Assessment and evaluation:

Alternatives for inquiry into language learning and teaching

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Dealing with change in language education
“We cannot afford to seek out foreign language skills after a terrorist attack occurs. The failures of communication and understanding have already done their damage. We must provide an ongoing commitment to language education and encourage knowledge of foreign languages and cultures.”

Daniel Akaka, U.S. Senator from Hawaii
Dealing with change in language education

The present state of language education and proficiency in Australia is seriously inadequate for our current and emerging needs, and far behind comparable levels in our peers and competitors. The size of this gap and the work and time required to close it has led some to describe the situation as a crisis.
At present, though, the English-speaking abilities of a large percentage of the population are inadequate, and this imposes restrictions on exchanges with foreigners and creates occasions when the ideas and opinions of Japanese people are not appropriately evaluated.
Dealing with change in language education

Language crisis facing UK schools

Ahead of a major report on how government policy wrecked foreign language teaching, academics demand new start for millions of children

Anushka Asthana, education correspondent

“We are lousy at foreign languages and shouldn’t be”

German that the school decided not to offer it at all.

Grace Hallows and her friend Sam Mottershed were among the handful who carried on. 'My Dad said he really regretted not listening in French lessons when he was at school,' said Grace, 14. 'He said it would look good on my CV and be useful for skiing.'
NCLB: K-12 school accountability in core academic subjects, “adequate yearly progress”

What gets assessed?
- Language arts (reading/writing)
- Math
- Science

What isn’t assessed?
- ‘Artistic’ arts...
- Foreign languages...
- Other subjects

What happens to FL/WL teaching and learning? (Rosenbusch, 2005)

Dealing with change in language education
Dealing with change in language education

“Viva la English”

Tribune Media: 10-26-2007

“I think that the fewer languages we have, the better off civilization will be.”
Dealing with change in language education

More than half of the world's 7,000 languages are expected to die out by the end of the century.

**BIOCULTURAL DIVERSITY?**

Most of what we know about species and ecosystems is not written down anywhere, it's only in people's heads.

David Harrison (2007) - Living Tongues Institute
Dealing with change in language education

Number of ‘newcomer’ children who need to study Japanese in schools in 1991 = 4,463

Number of ‘newcomer’ children who need to study Japanese in schools in 2002 = 19,764 (4X)

Foreign students in Japanese universities in 1985 = 19,741

Foreign students in Japanese universities in 2006 = 100,804 (5X)

 Brazilians residing in Japan in 1986 = 2,135

 Brazilians residing in Japan in 2005 = 302,080 (141X)
“English language learners (ELLs) are the fastest growing student population in America. Today, one out of every nine students is learning English as a second language...By 2025, English language learners will make up one out of every four students in our classrooms.”

Margaret Spellings (2005) - U.S. Secretary of Education

Number of children studying Chinese in U.S. schools: 24,000
Number of children studying English in Chinese schools: 200,000,000
Annual spending worldwide on English L2 learning: $50 billion
Dealing with change in language education

Proliferation of options

Tests (e.g., for English)
- TOEFL
- TOEIC
- IELTS
- SPEAK
- STEP
- KEPT
- Pearson
- ETC...

Commercial materials (e.g., for German FL)
- “Neue Horizonte”
- “Wie Geht’s?”
- “Deutsch: Na Klar!”
- “Kontakte”
- “Fokus Deutsch”
- “Access German”
- “Vorsprung”
- ETC...

Approaches & Principles & Techniques for L2 teaching
- TBLT
- CBI
- CLT
- FFI
- FONFS
- FONF
- FONM
- PI
- TPR
- ETC...
Dealing with change in language education

Are we seeking survival skills, intercultural competence, or academic proficiency?

Who are we teaching and what do they need to learn?

What are reasonable expectations for instructed L2 development?

What's the relationship between L1, L2, social, and academic development?

How should we go about understanding and improving language teaching and learning in the educational settings where it is needed and in response to the demands for change that it faces?

How should we inform much needed L2 educational reform?

How do we develop and support teachers to meet current demands?
Two approaches to L2 educational reform
Approach #1: Research as reform

**Theory**
- Cognition
- Acquisition
- Learning
  Etc.

Spoken interaction should be conducive to L2 acquisition

**Research**
- Methods comparisons
- Tasks, activities, techniques
- Instructed SLA
  Etc.

A variety of interactive tasks lead to noticing, awareness, and acquisition of L2 forms

**Practice**
- Curriculum
- Instruction
- Materials
- Teacher Dvlpt
  Etc.

TESOL/NCATE: “Candidates provide opportunities for meaningful interaction”
Research as reform?

Rationales and Principles
- Philosophy of Education
- Cognitive Psychology
- Sociocultural theory
- SLA
- Curriculum theory
- Planning and policy

L2 Education Programs
- Applied to
- Learners
- Needs
- Curriculum
- Instruction
- Materials
- Assessment
- Teacher development

Task-Based Language Teaching

Inform???
Task-Based Language Teaching

Discover robust, if small, truths

Improve teaching practice

Inform curriculum, course design

TEST hypotheses

Understand what works, where, when, & why

Generate theory

Research as reform?

GENERALIZABLE

DISCRETE

SITUATED

HOLISTIC
Researched claims about TBLT

Gilabert (2007): ...task complexity... stands out as a robust and testable construct for task and syllabus design.

Skehan & Foster (2001): ...the growing body of empirical research... provides principles which may guide pedagogic decision making.

Norris et al. (2002): ...These findings... are further discussed in light of the intended uses for performance assessment within language education.
Research as reform?

Researched claims about TBLT

Seedhouse (2005): ...how does the process of instructed L2 learning progress?

Slimani-Rolls (2005): ...This calls into question the desirability of output predictability as an aim for task-based materials design

Mori (2002): ...The examination of this episode raises several points of consideration regarding... task-based instruction in general
Premise: TBLT researchers (proponents and critics alike) want their work to inform claims about educational elements of task-based language teaching: e.g., syllabus, materials, pedagogy, assessment.
Research as reform?

**GENERALIZABLE**
- Generate theory

**DISCRETE**
- Discover robust, if small, truths

**SITUATED**
- Understand what works, where, when, & why

**HOLISTIC**
- Inform curriculum, course design

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**Task-Based Language Learning**
- Test hypotheses

**Task-Based Language Teaching**
- Improve teaching practice
Research as reform?

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Norris et al. (2002): ...These findings... are further discussed in light of the intended uses for performance assessment within language education.

Research basis for claims...

Quasi-experimental study of planning and task complexity conditions (N = 48)

Narrative review of empirical research on cognition and tasks

Analysis of test performances on tasks with differing cognitive demands (N = 90)
Research as reform?

Researched claims about TBLT

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Research basis for claims...

CA of 7 lines of interaction

Discourse analysis of 10 dyadic exchanges; follow-up interviews

CA of 3 extended, multi-turn interactional exchanges by one pair of students
Premise: Despite the will to make claims about educational elements of task-based teaching, TB research is driven by (a) theoretical concerns and (b) epistemological affinities.
Task-Based Language Teaching

Research as reform?

**GENERALIZABLE**
- Generate theory

**DISCRETE**
- Discover robust, if small, truths

**SITUATED**
- Understand what works, where, when, & why

**HOLISTIC**
- Improve teaching practice
- Inform curriculum, course design

Task-Based Language Learning

Test hypotheses
1. The scope of task-based research does not match the scope of our claims about (for or against) TBLT.

2. The focus of theoretical task-based research does not relate to the situated realities of task-based teaching and learning.

Needs
Curriculum
Materials
Instruction
Teachers
Learners
Assessment

Goals, outcomes
Scope, sequence
Resources
Practices
History, training
Individual differences
Intended uses, users

TBLT
Education
Programs
Theory-driven L2 research can inform certain improvements in L2 teaching and learning especially when we engage in sustained research programs that replicate instructional variables and accumulate reliable knowledge about specific cause-effect relationships (but that takes a while!)

However, research tends to focus on micro-teaching-variables and micro-learning-processes, overwhelmingly at the level of ‘lessons’

Research also occurs in highly controlled settings or through observation of highly selective segments of classroom discourse

L2 instructional research tends to operationalize acquisitional outcomes at the scope of specific L2 forms, rather than larger-scale language abilities
If we continue to suggest “implications” for teaching and learning based on research, we must ask ourselves to what extent our approach to research reflects the complex environments, the multivariate and large-scale outcomes, and the longitudinal time scales within which teaching and learning actually take place.
Approach #2: Policy as reform

**Professional & Political values**
- What works?
- What do we value?
- What can we afford?
  Etc.

FLs recognized as core academic subject in K-12, largely through efforts of the Standards movement (Rosenbusch, 2005)

**Policy**
- Standards
- Accountability, Accreditation, & other Mandates
- Testing
  Etc.

SFLL: Incorporate authentic L2 performance via teaching & learning in interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational modes

**Practice**
- Curriculum
- Instruction
- Materials
- Teacher Dvlpt
  Etc.

MLA (2008)

For college students majoring in a language, in addition to basic communicative skills other concepts should be emphasized:

- the aesthetics of language, for which literature can be a primary source
- the correspondence between sharpness of thought and aptness of expression
- the usefulness of language for manipulating abstract ideas and understanding complex issues

The major should instill the value of intellectual and linguistic accomplishment instead of functionality and should stress language and literature as key to understanding human achievement.
Policy as reform?

Introduced in...?

1996

Put into practice...?

High-quality teachers (2002)

NCATE - TESOL/ACTFL Teacher Development Program Standards


Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World
Policy as reform?

Testing becomes teaching & learning, for example:

**ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (1986, 1999), & OPI**

- A “common yardstick”...
- An “organizing principle”...
- A “proficiency movement”...
- A “quiet revolution”!!!

U.S. foreign language education
Policy as reform?

WebCAPE Foreign Language Placement Exam

Assessment as surrogate for teaching and learning
Top 3 sources of pressure for assessment in U.S. college FL programs:

1. University administration
2. The dean
3. Accreditation process

“As part of its re-accreditation, the university has required all undergraduate programs to create and implement outcomes-oriented assessment plans.”
(survey respondent)

“Time-consuming. Takes away from the business of teaching. Many aspects of learning can’t be measured.”
(survey respondent)
Educational policy can clearly engender reform in L2 teaching and learning.

Policy gets it right in knowing that assessment is perhaps the most effective and efficient mechanism for bringing about change (good or bad).

But, policy deals in extremely macro-level variables, such as idealized outcomes for all FL learners in the U.S., and may supersede realities of instructed SLA.

Policy-to-practice is also highly dependent on the extent to which assessment may or may not reflect intended improvements in teaching and learning.

Policy tends to ignore the realities of implementation—what teachers and learners do—focusing instead on end-points, regardless of how we might get there (or how teachers might be gotten there!)
Informing L2 educational reform?

Policy as reform

Standards & Testing

L2 Teaching & Learning
- Long-term
- Complex
- Situated
- Contingent
- Programmatic

Teacher/Professional Awareness

Research as reform
Assessment as inquiry into language learning
Assessment as inquiry

What is assessment?


Assessment is itself a particular kind of narrative:

• an evidentiary argument

• about aspects of what students know and can do,

• based on a handful of particular things they have said, done, or made.
Assessment as inquiry

What isn’t assessment?
**Assessment** is the systematic gathering of information about student learning in support of teaching and learning...It may be direct or indirect, objective or subjective, formal or informal, standardized or idiosyncratic...It provides locally useful information on learners and learning to those individuals responsible for doing something about it.

Norris (2006) *MLJ Perspectives*
Assessment as inquiry

ASSESSMENT USES

Accountability
Motivation
Justifying $ requests
Placement
Illumination
Revising curriculum
Improving learning
Articulation
Diagnosis
Certification
Achievement
Improving teaching
Development
Raising Awareness
Assessment as inquiry

Local educators
Local learners
L2 ed. researchers

Students’ L2
Development & Outcomes in situ

Reform: Improved L2
Teaching & Learning

Understand extent to which learning occurs as designed

Inquire into L2 learning in intentional, grounded, & systematic ways relevant to actual educational design

Local educators
Test

WHO?

WHAT?

IMPACT?

WHY?

Students’ L2 Development & Outcomes in situ

Reform: Improved L2 Teaching & Learning

Understand extent to which learning occurs as designed

Local learners
Test

In situ

Reform: Improved L2 Teaching & Learning

Local educators
WHO?

WHAT?

IMPACT?

WHY?
Assessment as inquiry

Defined by intended users

Embedded in curriculum & instruction

Reflective of learning trajectories

Developing assessment for inquiry

Authentic to learning targets

Collected systematically & regularly

Meaningful in scope and ‘grain size’
Assessment as inquiry

Who learns from assessment inquiry?  Local learning

“Focusing on student outcomes [...] has resulted in a cluster of new pedagogies [...] Starting with the outcomes that students are to achieve at each course level, we have created evaluation criteria, assessment instruments, and course content that are designed to help them incrementally improve toward those targeted goals in linguistic, cultural, and analytic abilities.”

Windham (2008, p. 35)
Assessment as inquiry

Who learns from assessment inquiry?  Local learning

“Assessment in this kind of a context is, I would almost say probably an indispensable aspect in order to clarify any number of things. Because it is in the discourse about assessment and how we would do that that our knowledge became articulated or the holes in that knowledge became clearer to ourselves, or the cover-ups that we had engaged in were no longer possible if we wanted to be honest with ourselves about it.”

Byrnes (personal communication; see also 2002, 2008)
Assessment as inquiry

Who learns from assessment inquiry?  Local learning

Southern Illinois German

“...More students are attracted to our program because the improvements in teaching and curriculum that grew out of the assessment process, which include increased emphasis on oral proficiency and culture for all languages, have enabled them to better move toward their goal of communicating fluently in the target language and acquiring an improved understanding not only of the target culture but also of their own.”

Carstens-Wickham (2008, p. 42)
## Assessment as inquiry

### Context
- German at Georgetown Univ.
- New curriculum: *Developing Multiple Literacies*
- Fully integrated Language & Content instruction
- Task- & genre-based
- Advanced L2 literacy target

### Problem
- New curriculum, new instruction, old assessment
- Accuracy of curricular learning trajectories?
- Students meeting expected outcomes?
- Feasible expectations for intensive and non?
- Relevance of external assessments?

### Role of assessment
- Operationalize curricular expectations
- Provide evidence regarding learner development & outcomes
- Enable between-level, and intensive/non comparisons
- Fit seamlessly into teaching and learning processes!!!
“Developing Multiple Literacies” Georgetown German

Level I: Contemporary Germany

Level II: Experiencing the German-Speaking World

Level III: German Stories & Histories

Level IV: Text in Context

Intermediate-Mid

Intermediate-High

Advanced-Mid

4-year genre- & task-based curriculum

Norris & Pfeiffer (2003)

ACTFL Proficiency benchmarks
Assessment as inquiry

Prototypical performance writing tasks

Level performance profiles

Task assignment sheets

Sample student performances

Development

Analysis

Revision

Deliberation

LEVEL

GROUPS

LEVEL

GROUPS
Assessment as inquiry

Curricular level expectations

- Task
- Content
- Language

Consistent assignment framework

- Assignment 1
- Assignment 2
- Semester...
- Assignment 3
- Assignment 4

Explicit performance criteria

Prototypical Performance Writing Task

- Task
Assessment as inquiry

Who learns from assessment inquiry?  
Global learning

Syntactic complexity development in task-based writing, Georgetown University German Department

Extended writing tasks (PPTs)

Longitudinal (N=23) + Cross-sectional (N=329)

End-of-curricular levels Across 4 years

Multiple analyses, including multiple analyses of Complexity
**LONGITUDINAL (n=23)**

MLTU ➔

= Global complexification

MLC ➔

= Subordination

C/TU ➔

= Phrasal elaboration
CROSS-SECTIONAL (n=329)

MLTU=Global complexification

MLC=Phrasal elaboration

C/TU=Subordination
Assessment as inquiry

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See Byrnes, Maxim, & Norris (forthcoming)
Assessment as inquiry

Global learning about syntactic complexity vis-à-vis proficiency/development

1. Complexification occurs in distinct ways at different points in development
2. Syntactic complexity is multi-faceted; so, measures must be multivariate
3. Complexification is a long-term developmental process, best understood in context
4. Ability to use very advanced L2 syntax can be achieved within instructed FL settings.

See also:
Norris & Ortega (2009)
Evaluation as inquiry into language education
Evaluation as inquiry

Patton (1997): “Program evaluation is undertaken to inform decisions, clarify options, identify improvements, and provide information about programs and policies within contextual boundaries of time, place, values, and politics.”

(p. 24)
Evaluation as inquiry

What isn’t evaluation?

**RateMy Professors**

**Quality Rating Categories**

😊 How easy?

😊 How fair?

😊 How good?

HOW HOT???

**RateMyTeachers.com**

Teacher Ratings By Students and Parents
Evaluation is the gathering of information about any of the variety of elements that constitute educational programs, for a variety of purposes that include primarily understanding, demonstrating, improving, and judging program value; evaluation brings evidence to bear on the problems of programs, but the nature of that evidence is not restricted to one particular methodology.

Norris (2006) *MLJ Perspectives*
Evaluation as inquiry

Major purposes for evaluation

**Summative purpose:** To judge merit, worth, value, and effectiveness of programs
- Judge
- Fund
- Hold accountable

**Formative purpose:** To develop and improve programs (An iterative process of reflection and innovation)
- Develop
- Improve
- Transform

**Empowerment purpose:** educate, empower, encourage ownership among program constituents via participation
- Empower
- Educate
- Advocate

**Knowledge construction purpose:** generate theory, share perceptions & understandings about programs
- Generate knowledge
- Test theory
- Illuminate
“The evaluator will be wise not to declare allegiance to either a quantitative-scientific-summative methodology or a qualitative-naturalistic-descriptive methodology.” (p. 7)
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Cronbach et al. (1980)
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“The evaluator will be wise not to declare allegiance to either a quantitative-scientific-summative methodology or a qualitative-naturalistic-descriptive methodology.” (p. 7)
Programmes are individual and personalised, and teaching involves constructing the curriculum rather than just delivering it. The programme is managed internally by students and teachers, and also shaped by quality frameworks and mandates from external bodies.

Kiely & Rea-Dickins (forthcoming)
Participation - stakeholders, representatives, primary intended users

Prioritization - challenges, questions in immediate need of answers

Instrumentation - what data will answer the questions?

Collection - how can we get data in available time/resources?

Interpretation - what do findings mean in context?

Utilization - what decisions & actions are taken?

Evaluation as inquiry

Language educators are ultimately responsible for what happens in language education. Participation by language educators is essential throughout evaluation if contextual relevance is sought.

A focus on specific intended uses for evaluation findings is essential from the outset, if evaluation is to make any difference.
Evaluation as inquiry


**SOCIETAL CONTEXT**

*Dutch SL*  
Education in Flanders; Nationwide; K-16; Ensuring Educational Access, Equity

Large-scale *Task-Based* LT Innovation; Improving Functional DSL Abilities

School-based *Teacher-Training* Programs; Enabling Teacher Change
Evaluation as inquiry

TBLT Program (introduced in Flanders)
- Learner needs analysis
- Syllabus design
- Materials development
- Pedagogic delivery
- Assessment

Teacher development

T-DEV Program (state-subsidized)
- Preservice training
- Inservice training
- In-school help
- Coaching
- Team-building

Training and Support
Van den Branden (2006): “...the teacher tries to act as a true interactional partner, negotiating meaning and content with the students, eliciting and encouraging their output, focusing on form when appropriate and offering them a rich, relevant and communicative input” (p. 217).

Evaluation as inquiry

**Evaluation PROBLEMS**

**Teacher cognition**
- What do they theorize about TBLT?
- How do they learn about TBLT?

**Teacher action**
- Are they willing to change with syllabus?
- How do they adopt/adapt TBLT in practice?

**Teaching context**
- What are the social constraints on T-Dev?
- How can T-Dev be optimized?

**Evaluation USES**

- Understand teachers
- Illuminate context
- Improve T-dev program
- Encourage teacher agency
- Ensure teaching success
- Enable TBLT learning
- Demonstrate outcomes
Evaluation as inquiry

Overall design:

→ Long-term (1992-2004), Sustained (e.g., 9-week study; 57 classroom hours recorded; etc.):
  → Use-focused (developers & funders seek improvement of teacher training)
    → Iterative problem-solving (each stage feeds into program development)
      → Program-context-embedded (actual teachers, students, trainers)
        → Multi-methodological!
Program: Theoretical inservice training

Methods:
• Teacher survey
• Training observation

Findings:
• Transmission model
• Short term (3 hrs.)
• “Try that with my students”...Post-coursal depression!

Program: TB training + syllabus support

Methods:
• Teacher logs, interviews, classroom observations

Findings:
+ awareness of TBLT
+ student enthusiasm
? teacher adoption
- teacher control
- task complexity
- groupwork

Program: Training + coaching + agency

Methods:
• Coaching obs, classroom obs, coach/teacher interviews

Findings:
+ conscious decisions
+ TBLT adaptation
+ self-evaluation
? teacher control
- transfer
- groupwork
Program: Sustained implementation of TBLT T-Dev with coaching, support

Methods:
• Pre-post student learning outcomes, teacher surveys, classroom observations

Findings:
+ incorporation of TBLT correlated with higher Dutch L2 proficiency outcomes
+ 3 year gains in DSL higher in TBLT intensive adopting schools
? mixed incorporation of TBLT across schools, teachers
Global learning from evaluation inquiry:

Teacher cognition makes a difference
- Adapt T-Dev methodology to long-term, gradual, concrete, supportive nature of teacher change

Social, educational context makes a difference
- Organize and embed T-Dev methods within political, social, school, and local training contexts

Teacher agency can outweigh pedagogic ideals
- Link agency to learning outcomes, provide needs-based training on individualized basis, encourage self-assessment at teacher and school levels

Teacher change related to learner improvements
- Persist in TBLT implementation activities, with improvements based on what was learned thus far
Any programme can be effective in promoting language learning. The key issues are how it has been made to work, and which factors and events have shaped success. Certainly, there will be many answers to this question, phenomena minor in themselves but connecting with a range of other features of the programme to constitute a complex set of experiences, with more or less potential for learning...

Evaluation then becomes a set of strategies to document and understand the programme...

Evaluation has to engage with the social, cultural, and historical identity of the programme, as a product of the institution, as a phase in the biographies of participants, and as a context of personal investments of individual stakeholders.

Kiely (2008)
Towards inquiry-based reform in language education
Towards inquiry-based reform

1. Re-conceive of assessment and evaluation as processes of inquiry, rather than bureaucratic or managerial mandates.

Richard Light (2001) on assessment:

“...a process of evaluating and improving current programs, encouraging innovations, and then evaluating each innovation’s effectiveness. The key step is systematic gathering of information for sustained improvement. And always with an eye toward helping faculty or students work more effectively.”

(p. 224)
Towards inquiry-based reform

2. Consider diverse ways in which we can learn from assessment and evaluation, at local, disciplinary, and policy levels.

Kiely & Rea-Dickins (forthcoming):

“We envisage that future evaluation for the development of instructional strategies will involve accounts of implementation from contexts such as these, accounts of how decisions are taken, rather than ‘branded’ methods tested and quality-assured for replication in new contexts.”

“Through practice, theoretical procedures change, new insights inform decisions, learning happens. Evaluation as part of this practice facilitates such change, allows tools to become processes, and empowers participants to maximise their own learning from the programme.”
Towards inquiry-based reform

3. Build a scholarship of assessment and evaluation in the service of understanding and improving L2 education.

Encourage and pursue advanced training in assessment and evaluation

Special issue, 13(1): Understanding and improving language education through program evaluation
http://www.nflrc.hawaii.edu/evaluation