

What do teachers do about formative assessment in the Queensland Senior Schooling system?

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What I'll be talking about today

- The context of the research
- What understandings of formative assessment are made available in Queensland policy
- The research focus and design
- Case Study 1
- Case studies 2 and 3
- Findings

The context of the research

- A personal story
- Education Queensland – school-based, criterion-referenced assessment
- Senior schooling – high stakes
- Assessment as a social practice
- The literature
- The policy
- The practice

Themes in formative assessment research

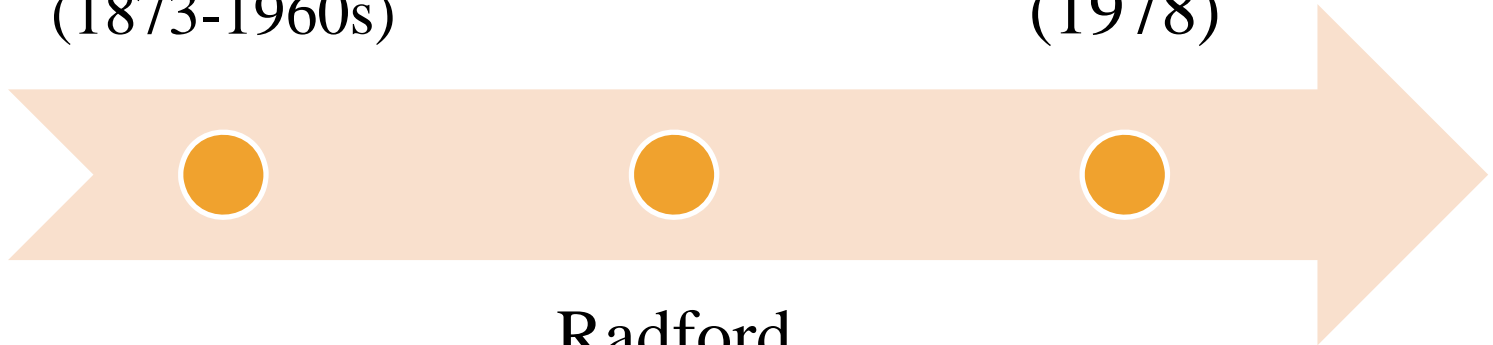
- An examination of the international literature reveals emphases on:
- Formative assessment purposes;
- The characteristics and conditions of formative assessment;
- The roles of participants in formative assessment.

The Queensland System – a brief history

External
testing
(1873-1960s)

ROSBA
(1978)

Radford
Review
(1970)



Changing emphasis across time

- Emergence of an emphasis on formative assessment
- Changing relationships between teachers and students
- Roles of teachers
- Roles of students



Criterion-referenced and school-based

- *...sufficiently distinct from the most fully developed existing varieties in the U.S.A. for it to require independent developmental work (Sadler, 1986, p.2)*
- The Discussion Papers and the Assessment Unit

Complementary relationship

- *Formative and summative assessments are not mutually exclusive but complementary approaches to a reliable indication of student achievement (McMeniman, 1986)*
- All assessment used first for formative assessment
- Schools to make decisions about the balance between formative and summative
- Explicit linking of criteria and standards to formative assessment purposes

The Senior Syllabus

- Syllabus documents (QSA, 2002)
- Work programs
- Formative assessment: improvement function
- Rehearsal model
- Roles of teachers and students
- Developing evaluative expertise; increasing independence

The research focus

- Gaps - the literature, policy, perceptions
- How do teachers enact formative assessment in their Year 12 English classrooms?
- Teachers' understandings of formative assessment and where they draw their understandings from.
- Classroom practices specifically in relation to the formative use of criteria and standards
- Case studies – interviews, artefacts

Case study 1

- Teacher talk
- School context
- A moral account – obligations and responsibilities
- Her role and the role of her students
- Relationships between teachers and students
- Relationships with authoritative others
- Her use of policy documents

Understanding of formative assessment purposes

- *...what my understanding is that year 11 is truly formative, um, and the way that I treat them what I explain to students is that this is your practise run...for you to...gain some familiarity, further familiarity with the genres that we use...it's an adjustment year and then year 12 is pure summative...that these are the marks that will count towards their exit level year, that 11 stuff doesn't count...*

Formative techniques

Pedagogical choices/
formative elements
(always)

Formative activities that
have a rehearsal purpose
(sometimes)

Using simplified
criteria to examine
exemplars (sometimes)

Self-assessment
checklists for summative
assessment (1x)

Modes –
written
and some
spoken

Formative feedback on draft work
in rehearsal for summative
assessment (always)

Emphasis on production of summative assessment items

- *In fact, I-I wouldn't have even thought of that fact I'm doing anything formative in Year 12, you know, I wouldn't do anything, it's all-it's all about, you know, this (indicates summative assessment task sheet) it's all about doing what we need so that you can do that and so that you can get the best mark. So you can get the exit level you want. (Laughs)*

Students – dependent on teachers

- *...I think we've created that system where they are dependent on us.*
- Feedback – editing and co-authoring moves
- Limited improvement available
- Differentiated feedback for different groups
- No emphasis on self-assessment

Criteria and standards for formative purposes

- *...I don't think they're very...reader friendly...they are just too kind of wordy and...too teacher talk.*
- Difficulties with the language of the criteria and standards
- Provision of simplified criteria – not for self-assessment
- Limited opportunities for development of evaluative expertise

Findings – key messages from Case 1

- A focus on product improvement for summative assessment purposes.
- Students are dependent upon the teacher for interpreting the task, the criteria and standards, and providing formative feedback.
- Students are not explicitly encouraged to engage in the management of their own learning.
- This teacher does not engage with policy documents that provide guidance about the enactment of formative assessment.

Case study 2

- School context
- Account reflects varied relationships with students and parents
- Emphasis on accountability
- Emphasis on responsibility to lift the students' results
- Emphasis on students' responsibility in this process

Emphasis on summative assessment in the system

- *...that's where I didn't satisfy my goal of broadening them in a more specific way...*
- Learning does occur, but is tied exclusively to the production of summative assessment items.
- All emphasis is on summative items, marks, achievement (students, parents, the system).

Formative techniques

Pedagogical choices/
formative elements
(group work,
individual – frequent)

Formative activities
that have a rehearsal
purpose (homework,
individuals – frequent)

Questioning in class
that can determine
what happens next
(frequent)

Formative feedback on
draft work in rehearsal
for summative
assessment (verbal
(many) , written (x1))

Modes – written and some
spoken

Students – dependent on teachers

- *...by then (semester 2 of Year 12) they should have the maturity in their work to self edit...instead of relying on the fact that you're going to be the one who will fix it up for them.*
- Dependent upon feedback from teacher
- For their understanding of the task
- For their understanding of what is required in a task (criteria)

Non-use of criteria and standards for formative purposes


- *I tend not to go through them...because they switch off, they just don't engage...*
- Limited opportunities for the development of evaluative expertise
- Does not use marking criteria and standards with students
- No self-assessment skills
- Feedback to students based on her understanding of criteria for summative assessment items


Case study 3


- School context
- Does not look at criteria and standards with students
- Students move lock-step through a unit
- Unseen tests – criteria and standards not seen until the day of the test
- Formative assessment opportunities limited to drafting for summative assessment items.

Findings of the study

- While the process of continuous assessment does afford teachers the opportunity to gather information about students' development over time, rehearsal for summative assessment items is the focus of classroom work in Year 12.
- Learning occurs only in relation to the production of summative items.

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- Students are interested primarily in marks, and both teachers and students believe teacher feedback is essential for product improvement leading to the improvement of marks.
 - The criteria and standards are not regarded as an essential tool in developing students' increasing independence.

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- Self-evaluative expertise is underdeveloped. Moves to self-assessment and self-monitoring are limited. Only ‘good’ students self-manage their learning and this is tied to their use of teacher feedback.
 - Teachers’ interpretations of the role of teacher inform how often and in what form formative assessment is made available for their students.

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- The key policy document, the Syllabus (2002), and the School Work Programs are not the key informing sources for teachers' enactment of formative assessment in Year 12 English.

In conclusion

- Teachers
- Students
- Policy into practice
- Further study

References

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