

EVALUATION FOR DEVELOPING EDUCATION

ANA MUNTEAN, Senior Lecturer
Bălți State University “A.Russo”

Higher Education in Moldova is undergoing a serious reform which has been prompted by both internal and external influences. In many ways, the reform aims at responding to European integration and Bologna processes; it emphasises the role education holds in a contemporary society, its mission to contribute to economical progress and international cooperation. Whatever the influences, the quality of education has always been one of the essential conditions of society development, and improving it has become one of the priorities of institutions of higher education in Moldova.

In this respect much attention should be given to one of the most essential components of the educational process, namely evaluation. The literature on evaluation in English language teaching is varied; however it has little to say about developing an appropriate evaluating system both efficient and favourable for teachers, also one that would contribute to the qualitative change of the educational process. The aim of this article is to discuss the role of evaluation in developing students' potential and to bring forward some ideas on the efficiency and benefits of continuous assessment in the classroom.

It is acknowledged that evaluation is an intrinsic part of teaching and learning. It is important for the teacher because it can provide a wealth of information to use for future direction of classroom practice, for the planning of courses and for the management of learning tasks and students. It is important for the student on condition that evaluation is seen as an opportunity to promote learning rather than as a final judgment; it shows learners their strengths and suggests how they can develop further. Students

can then use this information to redirect efforts, make plans to practise the learning, and establish personal learning goals.

From my experience of class observation I have concluded that currently one of the weak points of evaluation is not involving the students. Students still have little responsibility for their own education, consequently they soon lose interest in studying and reduce their participation to one question: "What do we have to do to pass the test?"

Although most educators view now evaluation as a continuous process of appreciating students' progress, the difference between evaluation and assessment is worth discussing. According to McTighe and Ferrara, assessment refers to the process of gathering and integrating information about learners from various sources to help us understand these students and describe them. Teaching is one type of assessment. Evaluation is the process of making a judgment of a product, a response, or a performance based on certain criteria. Continuous Assessment (CA) in the classroom can be characterised as ongoing, informal assessment and evaluation combined. It acknowledges that we cannot change the instructional process unless we change the assessment process.

The concept of CA itself holds rich potential for teachers because it affirms high-order creative and critical thinking and because it embraces not only cognitive outcomes but affective and behavioral outcomes as well. It puts the learner more in control of his/her own learning. The new policy of CA is aimed at bringing out a paradigm shift in the educational assessment in several ways. The central characteristic of this shift is the moving of assessment from a judgmental role to a developmental role

CA focuses on tasks or projects which demand performance of the learners. Such activities as journal keeping, reading logs, interviews, reflective responses, self-evaluation questionnaires, peer-evaluation questionnaires allow the learner to demonstrate understanding and personal meaning of what has been taught.

It is worth mentioning that English language teachers at "A.Russo" University have received continuous training on English methodology and evaluating students' outcomes, with a shift from product to process. We have been participating in numerous workshops and seminars which have resulted in building a new concept of evaluation as an ongoing process. Many English language teachers create authentic, engaging tasks that challenge the learners to use the language and develop related communicative abilities. Evaluation, in many cases, has become an integrated part of class routine which doesn't provoke fear or anxiety, but is viewed by both teachers and students as a

chance to revise, improve, and add. Bearing in mind that we are mainly training future teachers, it is very important to get the students used to various evaluation devices. By changing the roles of teachers and students we may get an immediate feedback about the teacher's performances during classroom activities and the teaching techniques used, about the students' contribution and achievements. Such open, critical discussions invariably lead to an improvement of both teaching and learning.

Of the variety of suggested CA devices, the crucial importance of self- and peer-assessment is worth speaking about

Self-assessment in language learning was pioneered by Oskarson, as an assessment which offers among other things numerical scales and checklists, many with examples connected to each question. Blanche and Merino stated that self-appraisal exercises are likely to increase the motivation of the language learner. They also showed that people can assess themselves quite accurately. However, it has been observed that our students are not prepared for such an assessment. They feel they are unable to recognise their own mistakes and cannot appreciate the value of self-assessment yet.

Peer-assessment can be defined as a response in some form to other learners' work. It can be given by a group or an individual in the form of checklists, questionnaires, written and oral comments, numbers along a scale, etc. Some benefits of peer-assessment may be considered the following:

- it helps create a community of learners;
- it improves the product;
- it improves the process; motivates, even inspires;
- it helps learners to be reflective.

As in self-assessment, responses should be guided by the teacher, who directs student assessors to reflect upon the strengths and weaknesses of their peers and give certain recommendations in view of improvement. Some advice regarding peer-assessment should include:

- Be sure that it is directed at the work rather than the student;
- Teach learners how to respond to the work of others;
- Focus on the positive, but do not omit the negative;
- Be authentic and tactful.

Students who have been exposed to peer-assessment found it more helpful and easier to conduct than self-assessment. Their own participation in the process of evaluation endowed them with a feeling of responsibility for the taken decisions, encouraged students' cooperation and developed their self-criticism.

CA offers a change from the familiar, often authoritarian classroom. Both teachers and students need to be familiarized with its strategy. Unless

teachers experiment, they are unlikely to view it as an active, constructing, questioning model which works toward developing the full potential of the students; consequently, they are unlikely to involve their students into it. Students need to become familiar with the task of thinking about their work and performance. Continuous assessment offers them such a chance.

With all the rush about the reform we should make sure we don't miss an important thing: we should make students' development the primary focus of the assessment process.

References

1. Rea-Dickens, P., and K.Germaine. 1996. *Evaluation. A Scheme for Teacher Education*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
2. McTighe, J., and S.Ferrara. 1994. *Assessing Learning in the Classroom*. Washington, D.C.: National Educational Association, Professional Standards and Practice Report.
3. Puhl, A.Carol. *Develop, Not Judge: Continuous Assessment in the ESL Classroom*, English Teaching Forum, Vol. 35, April 1997.
4. Yunian, X. and V. Ness. *Ongoing Evaluation, the Role of Teachers and Learners*. English Teaching Forum, Vol. 37, Oct-Dec 1999.