Some Reflections on Learning-Oriented Assessment

What is a scaffold?

Scaffolds do two things:
1. Provide access to otherwise inaccessible areas (e.g., of the L2)
2. Provide a structure on which to accomplish certain kinds of work (e.g., performing in an assessment)

What is a scaffold?

A few positive trends...

→Fundamentally, attention being paid to relationship between assessment and learning (and teaching)

→Exploration of what actually happens in classroom assessment practice and how it might or might not contribute to learning

→Considerable and creative efforts at designing assessment tasks to tap into new/different constructs, to reflect authentic communication and language use, to provide meaningful and detailed information about learner KSA

→Theorization of the ways in which assessment can be designed to foster and sustain valued learning of language and content (frameworks, models, approaches to validity)

→Diversification of assessment methods being researched

→Variety of notions of "learning" targets and processes being operationalized

What's new here?
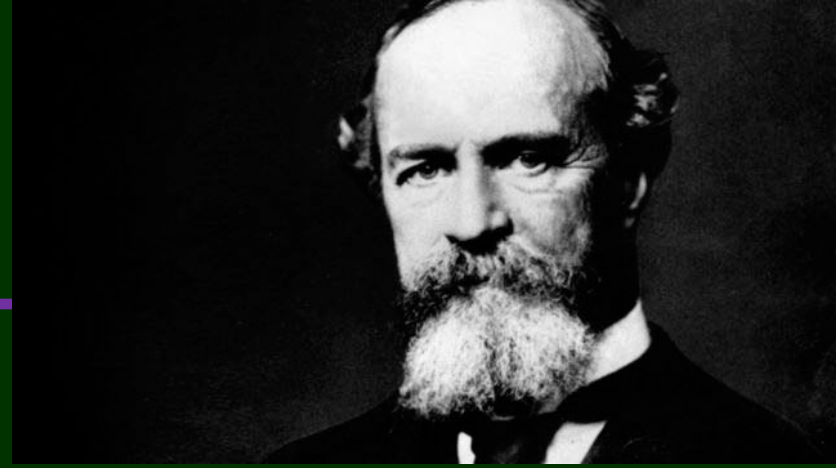
"Effective education requires that we receive sensible <u>news of our behavior and its results</u>. We hear the words we have spoken, feel our own blow as we give it, or read in the bystander's eyes the success or failure of our conduct. Now this return wave . . . pertains to the completeness of the whole experience."

William James

(19th century)

What's new here?

"[M]easurement research...concentrates on assessment methods that have the least utility for teachers' decision making. As researchers, our focus must be redirected to include assessment methods and quality control issues in the classroom environment that affect student learning and instruction"

(Stiggins & Bridgeford, 1985, p. 283).

What's new here?

Not so much...
→Instructed second language acquisition
→Task-based language teaching and assessment
→Discourse/conversation analysis
→Educative assessment
→Alternative assessment
→Assessment literacy

Quite a lot...
→Deep, extensive analysis of certain kinds of assessment in actual practice (e.g., feedback)
→Emergent integration of diverse array of theories (cognitive, social, psychometric) in researching LOA
→Very broad scope of assessments that are now being designed and understood in relation to learning (from classroom to large-scale)
→Development of models, materials, methods for supporting LOA, and in particular attention to teacher support
→Technology as mediator, delivery model, scaffold
→Notion of learning as progression, development, vs. static outcome

What is assessment?

ETS, Lord Chair
in Measurement and Statistics

Robert Mislevy (2004) on educational assessment

Assessment is itself a particular kind of narrative:

- an evidentiary argument

- about aspects of what students know and can do,

- based on a handful of particular things they have said, done, or made.

What is assessment?

Assessment =
Useful and used
information

Assessment is the <u>systematic gathering</u> of information about student learning in support of teaching and learning…

It may be direct or indirect, objective or subjective, formal or informal, standardized or idiosyncratic…It provides locally <u>useful information</u> on learners and learning to those individuals responsible for <u>doing something</u> about it.

Norris (2006) *MLJ Perspectives*

When is assessment 'learning oriented'?

When is assessment –at least in educational settings—not for learning? Isn't the basic intent of all educational assessment to tell us about learning, or the factors related to learning, in one way or another?

Spontaneous/planned teacher feedback → Learner performance

Student self/peer assessment → Learner awareness

Planned quizzes, tests, etc. → Teacher decisions

Student learning outcomes assessment → Course/program effectiveness

Accountability testing → School effectiveness

Large-scale standardized testing → Learner-program alignment, etc.

L E A R N I N G

Different assessments designed to inform different kinds of decisions and actions, yes…

When is assessment 'learning oriented'?

All educational assessments have the potential to be learning oriented—perhaps what we are getting at here has to do with the characteristics of assessments that maximally contribute to learning…?

Focused, developmentally appropriate feedback to (awake) learners

Highly prepared teachers as arbiters of classroom assessment

Assessments designed to probe and reveal multiple dimensions of KSA

Assessments aligned with values, objectives, trajectories of curriculum

Scenario-based, integrative, interactive, scaffolded, dynamic, immediate

Assessments providing interpretable, relevant, actionable information

BETTER LEARNING

Qualities of assessments that may promote improvement

Is assessment the same as teaching?

Teachers and learners can take advantage of variety of 'assessable' moments embedded within instruction, yes, and it is useful to figure out how that might best proceed...
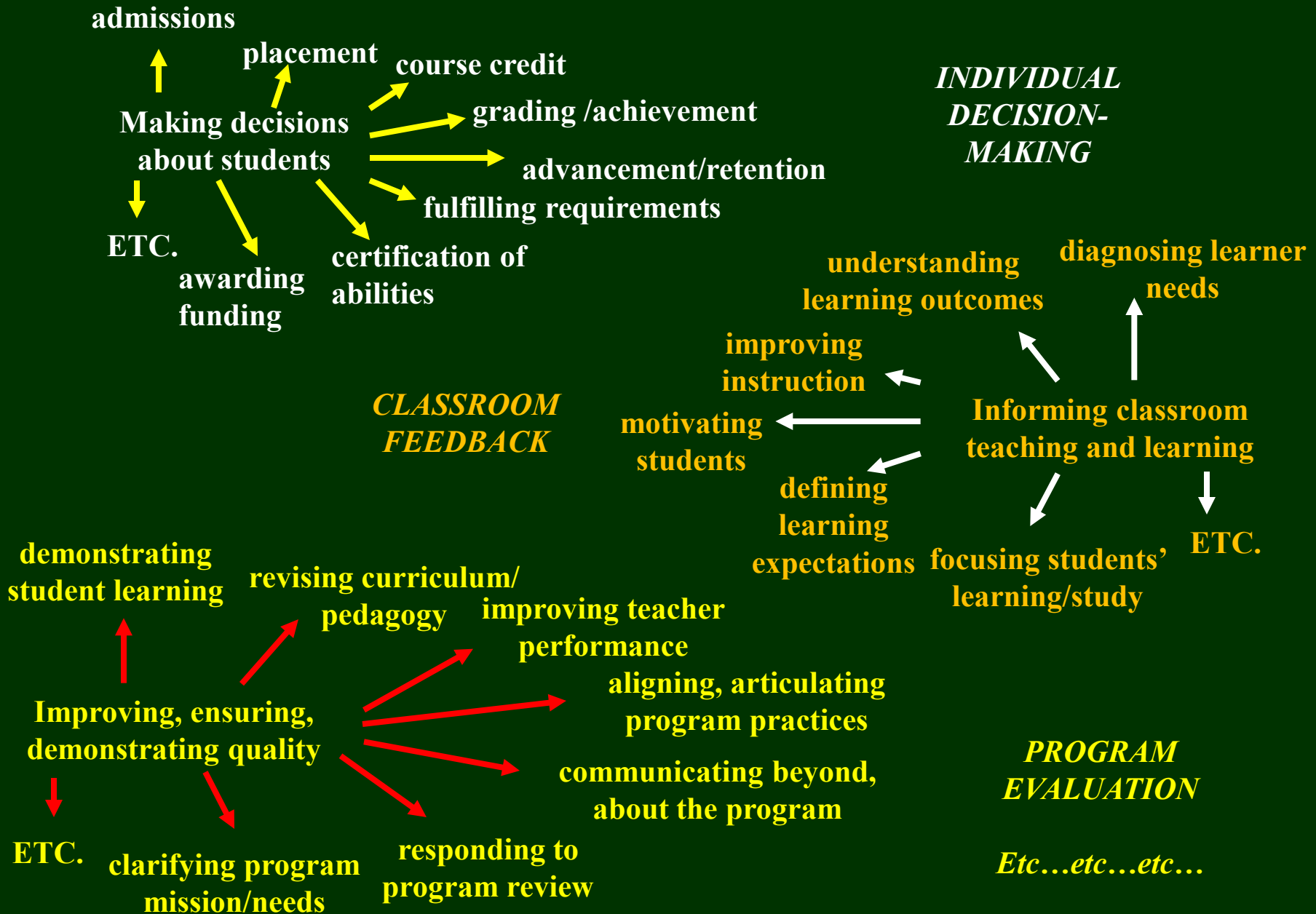
Whether it is useful to refer to that as assessment is another matter; maybe *learning-oriented feedback* is more accurate and less problematic...

Teaching (and learning, and language learning in particular) involves a lot more than constant inspection and correction...

Some separation may be essential, in terms of teacher capacities, learner affect, opportunity to focus, reflect, understand...

Assessments are used for a lot of purposes other than those typical of the classroom: it may not help us to conflate teaching & assessment ...
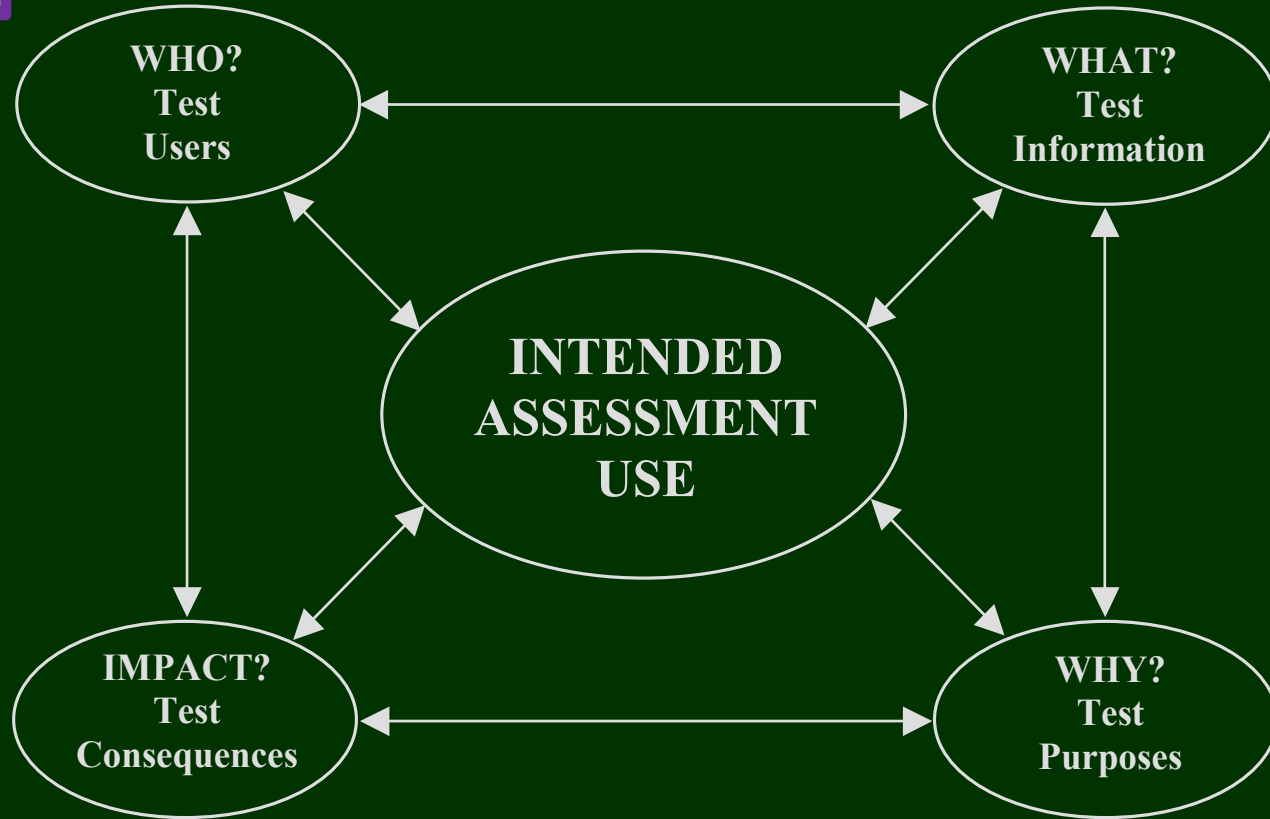
The kinds of interactions and dynamics assumed reflect specific cultural norms that may not coincide with distinct educational philosophies...

TESTING IS NOT TEACHING

KIDS and TEACHERS are NOT NUMBERS

EDUCATIONAL USES FOR ASSESSMENT

admissions

placement

course credit

grading /achievement

Making decisions about students

advancement/retention

fulfilling requirements

INDIVIDUAL DECISION-MAKING

ETC.

awarding funding

certification of abilities

understanding learning outcomes

diagnosing learner needs

improving instruction

CLASSROOM FEEDBACK

motivating students

Informing classroom teaching and learning

defining learning expectations

focusing students' learning/study

ETC.

demonstrating student learning

revising curriculum/ pedagogy

improving teacher performance

aligning, articulating program practices

Improving, ensuring, demonstrating quality

communicating beyond, about the program

PROGRAM EVALUATION

ETC.

clarifying program mission/needs

responding to program review

Etc…etc…etc…

What makes assessment useful?

WHO? Test Users

WHAT? Test Information

INTENDED ASSESSMENT USE

IMPACT? Test Consequences

WHY? Test Purposes

→Articulation of assessment design with intended uses and users...

What makes assessm...

Need for the notion of **"low-threshold"** LOA: just because we can do certain things, that doesn't mean we should...

Assessments

Feasibility

Relevance

Timeliness

Focus

Interpretability

Users

Understanding

Communication

Collaboration

Will to engage

Uses

Development

Improvement

Change

There is a real potential of overwhelming teachers, learners, and other users with more and more models, frameworks, analyses, options, and recommendations for practice

What is the role of the teacher in LOA?

Teacher at the center of doing, interpreting, acting upon assessment

Teacher as the primary or sole arbiter of assessment information…

…eliciting evidence
…questioning, scaffolding
…interlocuting
…providing effective feedback
…etc.

If assessment decisions and actions are always filtered through the teacher, there is a real risk of reverting to <u>teacher-centered</u> educational practice.
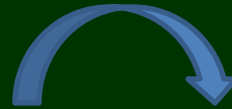
…1 on 1 tutorial model of ed?
…teacher assumptions trump other kinds of evidence?
…learner agency nonexistent?
…role of other affordances and constraints in the educational context?

Ways of subverting this default condition:

→Peer, self- assessment
→Technology-mediation
→Assessment task design
→Non-teacher facilitated assessment of <u>learning</u> practices and process (e.g., SGD)

Where is learning in L2?

What needs to be 'assessed' in learners themselves that should be...

Any of these phenomena may overwhelm any of the others; an exclusive focus on learners and what they learn may obscure the big picture.

LEARNING

TEACHER
Individual differences
Actions
Preparation
Performance

EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT
Curriculum
Materials
Resources
Time
Societal/Policy Culture
Etc.

LEARNER
Individual differences
Actions
Responses
Performance

What is good LOA? An appeal for evaluation

→Understanding and improving LOA should be driven by evaluation of the holistic assessment context: how does LOA actually get used by what kinds of users, and does it help?

→How does LOA interact with other affordances in the learning environment? What facilitates or constrains the effective use of LOA?

→What else is going on in the learning environment and how does that affect the learning that ensues (or doesn't)? How do we know?