ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT AS A SUITABLE TOOL IN COLOMBIAN EFL

CLASSROOMS

By

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Abstract

Alternative Assessment is an increasingly common and popular discussion in education. The potential value and benefit of alternative assessment practices are based on significant changes in assessment in the classrooms. In order to make a difference in the teaching practices in Colombia there has been a need of changing the traditional way of assessing students with the aim to move forward to the new strategies of assessment. This document intends to provide readers with evidence that convinces teachers of the importance of finding other tools to assess their students. Also, this paper will focus on providing information about the use of different ways of assessment including its potentialities and limitations when implementing them in an EFL classroom such as Colombia. The research ends with a discussion of how teachers can make rational choices among the various assessment options by thinking about the importance of considering students' needs in the learning process. As well as, the importance of using multiple sources of information in order to give variety in the classes and the benefits for teachers and students when using alternative assessment in Colombian classrooms.

Keywords: alternative assessment, EFL classrooms, Colombia.

ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT IN EFL CLASSROOM

Resumen

La Evaluación alternativa es un debate cada vez más común y popular en la educación. El valor potencial y los beneficios de las prácticas de evaluación alternativa se basan en cambios significativos en la evaluación en las aulas. Con el fin de hacer una diferencia en las prácticas de enseñanza en Colombia se ha creado una necesidad de cambiar la forma tradicional de evaluar a los estudiantes con el objetivo de avanzar hacia las nuevas estrategias de evaluación. Este documento tiene la intención de ofrecer evidencia que pueda convencer a los profesores de la importancia de encontrar otras herramientas para evaluar a sus estudiantes. Además, este documento se centrará en proporcionar información sobre el uso de diferentes formas de evaluación, incluyendo sus potencialidades y limitaciones en el momento de implementarlas en un aula de clase de Inglés como lengua extranjera en Colombia. La investigación concluye con una discusión de cómo los profesores pueden escoger las mejores formas de evaluación teniendo en cuenta las necesidades de los estudiantes en el proceso de aprendizaje. Así como también, la importancia de utilizar múltiples fuentes de información con el fin de brindar variedad a las clases y los beneficios para profesores y estudiantes al utilizar la evaluación alternativa en las aulas Colombianas.

Palabras claves: Evaluación alternativa, aulas de Inglés como lengua extranjera, Colombia.

Alternative Assessment as a Suitable Tool in Colombian EFL Classrooms

Introduction to Assessment

In recent years, a reform has taken place regarding evaluation. It is a shift from testing to assessment. Assessment is generally seen as one of the key challenges in the field of learning. Assessment; in the broad sense, means "any methods used to better understand the current knowledge that a student possesses" (Collins & O'Brien, 2003, p. 29). On the other hand, Brown (2004) states that assessment "is an ongoing process that encompasses a much wider domain". In other words is a constant appraisal of students' performance that could be done in different ways than a test. Even though, it is common to misunderstand "the meaning of assessment as a synonym of testing which is a subset of assessment; they are certainly not the only form of assessment that a teacher can conduct. Tests can be useful devices, but they are only one among many procedures and tasks that teachers can ultimately use: to assess students" (Brown, 2004, p. 4). In a setting such as Colombia, especially in public schools, it is common to observe this assumption in the way teachers assess students. Bringing into question among the teachers' community whether implementing or not new ways of assessment and how to implement them. Noting that, when learning a foreign language especially when talking about assessment, learners tend to expect results which represent all their efforts and process in every activity they had developed during the course. In order to achieve these expectations, the teacher in charge of the course has to create certain tests or activities in which learners' performance is validated. In other words, the assessment that teachers provide should comprehend students' needs and expectations, as well as the aims of the course, including some other characteristics which made the assessment reliable and valid to obtain the proper required scores. Assessment then is an important part for teachers since they need to design tasks, apply them and interpret their results.

Some of the tools which teachers most commonly use to measure their students' learning and performance are: paper and pencil tests, standardized tests, oral presentations, and question-and-answer activities. Thus, teachers spend a great deal of their class time engaged in one type of assessment or another (Stiggins, 2001). Those types of tests may not the best way to assess the learner's performance because some of them do not consider Brown's (2001) criteria for "testing a test": practicality, reliability and validity (Stiggins, 2001). If we consider what Stiggins states, assessment may be a challenging element for teachers to administer and manage in any context, not just decades before but also nowadays, where large classes, lack of information from the teacher and lack of materials have not contributed to accomplish the desired in language courses. In order to solve the problem, as Stiggins suggests, the first thing to do, as teachers, is to have enough information from the students backgrounds in order to fulfill their needs as well as having the latest information about how to apply and put into practice new theory and approaches to improve our performance as teachers in the classroom. Brown (2004) states that assessment includes a regular attention from the teacher to the student's performance in the classroom not only in the responses he/she gives to a direct questions to him/her but also to the comments, the use of new words or structures that he/she tries to put into practice during the class. Moreover, it is necessary to understand and be creative and look forward to the different approaches in L2 to be able to apply them in a context as Colombia. Teachers should not base assessment solely on tests that are not accurate enough to evaluate the students' performance. It is important to consider other ways to assess students, different from paper-and-pencil test this is called alternative assessment.

        Therefore, there is a need to show a different point of view and options of how alternative assessment might work in a setting such as Colombia. This document intends to

provide EFL teachers in Colombia with some key concepts regarding the importance of applying different assessment techniques, different from traditional tests, as an accurate and more comprehensive tool in order to monitor students' learning process, providing information about the use of different assessment types including its potentialities and limitations when implementing them in an EFL classroom. In the final part of this paper, some suggestions to bring alternative assessment tasks into foreign language classrooms in a setting such as Colombia are presented. Let us begin by discussing the importance of assessment in learning.

Assessment plays an important role in education because it provides information about learners' performance and might determine a learner's success. It plays a critical role in a student's learning journey and it is a tool for measuring student achievement and skill mastery. It also helps students to learn, teachers improve instruction, administrators have more information to decide how to allocate resources, and policymakers evaluate the efficacy of education programs. In line with the same perception, Huba and Freed (2000, p. 8) defined assessment as the process of gathering and discussing information from multiple and diverse sources in order to develop a deep understanding of what students know, understand, and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences; the process when assessment results are used to improve subsequent learning. Traditionally, teachers have been the decision and judgment makers in the process of assessment, deciding not only what topics students will be assessed on, but also what criteria and standards will be used, making teaching and assessment a teacher-centered process.

Dochy (2001) claims that the idea of creating new means of assessment takes a crucial role in switching from the teachercentered paradigm to a learnercentered one, because in the

process of assessing a student, teachers not only monitor the students' learning process, but

also improve its quality. This transformation of the student's evaluation makes learners more

involved in their own process of learning. Spiller (2012) noted that there is a need to think

about assessment as an idea to align more closely with the ideals of constructing learning in

students in which self and peer assessment can play an important role in this respect. This

change leads us to think that with the empowerment of students in the assessment process

new roles for learners and teachers need to be set. These changes might not be easy to

introduce since some students, due to their cultural features, expect teachers to be the agents

who carry out assessment. Grades or scores then might only be perceived as reliable if they

are provided by the teacher. This is something important for teachers who want to implement

peer assessment in their classes.

Considering the words of Lombardi (2008), assessment, indeed, is an important part of

language teaching which it is a vital element of any successful educational work. After all, as

Buchan (1993) suggests, teachers have a professional responsibility to ensure that a student's

performance is assessed on appropriate tasks and procedures. However, assessment experts

admit that there are many factors that could affect performance on language tasks and test

quality, including the characteristics of both the testee and the task. Additionally, Stoynoff

(2012) showed that scoring procedures on the assessment can also affect the reliability and

validity of the scores awarded. Stoynoff also supports the idea of Buchan, he claims that

teachers' assessment knowledge, abilities, and beliefs affect their assessment practices. These

elements will then, have a positive or negative effect on the efficacy of the assessment process

that teachers carry out with their students. This is one idea that novice and experienced teachers

need to consider since teachers might tend to believe that the assessment tasks they apply are

fair and lacking in subjectivity. Authors such as Ellington, Earl and Cowan (1997) and Dochy, Segers and Sluijsmans (1999) have suggested that, in recent years, the pattern of assessment has dramatically changed. This pattern might provide teachers with more varied information about the students' performance. "In the past, the responsibility of assessing students fell onto the shoulders of teachers. Nowadays, assessment is more studentcentered and continuous. The idea of involving students in the assessment process has become increasingly accepted, manifesting itself via peer, self and collaborative assessment methods" (Fion, 2009, p. 6). The features just described are directly related to alternative assessment, which is described next.

A different view of Assessment: Alternative assessment

In other words, as Orsmond and Merry (1996) stated, those changes in assessment are necessary for encouraging students to be more selfdependent in their own development. To reach such a purpose, student empowerment is needed, in which his/her autonomy is the priority in assessment. Lamb (2010) elaborates on the notion of assessment that is designed to foster learner autonomy, Lamb comes to the conclusion that "assessment for learning is designed to develop the necessary capacities for becoming an autonomous learner with a view to improving learning through better selfmonitoring and selfevaluation leading to better planning" (p. 100). The author defines assessment for autonomy as "any assessment for which the first priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting pupils "autonomy" (p. 101). To enhance and empower students, there are various ways in which peer assessment and selfassessment can be included. Somervell (1993) indicated that those assessments might bring a closer relationship among teachers and students as well as help students develop useful skills in academic and professional areas. Shohamy (1992) advocated linking up testing and learning in language classrooms and suggested three directions: 1)

integration of assessment and teaching; 2) student involvement in the assessment process; 3) use of multiple assessment sources (p.11). First, she supported an interactive relationship between teaching and assessment; more specifically, the results of assessment can be used as information to improve teaching in which there will be a difference from what it has been done in the past years. Second, she suggested that teachers and students should cooperate together in planning and analyzing assessment process and results, this kind of cooperation might improve the quality of the classes in the future. Third, she argued that there are diverse ways to obtain language samples and behaviors including portfolios, selfassessment, simulations, observations, peer assessment and so on, which makes a class full of variety and interaction with the language, creating a proper environment where the new assessments can be put into practice.

The purpose of assessment: Summative vs. Formative

An important distinction of assessment is how the assessment procedures should be used, i.e. the function of assessment (Brown, 2004). Two terms are frequently used in classifying assessment functions: summative assessment in contrast to formative assessment.

In the words of Mantz Yorke (2003), summative assessment is the evaluation of the extent to which students meet the course's objectives through a midterm or final examination. Summative assessment has been compared with the formative one, which has its roots in the field of program evaluation (Nichols P. et al, 2008). Moreover, Scriven (1967, p. 7) claims that "all assessments can be summative (i.e., have the potential to serve a summative function), but only some have the additional capability of serving formative functions."

Garrison and Ehringhaus' work (2007) states that summative assessments are given occasionally to identify at a particular point in time what students know and do not know. Yet,

summative assessments should not be associated only with standardized tests such as state

assessments, however; they are also used at and are an important part of district and classroom

programs. It is important to note that summative assessment should be seen as a means to

measure, at a particular point in time, student learning relative to content standards. Though the

information collected from this type of assessment is essential, that can only help in assessing

some aspects of the learning process. As they are spread out and occur after instruction every

few weeks, months, or once a year, summative assessments are tools to help evaluate the

effectiveness of programs, school improvement goals or alignment of curriculum. Summative

assessments happen too far down the learning path to provide information at the classroom

level and to make instructional adjustments and interventions during the learning process. It

takes formative assessment to accomplish this.

Briefly put, summative assessment gives a summary judgment about the learning

achieved after some period of time. It aims to inform external audiences primarily for

certification and accountability purposes; nevertheless it has been used to improve teaching

and learning (Wood & Schmidt, 2002).

Summative assessment is typically seen as "assessment of education" whereas

formative assessment is known as "assessment for education". Consequently, many

researchers and experts in the field identify 'assessment of learning' and 'assessment for

learning' (Black & William, 1996; Arter, 2003).

As mentioned above, 'assessment of learning' implies looking back and identifying to

what extent the student has accomplished objectives, however, it does not necessarily show the

way to future progress (Brown, 2004). As to 'assessment for learning', it aims to evaluate

students in the process of forming their competences and skills in order to assist them to

continue that growth process. The key in this kind of assessment is the delivery (given by the teacher) and internalization (applied by the students) of relevant feedback on performance, with an intent towards the future progression of learning (Brown, 2004).

Taking into consideration Brown's statement (2004), summative assessment aims to measure, or summarize, what a student has grasped, typically occurs at the end of a course or unit of instruction. Sometimes in the last part of the process, tests at the end of the course do not show exactly the real accomplishment of the learners during the units or the course in general. For that reason, certain bad attitudes were showed from students towards any kind of tests (quizzes, periodic review tests, midterm exams, etc.) (Brown, 2004). This attitude is very common among students in EFL classroom as an example in Colombia where most of the learners are used to take these summative tests not only in English as subject but also in most of the subjects they need to complete from primary school until college. Brown (2004) agrees that it is a real challenge for teachers to change the mind of thousands of students who are used to seeing a test only as a summative test, to a test that can accomplish different areas of their own process during a course. In Colombia, we can see as teachers that sometimes this type of assessment could cover a big amount of students per classroom and it is an easy way to score and give a fast judgement of the learner's performance. However, using summative assessment would not give you an accurate result especially, in terms of student's process during the course. Improving this kind of situations in EFL Classrooms might be difficult from the beginning, starting with the students' attitude towards a test, but getting used to tests that are presented in a different format could help students to transform the perception of what tests are.

Importance of formative assessment. After referring to some of the main concepts from

different authors of what assessment is and how it might work in a context such as Colombia, it is time to talk about formative assessment which has been considered to be an integral part of good teaching for a long time (Shepard, 2005). Regarding Black, William (1998) and Shavelson's (2003) work in assessment, they claim that formative assessment collects and utilizes information about students' knowledge and performance to close the gap between students' current learning state and the desired state via pedagogical actions. Giving a close idea Garrison and Ehringhaus (2007) believe that when implemented into classroom practice, formative assessment provides the information necessary to regulate teaching and learning while they are happening. In this sense, formative assessment can be described as a way to inform both teachers and students about student understanding at a point when timely adjustments should be made. These adjustments help to ensure students to achieve targeted standardsbased learning goals within a set time frame.

While formative assessment strategies appear in a variety of formats, there are some distinct ways to distinguish them from summative assessments. Overall, it can be stated that formative assessment is part of the instructional process. If this type of assessment is applied into classroom practice, it might give the information needed to adjust teaching and learning while they are happening. There is a large range of formative assessment methods available. Types of formative assessment involve informal observation, worksheets, pop quizzes, journals, diagnostic tests, analysis of student work, including tests, quizzes, homework, portfolios and collections of students' work. The above mentioned type of formative assessment enable educators supervise and update classroom instruction, and these types of assessments are not used in the grade point average of the student (Airasin, 2008).

So far, we have discussed about two common ways to carry out assessment, either

during the life of the course (formative), or at the end of the course (summative) to provide

information about students' learning (ChisegaNegril, 2011, p. 735). Furthermore, formative

assessment is used to identify what students have learned, what they have not learned and

where they are having difficulty, and this can support the teachinglearning process (Gipps &

Murphy, 1994 cited in Buhagiar 2007). According to Crooks (2002 cited in Ali 2011, p.11)

summative assessment provides a wellfounded, clear and uptodate picture of students' current

capabilities and progress over time and enhancing their development. However, formative

assessment deals with how the quality of student responses can be used to improve students'

competence (Sadler, 2009, cited in Connolly et al., 2012, p.596).

Alternative Assessment vs. Traditional Assessment

In the last years, there might have been a movement from traditional assessment

toward alternative assessments. Alternative assessment started being used as a means for

educational reform due to the increasing awareness of the influence of testing on curriculum

and instruction (Dietel, Herman, and Knuth, 1991). Likewise, Reeves stated that traditional

assessment, which is generally called testing, is challenged by alternative assessment

approaches (2000, p. 103).

Taking into account Bailey's work (1998), traditional assessments are indirect and

inauthentic. She also includes that traditional assessment is standardized and for that reason,

they are oneshot, speedbased, and normreferenced. In the same line of concepts Law and Eckes

(1995) underline that traditional assessments are singleoccasion tests. That is, they measure

what learners can do at a particular time. However, test scores cannot tell about the progression

of a child. They cannot tell what particular difficulties the students had during the test. Law and

Eckes (1995) stated that most standardized tests assess only the lowerorder thinking skills of

the learner. Alike to this perception, Smaldino et al. (2000) state that traditional assessment often focus on learner's ability of memorization and recall, which are lower level of cognition skills. Additionally, traditional assessment tools require learners to display their knowledge in a predetermined way (Brualdi, 1996).

Recalling the subject of alternative assessment, it is important to mention again a concept stated by O'Malley and Valdez Pierce (1996), in which alternative assessment consists of any method of finding out what a student knows or can do that is intended to show growth and inform instruction it is by definition criterionreferenced and is typically authentic because it is based on activities that represent classroom and reallife settings. In other words, it can be said that alternative assessment, assess higherorder thinking skills. In which students have the opportunity to demonstrate what they learned. This type of assessment tools focus on the growth and the performance of the student. That is, if a learner fails to perform a given task at a particular time, she or he still has the opportunity to demonstrate his/her ability at a different time and different situation. Considering that alternative assessment is developed in context and over time, the teacher has a chance to measure the strengths and weaknesses of the student in a variety of areas and situations.

More authentic assessment tools, such as portfolios, independent projects, journals and so on, allow learners to express their knowledge on the material in their own ways using various intelligences (Brualdi, 1996). Likely, Brown and Hudson (1998) give some examples of alternative assessments as portfolios, conferences, diaries, selfassessment and peer assessment. Furthermore, Simonson and others (2000) discussed the several advantages of alternative assessment. First of all, they tend to simulate reallife contexts. Learners have the opportunity to practice the authentic activities that they might encounter in real life. These

activities allow them to put into practice their skills to various real world related settings. Second, collaborative working is encouraged which foster accomplishment of a common objective in groups. Finally, alternative assessments assists instructors to have a better understanding of student learning (Winking, 1997). The above mentioned benefits, makes teachers focused on the student´s product rather than scores. Authentic Assessment can allow the instructor to get further insights regarding students' knowledge and skills (Niguidila, 1993).

However, as a different point of view Law and Ecke (1995) mention, alternative assessments can be laborious in terms of time and energy spent by the teacher. For example, the diversity of products in portfolios, which is viewed as one of the most important strengths, can lead to problems for the teacher in terms of practicality (Bailey, 1998). They might be harder to score and quite time consuming to evaluate the learner's performance (Simonson et al., 2000). In brief, it might be claimed that unlike multiplechoice tests, which are practical to score, performance assessments are viewed as quite time consuming to grade. While the first could be scored by a machine, the second relies on human judgment.

Significance of Self Assessment

Following the idea of looking for a different way to asses in the classrooms self-assessment is considered a part of alternative assessment, which authors such as Andrade and Du (2007) consider as a process in formative assessment where students reflect on and evaluate the quality of their work and their learning, judge the degree to which they reflect explicitly stated goals or criteria, identify strengths and weaknesses in their work, and revise accordingly.

In addition to the concept given by Andrade and Du (2007), selfassessment compels students more enthusiastically and properly to assess themselves and may increase self-

awareness and better comprehension of learning outcomes (Miller, 2002). Students can become better language learners when they engage in deliberate thought about what they are learning and how they are learning it. In this kind of reflection, students step back from the learning process to think about their language learning strategies and their progress as language learners. Such selfassessment encourages students to become independent learners and can increase their motivation. Oscarsson (1989) as well as Spiller (2012), renowned scholars in the field of self-assessment, provide different reasons why selfassessment can be valuable to language learning:

- It provides students and teachers with a high level of awareness of identified levels of abilities.

- It encourages student involvement and responsibility.

- It focuses on the development of student's judgment skills.

- It helps students participate in their own evaluation (Dickinson 1987).

- Effective engagement of students in their own assessment will result in useful post-course effects.

- Self-evaluation builds on a natural tendency to check out the progress of one's own learning.

- Further learning is only possible after the recognition of what needs to be learned.

- If a student can identify his/her learning progress, this may motivate further learning.

- Self-evaluation encourages reflection on one's own learning.

- Self assessment can promote learner responsibility and independence.

- Selfassessment tasks encourage student ownership of the learning.

- Selfassessment tasks shift the focus from something imposed by someone else to a potential partnership.

- Selfassessment emphasizes the formative aspects of assessment.

- Selfassessment encourages a focus on process.

- Selfassessment can accommodate diversity of learners' readiness, experience and backgrounds.

Selfassessment practices align well with the shift in the higher education literature from a focus on teacher performance to an emphasis on student learning.

Regarding all the possibilities that selfassessment brings to the learners it is important to point that this way of assessment helps students to create more independence in their learning process, as well as giving a different tune to the development of class where the teacher becomes a facilitator in their process rather than the main source of knowledge in the class.

However, there are various factors to reflect on when using selfassessment in the classrooms, the following points would be considered as some disadvantages or topics which the teacher should be aware of, before implementing this in his/her activities of the class:

- Potentially increases teacher workload by needing to brief students on the process as well as ongoing guidance on performing selfevaluation.

- Selfevaluation has a risk of being perceived as a process of presenting exaggerated grades and being unreliable.

- Students feel ill equipped to undertake the assessment.

- Ross (2006) claims that the "good kids" underestimate their achievement while confused learners who do not know what successful performance requires, over-estimate their attainments. These concerns suggest, from a measurement perspective, that selfassessment introduces constructirrelevant variance that threatens the validity of grading.

- Selfassessment can be subjective because students may not be sincere and may even overevaluate their own performance.

- Time consuming for students.

- Students may not be familiar with the assessment criteria.

Significance of Peer Assessment

Due to the growing focus on learner independence and autonomy, peer assessment has received a great share of attention in recent years. In a situation where learners are able to assess their own quality and level of performance and those of their peers, it is very likely that they will be capable of understanding the assessment criteria (Patri, 2002). Brown (2004) says that both self and peer assessment give the merits of involving students on their own destiny, encouraging autonomy, and increasing motivation (p. 270). Cheng and Warren (2005) maintain that involvement in and control over the methods, procedures, and outcomes of assessment as well as understanding the underlying rationale are crucial for both teachers and students. Peer assessment is one of the alternatives that has significant pedagogical value because it enables learners to take part in the evaluation process and gives learners opportunities to participate in and evaluate their peers' learning process and products.

Opposite to self-assessment, peer-assessment involves students in providing feedback to other students on the quality of their work. In some instances, the practice of peer feedback will include the assigning of a grade, but this is widely recognized to be a process that is filled with difficulties. In 1995, Falchikov defines peer assessment as the process whereby groups of individuals rate their peers. In other words, peer assessment requires students to provide either feedback or grades (or both) to their peers on a product or a performance, based on the criteria of excellence for that product or event which students may have been involved in determining

(Falchikov, 2007, p.132).

Furthermore, peer-assessment has also been described as a strategy involving students' decisions about others' work that would typically occur when students work together on collaborative projects or learning activities. Falchikov's work (2007) reminds us that peer learning builds on a process that is part of our development from the earliest years of life; in other words that might be clear to explain his idea this type of assessment is the practice of formal education and the centrality of the feedback can encourage collaborative learning through interchange about what constitutes good work. If the course objectives want to promote peer learning and collaboration in other ways, then the assessment tasks need to agree with this. It is also significant to recognize the extra work that peer learning activities may require from students through the assessment. In 1997, Boud, Cohen & Sampson observe that if students are expected to put more effort into a course through their engagement in peer learning activities, then it may be necessary to have this effort recognized through a commensurate shift in assessment focus.

One of the ways in which students reinforce the characteristics of quality work is by evaluating the work of their peers. By overseeing and assessing other students' work, the process of peer assessment develops raised awareness of what is expected of students in their learning (Miller, 2002). The rationale for peer assessment has been summarized by Boud (1989): 'Students have an opportunity to observe their peers throughout the learning process and often have a more detailed knowledge of the work of others than do their teachers.' According to Race, Brown and Smith (2005), peer assessment aims at involving students more closely in their learning and its assessment, and helping to enable students really comprehend what is needed of them. Brown and Dove (1991) also argue that well designed peer assessment

can produce the advantages listed below:

- It encourages student ownership of their personal learning

- It motivates and encourages active participation in learning

- It makes assessment a shared activity, by challenging the proposition that the lecturer is the best person to assess the student's inputs and outputs

- It promotes a genuine interaction of ideas

- It stimulates more directed and effective learning, at the same time encouraging a more autonomous approach

- It develops transferable personal skills.

- Peer learning draws on the "cognitive apprenticeship model" (Kvale, 2006).

- Students can help each other to make sense of the gaps in their learning and understanding and to get a more sophisticated grasp of the learning process.

- The conversation around the assessment process is enhanced. Research evidence indicates that peer feedback can be used very effectively in the development of students' writing skills.

- Students engage in commentary on the work of others can heighten their own capacity for judgment and making intellectual choices.

- Students receiving feedback from their peers can get a wider range of ideas about their work to promote development and improvement.

- Peer evaluation helps to lessen the power imbalance between teachers and students and can enhance the student's' status in the learning process.

  Even though, after regarding the advantages of peer assessment there are still some concerns about peer assessments which are significant to take into account, for example:

- Peer pressure and friendships can influence the reliability of grades given by students.

- Students may have a tendency to give everyone the same mark (for example, there may be collusion in return for good grades).

- Students are not experienced in assessing each other.

- Students may cheat in collaboration for group assignments.

- Fairness may not be maintained because extroverted students can be usually marked higher and quieter students marked down.

It is important to note that for peer assessment to work productively, the learning environment in the classroom should be encouraging: students must feel free and trust each other to give beneficial and honest feedback.

Black and William (1998) emphasize peer and self assessment as central techniques: "If formative assessment is to be productive, students should be trained in peer and self assessment so that they can understand the basic purposes of learning and thereby grasp what is to be achieved." The basic idea behind self and peer assessment is to provide mechanisms which help students to evaluate themselves and their work more critically. An ability to assess one's own strengths and weaknesses is an essential life skill that facilitates personal development whether in study or in the workplace.

Dynamic Assessment in the Process of Teaching and Assessing

One form of alternative assessment that has arisen from sociocultural theory is dynamic assessment (DA), ingrained in Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD). It is an approach which offers a diagnostic understanding of where the learner is at while simultaneously promoting development by offering the learner specific mediations or very small 'hints' during the assessment procedure, it is also seen as assisting the learner to move beyond or overcome,

obstacles to problem solving (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf & Poehner, 2008).

This way of assessment focuses on what a learner is able to do with the assistance of another peer with more experience than him/her and the type and amount of mediation needed for a learner to be able to do a task in dynamic assessment indicates the learner's learning potential. That is, the learner is able to overcome performance problems by working through his or her independent boundaries as they engage and collaborate with the teacher who offers just the mediation(s) needed to assist the learner in moving themselves forward in the given activity. Therefore, assessment and instructional activities are brought together in Dynamic Assessment so that learner development is fostered.

Regarding other concepts of dynamic assessment in which every moment counts. Instruction is not suspended for assessment, but is the continuity of that process. In Haywood's words on DA may be more than enough justification for applying dynamic assessment as an alternative assessment. Haywood (1992b, cited in Haywood & Lidz, 2007) suggests that dynamic assessment is a subset of the more generic concept of interactive assessment (Kozulin, & Garb, 2001; Jönsson, Mattheos, Svingby, & Attström, 2007).

Haywood additionally advocates dynamic assessment as an interactive approach to psychoeducational assessment and explains that in DA the examiner enters an active relationship with a subject and does more than give instructions, pose questions, and record responses. He adds that the word "dynamic" in DA indicates those approaches in which the interaction is richer with the purpose of having a real teaching. The interaction in DA, according to Haywood, is conscious, purposeful, and deliberate in order to produce change in the subject.

In other words, relating to and following the Vygotskian understanding of teaching and learning, the collaborative engagement of the "normal learning situation" is "a socially meaningful cooperative activity" whereby "new psychological functions originate on this interpersonal plane and only later are internalized and transformed to become the learner's inner psychological processes" (Kozulin, 2005, p.354). On that account, the fundamental nature of an energetic and interactive assessment such as dynamic assessment is what promotes a possible change in the learner for learning does not happen in the isolation of a gap or during a static test.

Useful Strategies to Consider When Implementing Alternative Assessment

After not only having an overview about the principal ideas of peer and self-assessment. But also giving some of the strong and weak points these assessments; now, it is time to cover another side of this subject, which is the implementation of peer and self assessment in an EFL classroom and what could be the possible strategies or activities that might work properly in a setting such as Colombia. As can be expected, to reach most of the advantages of peer and self assessment it is necessary to focus most of the activities into new approaches where the main aim of the class is the student's' needs and to work cooperatively in order to obtain accurate results in the learner's' learning process and the teacher expectations as well.

In order to create an environment more suitable to put into practice these alternative assessment, it is essential to involve learners in marking. Something that can facilitate the process is enabling that students to mark their own work and that of others against clear criteria and learning intentions. The criteria can be developed as a class activity; this clarifies the teacher's expectations and involves the learner in reflecting on how far their work fulfills these expectations. The aim of the activity should be to identify ways that the student whose work is

being marked can move forward. Students should be involved in establishing the criteria for judgment as well as in evaluating their own work (Boud, 1995). Regardless of the ways in which the criteria are set up, students need to be absolutely clear about the standards of work to which they are aspiring, and if possible, have practice in thinking about sample work in relation to these criteria. The following activities should be developed and taken into consideration the student's needs as well as the settings where they are applied, not all of them could work in large classrooms, as an example. Marking in groups, is an alternative to mark individually is for students to do this as a group. The focus should be on a recently completed piece of work and the group helps each other to assess the work against agreed criteria and suggest ways in which the work could be improved.

Traffic lights are a popular strategy and invites pupils to reflect on the current state of their learning in relation to a particular task or activity. If they feel confident that they understand a given piece of work, they use a green indicator (a marker, colored pencil / crayon, or a sticker). If they are not quite sure of their understanding they use amber. If they are very uncertain, they use a red indicator. In the light of their judgment, it is important that pupils then think about what they need to do to move from red/amber to green. Students indicating green could be used to advise those who used amber and the teacher can then work with those who used red. An alternative to the traffic lights is to use three versions of smiley faces or post it notes.

Last five minutes is a strategy which could be applied at the start of a lesson, the teacher makes the purpose of the lesson clear and during the last five minutes, one of the pupils explains what they have learned in the lesson. Others in the class question them about this.

Effectiveness of Alternative Assessment in a Setting such as Colombia

In a context as Colombia, the implementation of the strategies described previously in the paper is linked to external factors to assessment such as the large number of students teachers have in their classrooms, school facilities or availability of resources can affect the efficiency of the implementation of alternative assessment tasks. Another point to consider is the lack of information that teachers in public high schools might have about current assessment trends. In other words, the teacher needs to be informed as well as prepared for the challenge of coordinating cooperation among the students in the classroom, in order to reach a group goal instead of individual goals.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the teacher needs to create motivation among the students whom he/she will address because, without motivation as well as information about what are the purposes of the class are or the objectives to reach at the end of it, students might get lost in the process of implementing the alternatives to assessment, especially peer assessment, where the students need to know what exactly they are evaluating or assessing to their peers in order to give a proper grade and feedback.

It is quite significant to put into consideration that teachers in charge or with the interest of trying to apply alternative assessment, need to be well informed and updated about the latest approaches or activities to carry on in their own classrooms, with the only purpose to have an effective assessment learning process.

Another point to recall in this paper in order to use alternative assessment in Colombia is how the schools' the curriculum are based on certain standards. These standards sometimes are not even accurate or related to the real situation in Colombia's classrooms. So, when a teacher tries to make a complete lesson plan relating standards vs. class objectives; it could be

confusing and it would not reach the expectations or the main purpose of applying an alternative assessment in the classrooms. On the other hand, the lack of specification in standards also might affect the effectiveness of teaching a second language. Because, there is not a well based support that could hold or unify the knowledge of all students equally in the country. It might give certain disadvantage among learners from public or private schools. Public schools do not always have access or the ability to renovate the way of teaching a foreign language, they tend to keep the same traditional path of teaching in which the bases of its curriculum are translation and teaching grammar, leaving behind the communicative objectives of teaching a language. On the other hand, private schools might have more access to manage and apply standards according to what the government has established. These schools tend to have more economical resources that help them to reach what it is important for the educational curriculum.

When talking about an implementation of these strategies and alternative assessment in general or in any appropriate setting, it would promote learner autonomy in which the teacher is a guide during the learning process rather than a full provider of it. However, in an EFL setting such as Colombia the absence of motivation among students and teachers could affect the teaching process and the assessment of it. For example, in most institutions, the teacher who is in charge of the class does not have the freedom to modify or create new ideas to give learners a different way of thinking. Moreover, large classes as mentioned before are a big obstacle when implementing strategies such as peer or self assessment. If the teacher did not have a suitable autonomy to prepare a lesson plan, there would not be a possibility to create proper independence in the students.

Conclusions

Assessment is a task where the teacher takes the responsibility to evaluate the learning

process of the learners. In order to accomplish that objective the teacher should take into

consideration the student's needs and the aims of the course to have a proper assessment of the

learners. The idea of changing the traditional way of assessment to a different target, which is the

student's success, lead to create different means to assess the learning process into a positive

way. In order to have an effective assessment process, different from the traditional, it is

necessary to know how to prepare the group and to know if it is ready to take a step forward in

the process of assessment especially in a context such as Colombia where in most of the public

schools it is noticeable how the traditional teaching is often used in the classrooms.

Alternative assessment can provide teachers with authentic materials which gives real life

situations practice into the classrooms. When trying to bring to the classroom a variety in

activities to work inside the classroom alternative assessment is the best option to consider. It

offers a great deal of options to work rather in groups or individually most of the skills when

learning a foreign language. Also it gives the students the opportunity to put into practice

everything that they had learned during the course.

The creation of alternative assessment offers autonomy to students in their learning

process, building a critical thinking too. This is very important to start implementing in

Colombia because this matter brings the student a wide overview of how the language works.

Moreover, there is not only one method to assess students' knowledge, on the contrary with

alternative assessment there are extensive possibilities which facilitates the teacher to choose

according to what she/he needs to provide a proper assessment to his/her students. Additionally,

alternative assessment and its tasks are not a strict model which you have to follow, basically

they could be modified according to teacher or students' needs.

Besides, alternative of assessment creates an important interaction between the students and the teachers in the learning process where both sides can participate and the results are clearly demonstrated in the end or during the process. Putting this idea into context, in Colombia there is few teachers who can make this interaction happens, sometimes the lack of information from the teachers or the large classrooms in most of the public schools is a barrier to developed and accomplish this task with the students.

There are different ways in which a teacher can based on his/her assessment for the student, three of the most popular ones when talking about alternative assessment are: Dynamic Assessment, Summative and Formative assessment. First, Dynamic assessment is an approach rooted or based on Vygotsky's zone of proximal development in which the learning process of the student is seen and the teacher could promote different tasks in order to improve and overcome the problems of the students in their learning process. To accomplish these kind of assessment tasks is necessary the guidance of the teacher or a peer.

Second, Summative assessment are activities that could provide the teacher with the idea of what students know or do not know about the objectives of the course. In here there is surely an effectiveness of the process because it is not influenced by the teachers' subjectivity. Standard test are more popular in this category of assessment.

Third, Formative assessment provides information about the student's current process learning. Moreover, it could perfectly work for changes in the time frame if it is needed.

In formative assessment, there is a wide portfolio in which the teacher can choose from. One advantage of formative assessment is how it helps to supervise students' performance and lesson plans. Leading to a constant update and feedback in the teaching process. This type of task

is really significant to take into consideration in a setting such as Colombia. Because the lack of knowledge among teachers do not help the education to improve. At the contrary it helps to be in the same rut all over again creating a cycle where there is not an option for change in the way of teaching or assessing students.

In a foreign language context such as Colombia, students necessarily need to have an interactive environment, in which, peer and self-assessment practices could empower students to make decisions and construct knowledge that contributes to the individual's learning experience. Self-assessment in other words gives independence to the students during the activities developed in the classrooms. Those can promote and verify their own learning process.

When talking about grading in these kinds of alternative learning or when creating these types of activities increases the teacher's workload and sometimes, it might give some exaggerate grades because not all of the students are prepared or not completely secure to give a subjective judgment when giving a score. This might be a problem in Colombia where managing large classrooms would not be very effective when applying this techniques. In this case the teacher in charge needs to be really resourceful in order to accomplish a fair grading among the students.

On the other hand, peer-assessment takes into consideration all the students in the evaluation process. Also, the students are in constantly feedback from their peers. Besides, if there is the participation and the interaction among the students that could create a proper environment to develop independence from the teacher and he/she became a guidance in the learning and evaluating process. Even though, when applying this strategy might be found same grades among the students in order to avoid conflict between friendships and there would not be a real grade because as it might happen in self-assessment students tend to not having experience

in scoring.

It could be said that in Colombian classrooms, large classes are difficult to handle for some teachers also it is not a priority in the government standards for teaching a second language. When teachers have to face large classes sometimes could be a real challenge because learners might not behave or collaborate with the class. Though, if there is a real motivation and encouragement from the teacher and the learners the creation of an interactive environment where both can work in harmony could be real. Taking into consideration the implementation of alternative assessment, it would lead to students to know what the main purpose of learning a language is and to the teacher to provide learners an efficient guidance to succeed in the objectives of the class or the course by itself. Moreover, it could create an independence of thought among students, enhancing an active participation and discussion between learners and teachers in the learning and assessment process.

Alternative assessment is a clear option when we as teachers or an institution are not satisfied with the existence a standardized test. Alternative assessment, as the ones mentioned before, could capture a significant and enduring educational outcomes. These outcomes are based on students' performance, creation or production during the classes. It also helps to tap onto higher-level thinking and problem-solving skills. And as a big difference between standardized tests and alternative assessment; the scoring is done by the teachers not machines, which have a different judgment based on the student's process. Furthermore, these new assessment stress the importance of examining the processes as well as the products of learning. They encourage us, as teachers, to move beyond the "one right answer" mentally and to challenge students to explore the possibilities implicit in open-ended, complex problems, and to draw their own inferences. What is new about these alternative assessment is that they make

explicit and formal what was previously implicit and informal. They also motivate teachers to articulate their instructional goals clearly, to ensure alignment between their goals and current views of meaningful teaching and learning, and to gather systematic evidence to guide their instructional efforts.

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