Sustainable Assessment in Literature: Bridging the Gap Between Expectations and Reality

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Abstract. Educators promote assessment practices that help learners monitor their work, understand its quality, compare it to exemplars, and improve it. In many literature classes in the Philippines, however, short-term assessment practices dominate. This paper seeks to explain how to use sustainable assessment in literature classes. Through this article, the authors hope more teachers will adopt sustainable assessment practices to help learners see the practical purpose of assessment for lifelong learning and foster more profound and meaningful relationships with their teachers and classmates while benefiting from a pedagogy informed by learners' needs and capabilities.

Keywords. Sustainable assessment, Kto12 curriculum, literature teaching.

Context and Concerns

For the longest time, learners all over the globe have been conditioned to fulfill their institutions' academic requirements to satisfy the needs of "an assessment bureaucracy" (Boud, 2007, p. 28). This 'conditioning' is not surprising as many academic institutions have prioritized crafting the most valid and reliable tests, analyzing the results statistically to inform the effectiveness of the curriculum, and gauging the learners' academic performance and improvement (Boud, 2007; Sadler, 1989). Unfortunately, assessment for certification or a summative assessment (Boud & Molloy, 2013) has been the be-all-and-end-all of the learners' learning experiences, while feedback and formative assessment (or assessment for immediate learning) (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Salder, 1989) and learning as a process and future learning (sustainable assessment or assessment for long-term learning) took a back seat (Boud, 2007; Boud & Molloy, 2013). More so, this culture of assessment directly or indirectly conditions learners to put more premium on grades than on the learning experiences they earn from their classes (Boud & Falchikov, 2006). Ironically, while their high ratings can take them to places and elevate their careers to a higher plane, lifelong mastering skills can make them stay grounded in these places or even go farther.

Another problematic area in teaching and learning is how to go beyond the rubrics used in class to measure a learner's output or a performance task. The teachers' idea of quality assessment output has been "tacit knowledge" or "in-the-head standards" (Salder, 1989, p. 126). The teacher's monopoly of the assessment in this "spoon-feeding mindset or culture" that has been existing for a long time (Boud & Molloy, 2013) could be unfair and disempowering for the learners since they (1) are not completely aware of the full metrics that are used to evaluate their work, (2) are not given a chance to measure up to these standards, and (3) are not given a chance to express their opinion about the assessment process (Salder, 1989; Boud & Falchikov, 2006). This kind of practice also "limit[s] learners' learning behaviors" (Boud & Falchikov, 2006) as they are only bound to follow the assessment rules set by the teacher and the institution when they could learn more from being given opportunities to understand what "quality" work means and assess their work first before their work is judged finally by the teacher. Moreover, teachers and institutions have been satisfied with quantitatively measuring the learners' outputs, which further reinforces this culture, rather than providing high-quality, qualitative, and constructive feedback (Boud & Falchikov, 2006). Teachers expect learners to make sense of the feedback they receive and improve their work (Boud & Molloy, 2013). Often, feedback is not given immediately, and it becomes impractical for the learners since they cannot use it anymore to improve their work (Carless, 2016).

In a specific scenario, assessing creative work in literature classes is also challenging as "teachers…have their tastes and prejudices" (Kroll, 1997, p. 1, as cited in Mozaffari, 2013). Additionally, creativity is now

regarded as a "multi-faceted and domain-specific ability" and "involves a combination of cognitive, conative, and emotional factors" (Barbot et al., 2011, p. 125). Hence, more than assessing how the learners fulfill the requirements of a creative task, teachers should consider other aspects of creativity that cannot just be measured through quantitative means, such as the learners' resourcefulness, humility in accepting criticism, and collaborating with others. In this case, many assessment techniques lack sufficient reliability and validity (Baer & McKool, 2009) since they were crafted from the lens of the teacher as the sole assessor of quality or standard, and some criteria may not be aligned with the requirements of the creative task: The requisites of the genre and the correct disposition in creating a piece. While rubrics or grading grids are the best ways to ensure objectivity in creative assessment (Blomer, 2011, as cited in Mozaffari, 2013) and analytic rubrics, specifically, they are still deemed as reliable assessments for creativity (Johnson & Savingby, 2007), teachers must rethink their assessment practices that would best fit the objectives of the lesson and the context of the learners who will be performing the creative task.

Sustainable Assessment

Since the 1980s, educators, including Royce Salder, have been pushing for developing learners' capacity to monitor their work, to know in the first place what reasonable quality means, compare their work with exemplars of quality, and improve their work. Boud (2000) first explained "sustainable assessment" as a kind of assessment that does not only "meet the needs of the present" but also "prepares learners to meet their own future learning needs." (p. 1). It aims to develop attitudes, qualities, or dispositions that learners will be able to apply beyond the four walls of the classroom and into the future (Hume & Coll, 2009). Thus, summative and formative assessments are designed to achieve longer-term goals. Specifically, sustainable assessment aims to develop "effective lifelong assessors" (Boud, 2000) and "connoisseurs" (Salder, 1989) among learners. They are empowered to calibrate their work based on their evaluative knowledge—a set of criteria discussed in class and exemplary work they can compare their work with. Subsequently, they do their work at par with the model and the standards set by first identifying the gap between what is expected and what they have produced so far (Salder, 1989). They do not just rely on their teachers and classmates (and in the future, on their superiors and colleagues) for feedback; they can self-regulate and self-evaluate independently—with or without external guidance. On a larger scale, sustainable assessment aims to "form a capable person who can engage in professional work and contribute to society as an informed citizen" (Boud, 2007, p. 30) who can make decisions and act on them judiciously.

Before the learners can become connoisseurs, they must first undergo an "apprenticeship" in which the learner works on an authentic task and is given more responsibilities with supervision and critique from the practitioners (or the teachers). It is a collaborative practice when everyone experiences the "joys and frustrations of work, repetition and skill development, integrated assessment and feedback in everyday work, contextualized final assessment based on performance in a task (fit for purpose)" (Boud, 2009). On the other hand, the teachers must be expert assessment designers who can establish a productive and conducive learning community (Boud & Molloy, 2013) that encourages healthy collaboration, not a competition, and active learning and contribution to the class. As an expert, the teacher must also assess whether the competencies or learning outcomes are realistically suitable for each learner to ensure they correctly fulfill the task (Boud & Molloy, 2013).

The teachers' formative assessments may provide a fine-tuning mechanism among learners that monitors how they learn, what they know and want to learn in the process, and how they progress. For this type of assessment to be successful, the following are needed: (1) confidence that the task can be mastered; (2) exploration of criteria and standards from various sources; (3) active engagement with the learning tasks; (4) self-monitoring and progress tracking mechanisms; (5) troubleshooting problems; (6) access to support; (7) effective use of feedback; and (8) the use of careful language when judging someone else's work (Boud, 2000; Boud, 2010).

In this paper, Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick' (2006) principles of good feedback practices will be the focus as they offer more practical guidelines that literature educators can learn from, especially when making learners fulfill performance tasks that require learners to immerse themselves in a creative process. Concrete applications in the local classroom context are also provided.

Sustainable Assessment in Literature

Discussing Quality and Creative Work Through an Exemplar

In the 20th century, many teachers usually instructed learners on how to fulfill their performance tasks. Teachers would also present the criteria or rubrics for the learners to see how their work would be evaluated. Then, the teachers would assume that the learners already know how to execute the task and let them independently do their work and would only wait until the learners have submitted their output. However, with sustainable assessment, the performance task fulfillment process does not start and end if teachers desire learners to learn holistically from their assessments.

Nicol and Macfarlane (2006) explained that the teachers must first make explicit what is required of the learners and define a set of valid standards from which they could compare their work. The teachers should facilitate a class discussion and reflection on what "quality" work means before learners go on their way and do the task. According to Sadler (2010), "quality" is the degree to which work comes together to achieve a purpose. Thus, the learners' outputs must be judged holistically after assessing how they fulfill each criterion. Learners must then understand the concept of "criteria" for judging quality work and use these in evaluating and discussing their work with their classmates or teacher. For the learners to clearly understand what quality work looks like, Sadler (2009) suggested using exemplars in class to model the explicit criteria or characteristics that can be expected from the tasks that the learners will produce. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) called this strategy the "work sample technique." For example, before asking learners to write a creative haiku, literature teachers could first invite them to read one sample haiku from Kobayashi Issa, Matsuo Basho, or Taniguchi Buson. Then, they can ask them, "What makes the haiku exemplary or creative?"

Next, they will write all the learners' answers on the board and let the learners themselves explain the criterion or quality. The teachers' role here is to filter the learners' responses if there are misconceptions or misinformation and add additional information when needed. The criteria did not come from the teachers but from the learners' conception of a quality haiku.

A more creative way of doing the work sample technique is by showing two samples of haiku—one from a famous writer and one done by a previous learner (displayed with the learner's permission). Then, teachers may let the learners rate the level of creativity of the two-sample works based on what was discussed in class previously about the characteristics of a haiku using online poll applications. They may show the results to the class and then call on learners to justify their ratings. Teachers may write down these justifications on the board so the class remembers what they could emulate from the exemplars displayed. If there is plenty of time in the assessment process, teachers may also organize rating calibration workshops wherein learners collaboratively judge the two exemplars and negotiate with their fellow group mates what rating the exemplar deserves. In these workshops, teachers could also invite learners to discuss if the rubrics they use to evaluate the exemplars can be used to judge their work. The learners can then suggest changes to the rubrics so that the rubrics are adjusted to their needs and context. For more capable and independent learners, teachers can initiate the creation of the rubrics from scratch and discuss in class what specific criteria of a quality haiku must be placed in the rubric and be used to judge their work and what weight should be given to each. For example, the class can decide and negotiate with the teacher if the criterion imagery must have a greater or lower weight than the theme.

In this democratic negotiation process, teachers and learners are on the same page regarding the task expectations, and hidden criteria can be avoided. It ensures that the assessment process is fair and reasonable for the learners. The teacher could probably be assured of more quality haikus to grade later as possible gaps in understanding the task have already been addressed.

Closing the Gap Through Dialogic Feedback

After having a clear idea of the expectations of the creative task they need to perform or fulfill, the learners will then be on their own to do their work independently, but with their teacher as their guide on the side this time. In the past, learners needed to submit their output or perform their creative work first before they could get feedback, usually from their teacher. Thus, it is not surprising why teachers sometimes get disappointed with the results. They only see the output once, but not the process that the learners underwent, i.e., the trials and errors and drafts, where mistakes could be prevented, and many valuable lessons could be learned.

In sustainable assessment, feedback is dialogic and "more than just an information transmission" (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006, p. 11), aimed at closing, if not preventing, the gap between the standards discussed in class and the present work of the learners.

By engaging in dialogic feedback, learners develop their evaluative knowledge and skills and become more actively involved in the assessment process (Sadler, 2010), which was once the monopoly of the teacher. It happens in an intra-(within the learner) and inter-personal (between the learner and another source) way where learners gather feedback from various sources—from themselves, teachers, and peers, and improve their work (Carless, 2016).

Self-Assessment

Before the learners let others see their work, it is recommended that they are given enough time to reflect on their work first (or what Nicol [2009] calls an "inner dialogue") and reflect again after receiving their final grade before moving on to another lesson or task. Macfarlane and Dick (2006) suggested that teachers create a more structured self-monitoring and progress tracking mechanism in which the learners can self-regulate and evaluate their decisions and actions toward reaching their goal/s for the task. Below are some guide or reflection questions that can be given to learners to help them introspect among themselves as creators or artists and their works:

1. How would you compare your work so far with the exemplar discussed in class?
2. What aspects of your work and progress are you happy or proud of?
3. Are you experiencing any difficulties meeting the standards? If so, what were those? How do you plan to face these to make faster progress and create high-quality work?
4. What have you discovered about yourself as a person, creator, or artist in doing the task?
5. What have you contributed to the group work so far? Is there anything else you can do better to help the group move forward? (for group work)
6. How has your working relationship with your groupmates been so far (for group work)? Is there anything you think your group can do to make the collaboration more productive and efficient?

Nicol (2009) also suggested that learners submit a cover sheet for self-assessment accompanying their final submission, giving their predicted grade and justification for it. In this way, the teachers understand how the learners fare in judging quality work.

If done regularly, self-assessment would become part of the routine and system of the learners whenever they are given creative tasks (Boud & Molloy, 2013). This healthy habit and lifelong skill will help learners make deliberate, logical, and informed decisions, primarily when they handle more complex tasks as they grow older and are entrusted with more challenging tasks (Boud & Falchikov, 2006).

Peer and Teacher Assessment

When the learners are ready to show their work to others after their self-assessment and work revision, teachers may now facilitate peer assessment through face-to-face dialogue, virtual meetings, or an a/synchronous feedbacking mechanism (e.g., Google Suite applications like Google Docs, Padlet, free messaging applications, email, and the likes). With learners exchanging work for feedback, they could

look at different outputs, styles, and approaches to a task, learn from their peers' examples and mistakes, and get used to hearing constructive criticism in a cooperative environment (Carless, 2015, as cited in Carless, 2016; Sadler, 1989).

Sadler (2010) reminded teachers to do peer assessment purposefully. The teacher must clearly explain the peer coaching sessions' objectives and procedures. It is also important to emphasize that the learners do this out of concern for their classmates and a desire to help them produce quality work. This way, the learners learn together as a community.

Additionally, learners can better explain to their classmates their feedback using a language they both understand (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). They would not get easily offended or feel pressured hearing or reading their peers' honest feedback compared to when they get it first from their teacher. After receiving feedback from their peers, the learners should be reminded to revise their work once more immediately while they still remember what transpired from their dialogue.

There are numerous ways peer assessment can be facilitated. After the peer assessment, teachers can provide feedback before the learner submits the final work. Sadler (1989) suggested that teachers can informally grade the learners holistically first to give a more precise appraisal, and then they can comment on the distinguishing features of the work. Feedback can also be reinforced by one-on-one tutorials (Nicol, 2009), especially if the learners find the performance task challenging due to personal circumstances like prolonged absences, lower cognitive ability, or lack of interest in the creative task. Teachers can also suggest additional sources to help them re-learn the concept they have not mastered yet based on the initial drafts. Nicol (2009) also shared that audio feedback is better since it is more conversational and natural. Also, an advantage is that the learners feel the teacher's genuine concern and interest in helping them improve their work. Thus, it is easier for learners to trust the teacher in this non-threatening and non-didactic method of formative assessment (Carless, 2015). Learners can also be instructed to discuss one or two pieces of feedback that have been useful for them. Teachers can also give descriptive feedback as both learners and teachers review the rubrics before submission (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).

The learners and teacher can also use the same reflection questions enumerated above during the dialogic feedback. For example, instead of asking the learners to write a cover letter, the teacher can personally ask them first about their thoughts on their strengths and areas for improvement before sharing their objective judgment of their work. In this way, the learners can validate whether their work assessment is correct. As much as possible, teachers should allow the learners to think of the best actions to produce a better output instead of instructing the learners on what to do next.

It must be emphasized that feedback would not be effective if delayed. According to Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006), timely feedback gives the status of the learners' progress concerning their goals, and they use this to improve themselves as they achieve the said goals. Immediate feedback will also ensure that the learners and the teacher have a similar understanding of expectations and standards. The teacher could help bridge the gaps in learning, if there are any (Carless et al., 2011). The learners also get a prompt response and assistance in times of difficulties, increasing their chance of learning the correct way to approach a task before they could make worse mistakes. Likewise, they can improve their work through a series of resubmissions or attempts and produce better results in the end. The learners and the teacher gain in the process as they can be satisfied with the creative process outcome while deepening the relationship between the novice and the expert.

Dialogic feedback is not without challenges, and teachers must be prepared to face them. The learners' level of engagement, mental toughness, self-efficacy, self-regulation (Adams & Wilson, 2017), and feedback literacy (Carless & Boud, 2018) must be developed first for the learners to have a more accessible reception of sustainable feedback. While some teachers are anxious that learners may not respect their authority as much because they could both judge the work (Salder, 1989), this can be solved by changing the teachers' mindset about assessment and being prepared and equipped to be humble experts who can judge learners' work in a less intimidating and authoritative way. In the first place, teachers must be comfortable sharing the assessment work and collaborating with (not dictating) the learners. Carless (2016) also suggested not doing peer grading because some learners may be uncomfortable grading their peers and may feel unequipped or worthy of doing so. If this will be done with more mature learners, they still need to be taught explicitly how this is done through discussions of

exemplary works in class, as explained above. The teacher could ask learners to rate the sample work using the rubrics, and the class could agree with a rating for each criterion, accompanied by a logical justification. Whether it is a peer or teacher assessment, it is the teacher's role to create a healthy and conducive learning environment that establishes a safe space for collaboration, openness, and trust with each other (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Hume & Coll, 2009; Sadler, 2009) to lessen, if not prevent, the enumerated obstructions to sustainable assessment.

Delivering Feedback Information

Providing high-quality information is crucial to giving timely and dialogic feedback (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Below are the characteristics of high-quality feedback according to Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) and other experts on sustainable assessment.

1. **Constructive**

    Teachers may give a balance of praise and points for improvement and encourage positive motivation and self-esteem. They may commend the effort the learners put into their work, their strategic behaviors, and the achievement of learning goals rather than just their ability or intelligence.

    Teachers must be conscious also that the performance is the one that is judged and not the person. To reinforce positive behavior, the teacher can highlight a positive feature, explain its merit, and suggest that the learners continue doing it. Teachers can also ensure learners perceive comments as descriptive rather than evaluative/authoritarian. On the other hand, praise must also equate with the grade given. It should not be given to show mercy or consideration for the learners (Nicol, 2009). They can also emphasize that learners can succeed and overcome the challenges they are initially experiencing. They can also help learners accept that mistakes are typical and that people usually have misconceptions (Nicol, 2009) and deficiencies that can be corrected with an open mind.

2. **Corrective**

    Teachers can also give practical advice on improving their work, not just flatter them with their strengths and demotivate them with their work's loopholes. It is recommended that the learners "troubleshoot their performance and self-correct, i.e., it helps learners take action to reduce the discrepancy between their intentions and the effects." (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006, p. 9). Subsequently, the teacher can encourage learners to plan the strategies they might use to improve their work and other future work. This "feedforward mechanism, a concept from Bjorkman (1978, cited by Sadler, 2010), will help the learners continue the task proactively rather than dwell on past mistakes or inadequacies.

3. **Clear**

    Learners sometimes cannot find teachers' valuable feedback because they are illegible, ambiguous, too abstract, and general. To solve this, Lunsford (1997, as cited in Nicol, 2009) suggested that teachers write in plain language understandable to the learners. Teachers can use specific descriptive and evaluative words and sincere (and not canned) commendations. For example, instead of writing or saying, "Great job! Keep it up! the teacher can write this instead:

    > The haiku subtly captures a current issue in aquaculture using vivid imagery; however, the punctuation added would clearly show the separation of the two juxtaposed images. This is also like how you use punctuations when separating ideas in sentences or clauses for the reader's easy understanding. You

may check out some models in this [source] to see how punctuations are used and where they are strategically placed.

This sample feedback specifically mentions what makes the work ingenious or remarkable and is worth noting by the teacher. Thus, the learner would know precisely what their strengths are to develop further to become a better writer. It also makes the learners feel that their work was carefully assessed and that the merits of their work did not go unnoticed.

a. Concise

Feedback should be constructed like small lessons and limited to two to three well-developed points for extended written assignments. This could avoid overwhelming learners (Lunsford, 1997). If there is a need for a lengthy explanation, teachers can engage with the learners in dialogic feedback as they might need to re-learn some concepts to get the task right.

b. Contextualized

Teachers need to emphasize the relevance of the feedback to the learning outcomes and the assessment criteria (Nicol, 2009). The learners must also understand that the feedback was based on the teacher's objective perspective, the class's discussion of high-quality work, and the rubrics discussed and agreed upon in class.

Results-Informed Pedagogy

Submitting the assessment or output of the learners is not the end of the assessment process, not even after the teachers have checked the outcomes. While teachers discuss the general results of the performance task with the learners and enumerate points for improvement for the subsequent assessments, they must also make necessary adjustments to their pedagogy and assessment to better cater to the needs of the learners. For example, if many learners had difficulty creating images for their haiku, the teacher could first ask them what problems they had encountered in creating images. Then, teachers can re-teach imagery and give some more exemplars until the learners understand the correct way and remind them to do the same thing the next time they are asked to write poems. This way, the cycle of repeating the same mistakes stops.

Teachers can conduct action research to help them understand the trend in the assessment results and reflect on how their teaching style or assessment practices have impacted such results. More importantly, the teachers can adjust these to better suit their future learners' needs and contexts. However, since doing action research can be daunting and time-consuming for many teachers, there are simple and practical ways teachers could already use informal results observable in the class and their communication with learners to adjust their teaching style or the assessment process immediately.

Teachers should attentively listen to the learners' responses in class discussions on quality work and directly pinpoint wrong notions before these misconceptions translate into their actual output. For example, teachers should instantly correct it if learners have mistakenly understood the purpose of particular punctuation in the haiku displayed. When giving time for learners to collaborate for their group performance tasks, teachers are advised to observe what each group is doing and listen carefully to their discussions or look at their drafts or progress so far. Teachers do not need to wait for the learners to make mistakes in their output. Teachers can, for example, point out how the connection between the two images in their haiku draft is not so evident to the readers.

Teachers can also address common issues that hinder their progress and offer pieces of advice to be able to move forward. Some groups are usually concerned about their difficulty thinking of a theme for creative output. Teachers can intervene and help them brainstorm on themes that are palpable and relatable to their experience and need not think too far away.

They can help learners generate ideas and ask questions to help them think of exciting topics without the teacher feeding them ideas. Teachers should be able to assist in resolving these mistakes and/or concerns arising to improve the quality of their output or performance. Aside from observing learners in group work, common

concerns and problems shared by learners during synchronous or asynchronous consultation sessions could also be intervention opportunities teachers should not waste.

Rethinking Assessment: Implications for Teacher and Learner Re-Tooling

In sum, a critical discussion on "quality" and "creative" work and constructive feedback with no other aim but to effect improvement on the output and the 21st-century skills of the learners (e.g., resilience, self-regulation, collaboration, among many others) could most likely make literature classes more relevant for the learners. However, a 360-degree change in the Filipino teachers' mindset about assessment needs to be completed first to make them more open to assessment practices that are more attuned to the immediate needs of the learners. Teachers need to be trained in designing sustainable assessments that are effective and efficient for both learners and teachers since this kind of assessment can be time-consuming (Sadler, 2009). After re-tooling and professional sharing, schools can allocate enough support for the teachers to have ample time to discuss quality with their learners and assess their creative output carefully and substantially. Funding teachers' action research could also help inspire teachers to sustain a results-informed pedagogy.

Similarly, learners must be fully equipped with 21st-century skills to succeed in sustainable assessment. Their confidence in evaluating works of others and their own would be easy to build if critical evaluation is naturally integrated into class activities and if they are exposed to literary texts through reading high-quality literature available in the library or suggested by their literature teachers. Fewer learners hesitate to consult their teachers if their literature class atmosphere is non-competitive and democratic; learners are assured that mistakes are not roadblocks but steppingstones to improvement and that they can trust their teachers and classmates will judge their work objectively and not personally.

Though both teachers and learners may not thoroughly enjoy the fruits of sustainable assessment immediately after any performance task, the ultimate prize is "when learners have learned with [their teachers] and can continue improving without them." (Carless, 2013, p. 117).

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