

Assessment

Lesson Context and Pedagogical Reflection

Level: Intensive Second-Year Dutch

Lesson Topic: Oral exam review

Lesson Context This component is less the description of an assessment instrument than it is an exploration of the construction of such an instrument according to the principles of Assessment for Learning (Chappuis & Stiggins, 2002). The approach to the task involves primarily student-involved assessment and self-assessment in addition to effective teacher feedback. The Dutch curriculum at the University of Texas has traditionally featured an end-of-semester oral exam by which the instructor(s) endeavor to assess students' abilities to speak on various topics addressed during the course. The instructors are generally interested in skills of description and expression of opinion as well as a student's discourse and strategic competence. Instructors also tended to focus on 1) general fluency and amount of language 2) comprehensibility and 3) linguistic and communicative accuracy and appropriateness. These assessment targets and categories as well as study questions and content areas for examination have traditionally been the exclusive purview of the instructor(s). This semester, after having read the article by Chappuis and Stiggins (2002), I decided to approach the exam differently. (As the course syllabus was already published and agreed to, a wholesale reform was not possible).

Integrated Modules **Technology**—The use of GoogleDocs for this activity set plays a major role in the affecting Assessment for Learning. The tool amplifies any in-class collaboration that occurs and sees that that collaboration continues outside the classroom and beyond the time specifically devoted to the topic according to the syllabus. Students collaborate to gather possible exam questions; they exchange ideas and suggest improvements to possible answers. The instructor can provide feedback on one item and all participating students can see the correction. A certain degree of anonymity can be maintained, keeping anxiety low.

Semester Plan

At the end of each chapter/instructional unit, students were instructed to write (at home) three questions for discussion which they would like to pursue in conversation with their peers. In class the next day students were placed into small groups of 3-4. In these groups they were to present their questions and come to a consensus on their top 5 questions. As part of this assignment, students were informed that they were, in addition to reviewing the unit's content and skill set, constructing oral exam questions.

The assignment for the next class day was 3-fold. First, a group representative inserted the questions into a document shared among all class members in GoogleDocs. Questions addressing near-identical topics were eliminated. Other candidates for elimination were discussed and the final list of questions—determined almost

exclusively by the students—were all open-ended (none were discreet-point or yes/no type questions). Second, students were to create lists of sleutelwoordens, or keywords, which could guide their answers and further serve as a study aid. Finally, students were write down 2 possible follow-up questions their instructor or other interlocutor could ask in the course of an exam or conversation about the given topics.

Thirty minutes of the following class were dedicated to peer-to-peer conversation practice. Students held 2 10-minute long mini conversations with different classmates. The rest of the time was devoted to a whole-group debrief during which students reflected on the experience and set improvement targets to address between that class then the end of the next chapter when the whole activity would be repeated.

A version of the GoogleDocs document can be seen here <<http://www.laits.utexas.edu/wiki/pedagogymodules/uploads/PmWiki.Assessmen/GoogleAssessment.pdf>>.

Final Review

At the end of the semester, a week before the oral examination, the class reviewed the accumulated study questions from the GoogleDoc. They also were presented with an opportunity to review a preliminary assessment rubric. With these tools in hand, students held a final round of mock interviews which they then rated as if they were the instructors. Volunteer pairs presented a mock-interview and submitted themselves to their peers' evaluation according to the rubric. The instructor guided the ensuing discussion, making sure that comments balanced identification of errors AND strengths, criticisms AND compliments.