BEYOND PAPER-AND-PENCIL TESTS: GOOD ASSESSMENT PRACTICES FOR EFL CLASSES

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Beyond Paper-and-Pencil Tests: Good Assessment Practices for EFL Classes

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Dedication

To all the people who made the publication of this book possible.

To those EFL teachers who, day by day, give the best of their own for helping their students construct their knowledge and learn English in meaningful and effective ways.

Introduction

Individuals´ learning of a second or foreign language has been traditionally measured with paper-and-pencil tests. Unfortunately, such assessment practice prevents learners from demonstrating the skills gained throughout the teaching-learning processes and thus, their actual ability to use the target language effectively. It also limits learners from receiving positive feedback; which opens doors for them to improve their language skills.

The language teaching field demands that English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers have a vast knowledge of the fundamental concepts and theories that surround the assessment of EFL learning. It also requires that professionals who teach a foreign language keep up to date with assessment tendencies that go beyond paper-and-pencil tests as is the case of authentic assessments.

Assessment practices that go beyond traditional paper-and-pencil tests provide students with opportunities to be assessed in mental stress-free environments. Teachers who promote this alternative form of assessment prompt learners to perform real-world tasks so that they can demonstrate their capability to apply essential knowledge and skills in creative and meaningful ways. In other words, teachers gain insights about how much students have grasped by

their actual ability to perform in a specific situation instead of the number right or wrong answers they have made on a test.

This book is composed of seven chapters intended to inform pre-service and in-service EFL teachers about good assessment practices that go beyond the bounds of tests that require learners to read questions and respond in writing. The first chapter of this book provides EFL educators with a menu of authentic assessments that can be implemented in their classrooms. It also builds a synopsis of assessment practices in Ecuadorian EFL classes and the educational policies that have been implemented to improve them.

The second chapter of this book digs into the use of role-plays as an alternative to assess students´ oral production. The chapter is built upon the results of two studies on the topic and some research conducted by its author, addressing the causes that affect learners´ willingness to speak English. The third chapter focuses on the assessment of one of the receptive skills in language learning, reading. This chapter offers a compilation of resources for effectively assessing reading comprehension in EFL programs; detailing how these resources intertwine with the reality of EFL settings.

The fourth chapter discusses a set of strategies that have been evaluated by the authors of this section through action research. Based on their experience, the authors explain how such strategies can be used as tools to gain insights, develop reflective practice, and improve students' outcomes as well as the teaching environment.

In the fifth chapter, the readers will learn about the importance of determining and how to diminish students' test anxiety. This chapter also addresses practical authentic assessment tools and scenarios that give language learners anxiety-free opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge.

The sixth and seventh chapters have been devoted to the use of technology for assessing language learners authentically. Chapter six analyzes the change from traditional pen

and paper tests to those that have incorporated technology. The authors review the evolution of Information and Communication Technologies based evaluation and assessment applications for English as foreign language learning and teaching, as well as their advantages and disadvantages, current developments, and future trends for technology-based assessment practices.

Finally, grounded in an action research intervention, chapter seven examines how the use of Literature Circles, Google Apps, and corrective feedback can help students improve learners´ English language level. Each chapter in this book offers EFL teachers with valuable information on good assessment practices. It is expected that the educators who read this work consider the suggestions provided here and implement them in their practice. We are sure that by doing so, these educators will give their students the possibility of being assessed authentically; it is to say, by what they can do instead of by how many items they get right on a test.

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Tools for assessing reading comprehension in English as a foreign language programs

Jessenia Matamoros González; Luis Peralta Sari

Assessment tools are the backbone of reading development as they intervene prior to, during, and after instruction; whether it is to keep or redirect the instructional path as well as measuring students' growth. Unfortunately, English as Foreign Language (EFL) settings continue to suffer from starvation of professional development resources for reading comprehension assessment up to this date. The intricacy of reading and limited budgets for research have caused this agonizing scarcity. Furthermore, the unfavorable conditions match the outcome. Discouraging results regarding reading comprehension are evident even after years of permanence in EFL classes. Upon graduation from elementary school and high school, Ecuadorian students' reading levels in EFL programs continue to be very low. Thus, tools to assess students in order to forge actual reading growth seem to be necessary.

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First world countries are well known for their emphasis in reading. These countries have made significant efforts to "unpack" the complexity of reading comprehension for their English Language Learners (ELL). Therefore, a wide variety of resources about reading comprehension assessment has been made available for teachers, including reading assessment tools. However, most of these resources discuss ELLs in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs.

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It is well known that ELLs in ESL programs and ELLs in EFL programs learn English in different contexts; therefore, they pose differences. However, many of these ESL resources are quite useful for an EFL setting as both EFL and ESL programs have the same purpose, learning a language. The question is, which of these resources are useful for EFL students and what modifications are required in order to meet their needs. In order to find suitable reading assessment tools.

Teachers would have to embark upon a difficult hunt of picking and selecting what is appropriate for their students, as well as modifying those tools according to the needs of their students. Unfortunately, teachers' busy schedules and lack of expertise could prevent EFL teachers from successfully completing this task.

As a response to this issue, this chapter provides teachers with a compilation of resources for effectively assessing reading comprehension in EFL programs. Throughout the chapter, the readers will see in detail how these resources intertwine with the reality of EFL settings. With this contribution, the authors expect to ease the location of effective reading comprehension assessment tools for EFL programs. This chapter constitutes a source of knowledge intended to shed light on best reading comprehension assessment practices to improve the reading comprehension of ELLs in Ecuador and any other setting that mirrors the contextual reality of our country.

What is reading Comprehension?

Several experts have attempted to define reading comprehension. According to Snow, (2002) reading comprehension is "the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language" (p. 11). However, this and many other definitions fail to provide a detailed characterization that allows teachers to truly see what reading comprehension is and involves. Experts can't be blamed for this as reading comprehension is such an intricate concept and its complexity makes this phenomenon only comprehensible. The density of reading comprehension makes mentioning all its components and processes in one single definition, quite challenging. Therefore, we will skip attempting to provide a vague definition that you probably already have, and we will "unpack" what reading comprehension is by isolating and analyzing its most essential elements.

Reading comprehension begins with text. If there is nothing to read, reading comprehension can't exist. The basic components of a text are letters, words, sentences, and punctuation. The reader must be aware of these elements and how they relate to each other. For instance, readers will use sound-letter relationships to decode words and awareness of syntax to understand the message a group of words

provides. However, reading comprehension is more complex than just decoding words and understanding sentences. Tyson (2014) provided a similar definition to Snow's for reading comprehension. However, she believed it was worth to mention that "information from the text and the knowledge possessed by the reader interact in order to construct meaning" (p. 1). This allows us to see that reading comprehension requires students' background knowledge to process what is being read. For some teachers, background knowledge may seem straightforward. However, we will see that this element requires careful consideration.

Background knowledge is what students already know about a topic. However, to maximize the benefits of background knowledge we should take into consideration the background knowledge of all of the students in a class. Through different grouping techniques students will be able to display their prior knowledge for the whole class to observe. This collection of ideas will provide students with a solidified foundation to understand what they are about to read. This not only supports ELLs on higher levels, but it also benefits ELLs with lower proficiency levels, since it allows them to learn language from their peers.

In addition to traditional background building activities, teachers must understand the relationship between critical reading and background knowledge in comprehension. Critical reading needs to take place when the text reaches certain level of complexity and a higher level of thought is required from the student (Kusiak, 2013). One example of this type of reading is when students analyze the perspective of an author and the message portrayed. Through critical reading the view students have about a topic is deepened and their background knowledge is broadened as a multiple perspective intervenes during critical reading. As you can see, the role of background knowledge cannot be overlooked as it is a foundational component of reading comprehension. Therefore, it will be the teachers' responsibility to include appropriate background activities when necessary or redesign weak building background activities proposed by textbooks.

Text features and background knowledge are not the only elements that intervene in reading comprehension. Even though they are the foundational piece, other processes still need to take place in order to understand a text. In addition to these elements, reading comprehension requires a series of cognitive actions from the reader, which are the foundation of understanding the meaning of a text (Snowling, Cain, Nation, & Oakhill, 2009). These cognitive processes include the application to reading skills and reading strategies to achieve comprehension.

According to Manoli and Papadopoulou (2012), "strategies are deliberate actions, plans consciously deployed by learners in order to cope with comprehension difficulties, whereas skills are automatic behaviors. In fact, what differentiates strategies from skills is intentionality" (p. 820). In other words, strategies are a series of procedures the reader is clearly aware of, whereas skills happen almost unconsciously. For instance, students may need to consciously ask themselves questions in order to make inferences about a challenging text; this is strategy use. On the other hand, when the text does not represent a challenge for the student, inferences will take place automatically; that is skill application.

When reading skills and strategies are discussed, we can't help thinking about metacognition. Metacognition invites students to think about how they learn. In the case of reading, students use metacognition to think about how the comprehension of a text is achieved. Metacognition has been widely used and recommended to improve reading comprehension. Some metacognitive strategies include rereading the text, back and ahead; thinking aloud using context information; asking questions about what is being read; visualizing, etc. Several experts continue to confirm that these strategies improve the reading comprehension of students. The question that comes to our minds at this point is, does metacognition improve comprehension of a text in a second and foreign language?

Although the correlation between metacognitive strategies and reading comprehension of English language learners requires further study, several research articles have already discussed this relationship favoring the application of metacognitive instruction with these students. One research conducted with 130 English students studied the influence of metacognitive training in reading comprehension. 65 of these students took metacognitive training for 5 weeks. The results showed a significant improvement in reading comprehension in the experimental group (Çubukçu, 2008). Likewise, in a study conducted by Tavakoli (2014), a correlation between EFL students who applied metacognitive strategies during reading and reading improvement was demonstrated. As it can be observed, metacognition seems to have to ability to support reading comprehension in other languages.

Diagnostic Assessment of Reading Comprehension and Considerations for Selecting Appropriate Texts

In order to measure the English language level and skills of students, including reading comprehension, high stakes tests are an accurate option. Among these tests we can find TOEFL and Cambridge assessments as the most common in Latin America. These tests include reading passages in which students are required to answer multiple choice questions. However, these tests are quite expensive and many schools and students are not able to afford them. In this case, teachers have to design their own diagnostic comprehension assessments. However, what should teachers consider in order to effectively assess the reading comprehension of their students at the beginning of the school year?

According to Snowling et al. (2009), "a thorough assessment should include tests designed to measure both decoding and comprehension" (p. 4). Therefore, not only the comprehension of text should be assessed, but also decoding is an aspect teachers need to consider during initial reading assessment; especially when working with children since

at this stage many students struggle with sound letter-relationships. When it comes to older students, decoding abilities have already been developed. However, a few times, deficiencies in decoding go unnoticed even for adults. Therefore, it is good practice to listen to each new student read individually, regardless of their age, in order to overrule or confirm any decoding deficiencies.

When it comes to assessing decoding skills and comprehension of meaning, the text must match the students' reading level. A text with a level beyond the student ability does not provide reliable answers as the level of difficulty may interfere with the results. For instance, the level of difficulty of a text could be misunderstood as a decoding difficulty.

How can teachers match texts and students English proficiency levels? The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) developed by the Council of Europe (2001) is the tool many exam developers use nowadays in the EFL world for this purpose.

The Overall Reading Comprehension scale of CEFR provides performance indicators for reading comprehension ranging from the lowest to highest proficiency level. At the A1 level students comprehend very simple syntactic structures and easily recognizable words. At A2 levels students' comprehension stretches to understanding texts that contain common language and basic professional language. Once on the B1 level, students are able to understand undemanding reading about areas they have been exposed to, either for leisure pursuits or work. However, it is only when students reach the B2 level that they are expected to understand texts of different areas. Finally, at C1 and C2 levels, students not only comprehend texts of a wide variety of areas, but also the student is able to unwrap very complex ideas in the text (Council of Europe, 2001).

This scale explains how students in regular EFL programs are expected to transition from social to academic language in reading comprehension. This also explains the way EFL textbooks are designed. These books usually have social lan-

guage only in their readings at the first levels and academic topics only on higher levels. Therefore, beginners have little or no exposure to academic texts in traditional EFL classrooms. However, there is another category in the EFL world which is EFL-Bilingual programs. In these programs students learn English by using textbooks native speakers use in English speaking countries. In these type of books students, regardless of their English level, are exposed to social and academic language. Thus, in order to determine the reading level of students in EFL-Bilingual programs, it will be necessary to include academic texts in the reading assessment, even for students who come from first grades. This will allow teacher to find out to what extent students are able to handle academic texts.

In conclusion, it is quite important to carefully analyze previous schooling experiences of students with the intention to make appropriate assessment decisions. Some teachers may be wondering at this point, how students in the first years of education, who have just started to learn a new language, can understand academic texts. But this is possible as it correlates with Cummins (1979; 1981a) notions of BICS and CALP. Cummins emphasizes that students, regardless of their proficiency language level, and through appropriate instruction, can learn both academic and social language. In addition, we have to remember that even academic texts have different readability levels. For instance, a text about mammals can be written in very simple sentences. If a first grader has been exposed to science topics, he will be able to read the text with little difficulty. Readability of a text can be determined by Lexile levels.

Lexile levels basically measure how difficult a text is in terms of structure and content. They are divided into two categories. The BR_L category (Beginner Reader Lexile) and the L category (Lexile). The BR_L level is used for students at initial reading stages. In this category the highest level is BR1L and the levels will ascend to other numbers. The higher the number in the BR_L level, the easier the text. For instance, a text in the BR100L level will be easier than a book in the BR10L

level. In the second category, the L level, levels start from 0L and up. 0L to 200L are easier than texts in the 1000L level. The L level is usually for students who have more experience with reading (MetaMetrics, n.d.). Many online reading passages and books already bring Lexile levels which is very convenient for teachers. By using Lexile levels and the CEFR teachers can find more appropriate texts to assess the reading comprehension of their EFL students.

Standardized Assessment Versus Student-Centered Assessment

In the United States, assessment of reading comprehension in most grades is conducted through standardized tests under a multiple-choice format. Students start taking these tests as early as 3rd grade. Standardized tests constitute the main assessment tool, countries like the United States, apply to assess reading comprehension. In order to get students ready, many American teachers print and copy hundreds of online reading passages under the same format. These passages are used to practice for standardized tests, as well as assessing students throughout the school year. All of the American students, regardless of their English proficiency level, have to take standardized tests. However, USA is not the only country in America applying multiple choice tests to assess reading comprehension. For instance, Ecuadorian schools are beginning to apply standardized tests to assess reading comprehension in Spanish. This in an indicator that standardized tests are spreading to other countries. However, this form of assessment has been harshly criticized.

The National Center for Fair and Open Testing has launched a movement called FairTest to encourage test policy makers to rethink standardized testing. FairTest (2012) warned police makers and teachers about the dangers of standardized tests and multiple- choice formats in education. They believe these tests affect curriculum design and assessment negatively as they prevent application of more student-centered instruction and assessment tools. Most teaching practices,

when standardized testing is in place, aim at passing the test, not students' actual growth. This is caused by the fear to failure teachers face when it comes to standardized testing.

In spite of widespread standardized testing policies, many educators continue to defend practices tailored to the reading comprehension needs of students. These educators advise teachers to learn more about each student in order to plan or design the most appropriate assessment tools for them. Some student-centered assessment tools include reading interest inventories, reading interviews, oral/written retellings, checklists, anecdotal notes, etc. Each selected tool is intended to meet the assessment needs of each student.

One commonality among these tools is that they escape the standardized/multiple choice format, which is the usual piece of paper with a set of questions students answer by filling in a circle with a pencil. They aim at assessing students as individuals, but most importantly they are a reminder that reading assessment should be more personalized. If we are dealing with humans who have different reading skills, background, proficiency levels, etc., our assessment tools must be geared towards gaining a deeper understanding of students' individualities. In this way we will be able to provide more effective instruction.

Tools for Assessing Reading Comprehension

Reading Interest Inventories

Reading Interest Inventories (RII) are student-centered tools intended to find out the type of reading material and genre students are interested in. Some students could be eager to read romance novels while others might be interested in science fiction; and maybe one group is interested in graphic novels while another wants to read long books. Asselin (2004) considers the availability of a variety of texts in the classroom as one of the principles of supporting reading engagement. This allows students to find reading material they might be interested in, to become motivated to read.

However, many EFL settings lack reading resources and work on limited budgets. Therefore, it is highly important to be aware of what exactly students need in order to make the most of financial resources. This is when RIIs come handy as once teachers are aware of students' interests, they will know exactly which type of reading material their classes require.

In addition to finding out what genre students currently like to read, an RII is intended to deepen teachers' knowledge towards students' personal likes that may be connected to reading preferences; whether it is games, TV habits, hobbies, etc. (Bergeron, 2017).

This concept is quite important in places where reading is not a common practice as it allows teachers to know their students and guide them to find reading material by taking other personal aspects of each student into consideration. For instance, if a student has an interest in the discovery channel, he might find interesting reading non-fiction books or articles about animals. However, reading engagement goes beyond personal likes as it is tied to a wider concept which is identity. Identity plays an important role in reading engagement (Protacio, 2013). Each student comes from a context with a series of aspects that have shaped him in individual ways. Customs, beliefs, and personality traits are some of the identity aspects teachers need to consider when designing RIIs in order to find interesting reading choices for their students.

RIIs have worked quite well in ESL settings. How suitable are they for an EFL context? They are actually very appropriate for EFL settings due to their ease of application. RIIs are considered time savers as they can be applied to a group of students, regardless of their size, at once (Mariotti, 2009). It is well known that EFL classes in Ecuador and many other EFL settings are quite large. Any tools applied in this type of setting must not be obstructed by the number of students in a class. In terms of design, the survey should be developed considering the age of students and practicality. Age is important because individuals have different interests at different ages. A survey with content that is not age related,

in most cases, will provide inaccurate results. In terms of practicality, long surveys cause students to feel bored, which compromises the reliability of the answers due to tiredness.

Once students' interests have been identified, teachers will begin the task of finding reading material students are interested in. This is when educators need to consider the reading levels of these texts. We cannot possibly overemphasize the importance of making sure students reading levels match text levels. Difficult texts result in lack of motivation as students are not able to comprehend them (Mariotti, 2009). Even if students find the topic of the book interesting, a book that is too challenging will cause the student to feel frustrated and stop reading.

Assessing students' reading interests will allow teachers to multiply students' reading experiences. This means that students not only will count on the text provided by the teacher during instruction, but also, they will be exposed to additional reading material. Classroom libraries resulting from RIIs will be actively used as students' interests are carefully considered. With constant reading practice and appropriate reading material students' will have more opportunities to strengthen their reading skills (see table 1 for a complete list of topics to design your RIIs).

Table 1: Topics for Reading Interest Inventories

Topics	Subtopics
Likes	Sports Hobbies TV choices Games
Reading preferences	Genre Long texts Short texts Books with visuals Text only
Identity	Family roots Religion Personality traits

Reading Interviews

Reading interviews can be used to find out to what extent students understand a text. Prior to the interview, teachers will choose the reading strategies and skills to be assessed. With this information, teachers will be able to predesign the questions students will be asked. By conducting reading interviews teachers will find out in detail how well students comprehend the text as they are usually conducted on one-on-one basis or in small groups. Reading interviews, as any assessment tool, have to provide reliable assessment results. We have to remember that these results will be used to make curriculum and instructional decisions to improve the reading comprehension of students. What considerations should teachers make in order to apply reading interviews effectively in EFL settings?

One of the biggest obstacles of any activity in which students are required to provide oral or written answers is lack of language differentiation. It is for this reason that Krashen and Terrel (1983) provided us with a straightforward scale that makes teachers aware of what each student is able to do at the different stages of Second Language Acquisition. The five stages of Second Language Acquisition proposed by Krashen and Terrel (1983) are Preproduction, Early Production, Speech Emergence, Intermediate Fluency and Advanced Fluency. The lower the level, the more modifications are required in order to assess students.

At the first SLA stage, which is the Preproduction stage, students are not fluent and their comprehension is very limited. Any questions asked by the teachers should require non-verbal responses from students. In other words, in most cases, students will need to point to the correct answer in order to show how much they understand from the text. It is for this reason that Krashen and Terrel recommend the use of visual aids. The more visuals the story includes, the easier it will be for students to comprehend and show comprehension.

Children's stories used in EFL settings usually bring visuals and teachers can easily use these images to assess comprehension. However, that is not usually the case of stories written for older students. It is quite difficult to find beginner reading material with illustrative images for teenagers or young adults in EFL classes. Even though a few publishing companies in the EFL world do offer reading material suitable for very low proficiency levels, that is books with ample visual aids, this material is usually quite expensive and very few schools can afford it. Therefore, in many cases, teachers turn to internet to find free online stories to forge the reading skills of their beginner students. Unfortunately, although beginner stories are easy to find in internet, illustrated ones are also scarce.

Under this circumstance teachers will have to think outside the box and find another way to provide students with illustrated stories. Now that we know that free picture-less beginner stories can be found on internet. Other strategies will have to be used in order to illustrate them. For instance, the school can promote an "illustrator contest" in which the most artistic students will draw the scenes that go with beginner stories. You will be amazed at how well students can achieve this task. At the end of the contest, teachers will gather the illustrated books to use them with students during their instructional time.

The second SLA stage is Early Production. At this stage students comprehend some yes/no and WH questions and can say a few words and phrases. For instance, at this

stage teachers can ask questions like "What is the boy doing? Or "Who is she?" In this case the teacher will expect answers like "cooking" and "Amanda".

At this stage not only the students' comprehension of questions is higher, but also their reading comprehension is higher. Unfortunately, their speech is still very limited and even though they understand more, expressing it is hard. In this case teachers must provide additional tools to allow students to show their comprehension in a more detailed way.

One very useful tool teachers can use in this case is puppets. Puppets can accompany students' short answers in order to show their comprehension in more detailed manner. This would extend the number of tools students count on in order to avoid the language barrier. Story puppets can be made by simply drawing characters and main elements of the story on a piece of paper. Then, these images can be cut out and glued onto a stick. Some teachers may think puppets can be used with children only, but contrary to these opinion, older students really enjoy using them.

The third SLA stage is Speech Emergence. At Speech Emergence students are able to explain ideas using basic sentences. Therefore, teachers at this level can extend their questions to ask, for instance, why something happened on a story or how it happened and expect students to answer orally. At this point, the use of visual aids will also be a form of support, but students will not use them as much since they are able to provide spoken answers. However, teachers need to be mindful students' English may sound broken at different points, this is when tools like puppets can become handy.

At the Intermediate Fluency Stage, which is number four on the SLS stages, students are able to use a more complex discourse. Students are able to provide responses with more than one sentence and sentences contain varied forms of subordinate clauses. At this stage little differentiation needs to take place when assessing students since they are able to provide detailed answers to show comprehension.

The Advanced Fluency does not require any assessment modifications as students' proficiency is near native.

Oral and Written Retellings

In oral retellings, students read a story and then retell it in their own words. Oral retellings are an ordinary form of reading assessment tool in ESL environments. Not only because they allow teachers to see how students have grasped the elements of the story, but also because class sizes are usually

small in ESL environments. A small number of students in class allows all of the oral retellings of a class to be conducted in a short period of time. Unfortunately, that is not the case in most Ecuadorian EFL classes.

Large classes may impede the use of oral retellings. For instance, it can take about 3 hours to assess a class of 40 students through oral retellings. That is because a teacher would need at least 5 minutes with each student to use oral retellings. That gives us a total of 200 minutes to assess these 40 students. In total, teachers would be spending 3,3 hours on oral retellings. Tight schedules don't allow assessing every student of a large class through this assessment tool. On the other hand, in some EFL classes, not all of the students can take oral retelling assessments due to low English proficiency levels. In other words, the number of students who are able to take oral retellings may be limited in some cases. Under this circumstance, oral retells are more likely.

Oral retellings should be used with students who are at Speech Emergence level and above. Students at Preproduction and Early Production levels would not be able to retell the story as they lack the majority of linguistic elements in the foreign language. After taking this point into consideration, teachers will select the students who are suitable for oral. If student numbers are manageable, oral retellings should take place.

Experts, even in the recent years, continue to suggest the use of oral retellings to assess reading comprehension of ELL students. A study conducted by Faggella-Luby, Griffith, Silva, and Weinburgh (2016), showed the effectiveness of oral retellings to measure the reading comprehension of 5th grade ELL students. However, how oral retellings are conducted also determines how effective these tools are. Bernfeld, Morrison, and Wilcox (2013) warn teachers to carefully consider how many passages are used to assess students and the number of teachers who administer the assessment. They suggest using 4 passages and 2 teachers in order to obtain reliable results. Considering these requirements, these types of assessment will be conducted less frequently; although, it will depend on

the number of students who can take the test. The smaller the number, the more frequent the assessment.

A second option for students with higher proficiency levels is written retellings. They also allow teachers to see, through students' writing, the different elements involved in the reading material but this tool saves lots of classroom time since all of the students will be assessed at once. Rog (2003) expressed the following about oral retellings: "it enables the reader to focus on the story rather than the writing" (p. 46). This suggests that written retells could cause some sort of worry in students in order to write correctly with a risk of focusing more on the writing rather than reading compre- hension. This is likely as a piece of writing could constitute a documented evidence of their linguistic proficiency. This could affect the results of the assessment. For instance, stu- dents could write less to avoid mistakes or they could omit important information from the story because they are too busy trying to remember how to write correctly.

Does this mean written retellings are not reliable assess- ment tools? The answer is no. We can make written retellings work by having a detailed conversation with the students about what exactly will be assessed through the written retelling. Teachers can even show students samples of wri- ting in which their answers are not penalized due to spelling or syntax errors. That will give the students the confidence to focus on meaning rather than on language features during oral retellings. Students who are aware of exactly how writ- ten retells will be graded, perform better on this type of tests.

Checklists

A checklist is usually used as a self-assessment tool. The checklist contains the reading strategies teachers have tar- geted during instruction for assessment purposes. Students mark the strategies they applied during reading time on the checklist. Through periodical use of this tool, teachers will be able to identify which strategies are being used, which are being used correctly, and which are being used incorrectly.

As a result, student-teacher conferences can take place to find out more and reteach lessons can be planned.

In order to obtain reliable assessment information, checklists are never used alone. About the use of checklists Medina and Pilonieta (2017) suggested the following: "Ask the student to give an example of how the strategy was used" (p. 234). This means teachers not only need confirmation of strategy use through the checklist, but also, they need detailed information of its application. Thus, teachers will need to use additional tools to find out how students are applying reading strategies.

For instance, when reading passages, students could be provided with sticky notes to show how they used the strategy "self-questioning". The students will use these sticky notes to write their questions. During the assessment, the students will write which questions they asked themselves on the sticky notes. In addition, the students will place the sticky note on the edge of the reading passage; they will place it on the exact paragraph where they found the difficulty. At the end of the assessment, the students will turn in the checklists with all of the evidences for strategy use. In this case, the passage with sticky notes is part of this evidence.

Checklists can be designed to escape the "one size fits all" concept that many educators argue against. Bender and Larkin (2012) expressed that the items on a checklist must match the reading needs of each student. Therefore, teachers need to be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of individual students. With this knowledge, teachers will be able to develop personalized checklists. Getting to know students in depth is the key to developing checklists that suit the students' needs. Some teachers might think that gaining a better insight into students' individualities in large classes can be quite challenging. However, this can be achieved by thoroughly assessing students through written diagnostic assessments at the beginning of the school year.

Afflerback (2016) expressed the following about reading assessment: "We want to use assessment that helps shift stu-

dents from an outward orientation, where there is dependence on the teacher for assessment feedback, to one that looks inward" (p. 417). Based on this meaningful statement we can see the power of checklists since they can be used as self- assessment tools to foster independence in students. By using checklists, students can see where they are at strategy use and they can be used to set new goals. Also, by documenting how strategies are used along the way, students will be able to see what they tried previously, what worked, and what can be improved in terms of strategy use (table 2 shows a sample of a checklist with the most common strategies).

Table 2: Checklist for reading assessment

Strategies	How the strategy was used
Make Predictions	
Background Knowledge	
Context Clues	
Summarizing	
Make Inferences	
Ask Questions	

Anecdotal Notes

Anecdotal notes are observational tools aimed at recording details about students' performance during reading comprehension. These are particularly beneficial to assess students during guided reading. In guided reading the teacher meets with a small group of students in which a reading lesson takes place. In this lesson the teachers instruct students on how to become good readers by teaching them how to apply reading strategies. This is a great opportunity to use anecdotal notes and record students' strengths and weaknesses. Since guided reading is conducted by the teacher in small groups, teachers will be more aware of how each student responds to reading in terms of comprehension. However, Bell and McCallum (2016) invite teachers to avoid judgements and classifications using anecdotal notes.

These notes should be used exclusively to explain students' performance.

Anecdotal notes are actually quite useful for any group reading activity. The only requirement is for teachers to act as observers of said activities. In order to collect data for assessment purposes in group activities, Cornelius (2013) suggested using a sheet of paper that contains each group seating arrangement. Each student will be represented by a square with the name of the student at the top. Each square must have sufficient space for jotting down notes about the student. The teacher will walk around the classroom observing and writing down the behaviors that require attention in order for the teacher to intervene or make modifications. They can be used to write about the linguistic needs of students, mastery or lack of mastery in terms of reading skills and strategies, interactional factors, for instance, the behavior of a student towards their group partners. All these notes will be aimed at making more appropriate grouping decisions to guarantee the reading growth of all of the students in the classroom.
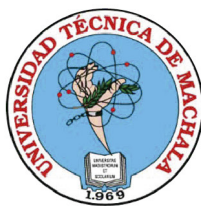
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