

Assessing Learning for Effective Teaching

Hazel Acosta

Pedagogical skill: Assessment and Evaluation	Topic: Formative Assessment
Curricular Thread: Oral Communication, Listening for Comprehension	Sub thread: Listening to an Audio, Speaking as form of response

Strategy 1: Performance-based Assessment Strategies

Description

Assessment reflects learning and it mirrors the instructional methods teachers employ to achieve learning targets. In assessing students in EFL learning environments, there is an added layer to the challenge it poses. First, students are learning a totally different code that implies that their capacity to demonstrate understanding may not be easy to infer due to their inability to express their thoughts. Second, in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the production of knowledge is privileged over the acquisition of skills in grammar and structure. However, in most cases assessment, is predominantly characterized by the giving of grammar-oriented exercises that may not measure what the learning goals purport to achieve.

The use of practical assessment strategies help teachers assess learners at different ages in a “spur-of-the-moment” technique that facilitates easy identification of learning gaps and milestones. This kind of assessment also aids teachers in inferring whether or not students are on the right track in language acquisition. These strategies guide instructions, capture students’ strengths and describe areas for growth.

The varying types of strategies depend on the target age of the learners. These assessments do not necessarily result to quantitative scores such as the cognitive types like quizzes, comprehensive examinations; however, they inform teachers at a specific teaching moment if learners are learning or not.

Strategy 1: Performance-Based Assessment Strategies

Description

Performance-based strategies are context-relevant to young learners whose age ranges from 6 to 7 years old. Young learners easily absorb a foreign code; however, their vocabulary may not be as expansive as older learners. Assessing their comprehension and understanding may not be easy due to their inability to express in complete sentences in the English language. Conducting short, task-based strategies will inform teachers if students have understood what they have listened to and can demonstrate this knowledge they have acquired.

Performance-based strategies vary. For young learners, it can be through Yes or No responses from simple questions, following directions, doing a task and performing in a game. The kind of tools that teachers use to document their readiness and responses is crucial. Tools that prove to be appropriate are but not limited to: checklists, color scheme, house-system and through role-plays.

Performance-based assessment strategies aim to develop comprehension of an audio material/literary text manifested through the selection of appropriate answers, and they are aimed at expanding vocabulary by constructing words that are culled from the audio text material/literary text.

Implementation of the Teaching Strategy



Source: *Spring Fortune Teller*

In conducting performance-based assessments, an action-oriented activity is at the core of its success when facilitating student's learning. The activity, "My Origami Story", is a performance-based activity that develops students' listening skills while they are being assessed in following instructions.

To facilitate this activity in a big class size, the teacher must provide simple and clear instructions. For basic users of the language like students who are in Year 2-3, teachers should provide a rim of colored papers or they may ask each child to bring 1 colored paper. When

teaching young learners, the teacher may start the activity by asking them, "What is your favorite color?" Young learners must be given a minute or two to approach the table where the colored papers are placed and let them pick one. After students have selected their preferred color, they must fold their favorite colored paper by listening to the instructions provided either orally or through a video. There are many videos on Origami folding in YouTube with detailed steps and instructions. When teaching children, teachers should speak slowly and they should translate certain words into Spanish. This is best achieved when teachers limit each step to one line which should be first uttered in Spanish and repeated in English.

When all students have finished folding their colored paper, they need to write down simple words in each part of the paper. The inner parts can be the characters of the story, and the outer parts can be illustration or

drawing that represent each character. In helping children fold and write the words into their papers, teachers should provide simple words like color, names, or other information about the story. When all important information is written down and the colored papers have been properly folded, the “origami” paper story is ready.

To assess how students respond to tasks, teachers should demonstrate their own story through the “origami” paper. A simple story should be read. Stories for young learners should be one-liners, simple and short. While reading, it is important to pause, point to key words and translate into Spanish the one-liner text so children would understand the story better

After the story is told, basic questions about the story should be asked by encouraging learners to use their “origami” paper to look for answers. Since the origami paper has blocks of similar answers, each side must be shown one at a time to avoid confusion among young learners. If major characters of the story are written inside the origami paper, teachers must direct students to open the inner part and look for the names of the major characters of the story.

Differentiation & Accommodation

All activities can be adapted to various class sizes. The determining factor to the success of the activities lies on the teachers’ capacity to facilitate and explain instructions in short, simple and doable steps. In big class sizes, learners can be grouped into 4’s or 5’s so they can follow the instructions of the teachers. In making the origami, each step has to be explained clearly and learners are expected to do each step together. With children, following a step and doing the expected activity is already milestone.

Similar Activities that Assess Performance

a. Yes – No Cognitive memory Answers

When reading stories to children, short text or conversations in bubbles is the most practical way to assess or infer if students have understood the question. Further, asking cognitive-memory questions that entail giving short, direct and predictable answers is often effective. Teachers may construct Yes-No answers on a ½ page bond paper and paste these answers on a stick (ex. Popsicle).

Characters of the story maybe drawn, colored and pasted on a stick and when a question is raised, learners may be requested to raise the drawing of the character they think is the correct answer.

b. Color-Star Performance Assessment

To assess students' performance and accomplishment of “small tasks”, a big chart with colored levels can be constructed and posted on the sidewall. Each time a task is accomplished, learners are encouraged to move their names one notch higher until they reach the stars (highest level). This is an immediate feedback for the teacher to see if young learners are following the tasks or if they understand the purpose of an activity they are involved in.

The activities that are presented in this module do not need ICT tools. The use of conventional materials such as colored papers, poster and writing materials are enough. If projectors and laptops are available, videos may be used to make storytelling more vivid and visual. Otherwise, the teacher's voice and the use of an appropriate contextualized story would suffice.

Pedagogical skill: Assessment and Evaluation	Topic: Formative Assessment
Curricular Thread: Reading for comprehension, Writing details	Sub thread: Inferential reading, structured writing of texts

Strategy 2: Product-Based Assessment Strategies

Description

Product-based assessments are tangible and concrete evidences of students' learning. This kind of assessments develop higher order thinking skills because students are expected, not only to apply knowledge, but also to construct, create and defend the proofs of their understanding of the topic or content.

There are various types of product-based assessments such as but not limited to books, reports, maps, charts, essays, and creative presentations, among others. There are two crucial aspects that should be considered in assessing product-based outputs namely - process in designing the product and assessing the output or product. Generally, teachers employ scales and rubrics; however, these tools are not easy to construct. Designing and assessing the process how students go through in producing the output is equally challenging due to the teachers' inability to monitor each aspect of the process. Most teachers employ monitoring templates and peer evaluation before the final product is presented.

Scales and rubrics may be used to grade the products of learners. If rubrics are difficult to construct, observation indicators can be used as alternatives. The most important is that through this type of assessments, learners are able to produce an output that manifests authentic learning.

Product-based assessment strategies are intended to analyze mechanisms on how to monitor students' progress individually and collectively through teacher-support materials that inform their level and understanding.

Implementation of the Teaching Strategy

The “**The K-W-L of Inferential Reading**” activity is a product-based assessment strategy. This is appropriate to students who know basic English and can understand simple sentences. In facilitating this activity, a short reading material should be presented followed by a set of sentence structures and a collection of pictures. The class has to be divided into three (preferred) groups and each group receives a reading material, another group receives a set of sentence structures and the third group has a collection of pictures.

Based on the assigned material, prompt questions are raised or posed to assess prior knowledge based on ocular inspection, or impressions of observable features. Prior knowledge are written under the K column of the KWL chart.

Table 1. K-W-L sample matrix

K: What I know	W: What I want to know/What I wonder	L: What I learned

The first task is for teachers to ask students to provide answers under the “K” column about what they know like the details of the story. This is the start of inferential reading or inferential learning technique. The generation of answers is important, and for young learners, they should be encouraged to draw what they have understood, or, to use stickers to help them express what they wonder about the text or reading material.

After filling in the “W” column, students should start reading the assigned material or start demonstrating about sentence structures. For young learners, they must be continuously checked if they are following what is being taught or talked about. After the teaching material is read, discussed or demonstrated, refer to the K-W-L chart and ask them to review what they have written under the “K” and “W” columns. With probing questions as guide, the filling in of information under the “L” column follows. While accomplishing the “L” column in the chart, students’ answers should be assessed, as there are their outputs or products of knowledge and skills acquisition. A checklist to confirm if their answers are near to the ideal answers is generally used; however, to encourage openness and diversity of answers, instead of comparing answers to the ideal ones, the rationale of their answers has to be probed. With grammar-focused lessons, ideal and correct answers need to serve as parameters in assessing students’ learning.

B. Similar Activities that Assess Performance

Audio-recorded speaking activities

For basic users, audio-recorded speaking activities are effective product-based assessment strategies. The advent of ICT tools such as laptop, tablets and mobile phones make it easy for learners to access information in the Internet. To ensure that these tools and applications do not foster a mediocre attitude, teachers can conduct audio-recorded speaking activities to students. There are three key points that serve as guide in turning this activity into a success. First, teachers need to provide a task. For example, to develop basic reading for comprehension, students may be encouraged to describe their favorite place in Azogues or Cuenca. With detailed steps, students start talking and recording through their mobile phones. The recorded audio should be short and arranged by frame. Self-evaluations and checklists can be used for students to assess themselves and for teachers to track their progress in a formative manner.

b. Creation of student- support materials

Actual student performance can be strategically assessed through a product – written output, drawing, essay or personal narrative. For learners who are in Year 8-10, they may be asked to produce projects that reflect their preference, hobbies or their interests. For example, they may share a personal narrative of their favorite book describing the reasons why they like the book accompanied by photos and sound in video format for just 2.5 to 3 minutes. Likert scales and rubrics can be used to assess them; however, the product itself is already a form of formative assessment because it reflects they process they go through in describing and explaining their favorite book. Woodcarving or thread crochet can be good examples of products that document how students understand steps and instructions in English. The defining element that should be factored in when using product-based assessment strategies is the coherence between the objectives needed to achieve and the desired output expected from students.

Differentiation & Accommodation

In conducting this type of assessment, teachers have to carefully consider the age and level of students. When requiring a product especially in an EFL class, guide sheets and orientation-related information about the product have to be presented to the students so that they are familiar with what is expected from them.

Both conventional and ICT-rich resources can be used and judicious use of these resources has to be observed to maximise its potential as tools. In creating digital stories, students need to have a working knowledge on how to record their voice, take photos through their mobile phones and package them into video format. This implies that this kind of product cannot be expected from young learners.

Assessing students through their products entails time; thus, in big class sizes, teachers may feel discouraged to use this kind of assessment. The best way to cope with time is for teachers to assess students in a pro-

cess-oriented manner; and, at each phase of the learning process, self-assessment and peer evaluation tools should be used.

Strategy 3: Using Think-Aloud Protocols (TAP) for Vocabulary Assessment

Description

Think-aloud protocols originally come from the field of data management, product design and development. This type of protocols is intended to gather data and determine the usability of a specific product or good. Think-aloud protocols can be effective assessment strategies especially to students who are in upper levels of senior high school or in “Bachillerato”.

The basic premise of a think-aloud protocol in an EFL classroom is to maximize the potential of students to remember, record, write down and establish their own understanding of a text heard or listened to. This type of assessment informs teachers on how students process the information they receive and how they think about how they think, thus, developing their metacognitive skills. Further, think-aloud protocols help students become active listeners and not just passive recipients of information.

Think-aloud protocols aim to develop skills in constructing content vocabulary from a text heard or listened to through the use of a think-aloud protocol sheet. They also monitor student’s understanding of the text through careful analysis of the words that are culled from the material used in class, and they foster retrospective reading through a report of one’s thoughts after the reading task is completed.

Implementation of the Teaching Strategy

In using think-aloud protocols to assess vocabulary, providing a reading excerpt from a popular novel is recommended for higher-level students such as Year 8-10 or “Bachillerato 1-3” students. It should just be one

page, and a simple excerpt from a novel for teenagers or from a popular book can be used.

Before the excerpt is distributed, the “Think-aloud Protocol” sheet should be given either individually or in pairs. The sample below can be used.

Table 2. Think-Aloud Protocol Sample Sheet (TAP)

Think-Aloud Protocol		
Words/Phrases	Clues	Confusions

When students have the TAP sheets in their hands, the selected excerpt has to be read slowly and clearly. After the reading session, students should fill out the table.

After the first try, students should be encouraged to read the excerpt again; however, during the second time, the TAP sheet has to be filled out with answers before the reading time is up.

Answers in the TAP sheets have to be discussed as a class to facilitate collaborative understanding of the text.

Differentiation & Accommodation

In conducting “Think-aloud Protocols” (TAP), teachers have to carefully prepare the TAP sheets and reading materials must be appropriate to the age and level of proficiency of the students. In using TAPs to young learners, children may be asked to draw and paste stickers to visualize what they have heard or listened to.

ICT tools can also be used to enhance the administration of TAP sheets to students especially those who are in advanced levels. They can use

codes, symbols and graphic organizers to express thoughts hidden from teachers who are observing them. However, the use of TAP sheets may be more strategic because while students are writing down their ideas and brainstorming what they think the essence of a text is, they are, at the same time, doing active memory call and constructive learning.

The use of TAP reflects authentic and formative assessment that promotes active learning and student-driven activities. By carefully writing down what they think about what they have listened to, teachers have a glimpse of where they should improve and what has to be done to take students' understanding to a higher notch or level.

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