

Learning Conversations in «The Between Zones»

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«Work in progress»

The working title of this project is “Inclusive Assessment – Learning Conversations as Formative Assessment in the Subject English”. Based on the sociocultural theories of learning, this project will examine how learning conversations are used by ESL teachers in lower secondary schools as an assessment method in the mapping of a students’ current level of competence and skills; when used in teacher-student interactions where the students are seen as active participants. This thinking builds on and extends Vygotsky’s original arguments that dialogic practice has a central role in students’ conceptual development (Egan, 2009).

According to the Core Curriculum the purpose of assessment is to give an indicator as to what the students know and what they are able to do (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2020). Engagement in teacher-student dialogue is pointed out as a must in order for the teacher to be able to provide guidance to be able to help their students develop their reading skills, writing skills and oral and digital skills in the subject” (Curriculum in English, 2020, p. 10).

This research project is a study of how learning conversations are used in an interactive situation where students can become involved in activities which often are more complex than they usually can master themselves. When teacher mediation, such as modeling, feedback, assistance, direction and assisted performance, is given to the students during the assessment, the outcome will indicate the students’ independent performances in future assessments (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007, p. 200). The concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) in a sociocultural perspective is to observe what the students are truly capable of doing when working with mediators.

The learning conversations referred to in this project are the developmental dialogues which can promote learning in “the between zones”, such as Vygotsky’s ZPD and Cummins’ theory of BICS and CALP language. Learning conversations are the conversations where students and teachers engage in sustained shared thinking where all students are given the opportunity for development, mastery, learning, and well-being based on their circumstances. Using formative assessment practices and adjusting instruction based on student needs, gives the teachers possibilities to promote individual learning and help students to reach their full potential.

This is a qualitative study based on teacher interviews about inclusive assessment and learning conversations, video observation of learning conversations followed by a video-stimulated recall interview with the participating teachers, and group interviews of the participating students.

Research Question:

How can learning conversations be used as a formative assessment method in mapping of the students' current level of competence and skills, and provide individualized support based on the students' needs in promoting individual learning?

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