Transcript EDUC172 Part 6-01

So for the final section of this course we're going to be looking at assessment and evaluation of student's language. Assessment and evaluation is a complex subject to get across in just a few short modules, but we'll see what we can do.

Assessment and evaluation of language is usually best done when strategic. That means it's directed towards individual students. Sometimes one notices patterns across a large group of students and then, it benefits all to have that instruction. But often students aren't actually all working at the same level, in terms of their acquisition of language and their development as readers and writers.

They have many different needs, and many different challenges that arise over the course of there school studies, and it may depend both on the nature of the subject that you teach, but it also may, also depend on the level of their language skill. We, very briefly at the beginning of this course, introduced the idea of, brought up by Jim Cummins, of two different styles of second language acquisition, two different stages of second language acquisition.

The first being basic interpersonal communication skills, or BICS, as he calls it, which is usually able to be acquired within one to three years of practice using the language. But that does not equal communicative, or rather cognitive academic language proficiency. Cognitive academic language proficiency or CALP usually takes five to seven years for it to really settle in, so that students are able to function across a number of subject areas, with complex academic texts, and succeed in not only comprehending them, but in also being able to produce ideas and papers worthy of good grades and excelling at their subject.

So, when beginning to think about the ways that we can assort students and arrange them into an understanding of how well they are performing in our subject area, it's important to also appreciate and take into account that language may be providing difficulties, not necessarily cognitive. The student may actually be doing fairly well at understanding the subject, but may not have the ability yet to adequately deal with the language to communicate ideas clearly.

So, we looked at different ways that students can organize and structure knowledge, and that we can assist them so that they do so more fluently and more easily.

One of those ways, of course, was to develop schemes as a knowledge and also we've looked at different, using different modalities and different media, using all kinds of different information sources. And, using all these different information sources also means we have to adapt the way we assess and evaluate the students, because they are going to be learning from all those different information sources.

And we have to appreciate that often concepts, such as provided by traditional grammar and what-have-you, are really not rules so much as conventions, and that the conventions of language use often also change over time.

So what we want to do is to make students confident as readers, as writers, as people engaging in the discourse of our disciplinary area, so that they are able to advance and go forward in that field of study. What's of course key to this, sorry, and that they are able to go forward in that field of study.

Key to assessment and evaluation of language is that students should be able to both read and write a great deal more, then we spend time evaluating them on either their comprehension or on their written skill, their skill at writing.

They need the opportunity to explore and play with language, to try out different ways of expressing ideas, different ways of putting ideas together in sentences, and different ways expressing the similar, similar ideas in different genres, and using different styles. Using all these different styles help them to master a shift in what we may call register.

Register is a concept that employs notions of field, tenor and mode. The field is generally what you're talking about or what's being discussed in the writing. The tenor is the manner of speaking. So, the manner of speaking shifts depending on who you're speaking to.

We've discussed this as a certain kind of formality to certain genres, in that they have a very formal tone and the manner of that kind of writing is usually quite formal. And it doesn't use contractions; uses complex sentences; it doesn't use colloquial expressions very much; it tends to use elaborate and detailed writing.

And so the tenor is a part of how we address people in a very simple sense when we address somebody quite formal in a letter, say, we might say "Dear sir" or "Dear madam'. In casual conversation, it might just be "Hey, Jack!". Well, the difference between "Dear sir" and Hey, Jack!" is exactly that, it's a change in the tenor.

And that's something that we need to become good at doing, being able to subtly shift between different tenors as we write to, either make the reader feel more comfortable with us as writers, so that we have a more oral and conversational tone to the writing, or to be able to shift up in registers to speak factually and authoritatively about the subject we're writing.

That's an important skill that students need to acquire and we can refer to that as the tenor. The last of these is, of course, the mode. And I've just discussed part of what is involved in mode because mode is like the media or the way something is being communicated. So writing is a mode, just speaking is a mode, and what we tend to see much of speaking being more colloquial, more idiomatic more less formal then a lot of writing. That's not always true, of course.

There are many situations in which we must speak very formally. This example I'm giving you right now of speaking and lecturing is a more formal mode than one might typically use when just in conversation with friends. So, that we can see that there are different tenors to every different kind of mode.

If we take those concepts packed into register being field tenor, and mode, we can understand that we need to adjust our assessment of language depending on the kind of audience that are, the writing, or the text, whatever has been produced is meant for.

What is the purpose of the text? Who does it address? How should it be addressing that subject, or topic, or person? What's the most appropriate form? It might not always be the most formal that is the most appropriate. And so we need to be able to help students move fluently between different fields, tenors, and modes, that is, different subjects, different manners of speaking, styles, and different media that they might express themselves in.

And we, likewise, need to be able to move fluently in our assessments and evaluations, always appreciating the purpose of the writing, the genre that it is within, and the way that it is expressing that. Is it appropriate to the purpose of the writing? We need to have all of those things working together.

So, when we go to first assess students, sometimes we can start simply by having students read aloud. Reading aloud, as was discussed in the second section of this course, is a quick way to get a sense of whether or not a student is struggling to pronounce words, which words they're struggling with.

If they're struggling, if they're reading slowly and struggling to make sense of a whole sentence then we know that the language is probably more complex than they're comfortable dealing with, at that particular point in their language development.

At the same time we also talked about sometimes students needing to keep a finger on the text in order to not lose their place, again because they are having to process things, each letter needs to be processed, rather than seeing words as whole units.

And that's the automaticity with the speed of reading increasing, because they are able to read more quickly and make more easy sense of more complex sentences.

So that's just in a reading sense. And of course, in a writing sense, we can take a closer and more detailed look of what is going on. Hence, we see that around the world, writing is usually used in formal evaluations and tests and that kind of thing in order to demonstrate understanding and competence at expressing ideas.

When we get to look at our students' writing that's when we can start to identify individual problems that may exist.

It's not always the case that the way we use language is the one and only, or the best. But we need to use it as a kind of touchstone, so are we able to make sense of what we are reading.

If we're not, we need to have students start to rework their own texts. It's useful to be able to identify what is not working, not just to simply comment that you don't understand or that it's bad. But we need to look more closely and say: Is there something missing? Is the students struggling to arrange thoughts, to add coherence, what aspect of it?

Then, one of the best ways to do things is to once again think about language as an ongoing learning process.

So we get the students to work with their own writing until we too, can comprehend it. We can share in it but we shouldn't rewrite their work for them. What I mean by that is it sometimes we can help them to rephrase ideas so that they make sense to us. This doesn't mean that we're ever doing it so that it's the right way, or the only way, that an idea can be expressed.

We've seen how the parts of language can be moved around, and that this can aid comprehension for the reader. But it's not necessarily that there's only one way to do it. There's many ways to express ideas clearly, and we need to give the students room to express their own ideas as clearly as possible for us.

Because often, we are their primary reader and as someone who marks their writing, we take a extra responsibility to assist them to write in ways that help us to comprehend that what they know, and to see how well they're doing with the content of the subject that we're teaching them.

So, the best way to work with writing as a form, the best way to work with language assessment and evaluation is to start by getting students producing writing.

Getting them producing writing and reading their own writing aloud, really can help to identify the disconnections that may exist between their ability to be basic interpersonal communicators and fluent speakers, with their ability to master written forms, especially a school-based written forms of language.

So, ideally, another form is to look quite closely at exemplars. We haven't used this concept very much in the course yet, but it's always useful to provide students with examples of good writing. Now, sometimes those can be pieces that you yourself have written and wish to share.

Unlike some of the examples I shared with you throughout this course, those should probably be pieces that you've already written and polished, that you already have gone through all the different stages in the process of composition and have managed to polish up a piece of writing you like.

Once you've done that, it makes it much easier to talk about how that process was achieved, and what you like about it. Does it have a catchy first sentence that engages the reader immediately, and causes them to want to read the rest of the piece of writing? Does it articulate ideas clearly? Does it give specific and concrete examples? Does it provide analogies? If it's of a, say, lower and less formal register? Does it provide humor? Does it provide ways of inviting the reader in, and engaging them? If it's a more formal register, is it using a sufficient variety of sentence construction, so is it using some complex sentences as well as some simple sentences?

Sometimes, depending on style, even sentence fragments can add a certain kind of volatile jot to the reading, so that the reader is once again engaged in the text by variety of sentences that are being used, sentence types that are being used.

Those become kinds of criteria that are very helpful to students when they want to make writing more engaging.

Now, the reason that I've mentioned exemplars is because when you're working with an exemplar it, can be of great benefit to share what you appreciate about the writing with students, and be explicit.

This really helps them to see what kinds of writing techniques they could start to develop for their own writing. Every time we take apart a sentence, and start replacing the words, and changing the meaning, moving things around, we gain a better familiarity with the flexibility of language with its versatility to it, to facilitate the expression of our ideas, and the close and detailed expression of our ideas.

When going to look at students writing, it's always important then to appreciate that they may be having difficulties, that some of those difficulties need to be addressed on an individual basis. When the difficulties we see appear to be happening across a larger group of students, then, of

course, we can build that into the curriculum in the moment, and we can generally do all of these, providing good feedback.

What's important and what really gets the writing process going with students, is providing useful consistent feedback.

When we provide feedback we can usually do so within a learning process that involves listening, that involves them speaking, that involves them reading texts and writing, and responding to both their textbooks and to their lectures. And, what they're finding out, and that when we read their work the more detailed we can provide feedback to them on that work, the more we can specify, not only what we think is problematic with the text they have written, but also the parts that we like, the word choices we think are good. When we give positive feedback, as well as that which offers them advice for how to improve the piece of writing, then this kind of feedback generally increases the students learning across the board.

So, an assessment that lacks feedback to the student is merely a way of making them fearful, and making them resort to the most conventional or safe practices they can. When a student is writing, and is constantly criticized for their writing, they won't tend to develop as better writers. They won't engage our imaginations more freely. They won't make us laugh with their humor. They will tend to write simple and less complex sentences. They will right less innovatively. They won't use imagination. They will simply try to get the task done, hand it in, and get it over with, as fast as possible.

This is not the way to assist our students to become better communicators and to learn faster the topics of the curriculum we want them to know. We need them to engage as imaginatively as possible at all times, and it doesn't matter how rigorous the science we're teaching them or the math, or the physical activities we're teaching them are. This kind of reflection and ability to express the concepts for themselves in a playful way, to apply the concepts in a broad range of unexpected ways, really changes how someone is able to think in our discourse, and to be able to respond, and share, and hopefully contribute to the disciplinary discourse that we want to welcome them into.

So, the more we can use writing as a way to engage creative imagination and use our topic that is the subject we're teaching at the time to motivate the writing, to focus the content of it, but then have them explore a variety of different forms, that is, to write the same concepts in the form of poems or in the form of essays, reports, recipes, translating across different genres. Taking a text that is a report and presenting it as a news report instead, being able to actually engage with some of those media and dramatize it, so that we are engaging our physical bodies as well, which are large part of most forms of communication if they're not in purely print format to bring all of those different skills, literacies and understandings to bear, is invaluable. And what we want them to do is to be able to generate something that they can deliver with confidence and pride.

When the do that and are ready by constantly reworking things, adding new modalities, new elements, illustrations, pictures, what have you, the more they can evolve the presentation of it, so that they really feel confident. It's when they achieve that point that we can step in and start to evaluate it.

So for this particular stage now what I'd like you to do is to take a piece writing of one of your students and to take a close look. Take a close look at the peace of writing, analyze it for what is

going on. Does it have sentence variety? Does it have simple sentences, complex sentences, compound sentences? Does it use...? Does it fit the genre well?

What we need to do in order to analyze that, is to have an exemplar. So for this we're going to go and take the text we originally looked at, and now break it down for all the things that I've just discussed. We want sentence variety. We want to understand the tone, its degree of formality, to what degree is it using complex words. How complex is the vocabulary? And think about those qualities as being qualities we hope our students can also master and have in their own writing.

And then, let's take a piece of our students' writing and compare them. All I'd like you to do is to write in feedback how you think the students' writing is similar to the writing that, to the textbook that we've been studying. How's the writing similar and how's it different?

What is dissimilar from the way the textbook is written, and write it as feedback for the student. So, that will be our next project. I'd like you to take our original textbook, which by now, I think you'll be pretty familiar with, and I've looked very closely at the language involved in that text.

And now be able to look at the students' writing and start to compare. See what they might need that will help them to be able to write in a similar fashion.

Now that textbook can be a science textbook, just talking about the ways molecules combine, or it could be a novel. It could be a novel, fantasy novel. It could be anything. We want, as I said, the students to write in many different ways, and every time we want to do so, we want to teach explicitly what we are going to evaluate them on. In order to teach that explicitly, we need to know something about the texts we are using, and how they present challenges for students, both as readers and as writers, to write within that particular form, genre, style or discipline.

So, given all those things, let's start by taking our exemplar text and making a comparison of a student's piece of writing, and writing our comparison down as feedback, feedback that would go to the student, feedback that would aid them, wouldn't inhibit them, or harm them with too much negative criticism, would aid them, tell them what we like, tell them how they can improve, share with them, so that they can communicate with us more clearly, what would we like to see that would improve that piece of writing.

So we'll start with that. You need to write some feedback for a student, based on a comparison between the exemplar text we have been studying, and their piece of writing on a similar topic

Okay let's do that now.