

Appropriate formative assessment in a collectionist culture

Paul Stables

Hong Kong Shue Yan College

ABSTRACT

Much work has been done in recent years on formative assessment and the importance of using feedback loops to close the gap between actual and desired student performance. In this paper, I suggest that as the formative assessment movement expands beyond its Western base, the experience of the English language teaching profession has some useful insights to offer. The profession has had long experience of using formative assessment through the process writing approach, but in recent years it has become wary of simply transferring teaching methods from Western countries to other contexts. Using qualitative interviews with six Hong Kong degree level students, this paper investigates one particular case where the instructor thought that a writing course featuring formative assessment had been very successful but the results of a student evaluation survey indicated otherwise. I conclude that, in what has been termed a "collectionist culture", it is necessary to dilute the collaborative pedagogy of formative assessment with a more didactic approach.

Introduction

Ever since Black and Wiliam (1998) produced their much cited comprehensive meta-analysis of 250 previously published items, and concluded that formative assessment produced major benefits, work has continued to design assessment instruments with feedback loops to help close the gap between actual and desired student performance. A glance through the references listed in review articles such as Black and Wiliam (1998) or Yorke (2003) reveals that most work on formative assessment has been firmly situated within an Anglo-Saxon western-oriented pedagogical context. Not surprisingly, it is now spreading beyond that. In recent years in my context of higher education in Hong Kong, there has been a significant effort to promote formative assessment as a useful response to concerns about the quality of student work. Much of this effort has been made by the Learning Oriented Assessment Project (LOAP), a three-year University Grants Committee funded project based at the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIED) with collaborative input from several other Hong Kong institutions. Numerous seminars have been organised in multiple locations featuring guest speakers, including such leading experts as David Boud, Lewis Elton, Peter Knight, Graham Gibbs, and Royce Sadler. These activities culminated in a one-day conference in June 2005 (Hong Kong Institute of Education, 2005). Independently of LOAP, another conference on assessment that had formative assessment as a

major theme was also held in June 2005 (Hong Kong Polytechnic University, 2005).

My own particular niche of higher education, teaching academic writing to non-native speakers of English, can, I believe, provide two useful insights relevant to the development of formative assessment in an East Asian context. Firstly, although Yorke (2003, p. 477) has said that formative assessment is “not well understood across higher education” it has been part of the English writing scene for many years. Law and Murphy (1997) have outlined how, from the late 1970s onwards, the writing centres of American universities, through their preference for the process writing approach, have put into practice the principles of formative evaluation set out by Bloom, Hastings and Madans in their *Handbook on Formative and Summative Evaluation of Student Learning* (1971). The process approach to writing has spread far and wide and has come to mean many different things, but underlying these differences is an interest in the creative process behind the writing product. Student writers are often guided through this process in stages from generating ideas and collecting information, through organising and focussing their ideas to writing initial drafts, revising those drafts in the light of peer, tutor, or self review before at some point finalising the finished product. Although Yorke (2003, p. 478) has conceded that there is a certain “fuzziness” about the definition of formative assessment, there are clear similarities between the process approach to writing as described above and formative assessment as described by Black and Wiliam (1998) and Yorke (2003). For example, the purpose of formative assessment is developmental and its nature is “quintessentially process-orientated” (Yorke, 2003, p. 485). Black and Wiliam (1998, p. 20) have said that the key to formative assessment is in first getting learners to recognise that there is “a gap” in their knowledge, understanding, or skills and then providing them with feedback so that they take action to close that gap. Both formative assessment and process writing are recursive remedial processes in which feedback, whether it be generated by the learner, a peer reviewer, or tutor intervention, is used to reduce the distance between the learner’s output and that which is expected in a particular context.

Secondly, during the 1990s, within the English language teaching profession, it has become less acceptable to simply transfer teaching methods, material, and expertise from countries that have English as a first language to countries that use English as a foreign or additional language. Anderson (2003, pp. 83-85) has argued that this “intellectual shift” has occurred because such a transfer is seen either as a form of neo-colonialism in which the centre oppresses the periphery [for expansion on this theme see Phillipson (1992), Pennycook (1994) and Canagarajah (1999)], or, as a clash of academic cultures that can occur both at the centre and the periphery. The latter alternative has been fully articulated by Holliday in *Appropriate Methodology and Social Context* (1994). He does not view the global expansion of English as necessarily oppressive but does see it as inappropriate and problematic to attempt to transfer pedagogical methodology developed in what he terms an “integrationist culture”—one characterised by blurred subject boundaries and a skills-based, discovery orientated, collaborative approach, to a “collectionist culture” that features strong subject boundaries and

a subject orientated, didactic approach. The differing agendas and expectations of the teacher and students can lead to conflict and confusion.

At this point, I think I should state very clearly what some might see as a bias: that is, I am a strong believer in formative assessment. My own observation is that it works, it certainly produces better student work, and I believe that over time it produces more thoughtful, more reflective, more competent students. However, implementation is everything. Writing in the L1 context, both Black and Wiliam (1998, p. 59) and Yorke (2003, p. 496) call for more qualitative research into how students perceive and respond to formative assessment. Given the concerns about transferring pedagogical methods from one culture to another, this may be even more important in the L2 context. This paper is both a response to the call for further research and a cautionary tale of what can happen if one tries to be too formative with students in a collectionist academic culture.

Context and Methodology

At very short notice, I was asked to teach an elective course entitled *Persuasive Writing* to students in Years 3 and 4 of a Hong Kong B.A. Honours degree in Journalism and Mass Communication. There were to be 28 students in the class, 26 female and 2 male. This was the first time this particular course had been presented. The syllabus, teaching materials, and assignments had been designed by a colleague with the intention that he would teach the course, but for various operational reasons this did not happen. I mean no disrespect to my colleague when I say how much I dislike having to teach a course designed by someone else, particularly when it has been designed for that someone else to teach. The teaching methodology of the designer permeates the course, and an outsider not privy to the private rationale behind it can often be left bemused. I had two particular concerns. One was that the quantity of teaching materials produced (30 pages) seemed inadequate for a fifteen-week course with three contact hours per week. The second concern was the scheduling of the assessment. Seventy-percent of the final grade was allocated to three essay-length pieces of writing that were to be planned, written, and revised in the final three weeks of the semester. To me, there did not seem to be enough space for students to do the necessary planning, writing, and revising let alone enough space for the instructor to provide significant meaningful formative feedback between and within each assignment.

Enthused by my attendance at a Learning Orientated Assessment Project or LOAP seminar held at the Hong Kong Institute of Education in June 2004 and emboldened by the success of a poetry course that had been heavy with formative assessment (Stables, 2004), I decided to reschedule the major assignments so that each one became a project stretching over four weeks, in which student work was interleaved with frequent formative feedback and evaluation from the instructor. An outline of the course appears in Table 1.

Table 1*Persuasive Writing: Overview of Course Schedule*

Week 1	Introduction to the course, objectives, distribution of course materials, small group work on brainstorming and analyzing a piece of persuasive writing.
Week 2	Thesis, audience, appealing to emotions, appealing to reason, anticipating counter arguments.
Weeks 3–6	Project 1 (Completed in instructor selected groups): An 800–1000 word essay for publication in the College newspaper that describes the problem of stress in Hong Kong undergraduates and advocates certain measures to alleviate the problem.
Weeks 7–10	Project 2 (Completed in instructor selected groups): An 800–1000 word proposal addressed to the Programme Committee of the Department of Journalism suggesting a new course for the journalism degree programme.
Weeks 11–15	Project 3 (Completed on an individual basis): An 800–1000 word essay that either argues for a particular point of view/policy in relation to sexual equality or advocates a new piece of legislation on any subject.

Each project was divided into four component stages: a) generating ideas, preparation, and research; b) draft introduction with thesis statement and outline plan; c) complete 1st draft; and d) final submission. Each stage was evaluated and awarded a grade; readers might like to note the distinction I make between formative feedback—comments and suggestions that the learner should respond to and formative evaluation—interim grades awarded prior to a final grade. To many advocates of formative assessment, awarding interim grades in this fashion is controversial (Black and Wiliam, 1998, pp. 23–24) and we shall be returning to this issue later.

This was a radical redesign that replaced much of the timetabled face-to-face contact time with project self-study sessions, group, and individual tutorials. It alleviated the problem of not having enough teaching material, but more importantly it created plenty of space for the instructor to provide formative feedback and further space for the students to respond. Table 2 sets out the interactive and formative nature of one of the projects.

Was the course a success? As I sat down in January compiling the final grades, I certainly thought it had been a critical success. In Project 1 five of the nine groups had produced poor or very poor draft introductions that provided very little context for their essay and contained little or no guidance about how it would proceed, but after a tutorial with the instructor, they had gone on to produce a fair to excellent first draft, and after a further tutorial they had been able to rework this into a very good or excellent final submission. Four groups had responded less well to the formative feedback. Three groups improved between the draft introduction and the first draft but had then stalled, while one group that produced a reasonable draft introduction failed to build on their initial success.

In Project 2, the draft introductions produced by all groups were significantly better than they had been for Project 1; six of the nine groups managed to make considerable improvement during the drafting and redrafting stages, two groups

Table 2

Project 2 Schedule: Weeks 7 through 10

Date	Student activity	Instructor's feedback
Thursday 21 October	Review of lessons learnt from Project 1. In-class brainstorming sessions conducted in small groups.	Verbal feedback in response to brainstormed ideas.
Thursday 28 October	No formal class, groups working independently on projects. Brainstorming notes and a working bibliography to be submitted to the instructor's pigeonhole on 29 October.	
Monday 1 November	Deadline for submitting, by email attachment, a draft introduction.	
Tues–Wed 2–3 November		20 minute group tutorials reviewing research and preparation and providing formative feedback on the draft introductions.
3 November		500 words of general formative feedback on draft introductions broadcast by email to all students.
Thursday 4 November	No formal class, groups working independently on projects.	
Monday 8 November	Deadline for submitting, by email attachment, a 1st draft.	
Mon–Wed 8–10 November		20 minute group tutorials providing formative feedback on the 1st drafts.
Thursday 11 November	No formal class, groups working independently on projects.	
Monday 15 November	Deadline for submitting, by email attachment, the final submission.	Margin and end-comments made on student texts.

that had produced very good draft introductions maintained the quality of their work and one group regressed.

Project 3 was written on an individual basis and therefore showed greater variation in performance. A few students, most paying the price for free riding during the group project stage, were unable to demonstrate that they had assimilated the main characteristics of persuasive writing and did not do so well, but the vast majority of students were able to use the individual tutorial at the

end of the draft introduction stage to produce a reasonable or even good first draft. However, they then found it difficult to use a self-analysis sheet to affect noticeable improvement before the final submission.

Despite this difficulty, significant because self-reflective autonomy is the end goal of formative assessment (Yorke, 2003, pp. 491–492), I would say that overall, the course was a success. I would even say that it was one of the most successful writing courses that I have ever been involved in. Student progress within each project and over the course was better than I had ever encountered before and to me the course had been an energizing experience. However, I had an unpleasant surprise when I received the results of the institutionally administered course and teaching evaluation survey (known as the CTE) that all students complete at the end of each course. The survey poses a series of statements and students use a five-point scale to indicate their level of agreement with each. 1.00 represents strong disagreement and is always a negative evaluation; 5 represents strong agreement and is always a positive evaluation. My normal range over the last few years has been between 3.5 and 4.5, depending on the course and the specific statement.

For this persuasive writing course, my range of scores was between 2.60 and 3.14 much lower than the level I am accustomed to and well below the level that I feel comfortable with. Standout brickbats included:

- The course's projects and assignments helped me to have a better understanding of the course. 2.86
- The teacher was well prepared for class. 2.64
- The teacher made effective use of examples and illustrations. 2.64
- The teacher made appropriate use of teaching materials and methods. 2.64
- The teacher gave clear instructions and provided constructive feedback on student assignments/ exercises/ tests. 2.91
- The teacher could maintain discipline in class effectively. 2.95
- In general, I am satisfied with the teacher's performance. 2.82

To investigate the mismatch between my own and the students' evaluation I interviewed six of the participating students. All were female, selected through a semi-random process that ensured a variety of different grades were represented. All interviewees could speak freely to me, confident that I would never be teaching them again. The focussed interviews took place individually at various coffee shops and restaurants convenient for the interviewee and lasted about one and a half hours. Questions centred on six themes; these were to do with the interviewees' motivation and their perceptions of the teaching methodology, the assignments, the interleaved formative feedback and evaluation, and their explanation for my low CTE scores.

Findings

Student motivation for taking Persuasive Writing

The CTE indicated that the level of student interest in this course was low to medium. This was confirmed by the interviewees. While developing or improving persuasive writing skills was mentioned twice it appeared to be a secondary concern behind issues such as timetabling, the belief that a skills-based course would involve less work than a content based course, and *Persuasive Writing* being the best choice available from a poor selection. Four interviewees said that being taught by a native English teacher was a major factor for them but care must be exercised from generalising from this finding as a student who wanted to be taught by a Native English Teacher is also more likely to accept an invitation to be interviewed by one.

Student perception of the organization and teaching methodology of the course

There was unanimous agreement that the organization and structure of the Persuasive Writing course was very different from any other course that they had experienced. No interviewee had previous experience of the instructor selecting groups, neither had any encountered the close level of project supervision, the level of continuous formative feedback through tutorials and emails, or the level of student interaction with each other, and they had seldom had the experience of a regular class being replaced by a self-study periods or a group tutorial.

Student perception of the project topics

All interviewees agreed that the first project on stress was the least interesting. All of them saw it as a standard topic, either very familiar or even too familiar. One said that it was a secondary school topic not suitable for undergraduates. Their familiarity with it might have led to a certain level of contempt and this might explain the general poor start to Project 1 mentioned earlier.

All interviewees also agreed that Project 2, suggesting a new course for their degree programme, was the most interesting. This was seen as a very fresh or novel topic, situated within their current sphere of experience, meaningful and relevant to all. One interviewee was eager for the final submissions to be forwarded to the institution's senior management.

Project 3 was seen as being somewhere in between. There was a choice of topics, students could either write on an aspect of sexual equality or propose a new law. Both topics were seen as interesting, one interviewee thought being given the chance to propose a new law allowed her to be creative, others having chosen the wide topic of sexual equality found it difficult to narrow it down sufficiently.

Student perceptions of the interleaved formative feedback for Projects 1, 2, and 3

There was general agreement that the emails, group tutorials, and individual

tutorials had been beneficial. All interviewees felt that they had been able to use feedback from the emails/tutorials to improve their essays or proposals. Two interviewees who had achieved the higher grades (A-, B+) were very enthusiastic they found both the tutorials and emails very useful and clearly stated that the course had dramatically increased their understanding of the importance of structure in a piece of writing and the importance of supporting assertions with evidence. Two others were less enthusiastic, but still positive; one, for example, acknowledged that if feedback comes at the end of a project, then it is too late to correct mistakes. Two interviewees (B and C+) had a more sceptical attitude; some of the caveats raised were as follows:

- The tutorials only helped us to develop the content and ideas for that specific essay and did little to develop persuasive writing skills;
- Some of the emails were too general and did not give specific enough advice;
- Group tutorials were too short and rushed, be better if drafts (with comments) were returned prior to the tutorial rather than at the tutorial;
- Whether tutorial is useful or not depends on how bad the draft is; if the draft was bad then the tutorial was useful, if the draft was good then it wasn't;
- The individual tutorial for the draft introduction did not clarify how the essay should be organised;
- Could the feedback not be given during normal classes? Group tutorials are inconvenient, it is difficult to find a good time for everyone;
- It would have been better to study more model essays in normal classes.

Student explanation for the failure of the self-analysis checklist in Project 3

Only one interviewee, who had received an A-, found the self-analysis checklist useful in affecting improvements to her first draft. Most of the others could identify weaknesses but claimed either that they had no confidence to initiate changes or asserted that they were "too lazy" to do so. One interviewee thought that students had become too reliant on the tutorial feedback and saw the checklist as a withdrawal of support by the instructor. A common remark was that most of them were confident that their work was satisfactory or OK and had no further motivation to try to make it excellent. One interviewee said she just wanted to finish the paper before the exams.

Student general perception of the interleaved formative evaluation

Three out of the six interviewees thought the interleaved evaluation whereby the grade for a project was the sum of the grades for its four component parts was good or very good. They believed it helped them monitor their progress and encouraged hard work. None saw it as unfair that the final grade for the project could be less than the grade for the final submission.

Two more thought it was OK or quite good and also accepted that it was a good motivator but seemed to have some reservation that they were unable to state. These five thought that the weighting for the generation of ideas, research and planning should be reduced from 30% to 20% and the weighting for the final submission should be increased from 40% to 50%.

One interviewee, who had also been the most sceptical of the usefulness of the interleaved formative feedback, thought that only the generation of ideas, research and planning, and the final submission should count towards the project grade. She felt that including grades for drafts was not helpful and she did not think the lack of grades would affect motivation as long as comments and feedback were still given.

Student explanation for my low CTE scores

The interviewees were amused and slightly embarrassed by my CTE scores. I attempted to go through the CTEs item by item to see what the explanation for each was but I had to abandon this approach when it became clear that there was one overarching reason behind the low scores and that was the very low number of traditional didactic teaching lessons. All interviewees believed that if the course had been more teacher-centred, with more traditional lessons, particularly ones that featured models of persuasive writing, and if there had been less group discussion to generate ideas and if I had been more prescriptive about the ideas and content that I wanted to see in the projects, then my CTE scores would have been a lot higher. In respect of my maintenance of discipline, all interviewees thought my score would have been higher had I been tougher with late arrivals and absentees and the key to this would be to award a grade for attendance. Two interviewees qualified their comments by saying that they did not think it was appropriate at the tertiary level to award grades for attendance but they were still sure it would have increased my score.

The interviews then developed into a discussion as to how the number of traditional didactic lessons could be increased. Four of the interviewees had been quite or very positive about the formative feedback and my own observation was that it had significantly improved student writing. I pointed out that it was not really possible to both increase the level of didactic teaching and maintain the current level of formative feedback with student drafting and redrafting. Four of the six wanted to ensure that the process writing approach and the formative feedback were kept but wanted to find a balance between it and a more didactic approach. Two suggestions were forthcoming to facilitate this. One was to maintain the current design of the projects with four component parts and frequent interleaved formative assessment but reduce the number to two, preferably individual projects or if this was not possible one group and one individual project. The space produced by this reduction would be filled with more traditional teaching supplemented by student analysis of model essays. The other suggestion, which was favoured by those who had been more sceptical of benefits of the formative evaluation and feedback, was to maintain the number of projects at three but reduce the length of each from four weeks to two and reduce the number of tutorials from two to one and not bother to rewrite the first draft.

Discussion

To summarise, my findings have shown that the interviewees had medium to low motivation, and thought that at least two out of the three essay-length assignments were interesting or very interesting. They also thought that the teaching methodology of this course was very novel. While most interviewees found the interleaved formative feedback to be useful, there was scepticism of its efficacy among a significant minority. Although the course had helped all interviewees to develop their writing skills, only one interviewee had reached a level of self-reflective autonomy that was close to the true end of formative assessment. However, whether the others were prevented from doing so by a lack of competence, confidence, or motivation remains unclear. All interviewees attributed my low CTE scores not so much to formative assessment *per se*, but rather to the collaborative nature of the learner-centred teaching methodology with its flexible timetabling and focus on skills development. Their prescriptions for higher CTE scores all involved some move away from this to a more didactic, teacher-centred methodology with a rigid timetable.

One way of making sense of the interviewees' comments is to relate them to Holliday's (1994) two contrasting paradigms of academic culture which he calls the 'integrationist' and the 'collectionist' paradigms. These were mentioned briefly in my introduction, but I think it is time for greater elucidation. Holliday (1994, p.72) has provided a contrastive tabulation based on Bernstein's (1971) paper *On the Classification and Framing of Educational Knowledge* and Reynolds and Skilbeck's (1976) book *Culture and the Classroom* (see Table 3 below).

Table 3

The Collectionist and Integrationist Paradigms (Holliday, 1994, p.72)

Collectionist paradigm	Integrationist paradigm
Separate subjects	Inter-disciplinary
Strong subject boundaries	'Blurred' subject boundaries
Didactic, content-based pedagogy	Skills-based, discovery oriented, collaborative pedagogy
Rigid timetabling	Flexible timetabling
Hierarchical, subject-oriented departmental structure	
Staff identities, loyalties and notions of specialisation oriented to knowledge of subject	Staff identities, loyalties and notions of expertise oriented to pedagogic and classroom management skills
Mainly vertical work relations between staff within their own subject	Horizontal work relations between staff in different subjects through shared, cooperative, educational tasks
Classroom practice and administration is invisible to most staff	Classroom practice can be team oriented and is open to peer observation and discussion
Oligarchic control of the institution	Democratic control of the institution

It is important to note that Holliday has not necessarily equated the integrationist paradigm with “Western modes” and the collectionist paradigm with non-western but has suggested that the distinction between the two has more to do with the status accorded to specialised knowledge within an institution. A traditional university department which has a strong sense of identity founded on its custodianship of a body of knowledge will tend towards the collectionist paradigm—whether it be somewhere like the United Kingdom or in a peripheral country. In contrast, the English language teaching profession, particularly its native English-speaking branch with its weak and fragmented identity, will tend more towards the integrationist. My observation as someone who has worked in his institution for more than eight years is that it tends towards the collectionist paradigm rather than the integrationist. This is not an absolute observation. There are examples of counter-practice and slowly my institution is moving in an integrationist direction, for example by introducing more general education courses to encourage interdisciplinary activities and interdepartmental work relations. However, when I look down Holliday’s table and ask myself which paradigm serves as a better situational summary, it is clearly the collectionist one.

As far as can be determined from within the opaqueness of a collectionist culture the same is true of the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, the home department of the students in this study, which might be expected to take a more interdisciplinary approach and to emphasise the development of skills rather than the acquisition of knowledge. For example, when their programme was externally validated the department emphasised the importance of transmitting its subject knowledge and expertise to its neophyte journalists and public relations executives over and above the need for more free electives. My judgement is supported by the interviewee comments as recorded above. They were clearly not used to a collaborative pedagogy. They preferred prescription to discovery, wanted to have their timetabled three hours of lectures rigidly imposed upon them, and tended to see writing in terms of a skill that could be taught in a didactic manner rather than as an attribute to be developed through an experiential learning process—in short they were generally collectionists.

The interviewees’ collectionist characteristics appear to have been a major contributory factor for my low CTE scores. Perhaps not surprisingly, it is the opposite integrationist characteristics that crop up so often in Black and Wiliam (1998) and Yorke (2003) as being common features of formative assessment. For example, Black and Wiliam (1998, p. 61) have emphasised that formative assessment should include the involvement of learners in the process of self and peer assessment within a constructivist framework, while Yorke (2003, p. 496) has pointed out that formative assessment is “fundamentally a collaborative act”. This suggests that the integrationist paradigm is the paradigm that can foster formative assessment while it is the collectionist paradigm that may stifle it.

This observation produces a question—why did the poetry course that had emboldened me to be so radical in my promotion of formative assessment on this persuasive writing course in the first place, not produce equally negative

evaluations from its students? The interleaved formative assessment design of the two courses was in many ways similar, but my CTE scores on the poetry course had been extremely positive, averaging about 4.3. My belief is that the English major students on the two-semester poetry course knew me much better. I had introduced them to formative assessment quite gently in the first semester, during which I frequently taught them in a more didactic mode so they knew that I could teach in this way if I thought it was appropriate. In addition, other courses in their programme had more formative elements within them. As an insider, I have observed that the English Department, which in my institution is responsible for both the English programme and service English courses, may be deemed to be less collectionist than many of its sister departments, influenced as it has been by the importance of the integrationist paradigm within English language teaching.

This suggests that even within a collectionist environment, there is some room for manoeuvre. I noted earlier that it was the context for formative assessment rather than formative assessment itself that could be the cause of my low CTE scores. At first sight, this might seem an insignificant difference, but it actually produces enough space for the teacher to renegotiate the pedagogical contract with the students, something that Black and Wiliam (1998, p. 21 & p. 56) acknowledge is a necessity, and something that my discussions with the interviewees show is perfectly possible. A collectionist culture is not incompatible with formative assessment, only inimical.

One last point of interest, the practice of awarding interim grades as part of a formative assessment strategy is controversial, something I noted earlier. The interviewees had mixed feelings about it, but on the whole, they were positive. However, when their performance on Project 3 and particularly their reluctance to use the self-assessment sheet to make improvements to their work are taken into consideration, then some of the issues related to grades (Black and Wiliam, 1998) seem to come into play, particularly the observation that extrinsic rewards can mislead students to focus on ability rather effort. It may be that if students had not had any guide to their performance other than my comments and their own analysis, then they might have tried harder to implement both instead of using the grades awarded to calculate that they had done enough to get by and that there was not much point in doing anything more. Having said that, my observation of students with low motivation, as these students had, is that if there is no extrinsic reward in the first place then nothing may get done at all. This could be a case of being caught between a rock and a hard place.

Conclusion, Recommendations, and Future Research

Clearly, introducing formative assessment into a collectionist academic culture is always going to be problematic and individual teachers need to exercise care if they are to succeed working against the grain. Someone like myself, an advocate of formative assessment, would ideally like institutions and departments to make the pedagogical environment friendlier by adopting a more integrationist culture. However, realistically this will happen only slowly. Nevertheless, my collectionist

students did not reject formative assessment as a pedagogical methodology; it is just that they wanted to see it repackaged in a more collectionist container. As this has been a small-scale study, it is not possible to make specific recommendations as to how this could be achieved in other situations. However, if I were to present this course again in the same context, I would amend my approach to make it more acceptable to the student notion of good teaching. I would not see this as a sell-out or as an abandonment of formative assessment but as a sensible negotiated compromise between the integrationist yearnings of this teacher and the collectionist expectations of my students—part of the ongoing search for what Holliday (1994) terms “an appropriate methodology”. Nevertheless, I would do so with a slightly heavy heart because I am far from certain that the changes would be beneficial in terms of product or student development. I repeat my earlier observation that in terms of student progress this was the most successful writing course that I have ever been associated with; hopefully if the changes are not beneficial then at least they will not be too detrimental. After reflecting on student performance, the CTE scores, and the interviews with the six students, these are the changes that I would like to make:

1. Reduce the number of writing projects from three to two (one group, one individual) but keep interleaved formative feedback (comments and suggestions for student action) and formative evaluation (interim grades for each component part) and increase their effectiveness by returning graded draft work with comments to students before a tutorial so that they can begin to prepare a response.
2. Modify the assessment weighting for the component parts of each project so that 20% came from generating ideas, planning, and research, 10% from the draft introduction, 20% from the first draft, and 50% from the final submission.
3. Use the additional space created by the reduction in the number of projects for both the conduct of more didactic teaching classes featuring model examples of persuasive writing and training in the use of analytical checklists to identify and repair writing weaknesses.
4. Rewrite the aims and objectives of the course so that they explicitly match the teaching methodology and assessment mechanism.
5. Award 10% of the final grade based on attendance.

As noted above, I would not at this stage abandon formative evaluation, but I would keep this under review and if the opportunity arose I would try and conduct an action research project devoted solely to this matter. It would also be a good idea to develop a questionnaire that could be used to quantitatively explore these findings with future cohorts.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to my six interviewees, without whom there would have been no study. I must also thank two anonymous reviewers for their insightful and helpful comments. Earlier drafts of this paper were first presented at the Learning Oriented Assessment Conference (LOAC) 2005—*Using assessment to improve learning*; Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIED), Hong Kong 10 June 2005 and the International Conference on English Instruction and Assessment, National Chung Cheng University, Taiwan, 22-23 April 2006.

References

- Anderson, C. (2003). Phillipson's children. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 3(1), 81-95.
- Bernstein, B. (1971). On the classification and framing of educational knowledge. In M. Young (Ed.), *Knowledge and control; new directions for the sociology of education* (pp. 47-69). London: Collier-MacMillan.
- Black, P. & Wiliam, D. (1998). Assessment and classroom learning. *Assessment in Education*, 5(1), 7-74.
- Canagarajah, A.S. (1999). *Resisting linguistic imperialism in English teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Holliday, A. (1994). *Appropriate methodology and social context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hong Kong Institute of Education (2005). *Learning Oriented Assessment Project*. Retrieved June 4, 2005, from <http://www.ied.edu.hk/loap/index.html>.
- Hong Kong Polytechnic University (2005). *The First International Conference on Enhancing Teaching And Learning Through Assessment*. Retrieved June 4, 2005, from <http://www.polyu.edu.hk/assessment/>.
- Law, J. & Murphy, C. (1997). Formative assessment and the paradigms of writing center practice. *ERIC Clearing House*, 71, 106-109.
- Pennycook, A. (1994). *The cultural politics of English as an international language*. London: Longman.
- Phillipson, R. (1992). *Linguistic imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Reynolds, J. & Skilbeck, M. (1976). *Culture and the Classroom*. London: Open Books.
- Stables, P. (2004). Interleaving student activity with formative assessment and feedback in a poetry essay project. In *Useful Practices, Learning Oriented Assessment Project*, Hong Kong Institute of Education. Retrieved June 4, 2005, from <http://www.ied.edu.hk/loap/51Stables.pdf>.
- Yorke, M. (2003). Formative assessment in higher education: Moves towards theory and the enhancement of pedagogic practice. *Higher Education*, 45, 477-501.