Closing your own gap: ESOL speaking self-assessment built upon Clarke's method

Research question

How does using formative assessment of speaking skills affect learner ability and motivation in a L2 ESOL class?

Rationale and aims

Learners cannot always "hear" their areas for development, nor document their progress, in speaking and listening (S&L) work.

This project aims to encourage learners to assess their strengths and areas for development, in order that they take more responsibility for the advancement of their speaking skills.

It builds on the work of Clarke (2001) but positions itself in an ESOL speaking context and focuses on self-assessment, rather than teacher-led assessment.

Participants: 13 learners from a L2 ESOL Adult (19+) daytime class, taking L1/2 ESOL and L1 FS qualifications.

Research methods: focus group, individual interviews, classroom activities, questionnaires and "Closing the gap" strategy from Clarke (2001).

Interventions: Learners listened to their own voice recordings (discussions and/or presentations) and were asked to find one thing which they wanted to work on.

Students gave written, informed consent to the research in line with research ethics.

The project was wonderful; it should be part of our targets. I love it!

I would like to ask all teachers to give this kinds of opportunities to student. Students might not realise the benefit of the activities.

Second time I find my mistakes.... It give me help to find which area I am weak and which is better.

Literature

Clarke, S.(2001) *Unlocking Formative Assessment*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
Coffield, F. (2009) *All you ever wanted to know about teaching and learning but were too cool to ask.* London: Learning and Skills Network.
Fielding, M. *et al.* (2005) *Factors Influencing the Transfer of Go0d Practice.* Nottingham: DfES.
Hannan, A. (2008) *Research In Education (RESINED)*
http://www.edu.plymouth.ac.uk/resined/resedhme.htm

Moving forward

Disseminate current findings to department colleagues at next staff training conference.

Ask interested parties to conduct joint practice research to develop the project further (see Fielding *et al*.).

Continue with project in this class and implement applicable recommendations, but also negotiate with learners how they want to proceed: develop "a workmanlike partnership" (Coffield, 2009: 9).

Preliminary findings

Despite initial embarrassment, learners were keen to listen to themselves. Some learners now record their voices at home and in class on Smartphones.

Not all learners liked using the blog.

Learners were able to identify one key area to improve upon after repeat listenings.

It is too early to say whether the intervention has had a positive effect on their S&L skills but all learners wanted to continue recording and listening to their voices.

Learner comments include the following: "useful"; "it is good to hear our errors"; "more useful if used frequently in class"; "easiest way to correct myself"; "I really like to record my speech"; "I don't like the blog"

It is a small-scale study but it provides limited support of Clarke's idea that focusing on one key area for development is effective in improving learner work.

Adopting the "Closing the gap" strategy with learners' written work has also proved useful in focusing learners' attention to key areas for improvement.

When I listen to my speaking then I found how much vocab I used and I think I used lots of conditional.

Recommendations

- Future classes to get accustomed to the "Closing the Gap" strategy via their written work before introducing it in S&L context.
- Learners to listen for 3 things they do very well and then to think of a prompt they would give themselves (like the prompts T has given on written work).
- Learners to listen to classmates' speaking and suggest key strengths, as well as areas for development (learners standing in zone of proximal development).
- Begin project earlier in the course with future classes and schedule a regular day/time for this work (if possible) so learners knew to expect it.
- Learners could be encouraged to create e-portfolios earlier in the year and keep all work for reference.
- One learner asked for teacher to give suggestions for improvement.

Learning by mistakes. [answer to "What makes a good English speaker?"]

I could try to...pronounce better...than in past. With the second discussion I found I did better than in our first. [It] was effective.

I don't know about grammar but I can find others [errors], e.g. confident, voice is shaking, pronunciation.

Challenges

- Learners used to being teacher-led; need time to develop self-study skills.
- Learners keen to please teacher with answers during one-to-one interviews & questionnaires?
- Lack of ICT skills → blogs too difficult to use for many learners so work saved onto hard drive.
- Introduction to FS this year taken focus away from S&L skills.
- Too short a timescale to measure effect of project on speaking skills.
- Why did some learners engage with recording their voice and others not? Factors to be explored in longer-term project: socioeconomic (access to technology); gender; ICT skills; sociocultural; age.

Special thanks to my L2 am class.

Researcher: Kate Lindley, ESOL Tutor at Kirklees College, klindley01@kirkleescollege.ac.uk