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Assessing Written Work and Working with Errors

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Annotation: The article deals with the issue of assessing written work of students and working with errors. As to the article, assessment is a part of the lesson during which the teacher evaluates how students have mastered the material and use it in reception and production of texts in the oral and written forms. Also, author studies theoretically the specific features of the assessment, characteristics of writing technique and types of errors and working with during the lesson.

Key words: assessment, learning difficulties, errors, writing, free writing, guided writing, instructions, accuracy, grammar, task achiement.

"Assessment" is a very broad term that can cover formal exams and tests, both external and internal, which are structured and built into the fabric of the academic year, as well as more informal types of assessment that teachers undertake as a part of their day-to-day practice. The term "control" is often replaced by "assessment".

In general, assessment is collecting data for revealing the level of language proficiency achieved within a certain time period. In language assessment, we gather information in a systematic way with the help of language testing tools.

Assessment is a part of the lesson during which the teacher evaluates how students have mastered the material and use it in reception and production of texts in the oral and written forms. For example, we may use an oral interview to gather information about students speaking abilities, then give comments based on that information, and make a decision what material and activities we should use if the students need more work on oral fluency. Thus, within the EL classroom we reveal

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sources and zones of learning difficulties, see the effectiveness of materials and activities, encourage students' involvement in the learning process, track learners' upgrading their English, and provide students with feedback about their EL learning progress for further classroom-based applications of language tests.

The objects of the assessment are:

A) Knowledge and sub-skills – language competence;

B) Using knowledge and language sub-skills in the process of production and reception of speech and interaction (communicative competence);

C) Country-study and linguo-cultural knowledge of verbal and non-verbal behavior – socio cultural competence.

We should identify learning goals and objectives with students' achievements and assessment. We need to create tools of assessment that will help us evaluate and understand whether our learning outcomes have been achieved. But we also recognize that the assessment contributes to achieving some of our communicative goals. The tools of assessment we set up can be very different both in the skills they focus on, and also in the way they are executed. The assessments might be individual, pair, or group-based. The assessments evaluation and feedback are also very important.

Writing is a complex communicative activity. It helps to communicate in the written form with the help of graphical symbols. Writing is a type of speech activity as "a communicative skill to encode, store and send messages with the help of written symbols".[1] The product of this type of speech activity is a text for reading.

[1] Milrud R.P. English Teaching Methodology. -M.: Drofa, 2007. -P.182.

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Writing techniques and activities can be characterized as controlled (for providing the content and form), guided (as free but a form is given) and free. (Controlled writing proposes using the following activities: coping, gap-filling, re-ordering words, substituting, correcting the facts and dictation.

Guided writing is used when we teach paragraph writing and rhetorical models. Paragraph writing can be practiced when students mastered basic skills of sentence writing and sentence combining. That's why it is usually used at the pre-intermediate and intermediate levels.

Free writing is used at the intermediate and advanced levels. Activities: writing narrations based on picture/pictures, description of facts/events, etc., information, report, review, instruction.

Writing involves content, organization, style, syntax, mechanics, grammar and spelling. It was pointed out that "If we limit our feedback to pointing out or correcting errors, our pupils will concentrate on producing error-free writing, neglecting the interest or even the meaning of the content. The equation teaching writing – error elimination is counterproductive"[2]. So it is necessary to conduct feedback in fair balance of content feedback and form feedback.

There are different types of writing performance in English which should be assessed[3].

Imitative: at this stage, form is the primary concern to assess learner's skills in the fundamental and basic tasks of writing letters, words, punctuation, and very brief sentences. This category also includes the ability to spell correctly and to perceive phoneme-grapheme correspondences in the English spelling system.

[2] Balan R., Cehan A. & et.al. In-service Distance Training Course for Teachers of English. -Romania: Polirom, 2003. - P. 201.
[3] Brown H. D. Language assessment-- principles and classroom practices. - New York: Pearson Education, Inc., 2004.

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Intensive: this refers to producing appropriate vocabulary within a context, collocations and idioms, and correct grammatical features up to the length of a sentence.

Responsive: assessment tasks here require learners to perform at a limited discourse level, connecting sentences into a paragraph and creating a logically connected sequence of two or three paragraphs. Form-focused attention is mostly at the discourse level, with a strong emphasis on *context* and *meaning*.

Extensive: extensive writing implies successful management of all the processes and strategies of writing for all purposes, up to the length of *an essay*, a term paper, a major research project report, or even a thesis. Students focus on achieving a purpose, organizing and developing ideas logically, using details to support or illustrate ideas, demonstrating syntactic and lexical variety, and in many cases, engaging in the process of multiple drafts to achieve a final product.

The experienced teachers consider that teachers should ignore the language mistakes that do not hinder learning, so teachers may correct only those mistakes which are very basic and those which affect meaning.

Giving clear instruction- To help the students to concentrate on particular aspects of language, we can tell them that a piece of work will be corrected for only one thing, the use of tenses, for instance. By doing this, we ensure that their work will not be covered by red marks, and we encourage them to focus on particular aspects of written language. We can individualize language work by identifying for each student a few kinds of errors and assigning that focus on these.

Using students work as material- Where a piece of writing contains a number of common errors, we may photocopy the work (erasing the writer's name) and show it to the whole class, asking them to identify problems. In this way the

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attention of the class can be drawn to common mistakes and photocopied document can form the basis for remedial work

Discussing errors- We will learn about our students' errors if we give them the opportunity to make them, fix them, and discuss them. We can ask our pupils to discuss where they think their mistakes come from and why they make them. This will help us to realize which mistakes the pupils can recognize and which ones they cannot. Asking the pupils to discuss their mistakes may provide us with wide information about interference, typical mistakes, usage of skills and give us clear evidence of language learning.

Pointing out strengths as well as weaknesses- Our students will have the chance to perceive a correct model in their own use of language and will be likely to continue taking risk if they see that their good qualities are noted and encouraged.

Also, in order to avoid too much correction of written work, give simple writing tasks which will not lead to many mistakes and which can be corrected in class.

Correcting work in class:

- go through the answers, writing on the board only if spelling is a problem;
- let students correct their own work or exchange books and correct each other's;
- move round the class to check what they are doing.
- Prepare a short writing activity for a lesson. The activity should develop writing skills, not just practice vocabulary and grammar.
- Read the instruction for using a picture for development of writing skills. Think about pictures/photos, writing tasks and activities which are suitable for school, lyceum and college students.

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Here, using a picture as a topic for several writing classes gives you an opportunity to develop not merely a wide variety of tasks but also a sequence of tasks, carefully selected so that students move from one level of difficulty to another, gathering more vocabulary, knowledge of idioms and sentence structures, and organizational skills as they proceed. The picture can be used as a reference point for students to discuss a cultural phenomenon and their own experience related to it. The picture can be used as the basis for a variety of sequential tasks.

Example: In the small groups students discuss the questions related to the content of the picture "Historical view of the city". They write down words and phrases that they can use. Then they compare the results. The teacher asks students to describe the picture in the written form using these words. Then, the teacher gives a task "Write a letter to a friend abroad about the historical view of his city in the picture".

5. Study the procedure of teaching writing a narrative essay in the book "Great Essays" by Keith S. Folse. A. Muchmore-Vocoun, E. Vestry Solomon. Note-taking the main points of writing a narrative essay according to the given plan:

1. The structure of the narrative essay on the basis of a sample.
2. The features of paragraph writing.
3. Transitional devices.

6. Find the samples of ready-compositions and analyze their structure and content. Think about activities for teaching writing a composition in the EL. Analyze the strategy of errors correction pointed out by the teacher.

A piece of writing (for instance, essay) as a final work at advanced level can be evaluated on the basis of criteria:

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1) Task achievement: relevance and appropriateness of ideas and examples, coverage, variety, suitability of the text, type and length, awareness of a target reader, precision;

2) Organization: cohesion, coherence sequencing, paragraphing, layout and punctuation, length/complexity of sentence, textual fluency;

3) Range: structures, vocabulary, appropriateness, flexibility, detail, avoidance of repetition;

4) Accuracy: grammar, vocabulary, spelling.

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1. Milrud R.P. English Teaching Methodology. -M.: Drofa, 2007. -P.182.
2. Balan R., Cehan A. & et.al. In-service Distance Training Course for Teachers of English. -Romania: Polirom, 2003. - P. 201.
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