

WORKS-IN-PROGRESS ABSTRACTS ---

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Reconciliation between assessment for learning and assessment of learning in Chinese award-winning teachers' EFL classrooms

As an indispensable component of campus and even social life, assessment should not be discussed in a culture vacuum. The values of assessment for learning have been investigated and supported in the international literature, but even in the western context where it has been promoted for decades, there are indications that achieving congruence between assessment for learning (AfL) and assessment of learning (AoL) is by no means an easy thing. In a more test-dominated setting like Hong Kong, paradigm conflict emerged when school-based assessment was introduced into a more formal and summative assessment system. To date, relatively little research has been conducted to unravel AfL in university EFL classrooms in mainland China; this study will address the gap by probing perceptions and practices of university award-winning EFL teachers in relation to classroom-based assessment. The group of award-winning teachers are brought into focus in this study because they are believed to achieve reconciliation between formative purposes of assessment and system-wide accountability demands in a tactical and practical way. The research participants are competitors in the final of a national foreign language teaching contest in China. The selective mechanism of the contest has decided that these teachers are well-acknowledged for their learning-oriented teaching and high academic performances of their students in some national standardized testing. Investigation into their assessment perceptions and practices may allow us a glimpse at how AfL and AoL can be aligned for practical purposes in Chinese university classroom settings. Seventeen EFL award-winning teachers selected by the contest were interviewed about their perceptions and daily practices of classroom assessment at the first stage of the study. As the study proceeds, further classroom observation in two of the participants will be carried out. Interviews with students and faculty-level policy-makers will also be conducted to elicit their beliefs about assessment, teaching and learning. Preliminary findings from the interviews indicate that award-winning teachers generally demonstrate formative orientation in their classroom assessment planning, framing, conducting and reporting. Through practices like learning strategies training and peer assessment, they align assessment with teaching and learning in the micro environment of classrooms to counterbalance unwanted impact of summative assessments from the macro contexts. This study, triangulated with classroom observation and interview with students and faculty-level policy makers in the following stage, will be of practical significance for the implementation of AfL in China and other Confucian-influenced settings. In such cultural contexts where tremendous importance has been attached to test scores, it is still possible and highly valuable to focus on the learning-facilitating purpose of assessment. The various strategies of AfL and its reconciliation with AoL in Chinese award-winning teachers' EFL classrooms may be a compromise, but in a necessary and beneficial way.