

## Using Cooperative Learning to Facilitate Alternative Assessment

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### **Rezumat**

*Scopul acestui articol este de a arăta modul în care învățarea prin cooperare poate fi folosită pentru a facilita evaluarea alternativă în clasă. Învățarea prin cooperare se bazează pe principiile de interdependență pozitivă, responsabilitate individuală, interacțiunea față-în-față, abilități interpersonale, la fel, și lucrul în grup prin care se ating atât scopuri individuale, cât și de grup.*

Alternative assessment is a useful means of gathering evidence regarding how learners approach, process, and complete real life tasks in the target language. Labels such as *performance*, *authentic*, *informal*, and *situated*, have been used to describe alternative assessment. Despite the different labels, what is common among these types of assessment is that they do not adhere to the traditional testing criteria of objectivity, machine scorability, standardization, or costeffectiveness [1, pp.8-11].

Alternative assessment uses a wide variety of formats, such as checklists, journals, reading logs, portfolios, videos of role-plays, audio-tapes of discussions, self-evaluation questionnaires, teacher observations, and anecdotal records to assess the performance of students. These formats show what the students can actually do rather than what they are able to recall. Alternative assessment reflects the curriculum being taught and provides information on the strengths and weaknesses of each student. Furthermore, it provides multiple ways of determining the progress of students and can be more culturally sensitive and free of the linguistic and cultural biases inherent in traditional testing [4, p. 16].

Alternative assessment is closely intertwined with classroom instruction. It does not require a separate block of time to be administered because it is based on day-to-day instructional activities. Finally, alternative assessment provides valid and reliable documentation of students' achievement and progress. This is because it utilizes various procedures and formats that provide multiple sources of evidence based on students' products and performance tasks. There are a number of issues, however, that teachers need to consider when doing alternative assessment. These issues are multifaceted and need to be integrated properly into an ongoing instructional program. They range from the purpose, focus, and setting to the stakes and shareholders of assessment. Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec [2, pp. 35-38] maintain that the purposes of assessment can be diagnostic, formative, or summative, whereas the focus can be the process of learning, the process of instruction, or the outcomes of learning and instruction. Likewise, the setting can be artificial (classroom) or authentic (real world) and the stakes can be low or high, depending upon whether the purposes of assessment are to determine, for example, the students' instructional needs (formative) or their admission to college (summative). Finally, the shareholders of assessment can be students and parents, the teaching staff, the administrators, colleges, and even potential employers.

The issues involved in assessment become even more diversified when we consider the question of what gets assessed and evaluated. For instance, Johnson and Johnson [3, p.58] maintain that teachers need to measure students' academic abilities, skills, and competencies as well as their attitudes and work habits. This suggests that in conducting alternative assessment, teachers need to integrate assessment procedures into an ongoing instructional program. These procedures will enable teachers to gather and interpret valid and reliable evidence regarding the progress of their students in the cognitive and non-cognitive domains of schooling.

### **Cooperative assessment activities**

The following examples of cooperative assessments were selected based on the assumptions that language teaching involves instructional objectives in the linguistic as well as paralinguistic domains and that meeting these objectives requires continuous and performance-based assessment. Likewise, it is assumed that cooperative learning facilitates language assessment given that it provides opportunities for continuous improvement and possibilities for assessing individual and group outcomes in a supportive and stress-reduced environment.

#### ***Correcting individual quizzes and homework***

This is an activity that enables teachers to save time when correcting individual quizzes and homework assignments. The activity can be used with students at the beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels of language proficiency. The activity is most useful to assess material that lends itself to single right answers, such as language rules and mechanics. It can also be used to assess reading and listening comprehension of ideas that are directly stated in the text, rather than implied. The procedure for this activity is as follows:

1. Assign students to heterogeneous groups of four.
2. Assign each group member a role. Four roles can be used to complete this assessment: runner, explainer, accuracy checker, and reporter. The group runner gets material and takes it to the group. The explainer explains step by step how to complete the homework or answer the quiz correctly. The accuracy checker verifies that the explanation is accurate based on answer keys, textbooks, or class notes. The reporter records the group responses and reports the score of each group member. These roles should be rotated to ensure that all members of the group do an equal amount of running, explaining, checking, and reporting.
3. Ask students to submit their individual quizzes or homework assignments and arrange them in group folders
4. Have the group runner collect the group folder and hand out the material to the group members.
5. Have the group explainer explain the task and discuss answers, the accuracy checker verifies correct answers, and the reporter reports the performance of each group member.
6. Finally, have the group runner return the group folder to the teacher and the group members analyze their performance and set goals for further improvement.

#### ***Interviews***

Interviews can be very useful in determining students' levels of learning, cognitive reasoning, and problem-solving abilities. However, interviews require a certain level of proficiency in order for students to express themselves in the target language. As such, this activity may not

be applicable at the beginning level of proficiency. The procedure is as follows:

1. Assign students to heterogeneous groups of four or five and give each group a set of questions.
2. Instruct the groups to prepare all members to respond to the questions. Give the groups some classroom time to practice so that all members can answer the questions correctly.
3. Select randomly a student to answer a certain question or a series of questions. Ask follow-up questions if necessary to probe for more information. When the student finishes responding to the question, have other group members add to the answer.
4. Call on other students to answer different questions until

#### ***Group projects***

This activity assesses group assignments and can be applied at all levels of proficiency:

The procedure is as follows:

1. Assign students to heterogeneous groups of three or four.
2. Assign each group a project. Depending on their level of proficiency, students could prepare a poster, summarize a chapter, or write a research report.
3. Provide each group with necessary material, set a time limit, and monitor their work.
4. Have students present their group project to the rest of the class.
5. Have students develop relevant evaluation criteria and evaluate the final group projects to determine which is the most original and which the best overall is.

### **Conclusion**

This article has proposed some cooperative learning activities that can facilitate alternative assessment in the second and foreign language classroom. The activities bring assessment closer to the language course objectives in the cognitive, communicative, and socio-cultural domains. Furthermore, the activities reflect the dynamics of real life situations where, more often than not, success is based on group rather than individual performance.

### **Bibliography**

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