

# Seeking Alternatives: Incorporating Teacher-Based Assessment in Reflective Teaching Practices

Hang Sun

College of Foreign Languages, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China  
Email: irishangsun@usst.edu.cn

**How to cite this paper:** Sun, H. (2024). Seeking Alternatives: Incorporating Teacher-Based Assessment in Reflective Teaching Practices. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 12, 131-139.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2024.125009>

**Received:** March 18, 2024

**Accepted:** May 20, 2024

**Published:** May 23, 2024

Copyright © 2024 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

---

## Abstract

Despite the growing interest in alternative assessment, few studies have investigated the actual process of teacher-based assessment in the classroom. In this reflective case study, the teacher/researcher integrated teacher-based assessment into ESL teaching practices throughout a semester in an attempt to develop her formative assessment literacy. The research took place in a spoken English program. Examples of the assessment tasks used in the classroom were presented, and the teacher/researcher's reflections were discussed. This study positions the teacher as a "learner" in the exploration and calls for more research describing in detail what teachers do when they carry out teacher-based assessment.

## Keywords

Teacher-Based Assessment, Reflective Teaching, Alternative Assessment, Assessment Literacy

---

## 1. Introduction

Recent years have witnessed an increasing focus on teacher-based assessment (TBA), in line with the promotion of Communicative Language Teaching and Task-based Language Teaching, both of which emphasize learners' communicative competence (Brown & Hudson, 1998; Butler, 2009; McMillan, 2003). TBA has been a policy-supported practice in many countries, such as Australia, Canada, South Korea and Singapore (Davison & Leung, 2009). Many researchers argue that language teaching will be more effective if assessment is integrated into instruction and classroom activities (McMillan, 2003; Ishihara, 2009).

Davison and Leung (2009) point out that professional teaching standards in-

creasingly require teachers to be skilled in TBA. Despite this fact, formative teacher-based assessment has not been a major part of teacher education due to the cumulative and pervasive impact of psychometrically oriented assessment culture (Leung, 2004). Thus, this study aims to present a teacher/researcher's (Iris) teaching practices throughout the semester within the classroom context, where TBA and instruction were woven together. As a reflective teaching practice, this study reports on Iris's inquiry into her own assessment practice in an endeavor to improve that practice and form a deeper understanding of it, documenting her growth in assessment literacy for teacher-based assessment.

## 2. Current Issues in Teacher-Based Assessment

Despite the strong promotion of TBA in many educational systems internationally, a great variety has been showed in terms of its concepts and principles (Davison & Leung, 2009). Regarding TBA, different terms have been used interchangeably, such as alternative assessment, classroom-based assessment, formative assessment and assessment for learning. These terms highlight different aspects of the assessment process. As the term "alternative" shows, alternative assessment highlights its divergence from traditional large-scale examinations and it encompasses a broader range of measures such as portfolios, journals, observations, and self and peer assessments (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). Formative assessment, in contrast to summative assessment, emphasizes the different function of an assessment—whether it is used to evaluate students in the process of learning and to provide insight into students' future growth or to summarize and grade what a student has achieved (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). Similarly, assessment for learning underscores the purpose of using assessment formatively to provide constructive feedback and improve learning, which differs from assessment of learning, whose purpose is grading, reporting or certifying (Davison & Leung, 2009). Classroom-based assessment emphasizes the context and setting. TBA draws attention to the central role of the teacher as assessor and can be defined as "non-standardized local assessment carried out by teachers in the classroom" (Leung, 2005: p. 871). Engaged in the classroom, teachers have a better grasp of students' learning strengths and weaknesses and can integrate multiple assessment choices with instruction within everyday classroom context.

The issue of reliability and validity of TBA has also been heatedly debated among researchers. Although some TBA proponents argue that the validity and reliability of TBA lie in the direct nature of the assessment and the multiple meaningful real-world or simulated tasks (e.g. Huerta-Macias, 1995), concerns have been raised. Researchers point out that the reliability of TBA may be fallible because of the rater inconsistencies and subjectivity, as well as lack of training for teachers to be eligible raters (e.g. Clapham, 2000); Additionally, factors such as limited content coverage, the difficulty of predicting whether students would produce the target linguistic information, lack of construct generalizability, and

construct-irrelevant variance factors may jeopardize the validity of TBA (Brown & Hudson, 1998; Brindley, 1994). In response to the criticism, some researchers question the application of conventional concepts of validity and reliability to TBA and call for a shift from objective evaluation of learning outcomes to inter-subjective measurement of learning process (Leung, 2005; McMillan, 2003; Rea-Dickins, 2007; Ross, 2005; Teasdale & Leung, 2000). They argue that traditional validity and reliability concepts are constructed from a psychometric perspective and are concerned more with the ability to generalize assessment-based inferences and the consistency of measures irrespective of the context, which is not applicable to context-dependent and formative TBA (McNamara, 2001; Teasdale & Leung, 2000; Butler, 2009). Therefore, evaluation of the validity and reliability of TBA should be approached with caution.

### 3. Reflective Teaching and the Current Study

Reflective practice holds a central position in professional education due to its long-established and recognized importance for teacher development (Mann & Walsh, 2017). Richards and Lockhart (1994) define reflective teaching as an approach in which teachers “collect data about teaching, examine their attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and teaching practices, and use the information obtained as a basis for critical reflection” (p. 1). Reflective teaching can help teachers expand their repertoire of teaching methods and approaches, as well as deepen their understanding of the teaching-learning process.

Kolb’s (1984) model of experiential learning explains a four-stage reflective cycle which includes: 1) active experimentation to plan and try out what one has learned, 2) immediate or concrete experience, 3) observation, review and reflection on the experience, and 4) abstract conceptualization which involves the concluding or learning from the experience. This explanation is a close approximation of the processes described in this investigation. As a novice teacher, Iris has learned the prevalence and possible positive wash back of TBA and seeks to incorporate TBA into the classroom. She positioned herself as a “learner” in this process, and the study was motivated by a quest to improve the skills and expand the understanding of TBA through its implementation.

### 4. Method

This reflective teaching practice reports on Iris’s assessment efforts in her ESL classroom. The teaching project took place in a Spoken English Program provided by a residential center in a U.S. university. The program aimed to help international scholars, students and visitors adjust to life in the U.S. and improve their daily conversational skills. The proficiency level targeted was advanced beginner, the lowest level provided by the center. The class met twice a week for two hours for 11 weeks in a small conference room. Two teachers (i.e. Iris and her co-teacher) planned the lessons together and divided the class in half, each leading for half of the time while the other assisted. The main textbook used in

this course was *Touchstone 1*, while *Four Corners* served as a supplemental textbook.

Nine female students enrolled in the program, aged from 19 to 37. Three of the students were spouses of visiting scholars and the others were temporary visitors. The class was culturally diverse, with students from eight countries, including China, Laos, Japan, Korea, Italy, Argentina, Venezuela, and Brazil. In the background survey, all the students reported that they wished to learn daily survival English. Both teachers held master's degrees in TESOL. Iris comes from China and her co-teacher comes from Korea. As novice teachers, they carried out their ESL teaching practices as fieldwork.

Since the researcher also served as the classroom teacher, this study was conducted through participant observation. The entire class sessions were video-taped to assist observation and reflections. Field journals were written after the classes, resulting in nine field journals in total, amounting to up to 17000 words. Field journals consisted of three main parts: lesson plan, observations, and reflection and analysis. In addition to class videos and field journals, class documents (i.e., handouts and students' work) were also collected, examined and used as a basis of critical reflection on TBA practice.

## 5. Findings and Discussion

### 5.1. Integrating Authentic Task-Based Assessment with Instruction

According to the need analysis conducted at the beginning of the class, all students expressed a desire to learn survival English for successful participation in daily life. As a result, the main type of TBA used in the class was authentic task-based assessment, which requires "candidates to perform an activity which simulates performances they will have to engage in outside the test situation" (Robinson & Ross, 1996: p. 455). Specifically, communicative tasks such as information gap, jigsaw, problem solving and role play (Pica, Kanagy, & Falodun, 1993) were employed to assess students' command of the target language.

For instance, a role play activity called "Let's have a party" was conducted during Week 5. In the activity, students acted as new enrollees in an English program, attending a party to interact with each other. This activity aimed to raise students' awareness of conversation strategies, such as using discourse markers to show interest or agreement and asking follow-up questions. These conversation strategies were fundamental, aligning with students' proficiency levels while also being useful for students' participation in daily conversations. Following a review of useful expressions, two students were selected to role-play a sample conversation to ensure their understanding of the task. Subsequently, students engaged in the activity: introducing themselves, posing questions from a provided list, demonstrating interest and follow-up, pre-closing and closing the conversation, and changing partners. Iris and her co-teacher circulated the room, consistently observing the students and taking note of whether students

employed the appropriate discourse strategies to maintain natural and smooth conversation. Students' comprehension and command of the strategies covered in the class were evaluated and additional strategies requiring future coverage were identified during this process. Also, feedback was provided to students without interrupting their performance. For instance, Iris noticed when a student requested clarification by saying "Repeat that". She gave the student a surprised teaching face. The student laughed and modified her utterance as "Could you repeat that?" It is believed that practice with common interactive patterns can heighten students' awareness of spoken English and foster their successful participation in conversation outside the classroom.

During Week 8, students learned how to give and make directions. To ensure the authenticity of the task, official maps of Seattle city from Seattle's visitor center were utilized as materials. After explaining how to read a map, an information gap task for pair work was designed: One student possessed the information of how to get to City Hall from Pike Place Market, while the other had directions from Pioneer Square to Seattle Aquarium. Consequently, both students needed to ask for and provide the directions. As noted in the field journal, during this exercise, the outcome of whether students could successfully reach their destinations was assessed along with observations of their language use during the communication process. Iris observed how students encountered difficulties with certain expressions, such as "take a right on Fifth Street", while demonstrating a good use of others, like "walk two blocks". It was found that students frequently struggled with ordinal numbers, prompting Iris to plan an explanation for the upcoming class.

By observing students' task performance, Iris was able to identify the knowledge points that required no further explanation and the areas where scaffolding and feedback were necessary. For students, these activities served as rehearsals for real-life scenarios they might encounter outside the class. For instance, during the map activity, students expressed heightened confidence in asking for and giving directions. It is believed that students could derive meaningful connections from these real-life contexts and thus apply what they had learned in class to situations outside of it. However, designing or adapting appropriate tasks for assessment was found to be quite time-consuming for teachers. Also, at times, students did not produce the target language as the teachers had anticipated, and their language use was limited or minimal, making it difficult for teachers to gauge their overall command of the knowledge.

## **5.2. Alternatives Forms in TBA**

Besides authentic task-based assessment, many other forms of TBA, such as selected-response (e.g. multiple choices), constructed-response assessment (e.g. fill in the blanks) and spontaneous moments of monitoring and observation were incorporated into the process. Narratives and presentations were also conducted during class.

In each class, students paired up to learn vocabulary together, and their mastery of vocabulary from each unit was systematically assessed by their partners using dictation. According to Roberts and Cooke (2009), narrative telling involves the ability of retelling and reconstructing experience, which is essential for learners' self-expression and self-presentation. During the classes, students performed many narratives to present themselves. For instance, in week 4, students shared their interesting experiences with their best friends; In week 8, students were asked to recount their past experiences of travelling to a new place. In week 8, one student stated that she felt proud of herself because, after all the narrative and presentation practices, she was different from at the beginning of the program, now able to talk in front of class for a long time without memorizing sentences she wrote beforehand. Ross (2005) contends that TBA gives autonomy to learners—instead of taking a passive role, students can make decisions and keep track of their language improvement, which contributes to confidence, motivation, and learning efficacy. Also, students reported feeling more connected to others as they shared their stories.

TBA includes not only in-class assessment tasks but also after-class assignments. As noted in field journal 7 and 8, students were assigned to ask the show times of one of the three new movies currently showing – either by checking online or going to a cinema. During the following week, each student needed to collect all three movies' showtimes by asking their classmates questions such as "What time does the movie *Oz: The Great and Powerful* start?" Iris monitored the process and paid attention to whether students had difficulties in asking and giving information about the timetable. It was found that students not only practiced the target language but also became deeply engaged, even asking further questions like "Ok, is the movie at 12:30 pm 3D or not?" Another assignment required students to email each other to seek information using the email etiquette learned in class. Peer assessment was then carried out as students commented on both the format and the content of the emails they received during the next class.

It was observed that a combination of various assessment forms can measure students' language ability in a more comprehensive way. For instance, selected-response was found particularly useful in terms of testing students' grammatical and vocabulary knowledge. After introducing simple present tense, students were assigned an exercise of "filling in the blanks" using the right forms of verbs as noted in field journal 6. As Brown and Hudson (1998) argue, different test types "are useful for some purpose, somewhere, sometime" (p. 657) and have their strengths and weaknesses. Thus, it is very important for teachers to use multiple sources instead of a single type of assessment to get a whole picture of students' learning.

## 6. Reflection and Implications

Through this reflective teaching practice in the spoken English program, the

teacher/researcher delved into the current issues on TBA and also experimented with how to intertwine instruction, assessment and feedback, thereby expanding her language assessment literacy. The study explores the feasibility of developing language assessment literacy through enacting TBA in the language classroom. Numerous benefits of TBA have been observed or corroborated during this process. For instance, TBA could occur at any time within a wider range of situations, encouraging students to work consistently (Davison & Leung, 2009). By incorporating authentic tasks, TBA can build a bridge between the classroom and real-life language use, preparing learners to apply their knowledge outside the classroom. In addition, TBA has shown potential in raising learners' awareness of communicative and pragmatic competence, promoting learning autonomy, and providing teachers with diagnostic information to make subsequent instructional decisions conducive to learning.

However, this study has several limitations. Due to the primary focus on instructional considerations, explicit rubrics or criteria, such as rating sheets for some assessment tasks, were not provided, and most of the evaluation relied largely on the teacher's intuition. The lack of concrete criteria made it difficult for the students to receive a more systematic and tangible appraisal of the outcome of their learning. Furthermore, as this study is a small-scale, localized and context-specific case study conducted by one teacher, caution should be taken in drawing general conclusions that may be more widely applicable to other contexts.

This study reports on a teacher's reflective attempt to conduct, observe and reflect on TBA within the classroom context to facilitate students' communicative language development. It illustrates how reflective teaching practices can be a useful approach to help the teacher gain insight into her role and performance as a teacher, an assessor, and, more importantly, a "reflective and critical educator". As TBA has made considerable inroads into language assessment field and education systems internationally, there is a need for more practitioner research-led endeavors within the classroom to advance the field in terms of both theory and practice. Additionally, the advancements in information technology, particularly in the realm of big data and artificial intelligence, have significantly influenced the landscape of foreign language education, offering potential for technology-enhanced assessment while presenting new challenges for foreign language teachers' digital literacy. Future research could further explore the impact of technology-assisted TBA practices on enhancing teachers' assessment literacy in the dynamic, information-rich foreign language education environment.

## Funding

Research Project for Teacher Development at University of Shanghai for Science and Technology (Project No. CFTD2024YB14).

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.



## References

- Brindley, G. (1994). Competency-Based Assessment in Second Language Programs: Some Issues and Questions. *Prospect*, 9, 41-85.
- Brown, H. D., & Hudson, T. (1998). The Alternatives in Language Assessment. *TESOL Quarterly*, 32, 653-675. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3587999>
- Brown, H. D., & Abeywickrama, P. (2010). *Language Assessment: Principle and Classroom Practices*. Pearson Education.
- Butler, Y. G. (2009). How Do Teachers Observe and Evaluate Elementary School Students' Foreign Language Performance? A Case Study from South Korea. *TESOL Quarterly*, 43, 417-444. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1545-7249.2009.tb00243.x>
- Clapham, C. (2000). Assessment and Testing. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 20, 147-161. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190500200093>
- Davison, C., & Leung, C. (2009). Current Issues in English Language Teacher-Based Assessment. *TESOL Quarterly*, 43, 393-415. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1545-7249.2009.tb00242.x>
- Huerta-Macias, A. (1995). Alternative Assessment: Responses to Commonly Asked Questions. *TESOL Journal*, 5, 8-11.
- Ishihara, N. (2009). Teacher-Based Assessment for Foreign Language Pragmatics. *TESOL Quarterly*, 43, 445-470. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1545-7249.2009.tb00244.x>
- Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. Prentice-Hall.
- Leung, C. (2004). Developing Formative Teacher Assessment: Knowledge, Practice, and Change. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 1, 19-41. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15434311laq0101\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15434311laq0101_3)
- Leung, C. (2005). Classroom Teacher Assessment of Second Language Development: Construct as Practice. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning* (pp. 869-888). Erlbaum.
- Mann, S., & Walsh, S. (2017). *Reflective Practice in English Language Teaching: Research-Based Principles and Practices*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315733395>
- McMillan, J. (2003). Understanding and Improving Teachers' Classroom Assessment Decision-Making: Implications for Theory and Practice. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*, 22, 34-43. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-3992.2003.tb00142.x>
- McNamara, T. (2001). Language Assessment as Social Practice: Challenges for Research. *Language Testing*, 18, 333-349. <https://doi.org/10.1177/026553220101800402>
- Pica, T., Kanagy, R., & Falodun, J. (1993). Choosing and Using Communicative Tasks for Second Language Instruction. In G. Crookes, & S. M. Gass (Eds.), *Tasks and Language Learning: Integrating Theory & Practice* (pp. 9-34). Multilingual Matters.
- Rea-Dickins, P. (2007). Classroom-Based Assessment: Possibilities and Pitfalls. In J. Cummins, & C. Davison (Eds.), *The International Handbook of English Language Teaching* (Vol. 1, pp. 505-520). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-46301-8\\_36](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-46301-8_36)
- Richards, J., & Lockhart, C. (1994). *Reflective Teaching in Second Language Classrooms*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667169>
- Roberts, C., & Cooke, M. (2009). Authenticity in the Adult ESOL Classroom and Beyond. *TESOL Quarterly*, 43, 620-642. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1545-7249.2009.tb00189.x>
- Robinson, P., & Ross, S. (1996). The Development of Task-Based Assessment in English



for Academic Purposes Programs. *Applied Linguistics*, 17, 455-476.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/17.4.455>

Ross, S. (2005). The Impact of Assessment Method on Foreign Language Proficiency Growth. *Applied Linguistics*, 26, 317-342. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/ami011>

Teasdale, A., & Leung, C. (2000). Teacher Assessment and Psychometric Theory: A Case of Paradigm Crossing? *Language Testing*, 17, 163-184.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/026553220001700204>