Chapter Eight
Making our stories accountable in the academy: judgement and evaluation

This chapter continues to explore the core value of **empowerment** as embedded in educational processes and choices. Chapter Seven illustrated empowerment through notions of finding a voice and acquiring visibility. Chapter Eight will extend this discussion into the processes of validity, evaluation and judgment within the academy. These processes will be explored through a project assessing the progression from critical to creative response on an undergraduate module at Oxford Brookes University.
The project has some parallels with the MA Finding Voices project described in Chapter Seven: it encourages learners to recognize and value their own creativity and to see the texts of others as a springboard for generating their own. However, this chapter will focus on the assessment process and how this is part of the process of empowerment. The teaching strategy underlying this will also be explored - the strategy described in Chapter Seven as *scaffolded creativity*

A number of questions are confronted and answered in the course of exploring the assessment/teaching/creative process interrelationship. Are creativity and assessment not contradictory to one another? What notion of 'creativity' is being used here, and how is this skill or term anatomized so it makes sense to both learner and assessor? How can this assessment be assured of transparency, objectivity and meaningfulness to the learner? What can we learn about how native and non-native speakers respond to this process of transition, from critical to creative? The chapter aims to illustrate the proposition that every learner has the capacity for creativity and that assessment, far from being a constraint, can in fact be a trigger for creativity.

8.1 Creativity and language learning

Earlier chapters have explored the notion of 'creativity' from different perspectives: for example, Chapters Five, Six and Seven discussed the value of constraint and the creative potential of 'rules': notions of exploratory and transformational creativity were discussed

(Boden 2001) as well as different descriptions such as Grainger's 'passionate play', Goldberg's 'writing down the bones', and Elbow's 'throwing the clay' (Grainger et al 2005, Goldberg 1986, Elbow 1973). The notion of creativity as arising from 'something' rather than 'nothing' was discussed in Chapter Three, and as a teaching principle in Section 7.4. I also invoke my own principles of creativity as transforming knowledge-in-experience, and Pope's working definition of creativity: "to make, do or become something fresh and valuable with respect to others as well as ourselves" (Pope, 2005: xvi). These will be underlying assumptions in the discussion of assessment that follows. My own position has been to explore the nature of this capacity with reference to texts and assessment, and to unpack exactly the kinds of competence this means in practice.

See Appendix Readings 17 and 19 for earlier papers on the assessment of creative response to literature and the design of assessment tasks

Second language learning research has recognized the role of 'expressive writing' in first language learning, but been sceptical of its validity for the second language learner: "Although many L2 writers have learned successfully through (expressive writing), others may experience difficulties, as it tends to neglect the cultural backgrounds of learners, the social consequences of writing, and the purposes of communication in the real world, where writing matters." (Hyland: 2003: 10). These are concerns which, as a second language educator introducing a creative writing assessment into the curriculum, I needed to take seriously, and address with specific reference to the language learner. NOT to encourage creative processes in second language contexts seemed to me a crucial omission. Language learning, for example, cannot involve 'banking' deposits "for later retrieval during assessments." (Freire cited in Moustakim: 2007: 212). Nor is it about achieving fixed outcomes in which learning is "directed towards some fixed-end state" (Elliott cited ibid: 212). The problem with both of these definitions, is that the learners themselves are not processing and transforming the knowledge into 'something new', but are forced into a lockstep imitation of the teacher and a predetermined set of outcomes. This paradigm of learning, if translated into the language learning curriculum, would generate only memorised patterns and systems, rather than creative and unique applications of them. Language learning theory makes clear that the capacity to 'make

something new' is essential to the learning process; we assimilate 'rules' in order to subvert them and generate unique and specific messages with them, such as Miller and Chomsky's example "the people who called and wanted to rent your house when you go away next year are from California" (Miller and Chomsky 1963 cited in Brown 2000: 19). The speaker/listener has the capacity "to produce or understand a potentially infinite number of sentences they have not previously encountered" (Maybin and Swann 2006: 12). To explain this capacity without the notion of linguistic creativity is problematic. There are no ways in which a child might otherwise 'learn' all the allowable utterances in their mother tongue, since these are "astronomical" if not "infinite". (Jenkins and Palermo cited in Brown: 2000: 19). We also know that 'ordinary' /everyday use of language involves 'wordplay', invention and creativity. Carter explores the fact that 'creative' use of language has a social, personal, pragmatic function and is part of our competence as language users: "creativity is basic to a wide variety of different language uses, from everyday advertising language and slogans to the most elaborated of literary texts" (Carter: 2005; 18). This includes "wordplay, puns, -- verbal ambiguities, -- sexual innuendos, word inventions" to name just a few.

Section 3.1 looked at synonyms of the word 'to create': *transform, formulate, generate, adapt, change, give birth to, develop, evolve, spring from, make, piece together*. If we take 'language' as the knowledge in question, this set of verbs looks a great deal more promising. Take this as an example:

To *transform* rules of language into meaningful utterances

To *generate* utterances which are unique to the learner's experience

In this paradigm of learning, the learner is taking the knowledge and transforming it into something new: using the ingredients to ***make something new happen***. However, this is a broad definition, and does not offer detailed guidance for a learner attempting to engage with this as an educational objective. To be more explicit, our 'making something new' is contextualized within various understandings as to the nature of the 'literary/poetic'. How is this to be defined and anatomized so it makes sense to learners? Carter identifies six features which represent 'literariness' and which offer criteria by which to measure

literary merit. He posits, rather than “an absolute division into literary/non-literary” texts, a “cline of literariness along which texts can be arranged”, and which form a useful framework for the assessor. (Carter 2006 : 85). These six features are: **medium dependence** (literary texts depend less on other media) (ibid: 81); **genre-mixing**:; **semantic density** (the capacity for a text to work at several levels); **polysemy**, (words resonate with multiple meanings); **displaced interaction** (“ meanings … emerge indirectly and obliquely”), and finally, **text patterning**, such as the use of repetition, echoes and recurrence of motifs throughout a text.

In focusing on the ‘anatomy’ of literariness, Carter helps us with closer definitions of how we might evaluate literary creativity. But how ‘fixed’ is this cline of literary value? And how watertight will it be as an instrument for assessment? The storm of response to prizes awarded in the fields of fine art (such as the UK national art award, the Turner Prize) or literature (such as the UK Man Booker Prize), suggests that the judgment of creative output is far from transparent or easily received and understood. The values attached to creativity are time-sensitive, and judgments at each period in history are mirrors of contemporary values. Thus at different times, aesthetic judgment has, for example, honoured and discredited representation, the self as a central subject, the notion of accessibility to audience, seen memory on a cline from solid to unreliable, and seen imitation on a cline from the practice of high art to indictable dishonesty. (Pope 2005, Hunt and Sampson 2006). Assessing creativity, therefore, cannot be socially and contextually disengaged. Assessors need to be explicit about which paradigms are in place, and to unpack assumptions about what is valued and why. The next sections will trace the way we responded to these questions.

8.2 Creativity and the scaffolding of learning

We have seen in the section above that creativity is integral to how a language is learnt and used; it is thus in the interests of both learner and teacher to make sure that this capacity is allowed to flower in the classroom. But how can this be done? My suggestion is the notion of *scaffolded creativity*, in which the learner is guided through the levels of language, acquiring the skills and ingredients they need to be inventive with language.

The earliest definition of 'scaffolding' described a process in which the learner is enabled to "solve a problem, carry out a task, or achieve a goal which would be beyond (their) unassisted efforts." (Bruner cited in Weissberg 2006: 248). Bruner identified the features of this 'enabling' as follows: parent/teacher simplifying the task, providing direction, guiding the learner towards specific features, modeling the process, and controlling frustration by "offering reassurance or a respite" (Weissberg 2006: 248). Since its first formulation, the term has come to be used in a wide range of different ways: "a framework for learning, an outline, a temporary support, a mental schema, a curriculum progression." (Weissberg: 248). However, 'strong' and 'weak' accounts of scaffolding share the idea that learners are guided towards learning through carefully framed tasks that offer appropriate levels of challenge, based on the learners' current starting point. Similarly, there is overall agreement that the aim of 'scaffolding' is to lead the learner towards self-sufficiency and the successful completion of tasks. It is in these two general ways that the term 'scaffolding' is used in this chapter.

In order to achieve this double role - framing tasks and guiding towards self-sufficiency - we need to be clear what levels of challenge are being demanded, and what progression through these levels will really mean. How can creative output be staged in a way that will enable a 'scaffolded' approach? Urban identified six developmental stages of creativity. These formed a series of developmental stepping stones from disregard of conventions and context, through imitation and replication, towards the development of an independent coherent system. The six stages he describes are: **autonomy** – in which the creation bears no relation to other stimuli; **imitation**, in which the writer simply copies texts without transformation; **concluding/completing**, in which the response is still 'closed' and closely connected to the original stimuli; producing thematic relations, in which theme has been 'owned', absorbed and transformed; and finally, **holistic responses**, in which theme and response have been developed to form a fully coherent, and independently successful text (Cropley 2001: 92). Vygotsky compares the earlier and later stages of creative maturity as creativity "which is egocentric and takes little account of the strict rules of reality or the social conventions", in contrast to adult creativity which "combines subjective and objective elements and is thus enriched by

greater maturity and experience" (Vygotsky, cited by Cropley 2001: 91). This progression is not unique to the notion of creativity. Bloom's taxonomy of intellectual/thinking levels also places imitation, reproduction and copying of ideas at the lower end of the spectrum, and the invention/generation of ideas at the highest level. His notion of invention/generation is also supported by the capacity to evaluate and analyse. (Bloom 1956, Vahapassi 1982, Weigle 2002).

In using the term 'scaffolded creativity' in this paper, I will be invoking this understanding of the progression from imitation to self-sufficiency, both as a reader and as a writer, and through the medium of tasks which model, guide, and highlight strategies.

The Context

This section will show how the scaffolding discussed above was achieved with reference to a 'Language through Literature' module and two generations of students that have moved through it. The module was team taught by myself and my colleague Rob Pope, and ran over 10 weeks, for 2.5 hours a week. It was offered in a range of different capacities within the University: as a module integral to an undergraduate degree with either an English Literature or an English language focus; as a freestanding module that can combine with other subjects; or as a stand-alone module forming part of an exchange visit to Oxford. Thus there was a highly mixed demography in the class, including native speaking students who arrive with a strong traditional background in critical response to literary texts, non-native speaking students whose goals are predominantly language development and cultural exchange, and students with no particular specialism in either language or literature, who are combining this module with programmes in Tourism, Business, Hotel and Catering (for example). The chapter describes a 2005/2006 cohort of 53 students, and a 2004/2005 cohort of 54. These classes comprised an average of 25% international and non-English speaking students, and 6.5% mature students (see Table 7). In every sense, then, the learners represent a challenging range of levels, agendas, proximity to literature as a field, proximity to language as a goal.

	TOTAL	Native English speakers	Non-native English speakers	Mature students (over 25)
English Literature specialists	58	56	2	6
English language/ Communication specialists	20	18	2	1
Exchange students on 1-year General Study exchanges	25	2	23	0
Other disciplines	4	4	0	0
	107	80 (74.8%)	27 (25.2%)	7 (6.5%)

Table 7: Student groups on the Language and literature module

The module guides students through a series of linguistic building blocks. In 2004 – 2005 we began with the smallest unit of language, the phoneme, working outwards to larger components as in Table 8 In response to student feedback we reversed the order in 2005/2006, starting with the largest chunks of language, whole texts, and moving back to discrete units. In both cases, the module leads the student from level to level, both from the perspective of an appreciative reader, and from the perspective of a creative writer.

1. sounds
2. words: morphology
3. connections between words: phrases
4. utterances and sentences
5. connections between sentences: cohesion
6. organization of information: coherence
7. whole texts; genres and text types

Table 8: Language Stepping Stones

To accompany the journey through language levels, students were issued with two collections of poems: one 'long list' for discussion and analysis in class and a second shorter collection of 12 poems, for use in the assessment cycle . Each 'level' made

explicit key concepts and terminology and applied these both to the appreciation of texts, and to the creation of them. Below is a summary of one of these levels, offering a ‘taste’ of how the ‘scaffold’ for appreciation and production was constructed.

Each discussion and session starts with a key question, which connects language with purpose and meaning; then explores key concepts and terminology which lead to detailed understanding of how language works at that level; then illustrates these ideas with reference to a range of poems which are deconstructed, and analysed; and, interwoven throughout, is the question – “how could I use these linguistic and poetic strategies to convey my own messages and write my own texts?”

Sound		
		Reading poems
Key question	How is sound used to convey meaning?	
Key terminology/concepts	articulation of sounds, such as plosive, fricative; the capacity of sound to convey meaning (onomatopoeia); phoneme v. grapheme patterns of sound: alliteration, , rhyme, etc.	
Analysis to creative response	**Sound as meaning** What actions or moods are conveyed by the sounds? How might we convey moods such as command, anger, surprise, fear, using sounds alone? Experiment with telling a story or setting a scene using sounds only.	*Tik, tak! Hic, hac! Tiket, taket! Tyk, tak!* *Lus, bus! Lus, das!* **Anon: *The Blacksmiths***
	Sound:spelling relationship How does the sound:spelling link convey the poet’s message about identity and language? What is the	**John Agard’s *Half Caste*** *Explain yuself*

	difference between the sound: spelling relationship in the two poems? Experiment with spellings in order to suggest dialect and idiolect. What is the effect of your spelling changes?	*wha yu mean* *when yu say half caste* **Roger McGough's *Streemin*** *Im in the bottom streme* *which means im not brigth*
	Sound patterns: What is the effect of alliteration in the medieval alliterative poem *The Blacksmith*? What feelings, movements are conveyed? How are these influenced by the actual mode of articulation (plosives: voiced/unvoiced sounds)? Identify alliteration in today's advertising jingles and names of products; write one of your own for your own product.	***The Blacksmith (Anon)*** *They spitten and spraulen and spellyn many spelles:* *They gnawen and gnashen, they groan together.*

Table 9: Scaffolded creativity: sounds

The chart thus shows the architecture of the module, in that critical/analytical appreciation is the first part of a process leading to creative response; and linguistic concepts are explored as a stepping stone towards deepened understanding of a text and its processes. In other words, each text and language level is explored from the point of view of how it illuminates the process both of reading, and of writing. The session concerning Word level, for example, considers: affixes and suffixes, how these can influence meaning and word function , how 'new' words can be constructed through word families, morpheme changes and word compounds, the semantic properties of words and how these are influenced by linguistic environment. All these are illustrated through literary texts with particular lexical vitality: for example, John Agard's *Half-caste* and John Updike's *Superman*. Through encounter with writers' lexical experimentation, learners are invited to experiment for themselves, by generating word compounds, word families, and collocations of their own. The session on Genre follows

the same pattern, exploring the generic experiments of recipe, list, memo as poem, and the ways in which generic features are both deployed and subverted by the writer.

8.3. Assessment as a scaffold for creativity

The assessment cycle

Thus far I have shown how students on the Language through Literature module were given a linguistic/poetic scaffold with which to read and appreciate texts. This section explores the ways in which the assessment framework evolved to take account of best practice in assessment, the stages of creative maturation, the complexity of defining creativity itself, and the need to be transparent and accountable to both learners and to the academy.

The assessment involved two phases, a first formative task analyzing and responding creatively to a single poem, and a second final task involving a comparison between two texts and the creation of a third that connected in some way. A collection of 12 poems was provided for the purpose, none of which had been discussed in class. A further collection of 12 poems was provided for experimentation, discussion, and modeling of the assessment process in class. Both sets of poems could be paired in a number of ways, on the basis of theme, genre, linguistic patterns and style, form, technical qualities such as the use of metaphor. Creative response could spring out from any aspect of the stimulus text: for example, theme, pattern and form, a subversion or mixing of the genres, an extending or reworking of the central metaphor. Finally, students were asked to analyse their writing process and decisions, explaining in what ways the chosen texts had formed a springboard for their own work, and analyzing their own linguistic and thematic choices. The tasks were weighted 30% for the first task, and 70% for the second one.

We chose comparison/contrast as a starting point, since this can often focus analysis in a way that single-text discussion cannot. Contrast provides a context and incentive for detailed analysis. It is often easier to describe by negatives: to say what a poem is not, by contrast with what another is. Another reason for asking students to choose two starting points, was to illustrate the point that creation does not spring ‘ex nihilo’, that writers

themselves draw on one another and that this is a natural part of the development process; and to focus on the writer's own understanding of the difference between imitation/plagiarism, and legitimate inspiration. Two texts also provide a rich environment from which readers might identify patterns, strategies, topics and poetic ideas, and 'own' them from their own perspective.

We also believe that a reflective process of writing may lead to more generative possibilities: 'liking' or 'copying' a good idea will not be the same as understanding its origin and its components, and thus being able to own, transfer and apply them to other contexts. This combination of texts and tasks thus provides the richest possible mix of opportunities, from which something might 'trigger' an identification and ownership.

Assessment for learning

The assessment is underpinned by the notion of assessment as an opportunity for learning, self-appraisal, and focused feedback, rather than – or as well as – grading and measurement. This principle is well-founded in recent research and policy which suggest that "assessment *for* learning (as compared to assessment *of* learning) is one of the most powerful ways of improving learning and raising standards" (ARG: 2002, my italics and parenthesis.). The Assessment Reform Group found that five factors helped to achieve learning through assessment: effective feedback; active involvement of learners in their own learning; adjusting teaching to take account of assessment; recognition of the connection between assessment and motivation; the need for self-assessment and recognizing ways of improving.

Effective feedback: the mid-module formative task was designed to be a learning opportunity and preparation for the final assignment. Feedback was matched to criteria, which were honed to be increasingly explicit about the stages of creative maturity (Cropley 2001) and the perceived levels of intellectual engagement (Bloom 1956, Vahapassi 1986).

Active involvement of learners in learning; students were invited to take ownership of the themes and issues raised by the 12 classroom texts. The texts were chosen to reflect

different Englishes and the multicultural voices of writers. They also showed poets experimenting, inventing and genre-mixing. Students were invited, to engage with the meaning and form of the texts, to compare responses and issues with their own contexts and cultures, to identify themes and characters, and to develop creative responses of their own.

Adjusting teaching to take account of assessment; as a result of the formative task, a more detailed set of criteria was developed and offered as a learning/teaching tool in the second half of the semester

Recognition of the connection between assessment and motivation; the first task led to a reading of work in progress in which students benefited from hearing how peers responded to the same initial stimuli

Need for self-assessment and recognizing ways of improving: the more detailed criteria, group readings, and teacher feedback formed a framework, or 'scaffold', for the second final assignment. The formative task represented 30% of the whole grade, as an incentive to engage with this seriously.

In establishing principles of good practice for 'learning through assessment', we needed also to take account of creative 'maturation' : what are the different stages of 'learning' in this specific 'creative' domain, and how can these be reflected and prepared by the criteria? It was important, therefore, to take account of the creative stages discussed above (Cropley 2001, Vygotsky 1962). Imitation and close proximity to the initial stimulus are flagged as a first and less advanced response to the task; adopting and taking ownership of themes and issues as a higher level; and the capacity to generate independent free-standing texts which are complete and coherent, the highest level. A response that bears no reference to the stimulus text and does not acknowledge influences is deemed a less valued response, than the one which fully engages with the stimulus text and has an informed and critical recognition of its influences.

Establishing transparency

Finally, the assessment developed to be transparent and accountable to both learners and to the academy over three years of the module, in three ways: clarity of the rubric, clarity of criteria, congruence and appropriacy of the feedback.

Clarity of rubric

Over three years, the rubric became increasingly explicit, taking account of underlying principles, student feedback, and core beliefs about good practice.
Reference to the term 'creative' was deleted from the rubric and the criteria, given the assumptions and ambiguities embedded in the word

Students were explicitly informed that all texts were complete, as several students believed they were reading extracts from longer works*: Select two texts from the Poems for Assessment booklet of 12 short and complete texts.*

Students were offered a list of ways in which texts might be paired in the final assignment, and encouraged to invent their own pairings. The 'thematic' pairing is first in the list, as a suggestion that this can lead to a higher level of response*: The two texts might invite comparison or contrast from a range of viewpoints: theme/topic, genre, patterning, language experimentation. Students are invited to make their own combinations of texts, and justify these in their analysis*.

Students were reminded that their analysis might refer to all the levels of language discussed in class.
Compare and contrast your chosen two texts, drawing on all levels of language discussed in class to explore the similarities and differences between the message, form and meaning of the texts: sound, word, word-mixing (imagery), syntax and sentence patterns, connections between sentences (cohesion), text organization, generic features, discourse features.

Students were reminded of 'genre-mixing' as a high level of 'literariness' (Carter 2006), and encouraged to try this for themselves.

Write a third text of your own, which responds to one or both of your chosen texts. You may wish to take your cue from the aspects featured above. The result may take the form of, for example, a poem, story, dialogue or a combination of all of these and more. Be adventurous!

The components of a reflective commentary were made explicit, so teachers and students had a shared understanding of this; thus encouraging the stages of analysis and evaluation (Bloom 1956) and the acknowledgement of context and conventions (Vygotsky's objective creativity).

Go on to add a reflective commentary in which you discuss your own writing process: how the initial text(s) influenced you; how you changed and developed it/them; which strategies and features you deployed; and how successful you feel you have been in achieving your aims.

Clarity of criteria; clarity of feedback

As criteria became fine-tuned and more precise, they formed a framework for collective feedback to the cohort as a whole. Criteria evolved in two phases. At first, we formulated a broad-based set of points, which connected with the maturation stages of creativity described above, and also with the programme as a whole.

Content

- The rubric made known to students under this category, guides them towards the development of independent, holistic and 'medium independent' texts
- *Understanding of key principles and strategies for exploring and experimenting with texts*
- *Ability to apply these principles independently and critically*
- *Ability to use linguistic terms and techniques accurately and appropriately*
- *Ability to respond to texts creatively as well as critically, and to reflect upon your own writing processes.*

Presentation

The rubric here ensures learners' work is firmly embedded within the conventions of the academic writing community; thus that they are capable of an 'objective' creativity which references itself to the outside world.

- *Clarity and coherence of writing, including clear and effective layout*
- *Accurate and complete referencing of sources*
- *Adherence to the given word limits*

The first formative assignment provided a learning opportunity for both students and teachers as assessors. We, Rob Pope and myself, were able to analyse our own responses, our own values and expectations concerning what we were looking for in a 'critical' response, and what we meant by a 'creative' response. The notion of creativity specifically came to mean: 'ownership' of themes and message, 'saying something new', personalized and authentic and being aware of the strategies and techniques for doing so. Mechanical experimentation, dependency on others, paraphrase or 'borrowing' of the themes or issues read about elsewhere, were all judged by the two assessors as outside good practice. The reflective process of creativity was also made explicit; that the writer be aware of the way he/she is conveying messages, and the way sources have informed and inspired the text. Specifically, these 'ways' might be interpreted as linguistic, thematic, poetic, artistic. This could also involve reversing, echoing, personalizing, transforming what has been read; direct 'borrowing' would lie outside the scope of creative good practice, unless this 'borrowing' were to comment, reverse or embed into a different setting. As a result of this evolved understanding, the following guidelines were generated, with which to interpret and unpack the core criteria.

Creative response

These were some of the ways you responded creatively:

- *mechanical playing with the language of the original*
- *replying to the original*
- *changing the genre of the original: eg. poem to email, letter, monologue, personal ad, story*
- *staying close to the original but manipulating some of the language*
- *reversing the theme/message of the original: eg. positive to negative (eg. love to hate, praise to blame)*

All of these were excellent, but those which were ONLY about mechanical manipulation tended to do the following:

- *not fully engage with the meaning and message of the poem*
- *not involve your own thoughts, beliefs, ideas*

So next time, try and write something that is saying something important to you. Try and include ***yourself*** *in your creative response. The best assignments did do this.*

Critical response

Take care to use terminology and vocabulary precisely and only when you fully understand their meaning. Some words have an 'everyday'/secular meaning, and a very specific one when used in a linguistic context. Take care that you use these words precisely, as appropriate to the genre of academic discourse and linguistic analysis. Here are some examples. Check their meanings in a linguistic context.

- *simple*
- *complex*
- *genre (connect this with the notion of* ***text type****)*
- *appropriate (use this instead of* **correct/incorrect** *language)*
- *colloquial (use this instead of* **casual** *language)*
- *formal/informal (check your understanding of the term* ***register****)*
- *present, past and future tense: these are incomplete descriptions. Remember that we also need ASPECT in order to describe a tense fully.*

Take care to connect linguistic features with meaning.
When you discuss a linguistic feature, remember to show:

- *what effect this might have on the reader*
- *what meaning this conveys*
- *what you think the writer's intention or message might have been.*

Thus far we have shown how the assessment framework took account of models of creative intelligence, literariness and assessment for learning; and how rubric and criteria were honed to reflect both underlying principles and evolving experiences. Having considered researcher, assessor and teacher perspectives, we need to turn now to the responses of the learners themselves.

8.4. Students crossing the bridge: appreciative reader to reflective writer

The assessment cycle, and the formative opportunities offered before final submission, yielded work with a high quality of engagement and personal investment. As an overview of responses, pairings which were based on theme/topic were the most popular. Pairings on the basis of experimentation with form were chosen by very few across the two cohorts.. The most popular 'pairings' included: theme/topic (eg. Louise Bennett and John Agard – see below), the two praise poems, a Dinka poem to the bull, and praise to the Behemoth in the Book of Job, patterning (for example, Kit Wright and Mirosluv Holub both use repetitive sentence patterns as an echo or refrain), language experimentation

(for example e e cummings and Edwin Morgan experiment with punctuation, invented word compounds, onomopoeic constructed words).

Students in the highest band of success engaged with themes, rather than attempted to stay close to the surface features of the original. Below are examples of thematic development from a number of different 'pairings' in the assessment collection.

Pairing choice 1: John Agard: *Oxford Don*, and Louise Bennett: *Colonisation in Reverse*

This was one of the most popular choices. Students identified several shared themes, some highly politicised such as coloniser/colonised, insider/outsider, oppressor/oppressed, public language/private language, unemployment. Others responded more personally, with, for example, personal responses to place, work and status.

Jeanne connected the issue of colonisation in the poems, with her own story of immigration and her dual nationality.

> I felt concerned by the themes presented in these poems: colonisation: because Ghana where my parents are from was part of the British Empire and immigration because my parents immigrated to France. (…) Being the daughter of immigrants, you experience the feeling you are in between. I'm not completely French but I am not completely Ghanian. (So) -- I have integrated the first sentence of the Ghanian national anthem – and the first sentence of the French national anthem (into my poem).
>
> Ghana is my homeland
> But
> I am also a daughter of France.
>
> – 'but' is isolated to show the ambiguity I feel when it comes to explaining where I am from.

Camille focused on the idea of speakers absorbing mainstream languages in order to assimilate. She explored the idea of language speakers influencing one another and generating a mutually meaningful code.

> The ideas that interested me most (…) were that a minority language could usurp and influence a widely accepted form of speech, and that language itself could be infectious. At first I considered writing a poem or story using an

> invented language or way of speaking. I also thought of languages that have been used as a form of control (George Orwell's *newspeak* and secret, defiant languages, like Nushu: a Chinese language spoken only by women. --- I decided, however, that I wanted to write something where the minority in question is just one person, rather than a whole race ---
>
> A sketch follows, of a girl who speaks her own 'other-language', which is gradually adopted by everyone around her.

Iris drew from the two poems the theme of employment/unemployment. She also recognised the contemporary power of the poems, relating them to the Labour government's 2006 restriction on Jamaican entry into the UK.

> Tony Blair is a very hard man …
> Him say 'inna Englan Jamaican don' belong'…
> De only immigrant him want is illegal one

Pairing choice 2: Kit Wright: *The Magic Box* and Miroslav Holub: *The Door*

Both these poems had surface parallels: repeated sentence patterns, a refrain-like repetition, a surreal dream-like quality created by the crossover of abstract/concrete meanings. Wright's magic box contains the uncontainable; Holub's door opens onto the intangible. These poems led naturally towards dreams, hopes and memories.

Katrin explains in her commentary that the Wright poem "allowed me to think that I wish I had this box in my life, or well could change my life in some way. I kept the same structure and tried to follow this theme."
Marie generated a 'dreamlike' poem that echoed the patterns and repetitions of the two chosen poems. The main connecting theme was, as with Katrin, the resonance between poem and personal experience. "My rewrite is based on my personal experience of being abroad, leaving my boyfriend for nine months."

> You put in my hand
> A spoon of the softest Saharan sand
> A piece of iceberg powdered with snowflakes
> And a cloud full of rain, smooth and warm.

Pairing choice 3: Dinka praise poem, *My Magnificent Bull* and *O Behemoth* (Book of Job).

Both poems build up praise of the animal through a series of powerful hyperbolic metaphors, and do so with a repetition of sentence patterns that give them an oral, incantatory quality. The students who chose this pairing tended to remain with the praise of animals, rather than, for example, subverting the genre into a 'flitting' or hate-poem, or extending praise to people, objects, places or settings.

Elisa responded to the incantatory prayer-like qualities of the poems by evolving a 'praise/prayer' to the Elephant, using words from her childhood language, Welsh.

> Just as 'O Elephant' uses 'ajanaku', the Nigerian word for elephant, I thought I would give the Welsh words for God - 'Du', thank you – 'diolch': and Jesus – Iesu. (...) Also 'sing my song' refers to the fact that I am a singer but suffer quite a lot with nerves and praying gives me confidence that solos will go well.
> (Elisa)

8.5 Marking the journey: tutor feedback

How easy was it to place these personally engaged responses within a framework of measurement and assessment? Clearly, the assessment framework was strongly criterion-referenced, and the clarification of language levels, and objectives within these, made the knowledge base explicit. The shared values as to the nature of the 'good' creative task had been made explicit, and these were used as a yardstick against which to measure our responses, and moderate one another's, during the feedback and assessment phase.

Scorer reliability

During the marking we ensured that the following criteria were met:

- The two pieces of work written by each student were each marked by a different assessor.
- The two assessors standardised their marking by opening the marking process with 3 shared assessments, and closing it similarly by co-marking 3.
- Wide differences in grading of an individual student across the two assignments were second marked. (ie. A difference of one band up or down)
- Distinctive cases were second marked: ie borderlines, distinctions and fails, as well as a sampling of students at the top, middle and bottom of the range.

With a shared understanding of objectives at each language level, and how these were to be applied to personal 'voice' , we found there was rarely a discrepancy of more than 5% in a response to an individual piece of work.

Critical feedback

The complete cohort feedback was examined after the marking process was complete, and a checklist identified of comments which appeared repeatedly or seemed characteristic of a lower assessment band. These comments fell into two clear groups: comments about language analysis, and comments about the creative process and clarity of reflection. Typical criticisms about the language analysis, found repeatedly in the assignments marked 55% or below included:

- Lack of precision
- Inaccuracy when describing linguistic features
- Inaccurate use of terminology
- Omission of core features in the published text, such as tone
- Value-laden, judgemental responses
- Inaccuracy in writing conventions,
- Gaps in the discussion (e.g. unsubstantiated generalisations).
- Misreading of the published text:

Typical criticisms about the student's creative response included: .

- Mechanical response to the published text, such as manipulation of language without addressing meaning
- Remaining too close to the original
- Lack of authenticity and not exhibiting ownership of the theme. :

Similarly, comments which emerged as characteristic of higher assessment bands offered insights into what was valued by the assessors. Positive feedback about language analysis found repeatedly with assignments marked 65% and above included:

- Using dialogue/varied voices to excellent effect to explore meanings
- Providing good explanations of terminology and core values, and applying these to the texts.

- Revealing full awareness of the relationship between the original and the new text and of the influences of the original.

Positive feedback about the student's creative response included:

- Transforming the original text into something new, lively and interesting
- Authenticity and engagement with content.
- Using strategies meaningfully to convey message

In engaging with the criteria and applying this to actual student responses, several new questions emerged. Our initial assumption was that a choice of texts would offer a stimulus and support for creativity. However, students in the lower categories used these texts to imitate and manipulate, and did not spring out into any production of their own. Why? Are we wrong, perhaps, in believing that appreciation of other texts is an important starting point and springboard for creativity? What is the 'threshold level' which is needed, for this process to work? At the opposite end of the spectrum were students who responded zealously to the list of 'literary' and poetic features and reconstructed them fulsomely in their response. Yet the texts with the highest number of examples of 'literariness', were not necessarily also the most successful. How to explain and define this? Do other judgments override notions of successful 'literariness'? If so, what are these? Authenticity, integrity, engagement might be starting points for answering this. Yet this leads to a third question: powerful personal engagement with the topic was not enough to be valued highly. In fact, in some cases, this powerful engagement actually led to weaker, *less* highly valued outcomes. Why? What are we learning here about the balance between an ego-centred creativity versus one that is 'adult' and publicly accountable? What is emerging about how these are valued, and how they interface with 'literariness'?

8.6. Analysing results

Table 10 illustrates the following quantitive dimensions of the students' results:

- The relationship between formative and final assessments
- The number of students whose results were in the top band (70% and over)

- The number of students who were in the bottom band (52% or under: borderline failure or fail)

	TOTAL	**Native speakers ***	**Non-native * speakers**
Students who improved by one grade/band between the two assignments	35 (33%)	28 (34%)	7 (29%)
Students who dropped one grade/band between the two assignments	20 (19%)	15 (18%)	5 (20%)
Students whose final grade was over 70%	18 (17%)	10 (12%)	8 (33%)
Students whose final grade was 52% or under	11 (10%)	8 (10%)	3 (12%)
Total Student numbers 2005/2006	107	83 (78%)	24 (22%)

* Percentages in these boxes are based on the native speaker/non-native speaker sub-totals.

Table 10: Overview of Student Achievement in the Language through Literature Module

Table 10 enables us to answer several interesting questions. Firstly, did our criteria for critical: creative response became more transparent to the students? 33% of students did improve between one assignment and the next, and amongst these, were just under one third of the international students and one third of the native speaker students. This suggests some progress which could be attributed to increased understanding of the task. A smaller percentage (19%) actually dropped a grade, with little significant difference between native and non-native English speakers. Again, reasons for this are merely speculative, but could suggest a difficulty in responding to the critical: creative challenge as its demands grew more explicit. In measurable terms, only 1 in 10 were assessed as failing in the process of transition from formative to final assignment: nearly one fifth were thought by both assessors to have been highly successful; another third made significant progress between the first and second assessment. These results do indicate that the formative stage had indeed provided a structure for development; that our concept of 'creative response' became more fully transparent to the learners so that we shared an understanding by the time we reached the final assessment

Secondly, were non-native speakers advantaged or disadvantaged in any way by the nature of the assignment? The table shows that the non-native speakers were significantly represented in the top band of achievement: 8 out of 18 first class results were non-native speakers. Their first languages included: Spanish, Italian, French, Polish, German. Amongst the native-speakers, 2 were bilingual French/English, Punjabi/English. Even more interesting is the fact that nearly one third of the non-native speaker group achieved at this highest level. Thus, far from arriving at the view that non-native speakers might be disadvantaged in comparison with native-speaking literature students, it seems that the experience of language learning and knowledge of a second language were significant factors in success. Those learners who had accessed English through the metalanguage of grammatical and linguistic descriptions, were distinctly advantaged. Similarly, those students with experience of a second culture were more able to extract broader public and political themes from the chosen texts, and to engage with them personally.

Thirdly, was there any pattern amongst the students who struggled most in 'crossing the bridge' from appreciative reader to reflective writer? The figures suggest that the challenge of transition was similar for the NS and the NNS (10% and 12% respectively). What is apparent from analysis of the feedback, is that the causes for failure were identical in both cases: either inaccuracy at the appreciation or analysis stage, or lack of engagement and authenticity at the creative response stage. The 'non-nativeness' was not significant at this level, compared to the highest achieving group, where a bicultural/bilingual experience actually appeared to contribute to success.

8.7 Intertwining teaching and assessment: scaffolded creativity

We shall now return to the questions posed in the opening section of this paper, and respond to them in the light of what has been discussed so far.

Are creativity and assessment not contradictory to one another?

This case study showed that an assessment exercise can also be an opportunity and an incentive for creativity. Students specifically praised the assessment cycle as the reason

they enjoyed and benefited from the module. The early, formative stage offered the opportunity to understand better the difference between dependence and ownership; it allowed an opportunity for tutors to hone their definition of a 'creative' task, and students the opportunity to experiment with the relationship between critical and creative response. Thus, in the end, assessment provided an incentive and a 'scaffold' from which creativity could emerge.

What notion of 'creativity' is being used here, and how is this skill or term anatomized so it makes sense to both learner and assessor?

We have seen that models of creative stages, of 'literariness' and of everyday linguistic creativity helped to shape the notion of creativity used in this assessment profile. What emerged from the cycle of teaching, feedback, analysis, assessment, is that there are indeed shared values and shared definitions of the term 'creativity', although even these are not without their complexities. 'Making something new' works well as a broad definition; however, the 'new' clearly needs to take account of the 'old' as well as the 'current'. Specifically, the 'something new' most highly valued is informed by peers and precedents; a generative 'something new' that involves the learner in appreciating texts more fully and being more confident in responding to them in their own voice.

How can this assessment be assured of transparency, objectivity and meaningfulness to the learner?

The transparency was established by 'thinking aloud' in the formative stage: What values about the creative:critical relationship are emerging from our formative comments? The linguistic/poetic scaffold upon which the course was framed became the framework too for evaluation: has this 'scaffold' been understood by the appreciative reader, and applied by the reflective writer? Results suggest that, in 90% of cases, this progression from appreciation to writing was achieved, and in 33% of cases, the more detailed criteria helped students to improve between first and second assignments. Some aspects of the framework are still open to question: how do we account for the 'accumulation' of literary features which do not necessarily add up to literary quality? Whilst advocating personal engagement in the topic, how do we account for the personally engaged texts

which are in fact weaker because of this? The values by which we judge need to be continually re-examined, especially so where our declared values appear to be subverted by later judgements.

What can we learn about how native and non-native speakers respond to this process of transition, from critical to creative?

Student and marker feedback suggest that an accurate understanding of language systems and a receptiveness towards language creativity assist the process of transition towards reflective writing. Learners with experience of more than one language and culture seemed to be advantaged in having a higher likelihood of this openness. Providing a reflective framework on which to build, seemed to be helpful for the majority of the students, who were able to use this to 'cross the bridge' into creative production. Establishing a shared explanation for 'creative production' also assisted the process.

To summarise, the module did justify our belief that the creative process is accessible to learners across a wide spectrum of backgrounds, language levels and interests, and that providing linguistic and reflective tools allows for greater creative risks and opportunities. Making these 'tools' explicit and placing them within an assessment framework appears to have enhanced the process, at least for the majority.

We have seen the skepticism attached to the notion of creative writing in a second language, and the complexity of issues that need to be addressed in order to do this responsibly. However, to be focused on this only is to lose sight of what is different and important about 'expressive' as opposed to functional and transactional writing. "The making of art enables individuals to ratchet up their ephemeral lives to the level of high symbolic adventure and philosophical questing" (Abbs: 2003: 7). This opportunity to 'make art' generates deep learning and active engagement. In a broader sense, this assessment cycle and its outcomes provide further justification that 'making something new' should be recognized as achievable, measurable and central to our notion of meaningful learning.

This chapter has explored the impact of assessment on the learning and creative process in the context of an undergraduate programme. It also aimed to show how assessment can

actually empower and facilitate learning. The next chapter also considers empowerment as an educational principle, but in the context of teacher education. It engages, as this chapter does, with the ways in which assessment and deep learning are intertwined, and interprets *knowledge transformation* as a process of teacher development leading to real and tangible change in teacher practice.

Students cited in this chapter have given permission for their words to be used. All names are pseudonyms. A shorter version of this chapter is in the process of publication: Spiro, J. (forthcoming) in L. Sercu and A. Paran.