Using Project Work in Alternative Assessment

Chapter · January 2011

CITATION
1

READS
7,097

1 author:

Ana Maria Elisa Diaz de la Garza
Autonomous University of Chiapas
26 PUBLICATIONS **16** CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

A guidebook for Assessing Learning

A Guidebook for Assessing Learning

Primera Edición 2011
Empresas Ruz, S.A. de C.V.

Colina de Acónitos No. 11
Fraccionamiento Boulevares.
Naucalpan, Estado de México.
C.P. 53140
Tel. 55 5562.3802

Diagramación
Hildebrando Cota Guzmán.

ISBN 978 607 7617 20 4

Printed in Mexico
Impreso en México

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

This book is intended to offer a view of alternative forms of assessment since according to Huba & Freed (2000), assessment is a systematic process of gathering, interpreting, and acting upon data related to student learning and experience for the purpose of developing a deep understanding of what students know, understand, and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experience; the process culminates when assessment results are used to improve subsequent learning.

It includes our attempt as teacher trainers to address alternative forms of assessment in an effort to foster support for teachers in a collaborative learning environment. This book will help you to explore practices around grading that are fair, reasonable, and focus on learning rather than task completion.

We hope to encourage other practitioners to continue exploring the value of alternative forms of assessment in their own professional venues since we believe that an increased use of meaningful (authentic) assessments that involve students in selecting and reflecting on their learning means that teachers will have access to a wider range of evidence with which to judge whether students are becoming competent, purposeful learners. It also means that study programs will become more responsive to students' differing learning styles and value student diversity. Finally, programs that focus on alternative assessment are likely to foster lifelong critical thinking skills that will allow for scaffolding for future learning, and thus enables students to evaluate what they learn both in as well as outside of the classroom.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Throughout our teaching careers we have had the opportunity to work with many valuable colleagues who have been fundamental in our development both personally as well as professionally. Our Values, Attitudes and Beliefs (VABs) have evolved as a result of this process and we wish to thank all of them for being there.

We would like to thank all the faculty of the University of Chiapas, especially the Tuxtla Language School for helping us to write this book. Similarly, we are grateful to Teacher Trainers, Trainees, graduate students and administrators, as well as the authors for their cooperation, collaboration, suggestions, time and understanding during the process of this study.

We are especially grateful to the Reader, Dr. Tony Wright, from the College of St. Mark and St. John (MARJON) affiliated with the University of Exeter ; Dr. Alfredo Marin Marin from the University of Quintana Roo, and Dr. Saul Santos García from the University of Nayarit for their valuable suggestions and feedback to improve this book.

Finally, as always, our thanks to our families for providing us with their loving support and encouragement to develop our Knowledge, Awareness and Skills (KAS) both personally as well as professionally.

Assessment for Learning in ELT

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF APPENDICES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADFs: Asynchronous Discussion Forums

ANUIES: Asociación Nacional de Universidades Públicas de Educación Superior **(National Mexican Association of Higher Education)**

B.Ed: Bachelor in Education

CIEES: Comités Interinstitucionales de Evaluación de la Educación Superior **(Evaluation Committees for Higher Education)**

COTE: Certificate for Overseas Teachers of English

DIP TESP: Diploma in Teaching English for Specific Purposes

EDUCAD: Distance Education

ESP: English for Specific Purposes

ELT: English Language Teaching

KAS: Knowledge/Awareness & Skills

ICELT: In Service Course for English Language Teachers

ITT: Initial Teacher Training

IT: Information Technology

LEI: Licenciatura en la Enseñanza del Inglés **(B.Ed Language Teaching Programme)**

OHT: Over Head Transparencies

OHP: Over Head Proyector

PIFI: Proyecto Integral para el Fortalecimiento Institucional. **(Educational Projects for Higher Education)**

QCA: The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

SEP: Secretaría de Educación Pública **(Mexican Educational Board)**

UNACH: Universidad Autónoma de Chiapas **(Autonomous University of Chiapas)**

VABs: Values, attitudes and beliefs

INTRODUCTION

This book is intended to help teachers and students with the use of alternative methods of assessment in B.Ed Language Teaching Programmes. According to Stiggins (1991), alternative assessment "consists of any method of finding out what a student knows or can do that is intended to show growth and inform instruction, and is an alternative to traditional form of testing." (1991, in O' Malley and Valdez, 1996:1)

Due to the recent changes that the University of Chiapas has undertaken, the three schools of languages in Chiapas adopted and adapted the new UNACH Curriculum Innovation Project (UNACH-CIP) in which instruction is based on learner-centered and experiential learning approaches. The main goal of the UNACH-CIP is to encourage learners to become more responsible for their own learning, showing evidence of reflection and a critical attitude towards developing knowledge and teaching practice (Proyecto Académico 2002-2006) .Thus, the B.Ed Language Teaching Programme has to implement this guideline by acknowledging that reflection is an important element to achieve quality in learning.

Based on the essential elements proposed by Breen and Candlin (1980) which is illustrated in Figure 1 below, the committee had strong motives for including reflective practice as alternative methods on assessment.

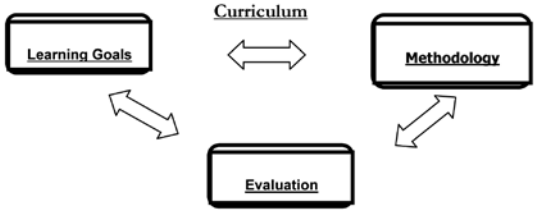


Fig. 1: UNACH Curriculum Guidelines for renewing Progra

(After Breen and Candlin, 1980)

These changes in the curriculum created the need for the Curricular Committee to choose a more formative approach in which both the assessment methods and the teaching strategies can achieve the learning goals set. Upon this, Fish (1989:184-185) states "if the goal is to produce a reflective practitioner, then the student must be more involved in assessment and the assessment itself must be focused.

How to use this book

This book may be read from cover to cover or on a chapter-by chapter basis. It is divided into three parts: the first part is a chapter called foundation on assessment for learning. The reader may find both the theory of assessment and the answers to some questions such as: why, how, when and what to assess. Issues related to feedback and reflection to enhance learning as well as a number of tables in which the reader may obtain practical tips to self-assess their teaching are included. At the beginning of the chapter the terms assessment and evaluation are distinguished since both concepts tend to be considered as synonyms. As the whole book is focused on assessment, it is expected that readers have a clear understanding of both concepts because assessment is an unending and unavoidable aspect of our teaching practice.

The second part of this book deals with assessment methods for teacher training. The reader will be able to explore 11 techniques to assess their students such as: Asynchronous Discussion Forums, Case Studies, Dialogue Journals, Essays, Learning Logs, Presentations, Teachers Performance in Practicum, Project work, Portfolio, and Observation. Each chapter includes a brief overview to set the scene, a definition of the methods, how to use them and samples on how to assess them. The examples provided in this book are drawn from a variety of different teaching and training contexts. Each author has experienced assessing methods in their area of expertise with their own BA ELT students identifying the advantages

and disadvantages of using each method. Finally, each chapter concludes with a number of sources.

The third part of this book explores assessment methods for language learning. Although the methods used for oral interviews, reports and peer and self assessment can be used for assessing BA ELT students, the examples are mainly focused on learning English. The reader will find a similar structure of the chapters mentioned before: an overview, definitions, how to use them and samples how to assess them, as well as a variety of sources. The last chapter deals with forms of assessing translation. Even though this chapter is not focused on teaching or learning a language, it was considered an essential topic since translation is one of the courses taken in some B.Ed Language Teaching Programmes in Mexico. The reader will find the information in Spanish since most of the translations are direct (from English to Spanish).

Part I

Foundation on Assessment for Learning

Chapter 1

What's the theory behind assessment?

Lucia Escobar Hernández
Elizabeth Us Grajales

"Be wary of standardized models and approaches"

(Brookfield, 1990)

Overview

This paper outlines the role of assessment in the teaching-learning process. The first section states the difference between evaluation and assessment because both concepts tend to be considered as synonyms. Then, explanations of the role of assessment as well as the principles about assessment are presented. The second section deals with assessment issues such as types of assessment: traditional and authentic as well as the answers for the following questions why, how, when and what to assess. The third section analyzes concepts on the assessment theory such as: reliability and validity; formative and summative; the role of feedback and the grading system. Finally, an explanation on both teachers' and students' beliefs on assessment and the relationship between teaching and assessment is included.

1.1 Misconception on assessment

We need to make clear the difference between evaluation and assessment since there are still teachers and students who tend to confuse them**.** As teachers many of us frequently misuse

them one for another, for instance, when a teacher applies an exam or test and he refers to it as evaluating students rather than assessing students' learning. Some authors such as Lethaby (2002); Rea-Dickins and Germaine (1992); Rayment (2006) and Tanner and Jones (2003) have defined these concepts as follows:

Evaluation for Rea.-Dickins and Germaine (1992: 3) "… is an intrinsic part of teaching and learning […] it is important […] because it provides […] information to use for the future […into the classroom], for the planning courses, and for the management of learning tasks and students" Similarly Lethaby (2002:1) defines it as "… a broader concept … evaluation refers more to student's behavior, attitudes goals and needs, learning styles and strategies; and the information is used as the basis for decision-making and planning about the program." We can infer that without evaluation (,) teachers, students and institutions could not know if the course have reached the learning outcomes stated in a programme or if the training context, teaching material, and teaching performance were appropriate.

According to Lethaby (2002:1) "assessment refers to the process by which we determine what learners are able to do by the end of a particular time frame…." Likewise, Tanner and Jones (2003) comment that "assessment means much more than examination, testing and marking. It goes far beyond the process of measuring pupils against standards". We can say that assessment is a process which measures students' progress, where we may find their strengths and weaknesses.

Traditionally, the purpose of assessment is for placement, promotion, graduation, or retention. In the context of school reform, assessment is an essential tool for evaluating the effectiveness of changes in the teaching-learning process. Lethaby (2002:1) considers that "assessment takes place after something [a task, a lesson…]; while evaluation does it all the time."

However, in an educational context, assessment is, according to Rayment (2006:2)

- A method of enquiry to determine the extent of learning.
- A method to acquire and collect essential feedback.
- The process of evaluating students within an educational context.
- The process of documenting knowledge, skills, attitude and beliefs.
- An essential teaching approach and technique.
- A cyclical and continuous process to evaluate teaching and learning should continue.
- A diagnostic and evaluative tool.

Having stated the difference between assessment and evaluation, let us turn to a discussion regarding the role of assessment and the rationale for using it.

Assessment plays an important role concerning any course/program; in fact it determines what students must do in order to achieve qualifications. (Wallace, 1991) The rationale for assessment should be carried out seriously to assure that assessment is covering the aims and objectives of the course as a whole, that does not mean it is a matter of routine. As Rea-Dickins (cited in Wu, 2003:6) mentions "the role assessment plays in teaching can be positive; nevertheless, inappropriate assessment also has the potential to obstruct learning or to cause negative influence in students learning attitude". If assessment is to play an important role in any program or course, teachers need to be aware of its importance and must be helped on developing and implementing a variety of methods to encourage learning. Otherwise, assessment would be no more than a meaningless practice rather that an integral part of the teaching and learning process.

The rationale for using assessment is to measure, motivate and encourage learning. However some principles must be taken into account in order to carry out an assessment appropriately. Furthermore, it can be an effective part of a teaching

cycle because teachers may also obtain feedback from their learners.

According to Wallace (1991:126-127) the following principles might have relevance to most courses:

- The assessment should be appropriately diagnostic and formative, providing feedback to staff and trainees [students] alike on the extent to which learning objectives are being realised, and on the existence of learning difficulties and the need for help and improvement.

- The assessment should be summative: it should constitute a valid and reliable measure of academic and professional achievement.

- Forms of assessment should also be varied, and progressively more demanding as the course proceeds in order to allow the trainees to demonstrate a range of expertise, and develop reflection.

- The load of assessment should be sufficient to yield adequate information (both to trainees and their tutors) on the trainees' progress, but not so heavy that they are denied sufficient time for reading and reflection.

- The distribution of assessment should BE such that the trainees are not under excessive pressure at certain points of the course and insufficiently stretched at others.

Considering that learning involves teachers and learners the use of *feedback* plays an important role for the assessing methods since it promotes reflection and enables both teacher and student to modify their behaviour within both the teaching and learning purposes. The principles mentioned before might be relevant in different teaching and learning contexts. They may be useful to help teachers to better understand how to apply them correctly in their classes and to improve their own teaching performance.

After this comment on the role of assessment, it is necessary to consider different issues related to it. Black and Broadfoot (1982: ix) points out that "the most strongly held view of assessment is that it is an integral and essential part of the teaching and learning process". In the same way, he argues (1979) that "assessment has to be regarded, then, not merely as a means of measuring outcomes but also as an aid to learning." We believe that feedback is the key to reach learning and reflection. According to Moon (2002:109), "feedback from assessment may enable learners to make decisions about future choices in learning." Students are the only ones who can decide if they want to improve or change their knowledge, skills, awareness and attitudes.

Moreover, Carless (2003) suggests that a good assessment practice is achieved through non-judgmental feedback. He also considers feedback as the key word for learning, teaching and assessment.

There are many different types of assessment that are suitable for a range of activities and tasks. Henceforth, it is important to master how we assess with what we are assessing in order to ensure that we are making the most of the process. Mueller (2006) classifies types of assessment into traditional and authentic.

Traditional assessment: refers to the forced-choice measures of multiple choices tests, fill in the blanks, true false or matching. Students select the answer or recall the information to complete the assessment. These tests may be standardized, administered locally, statewide or internationally. (Mueller, 2006:2)

Authentic assessment: is used to describe the multiple forms of assessment that reflect student learning, achievement, motivation, and relevant attitudes towards classroom activities. For example: portfolio, self-assessment, reports, case studies, projects, presentations, among others. O'Malley and Valdez (1993)

For a wider understanding, authentic assessment will be illustrated in the following chapters of this guidebook. Authentic assessment was classified by Rowntree (1994) into two categories: product and process assessment. Product assessment is where there is a physical product to assess. The product could be a piece of writing or a test. The process or performance assessment is where there is the assessment of an activity (e.g. a role play), which may or may not result in a product. (Lethaby, 2002)

Both product and process assessment can be administered and balanced in a classroom. It depends on what teachers want to measure in their students' learning. The following section will answer some questions related to authentic assessment.

1.2 Why to assess

According to Jarvis (2002: 161) " [assessment] has many different purposes, takes many different forms, has different levels of reliability and validity, takes place at different points in the learner's career and has findings communicated in different ways." In addition Tummons (2005:5) states that" assessment will be a permanent and unavoidable aspect of our professional role…" because in an educational context teachers and students as well as institutions take assessment as a compulsory requirement. However, each one has different reasons which will be explained below:

Teachers need to provide diagnostic and formative feedback to learners, in order to gather information for reporting purposes (grades), and also identify the appropriate level for a new student (placement), and to determine whether or not a student meets program requirements (certification), and finally to motivate learners to study and make steady progress.

Students need to know what is expected from them, and what they can do to improve their performance, and to understand what will comprise their course grade, and, finally, to judge evaluation as fair and meaningful.

There are many authors such as Lethaby (2002), Moon (2002), Tanner and Jones (2003), Jarvis (2002), Mohamed (2004), Rayment (2005) who have stated the reasons for assessing students. The purposes for assessment may include some of the following:

- To measure student progress
- To guide students and encourage improvement
- To grade students according to level or ability
- To diagnose weaknesses and enable students to remedy their errors
- To provide feedback on the effectiveness of the teaching methods
- To provide motivation for students
- To measure the objectives of the course
- To check if learners have understood the material taught
- To help learners to assess their own performance

As we could see above, there are many reasons for assessing students' learning. As teachers we should be aware of what students know (knowledge) or what students can do, and how well they can do it (skill; performance) and also how students feel about their work (motivation, effort) and finally how students go about the task of doing their work (process/reflection).

1.3 How to assess

Nowadays there is too much theory about the use of authentic assessment and its significance towards teaching and learning. Since "the only mode of assessment practiced in schools around the world has been tests at the end of the term or [semester]." (Cuartas 2000:45)

Likewise, in our Mexican system, tests have long been used for grading students. On the other hand, Cuartas (2000:45) argues that "assessment should be carried out by the teachers in the school and it should have different forms, not just testing" Assessment needs to be a continuous practise using different methods to be valid and reliable.

Table 1 shows ways to manage assessment suggested by Mohamed (2004):

MAINTAINING RECORDS:		COMMENTS
Be meticulous:		Record all the marks or grades immediately and systematically.
Keep assessment records in a computer and as paper copies:		Keep several back up copies in case of disasters.
Enlist the help of other people:		This is especially useful if you are not too keen on number-crunching and the use of technology, or when marking list.
REDUCING THE BURDEN		**COMMENTS:**
Reduce the number of assignments:		Assess only when it is necessary.
Reduce the length of assignments:		Set words limits to essays
Include of a variety of assessment procedures:		Do not simply stick to written assessment, which invariably involve a heavy marking load.
Involve student and encourage peer and self- assessment		When students have being assessed either by each other by themselves, it will be easier to monitor their work rather than doing all the assessment yourself from scratch.

Table 1: Ways to manage assessment (Mohamed, 2004:14)

We believe that these tips are useful for teachers because assessment is complex and as teachers we need to be careful when using them.

1.4 When to assess

This section answers the question of when to assess students' learning. "Any teacher involved in continuous assessment and interested in the formative aspect of assessment should assess and / or test students as often as they consider appropriate in order to obtain significant feedback concerning the teaching and learning process" (Cuartas, 2000:70). Definitely, teachers are the only ones who know the appropriate time to provide feedback and to check students' progress. Mohamed

also provides tips for teachers about when to assess. See table 2 below:

RECOMMENDATIONS	COMMENTS
Spread the assessment out throughout the semester or year	Systematic assessment throughout the year will allow feedback to be provided to students and allow them the opportunity to improve their work.
Decide carefully what you want to measure	Spend time designing tasks that will measure exactly this. Refrain from assessing the same skills or language points repeatedly
Involve the students in deciding when to assess	Allow them to decide and / or to agree on the hand in dates for assessments. This will provide them with a sense of ownership and responsibility for their own learning.
Occasionally set assignments on things that have not yet been covered in class	This is very effective in alerting students to what they need to learn during the course, and allows them to be more receptive to the topic when it is addressed later.
Be firm in sticking to deadlines	Let students know well before the due date as well as what the penalties will be for late hand-ins.

Table 2: Recommendation for assessing learning (Mohamed, 2004:12)

These recommendations might be useful for novice teachers since, sometimes, they seem not to know when the most appropriate time to assess is.

1.5 What to assess

Lethaby (2002:5) considers that teachers should assess the "knowledge and skills [they] have set down as learning outcomes and course goals [… since] there is a very close connection between objective and assessment. Learning outcomes will decide the kinds of learning events and tasks that can be set for students" Moreover Moon (2002:17) defines learning outcomes as "statement about what the learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do at the end of a module and of how that learning will be demonstrated." These authors believe that teachers need to take into account not only the content of a programme, but also the learning outcomes so that they can decide what and how to assess their students' learning. Sometimes novice teachers do not know what to assess, so they ask their students to carry out easy assignments or tasks to be graded. Mohamed (2004) provides a questionnaire to help teachers get ideas on it. See table 3 below:

	QUESTIONNAIRE
1.	Do we want to assess the product or the process?
2.	Do we want to test students' knowledge of the language or their ability to use it?
3.	Do we want to assess teaching or learning?
4.	Does the assessment require the allocation of grades or marks or is it more essential to provide detailed feedback on students' performance?
5.	Is the assessment [objective] (where there is only one right answer) or [subjective] (where students are free to demonstrate individually or diversity)?
6.	Should the assessment be holistic, integrating material from a variety of areas, or should it be serial, concentrating on a specific aspect of the language?
7.	Should the assessment be norm-referenced (measuring student's achievement in relation to that of other students) or criterion-referenced (measuring the students performance against a set of criteria)?

Table 3: A questionnaire for knowing what to assess (Mohamed, 2004:12)

These questions might be useful for teachers who find it difficult to decide what to assess. As we have mentioned above, teachers should bear in mind that learning outcomes are not separated from content, assessment criteria and assessment methods.

1.6 Assessment theory

Some fundamental concepts will be explained to understand this moral and complex activity. The first concepts are validity and reliability. According to Tanner and Jones (2003) all assessments methods should be reliable and valid, but there is always a disagreement between them, which is difficult to balance.

1.6.1 Reliability and Validity

According to Brown and Knight (1994:14), "reliability refers to making sure any assessment result describes the phenomenon being assessed and it is not a product of the measurement instrument used." Moreover, Lethaby (2002:12) says that it basically asks the question:

'Can we trust the results of the assessment?' Would we get different results if the assessment was done again or assessed by a different person? If the answer to either of these

questions is yes, then we can say that our assessment task is not reliable. This is affected by questions such as; how subjective is the scoring? Was the assessment done under the same circumstances by everyone? In other words, we want to know whether the assessment is a consistent measurement of what it is supposed to measure.

On the other hand, validity "has the primary meaning of measuring what you set out to measure." (Brown and Knight, 1994:17). It is very difficult to balance both of them as Lethaby (2002:14) states:

When we improve the reliability of an assessment method (for instance by making it more objective), the validity may tend to drop. When we try to improve the validity of the assessment method such as by giving the people to be assessed more freedom in how they carry out the task to be assessed, the reliability of the test may tend to diminish.

Therefore in our local context, it is important to include a variety of assessment methods in order to be consistent and fair when grading students' learning. Hughes (1989) proposes some ways to improve reliability in assessment methods which are illustrated in table 4 below:

RECOMMENDATIONS	COMMENTS
Take enough samples of behaviour	Make sure the assessment method has plenty of items.
	This is essential so that the person taking the assessment
Write unambiguous items	may not interpret the question in a way that the assessment designer did not intend
Provide clear and explicit instructions	The test-taker's performance must clearly be a result of their language ability and not a result of their ability to understand and interpret the instructions
Ensure that tests are well laid out and perfectly legible	We must be sure that the performance of the test taker is not affected by their ability to read the test
Students should be familiar with format and testing techniques	There should be no surprises on the test in terms of what students are expected to do.
Provide uniform and non-distracting conditions of administration	The length of time given and the surrounding conditions should be the same for everyone.
Provide a detailed scoring key	What is acceptable and how many points will be awarded must be decided and agreed on by the scorer(s).
Train scorers	Make sure that all assessors are doing the same thing in a standardised manner
Agree upon acceptable responses and appropriate scores at the outset of scoring	All students must play with the same rules

Table 4: Proposals for improving reliability (Hughes, 1989: 36-42)

Even though these recommendations are focused on testing, they can also be useful for other alternative methods of assessment.

1. 6.2 Formative and summative assessment

Assessment can be done at various times throughout a program. A comprehensive assessment plan will include formative and summative assessment; although assessment can take many forms, it is useful to separate each process into two categories: formative and summative.

Tummons (2005:31-32) considers formative assessment as " the assessment that takes place during the course or a programme or study, as an integral part of the learning process […] it is often informal […] carried out by teachers and trainers while teaching and training […and] defined as an assessment for learning" Formative assessment is often done at the beginning or during a program, thus providing the opportunity for immediate evidence for students' learning in a particular course of at particular point in a program. Formative assessment is an integral part of effective teaching and learning that is commonly conducted during the whole course. Similarly, William and Black (cited in Tanner and Jones, 2005:43) argue that "high-quality formative assessment has a powerful impact on learning." However, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, QCA (2001) agrees that effective formative assessment represents a key strategy for raising standards. They recommend that "formative assessment or assessment for learning must:

- Be embedded in the teaching and learning process of which it is an essential part
- Share learning goals with pupils
- Help pupils to know and to recognize standards to aim for

- Provide feedback which lead pupils to identify what they should do next to improve

- Have a commitment that every pupil can improve

- Involve both teacher and pupils in reviewing and reflecting on pupils' performance and progress

- Involve pupils in self-assessment

(Tanner and Jones, 2003:43-44)

On the other hand, summative assessment is a process that generally takes place at the end of a stage or task and summarizes the extent of learning that has taken place. It is a much more rigid form of assessment.

According to Tummons (2005: 39)

"Summative assessment is assessment of learning […] teachers[…] use [it] to discover what a student has achieved during the programme of study […] carried out at or towards the end of a course. It is always a formal process and is used to see if students have acquired the skills, knowledge, behaviors or understanding that the course sets out to provide them with. "

Likewise Lethaby (2002: 10) states that "summative assessment reports on what has been learned and takes place after the course of learning (or part of it). An exam would be an example of summative assessment. A key indicator is the fact that it is graded."

Rayment (2006:32, 33) in table 5 below makes a comparison demonstrating the two main forms of assessment and how a teacher might use them in the classroom:

These two forms of assessment demonstrate the importance of using them in the classroom. Teachers can work with both of them for their relevance to encourage students' learning and to check students' progress.

FORMATIVE	SUMMATIVE
Formative assessment informs the learning	Summative assessment sums up learning
Occurs continuously in a classroom environment	Is carried out by both subject teachers and a board of external examiners
Involves both teachers and learners in a process of continual review and consideration regarding levels of progress	Is carried out at the end of a unit, Key stage, year, or when the pupil is about to leave school
Provides constructive and encouraging feedback, allowing individuals to take responsibility for their own learning	Useful for making judgments regarding the pupil's progress and their performance in relation to national standards
Allows lesson plans to be assessed and adjusted as necessary, making teachers instantly aware of any potential problems or areas of difficulty.	Provides an overview of the pupil's achievements at the end of crucial stages in their education
Allows a teacher to plan lessons in line with their pupils' abilities	Usually presented in the form of a monitored test or exam and is more commonly written than oral
Is an exceptional asset to maintain effective and high-quality teaching standards	May be used to monitor the performance of a whole school or group, not just an individual
May involve oral or written feedback	

Table 5: Difference between formative and summative (Rayment 2006:32, 33)

1.6.3 The role of feedback

Marking student's work is not enough to achieve the benefits of assessment; the feedback provided to the students with their marked work is equally as important. According to Tummons (2005:75) "feedback describes the dialogue between the teacher or trainer and the students and it is an integral part of the assessment process." Similarly, Tanner and Jones (2003:59) agree that "feedback occurs in real time two-way interaction as part of the teaching process."

Undoubtedly, feedback plays an important part of assessment because it allows the students to know how well they are doing or it can show them why they have not reached the required standards. Regarding this, Mohamed (2004:14) mentions that "feedback should be targeted to enhance learning, and should concentrate on what the student needs to improve.

Avoid being overly judgmental, as this can be very discouraging." As teachers, we need to be tactful because students are human beings with feelings and students can be hurt if feedback is destructive.

Tummons (2005:75) also comments that "positive feedback can be seen as a reward for learning: confirmation from the tutor that the student has grasped a new skill or mastered a new body of knowledge." Both teachers and students can take advantage of positive feedback. For teachers, it allows them to measure their teaching practices, and for students, it helps them to become more aware of their individual progress.

According to Tanner and Jones (2003) oral feedback for writing tasks may be provided during the lesson in order to make sure that both teachers and students can talk and reflect upon what to do to improve. Sometimes students do not even read the written feedback on their notes that is why Tanner and Jones (2003) point out that oral feedback can help educators avoid taking students' work home and time consuming work. On the other hand, Mohamed (2004) suggests that group feedback also cuts down on the marking time if the mistakes are similar in the group. She considers that group feedback could be positive so students are able to see that they are not the only ones making the same mistake which could encourage them to work together.

As stated before, students are emotional with different personalities and self-esteem so "assignments covered in red ink without a single piece of positive feedback can be extremely intimidating and demotivating." (Mohamed, 2004:14) That is why the use of an ink colour other than red is recommended. She also recommends that teachers should provide positive feedback even when there is nothing good to say about the work. Those comments such as "I agree with your idea" "good point" could motivate students before telling them things to work on. "Criticism is important [… since] it will allow the students to see where they have gone wrong." (Mohamed, 2004:14) We consider these recommendations very helpful because as teachers we need to encourage learning.

Many authors such as Tummons (2005), Mohamed (2004) and Race (2001) have discussed feedback. Some useful suggestions about feedback are summarized in table 6 below:

SUGGESTIONS	COMMENTS
Be timely	The sooner the better, within a day or two
Be intimate and individual	Each student is still a person
Be empowering	Feedback is intended to consolidate learning
Be oriented to opening doors, not closing them	Be tactful
Be manageable	Too much feedback may result in not being able to sort out the important feedback
Try to write more than ticks	Ticks do not give much real feedback, comments do much more to motivate
Avoid putting crosses if possible	Short phrases such as 'no', 'not quite' can be much better ways of alerting students to things that are wrong
Try to make your writing legible	If there is not enough space to make comments, put code numbers or asterisks, and write your feedback on a separate sheet
Let students argue	When giving one-to-one feedback, it is often useful to allow students the opportunity to talk or to ask the teacher
Be realistic	When making suggestions for improvement of student work, consider carefully whether they can be achieved
Not to be linked to wealth	Check that you are not giving feedback on the amount of money spent on the work rather than the quality of content
Be clear and unambiguous	Our comments need to be clear, concise and easy to follow
Be specific and detailed	The more detailed, the more opportunity students have to learn from it.
Be supportive, formative and developmental.	Good feedback should allow students to build on his/her past successes and at the same time move away from errors.
Be understood	The students should be able to understand exactly how they have performed in reference to the criteria for the assessment and the course or program of study.

Table 6: Suggestions for feedback (Race, 2001: 86-89; Tummons, 2005:77-79; Mohamed, 2004:14)

Giving formative feedback demands time, a relaxing environment, patience and tolerance for both teachers and students. However feedback is a process in which participants need to be trained to follow the suggestions mentioned above.

1.6.4 Grading system

Our educational grading systems are mostly decided by institutional regulations. However, sometimes course design teams or committees have some freedom in deciding what form of grading system they should apply which can sometimes be dif-

ficult and problematic. This decision involves a great deal of hard work since we must then decide to break away from traditionalist education. Curriculum re-design committees have to be careful when establishing the aims and goals of the course, the types of assessment and the preferred grading system. In that case, we can mention that there are basically three approaches to this:

Wallace (1991:132) describes Norm-referencing as "a statistical concept whereby the total number of candidates is assumed to fall into some kind of 'normal distribution', in which there will be a few very able people, a few very weak people, and the majority scattered at various points in the middle."

On the contrary, Lethaby (2002:16) states that "criterion-referencing – classifies people according to whether they are able to perform some task or set of tasks satisfactorily." Douglas (2000:16), talks about "people who are taking a scuba diving test. It is clearly not important who knows more than someone else in this case, but what is important that the people who pass the test know the essential terms."

According to Tanner and Jones (2005: 5) the third referencing system is *ipsative* which is considered as the way "a learner […] might think that the main reference should be whether [he/she] is improving against [his/her] prior performance." Furthermore, Tummons (2005: 27) has commented that "*ipsative assessment* encourages "students to reflect on ways to facilitate and improve their learning and seek them out, it is a process which involves students and tutors in a dialogue facilitated by feedback:"

Even though there are three systems, our Mexican Educational System gives more emphasis on norm-referencing, which is why most courses place students in different categories: the best students get 10, good students get 9 or 8, and poor students get 6 or fail. As a result, most courses are not designed to assign a pass or fail score depending on the acquisition of Knowledge/Awareness and Skills (KAS).

1.7 Beliefs towards assessment

Graves (2000:26) points out that beliefs "come from your past experiences and the beliefs that grow out and guide that experience […] your education." Based on that quotation we can state that our beliefs on assessment also come from our past experiences as learners. Tanner and Jones (2003) consider that the word assessment can have positive or negative connotations to people since they have experienced assessment differently depending on if they were successful or if they were failing at school. As stated in the sections above, assessment is essential in the process of effective learning and teaching because it can encourage positive beliefs and attitudes in both teachers and students. Assessment means more than examination, testing and marking. It goes beyond the process of measuring students against standards.

1.7.1 Teachers' beliefs

According to Bailey and Jackson (in Richards, et al. 2001) change can refer to many things including knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, understanding, self awareness, and teaching practices. Several assumptions about the nature of teacher change underlie current approaches to teacher's professional development:

- Teachers' beliefs play a central role in the process of teacher development
- Changes in teachers' practices are the result of changes in teachers' beliefs
- The notion of teacher change is multi-dimensional and is triggered both by personal factors as well as the professional context in which teachers work

Teachers have their own professional ideologies and beliefs towards assessment. For that reason they may resist changing

from traditional to alternative assessment. According to Easen (1985:108), "If someone tries to change our long practiced experiences, those changes may bring up resentment and resistance to it. If we can learn to live with that change and to try to discover our purpose, perhaps both of us will change for the better…" Besides changes towards assessment implies more work since both teachers and students need to go through different stages to accept an assessment innovation. For example, they need to know the advantages and disadvantages of new assessment methods, they need to adopt and adapt them according to their needs, and then they have to train their students in the new assessment practices.

Kindsvatter, Willen, and Ishler (in Richards, 1996:30-31) state that teachers' beliefs are based on:

- Their own experience as language learners. All teachers were once students and their beliefs about teaching are often a reflection of how they themselves were taught.

- Experience of what works best. For many teachers experience is the primary source of beliefs about teaching. A teacher may have found that some teaching strategies work well and some do not

- Personality factors. Some teachers have a personal preference for a particular teaching pattern, arrangement, or activity because it matches their personalities.

- Principles derived from an approach or method. Teachers may believe in the effectiveness of a particular approach or method of teaching and consistently try to implement it in the classroom.

As teachers we tend to imitate teachers who have influenced our learning in the past and that is why it is difficult to accept innovations or change in our daily teaching practices. One way to understand new assessment practices is through personal reflection. "Teachers must become aware of the value of self-

evaluating their teaching practices because these practices affect students' learning processes, perceptions and everything they do in the language classroom." (Gomez, 2004:11)

1.7.2 Students' beliefs

Students also have their own beliefs towards assessment. Most of the time they think that tests are the only method through which they could be evaluated but when their teachers adopt different ones, they may also consider the new methods as tests. According to Tanner and Jones (2003:1) students have different feelings towards assessment such as the following:

- I'll be OK if I revise properly
- I can show that's what I'm worth
- I panic in a test and I don't do as well as I should
- Some people are just more intelligent than me

Students can feel insecure about the results they receive from teachers about their performance and progress because it may appear very subjective. According to Moon (2004: 114), "subjectivity is likely to creep into assessment process [because teachers] are humans. It is hard not to be influenced by what we read in an essay in front of us, liking or disliking views expressed in relation to our own consideration."

They are also concerns about learner's grades since most students have this misconception. They believe that the higher their grades are, the more knowledge they may need to grasp and achieve. Regarding this, Race (2001: 39) comments that "students pay more attention to their scores or grades when they receive marked work, and often they are blind to valuable feedback which may accompany their returned work."

We believe that students can also resist new assessment practices because they need to be trained in order to notice their advantages. Moon (1999:122) suggests that there are three approaches to learning:

The deep approach: the intention is to understand the idea by yourself when relating ideas to previous knowledge and experiences

The surface approach: the intention is to cope with course requirement by studying without reflecting on either purpose or strategy

The strategic approach: The intention is to achieve the highest grades possible by being alert to assessment requirement and criteria

Students´ approaches to learning depend on the beliefs which they hold. Therefore, strategic learners are the ones who can reach different degrees of reflections if they are aware that their learning will be graded. Similarly, deep learners are the ones who are reflective practitioners. However, surface learners are the ones who do not have a purpose for learning. As teachers, we need to be aware of these types of learners because we need to encourage them to move from traditional to alternative assessment.

1.8 Relationship between teaching and assessment

There is a close relationship between teaching and assessment because if teachers want to encourage students to reflect on their learning, teachers need to change their traditional teaching methods allowing students to be active and responsible for their own learning. According to O'Neil (cited in Gibbs, 1994:33), "a deep approach to learning is best fostered by teaching and assessment methods that promote active and long-term engagement with learning tasks." In the following sections we shall talk about a teaching approach which could help teachers to promote reflection in their learners.

1.8.1 Experiential learning

According to Saddington (cited in Moon, 2004:109), "Experiential learning is a process in which an experience is reflected upon and then translated into concepts which in turn become

guidelines for new experiences." Kolb (1984:42) proposes four stages which are illustrated below:

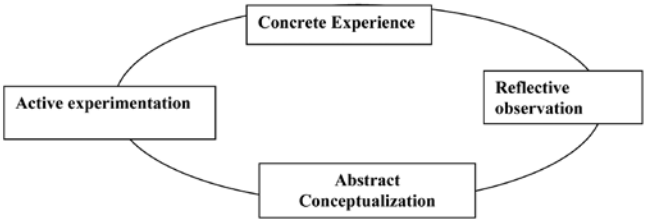


Fig 2: The Learning cycle

"Learners, if they are to be effective, need four different kinds of abilities which correspond to the four stages of this learning cycle: concrete experience abilities, reflective observation abilities, abstract conceptualization abilities and active experimentation abilities...any particular individual will have strengths in particular parts of these dimensions and will need to develop the skills to operate along the full range if they are to be effective. (Kolb, in Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1994:12-13)

Kolb identified four main learning styles based on the learning cycle.

- Learning through concrete experience- an engagement with direct experience (activist);
- Learning through critical reflection- observing experience from different perspectives and judging experience through a variety of criteria (reflectors);
- Learning through abstract conceptualisation- analysis experience to create new ideas, concepts and structures (theorists);
- Learning through active experimentation- using these new ideas, testing theories out in practice (experimenters).

(Rogers, 2002: 110)

However, as Rogers stresses (2002:111) "we all tend to use all these styles... but we prefer to use one or perhaps two modes of learning above the others."

This learning cycle can be useful for teachers and students because it allows them to recall, to do, to reflect, to analyze, to make decisions and to change. Experiential learning asks for conscious attention to the importance of the learners' experiences, attitudes and feelings about their own learning. If we can help learners improve their views of themselves as learners, they may become better learners and they would be able to use their learning strategies and skills more effectively.

Kolb (1984) classifies the importance of experiential learning based on the following arguments:

(1) *It facilitates personal growth:* teachers can help their students become more autonomous, strategic, and motivated in their learning so that they can apply their efforts and strategies in a variety of meaningful contexts beyond school.

2) *It helps learners adapt to social change:* Due to the fact that we are living in an uncertain society, teachers can provide learning opportunities in which students can be trained to face these changes.

(3) *Differences in learning ability;* some students are faster, others are slower and another type of students seem to have little ability even if they try hard.

(4) *Responds to learner needs and practical pedagogical consideration*. It takes into account students' needs therefore it can be adapted since each learner is unique.

This teaching approach is necessary for implementing alternative assessment methods in a classroom, for example; portfolios have been proved to be an effective means for reflection as well as for an effective learning. Regarding this, Melanie in (Gibbs, 1994:78) states that "...to explore innovative and exciting methods of teaching and learning… the practitioner of the future [adopts] more student-centered approaches… and

in turn this facilitates interesting ways of assessment, such as the portfolio" .

1.8.2 Assessment and reflection

Moon (2004: 82) states that reflection "is a process of reorganizing knowledge and emotional orientation in order to achieve further insights." It has been considered a complex issue since both teachers and learners are not used to being reflective. Besides, reflection is not mechanical and requires training. According to Fish (1985:78), "reflection processes are complex and involve both feelings and cognition".

However, Moon (2004) recommends writing reflective tasks so that we can provide students with learning opportunities in which, as teachers, we could encourage them to move from a surface approach to a deep approach. Likewise Moon (2004:134) emphasizes that "it is worth remembering that [teachers] who introduce reflective activities are likely to be those who understand reflection". Students as well as teachers need training and practice in order to use reflective activities effectively, and all this training takes time and it should be done little by little. Hatton and Smith (cited in Moon, 2004: 97) propose three levels of reflection which are as follows:

Descriptive writing: Writing that is not considered showing evidence of reflection. It is a description with no conversation beyond description.

Dialogic reflection: There is a recognition that different qualities of judgment and alternatives explanations may exist for the same material. The reflection is analytical or integrative, although may reveal inconsistency.

Critical reflection: Demonstrates awareness that actions and events are not only located within and explicable by multiple perspectives, but are located in and influenced by multiple historical and socio-political contexts.

It is believed that persuading learners to reflect on their learning could be a difficult part of our teaching for most learners are used to descriptive writing. "The development of assessment criteria for reflective work is particularly difficult since often we are unsure what distinguishes reflection from academic and everyday processes." (Moon, 2002: 130) Similarly Moon (2002) wonders what the criteria should be to assess reflection, that is why she suggests assigning a (very) few marks to the reflective writing methods.

Summary

As a conclusion, we can say that assessment is essential in the learning and teaching process because it helps teachers and learners become aware of their strengths and weaknesses. As we have seen in this chapter formative assessment should be carried out during the course so that students and teachers have an opportunity to improve. We also explored how feedback can be a key element for learning and for reflection if teachers provide it in a non-judgmental way. Throughout this chapter we have shared some recommendations which can be helpful for teachers who are interested in improving their teaching practice. We believe that alternative methods on assessment can also be useful to promote reflection in students. However, we consider that reflection needs to be trained. As teachers, we cannot force students to adopt innovative assessment without changing their beliefs, attitudes, behaviour, feelings, skills and knowledge. In order for them to welcome an assessment innovation, teachers need to encourage learners to be significantly involved in it.

Bibliography

Black, W. and Broadfoot, P. (1982) Assessment schools and society. London: Methuen.

Boud, D. et al. (1994) Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Boud, K, and Walker R. D. (1985) Reflection: Turning experience into learning, London: Routledgefalmer.

Brown, S. and Knight, P. (1994) Assessing Learners in Higher Education. London: Kogan Page.

Carless, R. D. (2003) Putting the learning into assessment. The Teacher Trainer. 17/3.

Cuartas, C.F. (2000), Towards a Collaborative Approach to Assessment in Spanish Secondary Schools, Unpublished M. Ed. Dissertation. College of St. Mark and St. John/University of Exeter

Douglas, D. (2000) Assessing Language for Specific Purposes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Easen, P. (1985) Making School-Centred INSET Work. Milton Keynes. Open University Press

Fish, D. (1989) Learning Through Practice in Initial Teacher Education. London: Kogan Page.

Gibbs, G. (1994) Improving Student Learning: Through Assessment and Evaluation. Oxford: Oxford Brookes University,

Gómez, E. (2004) A study of five English as a Foreign Language Teachers' Beliefs Unpublished MA in ELT programme Dissertation, Department of Language and Linguistics, University of Essex

Graves, K. (2000) Designing Languages Courses. Ontario: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.

Hughes, A. (1989), Testing for Language Teachers, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Handal, G. and P., Promoting Reflective Teaching, (1987) "The Society for Research into Higher Education", England: Open University Press.

Jarvis, P. (2002) (ed) The Theory and Practice of Teaching. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Douglas, D. (2000) Assessing Language for Specific Purposes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Kohonen, V. et al. (2001) Experiential Learning in Foreign Language Education. London: Pearson Education.

Kolb, D.A. (1984) Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development. Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Lethaby, C. (2002) DTESP Handbook. Unit 10: Assessment and Evaluation. British Council.

Mohamed, N. (2004), Assessment for the right reasons English Teaching Professional Issue 31, March 2004

Moon, J. (1999) Reflection in Learning and Professional Development: Theory and Practice, London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Moon, J. (2002) The Module and Programme Development Handbook London: Kogan Page.

Moon, J. (2004) A Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning: Theory and Practice, London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Mueller, J. (2006) Authentic Assessment Toolbox, available http://jonathan.mueller.faculty.noctrl.edu/toolbox/ (accessed January 2007)

Murphy, D F. Edited by Alderson J. Charles, Lancaster Practical Papers in English Language education Vol. 6 Evaluation England: Pergamon Press.

O'Malley, J. M. Valdez P. L., (1996) Authentic Assessment for English Language Learners, Addison-Wesley Publishing Co. New York: Longman.

"Plan de Estudios de la Licenciatura en la Enseñanza del Inglés" (LEI) 1998 Escuelas de Lenguas Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Tapachula y San Cristóbal de las Casas.

"Plan de Estudios de la Licenciatura en la Enseñanza del Inglés" (LEI) 2006 Escuelas de Lenguas Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Tapachula y San Cristóbal de las Casas.

"Proyecto Académico UNACH" (2002-2006) Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas

QCA, (2001) Assessment for learning, at www.qca.ac.uk/ca/5-14/afl/ (accessed June 2006)

Race, P., (2001) A lecturer's toolkit 2nd edition, a practical guide to learning, teaching and assessment, London: Routledgefalmer.

Rayment, T. (2006) 101Essential List on assessment. London: Continuum.

Rea-Dickins, P. and Germaine, K. (1992.) Evaluation, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Richards, J.C. (1996)Reflective Teaching in 2nd. Language. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Richards, J.C. et al (2001)Exploring Teacher's Beliefs and the process of Change, The PAC Journal Vol. 1, No. 1 2001

Roger, A. (2002) (3rd ed) Teaching Adults. London: Open University Press.

Rowntree, D. (1994) Assessing Students: How shall we know them? London: Kogan Page.

Tanner, H. and Jones, S. (2003) Marking and assessment. London: Continuum.

Tanner, R. et al (2000) ELT Journal January 2000 Piloting Portfolios in pre-service teaching education, Oxford.

Tummons, J. (2005) Assessing Learning in Further Education, Exeter: Learning Matters.

Wallace, M. (1991) Training Foreign Language Teachers. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

White, R. V. (1988) The ELT curriculum, Massachusetts, Blackwell.

WU, Chiu-yi (2003) The Possibility of Introducing Portfolio Assessment in ELT in a PE High School in Taiwan, Published M.Ed. Dissertation, Centre for ELT Education, University of Warwick, available from: file//E:\investigation\Assessment/ and investigation into the possibility of introducing Port (accessed July 2006)

Part II

Assessment Methods for Teacher Training

Chapter 2

Using ADF's in Alternative Assessment

Ana María Elisa Díaz de la Garza

"Take risks"

(Brookfield, 1990)

Overview

Asynchronous Discussion Forums (ADFs) are a valuable tool which allows learners to read and respond to participants' contributions "out of time." They have the potential to develop reflective practices and offer a written on-line document which may be assessed for course credit. In this chapter I hope to encourage practitioners to explore the value of using asynchronous discussion forums (ADFs) as an alternative assessment method.

2.1 Asynchronous Discussion Forums

Teacher training courses that include asynchronous online discussion forums maximize student learning in a number of ways, since they promote student involvement and feedback. Asynchronous Discussion Forums (ADFs) may be used as a support network in an effort to foster the development of a "*virtual learning community"* where habits of caring, shared Values, Attitudes and Beliefs (VABs) and interconnectedness are encouraged and participants are able to share information and experiences, challenge, question and offer each other alternatives to their usual practices. They have the potential

to reduce the sense of isolation and increase feelings of validation as well as to provide written products which may be evaluated.

Online discussion forums provide trainees with opportunities to work together on projects in small groups, participate in on-going discussions focused on course content, and to "present" group project products to the rest of the class which may be accomplished independently of student location and time of actual participation in a discussion forum. This is coordinated with a special alumni web site for assignments which compliment college courses and allow participants to negotiate and construct knowledge collaboratively. Since they are asynchronous, they allow trainees to have time to contribute their well thought out responses and consult literature as well as provide opportunities to interact with the content of the course and their peers on-line.

To be able to develop their teaching expertise, trainees require opportunities to reflect and make sense of issues. For Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985:191), reflection is an activity in which people "recapture their experience, think about it, mull it over and evaluate it." Thus, reflection is used to make sense of unstructured situations in order to generate new knowledge; it is the act of thinking about our thinking and acting.

It is therefore necessary to develop a facilitated climate for trainees to share ideas in an empathic, non-judgmental and supportive manner which may foster teacher development and raise trainees' awareness of issues.

2.2 Learning Communities

Wenger (1998: on-line) defines learning communities as:

> "Groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis."

Thus, a learning community is a place for sharing and creating knowledge collaboratively and develops around things that matter to people. Such development networks are also called 'collaborative learning communities (Mercer 1995), or, 'collaborative groups' (Diaz-Maggioli 2003). Their on-line equivalents are known as virtual communities' (Rheingold in Mercer 2000), 'asynchronous learning networks' (Black 2005), 'virtual knowledge communities' (Cummings et al 2005) or Asynchronous Discussion Forums (ADFs).

Discussion topics are assigned and trainees are asked to respond to one or two open ended questions designed to elicit discussion about course topics which require participants to respond to other trainees' contributions. Hopperton (1998 in Markel undated: on-line), states that participation in online discussion forums provides opportunities for active learning since it demands that participants become actively engaged with the course content and through their on-line interaction with peers, negotiate the meanings of the content. Thus, they construct knowledge through the shared experiences that each participant brings to the collaborative discussions and allows for the development of an "anytime, anywhere" learning network.

In setting up a community of learners, it is important that members share the following resources for mutual intellectual activity (After Mercer 2000: 116)

- A History (all participants are enrolled in the *LEI* teacher training program)
- Collective Identity (all define themselves as ELT trainees)
- Mutual Obligations (all must fulfill college course requirements)
- A Common Discourse (all share a common specialized language repertoire)

2.3 ADFs as an Assessment Method

ADFs provide students with the opportunity to discuss and share ideas on line at their convenience. They are given a time limit to contribute (usually a week) and can be graded in the following way:

The teacher trainer designs a task including critical thinking questions, trainees are then encouraged to participate in the forums to answer the task, for instance, at the Autonomous University of Chiapas (UNACH), the first semester trainees in the BEd in ELT (*Licenciatura en la Enseñanza del Inglés: LEI*) are using this forum instead of writing a learning log in their English Language Course because of its practicality and because learners can carry out the task anytime and anywhere. Figure 1 illustrates the ADF that trainees are currently using to complete assigned tasks at the Tuxtla Language School:

Figure 3: LEI Trainee ADF

The LEI website was created in March, 2006. I acted as the administrator of the site and as e-moderator. Students who participated received the full 10 percent credit towards their final grade. However, participation in the ADF did not clearly demonstrate if they had learnt significant information or if they had achieved the learning outcomes stated in the programme. For this reason, the following assessment criteria was proposed to assign 10% of total course credit for the learner's contribution to the forum:

As a result, trainees are encouraged and expected to participate in the forums to obtain full course credit.

Assessing trainees' participation in an ADF is not an easy procedure. According to Feenberg & Xin (undated: online), "assessing consists in any formal and usually scheduled activity aimed at insuring that individual participants are fulfilling the substantive purpose of the online forum." In educational contexts, this usually can be carried out through review sessions in which trainees are responsible for sharing their knowledge with the group. Another common procedure is to evaluate every substantive comment participants add to the conference is an opportunity for verifying their knowledge of the subject.

According to Australia's Innovative University (undated:online), online discussions can be structured with defined topics and procedures or unstructured allowing students free expression of issues and ideas. They may be a compulsory part of the curriculum, with students required to make regular contributions, or act as an alternate way for students to communicate with teacher trainers and other students. The decision as to whether online discussions should be formally assessed and contribute to the overall assessment of a subject will depend on the aims associated with the discussion. Two reasons for assessing participation include:

- Recognizing the workload and time commitment associated with the online discussion; and
- Encouraging students to participate, and in doing so to complete the required learning activities associated with the discussion.

Australia's Innovative University (undated: on-line) defines the following issues for consideration:

a) Quality versus participation: When assessing online discussions it is important to establish the assessment criteria. For example, is the quality of the discussion to be assessed or is participation sufficient? This will be determined by the aims of the discussion. Points to consider include:

- If the aim is to provide a forum for brainstorming and discussing ideas, then assessing for quality may stilt the discussion;
- An assessment of the quality of the contribution may act to raise the standard of the discussion; and
- Trainees need to know beforehand the criteria by which they are being assessed.

b) Discussion versus statements: It is desirable for the participants to acknowledge previous points of view and provide constructive follow-up comments. One approach may be a requirement for students to contribute a set number of postings which include a set number of follow-up comments for classmate's contributions.

2.4 Benefits & Drawbacks of Using ADFs

There are many benefits to setting up on-line discussion forums. The most important are that they may be set up at minimal cost to the university and allow for peer mentoring on an anytime anywhere basis.

However, potential users should be aware of the following challenges involved in setting up this type of facility. They include:

- The management challenge: getting alumni involved in this type of learning community and motivating them to participate.

- The community challenge: fostering an awareness of its value for both personal and professional development.

- The technical challenge: designing a forum which is easy to use and encourages participation from potential participants.

- The personal challenge: encouraging trainees to share their ideas and be open to the ideas of others in a format that is unfamiliar for most.

Table 7 illustrates the benefits and drawbacks of using (ADFs):

Advantages of ADFs	Disadvantages of ADFs
Computer mediated conferencing allows for anyplace anytime learning opportunities.	*Not for everyone.* Many people do not enjoy using them.
Users proceed at their individual pace.	*Many people might resist using them.*
Freedom to explore issues which encourage openness to share experiences and thoughts which may result in the development of shared thinking.	*Difficulty Establishing Bonds on-line.* It is difficult to build an open and trusting relationship with colleagues when participants are only able to meet when busy schedules permit.
Convenience of choice over when or how much to participate. (less intrusive than face to face discussion)	*Limited Immediate Feedback.* The lack of face-to-face contact obscures vocal intonations and verbal and non-verbal cues, including body language and expressions of emotion. This may require changes in a member's habitual patterns of interaction and thinking in order to overcome this limitation. Dissatisfied members typically cite limited feedback as a disincentive to participate. (Galinsky et al., 1996 in Gary and Remolino 2000: 4)
Combines elements of writing and reflection in a medium halfway between spoken conversation and written discourse.	*Members with Limited Language Skills.* Members with language limitations (such as English as a second language) may be frustrated by the rapid pace and multiple dialogues, and consequently, may be confused by text-based communication. Furthermore, members may be challenged in communicating feelings and thoughts clearly to others. In a text-only format with limited interpersonal feedback, communicative misunderstandings are common for all members.
Participants are free to communicate and individuals may receive special attention from anyone willing and able to provide it.	*Quality Control.* The quality of online support groups is inconsistent. Each sets its own standards and procedures. The moderator encourages participation but it can not be "forced."

Participants who wish to "lurk" or "browse" may do so.	*To keep the forum "alive" there must be discussion.* With no interaction participants become discouraged and the forum may cease to exist.
Participants may leave a discussion unseen and unembarrassed.	*Many people may just lurk and never become involved.*
Allows participants to make sense of, rethink and redefine ideas.	*Some participants may be receptive and only restate others' ideas.*
On-line support groups may attract members who previously avoided peers and traditional support systems.	*Potential users may avoid publicly stating their ideas in writing in fear of being criticized by others.* Others consider it a "cold medium" and will resist participating.
Computer-mediated communication tends to feature more balanced participation than face-to-face conversation, with less dominance by outspoken individuals.	*Extroverted and more confident participants may overwhelm and overshadow less confident individuals (in effect scare them away)*

Table 7: Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Asynchronous Discussion Forums (Adapted from Salmon 2000:17 - 19)

When setting up tasks for trainees to carry out in ADFs teacher-trainers should follow these recommendations for optimum success:

1. Teacher trainers set up a discussion forum and design an appropriate task to compliment course. (the UNACH EDUCAD Platform makes this relatively easy)

2. Trainees are assigned an on-line task.

3. Trainees are instructed to click on the topic message to read and reply.

4. Replies are viewable by all course participants who are instructed to build on what classmates contribute to the discussion thread.

5. Course design should include a requirement that trainees respond to at least 3 colleagues per week.

Hopefully participants will initiate discussions and respond to one another's postings. In this learning scenario Teacher

Trainers act as facilitators. Within this highly public, mostly text-based environment, social currency and value is accorded by response. In a best case scenario ADFs have the potential to significantly change the nature of interaction, de-emphasizing teacher input and accentuating interaction and collaboration between peers. (Jonassen et al., 1995 in Markel (undated: on-line)

2.5 Suggestions for Using ADFs in the Teacher Training Room

A. Opening Discussions (After Feenberg & Xin, undated: online)

All discussion threads must have a moderator. Contextualization and monitoring are two basic moderating functions. The trainer defines the communication model, makes the basic procedural decisions that enable the group to form with some confidence that it has a common mission, and checks for conformity with the model and the mission in the course of the discussion. (See Appendix 1: Moderating Functions)

To begin online discussions, the moderator should issue a request for some initial communicative act on the part of the participants to involve them in the thread. It is recommended that teacher trainers instruct BA ELT students to write a simple, brief opening comment about themselves providing personal information. Subsequently, topic raisers need to be offered on a regular basis to reopen the discussion. Topic raisers need to state a problem and provide the conceptual background to understanding it so as to bring up responses.

B. Setting up the Norms

It is essential that teacher trainers set an agenda for the discussion to introduce basic concepts in the field; granting trainees explicit recognition for their contributions; this will hopefully

result in raising topics and summarizing discussions which should keep the conversation flowing (a social function) and to communicate ideas (a pedagogical function.) Clear rules and expectations help relieve communication anxiety and enable participation. Such things as the appropriate length of comments need to be stated explicitly. The moderator should help students relax about their writing, and not to worry too much about formatting and spell checking. In ADFs success depends on interaction, as a consequence the moderator must frame appropriate expectations by offering clear guidelines to contributing. Otherwise, participants may assume that all they have to do is sign in and read. The moderator must encourage participants to become resources for each other. (See Appendix 2: Some recommendations for managing the on-line educational Forum)

C. Setting up the Agenda

The agenda should contain a brief outline of the process, mention the background materials of the discussion, and describe a more or less precise schedule indicating when participants will be expected to discuss these materials. An agenda setting message should also contain specific instructions regarding tests and dates when assignments are due and similar matters of timing.

In designing an agenda, it is critical not to expect too much from participants at first. This is an experience where technical and social skills are being learned at the same time as an academic subject. Thus, it is important to develop a supportive environment supplemented where possible with technical assistance for new participants experiencing problems. The pacing of the course should allow those with early problems to catch up. This may require considerable flexibility on the part of the teacher trainer to help Trainees develop their Knowledge/Awareness and Skills (KAS) regarding this type of learning approach, more than it is customary in the familiar face-to-face environment.

Summary

In conclusion, the use of ADFs potentially allows trainees to establish a social network with opportunities to share knowledge as they sort through their thoughts in an effort to explore issues which they wish to address collaboratively. There may be great resistance to using this type of technology, therefore; it is necessary to take into consideration that potential participants must receive induction and the proper training and continuous support during Initial Teacher Training (ITT) to successfully exploit this valuable learning resource.

Teacher trainers must ultimately decide for themselves if ADFs will provide suitable for their contexts and needs.

Bibliography

Australia's Innovative University (undated:on-line) *Teaching Online@Macquaria*. Available from: http://online.mq.edu.au/pub/CFLTOM/. Accessed 19/July/07.

Black, A. (2005). The use of asynchronous discussion: Creating a text of talk [online].

Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education [Online serial], 5/1. Available from: http://www.citejournal.org/vol5/iss1/languagearts/article1.cfm

Boud, D., Keogh, R. and Walker, D. (1985) What is reflection in learning? In Boud, D., R. Keogh, and D.Walker (ed.) *Reflection: Turning experience into learning*. London: Kogan Page.
Cummings, S. and A. Van Zee (2005) *Communities of Practice and Networks:*

Reviewing Two Perspectives on Social Learning [online]. KM4D Journal 1/1.

Available from: www.km4dev.org/journal. Accessed 28/May/05
Díaz-Maggioli, G. (2003) *Options for Teacher Professional Development*. [online] English Teaching Forum. 41/2. Available from

http://exchanges.state.gov/forum/vols/vol41/no2/#top. Accessed 4/June/05.
Feenberg, A. & C. Xin (undated) *A Teacher's Guide to Moderating Online Discussion Forums: From Theory to Practice* [on-line]. Available from: http://www.textweaver.org/modmanual4.htm. Accessed 18/July/07.
Gary, J, and L. Remolino (2000) *Online Support Groups: Nuts and Bolts, Benefits, Limitations and Future Directions* [on-line] ERIC Digest. Available from: http://www.ericdigests.org/2001-3/nuts.htm. Accessed 17/Jan/06.
Markel, S. Technology and Education Online Discussion Forums: It's in the Response[online]. Available from: http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/summer42/markel42.html.
Accessed 23/July/07.
Mercer, N. (1995) *The Guided Construction of Knowledge*. Clevedon: Multilingual
Matters.
Mercer, N. (2000) Words and Minds: How We Use Language To Think Together. London: Routledge.
Rogers, D. and L. Babinski (1999) *Breaking Through Isolation with New Teacher*
Groups [online]. Supporting New Teachers. 56/8. Available from:
http://www.michagan.gov/documents/35 Breaking Through Isolation article 1073307.doc. Accessed 18/Feb/06.
Salmon, G. (2000) *E-Moderating: The Key to Teaching and Learning On-Line*. London: Kogan Page.
Stansbury, K. and J. Zimmerman (2002) Smart induction programs become lifelines for the beginning teacher. *Journal of Staff Development*. 23/4. Available from:
www.NSDC.org. Accessed 18/Feb/06.
Wenger, E. (1998) *Cultivating Communities of Practice: Learning as a Social System* [online]
Available from: http://www.co-i-l.com/coil/knowledge-garden/cop/lss.shtml.
Accessed 12/Dec/05.

Chapter 3

Using Case Studies in ELT

Elizabeth Us Grajales

"Don't evaluate yourself only on the basis of student's satisfaction."

(Brookfield, 1990)

Overview

This chapter aims to describe the usefulness of using case studies as a method for assessing our students' learning. It provides some advantages and disadvantages of using them in the teacher training room. The examples were taken mainly from an Assessment Diploma designed for BA ELT students at University of Chiapas, Mexico in which assessment is the main topic of the case studies. However, in the last section, two more examples are included in which the reader can find topics for other kinds of courses.

3.1 Case studies as an assessment method

"Case studies are an increasingly popular form of teaching and have an important role in developing skills and knowledge in students." (Davis and Wilcock 2007:1) Case studies are very useful because of the wealth of practical, real life examples that can be used to contextualize theoretical concepts. Education considers them to be useful as a pedagogical tool. Similarly, Grant 1997, (cited in Davis and Wilock 2007:2) outlines the benefits of using case studies as "an interactive learning strategy, shifting the emphasis from teacher-centred to more student-centred activities."

Case studies can increase student motivation and interest in their discipline. According to Davis and Wilcock (2007: 2) they "allow the application of theoretical concepts to be demonstrated, thus bridging the gap between theory and practice, encourage active learning, provide an opportunity for the development of key skills such as communication, group work and problem solving, whilst it increases students' enjoyment of the topic and hence their desire to learn" .

Tummons (2005:65) points out that they "can be used in a number of ways…can appear in a range of formats: a single piece of writing describing a scenario …[where] students have to respond to a series of questions about the case study, using the attitudes, knowledge or competencies that they have acquired during the programme of study." For example, a case study for a training course may consist of a description of an incident that takes place in a typical relevant setting such as: a non-qualified teacher who does not know how to be fair assessing his students. Learners go on to answer a series of questions relating to assessment theory, teaching and learning problems. A set of examples of case studies is shown below:

3.2 Examples of cases for teacher training

Case study 1: Guillermo's problem

Guillermo is teaching English at a Mexican university. He has a group of adults who are studying their MA in Education. At least 25% of the reading his students will do on the course is from books or journals in English. This requires an intermediate level of reading skills equivalent to Cambridge First Certificate. However, learners´ current level is probably equivalent to Cambridge PET. Besides this, there are often visiting professors from US universities, who give lectures or workshops while they are at their faculty. Guillermo has to measure students' reading skills, but he doesn't know how to be fair grading since the institution wants him to use summative assessment. Guillermo is worried because if their students fail the English course, they cannot continue studying their master, which is paid for by the SEP.

Task
1.- What does Guillermo mean by fair grading?
2.- What problems will Guillermo face when he assesses students' learning?
3.- What could it be the best way to assess them?

Case study 2: Pilar's situation

Pilar is teaching English at the Hill Summer School. Most of her students have a good command of English and are planning to conduct studies abroad. They would like to improve their English and to socialize with other learners in a course. They are very active and participative. Pilar is worried because the institution wants her to reinforce speaking skills more, however she considers that her students are very good at speaking and they really need to reinforce writing and reading skills more because they show some weaknesses when writing essays and in understanding the main ideas of articles. Pilar wants to persuade her coordinator to let her change the assessment methods proposed in the programme.

Task

1.-What kinds of assessment methods could Pilar use to assess students' learning?

2.- What could it be the argument that Pilar can use to convince her coordinator? (Based on Literature)

Case Study 3: Mary's situation

Mary is an English teacher who works for the Anglo-Mexican School. She graduated from the Language Teacher Training Programme last year. She has been having problems with parents because she designed an achievement test and most of the group of high school students failed it. Parents commented that she had missed a lot of classes during the term and now she is assessing the content of the programme that she did not teach. Mary is worried because the principal wants her to assess students again using other methods. The principal warned her that all students should pass the course since she was the one who missed classes. However, Mary disagreed because there are some students who do not deserve to pass, and others are not at the right level to move. What should she do?

Task (based on literature) 250-500 word essay

1. What approach did Mary use to assess her students?
2. Was the instrument that she used reliable and valid? How do you know?
3. Why did the principal want her to assess the students again?
4. What did Mary mean by saying that some students do not deserve to pass?
5. What is Mary's belief about assessment?
6. What kind of assessment methods can she use in order to be fair assessing her students?

As we can see in these examples, learners need to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and awareness not only about assessment theory but also about their beliefs in teaching and learning. McDonough and McDonough (1997:204) state that "the case study offers a fascinating and detailed insight into a student's language development as he attempts to express complex arguments." In the examples above learners need to have a good command of writing skills to quote authors and to be able to effectively support their ideas. According to Tummons (2005:65) "the marking of such case studies will depend on how the questions are constructed: questions that require essay-style answer will provide the students with more opportunities to demonstrate deep levels of knowledge

and understanding, but they may be difficult to mark…" Although case studies are highly authentic forms of assessment because they ensure validity, they are subjective when grading.

3.3 The benefits and drawbacks of using case studies

Table 8 illustrates the advantages of using this technique to assess student's learning.

Bridge the Gap Between Theory and Practice	Learners can relate concepts, information from readings and their own experiences to solve the case.
Encourage lifelong learning	Most of the cases are real life problems which English teachers face in the training room.
Develop knowledge, skills and awareness	It requires to demonstrate their competence in different skills such as writing, analysis, synthesis, what the student learnt in the course and his experience as both as a learner and as a teacher.
Increase learners' motivation	Students can take ownership of their learning which makes them feel motivated to solve the case.
Ensure validity	It measures what was taught in the course.

Table 8: The Benefits of Case Studies

Table 9 presents some problems that both students and teachers may face when implementing this technique in the training room.

Take Time to Mark Objectively.	There is not a right answer. A wide variety of possibilities to analyze the case founded with good arguments may be encountered.
This style of work may not be suited to everyone since it requires deep learning	Students are expected to analyze critically the case supporting their ideas with literature. Students use different approaches of learning and they are good at in different skills. Some students may prefer an examination or a presentation to demonstrate what he learnt.
Mark allocation	It is necessary to consider how many marks are given to a case study since students have to spend a great deal of time carrying out research

Table 9: the drawbacks of Case Studies

In order to illustrate how to grade a case study, an example from case study 3 (Mary's situation) is presented. Trainees were given case study 3 in a course. They had two weeks to individually carry out the task.

3.4 Assessment criteria

Learners read the case and were explained each criterion in order to know what they were expected to report in an essay. They were also given the assessment criteria shown below:
The essay…

1. Follows instructions and addresses all parts of the task
2. Offers well founded personal interpretations and insights
3. Is organised in a structured and reader-friendly manner
4. Includes bibliographical references
5. Has few errors of vocabulary and grammar

According to Moon (2002:17), assessment criteria are "statements that indicate…the quality of performance that will show that the learner has reached a particular standard which is reflected in the learning outcome." That is why learners knew what they were expected to do. A sample of how a learner carried out Mary's case and how she took into account the criteria to write her essay is shown below.

Learner A

This case study is based on Mary's problems because she is an English teacher who works for the Anglo Mexican School; therefore Mary has been having problems with parents because she designed an achievement test also she used product assessment. Rowntree say that it is where teachers can see the product to assess; it could be a piece of a test or writing; it can be objective or subjective.

Many of the students failed it, then parents disagreed with the results so they said that the teacher missed a lot of classes and she assessed content of the programme that she did not teach; I think Mary's instrument is reliable because it show bad results to the whole group.

She have some believes that affect her way of thinking because when she said that some students don't deserve to pass that's not reliable because she is taking into account her believes. For the other hand the principal could think that it is necessary to pass the students in order to avoid to loss credibility because he hires the teacher.

One alternative way to assess her students in a fair way is by design a exam witch contain what she actually teach during the course and also let the students do a peer-assessment task in witch students are put into the role of assessors of their own or other´s role...(Moon,2002). In this way let them reflect about what they really deserve and also grade through the tasks what she should grade since the beginning of the course.

We can notice that the learner carried out the task using her own experience, knowledge and beliefs on assessment, learning and teaching. She has her own style and competence in writing and defending her arguments. Although she used bibliographical reference, she faced serious problems with quoting, citation and language. Her essay went from descriptive to few parts of founded interpretation.

3.5 Ideas for topics in case studies

In the following section there is a case study addressed to trainers of a Med Programme where participants were instructed to post contributions in an online forum.

Case study 4: A CASE for THE TRAINER

Situation

A group of initial trainees finds it very difficult to get the grips of the appropriate methodologies with which to involve

students in speaking and writing interactively. Mario, their trainer, has been trying with demonstration lessons, videos of classes and reading tasks to interest them, but without much success so far.

What should Mario do?

You are Mario's colleague. If you could persuade Mario to try other activities in his training sessions, it would make your work easier in the following years of the course. You also believe that trainees need to know something about 'communicative' activities. Your head of department has asked you to trouble shoot.

Here are some questions to help you get started:

1. Why do you think Mario is using the activities he is doing?

2. What strategies would you use if you were teaching Mario's group?

3. What could you do to 'break the ice' and get him into discuss training methods?

4. What resources would you show him, if any? Why?

5. What practical suggestions do you have for assisting Mario?

WRITE YOUR RESPONSES IN THE DISCUSSION FORUM ENTITLED 'MARIO'S PROBLEM'

(After Wright, 2004)

This case provides opportunities where learners can debate over the role of teaching and learning, design activities, explore beliefs about communicative approaches, among other

issues. We do not know if the teacher will grade the quality of contributions or he will just take into account the times that students participated in the forum.

Case Study 5: Homero's problem

Situation:

Homero is a lawyer with a good command of English. He is not planning any studies in the foreseeable future. However, there are very few advanced English courses for him to enroll in. He would like to improve his English and to socialize with other learners in a course; and his law firm will sometimes send representatives to England or the United States for short courses about topics such as negotiation or comparative legal systems. He wants to "stay in shape", especially as the firm chooses those associates who have shown evidence of interest in improving their English.

(DIP-TESP, 2003:43)

What should Homero do?

You work at the Harmon Hall School as the English Coordinator. He wants to know what kind of course could be appropriate for his needs. He cannot study English on weekdays because he is always busy. He requests an interview to enroll in one of the courses offered at your school.

Here are some ideas to help you:

Name of the course, length, aims, learning outcomes, content, and teaching resource.

(Work with a partner and design a course for his needs. Present it to the whole group justifying your answers from literature)

This case can be used for designing syllabuses in ESP. Students need to integrate what they have learnt in other courses to

fulfill the tasks. It provides opportunities for group work and encourages higher order thinking. Teachers can adapt situations since they can be written in particular contexts which are relevant to the particular learner in the Mexican or Chiapas context.

Summary

We have commented on the usefulness of case studies as pedagogical tools or strategies which provide insight into the context of a problem. We have also illustrated some advantages and disadvantages of using them as an alternative method in English Language Teaching. Learners can be motivated to carry them out because they need to be and feel involved in solving the case. However, some learners may not like them because they involve more student centered tasks. Case studies allow English teachers to present students with real issues such as: problems in designing materials, poor level of competence in students, discipline problems, among others. Although it takes time to mark or grade them objectively, they are very useful to encourage learning.

Bibliography

Christensen, C. R. (1981) Teaching and the Case Method; Text, Cases and Readings. Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School.

Davis, C. and Wilcock (2007) Teaching Materials Using Case Studies. The Higher Education Academy**: UK Centre for Materials Education.** Available at www.materials.ac.uk/guides/**casestudies**.asp Accessed in 2007

Diploma in Teaching English for Specific Purposes (2003) Module 3 Material Selections, British Council.

Grant, R. (1997) A Claim for the Case Method in the Teaching of Geography Journal of Geography in Higher Education Vol. 21 No 2 pp171-185

Kreber, C. (2001) Learning Experientially through Case Studies? A Conceptual Analysis Teaching in Higher Education Vol. 6 No 2 pp217-228

McDonough J. & McDonough S. (1994) Research Methods for English Teachers. London: ARNOLD.

Tummons, J. (2005) Assessing Learning in Further Education. Exeter: Learning Matters.

Wright, T. (2004) Online Contributions for MEd Programme. College of St. Mark and St. John, University of Exeter, England.

Chapter 4

The Value of Using Dialogue Journals in the Classroom

Esther Gómez Morales

"Learning is a step-by-step building block activity-it is organic, a process that requires time for recycling and assimilation."

(Hockly, 2000:122)

Overview

Using a dialogue journal in the language classroom is a valuable experience because of the numerous benefits it provides. There are many ways to use dialogue journals or written conversations. In this chapter, we will start with a definition of this alternative method of assessment and provide an explanation of what a dialogue journal includes. Then, we will explore the value of using it in the classroom. Finally, we will extend our comprehension of using dialogue journals through some examples and we will provide guidelines for marking dialogue journals.

4.1 What is it?

Peyton (2000:2) defines dialogue journals as "written conversations in which a learner and a teacher (or other writing partner) communicate regularly (daily, weekly, or on a schedule that fits the educational setting) over a school year, or course". This is a broad definition because it states that communication can take place not only between a teacher and a student but also among students by means of two (peer dialogue journal). Moreover,

this exchange of ideas, thoughts, concerns, feelings, learning processes and more can be carried out at different periods of time according to the needs of the class or the requirements of a particular course or school.

According to Strever (1997:24), dialogue journals are "written conversations in which students regularly write entries in a notebook to the teacher about topics of their choice, and the teacher writes back to them, responding to the topic or issue discussed. This exchange continues throughout the school year and is confined to the two people involved: the teacher and the student." It is important to highlight that this written conversation can be accomplished through different means. That is to say, it can be in a notebook, as the above definition states, or teachers and students can be encouraged to extend these principles to weblogs, also called *email dialogue journals*. They can create a strong sense of community in which students can assume active roles as participants. This kind of writing will be a more informal and less organized way of writing, but not a disorganized piece of it.

Peyton and Reed (1990:6) describe dialogue journals as "a place to practice personal expressive writing; an individual record of educational experience; a writing workshop; a technique to reflect upon experience to give it deeper meaning." As is shown in this definition and in the previous ones, students can write about a variety of issues that are relevant to them. The process is simple, one partner initiates a journal (initiator) and the other partner responds to it (responder), this way two journals are constructed simultaneously. Each writer is free to begin a conversation on any topic of personal and mutual interest. A key part in dialogue journals or written conversations is that each partner will acknowledge elements of the topic and comment upon it. This way, opportunity is provided for both sides to remain interactive in a continuous way.

It is important to mention that at all times students need to be encouraged to write creatively. At the beginning of the course it is vital to start writing the dialogue journal in class, then in time, it is possible to ask students to write it at home

and bring it the next class. Next, a variety of topics students can write about will be presented.

4.2 What do dialogue journals include?

It is important to give meaningful tasks, topics that are self-motivating and provide opportunities for constructive learning. Students are invited to write as much as they choose on a wide variety of topics, genres and styles. Here are some ideas:

- Records of thoughts, feelings, moods and experiences
- Personal reactions, concerns and giving opinions
- Descriptions of events, people and places
- Worries, happiness, needs, interests or sharing information
- Questions students want to be answered by the teachers or classmates
- Responding to stimulus such as a piece of text, video, audiotape or photographs
- Personal, family or academic concerns and interests
- Work related issues
- Topics of student's choice

Students should write in a style that they feel comfortable with but legibly, they do not need to worry about formal language conventions. It is important that teachers encourage students to take risks and explore new things, as a result they will write freely, expressively and openly. Teachers may devote part of a lesson to invite students to write in the class-

room. It is advisable to devote class time to allow them to internalize the procedures with guidance. As the course goes by, teachers can assign an entry as a take home assignment and then the teacher or another student can respond to it at a later time. This guidance will help students develop a deeper understanding of the importance of using dialogue journals. A possible procedure is to give students a mini lesson by writing an entry on the board and then asking students to respond to it in writing. The importance of student engagement in a conversation with another student through dialogue journals relies on cooperative learning, due to the fact that students benefit because they have the opportunity to get to know each other and bond with other classmates. Another important issue is the length of writing. Peyton (2000) suggests that at the beginning of the course the teacher can set a minimum of words and later on the amount of words will be decided on by the students. The most advisable thing to do is to have a session with students and talk about dialogue journals, how they feel about writing them, what are their beliefs and expectations and explore the benefits of using them as a means of communication.

It is also advisable to use dialogue journals on a continuous basis and as a regular part of the curriculum, but the frequency of use will depend on school regulations or the decisions students and teachers make at the beginning of the course. What is really important is to respond to journals in a timely and consistent fashion and with an open and responsive attitude. Moreover responses should be non-threatening, open-minded and considerate of individual student writers. In order to write suitable responses teachers can consider responding to a number of journals at random rather than the entire class at once. This will help teachers prevent from losing the care and thought needed to make them valuable for all parties. The teachers will respond accommodating the responses to the students' language proficiency level, even if it is minimal. Teachers can write a simple greeting, some comments and a question; this will give students some modeling of appropriate writing rules.

The focus on dialogue journal interaction is on communication rather than form. The teacher as well as the student writes as a participant in a conversation. The language input from the teachers should be slightly above the students' linguistic competence and the motivation to read the teacher's response will keep students motivated. This intensive interaction with language is bound to improve students' language skills over a period of time.

4.3 Why are dialogue journals valuable?

Dialogue journals are effective means for reflection as they create an opportunity to be reflective about students' experiences. Reflection involves analysis of attitudes and beliefs which affect decision-making and actions. Moon (2004:82) comments that people generally reflect "in order to achieve an outcome or for some purpose […] it is often a process of re-organizing knowledge and emotional orientations in order to achieve further insights." One should be open to consider alternative viewpoints and recognize the possibility of change. Reflection and experiential learning are vital concepts in learning and teaching, one supports the other. Experiential learning, according to Saddington (1992) in Moon (2004:109), "is a process in which an experience is reflected upon and then transferred into concepts which in turn become guidelines for new experiences." Moreover, dialogue journals promote meaningful learning and help students effectively acquire target information.

The following table illustrates some of the advantages and the disadvantages of using dialogue journals. It is important to mention that they are not in order of importance as the value of using them relies on both parties: the teacher and the student.

Advantages	Disadvantages
• Encourages independent thinking. • Engages and involves other students because it is based on meaningful activities. • Creates bonds between students, heartening foundation for later cooperative activities. • Provides a springboard for more formal papers or projects. • Supports student learning through the writing process. • Encourages reflection. • Fosters humanistic relationships between teacher and students. • Serves as a means for language learning. • Provides extended contact time with students. • Allows Teachers to get to know students better. • Provides a more continuous pattern of assessment. • Keeps track of students needs and progress	• Frequency of use. • Marking criteria • Students' expectations: some students do not like to write, some others might believe it is a waste of time. • Difficult to avoid attempting to correct students' writing. • Time consuming: it might take a long time to respond to each student's dialogue journal • Writing may be excessively personal. • Length of writing – some students might write a few sentences while others may write extensively. • Students' beliefs towards dialogue journals

Table 10: Advantages and disadvantages of dialogue journals
(Peyton, 2000:3-4; Marking Panel Workshop 2006)

As it is shown in the table there can be more advantages than disadvantages in using dialogue journals, of course this will depend on the context in which they are being used. Every classroom has its own culture, therefore teachers and students can benefit in different ways. One of the most valuable advantages of using dialogue journals is that teachers and students communicate often and this exchange provides feedback to both teachers and students not only on learning but also on different aspects of their lives. In the following section of this chapter some examples of dialogue journals are presented.

4.4 What do dialogue journals look like?

Students usually use a notebook of their preference to write dialogue journals. The decision is up to them. Some students

give the notebook a personal touch by decorating it. When students use weblogs they use funny icons (☻, ☹) to make it even more personal. On some occasions, I instruct students to write about a particular topic, nevertheless, learners wrote not only about the topic but also about their worries, concerns and other issues.

The following examples come from my students enrolled in the BA in ELT Program. They were taking English II in 2006.

How do you feel about writing journals?

Well, first I want to say "hello teacher", second I explain this question, well, I think this is a good exercise for meet something about us, but for me I don't like because I don't a good writer but, this is something that I can do it. The class for me is very relaxing. I don't feel pressure for work with my classmates. I like the class, I like the way you teach, it's dynamic and we ca work. The journal is part of the class and it's a different way to teach, it's OK, because the teacher near to your students. I hope improve with my writing, for me you are a good teacher. We can participate with your help.

Diana

Diana's verbatim

As it is shown in the example there are mistakes that interfere with the intended message, sometimes as teachers we feel the urge to correct those mistakes but we should avoid direct correction as this is not the purpose of dialogue journals. Dialogue journals consider mistakes as a process of learning, as a sign that tells the teacher that the students are learning and moving forward in the process of learning a language. Correction can take place in a more covert way. Teachers can collect common mistakes and talk about them

in a class. There are other times when students themselves ask you "Teacher, how did I write?" then teachers can take the opportunity to help raise awareness regarding specific mistakes.

The following two examples illustrate the way students interact with the teacher. It is a two-way communication where the students asked the teacher questions.

Share something that is important to you

Today I'm very tired, I don't know why, maybe is my routine of all days.
I know it's really hard for me in my condition but I do the best.
I hope my body helps me to finish the semester because I don't want to loose it. My question is a teacher or in this case 'living' in the UNACH… I know you have your life! But you love to teach … or why you decide to be a teacher or study English?
I know you are a good teacher and the people say that you are very hard but I say that you are the best.
Thank you to teach me how can I be a good teacher.

Bety

Note: Bety's verbatim

As the above example illustrates, the student is concerned about failing the semester. She was pregnant at that time and needed a great deal of support to deal with the different aspects of her life. Then, she moves away and reflects on what being a teacher implies – how teachers combine work and their daily lives.

Share something that is important to you

Hello Teacher!!

I'm sorry these days were very boring for me. I don't know why but I think that I'm nervous for the next exam. I feel it so difficult I don't know why. I promise you that the next exam I will pass although my mark will be 6.

Your class is interesting but sometimes when I participate I'm nervous.

Adriana

Note: Adriana's verbatim

The above writing shows evidence of the student's concern about failing the next exam; she is also determined to pass it. As teachers, it is important to take advantage of the situation and ask students about their study skills and the strategies they use to learn so we can give them some advice.

The following was quite a challenge because I did not know anything about the topic therefore I had to look for information in order to answer my student's question.

English 28th Sep

J. Miguel Gtz

Some weeks ago, I was trying to understand how a computer can emulate the human behavior. I found, through many hours of searching with different BOT programs (a BOT is a program which try to answer like a human does to a great variety of questions), that the complexity of behavior depends directly of the program character or personality.

A BOT can answer "fine, thanks" if the question "how are you?" is asked, or something like "just great, and you?" 'cause those are semantic and logic questions. If the computer or the BOT answers "the rain is kind of cold and trees are green", that doesn't seem to have sense at all. Two possible reasons for this are:
1. The program likes of doing jokes.
2. There is a malfunction in the system.

Whatever the reason is, the BOT still depends of the programmer. The question will be:
Can a BOT emulate personality?

Note: J. Miguel's verbatim

Students eagerly wait for their teacher's response, therefore it is worth taking three principles into account when writing responses to students' dialogue journals. Teachers can adopt Race's (2001) suggestions. First, teachers should select words carefully, thus they encourage learners and build up students' confidence. Second, teachers should respond to dialogue journals as soon as possible otherwise students will feel discouraged and unmotivated. Third, students are unique and have their own peculiarities; therefore, teachers should show

interest in students' writings taking into account their needs, personality and learning styles.

Finally, we will focus on the marking criteria for dialogue journals. A very important issue teachers need to keep in mind is that dialogue journals are not meant to assess students' writing skills. Nevertheless, it is also important to find ways to assess students' products (dialogue journals). Students eagerly expect their teacher's response, and, because dialogue journals are just one element of the way students will be assessed in a course, an evaluation criteria needs to be followed. Our Mexican Educational System favors norm referencing criterion, this is reflected in the LEI programs where dialogue journals represent 10% out of 100% of the students' final mark, therefore the importance of establishing a marking criterion must be reached. According to Merricks (2002:162), "assessment contributes to the learning process only when learners and teachers share an understanding of the purposes of the assessment and the criteria for marking and grading".

The Marking Panel Workshop was the means to discuss the way dialogue journals can be assessed. As was mentioned previously, teachers should avoid correction in dialogue journals therefore it was thought important to ask students to present a final product. After writing a certain number of entries in the journal the teacher can instruct students to write a final piece of writing that will be assessed and marked with a grade. An example can be:

Revise your dialogue journal and write the last entry to your teacher (200 words). Select the two entries you like the most and say why you particularly liked them. Then, add two different topics you would like to talk about in future dialogue journals and explain why you would like to include them.

Other possibilities:

Write about your experience in writing dialogue journals (200 words). Do you enjoy writing them? Why? Why not? What did you personally

learn about writing dialogue journals? What are some of the problems you face when writing them.

What has been the most challenging issue you have to overcome when writing dialogue journals? Why has it been a challenge for you? Thinking ahead, as a future teacher, do you think dialogue journals can benefit students? How? Write your last entry to your teacher in about 200 words.

Students can even quote from their dialogue journals and express their feelings, emotions and how much they have learnt or changed through the use of dialogue journals. Teachers may even instruct students to reflect on their personal experiences in using this two-way communication.

In the following section of this chapter the suggested marking criteria taken from the PET Handbook (2003) will be presented. Writing regulations, language and full realization of the task were taken into consideration:

- All content elements covered appropriately (full realization of the task)
- Message clearly communicated to reader (sense of audience)
- A well-developed piece of writing, controlled of language (structure and vocabulary) with few minor errors
- Format consistently appropriate to the purpose
- Well organized and coherent
- Offers well-founded personal interpretations and insights
- Effective use of punctuation and capitalization

Writing regulations, language and full realization of the task need to be taken into consideration. There are other schemes but the following mark scheme is suggested.

Mark	Task	Language
5	Very good attempt at task, clearly covering all content elements, with appropriate elaboration and minimal digression. Well organized, requiring no effort from the reader. There must be a closing formula	Generally good control and confident use of language. Coherent linking of sentences using simple cohesive devices. Language ambitious, including complex sentences and range of structures and vocabulary. Language errors may still be present, but they are minor, due to ambition, and non-impeding.
4	Good attempt at task, addressing all content elements, with some elaboration. There may be occasional lack of clarity, minor repetition or digression. Overall the script is reasonably well organized and requires only a little effort by the reader.	Fairly good control of language and linking of sentences. Either language is ambitious, i.e. showing evidence of range of structure and vocabulary, with a few errors, generally non-impeding, or the language is unambitious, but virtually error-free.
3	Adequate attempt to cover task. May be a rather simple account with little elaboration, or a fuller attempt containing some repetition or digression. Part of the content may be slightly short. Adequately organized, although some effort may be required by the reader.	Some control of language. Linking of sentences not always maintained. Simple sentences structure generally sound. Language likely to be unambitious, or if ambitious probably flawed. A number of errors are likely to be present, e.g. in structures, tenses, spelling, articles, prepositions, but they are mostly non-impeding.
2	Inadequate attempt at task, possibly with some misunderstanding. Part of the content elements may have been omitted. It may be too short or there will be noticeable irrelevance or lack of organization, which will require considerable effort by the reader.	Erratic control of sentence structure and use of tenses, e.g. past simple not used appropriately in many cases. Language may be very simplistic/limited/repetitive. Errors in the spelling of PET vocabulary often occur. Language errors are numerous, and will sometimes impede communication. Punctuation may be noticeably absent, leading to incoherence of sentences.
1	Poor attempt at task, because has little relevance, is noticeably too short or very disorganized.	Very poor control of language. Difficult to understand due to e.g. frequent grammar errors, errors in the spelling of PET level words, or poor sentence construction. There may be a general absence of punctuation, leading to serious incoherence.
0	Candidate has misunderstood or misinterpreted task. Content bears no relation to task.	Achieves nothing, language impossible to understand, or totally irrelevant to task.

Table 11: Mark scheme suggested
PET Handbook UCLES (2003)

Summary

In conclusion, it is important to mention that dialogue journals have proved to be a valuable alternative method of assessment if they are carried out properly. Teachers and students can benefit greatly in many different ways. Teachers are able to get to know their students much better, students feel more motivated as they freely express their ideas, both parties learn new things (the example from Miguel and BOT), opportunities for reflection, students become more competent writers and readers in time. It is possible to go on but I would really like you to discover all the benefits for yourself!

Bibliography

Marking Panel Workshop (2006) Escuela de Lenguas Campus Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas. I .

Merricks, R. (2002) Assessment in Post-Compulsory Education. In Jarvis, P. (2002) (ed) *The Theory and Practice of Teaching*. London: RoutledgeFalmer..

Moon, J. (2004) *A Handbook of Reflection and Experiential Learning: Theory and Practice*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

PET Handbook UCLES (2003) University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations. Cambridge.

Peyton, J. K., and Reed, L. (1990) *Dialogue Journal Writing with Nonnative English Speakers Handbook for Teachers*. Alexandria: Teachers of English to Speakers of other Languages.

Peyton, J. K.(2000) *Dialogue Journals: Interactive Writing to Develop Language and Literacy*. National Center for Literacy Education. ERIC/NCLE Digest and Q & A.

Strever, J. K. and Newman, K. (1993) *Using Electronic Peer Audience and Summary Writing ESL Learners*. Journal of College Reading and Learning, 28/1, (24-33)

Race, P. (2001) *The Lecture's Toolkit*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Chapter 5

Using essays to assess students' performance

Irma Dolores Núñez y Bodegas

"Acknowledge your personality"

(Brookfield, 1990)

Overview

This chapter aims to illustrate what an essay is and the general types of scoring for it. Firstly we will provide a definition of what essays are; what are the benefits of writing them; what are the different purposes of writing essays; the organization of the kinds of essays assigned to BA students of the *Licenciatura en la Enseñanza del Inglés*, together with different guidelines to mark them and lastly an example of a student's paper including the mark and feedback given.

5.1 What is an essay?

An **essay** is a piece of writing, usually from an author's personal point of view. An ***essay*** is a short piece of writing that discusses, describes or analyzes one topic. It can discuss a subject directly or indirectly, seriously or humorously. It can describe personal opinions, or just report information. An essay can be written from any perspective, but essays are most commonly written in the first person (*I*), or third person (subjects that can be substituted with the *he, she, it,* or *they* pronouns). (Asma, 2007)

Fab and Durant (1993: 1) mention that 'input' in literary studies is largely made up of what you **read** and how you read it. But that "the assessed 'output' consists of writing – whether this takes the form of short written answers to prescribed questions (as in examinations) or of extended coursework **essays**, dissertations or thesis". Next they say that your success in reading is invisible to others unless you also know how to write.

5.2 What are the benefits?

Brown and Knight (1994: 6) state that essays "tend to be ballasted with information and copious references to stock sources. Marks are largely awarded for what the learner makes of that knowledge, yet this is definitely the minor part of the essay." Tummons (2005: 63), points out that "essays allow students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the subject matter, demonstrate a range of study skills, such as academic writing, problem-solving and original thinking". However, one of the issues is that both teachers and students have different conceptions for essays. Another issue is that learners are not used to quoting and citing authors which leads them to commit plagiarism.

> "Essays allow for student individuality and expression, they can reflect the depth of student learning, Essay-writing is a measure of students' written style. However, it is very much an art in itself, they take a great deal of time to mark objectively, they take time to write." (Brown, Race & Smith 2001: 56-57)

Many students do not know how to choose a title or topic, how to write an introduction or present the thesis statement; each of which presents an idea to support the thesis together with supporting evidence and quotations; and a conclusion, which restates the thesis and summarizes the supporting points (Asma 2007).

5.3 What's the purpose of writing essays?

The first purpose of essay writing is for the students to demonstrate that they are familiar with the basic material which makes up the subject. Secondly they also have to demonstrate that they know how to argue a case. Arguing a case involves the following four stages:

- identifying a problem or issue in a given area;
- establishing competing points of view associated with the issue identified;
- presenting evidence in support of and against various positions which might be taken up with regard to the issue;
- reaching a conclusion consistent with the evidence and arguments you have presented.

5.4 What's the organization of an essay ASSIGNMENTS?

The introduction to an essay of limited words (i.e. 2000) as is the case in our universities, is a reflection of the competency of study skills because it reveals the structure of the piece of writing to follow. It should contextualize the title within the wider arena of the subject and then narrow it down to the specific topic. It is advisable to:

a) introduce the general context within which your topic is located;

b) introduce your topic;

c) introduce the specific focus of your topic. What is the question you are hoping to answer? Which theorists will you rely on?
Finally, put in your thesis statement (a sentence which states the central idea of an essay) or structural sentences in which you tell the reader how you will answer and in what order you will deal with issues raised.

d) Then you are free to follow that order, and reflect it in section headings.

Common problems with introductions

What follows are the most common problems introductions might present:

a) They are long thesis statements

b) There is a bit of a thesis statement and then other bits keep re-appearing in the body at the start of a new section. This interrupts the narrative flow. Put it at the beginning and then indicate to the reader in 'transitional statements' when you are leaving one area of discussion and moving to another.

c) No contextualization so the reader does not know where you are in the scheme of intellectual enquiry generally

d) No thesis statement

e) The thesis statement promises things which are not delivered.

Conclusions

What to remember when writing a conclusion:

1. No piece of writing is ever complete without a conclusion. Readers need to know that a piece of writing is ending and that the text has been appropriately rounded off.

2. Remember that what you have already said in the body of the essay may not be obvious to your reader so these points should be referred to again clearly.

3. So, in order to write an effective conclusion, always return to the title in your mind. Ask yourself:

    - Have I answered the question?
    - In what way?
    - Is there actually an answer?

Review the main issues you have raised and evaluate them with possible recommendations, justification, personal opinion or prediction. **Do not** introduce any major new ideas at this point.

5.5 What kind of tips would be useful for essays?

Gauntlett (2001: 5) has a collection of tips of how to write an essay. He recommends learners to take them into account and turn them into a lovely mobile to hang above the bed. The tips are shown below:

Answer the question	A clear, logical structure is essential	Give your own analysis not mere description	We want to see a fresh, original approach
Clear, consistent references are essential	Base your essay on extensive relevant reading and research	Indecisive 'it's a bit of both' essays are disappointing	Argue your case, with your own point of view
Use commas properly. Learn how to deploy semi-colon	We want to see evidence of independent thought	Try to avoid formulas, clichés and the obvious approaches	Have a clear relevant introduction and conclusion
It's important to know the difference between "it's" and its alter ego, "its"	Don't allude to anything you've read without giving a reference for it	Avoid a purely journalistic style in academic essays	Don't waffle, it's not cunning, it just suggests you've little to say
Illustrate your points with up-to date examples	Construct your sentences carefully	Use the internet – but with care and discrimination	Don't fill an essay with irrelevant historical detail
Use electronic resources to find material	Check your punctuation and spelling carefully	Ensure your essay is the required length	Bring the subject to life!

Table 12: **Tips for writing essays** After Gauntlett (2001: 5)

We consider these tips very useful for writing an essay and for knowing **assessment criteria** to assess student's assignments.

5.6 How can essays be scored?

There are two general types of scoring to choose from: 'holistic and analytic'. Holistic marking is where a single impression mark is given for overall quality. This is basically what teachers do when they assign number or letter grades to students' tests, such as compositions. Holistic scores represent teachers' overall impressions and judgments**.** They are not very useful in guiding teaching and learning because they provide no detailed information about specific aspects of performance.

Holistic evaluation is obviously to be preferred where the primary concern is with evaluating the communicative effectiveness of candidates' writing, but it can not be preferred when a different subject (sociolinguistics, discourse analysis. etc.) than just writing is being evaluated.

In **analytic** scoring, different components or features of the students' responses are given separate scores (spelling, grammar, organization and punctuation might be scored separately). The scoring categories included in an analytic system should reflect instructional objectives and plans. Determining levels of performance for each category generally reflects teachers' expectations. Analytic schemes have been found to be particularly useful with markers who are relatively inexperienced is mentioned by Weir (1990) who also states that they are devised to make the assessment more objective because they describe the qualities which an essay is expected to exhibit.

Tribble (1997) comments that the role of a teacher as examiner is an important issue and that it is worth reminding ourselves of the following basic principles of testing: validity, reliability and practicality, when taking the role of examiners.

5.7 Example of a STUDENT'S ESSAY

In Appendix 3: A student's essay, there is an example of an essay (Discourse Analysis subject) written by a student of the 8th Semester of the BA, together with the feedback given to him.

The two tasks chosen, from the ones (4) given by the teacher to discuss in the essay, were the following:

Task 1 - The characteristic grammatical features of the genre narrative.

The text chosen by the student, 'The Ibo Landing Story´ lends itself to examine the different elements that are commonly found in normal narratives: abstract, orientation, complicating event, resolution and codas (not always present). The characteristic grammatical features of this genre and the different markers used for complicating events, openers and time markers, were also given as marked in the task

Task 4 – An authentic text which is an example of a relevant genre for students.

Identification of its **generic structure**, comments on characteristic **lexical features** and **interpersonal** aspects of the text. Here what the student chose was to analyze a letter of complaint considering the generic structure (functional organization/sequence), the related grammatical and lexical signals, characteristic lexical features of this genre and lastly the stylistic choices.

The marking guide chosen to assign a score to this essay was the one designed by Mugford (2002) (Appendix 4: Guidelines for grading) because it is the one that takes into consideration most of the indications given to the students before writing the essay. The student got a **9, out of 10** because he did not write a **conclusion** to show a summary of what he wrote (Appendix 4-point 9) and maybe in it he could have included what mentioned in number 3: 'Practical application of background reading to the classroom'

In Appendix 5: Marking Scheme, there is another assessment scale for written work that was adapted by Tribble (1997) for use with adult learners on a **report writing**

course. In it five major aspects of a piece of written work are evaluated: Task fulfillment/content, organization, vocabulary, language and mechanics. Each aspect is accompanied by explicit descriptors of what is meant by the different band-scales. What Tribble (op.cit) says is that it might help learners to see where they are doing well and where they have problems. He also expresses that the system is extremely flexible and what can be considered more important is that individual teachers, or groups of teachers in a school, can develop their own band-scales to suit local or national needs.

In Appendix 6: Essay Assessment Checklist, another scale for written work is included. It was devised by the academic writing teacher of the BA of the Language School in Tapachula. As this scale is meant to assess academic writing, then, different aspects from the ones included in the assessment checklist (Appendix 4: Guidelines for grading) for the discourse analysis essay, are considered. It is given more importance to language like: sentence structure, grammar, vocabulary and mechanics (spelling, capitalization**,** punctuation).

It is not possible to use the same band scale to give a mark to all types of essays. In the guideline for grading in Appendix 4, the teachers are more interested in what the students have learned about the specific subject than what concerns grammar, vocabulary, etc. The last two scales (Appendixes 5 and 6) are appropriate to mark the students' writing ability.

Summary

Essays are common assessment method for assessing students' learning, but one of the main problems that students face is how to prepare, organize and present them. Writing is a complex skill which requires analysis and competence of language to master. That is why in this paper we do not only include how to mark them but also intend to define what essays are and how to write a good one.

Bibliography

Asma, S. T. (2007) *How to write a good essay*. Available at: http://depts.gallaudet.edu/englishworks/writing/essay.html (accessed: October 2007.

Brown, S., Race P. & Smith, B. (2001) 500 Tips Assessment. Routledge. Taylor and Francis Group.

Brown, S & Knight, P. (1994*) Assessing Learners in Higher Education*. London: Kogan Page

Burch, S. et al. (1990) *Selected Readings, An Anthology of Authentic Periodical Literature*. Puebla: Departamento de Lenguas at The University of the Americas.

Escobar, M. M. (2007) *Essay Assessment Checklist*. Escuela de Lenguas Campus Tapachula.

Fabb, N. & Durant, A. (1993) *How to Write Essays, Dissertations & Theses in Literary Studies*. Malaysia: Longman.

Gauntlett, D. (2001) *Essay-writing the essential guide*. Institute of Communications Studies. Available at: http://www.leeds.ac.uk/ics/ (accessed November, 2007)

McCarthy, M. (1991) *Discourse Analysis for Language Teachers*. Cambridge University Press

Mugford, G. (2002) *Guidelines- Discourse Analysis Module*. LIMSEDILE. Universidad de Guadalajara..

Tribble, C. (1997) *Writing*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.

Tummons, J. (2005) *Assesing Learning in the Lifelong Learning Sector*. Exeter.

Weir, C. (1990) *Communicative Language Testing*. U.S.A.: Prentice Hall.

Chapter 6

Learning Logs as a Useful Technique

Gloria del Carmen Corzo Arévalo

"Realise that you have a strong influence"

(Brookfield, 1990)

Overview

This paper intends to share the experience of using learning logs at the Language Teaching Programme. Firstly, a definition about learning logs is given and then how their usage contributes to learners and trainers. Secondly, their advantages and their disadvantages are explained according to author's experience in the training room, followed by how they could be used as an assessment method, and the assessment criteria regarding the UNACH Language School. Finally, the reflections of some samples of the learning logs are shown.

In spite of the fact that learning logs can also be kept on computer devices as part of e-assessment which can help or hinder the work done by students and teachers, in this chapter logs are focused in the training context using small notebooks.

6.1 Learning Logs as learning tools

A learning log is a log or record or journal of your own learning. It does not have to be a formal writing. It is a personal record of your own learning. It is a document which is unique

to you and cannot be right or wrong. A learning log helps you record, structure, reflect, plan, develop and evidence your own learning. It is not just to record what you have done during a week or a day, but a record of what you have learnt, tried, and reflected upon. (Brookfield: 1990).

Some authors have experienced working with learning logs and they define them as follows.

According to Graves (2000), Learning logs are records kept by the students about what they are learning, where they feel they are making progress, and what they plan to do to continue making progress.

Regarding Brown, (2003), they are dialogues between student and trainer; they afford a unique opportunity for a teacher to offer various kinds of feedback to learners.

Jordan (1994) adds that "learner diaries can inform the tutors of the items that students enjoyed, found difficult, did not understand, etc., sometimes with reasons given".

According to my previous experience of using learning logs, I can say that, they can be used as a tool to help students as well as trainers to become more aware of their learning progress. The following section will describe such process.

6.2 The effectiveness of Logs

The recordings of learning help develop learners' skills to become more reflective; therefore to become more self – aware, self critical, and honest about one's own learning, more open to criticism and feedback, more objective and more motivated to improve learning.

These skills are very important for both learners and trainers. The learners reflect more on their learning progress. Some learners will get more out of engaging in the process of producing a Learning Log than other people will. Research has found that reflection can help people to change. For example the learners can go from:

- Reactive to reflective
- Unskilled communicators to skilled communicators
- Impulsive to diplomatic
- Intolerant to tolerant
- Doing to thinking
- Being descriptive to analytical
- Accepting questioning

(Miller et al. 1994)

In addition, trainers have the opportunity to get to know their learners better. The Logs may also guide the trainers' lessons, therefore if something that had been prepared to be carried out in the lesson but did not go as expected by the trainers, the Learning Logs could be the key for them to become aware of it which may provide educators with the opportunity to make adjustments which will allow the tasks to be more successful. They may also help trainers be aware of the progress of their own teaching. This may be a way of giving and receiving friendly and positive feedback between the trainer and the learner.

6.3 Advantages and disadvantages of using Learning Logs

Advantages

- They offer opportunities for learners to write freely without undue concern for grammaticality.
- They help learners become more aware of how they learn, what language activities they enjoy and do not enjoy and their emotional / cognitive processes.
- They help learners reflect on their feelings and emotions towards their learning process.

- They can lead to a dialogue with the quietest learner who is usually afraid of talking loudly in the lessons.
- They allow teachers to know what the learners weaknesses and strengths are, making it easier to deal with them.
- They offer a unique opportunity for teachers to provide various kinds of feedback to learners.

Disadvantages

- They could be time consuming to check.
- Not every learner is as mature enough to really express their feelings towards their learning process.
- Some learners might find it difficult to reflect on their learning experiences.
- Learners might get tired of recording their feelings or emotions, therefore some learners do not always grow concerning their learning process.

(Tummons, 2005:65 and Marking Panel, 2006)

6.4 Learning logs as an assessment method

Learning Logs could be a very useful assessment tool, due to the fact that they record learning, experience and reflection. They help to gain a deeper understanding of the processes of learning, reflection and experience as they happen in learners over a period of time.

Learning Logs could be structured in many ways, depending on the topic being studied and the length of time over which the logging continues. The questions to complete these logs are set by the trainer, sometimes relying on a syllabus, other times relying on individual criteria. Logs can be

done weekly, or when a significant event occurs within lessons.

Every time a learner writes in a learning log it provides them with an opportunity for them to reflect on the extent to which their learning objective has been achieved. They may find that their main objective has been achieved quickly, and then set a new one or they may also find that it has been partially achieved and set new action points. However, the learner may find that the objective has not been achieved and have to change their action plan; but this is all part of the learning experience every learner goes through. At the end of the experience, most learners usually reflect on the whole learning process and the degree to which objectives have been accomplished. According to Cottrel (2003), it is a synthetic reflection that allows a learner to appreciate the links between their recent personal experiences and the bigger picture. Finally, new objectives are set, in relation to life-long-learning and personal goals.

6.5 How learning logs were set in the lessons.

On the first day of classes the students are asked to have a small notebook to be used to record their learning experiences, feelings and thoughts concerning their learning. This notebook must be small and easy to carry.

The logs contain questions such as:

- What have you learned?
- What has been significant for you and why?
- What has not been significant for you and why?
- How can you improve for next time?

The learners are asked to answer these questions not one by one but in paragraph form. Such information (the answers to the previous questions), should be completed every two weeks or every time they consider it convenient to do so.

The learning logs are more likely to be completed on Fridays, maybe fifteen minutes before the lesson finishes, so the learners feel more comfortable recording their experiences rather than having to do it for homework. Another reason to do them on a Friday is for the trainer to have more time to review them and write the feedback.

6.5.1 The Tuxtla Language School, UNACH

The Autonomous University of Chiapas has a faculty of Languages which offers an English Teaching Major (LEI). It has been offered for ten years, so it is not very old. There are usually thirty students in each class. According to the LEI syllabus, the first semesters of English as a Foreign Language (1 to 3) are divided into two groups to provide trainees with more attention which means that there are usually fifteen students in each group.

According to the LEI syllabus, the value given to the logs is 10%. The following section explains and gives the reasons for this evaluation criterion.

6.5.2 The assessment criteria within the Language School, UNACH, in Tuxtla

Trainees were instructed to write in their learning logs individually, once every two weeks, during a 150 hour course within a class of fifteen students from the Tuxtla LEI study program According to the LEI syllabus there was no set amount of questions for this task; therefore three questions were usually asked: *What have you learned during these two weeks?, what has it been significant in your learning these two weeks?* And *how can you improve for next time?*

The decision for asking these questions was to try to help the students to feel more confident, so that they would write their texts in an informal way and so that they would not feel it was a kind of class assignment. Thus, the idea of keeping the logs is to encourage students be honest when writing about their feelings and reflections regarding their learning.

Another reason for asking these particular questions is to try to help the students become more familiar with the process of using learning logs since this is usually the first time which they have ever done them.

As has been previously mentioned, the weightening for the learning logs is 10% of value of their total final grade to pass the English course. Thus, the other 90% is given to the rest of their work, for instance, their homework assignments, their participation in class, their attendance, and their oral presentations. The 10% is the grading criteria assigned by the first level English coordinator. Since the recording of the learning logs might be new for learners, the grading must be based on the continuity of such recordings. For instance, in a course of 150 hours, the learners are expected to have a total of approximately eight reflections (the recordings of every two weeks throughout the entire course). In addition, the information recorded in the logs must be coherent as well; otherwise, such recordings will not have a complete mark (10 %) The following section shows two samples to provide a clearer picture of such criteria.

6.6 Two samples of learning logs

Two logs were chosen out of a total of fifteen as samples.

A 'reflective' sample

"To be honest, I think that I have lots of things to learn in the future. I really enjoy my class of English, and one of my goals is to improve my skills on writing. The way that my teacher teaches is good, but I think she needs to be more dynamic"

This sample log shows an early reflective and honest aspect of the learner, when he adds *"I think that I have lots of things to learn"*.

This learner has lived in the USA for some time and he is very fluent in English; however he is aware of some of his limitations regarding the language. I believe that recording his

thoughts has made him feel more confident about expressing his feelings, because he is being very honest when he suggests that the teacher be more dynamic.

The teacher has made a feedback comment about this. (See Appendix 7:The learner's log A).

A 'learning recording' sample

"The most important thing I learned in class was the new vocabulary and the friendship of the class; I also learned that I can express myself (speaking) in a very good way and my classmates too. I don't like the books, so if I could change something it will be it. No books, only for questions. I liked a lot the speaking activities, so when we have to talk to someone else, I like a lot.

Personally I don't like to do the HW especially when it's boring and I have to write on the books. I like to explain myself so I like to write about personal things, such as vacations or how my day was…"

This learner has really recorded and expressed his feelings in an honest manner. This is the main idea of keeping a learning log. The teacher wrote a feedback for this, emphasizing on the importance of homework. (See appendix 8: Learner's log B)

These logs have been given full credit for the 10% of the final grade due to the fact that they answered the questions and demonstrated evidence of some reflection.

6.7 Learning outcomes achieved through learning logs in class

As a trainer I would like to say that having the learners keeping their learning logs has guided me very positively in order to teach the lessons more successfully. They have also helped me notice some of the strengths as well as the weaknesses of my learners and in my own teaching.

The learning logs have also given me the opportunity to get to know my students better, which has led me to be of better

help to them, since, if they feel emotionally well, they will be better able to cope with their learning more successfully.

Most of the learners who have participated in keeping the learning logs have found them useful and motivating. They have guided them in noticing their strengths and their weaknesses which has resulted in the development of their Knowledge, awareness and skills (KAS) regarding their learning progress. This has ultimately helped them to become more mature and confident learners.

6.8 Suggestions for using the method

One of the most difficult and biggest problems some trainers may have is how to assess learning logs. Therefore I have found Moon's quotation (2002:30) to be of relevant consideration: "the development of assessment criteria for reflective work is particularly difficult since often we are unsure what distinguishes reflection from academic and everyday processes." However, she states (2004) that a suitable way to assess them is to ask students to write an assignment, a report or an essay in which they can quote from their reflective writing (a learning log, a dialogue journal and a portfolio) to support their views or arguments.

Therefore, the reflective practices will not be graded because they will just be raw material to write a task; learners are able to obtain the 10% of the final grade just by carrying out the task. Some teachers agree with Moon's proposal for assessing logs because they have considered giving a mark to these reflective practices because we are aware that we deal with different types of learners, who perceive learning in a different way.

According to Entwistle, (1996) there are three approaches:

- The deep approach: the intention is to understand the idea for yourself by relating ideas to previous knowledge and experiences.

- The surface approach: the intention is to cope with course requirements by studying without reflecting on either purpose or strategy.

- The strategic approach: the intention is to achieve the highest grades possible by being alert to assessment requirement and criteria. (Moon, 1999:122)

Most trainers and learners can be placed both in the strategic and surface approaches, rather than the deep approach. However, we have noticed that we are in the process of reflection since we are interested in discovering our learning. Moon (1999:132), states that "being interested in a topic seems likely to encourage a deep approach to learning."

Since the LEI Programme states that as Trainers we give 10 percent of course credit to the learning logs, and does not have a set limit of questions, only the Trainees who responded to all of the questions obtained the total course credit grade at the end of the term. Most of the learning logs recorded by this class were mainly descriptive. As a result, trainees were instructed to make a greater effort to reflect more on their learning, so that they could achieve the required 10 percent at the end of the course.

The LEI Programme requires that learners record their thoughts every two weeks, but sometimes there was not enough information to record. As a result, I suggest that trainers assign learning log tasks when starting a new topic or when the activities within the lesson have been especially meaningful, or when it is being seen that the learners are really engaged regarding the lesson/lessons. I personally think this would motivate the learners more and richer learning recording may emerge.

Summary

Through this chapter, it has been commented that learning logs can be very useful methods to get to know learners better because they provide useful feedback for both trainers and learners. As trainers we can be of better help through their use if trainees feel emotionally well, which will ultimately help them to cope with their learning more successfully.

The samples shown in this chapter have been beneficial as evidence that the learners have found the learning logs useful and motivating because they have guided them by helping them to explore and identify their strengths and their weaknesses and to observe their learning achievements. This may help trainees to become more mature learners.

The experience of using learning logs as part of the LEI programme, has provided me with the opportunity to suggest, that it is necessary to train learners as well as guide them in order so that they progress from descriptive to more reflective writing. Finally, it is important to suggest that learners use their learning logs when the activities within the lesson have been especially meaningful or at the beginning of a new topic.

Bibliography

Brown, D. (2001). Teaching by Principles. An interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy. Second edition. New York. Longman.

Cottrel, S (2003) Skills for Success: the Personal Development handbook, Palgrave Macmillan.

Graves, K. (2000). Designing Language Courses. Canada. Newbury House Teacher Development.

Jordan, R. R. (1997). English for Academic Purposes. A Guide and Resource Book for Teachers. UK. Cambridge Language Teaching Library.

Marking Panel Workshop (2006) Escuela de Lenguas Campus Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas. I .

Tummons, J. (2005) Assessing Learning in Further Education. Exeter: Learning Matters.

Chapter 7

Using Presentations to Assess Students' Performance

Irma Dolores Núñez Bodegas

"Remember that perfection is impossible"

(Brookfield, 1990)

Overview

This chapter presents some useful tips for carrying out a presentation. Next brief overviews of holistic and analytical ways of marking are discussed, as well as the use of different rating scales. Advantages and disadvantages of using presentations are included together with the description of a presentation given by two students.

7.1 Presentations as an assessment method

Multiple forms of assessment exist for different purposes. Assessments conducted after presentations differ significantly from those given in the classroom. This is because classroom instruction occurs during multiple occasions over an extended period of time, while presentations are one-time activities. What is measured is another major difference between classroom and presentation assessment. In a classroom, growth in students´ knowledge and ability are assessed, keeping the focus on students´ learning. On the other hand, assessments given after presentations most often focus on the presenter´s skills rather than participants´ learning and

application of knowledge. Best practices include clarifying the purpose of the evaluation and how the results will be used before an assessment is developed (Mullins 1994). It could be said that the current practice of measuring presenters' skills is not addressing the following goal: 'Participants will apply what they have learned to impact student learning´. Current assessment most often include questions such as whether or not a presenter speaks clearly and audibly, as is the case in the assessment criteria checklist (Appendix 11: Checklist for Oral Presentations), where 5 points out of a hundred are given to pronunciation, enunciation, audibility and clarity; if the presenter is organized (Appendix 12: Assessment Criteria Checklist- Oral Presentations). But these two aspects do not indicate whether or not the presenter has successfully imparted knowledge.

In order to reach the goal of connecting attendance at development presentations with improved practice, Guskey (1998) proposes five levels of professional development evaluation:

The five levels include:

1) Participant´s reactions,

2) Participant´s learning,

3) Organizational support and change,

4) Participant´s use of development,

5) Student learning

Of the five levels included, obtaining participant´s reactions is easily addressed, but obtaining higher levels of evaluation, including level of learning, organizational support, use of skills, and student outcomes, is much more problematic

7.2 Tips for a Successful Presentation

One of the most stressful situations you are likely to be placed in is that of presenting material in front of a class. Because of this fact, it is very important to give students some tips on how to give a successful presentation. The process by which you present the material is as equally important as the content to be presented. Regardless of how well you have researched your topic, if the presentation is poorly prepared or unorganized the point will be lost. The audience will quickly lose interest.

Here are some tips and notes on how you can be most effective, prepared by Instructional Development Staff: R. Flager, J. Hamlin (2004)

1) Know your material! Have your content well in hand. Most problems can be alleviated by being very well prepared. Be sure to do a complete job in your research and reading.

2) Show interest in your topic. Find something unique of special interest about the topic and most importantly, show your enthusiasm and interest. An enthusiastic presenter will get an enthusiastic audience.

3) Know your audience. Whom will you be presenting to? How involved with the topic is your audience? What level of sophistication does your audience have with the topic? Do you expect them to be asking questions? If so what kinds? What do you expect your audience to be doing during and after the presentation? You may need to tell them your expectations. How you present the material will foster questioning, comments or argument.

4) Outline your talk in advance. The fewer notes you use the more natural your talk will be. Get a clear idea of the main points and supporting information, anecdotes, etc. Keep

it simple and to the point. Be sure to utilize all the appropriate parts of a speech including introduction, body and conclusion.

5) Make use of visual aids. They are a good way to draw and maintain interest from your audience as well as highlight main points. Be sure they are appropriate and support your presentation. Check them out to be sure they work. When you are not referring to them, set them aside or cover them up.

6) Practice your presentation. Talk to yourself OUT LOUD going through all the motions and gestures you expect to use during your presentation. Make the practice as real as possible. Start practicing with your notes, you will quickly find you will no longer need them and your presentation will be more natural.

7) Look sharp and expect butterflies. Don't be fooled! Everyone is nervous to some degree; some people hide it better than others. Prepare yourself, this is an important event. Dress, eat, and sleep appropriately.

8) Giving a good presentation requires skill. Above all, you must be well prepared and practiced. Be observant of others-watch what they do well and how you think they can improve.

Designing the OHT (overhead transparency)

Decide what the purpose of the OHT is

… this will help you decide

What to put on the OHT

Remember the OHT should not be a distracter to the presentation but an AID.

Points to remember:

- Layout or design should be easy to follow without too many complicated explanations
- Include headlines, titles, bullet points or key words but do not include too many details
- The OHT should be a summary or guide to the presentation, everything you say should not be on the OHT
- Fonts: is the writing large enough to be read easily?
- If the OHT is handwritten, make sure the handwriting is legible, but if you can, avoid handwriting
- Colours: some colours, such as yellow, do not show up well on the OHT

Presentation

Before the presentation:

- Check your OHT is clear and legible
- Check the OHP (the overhead projector) is plugged in and switched on!
- Check the screen is in the correct place
- Make sure the OHP does not block the view of anybody in the audience
- Check the focus
- If you are using more than one OHT, make sure they are in the correct order for the presentation

During the presentation:

- Put the OHT straight on the OHP
- Don't point to the screen but to the OHT
- Don´t leave the OHT running all through your presentation, turn it off when it is not required

7.3 Holistic and Analytic Marking

Desmond (1999) comments that one of the continuing areas of controversy in the rating of written and spoken production concerns the respective merits and limitations of 'holistic' marking and 'analytic' marking. She goes on saying that the most extreme case of holistic marking is where a single impression mark is given for overall quality. On the other hand analytic marking requires attention to specific aspects of writing or talk. Marking schemes that require impression grades for several criteria are more likely to be termed analytic (Weir 1993).

7.4 Rating Scales

The use of rating scales has become widespread in the assessment of spoken and written production. Desmond (op. cit: 181) mentions that a decision to specify rating criteria in terms of a rating scale can be related to two considerations:

> "A principled reason reflects the wish of some test designers to identify criterion levels of performance, rather than to make norm-referenced comparisons. A second reason stems from the requirement to be as explicit as possible about ways in which performance levels are to be identified and expressed"

She goes on saying that to design 'rating scales' or 'band scales', some of the issues to examine are the following:

- How many bands should a scale comprise?
- Should there be one rating scale for overall ability, or a number of rating scales for distinct criteria?
- Are criterion descriptions for each level truly self contained, or are they implicitly norm-referenced?

It is said that presentations are receiving increased attention, but little has been done to examine the effectiveness of current practices (Lowden 2005; Noyce 2006). Careful assessment is needed to identify if presentations are producing benefits. Well planned assessment is essential and research has to be conducted to improve assessment methodology.

Different band scales or rating scales that teachers can use to asses their students' performance during a presentation are given next:

In Appendix **10** there is a 'project presentation evaluation' devised by one of the BA teachers to assess his students' presentations. Different levels of performance of the following aspects are included in it: how the topic is handled; interference or not to look for information; technical aspects - multimedia projector or overhead projector; interaction with audience and if questions are answered satisfactorily. Based on the level of performance of the student, the marks to be given range from 5 to 10.

In Appendix **11** another assessment criteria checklist is given for oral presentations. The students are evaluated considering: content, organization and delivery. The author has structured this evaluation sheet into these three categories to provide clear feedback in terms of oral presentations. Areas for improvement are indicated with a mark next to related criteria. Organization and Content (45%), Presence (15%) and Delivery and Grammar (40%). Total score out of a possible 100 points: Grade:

In Appendix **12**(Assessment Criteria Checklist – Oral Presentations) the checklist' for oral presentations was designed by Donaldson, and Topping (1996). They consider four aspects: Content, evidence of background reading, presentation and discussion skills.

The teacher is going to tick a box in the checklist if the different aspects included were covered or not, and based on that, he gives a mark.

In Appendix **13** (Improving the Evaluation of Professional Development Presentations) it is included a Suggested Presentation Assessment Form. It integrates levels 1, 2, and 4 of Guskey's model mentioned before: participant´s reactions, participant´s learning and participants´s use of development.

It is highlighted that the **students** (the ones to evaluate the item in question) must be sure to read each question carefully, because the form varies from traditional evaluations. According to Guskey (1998) this format takes participants´ prior knowledge into consideration and allows the data to be provided in terms of gain scores. This method emphasizes the increase in the participant´s knowledge that is directly attributable to attending the presentation.

Another advantage of using this format is that the evaluator may easily recognize when an assessment has not been completed appropriately because of the student circling all 'excellent' responses. If done correctly, it is a good way to compare what the learners´ different opinions (audience) about the presenter are with those of the teacher.

7.5 Advantages and disadvantages of using presentations

- Presentations can be "a valuable way of assessing a range of abilities and competences." (Tummons, 2005: 66) The way you speak, your gestures, body and eye contact**,** the use of visual aids**,** the way you start your talk, the way you help your audience, the way you conclude your talk.

- Presentations are also a good opportunity for self-assessment and peer-assessment. Students are afraid of giving offence...nerves can affect the reliability of the assessment...practice and a supportive peer group will help." (Tummons 2005: 66)

- Students can learn from watching each others' performances. They can work collaboratively. They can develop their oral skill.

- However, with large classes, a round presentation takes a long time, some students find giving presentations very traumatic.

7.6 Description of a Presentation

In Appendix **1** the presentation given by two students of the BA in English Language Teaching of the Language School in Tapachula (7th. Semester-Discourse Analysis subject) is analyzed. Instructions were given about what to include in the presentation. During former classes, some tips and notes, mentioned before, on how to be most effective when giving a presentation were taught, as well as information about *designing* an OHT or a power point presentation.

To give a mark to the students' presentation described in Appendix 1 the 'project presentation evaluation´ devised by Cook (2007, appendix 10: Project Presentation Evaluation) was used. The mark given to both students, considering that there was no difference between both performances, was **6.**

This is the description of the band applied to the students´ performance:

"6 – 6.9 'Idea of topic is vague, creating confusion (redundancies were evident). Topic is presented in an irregular order which caused problem during presentation. Constant interference to look for information, examples or terms caused disconnection and interruptions which made understanding difficult at times. Little or no use of multimedia projector or

OHS were used and were difficult to understand. Questions were not answered or no time was given for them. Nervousness was evident. Time was not used wisely."

Teachers have to pay attention to what they ask students to present and, if it is the case, modify the existing checklists, depending on what the indications given were and if possible try to give the students some sort of observation sheet like the one included in appendix 13: Suggested Presentation Assessment Form. This way they would reflect on what exposed by the presenter.

Summary

Even though presentations are effective assessment methods for deep learning, we need to be careful with not overloading students with many presentations during a semester. Students can feel demotivated and tired of being in front of class many times. There are timid students who do not like to speak or talkative students who are eager to be in front of the class. What can be done is to have one or two presentations, during the next class the teacher clarifies any misunderstandings and expands what was seen before and, together with the students, decides on the practical applications that may derive from what was presented.

Bibliography

Cook, C. (2007) *Project Presentation Evaluation*. Escuela de Lenguas Tapachula. Unpublished.

Desmond, A (1999) *Language Testing & Evaluation*. Singapore: Singapore University Press

Donaldson, A.J.M. and Topping, K.J. (1996) *From Promoting Peer Assisted Learning Amongst Students in Higher and Further Education.* SEDA paper 96. Reproduced with permission.

Flager, R. Hamlin J. (2004) *Instructional Development Staff*: University of Essex.

Guskey, T. R. (1998) The Age of Accountability. Journal of Staff Development, 19(4), 36-44

Hemphill, B. (2004) *Oral Evaluation h*ttp://www.etsu.edu/scitech/langskil/oral.htm Updated Nov. 18, 2004.
McCarthy, M. (1991) Discourse Analysis for Language Teachers. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lowden, C. (2005). Evaluating the impact of professional development. The Journal of *Research in Professional Learning*. Retrieved on October 13, 2006 from http://nsdc.org/library/publications/research/lowden.pdf

Mullins, T.W. (1994). Staff development programs: A guide to evaluation. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Noyce, P. (2006). Professional Development: How do we know if it works? [commentary]. Education Week, 26(3), 36-37, 44.

Owen, J. M. (1994) *Genuine Reward: Community Inquiry into Connecting Learning, Teaching and Assessing*. Andover MA: regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast & Islands.

Siegel, W & Yates, C. (2007) *Improving the Evaluation of Professional Development Presentations Using Retrospective Pretesting of Existing Knowledge and Self-Efficacy. http://cnx.org/content/m14362/latest/*

Tummons, J. (2005) *Assesing Learning in the Lifelong Learning Sector*. Exeter

Weir, C. (1993) *Communicative Language Testing*. Great Britain: Prentice Hall..

Chapter 8

Assessing Pre-sevice Teachers Performance in Practicum

Esther Gómez Morales
Elizabeth Us Grajales

"Be clear about the purpose of your teaching"

(Brookfield, 1990)

Overview

The main aim of this chapter is to look at some ways to assess teaching practical tasks to assess the development of Knowledge, Awareness and Skills (KAS) in a Language Teaching Programme. Two marking schemes to assess teaching and which are commonly used to assess or certify teaching in real contexts will be presented.

8.1 Teaching as a practical and complex matter

It is strongly believed that it is through practice – real teaching experiences in real classrooms with real students— that initial trainees are able to articulate, examine and revise their own assumptions and beliefs, as well as the "received knowledge" about language teaching and learning. Based on this, trainees can begin to theorize and conceptualize their own practice (Ramani, 1987; Brumfit, 1979) and make sense of the information offered to them during the courses (Palacios and Us, 2004).

Being an English teacher implies a number of responsibilities which initial trainees need to develop through real practicum. According to Wright (1998: 3), "teaching is a

stressful and demanding occupation, as well as a very rewarding one." Teaching anything requires continual evaluation on the part of the teacher. It means finding out new ideas, activities and methods to apply in the classroom in order to make the learning process meaningful. However, in class, teachers are not completely autonomous because there are institutional policies of how to assess or what to assess, as well as what to teach. In theory, learners can design authentic or didactic materials, lesson plans and handouts, but when trainees go to real classes, they may face many unexpected problems such as the following: classroom management especially dealing with discipline problems and large classes as well as dealing with students who do not have the same English level.

Claxton (1984:171) points out that "teaching today demands speed, accuracy and repertoire skills. Similarly Jarvis (2002) states that the role of teaching is changing from teacher to student centred approaches. Therefore, initial teachers need to develop teaching skills through practice changing their deep-rooted beliefs regarding teaching and learning.

Initial teachers work with human beings who are highly emotional. (Hargreaves, 1998) Both of them tend to demonstrate their feelings in every action they do in class helping or hindering the learning and teaching process. Wright (2005:149) points that "the affective domain is central to learning and its management a central concern in teaching and learning. Managing affect poses specific challenges to teachers and students – it is difficult and delicate." The initial teachers need to facilitate learning creating a caring classroom climate.

Freire (1998 in Darder, 2003:497) states that "it is not possible to be a teacher without loving teaching… "an act of love (…) rooted in a committed willingness to struggle persistently with purpose in our life and to intimately connect that purpose with (…) 'true vocation'- to be human." In the Language Teaching Programme at UNACH, it is intend to encourage BA ELT students to enjoy their profession and train them to develop the ability to reflect and act critically about the social, cultural, and political dimensions of their lives.

Many elements exert tension as they need to be put forth in practicum. Shulman (1987) comments that the student teacher has to know about the subject matter, to know a variety of general instructional strategies and to know about the specific strategies necessary for teaching the specific subject matter Some lists used as guidelines for assessing students' performance are summarized in tables 13 and 14 section 8.3 assessment criteria .

In other words, many characteristics of the 'capable' or satisfactory student teacher are required. Program and context are very important elements to take into consideration when assessing BA ELT students as learning to teach effectively is a developmental process.

According to Claxton, 1978 (in Claxton, 1984:170) "learning to teach is not just learning a job: it is learning a new way of being yourself" Learning teaching is a developmental process therefore the great importance of providing opportunities for student teachers to develop the theoretical knowledge and engage in the practices required for effective teaching. In order for BA ELT students to excel in their practices, trainers must provide opportunities where they can have a full command of the subject matter, have a good background in learning theories, methodology, classroom management, assessment, as well as have the personal qualities needed for the profession, such as the patience, character, charisma, interest and motivation.

Teaching is a practical task which has been considered as complex for all the aspects mentioned in this section. Therefore assessing pre-service teachers' performance is a delicate matter which could be done using guidelines to balance validity and reliability

8.2 Feedback as the key for teaching

Trainers are also expected to provide formative feedback so BA ELT students can be able to deconstruct and reflect on their pedagogic practices in such a way that will inform their future teaching practices. According to Tummons (2005:75)

"Feedback provides us with an opportunity to provide advice, support, ideas or anything else that may be appropriate for students who have not yet reached the competence that they are working towards […]"

Feedback needs to be timely mainly after the initial trainees have finished their practicum so that they can reflect on their strengths and weaknesses during the class. It is difficult to help students reflect if time has passed. In table 6, chapter 1 of this book there are useful suggestion to carry out feedback.

Practicum could be seen as supportive experiences of developing and learning, gained through immersion in the real world. Therefore feedback can be a threshold to achieve meaningful learning experiences.

8.3 Assessing pre-service teachers' performance

There are many lists that include guidelines for assessing BA ELT students. These may be modified according to programs and contexts. It is important to mention that a large number of indicators are included in the different guidelines such the followings:

1. Lesson Planning

Initial teachers need to make decisions regarding students', course book, time available, among others. Woods (1996:7) provides the following influences in lesson planning:

- Number of students attending the class
- Availability of photocopying
- Knowledge about students' prior course experience
- Recent conversation with a colleague
- Estimation of the complexity of the task

- Estimation of how well the students and individual in the group are progressing
- Estimation of what the students can manage
- Class and individual dynamics

2. Classroom management

Wright (2005:16) states that "classroom management is concerned with four main strands of classroom life- space, time, participation and engagement. Initial trainees need to manage time, learners, resources, and to engage them for participation.

3. Teaching Strategies

There are many models of teaching and learning so initial trainees may employ a variety of strategies to teach according to their view of teaching and learning. Prabhu (1995:61) " … has to do with a pedagogic action or practice….Teaching is a matter of translating learning theory into teaching action…using teaching action as a source with which to confirm, disconfirm, or help develop learning theory."

4. Evaluation and assessment

During the teaching stage, the initial trainees start evaluating the lesson or the activities as well as assessing students' performance in order to make decisions for conducting and concluding the lesson.

5. Competence in English

Mercer (1995:4) states that "Language is a means for transforming experience into cultural knowledge and understanding." Therefore the English teacher needs to have a good command of the English Language.

The five indicators mentioned above are included in assessment criteria for assessing teaching in real classes. In the LEI Programme, students attend 7 courses such as the following: teaching listening, teaching grammar and vocabulary, teaching speaking, teaching reading, teaching writing, introduction to practicum and practicum. in which they need to teach *in situ*.

One of the practices is to teach an aspect that the learners would like to improve, for example classroom management. The trainer can use the marking scheme proposed by the Victoria University or ICELT Marking Scheme. Both of them have been validated by Boards of Education which have been used to certify teaching.

8.4 Assessment Criteria to assess teaching

In this section two marking schemes are presented, one taken from the Victoria University of Wellington College Education and another from ICELT, 2005. Even though they coincide in some indicators such planning, classroom management, evaluating the lesson, teacher's language, they use different categories or assessment criteria to assess teaching such the following:

- strong,
- competent,
- further development and
- urgent development required

However, ICELT uses the criteria:

- Pass
- Merit
- Distinction

Table 13 describes in detail the guidelines which the trainer may use to assess students' practice:

Guidelines	Strong	Competent	Further Development Required	Urgent Development Required
Planning and Preparation				
▪ Lesson plan follows accepted format ▪ Lesson is appropriate for the class ▪ Intention and purpose is clear ▪ Links made between learning outcomes and learning activities ▪ Achievement of learning outcomes and learning activities ▪ Resources are appropriate and organized ▪ Management contingencies planned for ▪ Individual student needs accommodated				
Communicating with Students				
• Effective use of voice and classroom presence • Strategies to gain attention • Effective classroom presence is achieved • Clear ordered delivery of instructions • Clear ordered delivery of explanations • Students involvement maintained • Clear closure and evaluation • Clear ordered board skills • Clear useful OHTs, handouts, resources				
Teaching Strategies and Routines				
• Appropriate strategies selected • Strategies modeled or explained clearly • Effective use of resources and material • Effective transitions between activities • Efficient and effective use of time • Range of questions used to test understanding • Effective response to student answers				
Managing Group Work				
• Strategies for establishing groups utilized • Tasks are appropriate for group work • Groups are on tasks • Effective reporting back procedures utilized				

Management of Students				
• Firm, fair and consistent management • Effective response to student answers • Off task behavior dealt with • Classroom and school rules maintained • Realistic expectations clear to students • Leadership accepted by students • Effective use of questioning for management				
Evaluation, Analysis and Reflection				
• Self evaluation is realistic and appropriate				

Table 13: Wellington Marking Scheme for teaching

Table 14 also presents in detail specifications for assessing teaching.

TEACHING – SPECIFICATIONS FOR SUPERVISED AND ASSESSED TEACHING (ICELT,2005)		
A lesson plan which: • Specifies the aims and learning objectives and states any important assumptions of prior knowledge needed for the achievement of aims • Describes the procedures planned • Includes a description of the language item/skill which the lesson focuses on • Is accompanied by a sourced copy of the materials to be used	**A rationale which:** • Includes a brief profile of the learners and describes the age and level of the learners and outlines their linguistic and affective needs • Explains how the needs of the learners relate to the aims and objectives of the lesson • Provides a clear analysis of any anticipated problems and possible anticipated solutions	**Post-lesson evaluation** After the lesson, you should evaluate your lesson in discussion with your tutor, formulate action points for ongoing development and provide a brief written summary of the discussion and the action points.
SYLLABUS FOCUS	Language knowledge and awareness, the background to teaching and learning English, resources and materials, planning and management of teaching and learning, evaluation, monitoring and assessment, professional development, language for teachers	

At **Pass** level, the candidate can:

1. Lesson planning a. Identify learning objectives appropriate to the needs, age and ability level of the group b. Select and/or adapt materials and/or activities suitable for the learners and the lesson objectives including, where appropriate, stories, art, music, investigations outside the classroom c. Assign realistic timing to the stages in the lesson d. Include an appropriate variety of activities, interaction and pace e. Anticipate potential difficulties with language and activities f. Present plans in language which is clear, accurate (including the appropriate use of terminology) and easy to read g. Present materials for classroom use with a professional appearance and regard for copyright requirements	**2. Classroom teaching skills** a. Establish rapport b. Foster a constructive and safe learning environment taking into account appropriate learner and teacher roles c. Set up and manage a range of classroom events d. Maintain discipline, showing sensitivity to individual needs e. Maintain learners' interest and involvement f. Teach in a way that encourages the development of learner autonomy g. Teach language items effectively h. Convey the meaning of new language with clear and appropriate context and check learners' understanding of it i. Help learners develop language accuracy j. Monitor learners' language performance and provide appropriate feedback k. Identify errors and sensitively correct learners' oral and written language when and where appropriate l. Make appropriate use of learners' first and other languages m. Teach language skills appropriately and effectively including literacy where relevant n. Help learners develop language fluency o. Use appropriate aids, materials and resources (including the board) effectively p. Adapt plans and activities appropriately in response to the learners and to classroom contingencies q. Achieve learning objectives
3. Lesson evaluation a. Reflect critically on their plan and their teaching b. Review and adapt their practice in the light of this reflection and of the views of tutors, colleagues and learners c. Set targets for on-going development (and, where appropriate, for the next assessed lesson)	**4 Use of English** Uses clear, generally accurate and appropriate language for all aspects of classroom teaching
At **Merit** level, the candidate can meet all of the above criteria. In addition, classroom performance will give strong and consistent evidence of all-round effectiveness as a classroom practitioner, in terms of qualities such as flexibility, organizational ability, independence of judgement, confidence, rapport with students and support for learning.	At **Distinction** level, the candidate can meet all the criteria specified above. In addition, there will be consistent evidence of exceptional ability in terms of the following: a. breadth of knowledge b. depth of understanding c. insight into learners and learning.

There are many criteria to assess teaching which are very effective to provide feedback both for the teachers and the learners. However, it is very difficult to observe many aspects from just one BA ELT student's class. Through real practice, BA ELT students can reflect on their learning to teach. Regarding this

comment, John (1996:104) points out that "prospective teachers enter courses of training with a vast array of personal theories about teaching, learning and learning to teach." Thus, we need to help them reflect and re-examine their beliefs through practice.

As we have mentioned before, it is very difficult to grade practicum because there are many unexpected problems during the lesson. Rees also (1997:92) states that:

> "There is not single set of skills, attitudes, interests, and abilities that all good teachers have and that all poor teachers lack. Effective teaching means different things to different students at different times, and research that has sought to discover one set of characteristics for effective teachers has doomed itself to failure"

The marking schemes shown above are helpful guidelines to provide developmental feedback to BA ELT students so that they can think of action plans to improve their weaknesses in future classes. As Reed and Bergemann (1992:6) say "teaching experiences are the bridge between the worlds of theory and practice." Through practicum student teachers can notice if what they are learning through the Language Teaching Programme is useful in the training room with real students.

It is advisable to use a criterion referencing system when assessing students because the learners need to demonstrate that they are competent in teaching a class in English which involves many aspects such as planning, designing, analysing, teaching, evaluating and assessing, among other responsibilities.

Summary

We have shown some guidelines to assess practicum, but as we mentioned before, there are many criteria for assessing one student's class. Teachers need to observe more than one students' performance in order to be able to give feedback to their students and to grade fairly their competence in teaching and speaking English as well as designing materials, providing tutoring or counselling, etc.

Bibliography

Bergemann, V. & A. Reed (1992) *A guide to Observation, Participation and Reflection in the Classroom.* New York: McGraw-Hill. Companies, INC.

Bolitho, R. (1991) Are good teachers born or made? Factors in the design and implementation of pre-service training courses for English language teachers. Paper to National Conference on Teacher Training for ELT. MPIK, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Unpublished

Cambridge (2005) Syllabus and Assessment Guidelines, ICELT, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Claxton, G. (1984) The Psychology of Teacher Training: inaccuracies and improvements. *Educational Psychology,* 4 /2.

Easen, P. (1985) Making School–Centred INSET Work Milton Keynes. Open University Press.

Freire, P. (1998) in Darder, A. et al. (2003) The Critical Pedagogy Reader. New York: Routledge

Hargreaves, A. et al. (1998) *International Handbook of Educational Change*. Great Britain: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

John, D. P. (1996) Understanding the apprenticeship of observation in initial teacher education. In Claxton G. et al (1996) (eds) *Liberating the Learner*. London: Cassell

Mercer, N. (1995) The Guided Construction of knowledge. Clevedon:Multilingual Matters.

Palacios, B. and Us, E. (2004) The Rationale behind the Core Elements of the new B. Ed in English Language Teaching at the University of Chiapas Module 4 (MIED07): Strategies for Teacher Education. Unpublished.

Prabhu, N.S. (1995) Concepts and conduct in language pedagogy. In G. Cook and B. Seidhofer (eds) Principle and Practice in Applied Linguistics. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Shulman, L. (1987) Knowledge and teaching: foundations of the new reform. Harvard Educational Review, 57,1-22.

Rees, A. (1997) *A Closer Look at Classroom Observation: An indictment*. London: Routledge.

Woods, P. (ed.) (1996) Contemporary Issues in Teaching and Learning. London: Routledge.

Wright, T. (1998) *Teacher Development: A personal view. Plymouth, UK: Available www.marjon.ac.uk/international/resources Accessed18 August 2003*

Wright, T. (2005) *Classroom Management in Language Education*. London: Palgrave.

Chapter 9

Using Project Work in Alternative Assessment

Ana María Elisa Díaz de la Garza

"Create diversity in your teaching"

(Brookfield, 1990)

Overview

A great deal of attention is now being paid to alternative forms of assessment in the Mexican educational system. Thank goodness educators no longer consider testing that emphasizes rote memorization of facts to be significant learning. It has become necessary to develop methods for assessing complex knowledge and learners' performance in problem solving due to the fact that goals for education have substantially changed in our country.

Since learners cannot learn everything they require in the classroom, it is necessary to find ways to help them develop their cognitive abilities by providing them with opportunities to solve real problems, to become self-sufficient by organizing and regulating their own learning, to learn independently and in groups, and to overcome difficulties in the learning process. This requires them to be aware of their own thinking processes and learning strategies and methods.' (OECD 1999:9)

Stroller (1997: 2) states that "by integrating project work into content-based classrooms, educators create vibrant learning environments that require active student involvement, stimulate higher level thinking skills and give students responsibility for their own learning." Projects are an effective

method to accurately measure and promote complex thinking and learning goals that are critical to learners' academic success and "demonstrated capability." By using projects, teachers can integrate performance-based assessments into the instructional process to provide additional learning experiences for students. (Brualdi: 1998)

9.1 Project Work

Project-based learning is an instructional approach that contextualizes learning by presenting trainees with problems to solve or products to develop. Performance-based assessments "represent a set of strategies for the...application of knowledge, skills, and work habits through the performance of tasks that are meaningful and engaging to students" (Hibbard 1996, in Brualdi 1998:5), which provides educators with information about how a learner understands and applies knowledge. Through the use of project work, classes move away from the traditional teacher-centered instruction and move towards creating a student community of inquiry involving authentic communication, cooperative learning, collaboration, and problem-solving. (Stroller 1997: 2)

Henry (1994 in Stroller 1997) defines 3 different types of projects:

- ***Structured projects*** are determined, specified, and organized by the teacher in terms of topic, materials, methodology, and presentation;
- ***Unstructured projects*** are defined largely by students themselves; and,
- ***Semi-structured projects*** are defined and organized in part by the teacher and in part by students.

Projects may also be categorized according to the approach chosen to report the information obtained. According to Haines (1989):

- ***Production projects*** involve the creation of bulletin boards, DVDs, radio programs, posters, written reports, photo essays, letters, handbooks, brochures, etc.

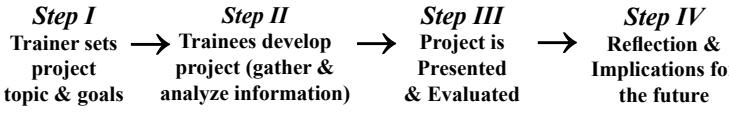
- ***Performance projects*** may be presented as debates, oral presentations, theatrical performances, food fairs, or fashion shows.

- ***Organizational projects*** involve the planning and formation of a club, conversation table, or forums.

Regardless of their configuration, projects may be carried out intensively over a short time period or extended over a few weeks, or a full school term; they can be completed by students individually, in small groups, or as a class; and they can take place entirely within the classroom or can extend beyond the walls of the classroom into the community or with others via different forms of correspondence.

Project work requires multiple stages of development to succeed. Fried- Booth (1986) and Haines (1989), recommend that educators follow these steps when implementing project work:

9.2 *Developing Project Work in the Classroom*



Principles of Project-Based Learning

Project-based learning is characterized by the following principles:

- Builds on previous work;
- Integrates trainees' skills;
- Incorporates collaborative team work, problem solving, negotiating and other interpersonal skills;
- Requires learners to engage in independent work;
- Challenges learners to use information in new and different contexts outside the class;
- Involves learners in choosing the focus of the project and in the planning process;
- Engages learners in acquiring new information that is important to them;
- Leads to clear outcomes; and
- Incorporates self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and teacher evaluation.

9.3 Assessment Criteria (stages)

To administer effective assessment teacher trainers must have a clearly defined purpose which takes into account the following:

- What KAS (knowledge/skill or awareness) am I attempting to assess?
- What should my learners know?
- At what level should my trainees be performing?

To identify what project best suits each subjects' assessment needs teacher trainers must consider the following:

- time constraints
- availability of resources
- how much information is required to properly evaluate the quality of a finished product.

According to Airasian (1991:. 244), the criterion for evaluating project work includes:

- Sharing assessment criteria with students from the beginning so that learners are aware of exactly what is expected of them. As teacher-trainers, we must remember that performance-based assessments do not have clearly defined right or wrong answers due to the fact that there are degrees to which a project is successful or unsuccessful. Thus, trainees' performance must be evaluated taking those varying degrees into consideration. Projects are evaluated within a specific time frame and setting and there are no surprises for the trainee since they have already signed a project contract. Authentic assessment offers the opportunity to assess trainees':

    - Creativity
    - Planning skills
    - Ability to integrate knowledge
    - Ability to work with others

Trainees' presentations can be judged in terms of:

1) Depth of understanding
2) Clarity
3) Coherence
4) Responsiveness to questions
5) Monitoring of their listeners' understanding.

Assessment of their performance should be done using check-lists or rating scales to ensure objectivity.

9.4 Benefits & Drawbacks

The main goal of education is the development of critical thinking skills. Nonetheless, some trainers may hesitate to

implement using project work in their classrooms. This is usually due to the fact that a great number of teachers feel they do not know enough about how to fairly assess a student's performance (Airasian, 1991). Another reason for reluctance in using performance-based assessments may be unsuccessful previous experiences.

Project work is viewed by most of its advocates "not as a replacement for other teaching methods" but rather as "an approach to learning which complements mainstream methods and which can be used with almost all levels, ages and abilities of students" (Haines 1989: 1).

Advantages of using project work include:

1. Project work focuses on content learning rather than on specific targets. Real-world subject matter and topics of interest to learners can become central to projects.
2. Project work is student centered; however, the teacher trainer plays a major role in offering support and guidance throughout the process.
3. Project work is cooperative rather than competitive. Students can work on their own, in small groups, or as a class to complete a project, sharing resources, ideas, and expertise along the way.
4. Project work leads to the authentic integration of skills and processing of information from varied sources, mirroring real-life tasks.
5. Project work culminates in an end product (e.g., an oral presentation, a poster session, a bulletin board display, a report, or a stage performance) that can be shared with others, giving the project a real purpose.
6. Allow trainees to formulate their own questions and then try to find answers to them.
7. Provide trainees with opportunities to use their multiple intelligences to create a product.

8. Allow trainers to assign projects at different levels of difficulty to account for individual learning styles and ability levels.
9. Provide an opportunity for positive interaction and collaboration among peers.
10. Increase the self-esteem of trainees who would not get recognition on tests or traditional writing assignments.
11. Allow for students to share their learning and accomplishments with other students, classes or community members

Drawbacks to project work include:

- Some learners doing nothing
- Groups working at different speeds.

Project work is potentially motivating, stimulating, empowering, and challenging. It usually results in building student confidence, self-esteem, and autonomy as well as improving students' language skills, content learning, and cognitive abilities.

9.5 Examples and Suggestions for Using Project Work in the Teacher Training Room

To ensure that trainees understand what is expected of them, make sure to have trainees sign a project contract and to make two copies: one for the trainer and one for the trainee. (See Appendix 14: Sample Project Contract) It is also a good idea for them to develop an action plan such as the following to keep track of progress on task based projects:

Action Plan 1: Planning and Gathering Information

In the next two weeks, you will plan and gather information for your project. List below what tasks will be done each week, which group member(s) will do them, and when the tasks will be completed.

Action Plan 1: Planning and Gathering Information After Kaiser (2002)			
Group members:			
Week	**Task**	**Group Member**	**Date Completed**
	Project proposal, organization, and action plan	All	

Projects which have proved successful in teaching practice include the following:

- EFL: At the end of the school term trainees are very motivated to create a school yearbook which includes the following. (See Appendix 14)

- Teaching Culture and Civilization: At the end of the term alumni must comply with the project: *"A Stroll Through Anglosaxon Culture"* for course credit. (See Appendix 14: Sample Project Contract)

Summary

Project-based work involves careful planning and flexibility on the part of the trainer. Because of the dynamic nature of this type of learning, not all problems can be anticipated. Moreover, sometimes a project will move forward in a different direction than originally planned since Project Work is organic and unique to each class. This makes it exciting, challenging, and meaningful to learners. Teacher educators can integrate projects into their courses to reinforce important pedagogical issues and provide trainees with hands-on experience, a process that may be integrated into future classrooms of their own. (Stroller 1997: 3)

Project work offers many solutions to the problems faced in the teacher training classroom, including increasing the amount of input trainees receive, making course content more applicable to trainees, and fomenting creativity. Once a framework is established, the trainer is free to act as a facilitator rather than to lecture. This framework can be applied to different subjects without becoming monotonous for the teacher trainer since each group will produce a unique project, thus project work can become a valuable addition to classes.

Bibliography

Airasian, P.W. (1991). Classroom assessment. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Brualdi, A. (1998). Implementing Performance Assessment in the Classroom. Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation. [ED423312]

Fried- Booth (1986) *Project Work*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Haines S (1989) Projects for the EFL Classroom. London: Nelson

Hibbard, K. (1996). A Teacher's Guide to Performance-Based Learning and Assessment. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Kaiser, A. (2002) Creating Meaningful Web Pages: A Project-Based Course *Forum 40/3*

OECD (1999) *Measuring Student Knowledge and Skills*. Paris: OECD.

Stoller, F. (1997) Project Work: A Means to Promote Language Content. *Forum 35/4*.

Chapter 10

Portfolio as an assessment technique

Beatriz de Ibarrola y Nicolin

"See yourself as a helper of learning"

(Brookfield, 1990)

Overview

This paper aims at explaining the use of portfolio as an assessment method. First I will define what a portfolio is, then I will discuss some of the advantages and disadvantages of using portfolios in the training room and finally some criteria about validation and assessment and two different perspectives from trainees who have created this new form of alternative assessment is considered.

10.1 What is a portfolio?

Portfolio is a word which is often used today in alternative evaluative processes to describe a collection of learners' documents with accompanying reflective comments. According to my own experience, a portfolio is a set of documents created by a learner. Each document records, in a detailed formal way, the BA ELT student´s reflection on one piece of learning. It may eventually contribute to a dynamic conjunction of both the teaching and the learning processes. This in turn may help the students to maximize their learning through reflection and self analysis in an autonomous, careful way. When sharing their portfolios, student teachers may be able to discover the richness involved in collaboration.

According to Johnson (1996), 'Portfolios are a useful tool leading to professional development. Curtis (2000:41) believes that 'portfolios are a tool for reflection'; Pollard (1997:303) affirms that portfolios support learners in reflecting on their own work, in affirming it and in harnessing the support of appropriate others (meaning trainers or tutors)'; he also believes that portfolios can be shared with others. Banfi (2003:28) describes them as 'the ideal tool for encouraging learner autonomy and a useful means of showing progress in the development of reflective skills.

A simple definition, given by Oxford (1990) is that portfolios are 'the story of the students' learning' and she encourages trainers to use them by saying: 'Let them tell their stories'. Spandal & Culham (1994:28) conclude this about portfolios: 'In truth, any portfolio exists first and foremost in the heart and mind of the designer who selects with care those works and artifacts that best tell the story of who a person is now and who he or she is becoming'. Curtis (2000) recommends that 'portfolios should contain commentaries and explanations and carefully selected examples of both student and teacher work'.

According to the previous definitions, portfolios imply a strong interaction among five relevant elements required in teacher education: reflection, autonomy, self analysis, collaboration and care. This is shown in table 15, below.

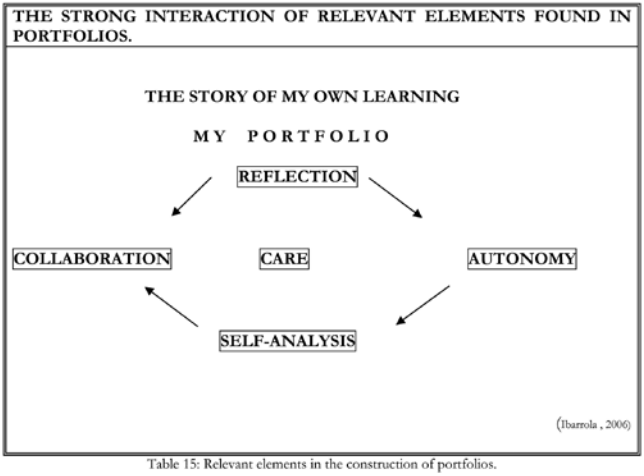


Table 15: Relevant elements in the construction of portfolios.

Moon (2001:25) affirms that 'reflection does not come alone'. Reflection is indeed accompanied by self-analysis, which means a desire for autonomy, it implies also taking into account different perspectives from others, a process that involves collaboration; all these should be observed with great care. The theory of learning underlying portfolios is thus contrary to the transmission of knowledge, it rather supports what Wells & Claxton (2002) describe as 'the development of understanding and the formation of minds and identities'. In table 16, the deep reflective stages proposed by Moon, and found in portfolios are described.

DEEP REFLECTIVE STAGES BY MOON	THE EXISTENCE OF REFLECTIVE STAGES IN PORTFOLIOS.
Self questioning	Internal dialogues. Documents with accompanying reflective comments.
Taking into account different perspectives	Perspectives from the student teachers and perspectives from trainer and tutors. Arguments with others' points of view.
Recognition of prior experiences	Building knowledge from previous experiences in the teaching/learning process.
Clear evidence of standing back from an event and reconsider.	Seeing things a second time; seeing things at a distance. A possibility of seeing things in the right dimension.
Splitting up the thinking processes from the points you want to learn.	Deciding on the use of the right strategies for each different challenge.
Recognition that an emotional change may occur according to the time in which the problems are analyzed.	Considering emotions as part of life. Measuring the emotional temperature as in the Kübler Ross Curve. Touching bottom and impulsing up.

Table 16: The Stages of Reflection by Moon.

10.2. Assessment Criteria

Assessment of portfolios is a crucial issue, and it should be based on the process itself rather than on the product. The product, the portfolio elaborated by the BA ELT student, should be accepted as the result of an individual analysis. It

is the process that can involve a consensual decision by all the actors involved.

This consensual decision implies a continuous negotiation that participants can divide in four consecutive stages, as seen in table 17, below.

STAGES FOR THE ELABORATION AND EVALUATION OF PORTFOLIOS
FIRST STAGE: A REFLECTIVE COLLECTION OF DOCUMENTS A careful collection of all the documents that contained evidence of: ▪ The student teacher's training room agenda for record of everyday work. ▪ Answers to thinking questions or thinking questions to be answered. ▪ Excerpts of the student teacher's learning log with comments on the process. ▪ Excerpts from the student teacher's reading log, including comments on authors. ▪ Reflective weekly reviews contrasting first/second/third attempts in improving. ▪ Activities done in the training room with other colleagues.
SECOND STAGE: A CAREFUL SELECTION OF DOCUMENTS The selection of the material according to the criterion for the portfolio analysis: ▪ A key moment/a relevant activity/a difficult experience/comments on the course trend. ▪ Comments on relevant authors/ a key activity in internet/a collaborative task/beliefs about the learning process/comparison of a first oral presentation and a second one/strengths and weaknesses/ best or worst experiences/critical friendships/ There is no limit to what portfolios may contain and the writer of the portfolio has complete freedom to decide how far 'the accompanying reflection' is included.
THIRD STAGE: WRITING ABOUT THE REFLECTIVE COMMENTS Elaborating the reflective comments around the deep stages of reflection recommended by Moon: self-analysis, considerations of others' perceptions, keeping distance, making action plans for overcoming challenges and weaknesses and considering emotions as part of the learning process.
FOURTH STAGE: A COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION ▪ Arriving to conclusions by rereading the portfolio with a critical friend. ▪ Sharing the portfolio with trainers/tutors and analyzing their reflective comments. ▪ Sharing the portfolio with other student teachers in the training room and analyzing their comments. ▪ Going through a self evaluation of the whole process. ▪ Negotiating percentages of total evaluation for each stage of the process.

Table 17: Stages for the Elaboration and Assessment of Portfolios.

This negotiation about the what, why and how of portfolios, needs to be applied also to evaluation and assessment. Genessee & Upshur (1996:99) remark that 'The positive effects of portfolios on student learning, arise from the opportunities they afford students to become actively involved in assessment

and learning and that this does not happen automatically… rather it depends critically on teachers' conscientious efforts to use portfolios as a collaborative assessment process'. It is a fact that more progressive styles for evaluation and assessment, alternative to the traditional ones, may involve participants themselves in the learning and practice of evaluative processes along with trainers and that negotiation without risking the quality of the process is an imperative.

10.3 Advantages and Disadvantages of the use of Portfolios in the Training room.

Portfolios can be a tool that helps BA ELT students in becoming reflective learners who learn to deal with their learning and who learn to practice what Claxton (2001:6) describes as 'Learning to live the learning life'. For future teachers this implies the continuous education in a life-long process! A second powerful advantage of portfolios is that through them learners may feel the benefits of inserting themselves in the deep approach to learning as described by Moon (2004:122) which is 'the intention to understand ideas for yourself' rather than to only cope with course requirements or get the highest grades, which correspond to the surface and strategic approaches and which are not necessarily reflective.

Those learners who belong to the surface or strategic approaches in learning, may move through portfolios to a deeper approach and they may begin to relate their learning to previous experiences and to previous knowledge. If learners become more interested in the course process and in the content of the course that will be able to examine both more critically, and be more careful in keeping a record of their learning by collecting and analyzing key tasks for their portfolios.

Portfolios are documents that enhance reflection, and in the new concepts of pedagogy, reflection should be the core of all approaches to teacher development. Curtis (2000:4) says that 'At the heart of all the approaches to teacher development is the notion of reflection'. If trainers think about authentic

development in training courses, they must use reflective tools: the creation and elaboration of portfolios is one, and through it learners can be encouraged to move from their habitual only descriptive reflection stage to deeper stages such as dialogic and critical as seen in Moon's stages for reflection in table 16.

Last, but not least, a third relevant advantage is that, as Brown & Wolfe Quintero (1997) say: 'Portfolios tell the story of efforts, skills, abilities, achievement and contributions of learners'; they believe it is crucial in education to hear the learners' voices. It is in Portfolios that the legitimacy of what Moon (2001:2) calls 'I', 'My functioning' can be reestablished in a developmental spirit: Learners will be able to tell about their own experiences and relate them to their own feelings and decide what or what not is to be done about their new learning. In table 18, below, a clear continuum of these possible changes in learners is presented.

A CONTINUUM OF CHANGE FROM SURFACE TO DEEPER APPROACHES: FROM……TO
AN UNREFLECTIVE CULTURE……...A CULTURE OF REFLECTION
Studying without reflection……Learning through reflective tasks
No purpose or strategy……...Developing strategies for learning
Only 'bits of knowledge'……...Treating the course as a whole
Memorizing……...Understanding
Routine procedures……...Meaningful tasks related to experience
Difficulty in making sense……Efforts in making sense
Feeling undue pressure……...Feeling satisfaction of learning
Worry about work decided by others……Concern about 'I', 'My functioning', 'My work'
Ibarrola (2006:38)

Table 18: A Continuum of Change, from Surface to Deeper Approaches.

The advantages already mentioned, can become disadvantages easily, if the task of elaborating portfolios falls into routine. Then, as Johnson (1996) warns, this evaluation form turns into a 'waste of time' or a 'pile of papers'. A disadvantage that must be carefully considered is that portfolios are a 'time consuming form of evaluation'. Trainers have to dedicate time and energy to their preparation, elaboration, and evaluation. It is undeni-

able that once the process is ignited, the benefits are evident in short time. To avoid falling into the possible existent disadvantages trainers have to respect the freedom that learners need in this kind of alternative evaluative form.

10.4 A sample: learning outcomes, assessment method, assessment criteria.

It is not easy to select a sample of a successful portfolio, because trainers must learn to accept all the ideas that trainees consider relevant as learning outcomes or as learning processes. Curtis (2000:42) suggests the following criteria for a positive evaluation and assessment concerning the contents of portfolios:

- Relevant vs. irrelevant.
- Short and careful vs. long and careless.
- Selective vs. redundant.
- About the process of learning vs. about other issues.
- Summarized vs. complete documents.
- Reflective vs. descriptive.
- Self analytical vs. analytical in general.
- Autonomous vs. dependent on authority.
- Collaborative vs. isolated.

Some guidelines for interaction in the evaluation and assessment process are suggested by Genesse & Upshur (1996:103) which are appropriate for reflective tasks and for a reflective relationship between trainer and trainee:

- Include learners in decisions.
- Let them choose what to include in their portfolios.

- Negotiate assessment.
- Plan -portfolio roundtables- to discuss portfolios in group.
- Encourage learners to share their challenges with portfolios.
- Organize review of portfolios.
- Ensure positive, collaborative and supportive attitudes.

Two examples of portfolios are included below in tables 19 and 20:

First example: Gloria's Portfolio. Topic: Key moments for my learning. Date: August/2004
"One of the most important things I have learnt during this module is the importance of feeling positive. For example when you are doing something you really enjoy doing, you realize you do not take too much effort on carrying the task on. However this situation does not come as simple as it seems to be. Concerning this module, for example, I feel very excited when it is about to start, as well as during the three-week sessions, which I really enjoy, therefore I feel very positive. I become so involved with the topics that the day goes by very quickly and so do the weeks. This is strongly related to motivation just as Williams (1999) points out: 'People are more likely to act in certain ways if they have been involved in making the decision to do so'. At the beginning of the module I used to focus my goals in the future, for example when finishing the course. However during the process of this course my goals have dramatically changed: they have been reduced to writing good assignments. One of the reasons for changing was reading an article on motivation by Williams (1995:5) in which it is stated that 'too low a level of challenge can result in apathy, but too high a level can lead to over-anxiety or stress.' I suddenly saw myself reflected in this statement and I started thinking about my goals, and then I realized they were too high, because they seemed to be focused in the future rather than in the present; this made me think that it is necessary to concentrate in the present day every day to create a solid learning future. My resolutions thus are: *a) Concentrate on reading about one topic first.* *b) Write about this topic on my reading log.* *c) Relate what I have read and written to my own experience.* *Conclusion: I have been trying to concentrate on the activities I do the moment I am doing them. This has been very helpful; I have been able to accomplish most of them in a more effective way".*

Table 19: Example of a trainee's portfolio.

Second Example: Margarita's Portfolio. **Topic: Comparing two Oral Presentations. Date: December/2006**
"In my portfolio I will register my experience in my oral presentations during the semester with the intentions of learning how to make them more precise and also more attractive to listeners. *At the beginning of the semester I did my first oral presentation in which I had to introduce a great Mexican poet to the class. The main objective was to show the poet's use of Spanish according to the characteristics described by Lope Blanch (1991). I worked in a team with two other colleagues and we prepared a poster in which we had to include the following: a suggestive title, biographical information about the poet and his/her work, a sample of one short poem, our conclusions, the bibliography and finally the date and our names as integrants of the team. When we finished our presentation we could realize that we had totally missed the point and that we had not worked as a team and that even our poster presented problems because the characters were too small, there was too much information, no bibliography at all, and we had forgotten to include our names and the date. At the end of the semester we had a second chance for an oral presentation, and we prepared a self evaluation sheet with four resolutions, with the intention of not falling into the same mistakes:* *1.- Size of characters, minimum 14 arial.* *2.- Relevant information only.* *3.- Include bibliography at the bottom.* *4.- Concentration on the objective of the presentation.* *Our presentation this time was far from being perfect, but our performance was more professional, the poster could be read at a distance by the students in the last row, the information included was brief and important to the objective of the presentation, the bibliography was included and as a team we reminded one another not to miss the point and we acted as a team in a more reflective, respectful and careful way. We did our self evaluation and contrasted the two presentations, and prepared resolutions for a third one. We include our two posters where the decisions for improvement can be noticed".*

Table 20: Second Example of a Trainee's Portfolio.

In both examples a clear continuum of changes produced by portfolios in trainees can be followed:

- **The synthesis of their learning through reflective self analysis.** This can be seen in sentences such as: 'I realized the importance of being positive'.
- **The developing of strategies for learning better.** This is evident in sentences such as 'I became so involved with the topics that the days went by quickly' or 'My resolutions for doing better in my next oral presentation…'
- **The meaningful tasks related to previous experiences and the effort for finding sense in what is being done.** Evident in sentences such as 'My previous own experience…Our previous oral presentation was far from being perfect'.
- **The satisfaction of the concern of "I", "We", "My functioning" and "Our functioning".** Evident in comments such as 'In my portfolio…', 'I have been trying…'.

All this confirms Moon's (2001:2) ideas in the development of a personal spirit that grows along with reflection and self-analysis.

10.5 Suggestions for the use of Portfolios in the training room.

The personal learning richness found in the whole process of portfolios may mean the truly basis for development in teacher training. This is what Beth, a trainee in her finishing semester writes about them: "Thanks to portfolios I could go through serious evaluation processes of my projects, in them I discovered my weaknesses and strengths and I could begin to look for the strategies I needed for reading and writing my future projects in a more successful way. Portfolios approached me to others and the thinking I did when writing them and rereading or sharing them took me to a better understanding of myself and of others through myself. I guess it was similar to the experience that authors have when they write their biographies, their stories, and learn to understand, to forgive and to change".

Although most of the experiences with portfolios seem to be positive, there are also challenges to overcome and some negative aspects that trainers have to consider before attempting their use in the training room. Overcoming these challenges may be a long, painful and continuous work in trainers' professional life. Table 21, below, contains the four most relevant ones and some suggestions to overcome them.

Summary

All these considerations about portfolios created in the training room, as an alternative form of evaluation, are only suggestions for both trainers and trainees. The personal experience of creating a portfolio is in fact the best way to arrive at useful conclusions.

The use of portfolios, the evaluation and the assessment criteria can be negotiated in the training room; each group of student teachers and trainers are different and their sensitivity and perspectives should be always considered to make the learning process richer.

We have already talked about the effectiveness of using portfolios and about the challenges that we can face if trainers try to impose this alternative form of evaluation on students. Student teachers need to create their own portfolios and they need to feel self-assured by them. It can always be a good advance to negotiate with BA ELT students if they want to be assessed through portfolios not as a product, but as a process, taking into consideration the different steps in which the document gives evidence of the learning of its creator.

Bibliography

Banfi, C. (2003) Portfolios: Integrating advanced language academic and professional skills. ELT Journal 57/1.

Brown, J.D. & Wolfe Quintero (1997) Teacher portfolios for evaluation: A great idea or a waste of time? Language Teacher,21.

Claxton, G. (2001) Wise Up. Stafford: Network Education Press/Ltd.

Curtis, A. (2000) Continuous Professional Development: Portfolios. English Teaching Professional Issue 16/July, 2000.

Genessee, F. & John A. Upshur (1996) Classroom-based Evaluation in Second Language Education. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.

Ibarrola, B. (2006) *Portfolios: A Challenge for Change in Teacher Education.* Dissertation.

Johnson, K.E. (1996) Portfolio assessment in second language education. TESOL Journal, 6/2.

Moon, J. (2001) Reflection in Higher Education Learning. Working paper University of Exeter. Available from nternet March, 10, 2004.

Moon, J. (2004) A Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning. London:
RoutledgeFalmer.

Oxford, R. (1990) Language Learning Strategies. Oxford. Oxford University Press.

Pollard, A. (1997) Reflective Teaching. London: Cassell Education.

Spandal, V.& R. Culham (1994)Analytic Model of Writing Assessment & Instruction. Portland: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

Wells, G. & Guy Claxton (2002) Learning for Life in the XX-Ist. Century. London: Blackwell Publishing.