranged to allow the teachers and students to work on action plans for improvement based on the diagnostic feedback.

This paper will focus on the interconnected assessment and instructional design of the intensive EAP course taught in Taiwan. Therefore, the main body of the paper will primarily discuss the processes and outcomes of implementation. The outcomes to be considered are firstly, the responses from students and teachers to the assessment activities, and secondly, the initial and final performances of the students as evaluated by the assessment criteria. This consideration will ultimately lead to suggestions for modification of the course design.