JASPER JONES: EMBEDDING ASSESSMENT AS, FOR AND OF LEARNING INTO A NOVEL STUDY

Luke Bartolo

Late in 2015, I took a punt and decided to tackle the great Australian novel *Jasper Jones* with my Year 10 class. The students, on the whole, rather enjoyed it and readily engaged with the issues it raised about Australian identity, conflict, context and culture. The main challenge I faced was in using the novel as a focal point for meaningful classroom-based assessment.

The first thing I had to establish was what I wanted to teach. The novel was part of a Conflict study that our English faculty undertakes, and we have a faculty-wide assessment in which all Year 10 students write a variety of texts based on and around their novel. Like all official assessment tasks in our school, this is used to gather some standardised data for our reporting. It was, however, my goal to gather some additional data that I could use for informal assessment of my own students, and to do this in a way that would explicitly teach some specific skills I had in mind.

The outcome I had was to have each student present a speech where they had to demonstrate skill with two literary techniques that Silvey had used in *Jasper Jones*. I set up a schedule in which two-three students would present at the beginning of each lesson over the course of the term. The techniques were assigned to them, and were divided up into two domains – techniques they should have been familiar with from previous units of study (things like simile, alliteration, imagery, rhetorical questions, colloquial language) and techniques that they would not have come into contact with yet (for example, anaphora, foreshadowing, pathetic fallacy, motif). The intention here was threefold – to reinforce student understanding, to build student confidence by letting them become an expert on one new technique, and to have students learn from each other about new techniques: in other words reading for writing. By staggering the speeches across a whole term, it would ensure that the rest of the class was not overloaded by the new literary techniques – which would also be taught to them throughout the unit of work during class time. At the very least, each individual student should at least remember one new technique that they could discuss in the official assessment task later in the term.

Informal Assessment Task

**How does Craig Silvey use language to engage his audience?**

You are to give a 1-2 minute speech/presentation describing how Silvey has used two literary techniques to engage his audience. You may use visual materials such as a PPT presentation, worksheets, or white board markers if this will assist you.

Engaging an audience can mean: **great quality writing, entertainment,** and/or **provoking an emotional response**. Think about how Silvey has used language to achieve this.

The techniques you will be focusing on are:

**Familiar Technique**

**Unfamiliar Technique**

You should:

1. Explain what this technique is and how it is generally used.
2. Give examples of your techniques from the text.
3. Describe how the language made you feel.
4. Explain what effect the author was intending and how the examples helped him achieve this effect.

This task is non-assessable but you will be accorded a mark to demonstrate your current skill level in regards to the English curriculum. In other words, this will help your teacher track your progress, write her/his report comment for you, and assist you in achieving better marks in upcoming assessment tasks.

Techniques

**Familiar Techniques:** Alliteration, Assonance, Imagery, Colloquial Language, Hyperbole, Metaphor, Personification, Onomatopoeia, Rhetorical Question, Rhyme, Symbolism

**Unfamiliar Techniques:** Anaphora, Ellipsis, Foreshadowing, Malapropisms and Invented Lexicon, Motif, Pathetic Fallacy, Portmanteau, Textual Allusion, Truncated Sentences, Visceral Language

(These were drawn out of two separate boxes by the students, to ensure fairness)
**JASPER JONES: EMBEDDING ASSESSMENT AS, FOR AND OF LEARNING INTO A NOVEL STUDY**

### Informal Assessment Task Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Understanding</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Understanding purpose and audience:**  
Student analyses the role and relationship of author and reader. | Non-attempt | Little to no consideration of author’s intentions. | Some consideration of author’s intent. | Considers author’s intent and purpose in some detail. | Insightfully considers the way that the author has positioned the reader. |
| **Understanding of technique:**  
Student identifies and explains how the language used to create meaning in text | Non-attempt | Limited grasp of literary techniques and textual features used by author. | Satisfactory grasp of at least one assigned technique is demonstrated. | Satisfactory engagement with both assigned techniques, or highly detailed analysis of one technique. | Highly detailed analysis of two techniques. |
| **Understanding of example:**  
Student gives examples to support techniques and explains these in detail. | Non-attempt | Implied understanding of text indicated. | Generalised understanding of text. Examples may be given with little to no relevance or accuracy. | Strong understanding of text. Examples given are mostly relevant and accurate. | Insightful understanding of text. Examples are all highly relevant and accurate. |

### Argument

| Structure:  
Student is able to organise a structured response | Non-attempt | Attempts to compose a response. | Some evidence of structure used in response. | Clear use of driving ideas in sustained response | Response is sustained and highly organised, with evidence of a thesis. |
| Presentation:  
Student uses a range of spoken style features to engage audience, may include visual aids. | Non-attempt | Attempts to speak, and/or duration under 1 minute. | Speech is clear but little style features are used. Duration of 1-2 minutes. | Several style features used (tone, eye contact, pacing). Duration should be over 1½ minutes. | Style features used convincingly to engage audience in dynamic speech of 2 minutes or more. |
A bigger (and so far unspoken) issue that underlies the use of this assessment is the style of criteria I've employed. The rubric above is an example of analytical criteria. The two main kinds of criteria employed in the assessment of English are analytical and holistic, and I have to admit here that I am a big believer in the use of the analytical kind. Without writing a whole other article, here is a brief overview of the benefits:

- **Analytical criteria use independent criterion points.** ‘Independent’ refers to the way that each strand or row in the criteria acts independently from the others. For example, a student can be marked high for presentation whilst achieving little in terms of their analysis of the author-reader relationship. The use of independent criteria allows for individual skills and understandings to be identified, and for specific and explicit data to be gathered in regards to the skills and understandings. The teacher can look at this grid and ascertain which particular areas their students need to work on.

- **Analytical criteria are accessible for students.** By using specific, explicit language that clearly outlines the difference between getting a 3 out of 4 and getting a 4 out of 4 for each particular area of assessment (rather than relying on just one word, like ‘sophisticated’, to differentiate each entire band) the criteria should make it easier for students to be able to break down what it is that is required from them in the assessment task. Analytical criteria ‘crack’ open the marking process for students, and it becomes less a case of ‘teacher knows best’ and more a case of ‘here’s what you need to know or do’.

- **Analytical criteria are sustainable.** A new teacher, provided they had adequate training, will have an easier time coming to grips with establishing what it is that they need to do when they look at a criteria like this. By contrast, a holistic criterion is the kind in which a teacher looks at the ‘whole’ of a student response and makes an experienced judgment of where said student should sit in a scale of bands. Holistic criteria are fine for English teachers with confidence and wisdom, but that confidence and wisdom also goes with them when they retire. Analytical criteria can help transition new teachers into the workforce as they gain their own experience, and can also be useful in assisting older teachers looking to come to better grips with the assessable concepts and processes from new paradigms such as the English Textual Concepts framework.

**As, For and Of**

Assessment as learning relies on students having a strong understanding of how they are being assessed and what they can do to achieve better results during this assessment, hence my love of analytical criteria and the use of this kind of task as an ongoing project to run alongside the rest of the novel study. In this case, with Year 10, the explicit teaching of set techniques also ensured that students took something away from the task that they would be able to use in other topics. I have since observed many of these students making authentic use of their knowledge of these new techniques when analysing texts in Year 11.

Assessment for learning is catered for through the gathering of data from this task, and it was a rubric that helped me establish which students need extra support in certain areas. For example, students who were unable to score highly in the Understanding criteria were in need of skills that would allow them to elaborate on their ideas further, and so they were given activities that explicitly taught the use of cohesive devices that would improve the lexical density of their writing.

Assessment of learning is often the easiest form of assessment for most teachers as it is the most obvious and ‘official’ way of doing things. The use of this task in the novel study allowed me to gather some extremely useful information on where my students stood in terms of their presentation and composition skills, and their ability to articulate their understanding.

**The Importance of Criteria**

English teachers love discussing contrary viewpoints and I know that everything that has been written here is not going to hit home in equal measure for every reader. What we can all agree upon, however, is that monitoring the level of success that our students have in relationship to English is an intrinsic and immutable part of successful teaching. The informal assessment style demonstrated in this article makes use of the English Textual Concepts whilst also embedding student-centred learning in a meaningful and highly structured fashion, and I have found it to be a successful and rewarding experience for both myself and the students.