



REFLECTIONS ON ASSESSMENT

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Resumo:

O propósito deste artigo é levantar algumas reflexões sobre avaliação, seus tipos; quem, como, o que, onde, quando e porque avaliar. Não é uma idéia pronta, mas um ponto de partida para construirmos uma boa interação entre ensino e aprendizagem. Aqui, o objetivo é promover um (re-)pensar de tudo o que temos aprendido sobre avaliação e começar a organizar informação em benefício de nossos alunos.

Abstract:

This essay is to raise some reflections on assessment, its types; who, how, what, where, when and why evaluate. It is not a ready idea but a starting point to serve as a guideline to construct a good teaching-learning interaction. Here, the aim is to promote a (re-) thinking of everything we have been learning about assessment and start organizing information in benefit of our students.

Palavras-chave:

Tipos de avaliação; alternative assessment.

This article has the goal of reflecting on assessment. This is not a recipe where a full description of evaluation steps can be found. It is a way to share experiences and promote a discussion on teachers and learners' evaluation during the learning process, since both are evaluated along the educational path. Teachers check their teaching efficiency and learners check their knowledge acquisition, while interacting in class.

Assessment is a process of measuring learning. "Assessment is done in order to have a feedback to aid learning and for a comparable measure of competence" (Dudley-Evans, St. John, 1998, p. 210). Assessment has its purpose on checking progressive learning and competence development. There are different types of evaluation. Some of them are listed below.

Traditional

"...under supervision and require candidates to answer questions in a given time limit, without reference to books or other people; learners are not involved in a setting or grading tests" (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998, p.211).
Quantitative testing (based on results only)
Summative (done at the end of the term by summing up grades)
Diagnostic/replacement (to check learners' proficiency level oral or written to apply to a higher level)
Achievement (a term final average, for example)

Proficiency replacement (to check learners' proficiency level oral or written)

Alternative

"...can be based on work carried out over a period of time and is more flexible and formative; learners may have some say in what the assessed task will be and can use additional resources to complete the work" (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998, p.211).
Qualitative testing (feedback on learning process)
Formative (done along the term by reviewing, founding, grounding)
Self-assess (learners assess themselves)

Peer evaluation (learners' colleagues are responsible by their evaluation)
Portfolio assessment (assessment based on a group of previous tasks, gathered in a portfolio in order to check learners' improvement, for example)
Group work (re-construction of knowledge by socializing research)

I myself prefer alternative forms of assessment. When teaching English classes, I apply:

- a) self-assess: I assign an exercise based on a studied content and ask students to answer it (dialogs, business letters, memos);
- b) then, I read the answers, underline errors and ask them (the authors) to correct their own exercises. At the end, they present their productions to the big group and I collect the exercises to take notes of how they are evolving in their learning process;
- c) peer evaluation: Sometimes, my students exchange exercises with their colleagues to be evaluated by their peers. At the end of the activity, I collect the exercises to write a report on my students' learning performance to give an overall feedback as part of a final grade at the end of the term;
- d) group work: by the means of group work, I divide a topic into sub-themes and assign them to the groups. The students research, organize their ideas and present them at the end. After the presentations, I collect the data and, with the learners, we re-write the theme as a reinforcement activity. "Learners are closely involved in the decision-making process regarding the content of the curriculum and how it is taught" (Nunan, 1988, p. 2).

Self-assessment is not an easy task to be asked to students without establishing topics to be used as evaluation patterns. Learners with low self-esteem are not able to self-assess. If they do not trust, like, or really know themselves as individuals and social agents in their

communities – important people for society – may have nothing to say but wondering around with no precise ideas. On the other hand, there will be learners with excessive high self-esteem who may say wonderful things about themselves but the truth. In one case or the other, learners lose the meaning of self-assessment and the contributions it has for the growth of their maturity and knowledge acquisition.

Peer evaluation is another point to be focused on. Because of a traditional way of learning – teacher-centered lessons – where teachers are the owners of knowledge and students are supposed to repeat everything teachers say, peer evaluation may be faded to be a big disaster since learners are not used to think of assessment as a means of observing their own learning processes but a way to be stressed, with long lists of contents to be memorized and, sometimes, a punishment for having not studied appropriately, or worst, not having behaved themselves during explanations in class.

Because of that, it is useful to think, discuss and establish evaluation patterns with students to develop an environment of confidence, maturity and responsibility. It is a means to develop teaching targets and ways to achieve teachers and learners' goals. When I teach, I like to make it clear to my students that, as future professionals, they have to start practicing while they are learners to internalize mature behavior, develop learning strategies, recognize insights and the purpose of being studying this or that content. Hence, when establishing how they are going to be evaluated (self-assess or peer evaluation), I write some key words on the board:

- a) who (persons to be evaluated: learners – regarding to all learning processes, and teachers – how effective is their teaching);
- b) how (self-assessment, peer evaluation, group evaluation);
- c) what (participation, interest, topic presentation, concerns related to colleagues' understanding of the presented topic, research development, punctuality, attendance, etc.);
- d) where (class, library, places to be collecting data, etc.);
- e) when (dates to work on pre-established material);
- f) why (understand the (individual and social) reasons to be doing such activities).

Teaching can be a much more enjoyable activity if teachers are aware of their responsibility to keep learners growing in knowledge acquisition. By getting learners involved in teaching, teachers have students interested in class all the time. To achieve such level of involvement, it is necessary to design an appropriate syllabus to fit all teaching needs.

A good syllabus design relies on the analysis of students' needs (Needs Analysis), "target-centered, looking at the learners' future role(s) and attempts to specify what is needed in order to perform the role(s) adequately" (Bloor, 1984, p.15). Besides, a process-based curriculum (focusing on the learning process, not the final product) - based on a task-based curriculum, a needs-based curriculum and learner-based curriculum - is an appropriate beginning to design appropriate syllabi (Celce-Murcia, Olshtain, 2000, p.188) in order to develop alternative ways of assessment. Syllabus design is not our aim here, but it is important to be mentioned in terms of developing a reliable set of alternative testing activities.

On the other hand, a traditional qualitative test is a good way to check how far the teaching-learning processes are going in terms of knowledge (re-)construction. Hence, a traditional test would be used as a diagnosis only, a tool to check the process, not a final and definite result (product).

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