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<th><strong>Title</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Author(s)</strong></td>
<td>Carless, DR</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Citation</strong></td>
<td>The 48th RELC International Seminar, Singapore, 18-20 March 2013.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Issued Date</strong></td>
<td>2013</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>URL</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10722/201371">http://hdl.handle.net/10722/201371</a></td>
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Developing formative potential when summative assessment dominates

David Carless
University of Hong Kong
Overview

- Relationships between summative and formative assessment
- The role of context
- Students setting a test paper
- Student drawings research
- Implications for theory and practice
SUMMATIVE (SA) AND FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT (FA)
Two teacher roles: judging and supporting

• Judging student performance, especially in summing up achievement (summative assessment)
• Supporting student learning (formative assessment)
• School tests usually need to fulfill both summative and formative roles: tensions
SA/FA relationships

• SA often a barrier to FA but also scope for positive interplay between the two.

• Possibility of developing greater formative potential from processes that might be interpreted by teachers and students as largely summative
Facilitated by ..

• Well-designed tests/assessment which promote cognitive engagement
• Active student involvement
• Focus on mastery as well as performance
• A purposeful cycle of revision and follow-up
• Assessment literacy
THE ROLE OF CONTEXT AND CULTURE
From Testing to Productive Student Learning: Implementing Formative Assessment in Confucian-Heritage Settings

David Carless
History of examinations

- Competitive examinations dating to the Han dynasty: Imperial civil service examination system (Keju 科舉) from AD 606 to 1905
- Implementing FA in Chinese settings particularly needs to acknowledge the dominance of tests
The sculpture “Play Less” <<戲無益>> is located in Guangzhou Diaosu Park.
Formative use of tests designed primarily for summative purposes

- Student self-evaluation of test performance
- Re-teaching in qualitatively different ways
- Peer co-operation in revision and follow-up
Example test preparation activity

• Competition amongst groups
• Energetic peer coaching by team members
• One member of each 4 person group called out to blackboard

(Carless, 2011)
TEACHER IMPLEMENTATION ➔ STUDENTS’ PERSPECTIVES
Students’ perceptions

Key words in captions

- exam
- marks
- test
- low
- happy
- nervous
- feel
- mother
- score
- high
- scared
- stressed
- unhappy
- study
- afraid
Before the exam, I feel happy and relaxed. After it, I cry and feel confused.
I gave my test paper to my mother. She was very happy because I got 100. If I got low scores, she will be very angry and will scold me.
Parental involvement

“Whenever I revise my for the exam, my mum is always sitting next to me. Her presence is like a policewoman more than a tutor who can teach me”

(Carless & Lam, 2012)
RECENT RESEARCH 1: DEVELOPMENTAL WORK WITH PRIMARY SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHERS IN HONG KONG (Carless & Lam, 2013; Lam, 2012)
Active revision

• Students drafting their own test paper to enhance their revision process

• ‘Regular’ 8 year old Hong Kong Chinese students learning EFL/ESL
Preparation of test questions

• Helps students develop an overview of what is being studied (Black et al., 2003)

• Leads to cognitive gains (Rosenshine et al., 1996)

• Generating (and answering) potential test questions promotes successful performance (Foos et al., 1994)
Teaching procedures

• Introduce various types of assessment items, such as MC, filling in blanks.
• Revise key test content
• Asked students to form groups of four and construct their own mock test paper (and a marking scheme)
• Exchange papers
Selected findings

• Teacher reported higher scores (average + 7%) in the test which followed, in comparison with the previous year.
• Some students found it challenging to write MC questions: constructing distracters as well as correct answer.
• Students found it novel and fun.
• Student: “I feel so proud I can set a test paper for my classmates.”
Summary of the practice

• Teacher built on student desire for high test marks by arranging a revision task with students generating test questions.

• Students develop some ownership of the test preparation process, participants rather than just recipients.
RECENT RESEARCH 2: STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL IN HUBEI (Xiao & Carless, 2013)
Yangyu Xiao (Shirley), PhD student
University of Hong Kong
Research prompt

Draw a picture of English assessment based on your own understandings, experiences and feelings, and include an explanatory caption.

29 students (16-17 y.o) generated 68 pictures.
Key themes

Affective responses
- 21 negative, 14 positive

Summative aspects
- Test results, procedures, limitations

Formative potential
- Teacher support
- Peer feedback
- Student follow-up
When I finished the exercises, the teacher checked my homework, made comments and communicated with me face to face. Afterwards, I am more aware of what I need to improve most and I will be motivated for future study.
Peer dictation is an original way for students to assess themselves. It can help improve student-student communication. It is great, but so hard!
I got a lot wrong in dictation. Textbooks are important and I need to digest them.
Student challenges

• Stating that they planned to follow-up, rather than actually following through
• Finding time/energy to remediate learning difficulties when faced with new content or tasks
• Memorization to boost marks rather than genuine long-term learning
Conclusions and Implications
Contextually grounded formative assessment practices

• Acknowledging dominance of testing and the existing practices / beliefs of teachers, whilst bringing some formative potential into summative assessment practices (Carless, 2011)
Restricted and extended FA

**Restricted** – a pragmatic, diluted version; emphasis on FA within SA

**Extended** – a more ambitious, extended version; greater emphasis on student autonomy and direction of own learning
Implications for theory

• A continuum of enacted formative assessment practice

Restricted <-> Extended FA

(Carless, 2011, chapter 5)
Implications for practice (1)

• Engaging students actively in test preparation and follow-up activities
• Promoting mastery (as well as performance)
Implications for practice (2)

• Key role of teacher in inducting students into rules of the (assessment and learning) game

• E.g. teach students how to revise, how to learn, how to use feedback

• Activate the students as users of assessment information
THANK YOU