

AN EXPERIMENT IN TESTING

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ABSTRACT

Este trabalho pretende apresentar alguns problemas observados na forma tradicional de avaliação e relatar a experiência de uma nova forma de avaliação que está acontecendo no Colégio Técnico da UFMG. Nesta experiência tenta-se eliminar a dicotomia entre ensino e avaliação e valorizar o progresso individual de cada aluno. Como a situação do Colégio Técnico da UFMG é semelhante à situação de várias outras escolas de segundo grau, este relato pode servir de base para que se modifique, aos poucos, o processo de avaliação tradicional.

As our school is a technical one, our students need English in the third grade for the professional course they are taking. They will also need English in their professional lives after graduating. Almost all the Electronics and Instrumentation projects and manuals are in English. Because of that we have decided to teach a course whose objective is to develop the reading skill in English as a second language. Then, in 1982 we started using the ESP methodology. At first we modified only the approach and the methodology, but went on using the same testing system. This system is similar to those used in almost every secondary school. The evaluation system consists of one bimestrial test, which is worth 60% of the credits of the bimester. These tests take

place in the "famous" Mid-term Test Week. The rest of the credits are distributed over two other evaluation activities.

As time went by we detected some problems in this traditional way of testing, which are the following:

1st problem: the Mid-term Test Week creates great tension in the students.

2nd problem: generally, students take two tests a day during the Mid-term Test Week. They have so many subjects to study that they have to establish priorities and in their priorities English is almost in the last position. As a result, they seldom prepare themselves for the English Tests.

3rd problem: tests results are unreliable due to two factors: a) During the Mid-term Test Week all the students of the same grade take the same subject test at the same time. Since all the students in school take the English test at the same time it is impossible for the English teacher to be in all the classrooms. Consequently, other teachers are supposed to give them our tests and the students feel insecure with the absence of their own English teacher who could help them, at least, to understand the instructions. Many times the students are able to understand the instructions but they need the teacher's reassurance. The teacher's presence in the classroom makes them more confident, what contributes to a better performance. b) Another factor which makes the tests results unreliable is cheating. In our school, the English students are divided in two levels, according to their previous knowledge of the language. On the day of the test they are all put together in one single room. Consequently, the room is overcrowded making it easier for the good students to "help" the weaker ones. Since it is impossible for a teacher to control such a big number of students (45 to 50), tests results are not reliable.

4th problem: the students don't give particular

importance to attending classes regularly, consequently, each regular class is treated as unimportant from the students' point of view. They may skip many classes in a bimester and still get a good grade in the Mid-term Test. At the end of the year it is common to see students who have the required passing grades fail because their attendance is insufficient.

To try to solve some of the problems presented above, last year we decided to try another testing system. It has worked out better than the traditional one so that this year we are using it again, trying to improve it.

We eliminated the dichotomy teaching/testing. We are trying to consider teaching and evaluation as a dynamic process in which one contributes to the other and learning takes place. We are trying to teach and evaluate in every class.

Steps followed to modify the traditional system of testing

The first thing we did was to eliminate the Mid-term Test and other traditional evaluation activities. This decreased the students' tension when facing evaluation. They have assessment activities but not "tests". These activities take place during the regular English class and they don't happen simultaneously with other subject tests. Therefore, the students don't have to face the problem of choosing which subject to study first. Whenever they have an English evaluation, they don't have any other tests. Consequently, they can concentrate on better preparing themselves for this English activity. The elimination of Mid-term Test also solved the problem of bringing the two separate groups of each class together for testing purposes. Each class has its regular activities irrespective of other group's. This

way the class isn't crowded during an evaluation activity. The elimination of the Mid-term Test also solved another problem, the one of having teachers of other subjects giving English tests. Since the evaluation activities take place during the English classes, the students' own English teacher will be with them. This makes the students feel more secure.

Another thing we did was to evaluate students every class during the whole year. The process of evaluation is continuous. We try to give more importance to the students' individual effort and progress than to give importance only to tests. We have noticed that weaker students many times make a much greater effort than the other students. According to each one's possibilities, the weaker students can progress more than the others. The better students, many times, already have some previous knowledge of English, then it is easy for them to succeed in a test. They have to make less effort than the weaker ones. On the other hand, although the weaker students many times have studied much more, they seldom get a good grade, that is, a good result in a test. (That happens because they have only two classes a week, so their progress is very slow.) Yet, according to their possibilities, they are making a lot of progress. The traditional system of testing doesn't take this into account. It doesn't consider the students' effort or progress individually, but only the students' test results, that is, the students' performance in a test or two.

In order to solve this situation we decided that every class, every text, and every individual or group activity would be valued. (Not only the physical presence in class but the work done in class.)

Although credits are given in each class, there are some evaluation activities which are worth more than others. We name these activities individual papers and group papers. The individual paper is

Avaliação de 1 bimestre - valor: 20 cred.					
Sistema tradicional			Sistema experimental		
Nº de aulas por bimestre	Atividades	Créditos	Nº de aulas por bimestre	Atividades	Créditos
1	aula→texto	0	1	aula→texto	1
2	aula→texto	0	2	aula→texto	1
3	aula→texto	0	3	aula→texto	1
4	prova	5	4	trab.grupo	4
5	aula→texto	0	5	aula→texto	1
6	grupo	0	6	aula→texto	2
7	aula→texto	0	7	aula→texto	2
8	prova	5	8	trab.indiv.	6
9	bimestral	10 (50%)	9	trab.p/casa	2
		20			20

Students aren't used to this evaluation process and as a result of this, the first bimester is very hard for them and for the teachers. As teachers, we have to make students aware of this process. The students' first reaction is that since there are no Mid-term Tests, they don't have anything to study. As the course develops they realize that they have to be much more responsible than if they were to have the traditional Mid-term Test. They realize they can't miss classes, that every class is important, and they start to become aware of their individual progress. In the traditional way of testing the teacher is almost a hundred per cent responsible for all the evaluation

process. It is he who does everything: sets the date, prepares, gives and corrects the tests. The teacher himself creates and suffers the tension of giving the tests and the results. The student plays a passive role in the process. He only takes the test and receives the results. All the rest is the teacher's responsibility. In this experimental system, evaluation is considered a continuous, active and dynamic process. Consequently, the responsibility is shared between the teacher and the student, creating a certain complicity. The student is then responsible together with the teacher for his own progress and evaluation. It is very gratifying although the teacher has much more responsibility in each class and much more papers to correct.

*The number of students in "recuperação" has decreased considerably since we started this system of evaluation, as you can see in the table below:

	Year	N. of students	Students in recuperação	Students approved in recuperação	Students who didn't succeed in recuperação
Before the experience	82	210	8	8	0
	83	210	9	9	0
	84	210	30	30	0
	85	210	16	15	1
*	86	210	4	4	0

Summary

Problems detected in the traditional way of testing	Important items in the experiment
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . elimination of the dichotomy teaching/testing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . tension created by Mid-term Weeks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . elimination of Mid-term tests . decrease of students' tension
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . during Mid-term weeks students had two tests a day and were forced to establish some priorities . tests results are unreliable due to two factors: a) absence of the English teacher in the class during the Mid-term Test what causes insecurity; b) cheating due to overcrowded classrooms during the Mid-term Test — classes are divided into 2 levels according to students' prior knowledge of English for teaching purposes, and the groups are put together for Mid-terms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . evaluation activities take place during class periods . this approach solved: a) students don't have to establish priorities so they are able to better prepare themselves for tests; b) the 2 different level groups are not put together for evaluation activities; c) English teachers are in the classroom with their students during evaluation activities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . emphasis is given to the students' efforts during the course, not only to

	their test results
. single classes treated as unimportant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . each and every class has its own value and importance due to credit points which are given in each one . students realized that if they miss classes they will not follow the course as required
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . individual papers instead of traditional tests . group papers . teachers' role during evaluation activities

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