

## Tools for Successfully Implementing Enacted Curricula

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**Abstract** – Teachers often find themselves caught in the middle between the constraints imposed by pre-specified curricular guidelines and the needs and interests of their students. Although a gap often exists between accountability requirements and what students want to learn, there are some effective tools teachers can use to integrate the objectives of both sides. These include needs assessment surveys, a negotiated or process syllabus, feedback forms, dialogue journals, reflection papers, reflective practice, portfolios and student-teacher conferences, and learner self-evaluation. The aim of this paper is to show how to use these tools synergistically to plan for a course and successfully enact a curriculum (i.e. implement, modify, expand, or refocus course goals to address students' needs in the classroom and still meet institutional requirements). Additionally, it will also highlight the benefits of designing and teaching a course this way, as well as offer critical insights into challenges enacting curricula pose.

**Keywords:** curriculum, enactment, approaches, development, tools, challenges

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### I. CURRICULUM DEFINED

A good place to begin is to define what a curriculum is, explain what curriculum enactment means, highlight different curriculum approaches, and outline the steps of curriculum development.

First of all, a curriculum is the nexus of educational decisions and outcomes in a particular setting, which is affected by explicit and implicit social expectations, educational and institutional policies and norms, teachers' beliefs and understandings, and learners' needs and goals. In other words, it is a dynamic system of three interrelated processes: *planning* (i.e. needs analysis, aim or goals, materials/resources, and activities), *enacting* (i.e. the learning environment, relationships and behaviors among students and teachers, and all teaching and learning approaches and strategies in the classroom), and *evaluating* (i.e. assessment methods). As all three are embedded in socio-educational contexts, it necessitates being clear about the value and ethos of the school or program, who conducts the processes and conceives the whole, for what purposes, and in which contexts. In this way, a curriculum is the product of someone's reasoning about what education (teaching and learning) is, whom it should serve and how (Jackson, 1992; Hall & Hewings, 2001; Richards, 2001; Snow & Kamhi-Stein, 2006; Graves, 2006; Graves, 2008).

There are, of course, several different types of curricula, which can be viewed as an interlocking and interdependent chain:

Written curriculum: Comprised of and specifies what is to be taught and is produced by

the state, the school system, the school itself, the classroom teacher, and any other stakeholders.

Intended curriculum: Policy tools as curriculum standards, frameworks, or guidelines that outline what curriculum teachers are expected to deliver (i.e. they're what we want students to learn).

Enacted curriculum: Actual curricular content that students engage with in the classroom.

Experienced curriculum: How students experience the curriculum (which differs from person to person).

Assessed curriculum: Tests and performance measures that check if students learned what we wanted them to learn.

Achieved (learned) curriculum: What students have learned as a result of what they were taught.

Hidden curriculum: What students learn from the physical environment, the policies, and the procedures of the school.

Null curriculum: What curriculum designers and/or teachers choose to leave out of the curriculum (Carter & Nunan, 2001).

A curriculum that maximizes the learning of all students is one that recognizes and celebrates diversity and engages them in intellectually challenging learning experiences. It provides students with clear guidelines on what they are learning and how they will be assessed. It involves a range of teaching strategies to meet different teaching needs and explicit teaching to scaffold students' learning so that they develop and consolidate the required knowledge and skills to meet the anticipated future demands of language use (Nunan, 1988).

Students are at the heart of all teaching and learning. For this reason, we need to know who the students are, what they already know, and how they learn. This involves *curriculum intent* (what we want students to learn), *pedagogy* (how we teach so that all students will learn it), *assessment* (how students show what they know and how teachers find out if they've learned what we wanted them to learn), and *reporting* (how we communicate what they learned and how well they learned it. This of course is a cyclical, ongoing process (Graves, 2000).

## II. CURRICULUM ENACTMENT

Curriculum enactment dates back to Barnes (1976) and later Eisner (1985), who both described a curriculum as events shaped by the purposes and cross-purposes of teacher, students, subject matter, and classroom occurring in time more truly than it exists in space. Snyder, Bolin, and Zumwalt (1992) then went on to define curriculum enactment as the educational experiences jointly created by students and teacher in the classroom (Bouck, 2008). Looking at it this way, enactment, which is the teaching and learning processes that happen in the classroom, is at the heart of education. Planning and evaluating are both directed at the classroom and are closely allied with it. Again, the three processes that make up curriculum are embedded in social and educational contexts that determine their purpose

and scope (Graves, 2008).

To be clear, curriculum plans, policies, syllabuses, and materials are not the curriculum. They may be referred to as such, but as reifications of planning processes, they will be interpreted differently through different enactments. They are products whose purpose is to guide and support teaching and learning. In this view, a curriculum is a complex, dynamic system where everything is interconnected, and nonlinearity and adaptation is the norm (Larsen-Freeman & Freeman, 2008). The processes of planning, enacting and evaluating are interrelated, not sequential. They move back and forth to inform and influence each other.

The curriculum enactment perspective is concerned with how a curriculum is shaped through the evolving constructs of teacher and students (Larsen-Freeman & Freeman, 2008). Externally created syllabuses and materials are viewed as tools that students and teacher use as they construct the enacted experience of the classroom. It views the process of enactment as one of growth for both teachers and learners. Research in curriculum enactment is concerned with classroom experiences and how the participants create them, the effect of externally created materials, policies, and participant characteristics on those experiences, and the effects of the experiences on the participants themselves. It is concerned with both the trustworthiness of teachers and learners to enact a curriculum with desirable outcomes and how to empower them to do so. In curriculum enactment, what happens in classrooms is the core of curriculum. What happens in classrooms is the evolving relationship between teacher, learners and subject matter. An enactment perspective focuses our attention on the classroom as where and when the language curriculum happens. However, a classroom is not an isolated environment; it is embedded in specific, complex and overlapping cultural, social, educational and political contexts. Contexts are more than physical places; they are communities of people, enmeshed in social systems that operate according to tacit and explicit norms, hierarchies and values (Freeman & Johnson, 1998). These systems are relational and overlapping (i.e. not static). Similarly, in terms of language policy and planning, our individual and collective existences do not occur in pristine spaces within which we place individuals, institutions and policies, but inside a fluid set of social relations with emergent possibilities for change (Ramanathan & Morgan, 2007).

A language curriculum is planned, enacted and evaluated in multiple contexts. The contexts of a language curriculum include the educational institution in which the curriculum is enacted, the larger community the institution is a part of, the provincial, and the national political context, and, increasingly, the global context (Pinar, 2003; Smith, 2003; Graddol, 2005). The classroom, where curriculum is enacted, is itself a sociocultural context with its own social systems, norms and values. The classroom is the context of enactment, embedded in the encircling contexts. And the relationship between socio-educational contexts and language are defining features of how language curriculums are planned, enacted and evaluated and that the relationship makes the subject matter of a language curriculum unique.

### **III. CURRICULUM APPROACHES**

Curriculum practitioners and implementers may use one or more approaches in planning, implementing and evaluating the curriculum. Even textbook writers or instructional material producers have different curricular approaches. Below are four of them:

1. Behavioral Approach. This is based on a blueprint, where goals and objectives are specified, contents and activities are also arranged to match with the learning objectives. The learning outcomes are evaluated in terms of goals and objectives set at the beginning. This is aimed to achieve efficiency. In education, behavioral approach begins with educational plans that start with the setting of goals or objectives. These are the important ingredients in curriculum implementation as evaluating the learning outcomes as a change of behavior. The change of behavior indicates the measure of the accomplishment.

2. Managerial Approach. In this approach, the principal is the curriculum leader and at the same time instructional leader who is supposed to be the general manager. The general manager sets the policies and priorities, establishes the direction of change and innovation, and planning and organizing curriculum and instruction. School administrators are less concerned about the content than about organization and implementation. They are less concerned about subject matter, methods and materials than improving the curriculum. Curriculum managers look at curriculum changes and innovations as they administer the resources and restructure the schools. And curriculum supervisors help develop the school's education goals, plan curriculum with students, parents, teachers and other stakeholders, design programs of study by grade levels, plan or schedule classes or school calendar, prepare curriculum guides or teacher guides by grade level or subject area, help in the evaluation and selection of textbooks, observe teachers, assist teachers in the implementation of the curriculum, encourage curriculum innovation and change, and develop standards for curriculum and instructional evaluation.

3. Systems Approach. This approach was influenced by systems theory, where the parts of the total school district or school are examined in terms of how they relate to each other. The organizational chart of the school represents a systems approach. It shows the line-staff relationships of personnel and how decisions are made. The following are of equal importance: administration, counseling, curriculum, instruction, and evaluation.

4. Humanistic Approach. This approach is rooted in the progressive philosophy and child-centered movement. It considers the formal or planned curriculum and the informal or hidden curriculum. It considers the whole child and believes that in curriculum the total development of the individual is the prime consideration. The learner is at the center of the curriculum (Richards, 2001).

#### **IV. CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT**

Curriculum development is an interrelated range of factors and planning and implementation processes (i.e. cyclical – not hierarchical, sequential, or linear). These include:

- Needs analysis
- Situation analysis
- Planning learning outcomes
- Course organization
- Selecting and preparing teaching materials

- Evaluation and assessment (Brown, 1995; Markee, 1997; Graves, 2000)

### Need analysis

Needs analysis is comprised of procedures used to collect information about learners' needs (both perceived and present needs as well as potential and unrecognized ones). The purpose of needs analysis is to make decisions about what will be taught, how it will be taught, and how it will be evaluated. Examples include:

- To find out why learners are studying the language
- To find out how learners will use language in target contexts
- To determine what language skills are necessary to enable learners to participate in school, at work, and/or in their communities
- To find out what prior experiences learners have had using the language
- To determine learners' language abilities
- To determine which students are in most need of training in particular language skills
- To identify a gap between what students are able to do and what they need to be able to
- To find out what language skills learners want to focus on or feel they need to work on
- To find out what learners' interests are
- To determine learners' learning preferences
- To determine the language modalities learners will use
- To determine the learners' level of intercultural competence
- To determine the learners' attitudes towards learning the language (Graves, 2000)

The process of needs analysis can be viewed as a cycle of:

1. Deciding what information to gather and why
2. Deciding when, how and from whom to gather the information
3. Gathering the information
4. Interpreting the information
5. Acting on the information
6. Evaluating the effect and effectiveness of the action
7. Deciding on further or new information to gather (Graves, 2000)

In order to get a comprehensive view of learners' needs, and that will represent the interests of the different stakeholders involved, the following procedures can be used:

- Questionnaires (both structured or unstructured)
- Self-ratings (of knowledge and abilities)
- Interviews or meetings (for in-depth exploration of issues)
- Observation (of learners' behavior in target situations)
- Collecting learner language samples (e.g., written or oral tasks, simulations or role plays, achievement tests, or performance tests)

- Task analysis (tasks learners will have to carry out in a future occupational or educational setting)
- Case studies (teacher and self-observations of language experiences, situations, and problems encountered at work or in school over a period of time) (Richards, 2001)

When looking at the results of needs analysis, teachers need to (in this order):

1. Summarize the data
2. Analyze it
3. Determine what needs are appropriate, relevant, practical, suitable (given context and time frame)
4. Prioritize them (from most important to least important)
5. Negotiate needs (in order to effectively deal with any differences between teachers and learners) (Graves, 2000)

It is important to note that what is identified as a need is dependent on judgments and reflects the interests and values of those making those judgments. Teachers, learners, parents, employers, and other stakeholders may have different views as to what needs are.

### Situation analysis

Situation analysis deals with the contexts and situations in which learning and teaching takes place. The goal of situation analysis is to identify key factors that can influence the implementation of a curriculum. These factors include:

- Societal factors (the role of groups in the community or society at large)
- Project factors (the impact of time constraints, resources, and personnel)
- Institutional factors (the effect of setting – both the human side and physical aspects)
- Teacher factors (to include the variability of teaching experience, knowledge and skills, training and qualifications, moral and motivation, teaching approaches, beliefs and principles, etc.)
- Learner factors (to include their backgrounds, language abilities, expectations, beliefs, preferred learning styles, etc.)
- Adoption factors (the effect of curriculum or syllabus change) (Nunan, 1988)

The procedures are similar to those of needs analysis:

1. Consult the representatives of as many relevant groups as possible (e.g., students, teachers, parents, administrators, etc.)
2. Study and analyze relevant documents (e.g., teaching materials, course curriculums, administrative reports, etc.)
3. Observe teachers and students in learning environments
4. Conduct opinion surveys
5. Review available literature related to the issue (Nunan, 1988)

### Planning learning outcomes

Planning learning outcomes involves stating goals and objectives. Goals help provide a clear definition of the purposes of a course, guidelines for teachers and learners, and a focus for instructions, as well as describe important and realizable changes in learning. Objectives refer to the specific and concrete description of purposes. They describe what the goals seek to achieve in terms of smaller units of learning, provide a basis for the organization of teaching activities, and describe learning in terms of observable behavior or performance. They are helpful in that they facilitate planning, provide measurable outcomes and accountability, and are prescriptive. Objectives should describe a learning outcome, be consistent with the curriculum goal, and be precise and attainable (Clarke, 1987).

### Course organization

Course organization involves identifying who the course is for, what the course is about, what kind of teaching and learning will take place, and the roles of teachers and learners, which can be done by describing the principles, beliefs, values and goals that underlie it.

Course content decisions reflect the teacher's assumptions about the nature of language, language use, and language learning, what the most essential elements or units of language are, and how these can be organized as an efficient basis for second language learning (e.g., simple to complex, chronologically, according to learner needs, in terms of prerequisite learning, from whole to part or part to whole, or spiral sequencing). After determining course content, teachers need to map out the course structure into a usable form and sequence. This involves selecting a syllabus framework and developing instructional blocks. A syllabus describes the major elements that will be used in planning the course. It also provides the basis for its instructional focus and content. Example syllabi include:

- Grammatical (grammatical items)
- Functional (communicative functions – e.g., reporting, describing, clarifying)
- Notional (conceptual categories – e.g., duration, quantity, location)
- Natural syllabus (“experiences” provided in class)
- Topical (themes or topics – e.g., health, sports, food)
- Situational (speech settings and the transactions associated with them – e.g., bank, store, supermarket)
- Skills (abilities related to the four skills)
- Lexical (target vocabulary)
- Task-based (tasks learners will complete in the target language)
- Competency-based (competencies in relation to specific situations and activities)
- Integrated (a combination of any of the above)
- Negotiated (planned between the teacher and students and enacted in the classroom)  
(Ur, 2002)

A course also needs to be planned in terms of sections or instructional blocks (i.e., self-contained learning sequences that have their own goals and objectives, as well as reflect the overall objectives of the course). The most common instructional blocks are modules and units.

### Selecting and preparing teaching materials

Teaching materials are sources of language, learning support, activities for learner practice and communicative interaction, stimulation and ideas, and instructional support. They are either authentic or created. There are advantages and disadvantages for both types of materials. For example, authentic materials can be more motivating than created materials because they are intrinsically more interesting. They also provide authentic cultural information about target cultures, provide exposure to real, rather than artificial, are more closely related to learner needs, and support a more creative approach to teaching. On the other hand, authentic materials may be too difficult for lower level learners, are not built around a graded syllabus (and thus don't provide systematic coverage of teaching items), and are burdensome to teachers in terms of preparation and development. Of course, teachers can adapt both authentic and created materials to fit their needs. Forms of adaptation include:

- Modifying content
- Adding or deleting content
- Reorganizing content
- Addressing omissions of content
- Modifying tasks and activities
- Extending tasks and activities (Graves, 2001)

Teachers can also develop their own materials. When doing so, they need to consider:

- Learners' experience and background, their target needs, and their affective needs
- The learning process (to include skill and strategy development)
- Relevant aspects of language and four skills integration
- Social contexts (to include providing an intercultural focus and developing a critical social awareness)
- Activities and task types
- Material types (e.g., print, visuals, audio, etc.) (Graves, 2001)

### Evaluation and assessment

Again, the interlinked system of needs, goals, teachers, learners, syllabus, materials, and teaching is what makes up second language curriculum. Once it's in place, there are a number of assessment issues that must be addressed. These include:

- Curriculum design
- The syllabus and program content
- Classroom processes



- Instruction materials
- Teachers, their approaches to teaching, and what they taught
- Students and what they learned or didn't learn (as well as their level of participation)
- The learning environment
- The school or institution (in terms of support)
- Teacher training and staff development
- Overall decision-making (in terms of how it results in learner benefits) (Brown, 2007)

There are three different purposes of evaluation:

- *Formative* (to find out what is working well, what is not working well, and what needs to be addressed)
- *Illuminative* (to provide a deeper understanding of the processes of teaching and learning that occur in the program)
- *Summative* (to make decisions about the worth or value of different aspects of the curriculum) (Richards, 2001)

A review of the process of evaluation to ensure that the evaluation was adequately designed must be done before making any final decisions. Once decisions are made, it is necessary to decide how to make use of the information obtained. The following are common processes:

- Review all information that was collected
- Disseminate findings to relevant parties
- Decide on what changes need to be made
- Identify costs and benefits of proposed changes
- Develop a plan for implementation of changes
- Identify people responsible for taking any follow-up action
- Establish procedures for review of the effectiveness of changes (Richards, 1992)

Examples of possible changes include:

- Revision or replacement of some of the course objectives
- Preparation of supplementary materials to compliment the textbook
- Selection of new textbook to replace the one currently being used
- Reorganization of the sequence of skills taught within a course
- Development of a materials writing project (Richards, 1992)

## V. CURRICULUM ENACTMENT TOOLS

There are many different tools to help with enacted curricula, to include:

- Needs assessment surveys
- Negotiated or process syllabus

- Feedback forms
- Dialogue journals
- Reflection papers
- Reflective practice
- Portfolios and teacher-student conferences
- Learner self-evaluation

### Needs assessment surveys

Needs analysis is directed mainly at the goals and content of a course. It examines what the learners know already and what they want or need to know. Needs analysis makes sure that the course will contain relevant and useful things to learn. Good needs analysis involves asking the right questions and finding the answers in the most effective way. The analysis of target needs can look at necessities (what do learners need), lacks (gap between where they're at and what they need), and wants (what learners think is useful for them) via language (lexis, grammar, functions, etc.), ideas (topics, themes, texts, etc.), skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing), and texts (genres and discourses types) (Nation and Macalister, 2010). They are a great help for course design, lesson planning, materials and content selection, and task and activity choices.

### Negotiated or process syllabus

A negotiated syllabus involves the teacher and the learners working together to make decisions at many of the parts of the curriculum design process. It allows learners to participate in choosing content, goals, class activities, homework and forms of assessment (Candlin, 1987; Clarke, 1991). The content of a particular course is a matter of discussion and negotiation between teacher and student(s), according to the wishes and needs of the learner(s) in conjunction with the expertise, judgment and advice of the teacher (Bloor & Bloor, 1988). Breen (2000) suggests three steps:

#### *Step 1*

- Purpose: Why are we learning the language? (aims and goals)
- Contents: What should be the focus of our work? (content and sequencing)
- Ways of working: How should the learning work be carried out? (format and presentation – resources, texts or materials, time, procedure, organization, guidance and support, etc.)
- Evaluation: How well has the learning proceeded? (assessment)

#### *Step 2*

- Actions undertaken on the basis of the negotiated decisions in Step 1 (e.g. tasks chosen and completed, plans made, evaluation procedures worked out, etc.)

#### *Step 3*

- Evaluation of learning outcomes (i.e. achievements and difficulties) and the process itself in relation to learning outcomes (i.e. appropriateness of purposes, contents, ways of working, evaluation and action taken in Step 2)

The levels of focus for the negotiation cycle (viewed as a pyramid from top to bottom) is as follows: task > sequence of tasks > series of lessons/sessions > course > specific subject/language curriculum > wider educational curriculum.

### Feedback forms

These are daily record or feedback forms that both students and teachers write after each lesson, which can be done inside or outside of class. They help provide the focus for negotiation at the start of the following lesson. Teachers can ask students simple questions such as:

- What did you learn today?
- What did you like about class?
- What did you not like about class?
- What was useful?
- What wasn't useful?
- What was interesting?
- What wasn't interesting?
- What was challenging?
- What was confusing?
- What do you want to learn next (or more about)?

Answers to these questions can help teachers have a better sense of what's happening in the students' lives so that we can build on that in class, know which activities engage them, address short-term problems, and/or understand each student's measure of success. (Tudor, 1996)

For students, it can help them see the week as a collection of activities, recognize how and when English is used outside of class (and how to extend those activities), separate personality (notably the teacher's) from classwork, to be able to critique the activities without anyone feeling defensive, help determine the direction of the class, isolate problems so they become workable, identify individual growth and successes, and/or learn to set (and articulate) short term goals (Scharle & Szabo, 2000).

### Dialogue journals

Dialog journals are tools that give students an opportunity to reflect on what they are learning in class. They are done less often than feedback forms, yet regularly. In essence, they are an ongoing conversation between the teacher and students, which involves personalized attention and insight into what is going on in the life of each person in the classroom.

Students can:

- Let you know what their learning interests and needs are
- Tell you what is helping them learn
- Tell you what is hindering their learning
- Talk about how useful class activities are
- Tell you what you like or dislike about the class
- Make constructive suggestions to help improve the class
- Request feedback on work they are doing in this class
- Ask you questions about class materials
- Discuss problems they may be having in class or with homework assignments
- Highlight their achievements in class or with learning English
- Talk about future plans and goals and what they will do to achieve them
- Express any personal concerns they might have (Holmes & Moulton, 1997; Kim, 2005; Anderson & Nelson , 2011)

### Reflection papers

These are similar to dialogue journals but are based on sections of a course or the course as a whole. Teachers can ask questions like these:

- What did you learn?
- Do you feel like you can \_\_\_\_\_ more effectively now than before starting this section of the course?
- What did you enjoy, appreciate, and/or find the most helpful about this section of the course?
- What specific activities did you like best? Least? Why?
- What would you like to spend more time on for this section of the course? Less time on?
- What, if anything, did you not like about this section of the course? Was there anything that hindered your learning?
- Do you have any suggestions or advice for me – specifically about how to improve this section of the course?

### Reflective practice

Reflective practice is the systematic process of collecting, recording and analyzing our thoughts and observations, as well as those of our students, and then going on to making changes. You may begin a process of reflection in response to a particular problem that has arisen with one or your classes, or simply as a way of finding out more about your teaching. You may decide to focus on a particular class of students, or to look at a feature of your teaching. The first step is to gather information about what happens in the class. To do this, you can keep a teacher diary (i.e. after each lesson write about what happened – to include

your reactions and feelings and those of your students), do peer observation, video record lessons, and get student feedback – all of which necessitates keeping the focus on what you did well and what you need to work on. Once you have some information, think about patterns you observed, things you were previously unaware of, and anything you may have been surprised by. Talk to a colleague or friend about these. Read up on different areas of teaching where you feel you could improve (i.e. turn challenges into strengths). And ask questions to other teachers and websites in an effort to get ideas from more knowledgeable others. Remember that reflective teaching is a cyclical process, because once you start to implement changes, then the reflective and evaluative cycle begins again. Consistently ask questions like these: What am I doing? Why am I doing it? How effective is it? How are the students responding? How can I do it better? Or you can base it on the experiential learning cycle, which is very effective as the task, activity, or lesson level: (1) What happened (describe the experience)? (2) Why/How did it happen? What factors contributed? How do you feel about it? (3) What is your new interpretation of the experience? What is the significance? What did you learn about yourself and others? (4) What will you do as a result of this experience? How will you use it to inform your future? As a result of your reflection, you may decide to do something in a different way, or you may just decide that what you are doing is the best way (Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Zeichner 1996; Marzano, 2011).

### Portfolios and student-teacher conferences

A student portfolio is a systematic collection of student work and related material that depicts a student's activities, accomplishments, and achievements in one or more school subjects. The collection should include evidence of student reflection and self-evaluation, guidelines for selecting the portfolio contents, and criteria for judging the quality of the work. Process and product portfolios represent the two major types of portfolios. A process portfolio documents the stages of learning and provides a progressive record of student growth. A product portfolio demonstrates mastery of a learning task or a set of learning objectives and contains only the best work. Teachers use process portfolios to help students identify learning goals, document progress over time, and demonstrate learning mastery. In general, teachers prefer to use process portfolios because they are ideal for documenting the stages that students go through as they learn and progress.

#### *Advantages:*

- Promotes student self-evaluation, reflection, and critical thinking
- Measures performance based on genuine samples of student work
- Provides flexibility in measuring how students accomplish their learning goals
- Enables teachers and students to share the responsibility for setting learning goals and for evaluating progress toward meeting those goals.
- Gives students the opportunity to have extensive input into the learning process
- Facilitates cooperative learning activities, including peer evaluation and tutoring, cooperative learning groups, and peer conferencing
- Provides a process for structuring learning in stages

- Provides opportunities for students and teachers to discuss learning goals and the progress toward those goals in structured and unstructured conferences
- Enables measurement of multiple dimensions of student progress by including different types of data and materials

*Disadvantages:*

- Requires extra time to plan an assessment system and conduct the assessment
- Gathering all of the necessary data and work samples can make portfolios bulky and difficult to manage
- Developing a systematic and deliberate management system is difficult, but this step is necessary in order to make portfolios more than a random collection of student work
- Scoring portfolios involves the extensive use of subjective evaluation procedures such as rating scales and professional judgment, and this limits reliability
- Scheduling individual portfolio conferences is difficult and the length of each conference may interfere with other instructional activities (Venn, 2000)

Portfolio use in classrooms essentially involves collecting samples of students' work and experiences, which reflect through the things they do and say the ways in which they think. Teachers that have paid attention to the process of learning as well as to the products of that learning evident in the portfolio collection can collaboratively assess the students' abilities, skills and knowledge to accurately evaluate, whether or not their teaching is preparing the students for the real world.

Teachers can provide feedback through structured conferences with specific goals. Conferences focus on suggestions and comments along with individualized goal setting on a formal level. Teachers can meet with a few students a day or a week depending on specific projects, deadlines, and individual student needs. It is important to set up these conferences in a structured way so both teacher and student make good use of their time. Below is a list of helpful hints for setting up student-teacher conferences.

- Teachers should look at student work beforehand
- A checklist or feedback form should accompany the work (things you did successfully, things you could improve on, next steps)
- Comments should be specific to the work and elaborated on during the conference
- The teacher should focus on two to three items that need work and be prepared to share examples on how to improve them
- Plenty of positive feedback should be shared throughout the conference
- Time for the student to ask questions and give input should be allotted
- Student should be able to take the feedback form/checklist with them at the end of the conference to use as a reference in making revisions

The main goal should be to meet with the students two or more times during the course of a project. This way, students are given multiple opportunities to make sure they are on the right track and make necessary improvements to their work. Using formal conferencing along with informal feedback, students are protected from failure and set up for success.

### Learner self-assessment

Penny Ur (2002) observes that the purpose of any assessment is either to enhance or to conclude a process by confirmation of something mastered. Involving learners directly in the different stages of the learning-teaching process can greatly enhance that process for both teachers and learners. In fact, the benefits derived by providing an active role for students in instructional activities often result in an increase in the learner's level of motivation, sense of responsibility, and feeling of empowerment. A more proactive assessment process can yield benefits that far outweigh any disadvantages. A number of such benefits are:

- *Diminished intimidation* (as learners have not traditionally been given the opportunity to assess their progress and not only must rely entirely on the judgment of their teachers but also must accept it, students can feel as if any assessment is intimidating and somewhat de-motivating – which makes self-assessment so effective as it allows students to consider their skills and needs on their own and in a non-confrontational way, think about the strengths and weaknesses of their class work without worrying about whether they will pass or fail or what their instructor or other students in the class think about their progress).
- *Personal involvement and attitude* (as teachers typically have the sole responsibility for identifying students' weaknesses and addressing them, and learners have a passive role in this traditional and top-down process, the immediacy of evaluating their performance can potentially alter their overall attitude toward learning the task at hand).
- *Awareness* (by assessing themselves, learners may also be more aware of the course content and learning objectives, and will thus have a clearer idea of the materials already covered and what remains to be learned).
- *Motivation* (self-assessment gives students a concrete sense of participation in the learning process, which can lead to their becoming more involved and cooperative class participants – which, over time, should help them become skilled judges of their own strengths and weaknesses and significantly increase their motivation to reach mastery of course material).
- *Self-direction* (through self-direction, students become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses and are able to set realistic goals for themselves).
- *Beneficial long-term and post-course effects* (students who learn how to realistically evaluate their own learning possess leads to independent learning).

Self-assessment means being realistically critical of one's own work. Research shows that students without experience in this kind of critical evaluation find that it's not easy for them and need guidance and encouragement. Some typical problems for inexperienced learners may include:

- At first, learners will probably not produce objectively valid or reliable opinions about their work
- Students tend to overestimate or underestimate their abilities and accomplishments

- Some learners might feel uneasy about doing something that they believe is a teacher's prerogative
- Initially, learners are often better able to determine or admit what they can't do than what they can do
- Students may have problems understanding the process of self-assessment (Oskarsson, 1980)

Clearly, guidance in the use of self-assessment techniques is crucial. This may even require providing help to students in their first language. For learners who are unfamiliar with the process, the teacher will need to explain the purpose and benefits of self-assessment. In cases where learners display anxiety, the teacher should encourage them to be honest in their assessment and reassure them that their honesty will not affect grades in any way. Above all, teachers should demonstrate trust in their students' abilities to be responsible and realistic. They also must be patient and remember that they cannot expect objectivity, realistic goal setting, or recognition of strengths and weaknesses from learners who are new to the process of self-evaluation.

Self-assessment is simply one stage in the learning-teaching process (Tudor, 1996). The process itself is continuous and cyclical. After self-assessment, in which students have identified their weaknesses, they set goals to remediate them. A concrete plan to address those weaknesses is essential; without one, students may be left with a real sense of failure. Following the step of setting remedial objectives, the attainment of them should be monitored. Monitoring leads to feedback and a continuation of the cycle of goal setting and learning. This cycle is closely related to the notion of promoting greater learner autonomy, which should be a long-term goal in most programs. (Richards & Renandya, 2002).

In order to become lifelong learners, students need to learn the importance of self-evaluation. They can do this by filling out self-evaluation forms, using journals, taking tests, writing revisions of work, asking questions, and critically discussing important issues. When students evaluate themselves, they are assessing what they know, don't know, and what they would like to know. They begin to recognize their own strengths and weaknesses. They become more familiar with their own beliefs, and possibly their misconceptions. After they self-evaluate they will be able to set goals that they feel they can attain with the new knowledge they have about themselves (Dornyei, 2001).

Teachers should encourage self-evaluation because self-assessment makes the students active participants in their education. There are a variety of ways for teachers to provide the students with self-assessments. Research suggests that the simplest tools to encourage student self-assessment are evaluative questions that force students to think about their work (Oskarsson, 1980). Some examples of these questions include the following:

- How much time and effort did you put into this?
- What do you think your strengths and weaknesses were in this assignment?
- How could you improve your assignment?
- What are the most valuable things you learned from this assignment?

It is important for teachers to model self-assessment too. Teachers need to show their students that it is important for everybody to self-evaluate by doing their own self-



evaluations. One thing teachers can do is to ask their students for feedback on how the class is going and what the teacher is doing well and not so well. In this way the teacher is showing that they want to make improvements where needed. Teachers could put up a suggestion box, and they can hand out evaluation forms at different times of the year. This shows the students that continuous improvement is important.

## VI. CONCLUSION

From my experiences over the years, these enactment tools need to be used synergistically, yet without overdoing it as the perception of routine can possibly compromise the quality of information that you're seeking. The valuable information that's gathered through them though has certainly helped me become a much better language teacher and teacher trainer over the years. It's always great to receive positive feedback, but I find constructive criticism via suggestions to be the most beneficial as it's generally very precise and pertains to a specific aspect of an activity, assignment, and/or the course as a whole. This gives me an opportunity to review materials, lesson plans and activities, methods of instruction and teaching approaches, and the minutia of all that transpires in my classrooms. In the end, it's this cooperation and collaboration with my students that help me learn as much or more from them as they do from me – and it's what I'll continue to joyfully do and surely reap the rewards from.

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