

Pigeonhole Questions and Comments
Paper 1. Purpura & Turner

Q: While I appreciate the spotlight that this puts on formative assessment, how is this different from what SLA researchers on writing & on feedback have been showing us?

A: We don't really think it's different. When a teacher or researcher elicits performance, evaluates the performance, identifies gaps in knowledge, and provides feedback, we view this as a form of assessment. Depending on the nature of the feedback and the effect this has on processing and ultimate success, this might be viewed as learning-oriented assessment.

Q: Jim, were the five tasks completed in English or another language?

A: The five tasks were completed in English by NS and NNS of English.

Q: Can this framework be used to create/develop tasks or is it more useful in analyzing existing tasks? How would it's application change in the two contexts?

A: The working framework is larger than single tasks. Its purpose is to help us deconstruct classroom assessment which we have further defined and labeled as LOA. So, yes it can help us analyze tasks, but more specifically it can help us understand the context in which these task (i.e., classroom assessment) take place. It is composed of seven interrelated dimensions which co-determine processing & learning outcomes. So in this way it can help inform us in creating useful tasks.

Q: Can you clarify what you mean by 'processing'?

A: When we mention processing, we generally refer to “cognitive processing.” The cognitive processing that underlies performance and learning refers to “the mental operations by which sensory input is perceived, transformed, stored, retrieved, and used” (Dehn, 2006) either to produce a response (performance) or to learn something new. Again citing Dehn (2006), “cognitive processes are involved in perception, thinking, reasoning, problem-solving, learning, and storing and retrieving information. We are not referring here to other types of processing like or motoric processing.

Q: Example 2 - how ineffective is the teacher who does not insist on correcting? Would this not have impeded flow of language?

A: When the purpose of communication is meaning conveyance in a conversation, then it's probably not the right time to correct for accuracy, or to give extensive lessons. In cases where this happens, students often get confused about the purpose of communication—accuracy or meaning conveyance.

Q: Example 2 - when the teacher recasts 'a meat ball' into 'meat balls', is the teacher just correcting the form?

A: No, most morphosyntactic forms (-s affix) also carry meanings (plurality).

Q: From the activities you presented, it seems to me you were doing formative assessment. Is there any difference between formative assessment and LOA?

The response to this question is provided below in a similar question.

Q: How do you stress the importance of LOA or ongoing assessment to non-expert, volunteer teachers at a free non-profit language program?

A: The response to this question would be best answered through a workshop. The main focus, however, would be to help the volunteer teachers grasp the value of embedding/integrating assessment into instruction and capitalizing on the information generated to (1) guide their teaching in terms of student needs, and (2) guide the students in improving their own performance.

Q: I am an EFL teacher from Senegal where teachers generally have four to six classes containing 60- 100 students each. How could LOA be implemented in such settings?

A: Similar answer to the question above.

Q: Is the Wetlands 'assessment' actually a scaffolded classroom activity (rather than an assessment) that builds both content and language knowledge?

A: In this situation it is an assessment embedded in instruction, so it's both. It's assessment because it consists of a task designed to elicit information about learner performance from which an interpretation can be made in order to make decisions (here pedagogical or formative, but could also be summative associated with an evaluation). In LOA assessment is intrinsically associated with learning and instruction. And yes, this assessment allows for an examination of the development of language and content (the proficiency dimension), but it also sheds light on the learning, affective, and interactional dimensions. In short, it's complex, as we all know.

Q: There seems to be a lot of overlap in these dimensions. Can you speak to this?

A: Classroom activity is complex and is actually looked upon as a natural entity in itself. The dimensions were created to help us make sense of this activity. They of course overlap because they are parts of a whole, actually share the same space and contribute to the outcomes.

Q: Was the Wetlands task intended to exemplify the "new construct" (of combined language and content) that Jim referred to in the opening?

A: Yes it was, but I don't think that construct is new. When we assess for language, we always assess for content (meaning conveyance) on some level. The problem is that many language educators think of communication only in terms of linguistic forms.

Q: What conclusions can we draw about the students who did not react as planned with extra scaffolding in the Wetlands task? Can we equate their reaction to the Meatball task?

A: One unexpected result from the Wetlands task was that one learner didn't need scaffolding at all because he was a science major and knew how to answer this question competently without assistance. I don't readily see parallels with this in the Meatball clip. Sorry.

Q: What do you mean by non-linear learning progressions in L2? Multiple paths? or qualitative steps? Or different sequences?

A: Non-linear learning progressions refers to the ups and downs of learning something. In language learning with some structures, students become aware of some learning points, the past tense for example. In the beginning they might use it correctly, but then they could use it incorrectly, and then correctly with variability over time until it is used correctly and automatically. This pattern is not linear;

it's more curvilinear. There is still much we do not know about language learning progressions.

Q: WHY IS 'let's go away' a confirmatory recast?

A: In the data the teacher is confirming the answer the student gave by using the same language.

Q: In the meatball example, although the teacher did a poor job in showing passive voice, how's the student understanding of passive voice change through his teacher's performance?

A: I don't think we have the data to answer this in this excerpt.

Q: As teachers, can we really 'force learning'? Do we really have that much control over learners' internal framing of instructional tasks?

A: Many agents can contribute to learning and teachers are only one. They can provide opportunities for learning, but in the end it is the students who do the learning.

Q: Can you enlighten us on how classroom assessment, formative assessment and LOA are similar to and different than one another)?

A: See response below to similar question.

Q: How can you apply LOA principles to large-scale assessments when it is so specific to classroom-based assessment? Is it appropriate without the essential classroom setting?

A: Some are exploring how large-scale assessments can also be learning environments. We refer you to Hamp-Lyons & Green's work.

Q: What's the difference between formative assessment and your definition of LOA?

A: Formative assessment focuses on eliciting performance from which a gap can be identified (usually by the teacher and feedback given (by the teacher) to help the student close the gap. With further performance the student might be able to close the gap so the information provided by the assessment was formative. Much of the work with formative assessment involves how teachers can listen and provide feedback to learners; a lot of the work is from the teacher's perspective, but FA does recognize self and peer assessment in this process.

LOA looks at this same event, but examines it from multiple lenses or dimensions. It considers (1) the context itself (does the sociocultural context encourage this type of feedback? Was there a supportive learning environment), (2) the elicitation dimension (how was performance elicited? Or if not elicited by se, how was the performance obtained?), (3) the learner's proficiency dimension (what target in the performance was being assessed? And how does this relate to a model of proficiency or to standards or to objectives?), (4) the learning dimension (did the performance indicate how the learner was processing the learning target? Did the assistance initiate or further processing? Did further performance confirm that some learning had occurred?), (5) the instructional dimension (did the teacher—peer, etc. know how to provide assistance in a way that it would be heard? Did the teacher—peer, etc., have a deep understanding of the target learning point?), (6) the interactional dimension (what role did interaction have to play in promoting further processing and the attainment of learning outcomes? Did the interaction promote or inhibit processing?), and (7) the affective dimension (was the learner actively engaged in the learning process? What was the learner disposition towards this event?)

So as you see, LOA allows us to pull assessment and learning apart so that we can focus, being informed by all these interacting dimensions.

Besides looking at assessments embedded in instruction (as seen above), LOA also considers how learning can be embedded into assessments---even standardized assessments.

So LOA is broader than FA and it's theoretically more complex. These frameworks are not in competition, as much, but not all, of what FA is trying to capture, aligns well with what LOA is focusing on.

Q: Was the wetlands activity and specifically the inclusion of assistance intended to prep/prime learners before the real assessment? In other words was it a learning activity

No, this was not meant to prime learners, but yes it was designed to teach something in the context of an assessment. As such, the assessment was able to get information on all the LOA dimensions, including the learner's performance over time, and his/her ability to take in new information and improve on a piece of writing. It was meant to simulate what we do in real life when we write multiple drafts. The difference is that it was actually designed to get information on each dimension.

Q: Where are boundaries of LOA vis-à-vis classroom based assessment? Or formative assessment or assessment for learning?

This question was answered above.

Q: Is LOA just a new term for good teaching?

In our view, LOA contributes to good teaching. See above responses which describe LOA.