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## “Experiencing theory first-hand was delightful and informative”: Bridging the Theory-Practice Gap in Online Language Assessment Training

Marie Alina YEO<sup>a,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> SEAMEO Regional Language Center (RELC), Singapore

### ABSTRACT

It has been argued that successful professional development efforts, especially in assessment-literacy, need to address emotional components and the existence of implicit conceptions in order to raise consciousness and ultimately transform practice (Xu and Brown, 2016: p. 156). Experiential approaches have been shown to be highly effective for adult learning, especially in bringing about and sustaining changes in beliefs and practices. In this paper, I explore the use of an experiential approach in an online language assessment course, describing in depth two formative assessment (FA) activities and the technology tools that were employed. These activities served to (1) develop participants' AL in formative assessment, including online formative assessment; (2) evoke emotions, raise consciousness about conceptions, and prompt a desire for transformation; and (3) bridge the theory-practice gap. This paper offers insights into approaches to FA and teacher development in online settings and seeks to contribute to the growing body of knowledge in the field of assessment education.

**Keywords:** assessment as Learning; assessment literacy; assessment education; Kolb's experiential learning cycle; teacher professional development

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\* Corresponding author: SEAMEO Regional Language Center (RELC), Singapore

Email address: [marie.yeo@relc.org.sg](mailto:marie.yeo@relc.org.sg)

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## Introduction

Assessment literacy (AL) and assessment education in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) are two areas that have continued to attract attention among educators, even more so now with the shift to online teaching. Key review articles on assessment literacy (Xu & Brown, 2016; Stabler-Havener, 2018; Coombe et al, 2020) have highlighted some of the main themes in AL research and publication. They include definitions of AL and LAL; the knowledge base, skills, competencies, and measurements of AL; and assessment education, including the evaluation of assessment courses. Most of this research has occurred within the context of classroom teaching and learning because, until the recent pandemic, most K-12 education and the majority of language teaching and teacher education courses have taken place in the classroom. Less attention has been paid to online language teacher assessment literacy, which I define here as, the range of competencies and dispositions that language teachers require to carry out formative and summative assessment effectively in online spaces. Correspondingly, there is little research on suitable training approaches specifically for language assessment literacy courses delivered fully online. Related to the theme of this special issue on Online Teacher Education/Professional Development, this paper seeks to make a modest contribution by describing and evaluating the use of an experiential approach in an online language assessment course for teachers of English in the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) region.

## Literature Review

### *Assessment Literacy (AL) and Assessment Education*

The early works of Stiggins (1995) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT, NCME, & NEA, 1990) were largely responsible for popularizing the term “assessment literacy” and raising awareness about the need for teachers to be assessment literate. As these discussions stemmed from the field of general education, many TESOL scholars felt that conceptualizations of language learning and teaching were missing, hence the introduction of “language assessment literacy” (LAL) (Fulcher, 2012; Levi & Inbar-Lourie, 2020; Taylor, 2009). Broadly, LAL refers to the “knowledge, skills and principles that stakeholders involved in assessment activities are required to master in order to perform assessment tasks” (Inbar-Lourie, 2017, p. 1). Coombe et al (2020, p. 2) describe LAL as “a repertoire of competences, knowledge of using assessment methods, and applying suitable tools in an appropriate time that enables an individual to understand, assess, construct language tests, and analyse test data”.

Notwithstanding terminology and definitions, a common theme among articles on AL and LAL since the 1990s has been the ongoing concern that teachers “lack” assessment literacy, resulting in continued calls for ongoing assessment education and training. However, there is little agreement about what exactly is “lacking” in teachers’ AL and assessment education because measurements of assessment literacy are constantly changing and expanding to address “contemporary demands” (Coombe et al 2020, p. 7). The literature highlights three areas in AL that are priorities for assessment education and training, as discussed below.

### *(Online) Assessment Literacy in Formative Assessment*

Coombe et al’s (2020) comparison of themes of assessment standards from 1990 to 2019 showed an important shift in AL measurements. The focus on teachers’ competence in Assessment for Learning (AfL) only became prominent in the 2000s, with earlier attention to competencies related to assessment purposes, processes, results, and fairness, seemingly skewed towards the language testing aspect of assessment. Indeed, some early definitions of LAL explicitly focussed

on “tests” (Fulcher, 2012, p. 2) and competencies to “create language *tests*” and “analyse *test* data” (Pill & Harding 2013, p. 382, emphasis added). It is perhaps no wonder that recent research has shown a gap between teachers’ assessment literacy in summative assessment (often equated with testing) and alternative FA, with greater competence in the former (DeLuca & Klinger, 2010; Koh & Luke, 2009; Lam, 2019; Vogt & Tsagari, 2014). At the same time, the recent pandemic has heightened the need for online LAL. Teachers may not be able to carry out high-stakes tests in secure venues due to lockdowns or social distancing restrictions. Instead, they may have to use course-based FA conducted remotely in online spaces to assess learning (see, for example, Zou et al, 2021). Therefore, a priority for assessment education is to develop teachers’ AL in online course-based FA.

#### *Conceptualizations and measurements of AL*

A comparison of earlier constructs of AL (Davies, 2008; Fulcher, 2012), which generally conceptualized AL as knowledge and skills, with more recent constructs (Taylor, 2013; Xu & Brown, 2016) shows the inclusion of additional components. For example, Taylor (2013) includes sociocultural values (Item 5), local practice (Item 6); and personal beliefs/attitudes (Item 7) to her list of eight “axes” of AL, which she argues should be differentiated according to who the stakeholder might be.

1. Knowledge of theory
2. Technical skills
3. Principles and concepts
4. Language pedagogy
5. Sociocultural values
6. Local practices
7. Personal belief/attitudes
8. Scores and decision-making.

In the last decade, personal beliefs/attitudes have gained prominence in the literature (DeLuca et al, 2013; Deneen & Brown, 2016; Koh, 2011; Lam, 2019; Stabler-Havener, 2018). In their reconceptualization of AL known as TALiP (Teacher Assessment Literacy in Practice), the authors include a level of AL mastery that involves “self-directed awareness of assessment processes and one’s own identity as an assessor” (Xu & Brown 2016, p. 159). They add that assessment-literate teachers are those who engage in constant reflection, participate in professional development, self-interrogate their assessment conceptions, and seek resources to increase and renew their understanding of assessment and their roles as assessors. This expanded view of AL is a far cry from earlier definitions that focussed on content and standards of knowledge and skills that teachers had to acquire to become AL. Even more recently, teacher assessment identity (TAI) has come to the forefront (Adie, 2013; Cowie, Cooper & Ussher, 2014; Looney, Cumming, van Der Kleij & Harris, 2018; Xu & Brown, 2016), with identity-formation considered an important component of AL development.

#### *Assessment education*

A third theme in AL research centres around shortcomings in assessment education and training and identifying effective approaches and pedagogies to develop pre-service and in-service

teachers' AL. The research consistently shows a failure of assessment education to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Coombe et al 2020, DeLuca et al, 2013; Deneen & Brown, 2016; Kleinsasser, 2005; Lam, 2013; Popham, 2008; Stalber-Havener, 2018; Yan, Zhang & Fan, 2018), with courses being overly theoretical and disconnected from practice. This may partly be attributed to the emphasis on "rational persuasion" (Xu & Brown, 2015, p. 156) without appealing to new areas of AL competence such as conceptions, reflection on prior experiences, and emotions. The gap may also result from the decontextualized nature of many assessment courses, with the literature calling for training to be "localized" (Koh 2011, p. 273) and to take account the context of practice (Coombe 2020, Xu & Brown, 2016).

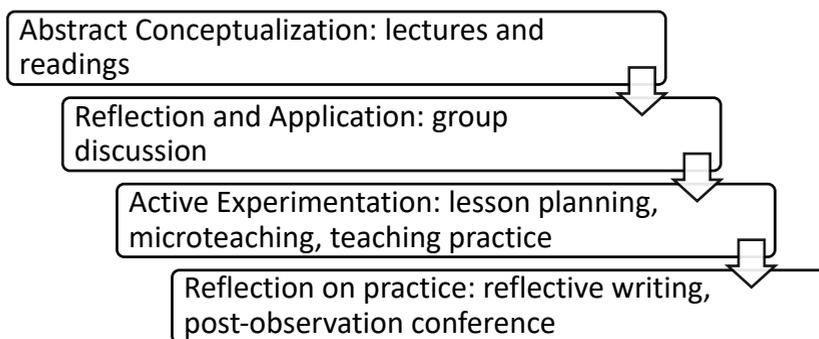
*Training approaches for teacher education and language assessment education*

Language assessment education (and, more so, online language assessment education) currently adopts and adapts approaches from the broader fields of general teacher education and language teacher education (LTE). While dominant approaches exist in the field of LTE and professional development (see, for example, Freeman, 2016; Richards, 2010; Richards & Farrell, 2005), they are not explicitly or exclusively designed for online training. Similarly, the recommendations from the literature on effective assessment education pedagogies do not specifically focus on online training.

According to Maggioli (2012), four dominant traditions in TESOL teacher training are the craft tradition, the applied science tradition, the reflective tradition, and the sociocultural tradition. In the craft tradition, teacher educators serve as models while the trainee teachers are apprentices. The primary goal of training is to enhance knowledge through prescribed activities. The applied science tradition regards the teacher educator as a resource selector and model. The aim of training is to enhance knowledge of theory to guide practice. In the reflective tradition, the teacher educator's role is that of a facilitator and trainees are researchers and practitioners. The goal is to enhance reflection in/on action to inform practice. Finally, in the sociocultural tradition, the trainer is a community member and change agent and trainees are part of the learning community. Together the trainer and trainees explore and construct professional, personal, community and collective sources of knowledge. The main aim of training is to enhance participation in a community.

The shortcomings of assessment education and training discussed previously hint at an emphasis on the craft, applied science, and reflective traditions. The applied science tradition, for example, seems especially pronounced in master's level courses. A typical example of a master's level assessment course appears in Deneen and Brown (2016) impact evaluation. The course aim, design, focus, materials, and three assessment tasks (writing an analytical paper on an assessment-related article; designing, evaluating and reflecting on an assessment tool; applying course knowledge to a hypothetical scenario in a final exam) exemplify the application of the applied science and reflective traditions. The researchers concluded that although the course was "successful" according to "modern, defensible specifications [and] may provide gains in skills and knowledge, this cannot be understood as sufficient" (p. 11) as teachers' conceptions of assessment were not enhanced. A common approach is that used in many teacher training courses, such as the CELTA or Certificate in Teaching English to Adults, which primarily adopts the craft and reflective traditions, including practical components such as lesson planning and teaching practice followed by reflection.

A possible enactment of the craft, applied science, and reflective traditions in assessment education focused on developing knowledge and skills is illustrated in Figure 1. The lesson may begin with lectures and readings (abstract conceptualization), followed by a discussion or application task based on the newly acquired knowledge. In pre-service and in-service training (rather than postgraduate assessment courses), active experimentation may occur through lesson planning, microteaching, or even teaching practice preceded and followed by a trainer-trainee conference. Finally, some kind of reflection may be required.



*Figure 1.* Typical Knowledge and Skills-based Approach in Teacher Training

While this approach may seem adequate in equipping teachers with knowledge and skills for assessment, it may be less effective for dealing with unfamiliar concepts and/or practices. For example, it may be difficult to get teachers to understand, apply, and evaluate Assessment for Learning (AFL), Assessment as Learning (AaL), or Formative Use of Summative Test if they have never experienced or, in some cases, even heard of these. What appears to be needed is an approach that combines the traditions, but one that also takes into account andragogical perspectives.

Adult education principles stress the importance of leveraging on adult learners' prior experiences and to locate learning in a real-life context rather than use a subject-oriented approach to learning (Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2015). A well-known experiential approach is Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1984), which comprises four inter-connected steps and iterative cycles: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Its application in an assessment training course might be as shown in Figure 2.

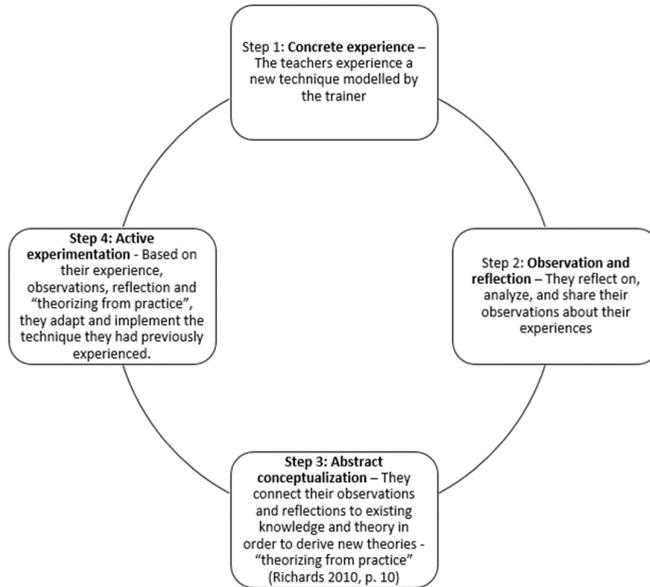


Figure 2. Application of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle in an Assessment Education Course

The experiential learning cycle (Figure 2) describes learning from the perspective of the learners. From trainer's perspective, the focus is on modelling the assessment practices. Modelling requires the trainer to "practice what we preach" (Singh & Richards, 2006, p, 162) and model assessment practices while teaching assessment concepts and practices (DeLuca et al, 2013). Alongside having perspective-building conversations with teachers, praxis-focussed activities, and critical reflection and planning, DeLuca et al (2013) identify modelling as integral in pre-service teachers' learning about assessment.

Further support for an experiential approach in assessment education comes from James and Pedder (2006), who advocate using assessment for learning approaches to provide course participants (pre-service teachers) with positive and authentic assessment experiences through activities such as self-, peer- and teacher-assessment to transform their concepts of assessment.

In consideration of the literature on AL and approaches to assessment education, an effective approach to assessment education and training, delivered face-to-face or online, might involve features such as these:

- Links theory and practice
- Appeals to emotional components as well as rational conceptions
- Promotes examination of conceptions
- Prompts a desire for transformation
- Is ongoing and sustained (instead of one-shot)
- Uses experiential approaches

- Promotes critical reflection of experiences
- Involves assessment for learning
- Is localized, contextualized and culturally-appropriate
- Involves modelling of good assessment practice by the trainer
- Adopts constructivist, active and collaborative models of professional learning
- Attends to teachers' assessment identity construction

In summary, this literature review has highlighted three areas that I believe are important priorities for assessment education today. First, teachers need to be equipped with AL to conduct FA both in face-to-face and online teaching. Second, assessment education needs to include emotional components and implicit conceptions of assessment. Third, teacher educators may need to integrate experiential approaches into their courses to help teachers to connect theory and practice. The added challenge is to address these through teacher education and professional development delivered fully online.

With this in mind, this paper describes in depth the use of an experiential approach in conducting FA in an online language assessment course for teachers of English. The key claim of this paper is that the experiential activities used in the course, "Hitting the Reset Button" and "Delayed Scores", helped to (1) develop participants' AL in formative assessment, including online formative assessment; (2) evoke emotions, raise consciousness about conceptions, and prompt a desire for transformation; and (3) bridge the theory-practice gap.

## Methodology

This study employed a mixed methods approach, seeking both qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data consisted of detailed descriptions of the FA activities and participants' qualitative responses evaluating these activities in an online questionnaire and course evaluation. Responses to selected-response items in the online questionnaire provided quantitative data.

### *Participants*

The study involved 16 teachers of English enrolled in a six-week online course on language assessment. Some relevant demographic and baseline data are provided below.

- Participants came from nine countries: (Cambodia = 2; Indonesia = 1; Lao PDR = 1; Malaysia = 2; Myanmar = 2; Philippines = 3; Singapore = 1; Thailand = 1; and Vietnam = 3).
- All participants had a relevant undergraduate qualification in English, Education, or English Language Teaching.
- All participants had at least two years of experience as teachers of English.

Data from the pre-course needs analysis showed that:

- Eight (50%) had never taken any course in language assessment before.

- Their self-reported level of familiarity with relevant assessment terms/concepts was as follows: 82% were "a little" or "not at all" familiar with "Assessment as Learning"; 65% were "a little" or "not at all" familiar with "Assessment for Learning"; and 30% were "a little" or "not at all" familiar with "FA".
- Out of 15, 12 chose "how to give feedback" (oral and written) as an area they were interested in learning about. Only 11.8% felt they gave oral corrective feedback and only 5.9% felt they gave written corrective feedback "very well". Three respondents identified giving feedback as the biggest problem they faced related to FA.

I was the lecturer in charge of the course and was responsible for course design, delivery, assessment, and evaluation. Before I began the research, I applied for and received ethical approval from the case institution. I also sought and received consent from the course participants. As the research took place three months after the end of the course and participants had received their grades, there was no conflict of interest.

#### *Course context and technology tools*

Previously offered as a three-week face-to-face course, because of COVID-19, the language assessment course was delivered as a six-week online course. The course focused on both formative and summative assessment. The FA objectives were for participants to be able to develop activities and resources for FA and integrate FA practices in their lesson planning. As it was a fully-online course, several technology tools were used to facilitate delivery. First, a learning management system (LMS) known as AsknLearn served as a repository for materials and a venue for participants to post and share their forum responses. Second, we used Zoom for the synchronous webinars, allowing the trainer to group participants in breakout rooms for group discussions. Third, we formed a Whatsapp group to allow instant messaging so that participants could get immediate responses from the community, consisting of the trainer and/or classmates. Finally, Microsoft Forms on Microsoft 365 was used for the needs analysis survey and for the Assignment 1 reflection task, described later on in this paper. These technologies, namely AsknLearn, Zoom, and Microsoft Forms, were used because of institutional requirements for security, requiring the use of a subscription-based rather than free, open-access platform (e.g. Google Classrooms or EdModo). Whatsapp was used for instant messaging because participants had access to and were familiar with this app.

#### *The FA Activities*

Addressing the need to bridge the gap between theory and practice and to adopt consciousness-evoking as well as rational approaches, two experiential activities, "Hitting the Reset Button" and "Delayed Scores", were carried out to provide first-hand experience of three important FA concepts: feedback and feed-forward; Assessment as Learning (AaL); and Formative Use of Summative Tests (FUST).

In the section below, I will explain the three assessment concepts as a basis for later discussion of the findings, then describe two activities that were carried out during the assessment course to enable course participants to experience the assessment concepts. As the implementation of the activity and the learners' engagement with the activities constitute part of the evidence for the claim, a detailed description follows.

*The FA Concepts*Concept 1: Feedback and feed-forward

Sadler (2010) reports that although the practice of giving students feedback on their assignments is a common practice, “feedback seems to have little or no impact, despite the considerable time and effort put into its production” (p. 535). Sadler adds that for feedback to be effective, students need to be able to understand the feedback, especially specific aspects that need improvement. This type of feedback is sometimes called “feed-forward”. As a subset of feedback, feed-forward refers to a specific type of feedback that is “future-oriented” and “prospective” (Sadler, 2010); answers the question of “Where to next” (Hattie & Timperley, 2007); and “presents comments on the next step in the performance” (Zarrinabadi & Rezazadeh, 2020). Wimshurst and Manning (2013) operationalize feed-forward as a two-step process in which students “engage in a first attempt at an assessment item, receive feedback from tutors and then use their increased understanding of criteria and relevant standards to tackle the subsequent summative piece which usually carries greater weight” (p. 451). This accords with the description of feed-forward offered by Ghazal, Aijaz, Parpio, Tharani and Guy (2018) as “the comments or feedback provided to students by instructors on their assignment drafts or on the outlines prior to the actual task submission” (p. 116).

While feedback and feedforward are not often differentiated and the term “feed-forward” is not commonly-found in the literature (Wimshurst & Manning, 2013), highlighting the concept of feed-forward may remind teachers that our comments need to be comprehensible and specific and that students should have the opportunity for uptake of feedback. For this reason, I felt it important to provide course participants with a concrete experience of feed-forward through the first activity, “Hitting the Reset Button”.

Concept 2: Assessment as Learning (AaL)

Assessment as learning (AaL) is subset of Assessment for Learning (AfL) and is focused on developing and supporting students’ metacognition (Earl, 2006). AaL allows teachers to “use classroom assessment as the vehicle for helping students develop, practice and become critical thinkers who are comfortable with reflection and the critical analysis of their own learning” (Earl 2012, p. 28). Dann (2014) describes AaL as an “aspect of FA” (p. 149) concerned with pupils’ self-regulation of their own learning, decision-making about how to use feedback, and engagement with classroom learning priorities. As AaL requires students to understand their progress and goals, Dann argues that self-assessment is central to AaL.

Just as the notion of feed-forward is not as well recognized as feedback, the concept of Assessment as Learning (AaL) is not as widely known as Assessment of Learning (AoL) and Assessment for Learning (AfL). In the field of TESOL, AaL seems more widely researched in the Hong Kong context (See, for example, Lam, 2015, 2019, 2020; Lee et al, 2019; Yan, 2021). The notion of AaL is important in assessment education because it encourages teachers to view assessment from the perspective of the learner and to consider what the learner does with the assessment feedback and results. It also reinforces the synergies between assessment and learning, so that assessment is “learning-oriented” (Carless, 2007) and students continue to learn even after they submit the assignment for grading, which is typically where learning ends. Despite its importance, Lam’s (2019) study found that while some teachers had a partial understanding of AoL and AfL, their understanding of AaL remained superficial and, while they could mimic the process, they were not able to “internalise its essence” (Lam 2019, p. 78).

As the needs analysis revealed low levels of familiarity with this concept (82% were "a little" or "not at all" familiar) and as AaL is not widely-recognised, I felt that it would be important for course participants to experience it through the "Delayed Scores" activity.

### Concept 3: Formative Use of Summative Test (FUST)

Within AfL and AaL, the concept of "Formative Use of Summative Test" focusses on using summative assessment (usually test-related) for formative purposes. Working in an exam-oriented, Confucian-heritage culture, Carless (2012) and Lam (2013) were among the first to popularize the idea of the formative use of summative tests, which aims to "create productive synergies between the purposes of formative and summative assessment to enhance student's performance and self-regulation" (Lam, 2013, p. 69). Carless (2012, p. 45) adds that FUST is "focused on stimulating productive student learning from the preparation and follow-up to regular internal school tests". Some examples of FUST include student-generated questions and assessment criteria for test/exam; peer marking of mock papers; and student self-evaluation of learning progress in relation to the summative test. As tests are commonly used in the ASEAN region and test preparation consumes a great deal of teaching time, I decided that course participants would benefit from experiencing FUST, which was exemplified in both activities.

#### *The (Online) FA Activities*

##### Activity 1: "Hitting the Reset Button"

Dirksen's (2011) article entitled "Hitting the Reset Button", which compared learning to gaming and urged teachers to give students the chance to re-do their assignments after receiving feedback, provided the springboard for this activity. The course participants were assigned to read the article and post a forum response on AsknLearn based on a series of questions for 5% of their course grade. They had expected the lecturer to comment on their posting and award a summative score, but, as shown in Figure 3 below, they received feedback and feed-forward through Whatsapp and given the opportunity to revise their posting for a higher score. Working in groups in Zoom breakout rooms during a subsequent webinar, participants reflected on their experience and shared their observations in reflections. I then provided theoretical justification for the activity and asked participants to try it out with their own students. (Unfortunately, due to schools closures because of COVID-19, this was not a mandatory part of the assessment, as many course participants did not have access to their students).

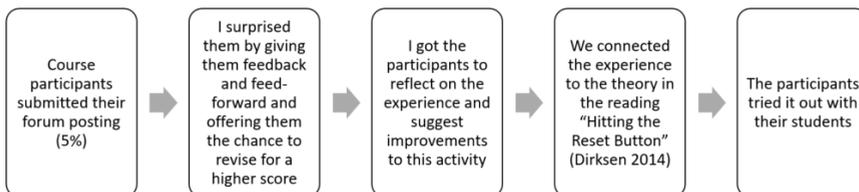


Figure 3. "Feedback as Feed-forward" Activity

### Activity 2: Delayed Scores

To encourage deeper engagement with feedback, self-prediction of scores (Hattie & Timperley, 2007), and appraisal calibration (Phakiti, 2016), the process of returning the assignment to the course participants was extended to include additional steps, as shown in Figure 4. Based on an adaptation of the “healthy self-assessment” procedure (Anderson, 2012, p. 187), instead of returning the assignments with feedback and a score/grade, I created two assignment report sheets: one with only descriptive feedback and another with descriptive feedback and a score. I sent an email asking participants to read the descriptive feedback, then predict their grade based on the assignment rubrics and feedback. Only after that should they look at their actual grade. They then calibrated their scores, reflected on their performance, and strategized ways to improve in their next assignment. After completing this process, the participants had to complete an online questionnaire asking them to report on their predictions, calibration, and strategies for improvement and to reflect on their experience of the activity. (See Appendix 1 for a copy of the questionnaire).

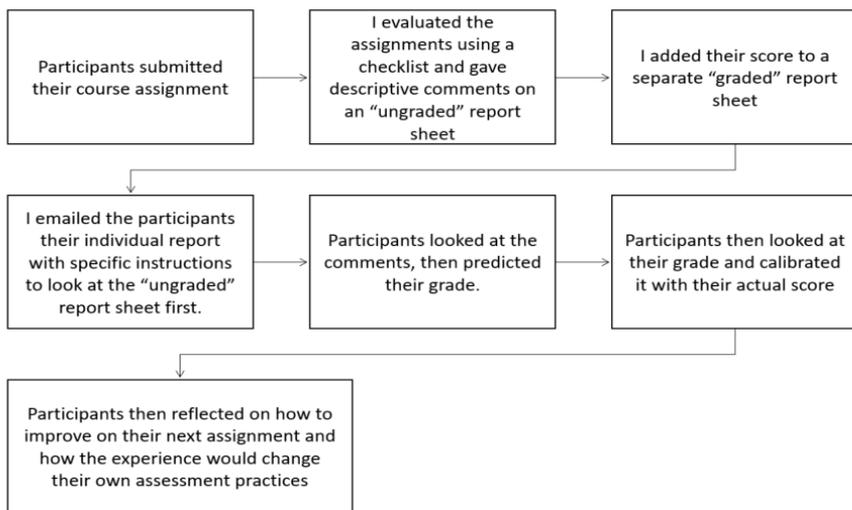


Figure 4. “Delayed Scores” Activity

## Results

The qualitative results presented below are based on participants’ written responses expressed in their text messages, the assignment online questionnaire, and the final course evaluation. Some quantitative data (e.g., word counts and average word length of responses, number of themes and responses per theme, and number of responses to selected-response items) are also reported. As the study involves myself as a researcher-participant, there is potential for bias, hence thick description of the data through extensive examples and quotes from the responses to increase trustworthiness is given.

### Activity 1: Hitting the Reset Button

Data from Whatsapp messages provide evidence of participants' positive response to this activity. Examples of the lecturer's feedback and feed-forward are shown in Figure 5 below.

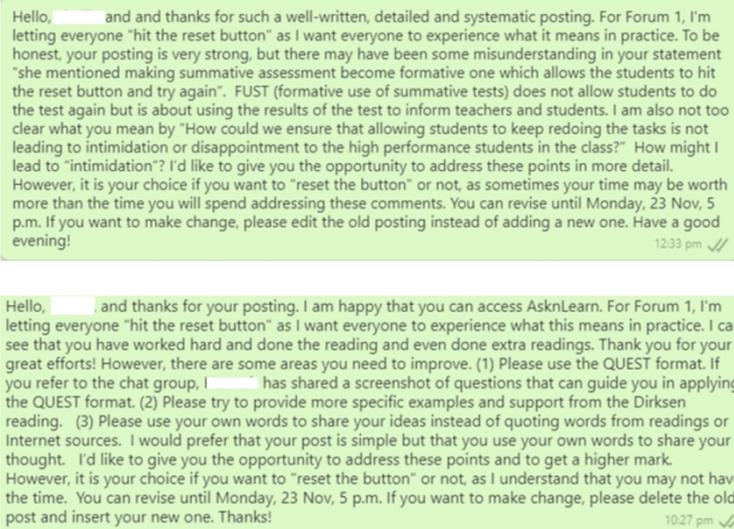


Figure 5. Two Examples of Feedback and Feed-forward from Lecturer

Participants' individual responses to my Whatsapp message were unanimously appreciative and positive. Some examples appear in Figure 6 below. Notable was that in eight of the responses, emoticons were used to express the course participant's feelings.



Figure 6. Sample Responses of Student to FA "Feedback and Feed-forward" Activity

Activity 2: Delayed Scores

To evaluate this activity, we will look at participants' self-predicted scores, calibrations, and their anonymous responses to two follow-up prompts in an online questionnaire administered through Microsoft Forms. Table 1 shows the predictions of the 15 participants who completed the assignment.

Table 1  
*Self-Predicted Grades*

Grade	Number of participants who predicted that they would get this grade
A	2
A-	3
B+	2
B	6
B-	1
D+	1

None of the participants predicted getting A+, C+ C, D or F grades. Data based on participants' calibration of their predicted and actual grade showed that 60% received a higher grade than expected; 13% received a lower grade than expected; and 27% received the grade they had expected.

The responses of the participants to the question about what they would do to get a better grade elicited a combined response adding up to 506 words, or an average of 34 words per respondent. By applying thematic analysis to the data set, the top three themes that emerged are shown in Table 3 below.

\*R7 denotes "Respondent 7". The abbreviation "R" will be used henceforth to abbreviate "Respondent".

Table 3  
*Themes Related to Prompt Asking About Participants Would Do to Get a Better Grade in the Future*

Theme	Number of mentions	Illustrative comments
Follow assignment specifications, rubrics, and exemplars more closely	8	"I will make sure to complete the task without missing areas" (R7)* "To stick to the rationale prompt more closely" (R8)  "I will try to include all the necessary facts described in each criterion from the rubric" (R13)
Read, research or ask questions to understand the concepts better	5	"I will read more about the topic, internalize in the deeper sense" (R10)  "try hard to learn from reading course book, information from internet, and ask my peer group members or my lecturer" (R11)
Improve assignment writing and referencing	4	"I will learn more about grammar and APA citation" (R2) "I need to learn how to write effectively within the word limit. (R5)

There was one unexpected comment from a course participant who had not been teaching for several years but, instead, worked in administration. Her comment hinted at her realization of the mismatch between idealized theory and realistic practice in her lesson plan. She commented, "Since my classroom teaching experience can be traced back a very long time ago, it would be helpful if I consult teachers who are currently in service", acknowledging that her lesson plan "may seem ideal but it may not be true in practice" (R4). The shortest comment was from R15, who simply stated, "Work harder", showing little engagement with the reflection task.

The final question yielded lengthy and thoughtful responses, amounting to 840 words from 15 responses, or an average of 56 words. The prompt stated, "We are teachers and we are the ones who give grades to our students. How does it feel to receive a grade? How will this whole experience of doing and getting a score for Assignment 1 change the way you assess your students?"

The feeling-related words that were mentioned are shown in the word cloud in Figure 7, with "excited" (or "exciting") receiving five mentions and "nervous" receiving four mentions. Some interesting words/phrases were "riveting", "like a student", and "inspired".

Figure 7. Word Cloud Showing Feeling-related Words

In addition, comments such as the following revealed strong emotional responses to the experience.

- "I felt excited yet nervous to check it out" (R2)
- "I feel like a student" (R3)
- "To receive a grade after so long not receiving it, that is just riveting" (R5)
- "It feels so great" (R9)

Responding to the question about how the experience would transform their own assessment practices, of the 14 responses, seven commented specifically that they would give quality feedback *alongside* scores rather than just scores alone. R5 said, "getting a grade AND feedback do really help in reflecting and assessing my own ability". R1 commented:

*I realised the importance of giving specific and targetted feedback alongside the scoring rubric provided, as this helps students to see more clearly how they can improve. It also highlights the fairness of the grading process.*

Also commenting on the fairness, R3 stated, “I’ve been regarded as a *fair* teacher by my students and the assignment will encourage me to work more effectively. I’ll also care more about giving feedback as giving score to my students.

Besides comments about feedback, respondents also mentioned using marking criteria/rubrics; marking more promptly; giving higher scores; and getting students to reflect and set goals.

### **Course Evaluations**

The responses to the open-ended item in the course evaluation asking for comments yielded 952 words, or an average of 63 words per respondent. Anonymous data relating to experiencing FA activities and the impact on practice are shown verbatim below.

- I learned helpful knowledge, skills and some technical tools for assessment. Overall, this course is really challenge, give more experience and new knowledge for helping my teaching and learning. And I will be able applied in my situation.
- This module helped me especially to understand the importance of giving helpful feedback, doing FAs and assessing students fairly. It sharpened my skills and gave many insights into processes I could use in my own lessons. The best thing was enabling us to experience those methods ourselves and evaluate their usefulness.
- The course was difficult but [the lecturer] had a great approach on the subject that made it easy to understand. Experiencing the theory first hand was a delightful and very informative.

There were four distinctive comments about feedback:

- The feedback provided for our assignments and forums were substantial and gave us a push forward so we can improve.
- giving us a lot of helpful feedback
- This module helped me especially to understand the importance of giving helpful feedback
- Feedback, comments and suggestions were really effective for me in my future studies and teaching

### **Discussion**

The claim of this paper is that the experiential activities used in the course, “Hitting the Reset Button” and “Delayed Scores”, helped to (1) develop participants’ AL in formative assessment, including online formative assessment; (2) evoke emotions, raise consciousness about conceptions, and prompt a desire for transformation; and (3) bridge the theory-practice gap. The findings from the results section are now discussed in relation the claim and in the context of existing research and theory.

*Claim 1: Developing participants' AL in formative assessment, including online formative assessment*

Participants were able to develop their AL in formative assessment through the reading itself, which was concerned with formative assessment activities, and by completing the forum posting task, but this development would have been at a conceptual level. However, as they engaged in the process of using feed-forward to revise their postings, participants were able to experience the process concretely, leading to a deeper and more enduring understanding and appreciation of the value of feedback and feed-forward in formative assessment. The comments in the Whatsapp messages agreeing with the lecturer about the shortcomings of their posting, explaining why they had written in a particular way, seeking guidance on how to improve, and stating what changes they would make show a deep engagement with the feedback. As well, all participants stated that they would revise their posting based on the comments and eventually did so, showing a high level of uptake of feedback. The effectiveness of the feedback process evidenced in this paper contradicts Sadler's (2010) assertion about the ineffectiveness of feedback on assignments. It is likely that the opportunity to revise for a higher grade incentivized participants to engage with the feedback. Without this opportunity, they may just have ignored or looked cursorily at the comments, rendering the process ineffective. Similarly, the frequency of comments about feedback and the importance of providing specific, detailed, and prompt feedback using rubrics show that some participants had acquired a deep understanding of effective feedback and feed-forward practices. The effectiveness of detailed, descriptive feedback to individual work has been found to be strongly related to student improvement (Lipnevich & Smith, 2008).

There is evidence that participants' understanding of feed-forward, AaL and FUST were developed. The feedback given by the lecturer (Figure 5) offered an example of the detailed and specific nature of the type of feedback that is known as "feed-forward". In fact, the implementation of the "Hitting the Reset Button" activity matched Wimshurst and Manning's (2013) two-step process of feed-forward as the participants had a first attempt (their initial posting), then used the comments from the lecturer to improve their subsequent piece, which carried the summative score. The "Delayed Scores" activity familiarized participants with key AaL strategies, namely self-assessment, calibration, reflection, and goal-setting. Their deep understanding of the process was borne out in comments such as "I realised the importance of giving specific and targeted feedback alongside the scoring rubric provided" and connections to wider assessment concepts, for example, when the same respondent wrote: "It also highlights the fairness of the grading process." Finally, as the formative assessment activities were integrated into and became part of the assessment rather than a separate activity, participants gained awareness of the synergizing potential of FUST, where summative assessments are used for formative purposes. It was important to demonstrate that formative assessment does not have to be an added burden, something separate from teaching. Teachers, especially those in exam-oriented systems, constantly complain that they have no time for formative assessment (Carless, 2012). The second activity showed how AaL and FUST can be integrated seamlessly in the learning process.

As for the ability to conduct formative assessment online, although course participants were not explicitly taught how to conduct formative assessment online, nor were they asked how much they had learned about online formative assessment strategies in the data collection, their online engagement in the activities would have developed their ability to carry out online formative assessment as they were engaged in "learning by doing". The lecturer modelled the process and used appropriate technology tools to carry out formative assessment while, at the same time, demonstrating feed-forward, AaL, and FUST, three key concepts associated with formative assessment. The fact that all participants were able to post and revise their forum postings on the LMS showed a degree of competence in online assessment. This is no easy feat as participants need to master the use of the online tech tools to complete the task. In fact, as shown in Figure 6, one participant had technical problems but found a way to navigate around it: "I couldn't edit the

post so I have to delete it and add a new reply". Additionally, all participants were able to complete the online survey form and complete the self-prediction, calibration, reflection, and goal-setting tasks. Completely unsolicited, one participant wrote in the course evaluation, "I learned helpful knowledge, skills and some technical tools for assessment". Young, Hafner and Fisher (2007) and Yeo (2021) argue that an effective way to prepare teachers to teach and, in this case, assess online is for them to "experience online learning from the perspective of a participant" (Author 2021, p. 11) as this empathy will help them design their online courses more effectively.

Based on the above discussion, we can conclude that the content and the process of the activities served to develop AL in formative assessment, including how to conduct formative assessment online. Participants gained a deep understanding of the concepts and strategies that were modelled by the lecturer, and they were also able to make a connection between these theoretical concepts and their enactment in practice.

*Claim 2: Evoking emotions, raising consciousness about conceptions, and prompting a desire for change*

The FA activities not only served to develop participants' content knowledge and skills, but the concrete experience evoked strong emotional reactions, which jolted participants' prior conceptions and, in most cases, prompted a desire for change. In addition, opportunities for reflection through the group discussions during the synchronous webinar and the online questionnaire led some participants to examine their beliefs and question their earlier practices. The crafting of the reflection questions was important as participants were constantly pushed to feel, reflect on their feelings, and connect their feelings, reactions, and realizations to their practices. The use of open-ended, higher order, affective questions was essential, for example, "Why didn't the teacher tell you beforehand that you would be given this opportunity?" (Activity 2); "How does it feel to receive a grade? How will the whole experience change the way you assess your students?" (Activity 3)

Evidence that the activities evoked emotional responses can be found in the use of emoticons in the Whatsapp responses (see examples in Figure 6). Words/Phrases such as "excited", "nervous", "relieved", "satisfied", "riveting", and "like a student" are some of the emotions that participants felt. The most telling comment can be found in the course evaluation when a student wrote, "Experiencing theory first-hand was *delightful* and informative". (Emphasis added)

While it may be useful to evoke emotions, the purpose of doing so is to raise consciousness and eventually bring about transformation. The literature argues that rational persuasion, or teaching concepts at a theoretical level, alone will not bring about changes in conceptions and practice (DeLuca et al, 2013; Deneen & Brown, 2016; Koh, 2011; Lam, 2019; Stabler-Havener, 2018; Xu & Brown, 2016). The comments in the online questionnaire in the "Delayed Scores" activity and in the course evaluations showed that the experience was transformative, with participants detailing changes to different aspects of their assessment practices. Of the 15 responses, 14 participants commented that they would change the way they gave feedback. The changes included providing individualized, detailed, specific, constructive, and timely feedback.

*Claim 3: Bridging the theory-practice gap*

Through concrete experiences, participants gained not just a theoretical but also a practical understanding of how the concepts could be put into practice. The first concept of "feed-forward" was operationalized in the "Hitting the Reset Button" activity, when participants revised their forum postings on the basis of feedback provided by the lecturer, who had modelled what

feed-forward looked like by asking for specific remedial actions. Instead of simply reading the article entitled "Hitting the Reset Button" and answering questions, participants had the opportunity to experience the process and feel the "delight" of being given a second chance. The concepts of AaL and FUST were operationalized in the "Delayed Scores" activity. Again, instead of listening to a lecture or reading about these concepts, as participants engaged in self-predicting, calibrating, reflecting on, and setting goals for their next assignment, they were practising these concepts while, at the same time, gaining empathy on how their own learners would perceive such approaches. The comments, "As you can see, I am resetting my text to you, and I will be resetting my post as well"; "Thank you for letting me press the virtual reset button"; and "This is exactly the example of 'hit the reset button'" clearly demonstrated that these participants saw the direct link between the concepts discussed in the article (theory) and the activity they were engaged in (practice).

Furthermore, the use of word/phrases such as "experience" and "experiencing" juxtaposed with "applied in my situation" and "use in my own lessons" suggest that those participants saw the link between their experience of the activity and their classroom practice. Their connection of theory and practice was evident in comments such as "The best thing was ... enabling us to experience those methods ourselves and evaluate their usefulness" and "I see that you're trying to give us not only [theory] but practical experiences for language testing and assessment".

## Conclusions and Implications

Research has shown the importance of increasing teachers' AL in formative assessment, addressing emotional components and implicit conceptions in order to bring about transformation in practice, and bridging the theory-practice gap. Due to the recent pandemic, teachers and teacher educators will also need to conduct FA online. This study has shown that the use of experiential approaches such as Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle has great potential in online assessment education since it allows teacher educators to address not just technical (content and skills) but also affective competencies of AL and help bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Two important implications of the study pertain to the assessment cycle and approaches for teacher education. Firstly, the "Delayed Scores" activity appears to have been effective as an AaL and FUST strategy and the process can easily be applied for a range of assessment tasks. Delaying scores and extending the assessment cycle will enable teachers and teacher educators to get the most out of assessment. A typical assessment cycle is shown in Figure 8 below:

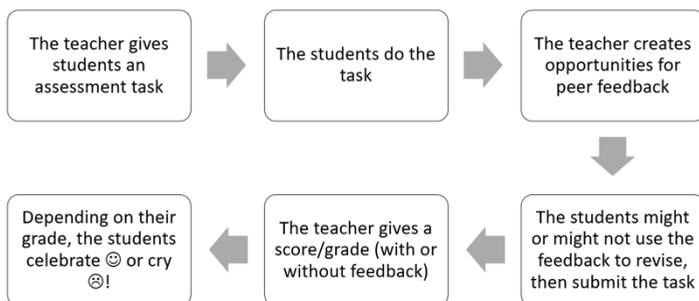


Figure 8. A Typical 6-step Assessment Cycle

However, by extending the assessment cycle and employing feedback and feed-forward, AaL, and FUST strategies, the teacher can make the assessment more formative and “learning-oriented” (Carless, 2007) rather than purely summative, and this will improve student motivation and learning. Such an extended cycle is shown in Figure 9 below.

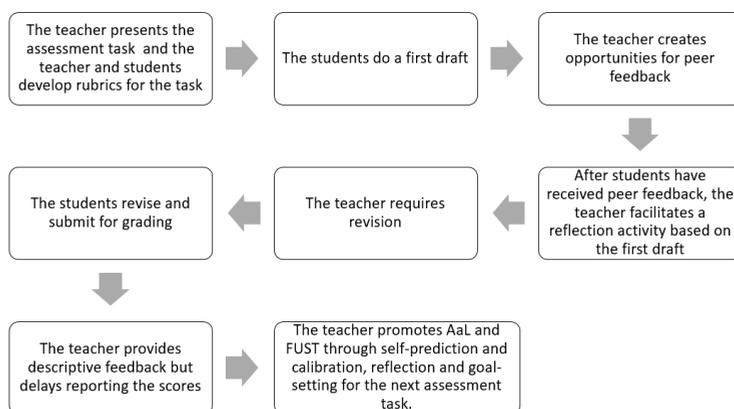


Figure 9. An 8-Step Extended Assessment Cycle Integrating AaL and FUST principles

A further implication is directed at teacher educators. Despite the renewed focus on the role of emotions in language teaching and language teacher education (Richards, 2020), teacher education, especially at academic levels, seem more concerned with “the ‘hard’, quantifiable and rational facts about second language learning and teaching” (Richards, 2020, p. 2) and “rational persuasion” (Xu & Brown, 2016, p. 157). However, we need also to focus on teacher emotional awareness and competence (Richards, 2020), and this applies not just to teachers but also teacher educators as our own prior experiences and conceptions about assessment have the power to affect the way we model assessment to teachers.

## Limitations

There were several limitations in the implementation of the activities and data collection. Firstly, because of COVID-19 and the closure of many schools in the region, course participants were unable to carry out the active experimentation stage of the experiential learning cycle, where they would have tried out the two activities with their own students. The opportunity for situated learning might have strengthened participants’ practical and theoretical understanding of the FA concepts and grounded their experience, reflections, and conceptions in their actual classroom practice, resulting in appropriate localized, culturally appropriate changes in practice. Fortunately, as the pandemic situation has improved and many schools have resumed, future course participants will be able to conduct the active experimentation stage online or adapt it for face-to-face teaching. Secondly, it would have been useful to capture the data from the group discussions following participants’ experience of the first activity. However, I decided to exclude the data because as the meeting host in Zoom, I could not record the simultaneous discussions of groups in different Zoom rooms. In future, each group could record their discussions, then save the recording as an MP3 file to be sent to the lecturer/researcher for more complete and accurate data collection and analysis. Finally, Kolb’s Experiential Learning cycle was not originally designed for online teaching whereas models such as the Salmon 5-Stage Model for Online Teaching (see

<https://www.gillysalmon.com/five-stage-model.html>) is specifically designed for e-learning. Although it was possible to apply Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle in this research, for online assessment education and teacher education in general, it may be better to include some of the stages of Salmon's model that focus on helping learners to access and use the technology and socializing them to online learning.

### Further Research

While there is available research on the impact of assessment education, such measures as pre-course and post-course AL inventories (McGee & Colby, 2014); teacher assessment tasks, student work samples, and focus group discussion data (Koh, 2011); and data from open-ended questionnaires (DeLuca et al, 2013) dominate. These data sources rely on participants' perceptions and conceptions. As research has consistently claimed the gap between teacher beliefs/conceptions and practice (Lee, 2009; Nishino, 2012; Phipps & Borg, 2009), it would be useful to evaluate the impact of assessment education by observing teachers in action as they carry out assessment activities in their face-to-face or online lessons. With the affordances of technology, lesson observation can be done asynchronously with online lesson being recorded and viewed by the teacher, teacher educators, and researchers. Technology tools such as Zoom recordings and teacher activity and student participation reports in tools such as Nearpod, Kahoot, and Mentimeter could enable us to observe teachers and learners engaged in formative assessment in their own classrooms, giving us a more accurate and in-depth understanding of teachers' AL in practice.

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**Marie Yeo** has been teaching English and training teachers and trainers for the past 30 years. She has worked throughout ASEAN for universities, non-government organizations and international organizations. Marie currently teaches on a range of teacher education courses, specializing in language assessment, professional development, and English Medium Instruction (EMI).

**Appendix 1: Online Questionnaire for “Delayed Scores” Activity**

1

Based on the descriptive feedback you have received, what GRADE do you think you will get for Assignment 1? (Tick one only) \*

**How I award the grade and calculate the scores**

1. I refer to the Grading System and Grade Descriptors (below)

2. I choose the descriptors that best fit my performance on the assessment.

3. I then select the letter grade and corresponding score based on the specific assignment marking criteria.

Grade	Level of Performance	Description
A+	Outstanding	Clearly meets all the criteria set for the assignment and goes beyond this by offering unique insights.
A	Excellent	Clearly meets all the criteria set for the assignment.
A-	Excellent in most respects	Appears to meet all the criteria set for the assignment, but not equally in all areas.
B+	Very good	Clearly meets most of the criteria set for the assignment, if the marking is some important regard (which prevents award of an A), but is very good in another.
B	Good	Clearly meets most of the criteria set for the assignment.
B-	Good overall, but some weaknesses	Appears to meet most of the criteria set for the assignment, but requires some acceptance of weaknesses.
C+	Satisfactory to good	Meets only slightly over half of the criteria set for the assignment, but the quality of work for the criteria that are met is good.
C	Satisfactory	Meets only slightly over half of the criteria set for the assignment.
C-	Poor overall, but with some evidence of learning	Meets less than half of the criteria set for the assignment.
D+	Poor overall, with very little evidence of learning	Meets for less than half of the criteria set for the assignment.
D	Weak	Meets less than half of the criteria set for the assignment.
F	Very poor	The piece of work meets almost none of the criteria set for the assignment.

A+

A

A-

B+

B

B-

C+

C

C-

D+

D

F

2

How did your PREDICTED grade compare with your ACTUAL grade? \*

I got a HIGHER grade than I predicted

I got the SAME grade that I predicted

I got LOWER grade than I predicted

3

What will you do to get a better grade for future assignments (for this course or other courses)? \*

4

We are teachers and we are the ones who give grades to our students. How does it feel to receive a grade? How will this whole experience of doing and getting a score for Assignment 1 change the way you assess your students? \*