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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Authentic assessment & practical tools to reduce test anxiety

Rebecca Bonarek; Paolo Fabre-Merchan;
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Assessment has historically been seen as one of the most imperative and influential stages within the learning process, necessary to effectively measure students' academic achievement. All individuals, at least once in their lives, have been exposed to testing, which is often recalled as a threatening and stressful experience. Unfortunately, testing cannot be separated from the teaching-learning process; it is a necessary evil. Nevertheless, it can be transformed into a poignant and enjoyable experience rather than an awful and anxious memory.

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It has been proven that test anxiety is one of the most common and visible stressors that are evident during evaluation periods, which normally results in poor academic achievement. Remembering and reproducing a great amount of information produce anxiety and fear for students, considering that most of the time, students' passing ticket is attached to a test, no matter how well they have performed throughout the course. This situation drives us to reflect on the effectiveness of the current grading system, in which the midterm and final formal tests are normally worth at least a 50% of the final score.

In the Ecuadorian context, the Academic Regime Regulation (CES, 2012) establishes that fifty percent of the final grade is based on the final examination. Likewise, at Milagro State University (2014), it has been established that students will be exposed to two formal testing instances during the course, which are worth 60% of their final grade. The majority of university courses are graded considering three aspects: research practices, out-class assignments, and formal evaluations. In considering the United States's educational system, grade allotments are similar. Most colleges or universities heavily weight the final exam's outcome. In fact, some state- or federal government-funded programs administered at the higher education level consider the final exam to be the sole determiner of whether or not a student can be promoted. Litchfield and Dempsey (2015) stated that the majority of university courses are composed of only three practices: "lecture, traditional assessment, and assignments" (p.68), the importance of which are exaggerated, unequal, and ineffective when compared to real-world situations. In cases such as these where class time is spent performing relatively undemanding cognitive work, it makes sense that teachers tend to focus heavily on the test, but student anxiety skyrockets as a result.

Additionally, throughout our experience, we have observed that students' failure is mostly a product of poor teacher training in authentic assessment design. Most teachers design exams according to the book, without taking into account

the mode of instruction given throughout the whole learning process, i.e. these tests do not exhibit true content-related validity (Gursoy & Arman, 2016). In a more harmful scenario, instructors take the tests provided by the book, no matter the real content or strategies which students were exposed to during the course. Those situations become extremely damaging for students, who realize that all the time and hard work performed throughout the course have been obsolete since the instruction received and the assessment tools applied do not coincide.

Within these scenarios, it is imperative that educators transform their assessment practices and challenge themselves to go beyond the traditional grammar based tests, which have a high focus on prescriptive grammar, leaving behind other important aspects of the language (reading, listening, and oral and written production abilities). Hence, applying assessment tools that really demonstrate the use of language in authentic contexts becomes essential in order to have a complete view of students' knowledge and abilities. Assessment needs to include activities that are familiar to students. That is, educators have to consider the application of some practical assessment tools that promote community among students, permitting learning based in confidence, and therefore having optimal outcomes over the whole learning process in a friendly and stress-free learning environment. In this sense, it has been proven that authentic assessment provides students with a friendly way to demonstrate their learning, most of the time using the same instructional tools used in classes to formally assess students' performance and language use. Authentic assessment strategies are not only friendly to students but also allow teachers to construct a general view of students' knowledge, language skills, higher-order skills, metacognition, and processing abilities (Litchfield & Dempsey, 2015).

However, several queries exist related to this controversial topic which need to be resolved to completely understand the assessment world, such as: (a) what is the real problem related to test anxiety? (b) Is there a way for teachers to really

know the anxiety level of our students while they are taking a test? (c) Is there any fair way to assess all the students in the same room yet still differentiate instruction according to their individual needs? (d) Is authentic assessment a valid and precise way to evaluate our students and to make them feel comfortable?

In this sense, this chapter will discuss the importance of determining and how to diminish students' test anxiety. It will also examine the importance of being trained in holistic assessment and not only in testing design itself, which aims to transform the traditional pedagogical belief of teaching to the test into teaching to make the whole learning experience meaningful. It will also attempt to provide readers with valuable information about authentic assessment, which will give practical and contextual tools and scenarios where students can demonstrate their improvement in an anxiety-free and friendly environment.

What is Test Anxiety?

Test anxiety is defined as the behavioral, physical, and emotional reaction that students present when taking a test (Numan & Hasan, 2017). This situation can lead to positive effects, preparing students to visualize themselves performing better on the test; nevertheless, it also can cause negative effects, provoking students to lose interest, show antipathy, and have a misconception of their own abilities and capacities. According to Cizek (2006), test anxiety can be part of the general definition of anxiety; this can be described as the fear experienced when a person feels threatened, and this leads to "physical, emotional, or cognitive reactions" (p. 11).

Numan and Hasan (2017) quote Zeidner's (1998) definition of test anxiety as "a scientific construct, that refers to the set of phenomenological, psychological, and behavioral responses that accompany concern about possible negative consequences or failure on an exam or similar evaluative situation" (p. 2). Moreover, it is also necessary to keep in mind

that anxiety can interfere with the performance of good study habits and increase the bad, such as procrastination (Gerwing et al., 2015), which has been observed as a harmful effect on students' performance and motivation throughout our professional experience.

Causes of Test Anxiety

According to Cizek and Burg (2006), anxiety is not an isolated phenomenon. There are other conditions such as "sex, age, socioeconomic status, family environment, self-esteem, subject matter, cross cultural relationships, and teacher-manifested anxiety" (p. 61) that can be related to this phenomenon, as well as attention deficit problems and other learning conditions such as instruction and learning environment. Thus, teachers have to acknowledge that students have different situations that can interfere with proper performance on a test; teachers need to take into consideration that we cannot evaluate our students only based on summative formal tests without analyzing the educational models and learning environment to which we are exposing our students during those assessment periods.

Aspects of Instruction

Gursoy & Arman (2016) and Cizek and Burg (2006) claim that the influence of standardized tests on how the curriculum and instruction is enacted is one of the most common causes of test anxiety. Cizek and Burg (2006) and Litchfield and Dempsey (2015) explain that some teachers prefer traditional methods and instructional tools instead of implementing innovative strategies since assessment is usually focused on traditional methods. Also, it is important to specify that in certain education systems, the emphasis on certain subjects like math and literacy (taken in their mother tongue) over others like physical education or English is noticeable, which is also evident to students. This is a reality in the Ecuadorian context, especially at the middle and high school levels, in which English is seen as an optional subject, without crea-

ting a major issue if a student fails. These situations increase students' anxiety during evaluation instances since students feel the pressure of being exposed to assessment tools with which they have not been previously familiarized during instruction periods, especially in subjects like math and language.

Aspects of Test Environment and Atmosphere

The environment can be a powerful cause of students' test anxiety and poor performance. Deffenbacker determined that the evaluative or non-evaluative condition prevails over content and skills to be assessed in a test (as cited in Zeidner, 1998). Test anxiety has been observable since evaluations started taking place in the education system. There are some ways to overcome this problem, although it is an inherent condition to tests. Schools are evaluated regarding the scores obtained on standardized tests, and that is one of the main reasons why anxiety appears. These conditions do not only increase anxiety during evaluations, but also negatively affect the whole learning process.

The importance of revealing the causes of test Anxiety

Numan and Hasan (2017) defined different aspects that were disclosed while researching this topic as causes of test anxiety. It is essential to analyze them to better understand how this situation is shaped and to determine if there is a genetic or environmental characteristic that boosts anxiety. Educators need to go through the delineation, specification, testing of the causal mechanisms that include family climate and parent/child dynamics, and finally, the individual response to test anxiety that can be vulnerability or resilience towards examinations.

Effects of Test Anxiety

Educators cannot ignore the negative effects that decontextualized tests produce on the learning process. It does not only affect students but also the learning environment, since both aspects are closely connected. Hence, there are several considerations that all teachers need to be aware of to make the best decisions in the best interests of the students and their own construction of knowledge. This creates a friendly environment to reduce anxiety and to improve students' assessable performance.

Effects on Students

Numan and Hasan (2017) claimed that there are several different positions about evaluations that affect students, which is palpable in their reactions and behavior. Test anxiety can influence students in different aspects; in terms of stress, it will affect students' concentration and memory which usually inhibits students from verbalizing or clearly expressing ideas. Additionally, their self-esteem can be distorted, creating a negative attitude towards the evaluation (Kasper & Petrello, 1998), which is demonstrated through a lack of interest in and apathy towards the evaluations and nervous behavior during testing itself. Those situations can guide students to think that they are not capable of doing well on a test, which usually drives them to commit academic dishonesty. Negative testing past experiences also provoke students to develop more anxiety during current or future evaluation periods (Zeidner, 1998). Thus, any of these situations directly affect students' overall performance and academic achievement.

Effects on the learning environment

A testing experience in any context creates a stressful and anxious environment for students, which can produce some negative effects on the learning process. Decontextualized evaluation reduces students' motivation and active partici-

pation during upcoming lessons since students believe that what is done in class will not support them to successfully complete the course. Furthermore, low motivation and poor interest on behalf of the students directly affect students' assessable performance, active participation, and academic achievement (Fabre & Boroto, 2017).

Test Anxiety and Assessable Performance

Test anxiety is strongly related to overall students' performance, but it depends on the nature of the test (Baş, 2016). According to Ball (1995) and Kasper and Petrello (1998), the test anxiety level will increase or decrease depending on when and how the teacher provides feedback. Zeidner (1998) claims that there is a strong negative relationship that anxiety influences memory, cognitive, and complex tasks performance, and even real-life situations as well as laboratory practices. It means that not only the performance of students is affected but also many other factors can be influenced. Family relationships, environment, genetics, and individual responses can affect and boost test anxiety levels. Hence, it becomes important to understand that test anxiety is not an isolated reaction (e.g. Baş, 2016).

Some out-classroom and school situations also need to be analyzed in order to propose a plan that reduces anxiety during tests. Educators need to have in mind that family and society are aspects of students' biographies which have a high influence on their performance at school (Herrera & Murry, 2011). As teachers, we all can recall an experience in which an excelling student, who has always performed well during formal and informal assessments, suddenly failed a test because of a family or community issue that was emotionally or physically affecting him/her. Based on this situation, teachers need to remember that each student is a microcosm, and that it can positively or negatively impact their individual performance and academic achievement, increasing anxiety and stress not only during evaluation, but also throughout the whole course.

According to Baş (2016), test anxiety can determine students' results in their performance. Anxiety can make students lose focus and produce a negative self-evaluation of their performance. However, Yerkes and Dodson (cited in Sapp, 1993) claimed in their study that test anxiety would depend on the nature of the quiz. Furthermore, students affirm that when they receive immediate feedback, the level of anxiety considerably lessens; however, negative feedback after an evaluation can increase anxiety levels (Ball, 1995).

Additionally, Ball (1995) defined two principles that can help determine the relationship between test anxiety and performance: task difficulty and overqualified students. When a test has a poor level of difficulty and evaluates content that is too basic for students, it will diminish the level of anxiety, and consequently, the results will be positive. On the other hand, when students face challenging tests, which go far beyond their current level of ability and knowledge and include unfamiliar format and strategies, their anxiety will rise, directly impacting their academic achievement. The second principle includes the behavior and reactions of overqualified students. When an excelling student is exposed to a test that does not challenge her/him, the level of anxiety might be almost null, and they will perform well; nevertheless, they will lose motivation and interest in the subject since the course does not require a lot of effort.

Empirical Evidence for the Test Anxiety-Performance Relationship

According to research conducted by Numan & Hasan (2017), there was evidence that there exists a strong relationship between test anxiety and students' assessable performance. The higher amounts of stress, pressure, and anxiety a student is exposed to, the poorer the performance and academic achievement is. To illustrate, a study of Chinese college students taking computer-based spoken English tests found that as students' test anxiety increased, their scores also decreased, regardless of familiarity with the test format or gender issues (Yang, 2017). This research also demonstrates

that test anxiety can deeply influence memory, cognitive and complex task achievement, real life problems and laboratory practices.

Ways of Overcoming Test Anxiety

After discussing the main concepts of test anxiety and its effects and causes, it is essential to develop strategies that can benefit both instructors and students during the learning process in order to diminish students' anxiety and hence improve their performance and academic achievement. There are several options that can be taken into consideration. This section of the chapter includes practical ideas that can boost students' confidence and can help them to overcome anxiety, which are based on the study of the following pedagogical approaches and beliefs analyzed by Zeidner (1998) and Flippo (2008), as results of their research: a) Cognitive Approaches, b) Cognitive- Skill Deficit Approach, c) Evaluation of Cognitive Levels (Zeidner), and d) Preparing Mentally and Physically, and Organizing your Course Content (Flippo).

Tips and Strategies for Reducing Test Anxiety

Familiarizing and guiding students to get alone with the type of test and format they will be exposed during assessment instances is one the main means to reduce test anxiety. "People are often uncomfortable with unfamiliar or with things they don't understand" (Cizek, 2006, p. 109). Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) explain that it is beneficial for students to be familiar with the way they are going to be assessed, and an explanation of scoring criteria is essential to prepare students and provide fair evaluations. In our personal practice, this situation has been observed as a matter of course; all the activities that take place within the classroom are different from the formal assessment tools that are applied to students during midterm and final evaluations which increases student anxiety during test instances. In short, we know our students have the appropriate knowledge, but they have no

idea what to expect on the test. Because of that, it becomes imperative to familiarize students with the techniques that will be implemented to assess their knowledge and skills by the end of the course. These conditions guide teachers to realize that the best practice to overcome this problem is introducing authentic strategies throughout the whole instructional process as well as during assessment instances.

Transforming the Assessment Instances

Throughout the chapter, the fact has been discussed that when students get stressed, an optimal performance will not be obtained since learners are required to complete a test instead of using the learned content and acquired abilities. In a real situation, this condition should impact instructors' minds and their current professional practices, encouraging themselves and others to transform their assessment tools by including authentic activities that can support students in feeling that what they are learning is worthwhile.

Authentic Assessment

O'Malley and Velez (1996) acknowledge that authentic assessment is considered to be the use of multiple strategies that require "reflection about students' learning, achievement, motivation, attitudes, or instructionally relevant classroom activities" (p. 4). They are student-centered as opposed to instructor-centered (Güneş, Demır & Balaban, 2015). O'Malley and Velez (1996) propose three effective different assessment strategies.

a.) Performance-based assessment: in this type of assessment, an oral or written construction is developed that can help solve realistic problems. It can also be an artifact or any product that can help to address any problematic situation and that requires students' reactions. There are some characteristics of this type of evaluation such as constructed responses, high-order thinking, authenticity, integration, process and product, and depth vs. breadth (O'Malley and Velez, 1996).

EXPERIENCES & VOICES

My experience with role plays, both as a student and teacher, was memorable and meaningful. As a student learning French in university, we convinced our professor to do a role play as our final: a group of therapy sessions (one for each student in the class) conducted in the guise of Harry Potter characters. I remember being able to use the language. As a teacher, I want encourage that feeling of freedom with my students. Creating the scenarios stretches the teacher's creative muscles, and constructing grading rubric (which is the most daunting part) can be done collaboratively with students, which offers them a measure of the same ownership I felt as a student. Once I see my students start to take ownership of their knowledge of the language, it becomes easy to assess their progress.

Becky

b.) Portfolios: these are the systematic collection of students' work, paper or virtual, that support teacher and school to keep track of student progress and academic achievement records. It is also useful a great source to foster self-education and self-assessment in students, teachers, authorities and parents to be aware of the improvement in the students' learning (Güneş, Demır & Balaban, 2015).

c.) Student Self-assessment: this type of assessment helps students to define whether they want to work and how to do it. Moreover, it develops a sense of self-agency in their learning, helping to construct knowledge consistent with students' interests. Performance and development can be also evaluated while this strategy is being applied (O'Malley & Velez, 1996).

Types of Authentic Assessment

O'Malley and Velez (1996) in their book, describe some types of authentic assessment that are commonly used to evaluate English Language Learners (henceforth, ELLs). The information has been synthesized in Figure 1 to provide a better understanding, and also includes the characteristics which are highly beneficial for students and teachers.

Figure 1. Types of Authentic Assessment

TYPES	CHARACTERISTIC
Oral Interviews	· Determine English Language Proficiency · Can be accommodated according to the level · Determine comprehension
Storytelling/ Text Retelling	· Read or listen a story and retell ideas or details · Resembles class authentic and actual activities
Writing Samples	· Include different purposes, e.g. expressive, narrative, expository, informative, persuasive · Include different genres · Feature scoring rubrics
Projects/Exhibitions	· Exhibit work · Can be individual or cooperative · Include an oral or written report
Experiments	· Experiment with using actual materials or expositions of processes · Include an oral or written report · Encompass presentation of materials, hypotheses, methods, conclusions.
Constructed-Response Items	· Typify performance assessment · Answer questions on reading material · Elicit comprehension and higher-order thinking · Apply knowledge instead of recalling information · Create materials · Use knowledge in real contexts
Portfolios	· Collect students' work · Show progress of work to superiors and parents. · Collect samples systematically · Assess with rubrics and checklists

Adapted from: O'Maley J., & Valdez R. (1996). Authentic Assessment for English Language Learners: Practical Approaches for Teachers. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

Designing Authentic Assessment

O'Malley and Velez (2006) and Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) describe the design of assessment as a whole process that includes other teachers, parents, superiors and authorities. The inclusion of other teachers is essential to create

a network to share experiences and procedures. Parents need to be included since grading and procedures implicit in authentic assessment will be different from traditional assessment and some explanation may be necessary. Moreover, administrators and superiors need to know the change in process to support the teaching practicum. We suggest an eight-step process to design authentic assessment which is summarized in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Authentic Assessment Design: Process

Review and edit

Create a community (teachers, parents, authorities)

Socialize and determine the purpose

Test validity and reliability of tools

Set specific aims

Adapt or design assessment tools

Collect and analyze samples of authentic assessment tools
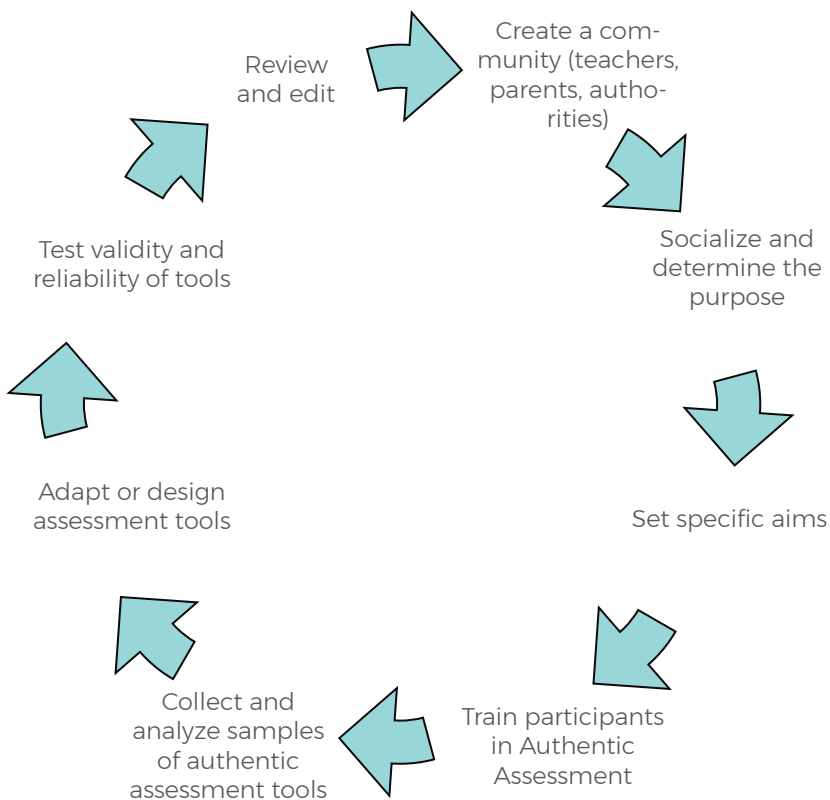
Train participants in Authentic Assessment

Adapted from: O'Maley J., & Valdez R. (1996). Authentic Assessment for English Language Learners: Practical Approaches for Teachers. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co.

This process is a crucial support to develop authentic assessment tools in any context and subjects, not matter students' levels or biographies. In the following sections of the chapter, we will focus on providing authentic assessment strategies and tools to effectively evaluate students' language skills, considering English as a Foreign language (EFL) and English as a second language (ESL) teaching. Those strategies will be based on the Teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) standards and culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students' biographies.

Dimensions for a task and test to be authentic

Assessing students authentically can be considered as a simple way of applying tasks in class with a "real" context (Frey et al., 2012). It is important to take into consideration some other factors that constitute authenticity. This broad classification provides teachers with a great opportunity to create meaningful lessons for the students situated in a context which they might experience in the "real world." While planning an activity for classes, we have to take into account all the dimensions of developing instructional plans with efficacy. These are described in Frey et al. (2012). The dimensions are context, students' roles, and scoring. Giving students the opportunity to work on activities that are authentic will improve their abilities in many fields.

Process of Authentically Assess Language: Skill by Skill

O'Malley and Velez (1996) also provide a general process to assess CLD students' language use considering the four basic language skills, which is summarized in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Assessing Language Skills: General Process

Identify purposes of the assesment	Planning the assesment	Developing rubrics and scoring	Set of standards	Self and peer assessment	Use of oral portfolio
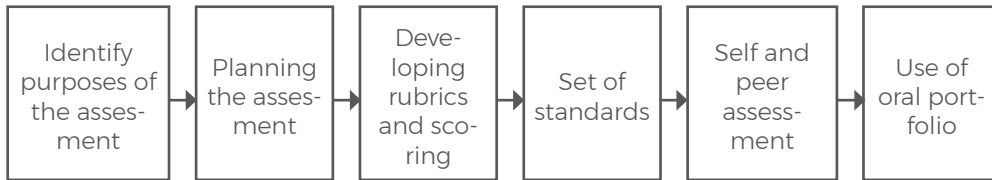
Source: O'Maley J., & Valdez R. (1996). Authentic Assessment for English Language Learners: Practical Approaches for Teachers. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

Based on this process, the following lines will analyze, discuss, and provide some effective means and modes to authentically assess students' language abilities and knowledge in an enjoyable learning environment, which aims to reduce students' anxiety and fear when evaluation is being applied.

Oral Language Assessment

Oral language or speaking skills are part of the construction of language. Therefore, it has to be assessed in an EFL classroom. Story/Text Retelling is an assessment tool that prompts students to retell a story (O'Malley and Velez, 1996): students read or listen to a story, take notes, and use them to perform a presentation to the class or an evaluator. This is beneficial since students do not need to have a prolonged preparation. Storytelling is recognized as an authentic assessment tool since people relate stories to others all the time, and students will be trained to develop this skill. It is important to set criteria while considering aspects related to both accuracy and fluency, criteria which need to be prepared and practiced with the students previous to the formal evaluation. Checklists and rubrics can be used here: they bolster confidence within students because the latter know exactly what the teacher's requirements are while being able to map their skills onto predetermined criteria of competence (Litchfield & Dempsey, 2015). It is necessary to mention that this activity should be developed for and accommodate student level and needs (Herrera, 2010), creating and inclusive and challenge environment for all participants.

Strategy Application & Learning Outcomes

In storytelling, students receive a picture story in a bag, then they need to decipher the meaning of those images, and in upper levels, teachers can ask them to sort and sequence them in any order, so they can start guessing the baseline of the story. For example, if students get three pigs, a wolf, and different types of houses, they may have heard the story already or they can be introduced to it by their friends. The teacher can also include extra pictures that do not have any relationship to the story, so students can also take a known story and create a new one.

EXPERIENCES & VOICES

Story Reteeling provided my students a canvas of opporunties to not only use the language in a free-anxiety environment, but also they were free to create. Being able to observe students' creativity, progress, and linguistic competences in the language were the most visible outcomes that this activity brought to my teaching practice. Most of the students mentioned that they enjoyed the activity and that it was like having fun, which dismissed the tension of being assessed. It is also essential to mention that more than a 80% of the students achieved high scores.

Paolo

Students' creativity increases through the use of this collaborative activity, but not only that, it is worthwhile to mention that students improve their language since they are using the target vocabulary and expressions corresponding to that reading level. Additionally, students feel more comfortable and engaged when reporting stories; their internal organization is mastered since they need to put together events to create or report the story. Their description of characters and events also develops their critical thinking skills, since they can summarize, evaluate, criticize, reason, predict, and even change the story while at the same time agency is gained when they decide what to do with all the components of this story. Students feel it is their own creation, and it becomes meaningful to them. At this point, the instructor can easily identify if the objectives of the class have been met

without the need of a formal speaking test but instead with the help of an authentic assessment strategy, thereby reducing students' anxiety.

Reading Assessment

As is commonly known, reading is one of the basic skills of language learning. Thus, this skill has to be exercised, mastered, and assessed during the EFL and ESL instruction. According to Shum et al. (2016) and Bourgoin (2014), there is a strong relationship between L1 and L2 literacy. They claim that students with reading difficulties early on in their L1 reading careers will have similar difficulties in their L2.

There are programs that promote and exercise reading skills. Fielding and Pearson (1994, as cited in O'Malley and Velez 1996) claim that for this kind of program, it is essential to maintain 4 different components: 1) a great amount of time exclusively for reading, 2) guided instruction for reading comprehension, 3) creation of opportunities for collaboration, and 4) creation of opportunities for discussion about the reading.

There are different levels of reading proficiency, and we would like to emphasize the level of the students who were exposed to this activity. They were able to read short stories, use reading strategies, and retell the story from beginning, middle and end. In addition, they were able to describe the plot, characters and events; all these skills are attributed to reading level expansion as explained in O'Malley and Velez (1996). Reading logs are an authentic assessment, and they can help students to diversify information taken from the texts; in other words, logs can be specialized to include characters, plot, and main events.

Strategy Application & Learning Outcomes

Students receive one reading passage or complete book and are also provided with worksheets that act as logs. They can be for characters, theme, plots, setting, storyline, or a combination of the above. This variety can give teachers the opportunity to evaluate students' understanding through small,

ongoing tasks. They can be kept in a folder for the future, so students can have different ways of looking at a story and decoding meaning.

This activity gave our students the opportunity to understand a story not only through event order but by analyzing several different criteria. They received a story and decided to sketch the characters by describing their characteristics. Then students categorized them by commonalities or in what order they appeared within the story. The sequence of events were drawn too using a blank comic strip. Students could play with the characters and move them while retelling the story.

Reading logs give students the opportunity to understand a story not only based on events, but by analyzing characters, settings, and themes. Reading logs can be used in any order; however, it is suggested to start with characters. Students can receive a comic strip and sketch the characters; they can add words to indicate a certain personality or physical trait. They can sort characters by commonalities or by their role in the story. Additionally, students can use a reading log with a time line or with drawings to illustrate the main events. At this point, the instructor can ask students comprehension questions in order to understand how students processed the information (including vocabulary) and if it matches with the content of the story.

It has been demonstrated that the use of logs fosters students' autonomy and creativity; they decide how to draw the characters and how to relate them, while they revise the story events by using information from texts. In the same vein, students are graded in a free risk environment, since the teacher, while monitoring the activity, can highlight and correct any mistakes that take place during process of understanding meaning or reporting the story to someone else. At this point, students' language can be assessed as well: a checklist of the target language can be taken from the text. Finally, this activity demonstrates that students can better remember all the parts of the story (i.e. characters,

setting, plot) because they are actively interacting with and manipulating the text by moving the characters from one event to the other.

Writing Assessment

Writing skills are also part of language proficiency, and it has to be assessed along with the other skills. According to Beaglehole (2014), assessing writing helps the teacher to track opportunities for instruction improvement and course content. O'Malley and Velez (1996) also claimed that there are three types of writing (informative, narrative, and persuasive), and they are important as they guide the type of product that the teacher would obtain from the students. O'Malley and Velez (1996) determined in their book that it is imperative to follow a specific process while assessing writing; this includes pre-writing, writing and post-writing. We will summarize the main ideas of each step presented in their book. First, pre-writing includes the preparation of topics before writing and the outline of the composition. Writing consists of overseeing the process itself, monitoring the use of words, sentences and paragraphs. Finally, in the post-writing phase, the writer edits and revises the piece of writing and makes any final correction to present it to the teacher. After this process, the teacher will grade the final draft with a rubric based on "analytic scoring" (O'Malley and Velez, 1996), which separates features into diverse components to analyze them objectively, therefore allowing the teacher to provide specific feedback. All these previous processes can include technology, and Alexander and Levine (2008) defined this type of activity as Web 2.0 Storytelling, which means the traditional storytelling format can now incorporate new technology such as images, hyperlinks and other media tools. The idea is to enrich stories through the use of different modes in order to convey messages with clarity, making it more accessible.

EXPERIENCES & VOICES

Applying the strategies discussed in this session was memorable, my students were writing their final paper for their English for Academic Purposes II and they were looking for sources. They wrote their topic, title, and a short introduction draft. All students had access to Google doc, all of them helped them checking grammar, and also adding links in order to compile a good data base for their classmates in order to write their papers. Students were engaged during this activity since they realized that having twelve students looking for sources for ten minutes was more efficient than them doing it by themselves for two hours, and fresh eyes helped them to obtain better information.

Gabriela

Strategy Application & Learning Outcomes

Shared writing is an activity that can be adapted to Web 2.0 storytelling, since students can not only write a piece of text collaboratively, but they are able to use different modes to create a multimodal story that will benefit them and their audience. The instructor creates and shares a Google Doc or Slides presentation, depending on the purpose of the activity. After students are asked to watch a video, read a text, listen to a song, or any source of information that students will manipulate during the activity, they form groups and take notes individually before sharing them with the other members of the group. The task should include writing at least ten sentences for lower levels and even essays for advanced levels; the only condition is that they need to write a piece of text. The instructor assigns one specific part of the document for each group. After the arranged time, students need to revise the first group and make suggestions or fix mistakes. This process is repeated with all the groups; therefore, all students become writers and editors at some point. While this is happening, the teacher projects the text for all to see; thus, all students can see and fix changes and suggestions in real time. At the end of this process, students have their document checked, and they can use it to make a presentation to the rest of the class. During this activity, students can also comment on each other's work.

The main benefits of using this tool is the cooperation and rapport that is generated when students cooperate and feel useful, and when their ideas are taken in consideration by their peers. Additionally, the group that is being checked learns that positive feedback is essential for improvement; they let down some of their affective filter. Moreover, the use of technology facilitates learning and creates a low risk environment because students do not feel they are being evaluated but instead simply building a text and using different modes, which makes the activity even more attractive. Meanwhile, however, the teacher can assess their writing while they are actually producing their text. Instead of waiting to receive feedback until the next unit has already started, feedback can immediately identify their flaws.

Listening Assessment

For Lems (2001) songs and lyrics not only benefit in the listening area; they additionally help to reduce anxiety within the classroom (Li & Brand, 2009) by the fact that students and teachers feel enthusiastic while songs are playing. This creates a positive environment and alleviates stress. It has been reported that the use of music improves pronunciation, vocabulary, and speaking, facilitating more natural communication. Music also incorporates cultural aspects that can be analyzed during lessons, giving students the opportunity to understand their culture or another issue of biographies and language through music. In order to understand the close relationship of music and languages, (Li & Brand, 2009) determined that music and languages are developed in the same brain area, and in addition to that, Maess, Koelsch, Gunter and Friederici (2001) in their study that both music and syntax have the same process at brain level. This indicates that the brain will naturally link music with language. Thus, it is important to mention that teachers need to be aware that songs have emotional, cultural, and sometimes obscure connotations which are connected to the acquisition of a language, and therefore, music needs to be selected according to the level/ proficiency, age, and interest of students.

Strategy Application & Learning Outcomes

Using songs with students benefits the classroom environment as well as language skills. Some ideas are listed in order to provide a general view of how versatile songs and music are in general. First, students can read the lyrics and sing karaoke; this activity will help students to read and pronounce words that can be challenging to them along with matching words to a specified rhythm. After this, the instructor can provide the lyrics with blank spaces; this encourages students to listen to a specific word and later be able to identify it in real conversation. In terms of vocabulary, songs permit learners to identify the general meaning of a word as well as the specific meaning within the song's context. This is essential when one word can have several interpretations. The teacher can also use songs for instruction or practice of grammar points. For instance, the teacher can pick a specific song that uses past tense to teach regular and irregular verbs.

Using music within the classroom is beneficial since it permits students to learn to pronounce words that sometimes can be particularly difficult for them. This happens because in the majority of lyrics, words are repeated several times. It is easier to play a song and sing it instead of repeating words in isolation. Blank spaces can be used to learn and practice vocabulary as well as grammar points. Students feel less stressed when they are instructed through music because they are not explicitly learning the rules and completing grammar worksheets, or even worse taking a test; they are using the content by singing it.

Conclusions

There is clear evidence that the current assessment tools provoke a high level of anxiety for students, which can be observable in students' behavior and reactions; moreover, it affects students' assessable performance and academic achievement. Throughout this chapter, it has also been demonstrated that empirical data proves effective application of authentic assessment tools lowers students' affective filter which results in effective learning. Thus, it becomes imperative to construct educational communities to collect, analyze, explore, design, and socialize with interactive and friendly evaluation tools in order to reduce the anxiety and fear commonly caused when assessment is being applied. Teaching communities need to be holistically trained in authentic assessment design, and not only in testing itself: determining the evaluation purposes, criteria, and aims (to which teachers must expose students beforehand) is important so that students are not threatened with being exposed to unknown processes.

In addition, it is essential for teachers to keep a personal and professional journal to reflect about the process and mark the most important events during all steps of this process in order to be accurate while making decisions and drawing conclusions after the fact. Educators and students need to keep in mind that this is not only strategy change for the test; in order to have an efficient system, students need to be instructed and assessed using the same strategies and tools. They need to demonstrate they have acquired some communicative competences, not that they can pass a test. Students need to be comfortable and secure in their knowledge.

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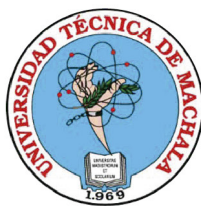
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Redes

Redes es la materialización del diálogo académico y propositivo entre investigadores de la UTMACH y de otras universidades iberoamericanas, que busca ofrecer respuestas glocalizadas a los requerimientos sociales y científicos. Los diversos textos de esta colección, tienen un espíritu crítico, constructivo y colaborativo. Ellos plasman alternativas novedosas para resignificar la pertinencia de nuestra investigación. Desde las ciencias experimentales hasta las artes y humanidades, Redes sintetiza policromías conceptuales que nos recuerdan, de forma empeñosa, la complejidad de los objetos construidos y la creatividad de sus autores para tratar temas de acalorada actualidad y de demanda creciente; por ello, cada interrogante y respuesta que se encierra en estas líneas, forman una trama que, sin lugar a dudas, inervará su sistema cognitivo, convirtiéndolo en un nodo de esta urdimbre de saberes.