Strategies of Assessment for Learning in the Language Classroom

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Assessment of learning vs Assessment for learning

- Assessment of learning (AOL) focuses on using assessment to provide judgment of student learning and utilizing the assessment information for administrative and reporting purposes (Wiliam, 2001).
- Assessment for learning (AFL) aims primarily to promote student learning.

Defining AFL

Assessment for learning is any assessment for which the first priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting pupils' learning. It thus differs from assessment designed primarily to serve the purposes of accountability, or of ranking, or of certifying competence. An assessment activity can help learning if it provides information to be used as feedback, by teachers and by their pupils in assessing themselves and each other, to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged. Such assessment becomes "formative assessment" when the evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching work to meet learning needs. (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall & Wiliam, 2004, pp. 2-3)

Student involvement in AFL

In AFL-focused classrooms, students
- are fully aware of their learning objectives and expected learning outcomes
- play an important role in managing their own learning
- are provided with plenty of practice opportunities to work towards the learning goals.

Teachers promote learning through
- delivering formative feedback
- identifying students' strengths and weaknesses
- showing them what they can do to close the gap between their current performance and desired performance – i.e., the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978).

Four major principles of AFL (Jones, 2010)

- There is a need to "meet learners at their level of knowledge and to revisit prior learning" (Jones, 2010, p.176).
- Students have to be actively involved in their learning.
- Students must be clear of the learning goals they are working towards, so that they know the criteria they are evaluated against and how to improve on their work.
- Students need to engage in self- and peer assessment to develop critical awareness of what is required of them and to improve their work.

Unpacking AFL: Seven strategies of AFL (Chappuis, 2009)

Where Am I Going?

- Strategy 1: Provide students with a clear and understandable vision of the learning target.
- Strategy 2: Use examples and models of strong and weak work.

Where Am I Now?

- Strategy 3: Offer regular descriptive feedback.
- Strategy 4: Teach students to self-assess and set goals.

How Can I Close the Gap?

- Strategy 5: Design lessons to focus on one learning target or aspect of quality at a time.
- Strategy 6: Teach students focused revision.
- Strategy 7: Engage students in self-reflection, and let them keep track of and share their learning.

AFL Strategy 1:

Provide students with a clear and understandable vision of the learning target

Teachers work on familiarizing students with the learning targets, making them understand the expected learning outcomes and helping them understand the goals they are working towards.

Learning targets for reading

Before I read, I
- read the title of the text and predict what it is going to be about
- think about the topic and what I know about it
- set a purpose for my reading

While I am reading, I

- imagine what the places, people and/or events mentioned in the text may look like
- connect my personal experience to what I am reading
- check if my prior predictions were correct
- have a dialogue with the writer by asking questions
- read between the lines – i.e. make inferences from textual clues
- distinguish between fact and opinion
- predict what will happen next, and read on to confirm or reject my predictions
- re-read difficult parts of the text
- guess meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary

After reading, I

- determine if my initial impressions were correct
- review and summarize what I have read
- attempt to answer the questions I have raised during reading
- ask new questions about the text
- reflect on what I have read
- consider the writer's intention
- evaluate what I have read and support it with reference to the text

Learning targets for story writing

- I can give clear information about the setting of the story.
- I can provide interesting details about the main characters.
- I can use suitable vocabulary to describe the setting and characters.
- I can create a problem that arouses interest.
- I can develop ideas in the story.
- I can describe the events in a logical sequence.
- I can provide an attention-grabbing opening.
- I can provide an interesting ending.
- I can write simple dialogues.
- I can use the simple past tense to narrate past events.
- I can write in neat paragraphs.

- Teachers have to engage in explicit instruction to make sure students know what these targets mean and how they can be realized in writing.
- Teachers can design learning activities on each of the learning targets to prepare students for the writing task.
- In doing so, teachers teach what they assess. AFL, therefore, is not only about assessment, but it is also about teaching.

AFL strategy 2:
Use examples and models of strong and weak work

Example: Story writing

- Teachers can show students the entire story, specific parts of the story (e.g. beginning and ending), or use strong and weak sentences to illustrate language use.

Story opening

- (A) Johnny was very bored. He was tidying the books on the book shelf. He did not think that his job was fun. He put his hand inside the shelf and found a paper. He took it out and it was old and yellow.

Story opening

(B) Johnny was not Thomas Edison, of course, but he could well be compared to him. Both were men of vast curiosity and utter intelligence, born with a natural talent and ability to analyze things. One day, Johnny put his hand into the vast, towering, bookshelf and stifled another yawn. He was supposed to clear out all the volumes from the shelf, and to re-order them. It might've been interesting at first, but after working for two hours, this task became extremely dreary. Suddenly his fingers stroked something strange. When he reached and touched it, he felt a growing sense of stimulation. The wrinkled piece of paper was yellow, and anybody could speculate that this paper was old.

- Teachers can get students to read and analyze Texts (A) and (B) and discuss which one is a better story opening – e.g. which is more attention-grabbing, which contains juicy words and showing sentences, and which is more interesting overall.
- Through the discussion, students can come to a better understanding of how they can write a good story opening.

AFL strategy 3:
Offer regular descriptive feedback

- Clear, descriptive feedback - such feedback has to be specific and given with reference to the expected learning outcomes.
- Students have to be told what they did well and what areas they need to improve on.
- They also need to be provided with opportunities to act on teacher feedback and given explicit guidance to make improvement to their work.

A feedback form for delivering descriptive feedback: Recount genre

Evaluation Criteria	Comments
Structure and organization	
Provides an orientation, establishing who was involved, where, and when the events happened	
Sequences past events in a clear order	
Ends the essay appropriately . e.g. with a feeling, a thought or a comment	
Language features	
Uses the past tense accurately	
Uses time words appropriately	
Uses a range of appropriate vocabulary to describe the events	

- Feedback is effective only when it is manageable for students. Teachers should therefore vary their feedback according to student needs and avoid overwhelming students with a large amount of feedback.
- The sample feedback form could be adapted for different learning situations – e.g. it could be shortened, simplified or made more concise. Teachers could focus on selected items according to student needs.

Written corrective feedback for student writing

- As for feedback on language use in student writing, detailed written corrective feedback may not be productive since such unfocused feedback could easily confuse and frustrate students.

- In responding to written errors, it is advisable for teachers to focus on the most critical areas that warrant attention rather than fill student texts with the red ink by underlining and/or correcting every single error.

AFL Strategy 4:
Teach students to self-assess and set goals

- In AFL, active student involvement is crucial – as students have to learn for themselves.
- It is important for teachers to engage students in self-assessment so that they understand their own strengths and weaknesses in learning, come up with strategies to help themselves improve learning, and take responsibility for their own learning.
- Through assessing their own learning, students will be able to set goals to further their learning.

Self-assessment and goal setting for reading

Reading strategies	Often	Sometimes	Almost never	What I plan to do
I make predictions about the topic before reading.				
I ask questions while I am reading.				
I look for the main idea.				
I attempt to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words.				
I don't pay much attention to unimportant details while reading.				
I think of the intention of the author.				
I relate the reading to my personal experience.				
I discuss what I read with others.				

Goal setting

″ I am good at:

″ I need to improve on:

″ Setting goal:

Goal	Steps	Evidence
What I need to improve on?	*How could I achieve my goal?*	*What evidence is needed to show that I've achieved my goal?*

AFL Strategy 5:

Design lessons to focus on one learning target or aspect of quality at a time

- To help students close the gaps in their learning, short practice tasks or assignments on specific skills or concepts can be designed.

- The major principle of this strategy is "one at a time". That is, a big learning task is broken down into smaller and manageable components for students.

Example: Reading

- Teachers can design short practice tasks to help students focus on one learning target at a time
- Inferencing task – to help students infer meaning while reading
- Skimming task – to help students get the gist
- Scanning task – to help students locate specific information
- Vocabulary guessing task - to help students work out meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary
- The emphasis is on "one at a time".

Focused vocabulary guessing task

- (1) Mrs Wong went to the cupboard to get her dog some meat. When she opened the cupboard, however, it was <u>bare</u>. As a result, the poor dog did not have anything to eat.

- (2) Are IT products always reliable? I doubt. For teachers, IT can sometimes arouse students' interest in learning. However, electronic <u>gadgets</u> can break or go wrong any time.

Vocabulary guessing procedure

- Get students to identify the part of speech of the target word;
- Draw their attention to the contextual clues (i.e. the surrounding text);
- Encourage students to guess the meaning of the target word and explain their inference;
- Students can compare their inference to the target word and put it into the original context to see if their guess works or not;
- Finally students can confirm their guess by looking up the dictionary.
- If students make wrong inferences, teachers can draw students' attention to the contextual clues and get them to re-evaluate their inference so that students can learn from their mistakes.
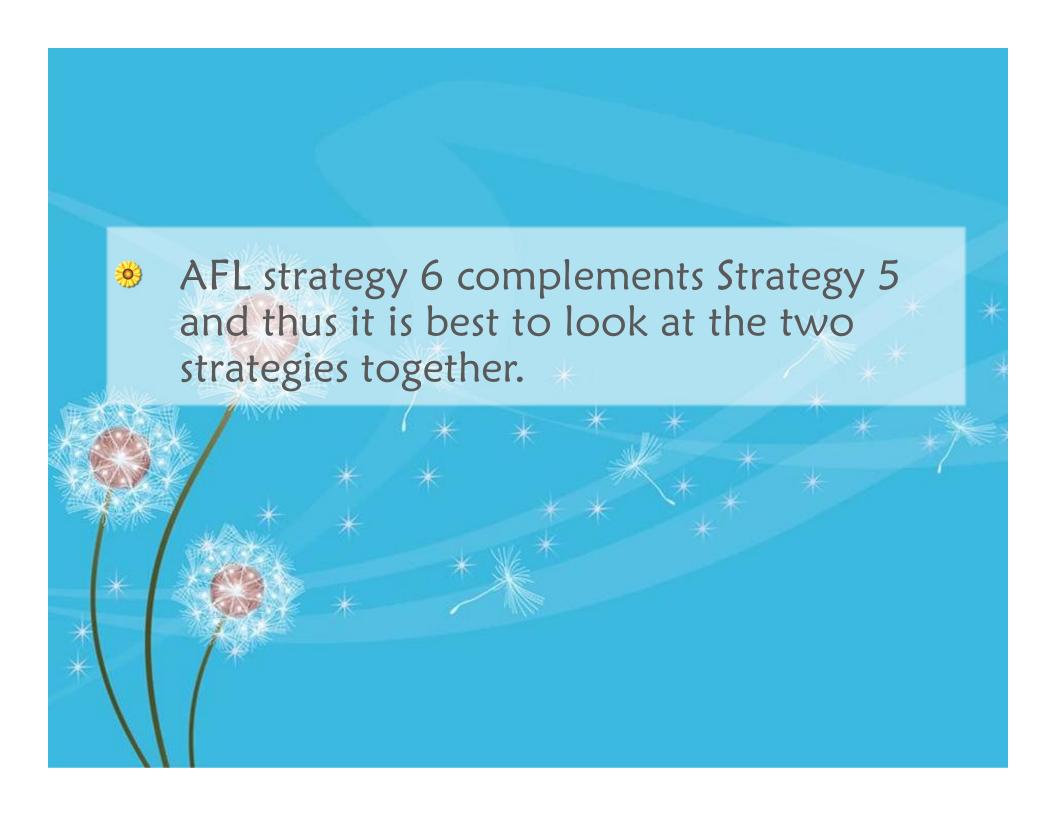
Example: Writing

- Planning task using visual organizers – to help students organize ideas logically
- Story opening task – to help students write an attention-grabbing opening for a story
- Dialogue writing task – to help students include effective dialogues in story writing
- Sentence-level writing task – to help students enrich descriptive details

Focused sentence level writing task

- (1A) One night, I was walking back home.
- (1B) One dark rainy night, I was walking back home all by myself. (suggested answer)

- (2A) The woman has long hair.
- (2B) The old woman has long, dark, unkempt hair. (suggested answer)

- (3A) A vampire appeared.
- (3B) A fearsome and blood thirsty vampire appeared. (suggested answer)

- (4A) A vampire appeared in the air.
- (4B) A fearsome and blood thirsty vampire appeared in the thin misty air. (suggested answer)

- (5A) They entered the castle.
- (5B) Fearfully they entered the creepy old castle. (suggested answer)

AFL Strategy 6:
Teach students focused revision

AFL strategy 6 complements Strategy 5 and thus it is best to look at the two strategies together.

Example: Writing

- AFL strategy 5 - teachers identify "providing rich descriptive details" in story writing as a specific focus; they design short focused tasks for students on this area.

- AFL strategy 6 - teachers respond to students' own stories by providing feedback on the descriptive details in students' stories and suggest ways to improve them. They also ask students to revise their stories by enriching the descriptive details.

Example: Reading

- AFL strategy 5 – teachers give students short focused tasks on inferencing in reading.
- AFL strategy 6 – students do not do well in MC inferencing items in reading comprehension task; teachers ask students to re-read the text and the inferencing questions, examine every option provided for each question and explain why the options are right or wrong, using evidence drawn from the text.

Focused revision task on inferencing

- Johnny was not Thomas Edison, of course, but he could well be compared to him. Both were men of vast curiosity and utter intelligence, born with a natural talent and ability to analyze things. One day, Johnny put his hand into the vast, towering, bookshelf and stifled another yawn. He was supposed to clear out all the volumes from the shelf, and to re-order them. It might've been interesting at first, but after working for two hours, this task became extremely dreary. Suddenly his fingers stroked something strange. When he reached and touched it, he felt a growing sense of stimulation. The wrinkled piece of paper was yellow, and anybody could speculate that this paper was old.

Question:

- How would you describe Johnny's attitude towards the piece of paper he found from the bookshelf?
- (a) uninterested
- (b) curious
- (c) tired
- (d) shocked

- 'A' is right / wrong because ….
- 'B' is right / wrong because …
- 'C' is right / wrong because …
- 'D' is right / wrong because

AFL Strategy 7:

Engage students in self-reflection, and let them keep track of and share their learning

- Teachers encourage self-reflection and enable students to keep track of their own learning.
- Examples:
  - students keep a portfolio to self-reflect and track their own learning and progress
  - students keep a weekly reflective journal
  - students keep track of their self-directed language work outside the classroom
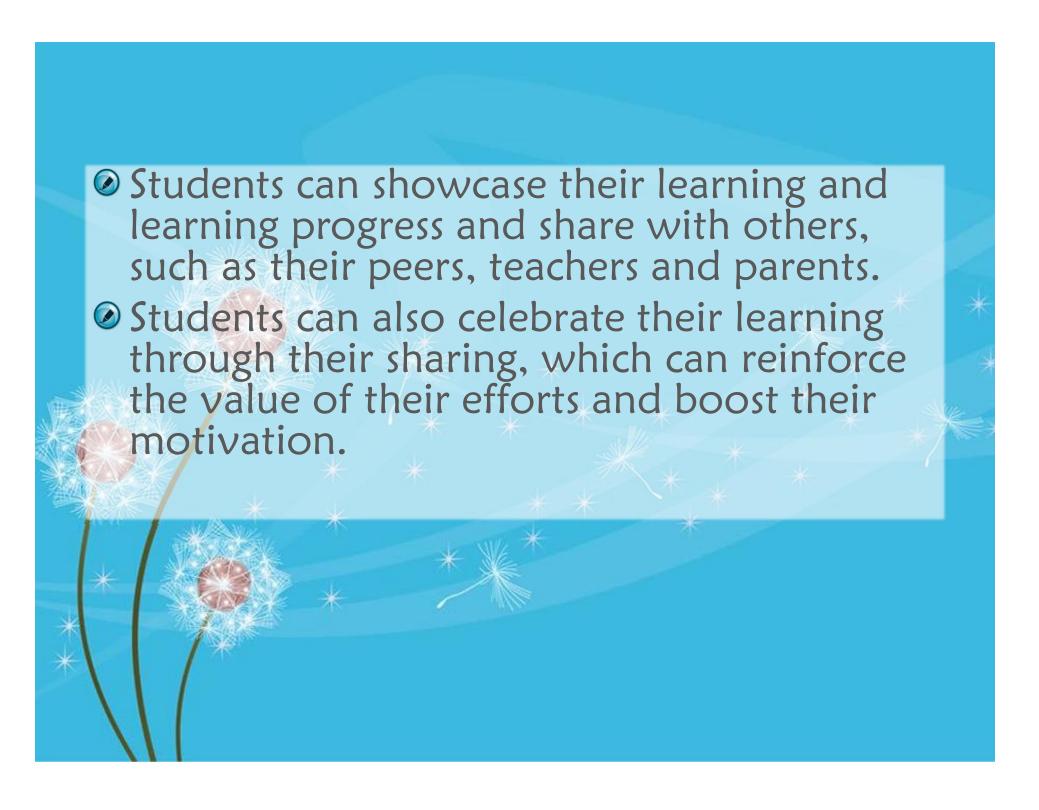
A reading-writing portfolio

- A timed essay done in class
  - What parts of the essay do you particularly like? Why?
  - What areas do you like least? Why?
- A project report (include all notes, drafts, and materials leading to the final paper)
  - What did you learn from writing the project report?
  - Which was the most enjoyable part of the project work? Why?
  - Which was the least enjoyable part of the project work? Why?
  - What difficulties did you encounter writing this report?
  - What did you do to overcome the difficulties?
- An assignment based on a book you have read (e.g. a reading report)
  - Why did you select this book?
  - Which areas of the assignment did you like most? Why?
  - Which areas did you like least? Why?
  - If you were to recommend the book to a friend, what would you say?
- A writer's choice (any text that has been important to the student – e.g. a poem, a blog entry, a creative story)
  - Why did you choose this item?
  - What does it say about you (e.g. as a person and as a writer)?
- An overall reflection on the portfolio
  - What were your goals in learning reading and writing?
  - In what way was each of the portfolio items above important in helping you achieve these goals ?

Weekly reflective journal

" Three most important things I have learnt (about grammar / writing) this week:

  . 1.

  . 2.

  . 3.

" One thing that I have achieved this week:

" One thing that I want to improve on next week:

Self-directed language work: What I have accomplished

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
I read:	I read:	I read:	I read:	I read:	I read:	I read:
I wrote:	I wrote:	I wrote:	I wrote:	I wrote:	I wrote:	I wrote:
I listened to/watched:	I listened to/watched:	I listened to/watched:	I listened to/watched:	I listened to/watched:	I listened to/watched:	I listened to/watched:

- Students can showcase their learning and learning progress and share with others, such as their peers, teachers and parents.
- Students can also celebrate their learning through their sharing, which can reinforce the value of their efforts and boost their motivation.

In conclusion, …

- Through AFL, teachers can foster a stronger link between assessment, learning and teaching.
- They also focus on student learning, work on maximizing student involvement in learning, and enhance learner motivation.
- Together these seven AFL strategies can make learning more focused, engaging, and productive, and teaching more goal-oriented, learner-centred, and effective.
- Indeed, AFL not only concerns itself with assessment, but it also has a lot to do with learning and teaching.

Thus, in implementing AFL, teachers

" Teach what they assess, and assess what they teach.

Thank you