

Final project: PFLE2017

Assessment Literacy: Principles and Practice . IN-64. 10-13 July 2017

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Task: select a copy of a formative classroom test you use. This can be your own test or from a coursebook. It can be a single or a multiple skills test. Do NOT use commercial test.

I have chosen a test I designed for formative assessment, that reads as follows:

Write a story about a dream you have had recently. (200-250 words)

1. Comment on each of the four assessment principles in relation to the test, validity, reliability, practicality and impact (800-1000 words).

- A) Explain how well the test reflects each principle.
- B) Suggest reasons for any problem you notice.

Firstly, I am going to describe the context where the test was carried out. Then, I will explain how well the test reflects each of the four assessment principles: validity, reliability, practicality and impact, following the EALTA¹ Guidelines to support my ideas. Secondly, I will suggest some reasons for the problems I have noticed.

This formative test was carried out during the second term of the current academic year (2016-2017) by a group of 36 students in the post-compulsory education and more precisely in the First Course of Bachillerato, who were working to achieve a C1 level according to the CEFR. Most of them had a high level of motivation. However, there were three students whose level of English was lower than the rest of their classmates. The students are participating in the Bilingual Program designed by the Comunidad de Madrid and the subject they are taking is called Advanced English.

I am going to analyze following the EALTA Guidelines if the test followed the four assessment criteria, or not. That is, if it did the right thing and it provided an effective language assessment. Throughout all this paper, assessment is used as the process of gathering data from multiple and diverse sources to develop a deep understanding of what students know, and can do with their knowledge. In other words, assessment is the process of finding out what students know and can do. Assessing students' learning is at the heart of a teacher role. It measures what they know and can do and it fosters their learning and makes us reflect on our teaching practices. The test above was supposed to measure the linguistic competence and sub-competences of my students and to be more precise their writing skills. This test was supposed to provide formative assessment.

The main objective of the test was to check, after some guided practice in class, if the students had achieved some of the main objectives of unit 6. All the didactic units were designed according to the Law, adapted to the context and needs of the students and high-school. Besides, it has always been kept in mind the necessity of attaining the objectives shown in the Decree and in the Annual Program for English designed by all members of the English Department of our school. The main objective of this test was to show if the students were able to write a story (a narrative text) in a cohesive and coherent manner. The objective was designed taking into account the proposals included in the CEFR, the objectives stated by the Law, and the Syllabus Design for the First course of Bachillerato for this group of students.

As it has been stated above, this test was designed to carry out a formative assessment. The main goal of this kind of assessment is to monitor students' processes of learning in order to provide ongoing feedback. This feedback helps both, students and teachers, improve their performance. It aids students to reflect on their strengths and their weakness, so they can keep working on those areas where they need reinforcement or more practice. It assists teachers to address students' weakness immediately and improve

1 To see the EALTA Guidelines the following link can be followed: <http://www.ealta.eu.org/guidelines.htm>

their teaching. Formative assessment is usually low-stakes, it is used to monitor and measure students' learning and academic achievement, the test results are not used to determine an important outcome.

There are four key principles which help us design and evaluate our assessment: validity, reliability, practicality, and impact. The test proposed above will be examined according to each of the four principles. Firstly, the concept of validity will be examined. Validity helps us know if the test is telling or measuring what we want to know. I wanted to find out if my students could write a story (narrative text) in a proper way. The purpose of this test was to let me know if my students had achieved this objective, or not. I gave feedback to every student, and I prepared reinforcement activities for those who did not achieve the goals.

Secondly, reliability helps us to be systematic. It measures the consistency of students' performance and scores. The performance of our students and their scores has to be the same, independently of the time of the day when they take the exam or the examiner who is going to correct them. The test proposed took into account this principle accurately.

Thirdly, practicality refers to the money, time and effort invested in assessing. This test followed this principle accurately. It was easy to design, administer and mark. It was performed in a reasonable amount of time, a class session. A handout was provided to all students, therefore it was not too expensive and it was not difficult to mark.

Finally, I will analyze the concept of impact which refers to the effect the test had on the teaching and learning processes. This concept will be analyzed in depth in section 3 of this paper. This test had a beneficial impact on the teaching processes because it helped to assess the skills and contents seen and practiced in class. It has also a positive effect on most of the students, it encouraged them to study more and it raised their self-esteem levels.

Some students, to be more precise 5, did not perform as well as I expected. As I have stated before, three had a lower level than the rest. Two could not think of or remember a dream. Therefore, if I want to be as fair as possible and take into account all the principles explained in the previous paragraphs, I should modify the test a little, this can be seen in the next point.

2. Explain 3 ways in which you would improve the test with a rationale for each of your suggestions (750 words approx.)

As it was stated above, 5 students did not perform as it was expected. Therefore, in the following lines I will provide three ways in which the test proposed above could be improved.

To be fair and to give all students the same amount of opportunities I will modify the wording of the task a little bit, considering that some people hardly remember their dreams. The test has to be valid and reliable, as it was stated before. It cannot be valid nor reliable if it does not test what it is supposed to be testing, or it does not give all students the same opportunities for performing the task, in this particular case: writing a story. If some students are not able to write about dreams because they find it difficult to remember them, I have to modify the wording of the task to offer the same opportunities to all students. The task will be as follows:

Task: write a story about a dream or a daydream you have had recently (200-250 words).

It is also necessary to remember that our classrooms are diverse and we are always working with mixed-ability groups. We have to cater for the diversity of our students, using inclusive strategies and attending each student's needs at all times. This statement brings back again the principle of fairness. Is this test fair to all?

Taking into consideration the description of the context provided at the beginning of this paper, it is necessary to consider that some students have a lower level of English than the rest of the class. The task is stated in a straightforward manner: write a story, but some students might need some help to organize their writing, as the main objective of this test is to write a story (narrative text) in a coherent and cohesive manner. To guarantee that all the students are able to carry out the task and to promote the learning of all, I will elaborate the wording of the task a little bit more. I will make them think about how to organize a narrative text with the following reminder:

Task: write a story about a dream or a daydream you have had recently (200-250 words).

- ✓ Remember to arrange your story in logical paragraphs:
- Paragraph 1: Describe the background scene (time, place, characters and actions).
- Paragraph 2: Write about what happened before the main event.
- Paragraph 3: Describe the main event.
- Paragraph 4: Describe the reactions of the characters and the consequences of the event.

The test is authentic in the sense that they have been asked to perform a real world task. We use narrative texts beyond the classroom all the time. Besides, it should be taken into account that most of the students of the First Course of Bachillerato will be taking next year a high-stakes exam, the EvAU. In this high-stakes exam students are asked to write a text either narrative, descriptive, argumentative or expository. Therefore, the test uses a real world task, story telling, and it will make them practice for the EvAU English exam.

As far as language awareness is concerned the students knew that the test had been designed to monitor and check if they had achieved one of the objectives of unit 6. As this test was done in the second term, students were familiarized with the classroom routines. The score of the test, although it was not high-stakes, would be part of the end-of-term summative assessment, as all activities, tasks, and projects performed in class were worth 10% of the final mark. Students were aware of that, so the test motivated them to study and to revise everything they had seen previously in class. In order to help them be aware of some of their most common problems I will elaborate the wording a little bit further:

Task: write a story about a dream or a daydream you have had recently (200-250 words).

✓ Remember to arrange your story in logical paragraphs:

- Paragraph 1: Describe the background scene (time, place, characters and actions).
- Paragraph 2: Write about what happened before the main event.
- Paragraph 3: Describe the main event.
- Paragraph 4: Describe the reactions of the characters and the consequences of the event.

✓ Use correct verb forms/tenses to set the scene, and to describe events before and during the story.

✓ Link events using a range of linking devices from the unit: *Just then... Suddenly... All of a sudden...*

Just in the nick of time...

3. Evaluate the impact of the test on your own classroom practice (500 words approx.)

The process of formative assessment should help teachers to collect and interpret the results in order to make important decisions about their teaching practices. After a test has been taken by the students and the teacher has collected the information from the results, it could be easier to understand how the students are learning, to verify the state of students' progress and if they are in the right path towards achieving the objectives proposed beforehand.

The impact of assessment was defined above as the influence that a test has on our students, their learning processes and finally on our teaching practices. To begin with the effect this test had on my students, I can say that it had mainly a positive effect on most of the students. As stated before, most of them performed fairly well. Good performance always helps them increase their motivation, at the same time that it helps them reduce the levels of stress and contributes to raise good levels of self-esteem, that is, students felt more confident. The feedback provided after the test was corrected assisted most of them to improve their learning and focus more on those aspects where they were not so good at. In other words, it aided them to develop the necessary strategies to be independent learners and to find out different strategies of learning how to learn.

It also had a positive effect on those students that were weaker, or whose performance was not as great as the rest of the classmates. After the feedback, the weaker students easily understood the areas on which they needed more practice too. They could seek assistance and the teacher could address their problems in a more accurate manner. The fact that they did not perform as well as expected it had not terrible consequences, the score in this test would only affect a tiny amount of the final mark. The most important thing taken into consideration was, as the saying goes, that practice makes perfect. The test helped to provide remedial work and reinforcement activities. Thus, the test boosted students' progression and improvement.

At a teacher level, this test helped the teacher to find out areas where more time should be spent. Sometimes teachers take for granted the previous knowledge of the students. In this case, I designed the test the first time thinking that the students would not have any problems writing a story (narrative text) in a cohesive and coherent manner. After all the results were gathered I found out that even those students that performed the task fairly well could have profited from some kind of guidelines. That's why I kept on adding clues to the task they needed to perform. The impact showed clearly which parts of the contents seen in class were not been understood properly, which objectives were not being achieved and therefore, needed revision and more practice. It also provided me with important information that help me assess my own teaching and modify the test design and the teaching approach.

4. Outline two activities for classroom practice with teachers notes to practice the skill assessed in the test (750 words approx.)

These two activities have been designed to attain the following learning objective:

- ✓ Students will be able to write a story (narrative text) about a dream or a daydream they have had recently in a cohesive and coherent manner.
- ✓ They will consider the nature and elements of stories and learn to write them more concisely.

1st ACTIVITY

This activity has been designed to provide students with some vocabulary practice about dreams and daydreaming.

Warm-up:

Brain-storming. Speaking activity: a discussion about dreams, work in pairs, class discussion.

1. The teacher writes on the board the following words:

A daydream, a recurring dream and a nightmare

2. Students have to think about a definition for each word and write it down. Some students read their definitions aloud before the teacher provides feedback (5').²

3. Students should read the following questions (handout material) and think about them (2'- 3').

- ✓ Some people easily remember their dreams, do you remember your dreams or nightmares? Have you ever experienced any of the dreams discussed before? If so, tell your partner all about it.
- ✓ Do you believe that dreams can help us solve our problems? If so, tell your partner how.
- ✓ Do you think dreams have a meaning? Do you try to understand them?
- ✓ Do you daydream? If so, tell your partner when and about what.
- ✓ Have you ever had a dream that later come true? If so, tell your partner.
- ✓ How do dreams differ from real life?

4. They discuss the questions in pairs. Then, some volunteers tell their answers to the rest of the class and after that the teacher provides feedback. Meanwhile they are carrying out the activity the teacher circulates and monitors how they are performing (10').

(Timing: 18 minutes approximately)

2nd ACTIVITY: Story Telling

1. **Small groups work** (4 or 5 students). **Task:** each student thinks about a book or a movie that he/she likes and discusses with the rest what makes it a good story. They also think about what a story needs in order to be a good story. The teacher monitors their performance and answers. Some volunteers tell the rest of the class why they think a book or movie was a good story (10').

2. The teacher provides positive comments to encourage and motivate students. Then, the teacher writes on the board the necessary elements for a narrative, for example:

2 This activity has been adapted from the following course book: Falla, Tim, and Paul A. Davies. *Solutions*. Oxford University Press, 2013. Print.

- ✓ **Characters: people or living things or creatures about whom the reader will care and is interested.**
- ✓ **Setting: a place, a context and time.**
- ✓ **Action: something really interesting happened, the writer has to engage the reader. A conflict, resolution, etc. Well-structured event sequences**
- ✓ **Description. Well-chosen details.**
- ✓ **Dialogues.**
- ✓ **Transition words, etc.**

If an interactive whiteboard is available this information can be displayed in the form of a mind-map (5').

2. The teacher asks students to think for few minutes (2' or 3') how they feel about being asked to write a story. The teacher monitors, gathers some information and writes some of their answers on the board. Then, feedback is provided.

3. **Video watching (4'). Task³:** Students watch some of the last scenes of *LA LA LAND*, during which Mia (Emma Stone) enters in a nightclub and finds out her ex-boyfriend, Sebastian (Ryan Gosling) playing the piano, and she starts daydreaming about how her life would have been if they had stuck together. The scenes do not have dialogue.

4. Students have to think about a story related to the video they have just watched. They check their notes to review what a story needs to be good and write it.

Task: students have to write the story which lies behind the scenes they have just watched (150-200 words).

5. The teacher reminds them to plan, write, rewrite, edit and revise their piece of writing. The teacher circulates and monitors their performance and assists those students who need help.

6. Once the task is finished, students can swap their writing pieces in pairs. They will provide feedback to each other (**peer-assessment**). This is something that usually boosts students' attention and motivation (writing and peer-assessment 15'-17')

7. The teacher collects the writings so they can be corrected. This piece of writing does not need to be graded. The teacher collects and corrects them to see how well the students performed the task, and to think about possible improvements and to detect weak points, or areas that were not understood properly, so remedial work and reinforcement activities can be provided, if some students need them (**formative assessment**).

(Timing: 37' approximately)

Next session:

6. **Feedback (5'). Formative assessment.** Once the writings are corrected and the students have seen them, the teacher asks students what they learned from the task carried out the previous day.. That is, what the lesson outcome was. The teacher provides positive comments and tells students what can be done to improve their performances in future writings.

3 Activity adapted from: <http://moviesegmentstoassessgrammarggoals.blogspot.com/es/>

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