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EVALUATING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

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PALABRAS CLAVE. Evaluación, medición, ingles como lengua extranjera, jóvenes aprendices

RESUMEN. En este artículo queremos dar una panorámica de la evaluación del inglés en primaria, analizando los principios de la evaluación, as como el deber del análisis y la observación de la fase de evaluación por la parte del profesorado. Se analiza la posibilidad de la autoevaluación y se hace un análisis de cómo influye el Marco Común Europeo en la evaluación de las capacidades de los niños y niñas de primaria.

KEY WORDS. Evaluation, testing, English as a Foreign Language, young learners

SUMMARY. In this article we analyze the evaluation process of English in Primary Education. We analyse the principles of evaluation as well as the duty of the teachers to analyze and observe the evaluation process. We also deal with the influence the European Framework has in the evaluation of the capacities of boys and girls in Primary

Principles of evaluation

Evaluation is a tool for analysing the effectiveness of the educational curriculum and for effecting change within all levels. Focusing on the performance of pupils alone does not tell us why a teaching procedure is or isn't working. We need to evaluate the whole teaching-learning context in all its aspects in order to improve on the processes (for example, the types of materials, the teaching methods, the involvement of the individual learner, the interaction between children, and the interaction between the class and the teacher) which lead to successful teaching and learning.

In Primary, evaluation has to be integrated in the curriculum. It has to be also under the parameters of the formative evaluation paradigm and we must not forget that evaluation is a tool for teachers as well as an instrument that helps our pupils to construct the new knowledge they identify as "the English language".

Teacher's self-evaluation

Teacher's self-evaluation should be based on the teacher's action-research into the process of teaching-learning. This approach involves **planning** aims and methods before

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teaching, **acting** on the plan in class, **observing** what pupils do in class, and **analysing** why pupils behaved in this way.

You can write up your lesson plans, observation and analysis in a **Lesson Record.** It is useful to ask questions of yourself under each heading in order to structure your record:

1. Planning:
   - What are the aims of this lesson?
   - What will I expect children to do by the end of the lesson which will show that the aims have been achieved?
   - Are there opportunities to develop interactive social skills?
   - What problems could be anticipated? How could these be overcome?
   - How will I be able to support the less able children / challenge the more able children?
2. Observations
   - Where children absorbed in the activities? (Give examples of what pupils did.)
   - Where any children not involved? Why?
   - Did any children show particular abilities (e.g. producing spontaneous language)?
   - Was pair / group work carried out effectively?
   - Were there any practical problems (e.g. problems with materials, space, noise)?
3. Analysis
   - To what extent were my aims achieved?
   - Which aspects of the lesson were most successful? Why?
   - Which aspects were less successful? Why?
   - How can I reinforce pupils' learning?

Pupils' self-evaluation

It is important to give pupils a sense of the progress they are making in class. One way of doing this is by means of a *Progress Diary.* It is normally used at the end of each unit and provides an opportunity for the pupil to reflect upon his or her learning process. Although the questions are usually in English, the answers may be given in L1. This diary concentrates on the particular objectives of that unit, and encourages pupils to comment on the extent to which they feel they have achieved those objectives. The diary is used for self-evaluation , but it is also a useful tool for the teacher, who can use it to assess the pupil's progress. The diaries should be collected regularly, read, and account taken of the information in them.

Teachers can use self-evaluation to analyse the process of teaching and learning. It will also act as motivation for the pupils. They will develop a positive attitude towards the foreign language if they have an opportunity to show what they know and what they can do. We can encourage our pupils to evaluate themselves by means of simple conversations in their mother tongue and activities that can help them to reflect upon their learning of English and the strategies they use to learn it.

Pupils' profiles

Alongside the self-evaluation of the *Progress Diary*, pupils and their parents, and other staff and administrators in the school, need records of actual achievement. Listed below are some attainment targets for primary school pupils, followed each one of them by a short explanation of what the pupil is able to do, plus an example of an activity where the specific attainment target is implemented. Decisions about whether a pupil has attained a particular target will be based on the way the pupil behaves in class (by means of a classroom observation sheet), the pupil's own self-evaluation and the attainment tests.

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Explanation of the attainment targets of oral communication

Attainment target	The pupil is able to …	In activities such as…
Can understand specific information and simple oral instructions.	understand the full meaning of oral texts and instructions needed to carry out a task he or she is required to do.	*Listen and complete the picture*
Can grasp the overall sense of oral texts.	grasp the topic or type of oral document presented to him. In particular, the pupil is able to follow the story line of a tale told by the teacher.	*Listen and order the pictures*
Can grasp specific details within an extended oral text.	choose the information that he or she needs, and disregard that which is not understood or needed.	*Listen and choose the right picture*
Can understand and use social expressions.	use social expressions learnt in previous years or which appear in this year for the first time.	*Ask and answer*
Can recognize and reproduce the sounds, intonation, and rhythm of English.	imitate the pronunciation and rhythm of the English language in oral activities and particularly in songs and chants.	*Sing the song*
Can reproduce short messages based on given models.	carry out a series of oral activities (e.g. comic stories, interviews, etc) which require the use of particular phrases.	*Listen to the story. Then, act it out.*
Can use English to communicate with the teacher and class-mates in everyday situations.	use the English language in normal communication situations, although this use may not be free of errors.	
Can engage in oral interchanges using and experimenting with language already known.	use words and phrases already studied in a creative manner.	*Play the game*

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Explanation of the attainment targets of written communication

Attainment target	The pupil is able to …	In activities such as…
Can understand specific information and simple written instructions.	understand the written instructions used in the book on how to carry out an activity.	
Can grasp the overall sense of written texts.	skim-read a text and identify its main idea or topic.	*Read and match the description with the pictures*
Can grasp specific details within an extended written text.	read a text and extract specific information to solve a problem or answer some questions.	*Read the text and answer the questions.*
Can reproduce sentences and short texts following given models.	write a series of phrases following a fixed model that he or she will have to adjust.	*Look and write*
Can produce short texts, using and experimenting with language already known.	use phrases and words that are already known to make new combinations that help the pupil learn to express him/herself in writing in English.	*Write about the capital of your region*

Attainment tests

The main aim of these tests should not be only to label the pupil in terms of pass / fail, but to collect information in order to check aspects of learning that are difficult to assess by classroom observation alone, and to gain a more rounded view of the pupil's achievements. The information collected in this way should have a direct effect on the planning of future classes, for example by highlighting aspects of the language the pupils were thought to have mastered, but in fact they still have difficulty with. The tests should also bring to the teacher's attention any pupils who are not keeping up with the rest of the class, and who may need extra help.

It is important that these tests reflect the language subject of study and the type of activities they do normally in class. The tests have to reflect the difference between the courses and cycles we divide Primary Education. In the first years they include a word or sentence approach. In the last years of Primary they must include a more discursive approach.

The tests are the quantitative element of the evaluation process. In Primary, it is important that it is combined with qualitative observation.

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Qualitative observation

The qualitative observation can be done with observation sheets that can help us in the process. The sheets we propose can be organised by the teachers as they like and include aspects they can observe every day in the classroom. We think that those sheets can be a valuable register of the linguistic and socio-cultural progress of our pupils. These sheets can be used as internal reference and also with meetings with parents.

The observation sheets could be divided in categories that each teacher can complete in the ways he or she likes. It could include the following categories.

1. Communicative abilities and uses of English
2. Attitude towards learning
3. Behaviour in the classroom
4. Socio cultural and intercurricular themes

Each category can be covered with items such as:

1.1. Recognises the vocabulary of the unit 1.2. Tries to use English to communicate in class 1.3. Reads and understands short stories
2.1. shows a positive attitude towards the foreign language 2.2. shows interest in communicating in English 2.3. begins to use language learning strategies consciously
3.1. answers with good behaviour 3.2. brings his/her school books to the class 3.3. works well in pairs or groups
4.1. non-sexist education 4.2. environmental education 4.3. peace education

The European perspective

The "*Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*" (CEF) (1) saw the light in its French and English versions in 2001, the European Year of Languages. It was translated later into more than 20 languages.

The CEF describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication, and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively. It also defines levels of proficiency which allow learners' progress to be measured at each stage of learning, and on a life-long basis.

The approach used in this document is an action based approach .Language use, embracing language learning, comprises the actions performed by persons who as individuals and as social agents develop a range of **competences**, both **general** and in particular **communicative language competences**. They draw on the competences at their disposal in various **contexts** under various **conditions** and under various **constraints** to engage in **language activities** involving **language processes** to produce and/or receive **texts** in relation to **themes** in specific **domains**, activating those **strategies** which seem most appropriate for

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carrying out the **tasks** to be accomplished. The monitoring of these actions by the participants leads to the reinforcement or modification of their competences.

The CEF promotes the use of the language portfolio. What is the portfolio? This instrument is a way of recording the experience of learning a language. It has three main objectives:

a) to promote a life-long learning;

b) to give a control of the linguistic abilities that is recognized internationally;

c) to promote a socio-cultural conscience and a tolerant attitude towards other cultures and languages

Each pupil will have his or her portfolio that will accompany him or her during the whole learning process.

The European Language Portfolio consists of three elements:

The Language Passport

It offers a general perspective of the linguistic abilities of each pupil in one or more languages. It includes the linguistic competence in the four skills and it includes elements of self-evaluation and evaluation made by the teacher, as well as any certificate the pupil has acquired during his or her learning process.

The Linguistic Biography

This instrument wants the pupil to evaluate the learning process. It also wants a reflection on it so that pupils can plan their future learning. It encourages pupils to think what they can do in the foreign language and it includes information about the linguistic and cultural experience acquired in and outside the school. It finally pretends that the pupil recognizes that he or she can understand and speak the foreign language.

The Dossier

The dossier contains the practical work that illustrates the achievements indicated in the language passport and linguistic biography.

We have recently publishes a series for English for Primary (2) where we have tried to produce a practical version of the portfolio so that teachers and pupils in Spain can use it without difficulty. We tried to familiarize them so they can use them in the future in Secondary Education because we think that they will be a general tool in a couple of years. We also think it is an important tool for the secondary education teachers who will know exactly what their students have done in the previous courses.

In our version of the portfolio we have included several elements we think that are important for a primary school learner. First of all it includes a proposal of the language that has been taught and learned. This proposal that the pupils have to tick comes in sentences that begin with "I know…." We also give them a record sheet where they can select the language the use more or they like most. Here we emphasize that the language they have learnt is the language they can use.

There is a section where they can record the additional activities they have done as well as the projects they have done with their teachers and exceed the English class.

Apart from the different skills and linguistic abilities we have incorporated a self-evaluation sheet and a learning strategies record sheet that we include below:

Estrategias de aprendizaje

A principio de curso colorea uno o dos de los dibujos de Witty para cada estrategia según la frecuencia con la que la utilices para mejorar tu inglés. Al final del primer, segundo y tercer trimestre colorea uno o más Wittys según tu progreso.

Comprensión oral

Escucho atentamente lo que dice el profesor.

Intento seguir las instrucciones del profesor.

Intento fijarme en las palabras clave para entender los textos del CD.

Escucho las canciones en casa.

Escucho atentamente a mi compañero durante intercambios orales.

**Expresión oral**

Hablo en inglés en clase con mis compañeros.

Procuro hablar siempre en inglés aunque cometa errores.

Pregunto cuando no entiendo algo.

Intento usar palabras y expresiones nuevas en clase.

Comprensión escrita

Uso las ilustraciones para entender las lecturas.

Intento entender los textos aunque no sepa todas las palabras.

Utilizo un diccionario bilingüe para buscar el significado de las palabras.

Expresión escrita

Escribo las palabras nuevas en mi cuaderno.

Cuando escribo me fijo en los ejemplos del libro.

Vuelvo a leer lo que he escrito para detectar los errores.

Uso la ayuda de mis compañeros para corregir las actividades.

Utilizo mi Picture dictionary para memorizar el vocabulario.

Utilizo un diccionario para saber la ortografía de las palabras.

General

Hago todas las actividades y tareas.

Sigo los consejos de Witty.

Memorizo palabras nuevas.

It is important the young learner has an opportunity to think about how the foreign language is learned.

In general, we think that this new approach to collecting data for teachers and learners will improve the quality of the teaching and learning in all European countries.

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Referentes

(1) European Commission (2002)*, Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.* Brussels

(2) Bazo, Peñate et al (2005), *Cool Kids*, Oxford University Press. Series for Primary Education.

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