ABSTRACT: Continuous and comprehensive evaluation (CCE) has been made mandatory in Indian school education in an attempt to foreground evaluation as a pedagogic tool. In most schools, however, CCE is interpreted as comprising formative and summative tests and examinations, and a few assignments. Enablings, whether by care-givers or teachers, do not happen without a convivial and pedagogic evaluation that is an intrinsic part of all teaching. A student’s growth will be visible only to the teacher who observes and tracks it. This paper is an attempt to critically examine samples of student writing to capture instances of such growth in academic writing at the tertiary level of education.

KEYWORDS: assessment of, for and as evaluation, continuous and comprehensive evaluation (CCE), convivial evaluation, pedagogic tool, small gains, scaffolding

0. INTRODUCTION

Evaluation has two major roles in education, as a means to certify students and as a tool to enable better learning to happen. The former is assessment of learning, the latter, assessment for learning. If we conceptualize education as the mere transmission of knowledge, learners are then expected to simply learn what they are taught and reproduce it in examinations. The purpose of evaluation, in this context, is to find out whether pre-determined learning objectives have been met. For this purpose, neatly structured, syllabus-based summative tests and examinations are sufficient. In a context where education is not equated with the mere transmission of knowledge, learners are seen as co-constructors of knowledge: they will take the knowledge made available to them and create a new meaning for themselves. Alternatively, they will understand and interpret such knowledge in different ways. The teacher becomes a facilitator and co-constructor of knowledge and
learning. Evaluation functions primarily as a pedagogic tool. Assessment for learning, genuinely formative in nature, therefore becomes as much or even more important than the summative assessment of learning.

It is in this context that the National Curriculum Framework and the Right to Education Act together made Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) compulsory in schools. The University Grants Commission is now toying with the idea of making CCE compulsory even in the context of higher education. Such assessment for learning, which is what CCE is all about, did not, however, originate in either of these articulations. It has only been made mandatory and compulsory, for our country, in those two documents. An evaluation that is convivial in nature, with care and tolerance as its main hallmarks, (Illich 1973), which enables better learning, as suggested in Durairajan (2003), is actually as old as human kind. More abled peers and adults have always educated and taught others; that is how socialization into a community happens. This is also the evaluation implied in the notion of the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky 1978), which requires teaching through which a child is “enabled to advance by being under the tutelage of an adult or a more competent peer,” where the tutor or peer “serves as a vicarious form of consciousness” until the learner is able to master his own actions through his own consciousness and control (Bruner 1985: 24). Such educating, “which took place long before there were formal institutions called schools” (Gardner 1999:22), includes critical scaffolding and could not have happened without a pedagogic evaluation. Pedagogic evaluation is not judgemental, and is more like a monitoring. Pedagogic evaluation is an evaluation where no test is conducted according to “explicit rules and procedures” and where “deliberate samples of behaviour have to be elicited for reliable judgments to be made” (Bachman1990: 19-20). Pedagogic evaluation is done under ‘typical’ and not ‘maximum’ performance conditions (Cronbach 1970). It can be done through the look of an eye by the teacher, through an observation of something written or said by a student, or even by a gesture or a body movement that is often repeated by a student.

Whenever we teach someone we also evaluate. We evaluate the what and the how of learning in a continuous and comprehensive manner.
When teaching/learning happens on a one-to-one basis, as teaching progresses, the adult or more abled peer evaluates and modifies his or her teaching. This is done instinctively and no record is maintained. But in the context of formal education, where many learners are taught at the same time, it is impossible for any teacher to remember the individual learning curves of students. When we teach large classes, we know that although we teach the same thing, different students may take away, from what is taught, different things, or learn the same thing at different speeds. CCE is a way of capturing these different learning curves. Such changes, or growth, or ‘small gains’ (Tharu 1981) can only be captured through observation. CCE, in most contexts, is reduced to two formative and two summative examinations, and a few assignments with projects thrown in. However, tests and examinations alone can never capture the individual growth trajectory of students. The purpose of CCE is not to record marks in school registers: a testing tool can never capture the organic development of a student.

1. NATURE AND FEATURES OF CCE

It is not by chance that the last letter of the acronym CCE, is neither ‘A’ as in assessment, or ‘T’ as in tests but ‘E’, and importantly, not ‘E’ as in Examinations, but ‘E’ as in Evaluation. Tests and examinations can be used to find out whether objectives have been achieved. Conventional tests and examinations, whether at the end of a unit of teaching, or a term, semester or year, can assess only the learning of what has been pre-specified. They are summative and describe a student’s status after teaching has been completed. Unpredictable learning cannot be captured through these assessments or tests. For purposes of reporting to higher authorities and entering marks and grades in report cards, formal, formative tests and examinations will have to be administered, but these alone can never comprise CCE.

CCE needs to be grounded in observations and mental or actual notes or jottings made by the teacher. One large chunk of CCE takes place even while teaching is happening. Any teacher who is capable and experienced knows when students are being inattentive, or when they have not
understood something, or when they are bored. When the teacher has given some work to be done, and is going around class, watching students at work, a lot more of these informal, individualized observations will take place. The ‘has understood what I have taught’ student, the ‘student who needs a bit of help or a little nudging,’ and, the ‘student who is going on the wrong track,’ are all identified. Even before CCE came into existence, these observations have always been made: CCE provides a way of recording the information in a formal manner. A third type of CCE happens when teachers correct homework. Good responses, varied interpretations and understandings, non- or mis-understandings, problems in writing etc., all get written down. Based on the level of the student and need, teachers decide when to provide further instruction. Sometimes the whole class is taught what is needed. At other times, individual instruction may be provided.

For these reasons, CCE can be done only by the teacher and never by any external agency. CCE must be located firmly within the space called the classroom, where individual/group transactions, teaching and learning take place. Tests and examinations, with their accompanying marks, must comprise, if at all, one very small aspect of CCE. Teachers do not need tests or examination answer papers to discuss the level of their students with parents or other stakeholders. When asked about their different students and what they have learnt, they usually only have to close their eyes and focus mentally on that particular student for a minute or two before they begin talking. If asked to provide concrete evidence, they are often at a loss or are perplexed. The only evidence they have, in traditional contexts, is an examination answer paper which may not contain the evidence they need. Teachers have observed their students and therefore know them very well, but when asked to cite evidence, they are not sure whether what they have observed is what is necessary or suitable. This paper is one attempt to examine my own observations, jottings and notes as a teacher, to provide a few instances of what could be termed as ‘relevant for CCE’ observations.
2. THE STUDY

The present study is based on the writing samples of three university-level students registered for a course in academic writing of a higher order. The data comprises two drafts of summaries of three articles, and a 20-word group summary of a different article that were written in the span of three weeks. The analysis is qualitative and aims to identify the small gains achieved by these students. No attempt is made to compare one student with the other. The questions posed are:

i. What is the kind of growth that can be discerned in the writing samples of students in a three-week span?

ii. What are the different kinds of growth that can be identified across these students?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Nature of students and tasks

The participants of the study were nine students registered for a university level course in higher order academic writing. Classes were held twice a week, for two hours each day. Students were required to read research articles at home, which were then discussed in class, with a focus on critical reading and writing. The three articles that were summarized by the students focused on the use of the first language as a resource in ESL classrooms. Aggarwal (2013) dealt with using multilinguality in the classroom and focused on the teacher’s role as a learner. Meher (2013) explored the possibility of using the home language in teaching English at the secondary level. Rahman (2013) studied the role of L1 in the acquisition of English. All three articles were taken from a conference proceedings publication so that the style and manner of writing would be the same. As a first assignment, the students were asked to summarize these research articles and submit their responses. Based on what they wrote, one-on-one discussions were held and feedback provided by the teachers on the content of the summary, the amount of detail provided and the nature of summarization. Accuracy problems were commented on only if they interfered with the communicative adequacy of what was
written. The students were then asked to submit a second draft of the summary. They were not told to “revise” what they had written but to write the summary afresh. The two draft summaries were submitted a mere three weeks apart. In the interim, other research articles were read but individual summaries were not attempted. Based on the ‘problems’ identified by the teacher with the initial summaries a group summary task was given as a mediation task. This was deliberately visualized as a group task so that the more abled peers in class would serve as a scaffold and enable learning to happen. An article was read and discussed and students were asked to write, in groups of three, a 20-word summary in class. The three group summaries were put up on the board and the whole class, along with the teacher, critically examined them and tried to fine-tune them. Within a few days after this group summary writing, the students submitted their second drafts of the initial summary. One student later also submitted a third draft, for this person felt the need to do so.

In this study the first and second draft summaries of two students, and the first and third draft summary of one student are compared for discussion. The summaries written by each student within a span of three weeks are compared to identify the ‘small gains’ achieved in each of the summaries. The notes and a few observations were the only ‘evaluation’ attempted. These comments and extracts from the student summaries are analysed to identify the different kinds of growth exhibited by students. For purposes of anonymity, student names and the actual course title are not presented in the paper.\(^1\)

3.2 Data Analysis

**Student 1, Draft 1**

The comments made by me, as the teacher, on the first draft of student 1 were: *Has a sense of stance and perspective; is comparing and contrasting the three studies, but the link between the different statements is not clear. Choice of linkers is not appropriate. There is no paragraphing.*

\(^1\)No class teacher would refer to his/her student as Student 1, 2, or A, B etc. But respecting the wishes of the students, and to maintain confidentiality, this anonymity exercise has been undertaken.
The summary begins with an initial statement:

| India is a multilingual country and it has been widely accepted through the research that learner’s L1 plays a significant role in the process of learning L2. Out of the several studies, supporting this stance is the study of Rehaman (2013). |

The summary then states:

| The findings of his study are in line with major argument that L1 facilitates L2 learning. Both the teachers and learners favoured Assamese as a resource language in English classrooms. |

But one line later, the summary states:

| However, there are also studies that further examine the context of the usefulness and feasibility of the already present bilingual instruction. |

The use of this linker, ‘however’ is not suitable in this context. This linker suggests that there is an implicit contrast between the other studies and the one under discussion, but the topic of the contrast has not been made clear.

At the same time, this student is able to write about the second study, (Meher 2013) and use an appropriate connector like ‘another’ to state:

| Another study by Agarwal (2013) addressed the issue of bilingual instruction from a different perspective with the close examination of the bilingual or multilingual instruction practiced in a primary school in a village from Bhopal. |

The student was also able to compare Meher and Aggarwal’s work with the phrase, ‘from a different perspective.’ But the student comes to the conclusion for which there is no evidence by describing Aggarwal’s study as ‘probably the extension of the two studies mentioned earlier.’
The summary ends stating the implications of the work:

Agarwal’s is the study that has immediate and wider implications in a multilingual country like India out of the three studies mentioned here.

In this summary, the ability to foreground one study from among the three is an indication of perspective but very little justification has been provided.

When we look at draft 2 of the summary written by the same student, many ‘small gains’ can be identified.

**Student 1, Draft 2**

My comments to myself on this summary were: *Better introduction to the topic. Good use of firstly, secondly and finally as organizational linkers, sharper focus.*

The initial statement, unlike the earlier summary does not state the obvious fact that India is a multilingual country but narrows down to the research area focused on in the three studies:

The ‘empty’ statement, *‘it has been widely accepted through the research that…’* is not there. Instead the summary comes to the point directly:

Research, in the area of bilingual instructions recommends the use of L1 in L2 classrooms to facilitate learning.

This is followed by two background statements, one on grassroots multilingualism in India and how assimilation to one language is not possible and the other on how the national policy of education advocates the use of regional medium languages in schools. The summary then places the three studies within the context of the three language formula and makes one overarching statement about all three studies:

*The three studies in the area of bilingual instruction, done in three different L1 contexts, examine the ways in which learners’ L1 is used in the ESL classrooms in the Indian context.*
The summary then goes on to succinctly capture the essence of each study, with good use of three linkers, “firstly”, “secondly” and “finally”.

There is also one final statement that captures the view of the researcher.

The two studies mentioned above, except the one by Rehaman, identify and address the problems in the current bilingual instruction, whereas Rehaman’s study justifies a general notion of using L1 in L2 classroom.

The student still has a few problems with writing, but a clear attempt has been made to refer to what has been written earlier and provide a link to it. The two studies referred to do not actually identify and address problems in the current bilingual instruction. This is an overgeneralization on the part of the student. But there are many small gains which is how progress happens.

Student 2, Draft 1

The comments made by me, to myself, as a teacher on this summary were: Has one overarching statement right at the end, but no link between this and earlier stuff. Has loads of detail and specifics not needed. Has paragraphed, but each article is in one paragraph with no link between them.

The summary has four paragraphs but each study is summarized in one paragraph. Each one of them is a detailed description of the actual classroom transactions/observations. The final statement, which is paragraph four, reads:

The above three studies, though different from each other, lay the importance of the use of L1 which acts as a scaffolding device in learning English in the classroom in an efficient way.

This student has understood that a comparison between articles is needed in summaries. However, this person has not been able to do so within the individual summaries in three paragraphs. A token attempt has been made in the final statement.
Moreover, there is nothing in the earlier three paragraphs about the nature of the ‘scaffold’ referred to in the final statement, or about the ‘efficient way’ in which L1 has been used. Knowing that a concluding statement has to be made, the student has just put it in.

Student 2, Draft 2

My comments to myself, on this draft were: Attempted to bring all three articles together; has seen similarities and differences, has looked at different aspects of the studies, has focus, modality of research and analysis, but still loads of detail not needed in summary.

Instead of analyzing the writing from this draft, the student actually asked for permission and wrote a third draft: an analysis of this is being attempted.

Student 2, Draft 3

My comments on draft 3 to myself were: Has learnt to make one overarching statement, has made use of connectors of comparison and contrast. Much shorter.

Like in Draft 2, Draft 3 has 5 paragraphs. A lot of redundant detail has been left out, reducing the length from two pages to one. The initial statement in the summary reads:

The studies of Neha Agarwal, Sadananda Meher and Ataur Rahman focus on the use of L1 as a resource to learn English in an efficient manner.

The one paragraph write-up per study has now been reduced to three lines each in paragraph one, with a connector like ‘whereas’ used to compare Aggarwal’s study with Meher’s. Similarly, the statement about Rehman’s study begins with ‘on the other hand’.

Paragraph two begins with:

All the three studies focused on the students learning of English, their teachers and the resource language that affected their learning.
The rest of the paragraph compares and contrasts the three studies focusing only on these three differences. When we examine the writing ability of this student, it is clear that there are still many problems. But, there is remarkable improvement in terms of writing with a perspective, of being able to compare and contrast, and in the use of some linkers.

The third draft was written soon after the second; as such, in the space of twenty one days, for this student, it is not just ‘small’ but ‘big’ gains that can be discerned.

**Student 3, Draft 1**

My comments to myself on this draft were: *Starts with a specific statement; no focus of perspective on all three together. One straight observation on all three, but no evidence or justification. Three ‘what is done, + finding’ pattern. ‘Thus’ is the only linker.*

The first two sentences of this summary are:

Aggarwal, (2013) in the study has highlighted that how teacher uses multilinguality as a resource to teach English in the classroom. For that teacher has adapted many methods but not specifically one.

The third sentence begins: *‘The finding suggests…’ This pattern is repeated for all three studies. A pre-concluding statement says: ‘Thus, it can be observed from the three studies L1 acts as a scaffolding role in L2 learning.’ The last two lines are statements that justify and explain why scaffolding is important. This student has been able to identify the focus of each study and locate the findings; has focused on how in each, the methodology ‘used the L1 as a scaffold’. In this sense, there is a perspective adopted but it has to be gleaned with careful reading by the teacher.*

With reference to the use of linkers, except for the use of one linker, ‘thus’, in the pre concluding statement, there are no linkers used at all in the summary.
**Student 3, Draft 2**

My comment on this summary is: *Has a focus. Is able to look at all three studies together. Is contrasting. But this time, focus is mostly on methodology. Has one concluding statement, but no link with what went earlier. Has used linkers.*

The first three lines of this draft reads:

> Aggarwal, Meher & Rahman (2013) studies have identical focus in which they claim use of L1 acts as a scaffolding device for learning L2. In two of the studies, researchers acts as an outsider because they have collected data without intervention whereas, in another study research acts as an insider. All the three studies use questionnaires that are administered…

The rest of the summary consists of three more sentences all dealing with tools used for data collection.

The concluding sentence reads: *The findings of the three studies show that L1 has positive impact on learning L2.*

There is nothing stated in the summary as proof of this concluding statement about the impact. This student has attempted to look for a common focus and has achieved this only with reference to the methodology used in the three studies. The student is aware that a concluding statement needs to be made, but in this case, it seems like an empty statement. In reality, in the articles, there is definitely a positive impact, but the summary fails to capture that information.

The improvement in this student is in the use of linkers and in attempting to look at all studies together. Unfortunately, the attempt to combine the studies has resulted in a tunnel focus.

3.3 FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

*Findings:* The three students whose summaries are examined have exhibited different patterns of growth:
Student 1 has learnt to use an appropriate introductory statement. The student has also been able to identify an overarching focus and places the articles within that context. The student has learnt to use appropriate linkers to organize the summary.

Student 2 who had written three separate summaries, by draft 3, has been able to perceive similarities and differences across the three articles. This student has learnt to identify aspects, like focus, modality of research and nature of analysis. This student, however, continues to present a lot of detail in the summary.

Student 3 is able to compare and contrast the studies, and has learnt to use linkers for this purpose. The focus of the summaries, however, still remains a bit skewed, with particular attention drawn to one aspect of the three studies.

*Interpretation:* We need to ask ourselves a few questions to interpret the findings. Have these three students learnt anything? If yes, what is the nature of this growth? Can these different patterns of growth be compared? Are they identical? Can they now write perfect summaries?

When we look at the three patterns of ‘growth’ it is clear that all three students have grown, but the nature of the ‘growth’ is not identical. Each student is at a different level of proficiency and this comes through in what they have attempted to do in their later drafts. If we were to take away the student categories and ‘merge’ the aspects of growth perceived, an outsider to this teaching-learning experience might even assume that no common teaching had happened. But this is not the case. The purpose of CCE is not to identify the same strands of growth across all students.

There are a few commonalities: the three students have understood that there is a need for a perspective and have tried to begin using organizational linkers. They have also learnt to sift the detail from the general statement in articles. These three students have definitely not become ‘perfect’ summary writers. But that was not an anticipated outcome in three weeks. Growth does not happen overnight or all at once. More importantly, individual ability varies; not all students may reach that state of perfect writing capability (which anyway is an ideal and may not exist in reality at all). Eventually, these students will learn...
to fulfill their communicative needs and satisfy some or all of the criteria set by a summative evaluator.

4. CONCLUSION

This preliminary study illustrates how CCE is able to capture individual growth trajectories of students. CCE is not about getting students to write perfectly. The feedback and guidance provided by the teacher must always be in consonance with the students, their level, and the nature of the task. If two months after this exercise, I had decided to get the same students to write another round of summaries based on research articles, the focus of my feedback and the nature of growth exhibited in student writing would probably be very different. Continuous evaluation implies that it is fine-tuned and student sensitive. Growth trajectories may vary student-to-student and month-to-month. CCE is all about capturing these variations.

REFERENCES


Evaluating and teaching through observing and recording student growth


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