**“ASSESSMENT LITERACY” COURSE (10TH-13TH JULY 2017)**

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**TASK 1: COMMENT ON THE FOUR ASSESSMENT PRINCIPLES.**

Here we have a reading test for a ESO 1st course belonging to the bilingual program (B1 level) which consists of a text about a music band and their involvement in the environment. This text has two comprehension questions. In the first one, students have to match the question with a number present in the text and in the second one, students are given sentences and they have to say whether they are true, false or “doesn’t say” in the text.

This test was given to students as a reading activity at the end of two units, out of the six students saw along the year. Therefore, what we have here is an example of formative assessment.

In terms of **validity**, we are dealing here with a test whose main aim is to check the comprehension the students have developed along the year and, specifically, whether they know the meaning of some vocabulary seen throughout the two units and present in the text. So does the text really test the comprehension of students? Generally speaking, we can say so, since they have to scan the text for specific numbers and they also have to do some intensive reading to check the understanding of the statements in activity number 2, and say if they are true, false or the answer is not in the text.

As far as **reliability** is concerned, we can state that this test is reliable in that its results can be objectively measured by different raters (inter-rater) and, also, by the same rater on different occasions (intra-rater). The questions have very clear answers and there is no room for interpretations. The teacher can have an objective results about the students’ performance and these can be fairly trusted.

In relation to **practicality**, the test is fairly easy to produce and administer and equally easy to grade, being the possible answers so clear. Also, it will represent a valid tool for the teacher to check if students have acquired the vocabulary seen throughout the two units and whether they keep progressing or not in the comprehension of texts, since this activity will be frequent along the academic year.

The overall **impact** on the classroom can be determined as positive, since students will be able to show that they have indeed mastered the vocabulary related to music and the environment, in this case, and that they have developed some skills to tackle reading-comprehension activities successfully. Additionally, students will feel that it is not a “high-stakes” test, as they have had to face a lot of reading activities before and, therefore, will not be too nervous or anxious about it. As for the teacher, they will be able to carry out a self-assessment activity with the results of the test and will be able to determine if the class is moving on adequately.

However, this test is lacking in other aspects, namely, the students’ production skills. If we had chosen a test with open questions, we would have had the opportunity of checking their writing and this would have served as a very valid material for summative assessment. Furthermore, with this type of test, students will practice scanning mainly, consigning skimming to a second place, which might not have been our goal when preparing the test.

The reasons for these problems can be found in the fact that students also need to come face to face with any kind of tests and that the different formats will not impede their general comprehension. Also, not all tests are designed for the practicing of all reading strategies; some can be meant for specific purposes, in this case, scanning mainly.

The principles behind this analysis are present in the work of many authors, but, they are key factors in documents of paramount importance in Europe, such as **EALTA**, the European Association for Language Testing and Assessing. This association has established some guidelines for good practice in language testing and assessing. Taking into account that the European Union is comprised of so many different countries, they have realized the necessity of having some common principles to unify the differences that these countries might show when it comes to assessing.

**TASK 2: WAYS TO IMPROVE THE TEST**

This reading comprehension activity can be improved in a number of ways bearing in mind the specific characteristics of the students. In the case, this test was given to a class of 32 students in ESO 1st , in the bilingual program. It was a test handed out in the third term and destined to check the vocabulary studied in the last two units of the academic course and to practice the students’ reading skill.

To begin with, this test was part of the formative assessment, since it only checked the vocabulary of two units. Ideally, it should have included vocabulary of all units and become summative assessment, as it would have been a good way of finding out whether my teaching had been effective or not. Also, it would have become a good evidence to measure the achievement of my syllabus. Moreover, I would have gathered some feedback from my teaching along the academic course, as it would have summarized what the students have learnt.

Secondly, the questions provided to check the students’ understanding could have been more thorough. By this, I mean that the questions were two specific and that the students did not have the opportunity to prove their writing skills. Although it is true that the test was aimed at checking the students’ reading skill, which is a receptive skill, we could also have checked their writing skill, which is productive, all in one test. By having open questions, students could have shown their writing abilities and their comprehension at the same time. Thus, we would have had a more complete test and we, as teachers, would have had more results about our teaching practice.

Also, a great deal of the test could have been done arbitrarily on the part of the students, since they only had to do some matching in the first exercise and pick an option out of three in the second one. We can assume that an unspecific number of students were not sure about some of the answers but answered them anyway. For this reason, the principle of reliability might have been violated and the results gathered might not have been trustworthy.

Thirdly, besides changing some of the questions to make them open and have the students write down the answers, we could also make some changes to the activities so students could practice skimming and not just scanning. The activities included in this test mainly require scanning strategies, that is, looking for specific information. Instead, we could have more questions related to the general understanding of the text, such as filling the blanks.

To conclude, we can improve this test in different ways: turning the test into summative assessment by including vocabulary and tenses seen in all units, having open questions instead of the matching of statements and figures to check their writing skills as well, and having more general questions so students can practice other different reading strategies such as skimming.

**TASK 3: IMPACT OF THE TEST ON CLASSROOM PRACTICE**

As previously mentioned, this is a “low-stakes” test in that by the end of the third term, students will have already faced quite a few reading activities and tests and will not perceive this one as extremely important. Additionally, students normally feel they have nothing to review before a reading test and, therefore, this may eliminate any fears derived from a last-minute review. However, it is also true that high-achieving students will always feel pressured to get a good score even when they are doing an activity that does not require much reviewing. For this reason, this particular type of students might show high levels of test anxiety. Also, some of these high-achievers might see their self-esteem affected in a negative way by this kind of tests because they may not see a straight relationship between amount of studying and results. If is indeed very likely that they think that the results of their performance were determined by just pure luck.

As for low-achieving students, more often than not, they may feel at a loss when facing this kind of tests, since they might think that no matter what they do, they will fail anyway. The reason for this can be found in the fact that they do not know how to prepare for a reading test and they have a poor level of English.

With this test, the teacher will gather valuable proof of the students’ performance and will be able to use it as feedback. Thus, if the students do badly in the test, the teacher can carry out some self-assessment activity and identify possible problems, such as: too difficult a text, too difficult questions, not enough reading practice on the part of the students, etc. Although it is well known that tests give only a narrow view of what students can do, in tests which are reliable enough, the results can be revealing of the students’ progress.

To sum up, we as teachers must ensure that our students see tests as a reliable, valid and fair process necessary to carry out an objective evaluation of their performance. If we make sure we do not put too much emphasis on performance instead of process, give frequent feedback as an essential part of further learning and create a comfortable classroom climate, our students should be able to acquire the syllabus contents and reached the goals established at the beginning of the academic year.

**TASK 4: ACTIVITIES**

**Activity 1: Answer the following questions in relation to the text. (10 marks)**

1. How long have Radiohead been together?
2. What makes Radiohead different from the rest of other UK bands?
3. How can playing small gigs help the environment?
4. Who was the first artist to release music online?
5. How many albums have Radiohead sold as downloads?

**Activity 2: complete the sentences with information from the text (5 marks)**

1. Radiohead have had very big hits, such as\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Radiohead have sold more than \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in total.
3. Radiohead once gave away 50 free tickets to fans who went \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. Radiohead release some albums online so that\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. To be environmentally perfect, Radiohead would have to stop\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

By providing these two activities to students, I believe we would be encouraging the principles of reliability and fairness more strongly, since we would be grading not only their reading skills, but also their writing skills. In addition, these two activities would eliminate any answers done arbitrarily, as students have to look for the information in the text and then write it down. Thus, if we were to do any statistics about the test, we would be certain to have reliable results. Also, the teacher would feel they have been fair to all students by asking questions that require objective answers.

The activities proposed by the textbook before were valid enough, but, in my opinion, they had some flaws that demanded correction, since they failed to comply with some important principles behind assessment.

In conclusion, asking students to match a statement with a figure can be a way of checking their scanning abilities, but it leaves too much to the luck factor. The other activity (true, false, doesn’t say) presents the same problem. Also, they only check their reading skills and only to a certain extent. That is why it is my opinion that the new activities developed are more trustworthy in terms of reliability and more fair to students.

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EALTA. www.ealta.eu.org

**ANNEX 1**

