

Changing the Mask: Formative Teaching of Ancient Greek Theatre in the Digital Age

Given the special circumstances during a pandemic, and the continuing need to keep improving the quality of teaching through suitable didactic strategies, this paper argues for a further development of the formative approach of teaching in order to make accessible the full repertory of online available resources. For the study of ancient Greek theatre, due to its strong ties with the ‘visual-based’ Reception, Cultural and Performance Studies, the formative approach is especially well suited. Formative assessment’s main objective is to contribute to the learning process through feedback and criticism.

The unlimited availability of study material, and the possibility (and challenge) of contributing to this material through peer-to-peer feedback and participation in work-in-progress, are opportunities that the digital age offers, and have not been on offer on such scale before. The study of classics rapidly develops into students’ participation, criticism, and contribution through the wealth of online initiatives and projects concerning lexica, editions of texts, fragments, and commentaries, and the archiving and reworking of reception pieces. In online teaching, digital philology has become a students’ assignment too. Formative assessment encourages students to ‘learn-through-participation’ and immersion.

Using examples from my own teaching practice, I will show how the formative approach, a cyclic process based on feedback and response, opens the way to a heightened students’ accessibility and adaptability of the various online resources on ancient Greek theatre – an approach that was not invented in response to a global pandemic, but has been impelled decisively by it¹.

¹ This article reflects work-in-progress: as National Teaching Fellow with DUDOC-Alfa (Dutch National Research Council | NWO) I investigate the

Introduction

Over the past years, I have been so fortunate as to teach the so-called *Bachelor Research Course* to students in bachelor years 2 and 3, studying classics at Radboud University, the Netherlands. Students get to choose between a course working from ancient Greek primary materials, and one based on texts in Latin. In this course, I can choose a subject of my liking, as a topic to formulate research questions around, and to write a research paper on. Topics over the past decade included the *persona* of Helen of Troy in epic, drama, and rhetorical works², *capita selecta* from both general and ancient Greek linguistics³, and the theory and practice of ancient Greek prosody⁴. In the latest course, on *Performance Studies*, students had to read some primary ancient Greek text⁵, and recently published articles on the performability of ancient Greek text⁶. I tried to make my students see that the status of text as *screenplay* or *performance document* deserves special attention⁷, next to documentary evidence⁸. After seven weeks of class the students took

possibilities and benefits of Formative Assessment for ancient languages teaching, the first results of which will be published in a forthcoming issue of *Polis* (Blankenborg 2021). I thank the anonymous reviewers of «FuturoClassico» for their helpful comments and suggestions.

² Starting from Hughes 2005, who presents an attractive and useful overview of Helen's role in mythology, cult, and imagination.

³ From Christidis 2008, Bakker 2010 (and online <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/book/10.1002/9781444317398>), Giannakis 2013 (and online <https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/encyclopedia-of-ancient-greek-language-and-linguistics>), and Logozzo-Porcetti 2017.

⁴ Starting from Devine & Stephens 1994. A valuable recent contribution that will prove indispensable for the next run is Gussenhoven-Chen 2020.

⁵ Homer, *Ilias*, XVIII, 369-616; Lysias, *Orationes*, 1 & 3; Pindar, *Olympian*, IV; Euripides, *Medea*; Aristophanes, *Vespae*; various *anacreontea* and a selection of inscriptions.

⁶ Bakker 2005; Bierl 2009; Bollack 2016; Calame 2009; Cazzato-Lardinois 2016; Collins 2004; D'Angour 2001; González 2013; Meineck 2018; Serafim 2017.

⁷ Cfr. the description of the status of text («transcript»/«script»/«scripture») and its intertwining with performance in an evolutionary model in Nagy 2004, pp. 1-3.

⁸ Wilson-Csapo 2012; Ley 2015; Baggio 2016.

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an exam on secondary and primary literature. I had planned to devote the next seven weeks to students' activities like formulating research questions around a source of their own choosing, working on the first draft of a paper, and giving feedback on each other's preliminary steps in this process.

I realized that for quite a few students it was not yet common practice to roam the ubiquitous materials available – especially online⁹. For that reason, I included a purely formative question in the exam; not because there is just one, correct answer, but merely to make my students think deeper about the steps needed, and to better prepare them for the level of competence required in the second half of the course. The question looked like this:

Question 4

Question 4 wants to be a taster for your wording of a research question in period 4. A vase painting (Attic red-figure column crater, ca. 480 BCE, Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig BS 415):



⁹ Still an underrepresented point of focus in classical languages and cultures teaching, cfr. Bodard-Mahony 2010; Balbo 2015.

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Answer the following questions (a-i) and motivate your answer in a few sentences. All answers are, inevitably, speculative, and 'plausible' at best:

- a) Who painted this picture?
 - b) At/for what occasion?
 - c) What is its target audience?
 - d) Describe the performance of the chorus.
 - e) What was the occasion of performance?
 - f) What props are pictured?
 - g) How may this scene be reconstructed?
 - h) What is the relation with any known or fragmentary play?
- What will be your first two steps in approaching this source?

As soon as I saw my students after the exam, this was the exam question that had them all confused and wondering: what was the 'correct' answer? They immediately started discussing the matter, comparing answers that ranged from «this is clearly a real-life representation of a scene from an actual performance of tragedy» to «this picture cannot teach us anything concerning ancient theatre».

I then presented them with my own speculative answers, based on a 2015 publication¹⁰, thus building an 'oral research paper' at the spot, tying in the different aspects of the reconstruction: «Searching on BS 415, I presume that a chorus of six masked young men reenacts the summoning, over a tomb, of a spirit in a play unknown to us: letters close to the open mouth of one of the youths evidence singing. A combination of dithyramb and dramatic staging suggests a very early representation of choral performance painted by an unnamed artist, possibly to serve as a prize in a contest».

I was quick, of course, to emphasise the speculative character of my reconstruction: what if art on pottery is not at all mimetic?¹¹

¹⁰ Wellenbach 2015.

¹¹ Or at least not representative for the tradition that culminated in extant tragedies, cfr. Weaver 2009 on Euripides' *Bacchae*. Coo 2013, pp. 72-73: «Scholarship on the depiction of 'tragic' scenes on Greek painted pottery and their relationship to the text and performance of Greek tragedy has tended to divide into two camps: the 'philodramatists' and the 'iconocentrists'. Broadly speaking, a strictly philodramatic approach would prioritise text over image, arguing that

My reconstruction is hardly better than my students'. But that was not the point: I had them thinking about the type of questions and the multitude of issues to be researched and materials to be investigated – and hence focused on what I have gradually become aware of as an issue in my teaching: with so many, various online resources on ancient Greek theatre, how to heighten their accessibility and feasibility for students?

Given the special circumstances during a pandemic, and the continuing need to keep improving the quality of teaching through suitable didactic strategies¹², this paper argues for a further development of the formative approach of teaching in order to make accessible the full repertoire of online available resources, beautiful examples of which are presented throughout the present volume¹³. My contribution, however, does not focus primarily on

corresponding or compatible details between play and picture may be understood as proof of the artist's dependency upon a pre-existing tragic written text and/or performance. In other words, the painting is to be interpreted in light of the tragedy: this may range from a general assertion that the painting is 'inspired' by the play, to, in its extreme form, the assumption that the painter may faithfully 'illustrate' the 'original play'. Conversely, the iconocentrics have denied any such hierarchy, arguing that art does not need to be explained in terms of literature and that paintings are not mere reflections of literary sources. Artists work within their own separate, self-sufficient repertoire of pictorial conventions» (cfr. Braund-Hall 2014 on the gender confusion stemming from the ΚΑΛΗ inscriptions next to masks worn by male performers) «and traditions, and, so far from being reliant upon the fixed details of a written text, are understood to follow a model of oral transmission where variants are the norm and there is no 'original'. As Giuliani and Taplin among many others have argued, it is clear that holding extreme positions on either of these views is ultimately untenable: just as few would want to reduce a painted pot to a mere 'illustration' of a dramatic text, so it is equally implausible to defend the thesis that Attic and Apulian artists of the fifth to third centuries BC were wholly immune to the cultural influence of tragedy».

¹² Cfr. Balbo 2021, p. 73 who emphasises «the future perspectives of teaching classics in a context where distance teaching seems still far from being abandoned».

¹³ Among which the digital editions of fragments *DEFrAG-Tragedy* and *KomFrag*, the online database of Greek dramatic meters, digital archives (e.g.

the wealth of online materials pertaining to ancient Greek theatre, and their accessibility: I will start from didactics and work towards an approach that better enables students to benefit from the high accessibility of materials, and grow as a learner. For the study of ancient Greek theatre, due to its strong ties with the ‘visual-based’ Performance Studies, the formative approach is especially well suited. After a brief description of the formative approach as a teaching strategy, I will illustrate my argument in favour of formative assessment as a method for the teaching of ancient Greek theatre in online ubiquity with examples from my own teaching and lecturing practice.

1. Formative assessment in teaching

The formative approach in teaching is not meant to render other methods of assessment obsolete. Rather than serving as its replacement, formative assessment aims to complement summative assessment¹⁴, through stimulating learning processes like self-guidance, self-regulation, and motivation for learning¹⁵. Unlike

DAPLAP [a database for the reception of fragmentary ancient Greek Drama] and the digitalisation of the audio-visual database *CRIMTA* and lexicons (e.g. *Lessico Digitale della Commedia Greca* [*LDCG*], *Lessico degli oggetti dalla commedia greca*, *Lessico digitale del costume teatrale nell'iconografia greca e magno-greca* [*Skeuê*]), and integrated digital editions of individual plays.

¹⁴ As students tend to remain focused on their results/grade (cfr. Rowe 2017).

¹⁵ Sadler 1989; Pavou 2020a. Over the years, many theoretical studies have been published, and quite a few based on empirical data (Shepard 2000; Black *et al.* 2004; Gibbs-Simpson 2005). Unfortunately, the empirical studies all use different definitions for ‘formative assessment’, making a comparison difficult (Cfr. Knight 2002; Bennett 2011). Black *et al.* 2004, p. 10: «assessment for learning is any assessment for which the first priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting students’ learning». Carless 2007, p. 58: «As Yorke (2003) points out, formative assessment is more complex than it appears at first sight. The 3 different conceptions of colleagues in the HKIEd fell roughly into two camps: one group who viewed formative assessment as mainly involving formal structured tasks, similar to Bell and Cowie’s (2001)

Data-Based Decision Making processes, that largely take place outside the class room¹⁶, the formative approach copies the use of students' data to optimise learning, and the emphasis on the role of the teacher¹⁷. Most importantly, the formative approach considers the learning process as a cyclic process of feedback and response¹⁸. Its main focus is to contribute to the learning process through feedback and criticism rather than to judge the outcome of the learning process¹⁹. The feedback provided by formative assessment is meant to stimulate students' self-regulation²⁰: it may well start from a mark, but the mark is merely interpreted to enable the student to take the next, often a revised or repeated, step. As a contribution to a process, formative assessment is summarized in three core questions, centring around the terminology

planned formative assessment. Another group, of a more constructivist orientation, considered formative assessment as mainly informal and ad hoc, what Bell and Cowie refer to as interactive formative assessment. When each party had its own view of what formative assessment is or should be, dialogue was constrained by the fact that individuals were actually talking about different conceptions even when using the same term».

¹⁶ Levin-Datnow 2012. DBDM features empirical research with stronger longitudinal designs (Snijders 2005), but its focus lies with standardised learning results and systems for monitoring students' progress (Schildkamp-Lai 2013). In other words, it does not concern itself so much with the learning process between student and teacher.

¹⁷ Especially on what he/she *does* in the class room to support the learning process, Gulliker-Baartman 2016, pp. 9-13.

¹⁸ Ruiz-Primo-Furtak 2007, p. 61.

¹⁹ Gibbs-Simpson 2005; Winstone *et al.* 2017; Winstone-Carless 2019; Pavou 2020a. This latter approach, judging the outcome of the learning process, is known as *summative*: summative feedback has its merits, of course, but it is rather poor when it comes to information (usually a mark, expressed in a number), and it only appears *after* the students' performance and achievement. Thus, summative feedback is only loosely tied to the proceeding teaching and learning process. The targets from summative assessment are regularly soon forgotten, as the students' learning process ends with (and stops at) the publication of the results (Black-William 1998. Cfr. footnote 12 above). What follows summative assessment is usually a next step in knowledge acquisition, rather than a revised step, or the previous step taken twice.

²⁰ Nicol-MacFarlane-Dick 2006.

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feedup ('what is the student's goal?'), *feedback* ('what is student's current position?'), and *feedforward* ('what does the student require to reach the goal?')²¹.

In the study of ancient theatre, formative assessment preferably focuses on students' awareness of, and reflection on, their personal progress in the acquisition and interpretation of materials²². With assessment defined as a student-responsible process, existing definitions do not steer away from teachers' action sufficiently

²¹ Hattie-Timperly 2007; Wiliam 2011. DBDM would summarise a similar process in the following steps, using slightly different terminology (Blankenborg 2021): 1) Identification of the goal; 2) Gathering data; 3) Analysis of data; 4) Interpretation of data; 5) Action: making decisions and taking further steps. What makes DBDM differ from Hattie-Timperly and Wiliam is that DBDM places emphasis on adaptations initiated by the teacher or the school, whereas Hattie-Timperly and Wiliam focus on students' actions and initiatives.

²² Struyven *et al.* 2005, p. 338: «Broadly speaking, Sambell *et al.* (1997) found that students often reacted negatively when they discussed what they regarded as 'normal' or traditional assessment. Many students expressed the opinion that normal assessment methods had a severely detrimental effect on the learning process. Exams had little to do with the more challenging task of trying to make sense and understand their subject. In contrast, when students considered new forms of assessment, their views of the educational worth of assessment changed, often quite dramatically. Alternative assessment was perceived to enable, rather than pollute, the quality of learning achieved. Many made the point that for alternative assessment they were channelling their efforts into trying to understand, rather than simply memorize or routinely document, the material being studied (Sambell *et al.*, 1997). This conclusion is mirrored in other research about particular forms of alternative assessment. For example, Slater (1996) found that students like portfolio assessment. Students thought that they would remember much better and longer what they were learning, compared with material learned for other assessment formats, because they had internalized the material while working with it, thought about the principles and applied concepts creatively and extensively over the duration of the course. Students enjoyed the time they spent on creating portfolios and believed it helped them learn. Segers and Dochy (2001) found similar results in students' perceptions about self and peer assessment in a problem-based learning environment setting. Students reported that these assessment procedures stimulate deep-level learning and critical thinking». Cfr. Pavou 2020.

explicit²³: teachers' action in the class room as part of formative assessment are better studied than students'²⁴. In order to be cyclic, and help students focus on their learning objectives (the clarification of expectations, learning goals, and criteria for success²⁵)

²³ One of two «educational researchers'» definitions presented by Swan *et al.* 2006, p. 46: «Assessment is an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student learning. It involves making our expectations explicit and public; setting appropriate criteria and high standards for learning quality; systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well performance matches those expectations and standards; and using the resulting information to document, explain, and improve performance». Their alternative definition states that «[a]ssessment is defined as the systematic basis for making inferences about the learning and development of students. More specifically, assessment is the process of defining, selecting, designing, collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and using information to increase students' learning and development».

²⁴ Antoniou-James 2014 link teachers' actions to students' activities. What is missing is the students' response that, in turn, 'feeds' the teachers' actions. Nor does it show the cyclic movement of formative assessment that is better represented in the figure that Ruiz-Primo and Furtak (Ruiz-Primo-Furtak 2007, p. 61; cfr. Ruiz-Primo 2016) drew up under the title «the ESRU-cycle». ESRU stands for Elicit – (Students) Respond – Recognize – Use. The representation by Ruiz-Primo and Furtak not only acknowledges students' response as a step in formative assessment, but also as the feedup for teachers' actions that, in turn, makes formative assessment a cyclic process rather than a one-way enticement (Running the risk of ending in a dead end street due the student's unwillingness «to engage with feedback due to its emotional impact» [Rowe 2017, p. 159]). Pitt 2017 aptly summarises the feedup of teachers' action as «dialogic feedback opportunities».

²⁵ Carless 2007, p. 59: «The first and most crucial strand of LOA (Learning-Oriented Assessment [RB]) is represented by the term assessment tasks as learning tasks. This conceptualisation holds that when assessment tasks embody the desired learning outcomes, students are primed for deep learning experiences by progressing towards these outcomes, akin to what Biggs (1999) describes as constructive alignment of objectives, content and assessment. The tasks should promote the kind of learning dispositions required of graduates and should mirror real-world applications of the subject matter [...] The second component of LOA is student involvement in assessment so that they develop a better understanding of learning goals and engage more actively with criteria and standards [...] Thirdly, for assessment to promote learning, students need

assessment aims to elicit self-reflective questions²⁶: «What will I (the student) learn? When will I be successful? What will I be able to show, do, or understand, if I am ‘successful’?»²⁷.

While acknowledging that «assessment for learning is any assessment for which the first priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting students’ learning»²⁸, I emphasize the importance of gearing assessment «towards the needs of the 21st century by helping students to develop the attributes and skills required to deal successfully with a complex and rapidly-changing world: to be creative, be capable of learning independently, take risks, be flexible, have the capacity to use particular knowledge in context»²⁹. In general, I argue, students’ learning should be through participation, immersion and contribution. Such actions, however, root in students’ motivation and pro-activeness³⁰.

2. ‘Digital philology’

The formative approach may be described across various ‘dimensions’ that specify the distinctions between formative and summative assessment³¹. I will describe my choices across five

to receive appropriate feedback which they can use to ‘feedforward’ into future work. Feedback in itself may not promote learning, unless students engage with it and act upon it [...]».

²⁶ Nicol-Macfarlane-Dick 2006. Pavlou 2020a, p. 46: «Assessment should be designed in a way that promotes intrinsic motivation and sustains engagement: it should be authentic, involve collaboration, promote autonomy and higher-order thinking skills, and allow students to retain some control over their material. It should also be relevant [...]».

²⁷ Guliker-Baartman 2017b.

²⁸ Black *et al.* 2004, p. 10.

²⁹ Pavlou 2021, p. 46. Cfr. Rönnebeck *et al.* 2018.

³⁰ Winstone *et al.* 2017.

³¹ Trumbull-Lash 2013, p. 4 distinguish informal/formal, immediate/delayed feedback, embedded in lesson plan/stand-alone, spontaneous/planned, individual/group, verbal/nonverbal, oral/written, graded/ungraded, open-ended response/closed (or constrained) response, teacher initiated (or controlled)/student

selected dimensions: they determine my suggested approach when confronted with the challenge to help students improve their attitude towards their newest assignment in ‘digital philology’, to heighten the accessibility and feasibility of the unlimited resources available. I will illustrate my choice from the options within the ‘dimension’ as summarised with an example from my Greek drama teaching practice.

1. The first dimension concerns the environment and the type of the assessment: I prefer classroom assessment, which is usually more informal than individually geared feedback, over formative, written feedback. Classroom feedback facilitates me and my students better to integrate the feedback in guidance, so that (fellow) students have clarity how to act on feedback³². The self-regulatory motivation driving dialogical feedback is fuelled by students’ growing competence as peer-to-peer assessors³³, a competence that can be trained in the classroom. For that reason, I apply every formal and informal type of test used in the classroom to monitor students’ learning and adapt teaching. In a classroom evaluation on heuristics, for example the type of assessment presented in the introduction to this contribution, students are constantly asked to comment on their search terms and results, as well as on those of others and mine in peer-to-peer feedback: «short answer examinations»³⁴.

2. Teachers’ and students’ initiative are equally important, though students should gradually get the feeling, and the confidence, that theirs is the most wanted for themselves. The study of ancient Greek theatre rapidly develops into students’ participation, criticism, and contribution through the wealth of online

initiated (or controlled), teacher and student(s)/peers, process-oriented/product-oriented, brief/extended, and scaffolded (or teacher supported)/independently performed.

³² Brooks *et al.* 2019, pp. 16-18. Cfr. the importance of improving teachers’ and students’ «feedback literacy», Carless-Winstone 2020.

³³ Carless 2013, pp. 92-93.

³⁴ Bigs 2003², p. 21.

initiatives and projects concerning lexica, editions of texts, fragments, and commentaries, and the archiving and reworking of reception pieces. In online teaching, digital philology has become a students' assignment too. Formative assessment encourages students to learn-through-participation and immersion. While assessment aims to improve both teaching and learning³⁵, primarily students' learning should be influenced. Above anything else, formative assessment aims to identify learning gaps and to assess how to close those gaps³⁶. By analysing their own mistakes and misconceptions, and by being offered the next chance to improve their work, students are encouraged to further their awareness with regard to what they still need to master. Key is the notion of the 'next chance': formative assessment is not the final evaluation, nor the final mark – it 'feeds forward'. Instead of focusing on remediation through evaluation like feedback, assessment encourages learners to try again after rethinking preparation and strategy³⁷. Students in my Classical Traditions course on Aeschylus' and Seneca's *Agamemnon* and its reception, having been set the task to complete an abstract for submission to an international conference, commented on each other's versions for four weeks in a row, benefitting from peer-to-peer feedback while rewriting their abstracts in between sessions. I encourage them to view the conference's organisers' reply as part of the lesson plan's formative assessment too, as both acceptance and decline are merely a step towards rewriting or resubmission.

3. Formative assessment is an instrument intended to facilitate the learning process rather than its outcome. There is no set pace for students' development in research method acquisition since «student take-up of formative assessment opportunities is often

³⁵ Brooks *et al.* 2019.

³⁶ Sadler 2002, p. 120 puts it more explicitly goal-oriented: «Formative assessment is concerned with how judgments about the quality of student responses (performances, pieces, or works) can be used to shape and improve the student's competence by short-circuiting the randomness and inefficiency of trial-and-error learning».

³⁷ Winstone-Boud 2020.

not as high as it should be»³⁸. Faced with an overwhelming and practically unlimited availability of study material, students should, I argue, first and foremost be stimulated to transform their capacity for self-regulation into curiosity and an intellectual bravery to venture out into the online sea of information³⁹. The possibility (and challenge) of contributing to this wealth of material through peer-to-peer feedback and participation in work-in-progress, are opportunities that the digital age offers, and have not been on offer on such scale before. The assessment example at the start of this contribution, and the mid-term exam for the course Classical Traditions that I present below both show how students are encouraged not merely to reproduce what they have learned or have been able to find, but rather to keep on searching for additional materials that may further widen their proposed scope of the issues at hand⁴⁰.

4. As formative assessment, both marked and unmarked, avoids summative assessments' finality, it is instrumental for promoting students' learning and attitude, both more important in the virtual learning environment than the ability to quote correct answers after shutting down the internet connection. Self-regulation and motivation outweigh marks, regardless the exact outcome and the way it is measured. Motivation is key⁴¹. My teaching aims to

³⁸ Higgins *et al.* 2010.

³⁹ In a paper read at the international conference *Covid-19, Crossover, and Corporeality*, Ramat Gan, 6-9 December 2020, entitled *Surfing the Waves First*, I compared the audacity required from students in an online environment with that of Odysseus and his comrades when embarking on their journey to the entrance to the Netherworld. The information gathered by Odysseus from the souls of the deceased, and his methods of interrogation, selection, and indulging, I argued, resemble the possibilities and the threads that students face when trying to make sense of the endless push-notifications and distractions.

⁴⁰ Rönnebeck *et al.* 2018.

⁴¹ That is, *intrinsic* motivation (Ryan-Deci 2000, p. 71 «The term extrinsic motivation refers to the performance of an activity in order to attain some separable outcome and, thus, contrasts with intrinsic motivation, which refers to doing an activity for the inherent satisfaction of the activity itself») which in this case equates curiosity.

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engage pupils and students through a continuous outlook on their present-day world. Ancient civilisation is studied for methodological approach of relevant themes, and their formulation of thought processes. Ancient civilisation study shows how even contemporary society may be observed and studied as any other remote object of interest. In a recent round of abstract writing, students came up with topics ranging from ‘Dante’s version of the Agamemnon story via Cicero’⁴² to ‘My baby’s got a gun: Clytaemnestra as criminal-celebrity and rogue-celebrity’⁴³. Allowing classics to continuously reflect students’ personal growth potential, I am careful not to break the mirror⁴⁴.

5. Finally, formative assessment is never an isolated event: as it follows the ‘five steps’, and returns to its starting point, it is cyclic, and therefore integrated. What use is written comment on a research assignment growth document if it is not received as feedback by the student?⁴⁵ Yes, I do mark my weekly (mostly oral) tests and evaluations, but given the number of opportunities the weighted end mark is a reflection of the process (‘participation’) rather than the issue of the day. A cyclic process based on feedback and response opens the way to a heightened students’ accessibility and adaptability of the various online resources on Greek drama. The most important aim of formative approach is to elicit feedback and to use this feedback to take further steps in the

⁴² Published as an article in *Kepos*, by Stijn Timmerman, http://www.keposrivista.it/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/12_TIMMERMANS_def.pdf.

⁴³ Part of the 2021 expert meeting *Kyklos* at Harvard’s Centre for Hellenic Studies, presented by Loes Wolters, <https://chs.harvard.edu/kyklos-2021-contributors-and-abstracts/>.

⁴⁴ Recently, much attention has been given to Dan-el Padilla Peralta’s plea for classics as «a site of contestation» for the communities who have been denigrated by it in the past, if the field is to survive. An activist approach discusses «the politics of the living» as «what constitutes classics as a site of productive inquiry», and this requires «breaking the mirror» (Poser 2021).

⁴⁵ Being «more effective for cognitive and physical outcome measures than for motivational and behavioral criteria», Wisniewski *et al.* 2020, p. 12. Winstone-Carless 2019, pp. 78-95.

learning trajectory and to clarify learning goals. In formative evaluation, feedback plays a centre role in *feedforward*.

As feedback is not the end or the conclusion, but merely a step in the process meant to encourage the next step, formative assessment is «like the cook trying the soup»: it is likely that the taste of the soup needs some adjustment, but you can only find out by trying. Such trial is useful when the cook is skilled enough to judge his own achievement so far, and willing and able to make adjustments where required and wished for. His/her *feedup* is the wish to create a delicious and satisfying taste; his/her *feedback* the acknowledgment (possibly by others as well) that certain flavours are still weak, unbalanced or missing; his/her *feedforward* is a rethinking of the recipe and its execution so far, and suggestions (by others as well) for further improvement. A summative assessment, on the other hand, resembles «the customer enjoying the soup»: here the evaluation and judgement take place after the completion of the process – rather than usable feedback, summative assessment elicits judgements that do not contribute to an improvement of what has been judged.

3. *Practice*

Formative assessment confronts the student with what might or should be mastered at a certain point in the future, while acknowledging that confrontation of the student with the goal or the challenge now will almost certainly result in doubts, questions, and learning needs on the part of the student. In this concluding section, I will present some examples from my own teaching practice that were aiming at encouraging students to explore new territory on their own.

My first example is a general formative assessment that is used as a course introduction in the master Ancient Languages and Culture at Radboud University, the Netherlands. In the past few years, staff at Radboud University noticed what appeared to be a gradual decline in knowledge and research skills with students who went on from the 3-year bachelor phase of the study Greek and Latin

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Language and Culture to the 1-year master Ancient Languages and Cultures⁴⁶. All classics students entering the master had completed a bachelor based on language and research method acquisition and interpretation, so why had these skills decreased? Rather than trying to make changes to the curriculum of the bachelor program (which had been to everyone's satisfaction so far, as were the academic results), staff turned to a means to prepare future master student for the specific requirements and demands that distinguish the master from the bachelor program: independent thinking and self-regulation, analysis and interpretation on a higher level, pro-active and constant use of relevant resources. What was needed was a preview for students of the master examination level, so that students could compare their current level, at the start of the master, with the requirements set by these final goals. Staff therefore drew up a sketch for such a preview, an introductory, formative assessment in general, a shortened version of which is offered here:

Formative assessment master *Ancient Languages and Cultures* (Oudheidstudies, OHS)

'Formative' means: 'this is where you come from, this where you are now, this is where you're going to'. A formative assessment for the master Oudheidstudies (OHS) for students with a bachelor Greek and Latin thus offers:

- confirmation of the level at which the bachelor has been finished: student is able to work independently with primary text with the help of translations, commentaries and secondary literature. Student can provide an overview of secondary literature and judge its relevance. Student can formulate research questions based on the interpretation of primary and secondary literature;
- diagnosis of the current level of knowledge and skills. As a result of diagnosis a student may be advised (or want) to remediate on certain issues;
- a taster of the level of competence required (criteria for success) for a successful completion of (parts of) the master. The taster will show that essay

⁴⁶ Students who take the master Ancient Languages and Cultures at Radboud University regularly continue their studies with an additional 1-year master in Education (classics or history).

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questions aim at a bird's eye view treatment of secondary literature, and at analysis, rather than descriptiveness: student is supposed to be able to independently formulate research questions based on interpretation of primary and secondary literature.

As an example, I provide one such assessment, used to start the academic year 2020-2021: formative assessment for the master course *Subject and Performance of Pindar's Epinikia*:

- 1) Hand in an acceptable translation of Pindar *Ol.* 11 (p. 33 in M.M. Willcock, *Pindar. Victory Odes*).
- 2) Write a review of Willcock's commentary on this ode in Willcock, *Pindar. Victory Odes*, pp. 55-60. What are the merits of his commentary, what are the downsides? Add two pages of your own observations to Willcock's commentary.
- 3) Read the article by Malcolm Heath and Mary Lefkowitz ('Epinician Performance', *Classical Philology* 86 [1991], pp. 173-191). What do you consider the most likely mode of performance of Pindar's odes, either by Pindar as a solo performer, or by a chorus? Refer to the arguments brought forward by Heath and Lefkowitz, in addition to three recent articles of your own choice, dealing with the same research question.

Overall, this approach works fairly well: it clarifies for students where their needs still lie, and encourages them to evaluate their own learning trajectory. The assessment is part of the trajectory: it evaluates the outcome of the bachelor, and serves as feedback for students' position when entering the master phase. Both the teacher and the student are brought in a position to provide and evaluate feedback, and both have a responsibility in the drawing up of plans for remediation and further reading.

Turning to ancient drama, as a second example I present the mid-term exam of the master course Classical Traditions. In this course, students read both the *Agamemnon* by Aeschylus and by Seneca in the original language, and take an exam on the language, the performance context, and the literary issues dealt with in commentaries and secondary literature, at the end of the course. Students prepare for this mid-term exam largely without guidance by the teacher: only in the weeks immediately before the final summative exam do I provide two sessions with the opportunity to

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have their last remaining questions on language and text answered⁴⁷. The mid-term exam is hence meant to both finalise the activities of the course's first half, and prepare students for those of the second half. The first half of the course classes is devoted to discussion of the various methodologies with which to approach the texts and the issues raised by them. In the course's second half, students explore a reception piece of their own choice, and write both a conference abstract and an essay, guided by weekly sessions fuelled by peer-to-peer and teachers' feedback. Through a mid-term exam I prepare them for the assignments in the second half, and make them think about strategies to approach the abundance of materials, resources, and digital instruments⁴⁸:

*Choose **four** questions to answer from the first eight questions below. **Every-one** answers **question no. 9**. Refer, when asked and where possible and relevant, in your answers (ca. 150 words per answer/essay) to the secondary literature discussed (list of references at the end of the exam). Use further online resources to actualise your answers, and to delve deeper in accordance with personal preferences.*

1. Agamemnon is a character from Greek mythology, a set of narratives in which characters often remain one-dimensional. Elaboration of Agamemnon in a genre like tragedy results in more detailed and rounded characterization. Describe the three most important contributions of tragedy to the representation of the character Agamemnon. Also mention an aspect of the description that had to remain behind in mythology.
2. 'Agamemnon is more about Clytaemnestra's guilt than Agamemnon's'. Plea in favour of, or against this thesis.

⁴⁷ Peer-to-peer feedback and collaborative mock examination helps students prepare, especially in a technology-enhanced learning environment (Swan *et al.* 2006; Keppell *et al.* 2006, pp. 455-456: «ICT is a process of enhancing teaching and learning; a process of empowering learners and equipping students with necessary skills needed for the future [Jonassen *et al.*, 2003]. Wang and Kinuthia [2004] define technology-enhanced learning environments as having four characteristics: 'using technology to motivate people, using technology to enrich learning resources, using technology to implement learning and instructional strategies and using technology to assess and evaluate learning goals' [p. 2725]»).

⁴⁸ The bibliography at the end of the mid-term exam lists the references that have been used in preparation for the sessions so far.

3. *Agamemnon* is a tragedy about retribution and justification. Different playwrights apply different sets of values and arguments, against different societal backgrounds. Phrase a research question with which to compare the various 'messages' in the plays by Aeschylus and Seneca. Provide a comprehensive elucidation.
4. *Agamemnon* is a tragedy with a remarkable man-woman intercommunication. Exemplify the remarkable intercommunication by going into how the various 'roles' taken up by Cassandra define the parts of tragedy allotted to men and to women.
5. Aeschylus and Seneca both form part of the tradition; at the same time, both are instances of reception. How would you describe the relationship between their versions of *Agamemnon*?
6. In Homer's *Odyssey* (epic, ca. 800 BCE), the events centring around Agamemnon, his son, wife, and concubine are being used by various narrators to hold up a mirror to Odysseus, his son Telemachus, and his wife Penelope: Odysseus must watch his back upon returning home, and Telemachus should follow Orestes' example! Describe how the exemplary function of Agamemnon *cum suis* changes in modern reception pieces.
7. To a modern audience, a tragedy like *Agamemnon* may express the 'triumph of independent, strong women': commentators describe the actions of female characters in emancipatory terminology. Use three examples drawn from the tragedy's text to illustrate the thesis that the actions of the female characters must be evaluated against the contemporary societal background.
8. Aeschylus and Seneca both rework, each in their own way, the Agamemnon-myth as it was handed down by tradition. Which of the two versions best presents, in your opinion, Agamemnon as both the leading and the bleeding character?
9. In antiquity, Agamemnon is being presented in the genres epic, lyric poetry, and tragedy. Argue for the choice of (modern) genre to best revive the character of Agamemnon: a real-time digital novel on *Facebook*, a vlog on *YouTube*, a product of fan-fiction, or a *Game of Thrones* spin-off.

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Obviously, the essay-questions of the mid-term exam are not meant to check to what extent the sources already discussed have been learned by heart: the questions are presented as a take-home examination, encouraging students to consider the material already discussed and (re-)presented as their starting point. In choosing questions, students tend to favour nos. 1, 2, 7, and 8, probably because of their reliance on the texts already studied: all four questions are primarily text-based, and may be answered confidently through 'traditional philology'. Question 3 is generally avoided. Students' feedback makes clear that they experience the wording of a research question as too difficult a task within the limitations of a 3-hour exam – despite the possibility of consulting online resources. Question 8 is favoured for the opportunity to work from opinion and preference, whereas the combination of opinion and methodology in no. 5 is less popular. No. 9 is mandatory: remarkably enough, students in general 'forget' to reference the relevant sources while drawing up their preferred vlog or fan-fiction. Their approach of a more creative assignment like no. 9 suggests that the initial step in answering the questions is one of two: either referenced with sources, or fully to one own's familiarity with the suggested reception media.

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As a final example, I present the rubric with which students were encouraged to provide peer-to-peer feedback, in four rounds, on each other's abstracts with regard to an *Agamemnon* reception piece of their preference. The rubric supplements the oral feedback in class and the written comments inserted in the abstracts' PDF:

An abstract (or pitch) is evaluated with regard to: 1. Mission statement. 2. Use of literature/sources/examples to illustrate both <i>status</i> and <i>lightning talk</i> . 3. Content and scope of the conclusion. 4. Formal requirements (word count, phrasing, references). 'Insufficient' and 'exceeds' leave room for written commentary.					
	Insufficient	6/10	7/10	8/10	Exceeds
1		Adequate title, transparent and unambiguous (research) question.	Challenging and provocative, does not elicit an easy answer.	Works from a new insight, illustrates a new perspective.	
2		Uses recent literature, adequate summary of <i>status</i> , own examples.	Focuses on one aspect of the SQ, coherent treatment of the question, solution-oriented approach.	Problematizing SQ with explicit relevance, solution-oriented and actualising hypothesis.	
3		Conclusion answers the question.	Scope of the conclusion is widened with examples.	Scope of the conclusion is suggestive of more widely applicable methodology.	
4		Phrases correctly, minimal (preferably recent) referencing.	Phrases appealingly.	Phrases convincingly, uses omnifarious references.	

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The rubric is primarily meant to encourage peer-to-peer feedback, and to suggest the appropriate wording for it. Insufficiencies and exceeding achievements require wordings of their own: both empty spaces, *insufficient* and *exceeds*, are regularly used by students to comment on their own, and each other's abstracts. As a case in point, the acceptance of an abstract for a conference presentation or an invited article is considered sufficient reason to award a fellow student a higher mark than 8/10. A wide range of additional secondary sources is taken for granted, but not rewarded until proof of its use in an elaborated article. In general, students evaluate their own achievements and progress in abstract writing modestly, but peers' reference to the rubric's suggestions prove to be convincing. As a final confirmation of marks, students tend to rank the abstracts from the best to the least: explicitly explaining the strengths and weaknesses of the abstracts, they refer to the way an expanding online search enabled a fellow student to better assess the relevance and topicality of the mission statement. Evaluation of the extent to which an acquiring online attitude results in a challenging research question or statement turns out to be peers' benchmark for considering the achievement as sufficient.

In their course evaluations, students particularly appreciated peer-to-peer feedback's contribution to their motivation for, and confidence in, the ability to engage with the ubiquitously available online materials on the *Agamemnon* and its reception. Initially experienced as an acceptable alternative for the real-time class instruction and cooperation during a health crisis, openness to online exploration and pathfinding was soon enough recognised as an essential aspect of higher education teaching. One of my drama students aptly (at least in my view) described the newly found attitude as a 'change of mask'.

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Abstract.

Given the special circumstances during a pandemic, and the continuing need to keep improving the quality of teaching through suitable didactic strategies, this paper argues for a further development of the formative approach of teaching in order to make accessible the full repertory of online available resources. For the study of ancient Greek theatre, due to its strong ties with the 'visual-based' Reception, Cultural and Performance Studies, the formative approach is especially well suited. Formative assessment's main objective is to contribute to the learning process through feedback and criticism.

The unlimited availability of study material, and the possibility (and challenge) of contributing to this material through peer-to-peer feedback and participation in work-in-progress, are opportunities that the digital age offers, and have not been on offer on such scale before. The study of classics rapidly develops into students' participation, criticism, and contribution through the wealth of online initiatives and projects concerning lexica, editions of texts, fragments, and commentaries, and the archiving and reworking of reception pieces. In online teaching, digital philology has become a students' assignment too. Formative assessment encourages students to 'learn-through-participation' and immersion.

Keywords.

Formative assessment, teaching ancient drama, covid-19, digital humanities, feedback literacy.

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