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TFM MODALIDAD A

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT AS A STRATEGY TO IMPROVE THE TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESSES IN EFL SECONDARY EDUCATION



**Universidad
Zaragoza**



**Facultad de Educación
Universidad Zaragoza**

Guillermo Herrero Casamayor

Tutora: Violeta Delgado Crespo

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1. INTRODUCTION

For the last two decades, the increasing importance that English has gained in educational policies has derived in a profound debate on different issues pertaining the way English is taught in Compulsory Secondary and Bachillerato classrooms. This Master has meant a meeting point for the discussion of many different ideas that have changed my mind in relation to both teaching as a profession and to the subject matter itself. This dissertation has two primary aims: summarizing and critically reflecting on the knowledge and skills I have acquired during the Master, based on the [specialized bibliography](#) I have been able to have access to, and especially focusing on an area which is fundamental for my future teaching profession, which is the related issues of assessment and evaluation.

The first term was a chance for new discoveries in connection with becoming a teacher, not only concerning the English subject, but also other matters such as psychological strategies to be applied in the classroom and how to solve conflicts, or understanding the context in which the teaching takes place. My Degree in English Studies was not focused on this potential job prospect; thus, almost everything we coped with in the first term was new to me. One of my greatest achievements was to identify and understand all the documents School Institutions are required to produce and keep updated, and the way these documents are organized in terms of hierarchy. In that sense, the experience at the first Teaching Practice period was an eye-opener, since School Direction at Santa María del Pilar Marianistas School managed to get us involved in the process of realizing the usefulness of documents such as the *Plan de Atención a la Diversidad*, the *Proyecto Educativo de Centro* or the *Plan de Convivencia* that all schools are required to elaborate. I also understood how objectives, contents and, most importantly, evaluation criteria are based on legal institutions' prescriptions (i.e. current national legislation, *LOE (Ley Orgánica de Educación)*, and regional legislation, such as the *Currículo Aragonés* which is developed from the national legislation), but they are also variable depending on the contextualization of each school. This was, undoubtedly, the second lesson I learnt from this Master. Contexts are variable, but they are key to understanding teachers and students' behaviors. Whenever a teacher approaches a new class, he/she must understand the context in which he/she is

involved. And context is everything. For instance, the area in which a school is located will tell teachers many things about the kind of families that form the school. Besides, it will also allow teachers to make the most of that area, since a school which is integrated in its neighborhood will attract more people and will get more opportunities to cope with students' integral education —a concept which was first established by the Indian philosopher Sri Aurobindo at the beginning of the 20th century, but which is currently what every school attempts to reach.

Besides, we also had the chance to observe the way English Teaching has evolved during the last two centuries. Many decades ago, English was taught in the way Classical Languages (Latin and Greek) were being taught. Students translated English texts into their first language (L1). This was called the **Grammar-Translation** method. Scholars reacted against this method, and the **Direct method** emerged as an alternative. L1 was banished from English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms and the target language was learnt through exposure to input. The late 1950s meant the birth of the **Audiolingual method**, which relied on responding to input in a systematic way, in order to acquire habits. However, the focus was still on the teacher, so by the 1970s, scholars were already thinking that students should be placed as the focus. This is the decade in which the Humanistic Approaches emerged, drawing on theories from several educationists. Some Humanistic Approaches were **Total Physical Response**, encouraging students' movement and kinesthetic abilities instead of production of the Foreign Language at early stages, the **Silent Way** or **Suggestopedia**. In the 1980s, Krashen came up with the **Natural Approach** and his Monitor Model. But, the emergence of the **Communicative Approach to Language Teaching** was the major paradigm shift. It will be explained some lines below, but it relied on student-centered teaching, based on interaction and the fostering of oral abilities as its main aim, without leaving aside the rest of the skills. The focus was on the functional communicative approach to the foreign language. Nevertheless, methods became too rigid and prescriptive, and Kumaravadivelu (2006) came up with a solution for the period that he calls "Post-Method Period". This post-method pedagogy makes use of tasks as the core unit of planning and instruction. This is known as task-based language teaching, and to a certain extent, it criticizes Communicative Language Teaching, questioning its authenticity, acceptability and adaptability (Kumaravadivelu, 2006: 62). Task-based language learning was introduced as early as the 1980s by Prabhu in some secondary

schools in India in what is known as the Bangalore Project. Our current approach to Task-based Language Learning is based on Ellis' concept of *task* (2003: 16), which will be covered some lines below.

Finally, that first term meant a first step towards course planning and syllabus design. The elaboration of a Course Plan was something I had never done before. In fact, as a student I could have never imagined how many factors affect its elaboration. A Course Plan is a document elaborated by a teacher or by a whole Department. It is divided into several sections, containing all the relevant information for the academic course. The Course Plan must contain the objectives, contents, evaluation criteria (including minimum requirements) and the methodology which is going to be applied, the schedule and the allocated time for each unit and lesson, other principles such as the literacy development or the use of ICTs. It can also include the materials that are going to be used, the way students are going to be assessed, and everything has to be previously contextualized, giving details about the most remarkable data from the School and the target class. Factors such as their proficiency level at English, their background knowledge (what they have learnt in previous years), the school facilities (if there is no computer room, it will be difficult to use ICTs), and the socio-economic background (students coming from a poor area may have different reasons for learning English than those coming from wealthier families) may influence on the way a Course Plan is designed. That is the reason why I have chosen the Course Plan as one of the assignments to be critically analyzed in the present Dissertation.

The second term was specifically devoted to EFL teaching. Planning narrowed even more, and we were asked to design a Learning Unit for a specific course at Secondary Education or Bachillerato. Previous preparation was fundamental to understand that any task teachers design must have a purpose, and the closer this purpose is to a real-life situation, the more teachers get closer to the objective that should guide the teaching and learning process: the communicative outcome. This objective is based on Hymes' description of *communicative competence*, defined as the ability to use grammatical competence in a variety of communicative situations, therefore connected with a sociolinguistic perspective. Canale and Swain (1980) added another component to its definition, the *strategic* dimension of communication (also referred to as *discourse competence*). Thus, communicative competence was not only the knowledge of rules and its appropriateness, but also the adequate use of

communication strategies. The Common European Framework of Reference (from now onwards, CEFR) advanced a step further. This European document divides communicative competence into three elements: linguistic competence, which is the knowledge of all the different components of a language, and the cognitive organization learners develop to store those components; sociolinguistic competence, a component that affects language communication depending on the rules of politeness, the interlocutor's culture or other norms that have to be respected; and the pragmatic competence, in which interactions play a key role and which has to do with the functional use of linguistic resources. The increasing attention that communicative competence has been given can be seen in our national legislation. LOGSE (*Real Decreto 3 Octubre, 1990*) already dealt with this competence when stating the objectives and evaluation criteria for Compulsory Secondary Education, which implies that communicative competence gained importance from the beginning of the 1990s. LOE (*Real Decreto 3 Mayo, 2006*) even contains a section dedicated to *communication*. To be more specific, the Aragonese Curriculum (*Orden 9 Mayo, 2007*) divides the communicative competence into *morphosyntactic, pragmatic, process* (or procedural) and *intercultural* competences.

The Learning Unit will be the second project I will analyze critically, especially in relation to the chosen topic, which will be connected with evaluation and assessment. Once I realized that students should be given the opportunity to communicate and interact in situations that resemble reality as much as possible, I understood that pronunciation played a key role. The Aragonese Curriculum justifies the demand to teach English because of the growing demand for communication and interaction due to European convergence. The debate on whether we should teach students to be accurate and fluent was also intense, and I concluded that what matters is that students are exposed to as many language variations as possible, so that they are able to respond to any circumstance in order to get what they want at that specific situation. Therefore, I learnt that teachers should have a clear policy on correcting errors depending on the purpose they want students to accomplish.

In sum, there are many ideas and factors that teachers have to bear in mind when facing a group of students. Someone who is perfectly proficient at English may not be a good teacher if he/she is not able to develop the adequate strategies to cope with students' variable moods. And just the other way round, whenever a teacher is not able

to produce accurate English, whenever he/she commits mistakes in whatever field, students will fossilize in those mistakes, since teachers are always models to imitate.

What I have done in the previous paragraphs is to summarize the main learnings I have acquired in this Master. But, in addition to this, I have also assessed/evaluated these learnings, strengthening the ideas I agree with and discarding the ones which do not seem significant to me. Good teachers are those who are capable of reflecting constantly, both while they are conducting the lessons and when they are over. This reflective practice, then, can be divided into what is known as *reflection-in-action* and *reflection-on-action* (Schön, 1983). The first one refers to the ability to solve problems that may arise during the lesson, such as students' lack of motivation, time disruptions or problems with ICTs (*Information and Communication Technologies*). *Reflection-on-action* allows more time to think and reflect, and it depends on teachers' own observations (which should be previously planned). Both strategies are gained through teaching experience, but the Teaching Practice period was a good opportunity to test both abilities. My conclusion was that, the more teachers think about possible problems, the more they will be able to solve them effectively and without wasting much time. Besides, the more critical a teacher is with his/her own teaching, the more tools he/she will design in order to observe and analyze the different aspects of the teaching and learning process (use of target language, use of L1, quality of instructions...), the better he/she will reach conclusions and think of improvement measures for future lessons.

Evaluation is present in our daily lives, no matter what our occupation is. Choosing, discriminating, grading pros and cons...they are all attitudes we follow when buying a new product, for instance. For teachers, assessment/evaluation is an inevitable step to improve and progress. Therefore, I have chosen to focus on assessment and evaluation as the starting point of this Dissertation. I will first try to establish the difference among these terms, since they are many times used indistinctively by teachers themselves. Then, I will deal with different types of assessment and evaluation depending on where the teacher places his/her focus. From that theoretical background, I will observe how the evaluation and assessment for the Course Plan (that I designed as part of a group) was planned and how those views evolved and developed for the Learning Unit (which was designed individually). Finally, I will try to show an alternative for my future professional development, based on my experience and observation at School Placement and on the theoretical background.

2. ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION: TWO FACES OF THE SAME COIN?

Assessment and Evaluation are two concepts that Spanish students usually mix up. The main reason is that in Spanish there is only one word for both concepts. However, for a principled view on Education, further specification is needed, so that both terms are used adequately. Thus, although the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) defines “evaluation” as a broader term (the document defends the idea that evaluation refers to many more things than simply assessing learners’ proficiency, such as the use of materials, the kind and quality of discourse, teaching effectiveness and learners’ satisfaction, among others), when focusing exclusively on learners’ performance, “assessment” is the term which fits the purpose of this Project.

In fact, both assessment and evaluation are similar, since they both require identifying specific criteria and collecting data. These are the first two steps both processes have to follow in order to be developed. However, there are some important differences that need to be taken into account. Parker, Fleming, Beyerlein, Apple and Krumsieg (2001) point out some of these differences.

In terms of purpose, assessment is used in order to improve future performance. This is done by the use of feedback given by the teacher at any moment during the teaching and learning process. On the other hand, evaluation’s main aim is to judge the merit of a performance in comparison to a pre-determined standard. The main conclusion is that when evaluating someone, we are trying to compare him/her with someone else, or at least with a standard established by the institutions. By contrast, assessment is used to guarantee students’ improvement, no matter to what extent this improvement is achieved and how much other students are advancing in their learning process.

Another distinction is done when dealing with criteria establishment. When teacher assess a learning process, they should bear in mind that both teacher and student (assessor and assessee) should reach an agreement to establish the specific criteria that are going to be the basis of the assessment process. Regarding evaluation, it is the teacher (evaluator) the one who establishes the degree of achievement of the criteria

based on the Aragonese Curriculum (which defines up to eight evaluation criteria for each course in Compulsory Secondary Education), and students have no alternative than resign themselves and try to fulfill those criteria.

There is also a difference in relation to “control”. Assessment is based on performance, feedback and response to that feedback. Therefore, the control is in the student’s hands, since he/she will have to choose whether to take advantage of the feedback he/she has been given or to reject it. Evaluation works the other way round, since the evaluator will give students a mark/judgment and students will not be able to respond to that judgment.

But perhaps the most important distinction is that connected with the analysis that is done after the process. Assessment allows both teachers and students to look at the assessee’s weak and strong areas, and it will also give clues about how to improve those areas. The analysis is much more thorough and significant. On the other hand, the analysis that is made when evaluating is much more concise and irrelevant, since it only serves to compare students’ results to those results that were expected according to the standard. Comparative analyses are useful sometimes, but not for the purpose every teacher should try to achieve, meaning helping students to progress with their learning processes.

Finally, there is also a strong difference in terms of response/reaction. Assessment allows students (at least those who are motivated towards the subject) to develop and implement an action plan/solutions in order to solve the difficulties observed during the assessment process. This cannot be done with evaluation, since the results tend to show up to what extent or degree students have succeeded or failed. Therefore, students’ feelings towards their own evaluation are too radical, and most times these emotions do not allow students to take a closer look at what they did wrong. Thus, when an evaluation is done, students feel that everything finishes with it, that there is nothing after it. Undoubtedly, this is something that can negatively affect students’ learning process, and I saw that at my School Placement, where many students asked questions to the teacher about the exam, trying to find clues about what topics they should prepare, instead of focusing on the difficulties they encountered when developing the tasks.

3. ASSESSMENT: TYPES, TOOLS AND CONDITIONS

The terminology analyzed in the previous section of this Dissertation is widely accepted by critics nowadays. Yet, some other authors do not make this distinction. When coping with the different kinds of assessment that are carried out for academic purposes, Ur (2012) distinguishes among **summative** and **formative** assessment (the same distinction is established by the CEFR). She defines *summative assessment* as that which serves to conclude or summarize a period of learning. Often, it offers no feedback and the only purpose is to give a grade to students, in order to compare with a standard (usually, the pass mark). On the other hand, when dealing with *formative assessment*, she points out that it is the most frequent one in current academic environments. The purpose of this kind of assessment is to enhance future learning by giving feedback. It does not mean that grades are not present, but it definitely focuses on areas for improvement that can be observed after the test. What is common to any kind of assessment is that the process implies gathering information or observing evidence, interpreting it, reaching conclusions and taking decisions. If that last step is not accomplished, that is, if teachers do not use assessment tools in order to reach conclusions and make decisions, the process is not complete.

According to Angelo and Cross (1993), formative assessment is at the same time process-oriented, since it focuses on how the learning process is evolving. Besides, it is diagnostic, since it is useful to identify lacks or strengths and, from that point onwards, teachers should design future tasks in order to solve those lacks and strengthen “the already learnt”. On the other hand, they connect summative assessment with a product-oriented quality, since teachers only focus on the final result. Therefore, it is a judgmental kind of assessment, since students will be labelled according to their score, which may derive in students’ lack of motivation and personal disputes among classmates.

These differences were connected with the different purposes teachers can have when designing a test. However, there is yet another very evident distinction, regarding the method teachers follow in order to assess their students. McNamara (2000) offers a very specific terminology. “Paper-and-pencil tests” usually take the form of the familiar examination question paper. Such tests are the ones students of English as a Second Language have typically been exposed to. They consist of several kinds of questions

which do not involve further thinking; they often ask students to produce fixed responses. Usually, they include “multiple-choice questions”, in which students have to choose the correct option (usually there is only one right answer). Obviously, these tests are very restricted by their format, since it is nearly impossible to assess students’ communicative abilities by designing a “paper-and-pencil test”. To fulfill the communicative outcome our current Curriculum (*Orden 9th May, 2007*) proposes, McNamara develops an explanation on another kind of test, which he names *performance based tests*. They are connected with speaking and writing abilities mainly; therefore, they are more adequate to assess those skills in which students are asked to produce output rather than receive input. As its name indicates, these tests measure students’ ability to perform in the language, to solve the difficulties they encounter or that are designed by the teacher.

McNamara also deals with another distinction, and he claims that it is connected with the purpose. This distinction is different from the traditional one (summative vs formative), because the term “purpose” is wide and he does not observe it from the same point of view. Two terms are needed at this point, *achievement* and *proficiency* tests. Achievement tests are those that measure the amount of learning students have made during a course/term/period of time. However, the learning that is tested is the one that should have taken place inside the classroom. Thus, these tests are connected with the “teacher-centered” traditional view of the English lessons, in which teachers had the control and selected what students should learn and what could be left aside. These tests have a clear disadvantage, since students are prepared among a defined period of time in order to pass the test, and a good mark does not guarantee that students are becoming proficient in any task. It only implies that students are good at learning what teachers want them to learn. This is a constant debate in our current system of Education, since *Selectividad* exam is the focus all schools have for their Second Grade *Bachillerato* students. Thus, the syllabus and planning at that stage is a hundred percent influenced by that test, and students are not given freedom to develop any more skills due to the lack of time. In contrast, proficiency tests are related to the future areas in which students are going to use English. In fact, they are not ideal kinds of test, because they also focus on the future uses and, therefore, they also confine students to learn certain issues and leaving others aside. However, at least these tests promote real-life situations

students are going to be exposed to, and then the communicative outcome is partly taken into account.

Another concept McNamara introduces is that of *criterion*. He defines it as “the future real life language use” (2000: 8). His definition of the concept and the analysis he makes of it, related to the different tests students usually face, makes me reflect on the concept of *assessment*. Basically, McNamara reflects on the idea that, even when teachers prepare performance tests, in which students are asked to produce language in a “real-life” situation, the criterion is not completely fulfilled. The reason is that the communicative role all these tests pursue cannot be directly observed, because students are still immersed in a test. Both the tester and the assessee are aware that the situation is not real, no matter how “realistic” it seems to be. This idea is connected with Tracy’s (2002) analysis of students’ stress, which is caused by their own perception of the situation, which many times derive in feeling that teachers are trying to catch them out. One of the things I learnt during this Master is that the affective dimension is as important as the cognitive one. Significant learning depends both on affective and cognitive factors, an idea which was already present in the 1970s with the emergence of the Humanistic Approaches. I will go on with this idea when describing my own views on assessment.

The distinction among *criterion* and *test performance* is also related to time. Although McNamara exemplifies this issue with teachers (their use of the target language), I will show this “limitation” or “distinction” with another instance. If a student is observed on whether he/she is able to book a table in a restaurant, there will come the moment in which the assessor will have to make a decision on whether the student is performing well. Before that moment, the teacher will have observed the student several times, and his/her decision will be based on that observation. However, McNamara points out some factors that question the validity of the decision. In the case of this example, students may have had the opportunity of planning carefully what they have to say, what the head waiter is going to answer... However, the conditions of performance in real life may be variable, and how students will react in that situation cannot be stated in advance.

Thus, the validity of the test is questioned. McNamara’s (2000: 8) conclusion on this issue is the following: “In judging test performances then, we are not interested in

observed instances of actual use for their own sake; if we were, and that is all we were interested in, the sample performance would not be a test. Rather, we want to know what the particular performance reveals of the potential for subsequent performances in the criterion situation”. Based on this concept of *criterion*, the CEFR makes another distinction: **norm-referencing assessment vs criterion-referencing assessment**. The former takes into account the performance of all students and it establishes a ranking, in which they are compared with their peers. In *criterion-referencing*, students are assessed individually and without depending on their peers’ performance, their ability is independently observed. The implications are that, when facing norm-referencing assessment, students can feel the need of “beating” their peers; some people could claim that it is a way of increasing students’ motivation, but my experience at School Placement shows that it only strengthens their stress, their fear of not succeeding and being “labelled”. On the other hand, when facing criterion-referencing assessment, students’ motivation is powered, because there is no human being they have to “beat”, but a certain level they have to reach.

The background on assessment, its conditions and the consequences teachers’ decisions on what type of assessment they choose have to be known. Their choices will be key in order to establish the methodology that is going to be used. The process shall not be reverted, teachers should first choose the kind of assessment and, from that starting point, they should adapt the methodology in order to prepare students for the situations they are going to face when being assessed. Although it may look a strong defense of the “achievement tests”, the idea is that teachers should be first aware of what legal institutions prescribe and describe about assessment (the current LOE Curriculum), so that they can make choices in order to accomplish these descriptions and then methodology follows the path and closes the circle. If methodology and assessment are neither coherent nor consistent, students will not make the best of their learning process. But teachers do also have another duty regarding assessment. They have to design assessment tools, in order to ensure that the process is objectively observed. Therefore, the following paragraphs will be devoted to the analysis of different assessment tools. To be more specific, I will briefly comment on the differences between *scales*, *checklists* and *rubrics*, which are the ones we have coped with during the Master and the ones I used for my Course Plan and my Learning Unit.

Checklists: The CEFR establishes checklists as one of the ideal tools to deal with self-assessment, as they can be used both by teachers and students. Besides, this European recommendation also tells us that checklists can be used for continuous and summative assessment. In fact, it is a really easy way to check students' performance in relation to the indicators and the objectives we have planned for each lesson/unit. For instance, for the outcome "students will be able to interact with their mates, give their opinions about priorities when selecting which University Hall they will live in" (See Annex 2, page 30), students could check, at the end of the lesson, if they have accomplished that outcome, and the objective could also be split into sections, such as: "rating items according to their priorities", "using subjective clusters and verbs such as "In my opinion", "I think"...". Checklists' items usually have to be answered with "yes", "no", "partly", "fully" or "not at all"; thus, the descriptors or indicators shall be correctly expressed in order to avoid ambiguity.

Scales: In contrast with checklists, scales establish several bands, and teachers have the responsibility of placing his/her students at a determined level of the scale/band. Each item and each band should be carefully described; otherwise, it would be really difficult for teachers to decide at which level he/she must place each students. As the CEFR clarifies, the emphasis is vertical. A teacher can design many different scales, which can be presented separately or as a grid.

Rubrics: A rubric is in part similar to a scale, since its design involves that teacher has to write objectively and accurately each level so that he/she is as objective as possible when observing students' performance. A rubric usually establishes levels from poor to excellent for as many criteria as the teacher is able to judge and observe.

There are many other issues to comment on in relation to assessment. School institutions are nowadays very much concerned with terms such as self-assessment and students' autonomy, and therefore the assessment process is changing its own views. What I observed at the School Placement was that students were given the opportunity to decide what kind of assessment they will have, except for a compulsory final exam for each term. If the situation in the classroom is changing, if the role of the teacher is now that of a facilitator of the learning process of the student, who has to construct knowledge, that is, incorporate it into his previous knowledge and mental schemas through lessons which are completely adapted and adjusted to their needs (Brooks and

Brooks, 1993) and if students must be prepared to learn beyond the four walls of the classroom (Kumaravadivelu, 2003); in few words, if the process is now learner-centered, students should be able to make choices and reflect about their own learning process. The mixed-focus product and process model (Finney, 2002) that our current curriculum is based on, emphasizes this required flexibility and the need for relying on students' ability to reflect. Thus, self-assessment is a key term and it will be reflected in my improvement proposal.

4. COURSE PLAN AND LEARNING UNIT: PLANNING AND ASSESSING

The two assignments I have chosen to focus on (at least some sections, the ones connected with assessment and evaluation) are the Course Plan and the Learning Unit. The Course Plan was designed by a group of four people and it was entitled *Year Plan I.E.S. Puertas Abiertas*. Its main features will be summarized some paragraphs below. The Learning Unit was designed individually and it was entitled *Learning Unit: Santa María del Pilar Marianistas School: Against the Law*. There are two main reasons for my choice. On the one hand, the planning and implementation (in the case of the Learning Unit) of these two assignments took me a lot of time and reading a vast quantity of bibliography which was completely unknown to me before starting this Master. Therefore, those readings meant to me new discoveries and reflecting on many issues connected with teaching and learning, but also I got familiarized with the LOE Curriculum and its regional regulations (Aragonese Curriculum) and the CEFR, which are documents teachers have to handle constantly. On the other hand, although all the assignments we have been asked to produce during the Master have been meaningful, these are the ones that are most useful, since these plans will be part of our daily work when becoming teachers. In order to develop this section of my Dissertation, I will start by reviewing the bibliography on good planning and the importance it has in order to improve the learning process. I will then focus on the assessment sections for each of them, so that I can explain how my views evolved in relation to these issues and the lacks I observe nowadays after acquiring a more refined and critical view on the topic.

The Communicative Approach to Language Teaching is nowadays widely accepted by teachers and language specialists all alike. We agree that students must be given the opportunity to enter a classroom in which they will encounter real-life situations. Task-

based language learning is a recent development of Communicative Language Teaching that integrates Second Language Acquisition theory and Foreign Language methodology. It is a term we have learnt to cope with during this year, and, the essential features of a task (following Ellis, 2003: 9-10) are basic for teachers in training in order to design good lessons. In few words, lessons have to include tasks which accelerate students' cognitive processes by establishing a real goal they have to reach, with a primary focus on meaning rather than on form. However, all this has to be integrated with a key concept when designing a lesson or a whole course plan, which is *flexibility* (Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

Flexibility consists in bearing in mind all the theoretical background I have summarized in the previous paragraphs and, from that point onwards, being able to transform those ideas into actual activities and tasks, adapting them both to students' level and age. This was perhaps one of the most complex issues I had to deal with when designing my Learning Unit, and my tutor's observations, together with students' reactions towards some of the tasks taught me that I had overlooked the age factor. When assessing myself, this was the main lack or weakness I pointed out; the fact that I had created tasks which were far beyond students' level. But, was it a matter of their level (proficiency) or was it a different cause? Indeed, the problem was that I was asking my students to activate their background knowledge, but due to their circumstances (they were students at Fourth Grade of Secondary Education), they did not have this prior knowledge yet and, therefore, they could not succeed in the task.

There are other principles teachers have to draw on when planning a lesson (Bailey, 1996). They are related to some aspects I commented on in the introduction. For instance, learners' difficulties have to be taken into account and they should even be the starting point in order to respond to them and build new learnings. Teachers should also be tolerant of learners' mistakes, and this is something I will cope with in my proposal, because assessment is also connected with how, when and what teachers should give feedback for and what kind of feedback they should give. Teachers should also engage all learners in the lessons, avoiding the excessive focus on what is known as the *action zone* (Adams and Biddle, 1970), which is that spot of the classroom where students are most attentive and involved in classroom interactions. Engaging all learners also involves preparing tasks which go from the easiest to the most difficult step, so that those students who are less gifted can at least succeed in the first steps, in order to lower

what Krashen called in the 80s their *affective filter* (Krashen, 1982), to refer to the affective factors of Learning and maintain their motivation.

With all that background in mind, we (as a group) started designing our Course Plan. Its main features were the following. First, we decided to build a topic-based syllabus, in which each lessons were organized around a certain topic. This is what textbooks have typically done, but we wanted to make the difference when selecting the materials. Textbooks organize lessons around a topic, but the materials are artificial or adapted, the tasks are not realistic and the lessons' structure is still primarily grammar-based, following traditional methods we wanted to overcome. All topics and units were given a title, and they can be seen on Page 15 of Annex 1. Our emphasis was on students' oral use of the Second Language when facing real-life situations such as a Skype conversation, asking for information abroad... Furthermore, we relied on students' critical thinking and autonomy and, therefore, we asked them to give their opinion on assessment (as it will be showed later) and other issues, so that they were the epicenter of teacher's work. Besides, we also wanted students to work cooperatively and interact among themselves. For that purpose, teachers would play with unpredictability and he/she would also have the duty of creating a good classroom atmosphere so that students felt comfortable when interacting. Finally, we wanted to create tasks (although we did not need to, because it was the plan should only show an overall view) that involved more than one skill at a time, because this is the way in which skills are used in real communication (this is the integrated skill approach that Communicative Language Teaching promotes). For instance, oral presentations involve speaking on the side of the speechmakers, but also listening on the side of their classmates if the teacher asks them to do something with the presentation (assessing it, being able to paraphrase its content, etc.).

Also, there were other features that deserve mentioning. For instance, we relied on the use of authentic materials, because if teachers provide students with materials that are adapted or even designed for academic purposes, then the learning process might be successful, in the sense that they can be able to answer the questions on the text, for instance, but *fake*, since that is a task they will be never asked to perform in their daily lives when they are required to use the Foreign Language. Authentic materials are challenging, but being able to select them will be the first step to immerse students in situations they all want to discover (at my School Placement, I realized that most

students are motivated towards English in order to be able to travel to Anglophone countries, and that means a substantial advantage for teachers). In terms of space, we wanted to get students moving around the school, taking advantage of all the facilities a school may have. Nowadays, Computer' rooms, film rooms and even the playground are key to getting students involved and motivated. In addition to this, *integral education* was one of our main aims when designing our Course Plan. Teachers must never forget that they are facing teenagers, who are “suffering” many physical changes and who want to feel they belong in a group. Being able to help them develop the democratic values encouraged by the LOE Curriculum (which emphasizes equality among men and women, respect towards environment and tolerance among human beings, for instance), which are at the same time linked to other subjects such as Educación para la Ciudadanía is a supplement English teachers must attempt to cover, so that we educate students academically while helping them to build a civic values scale. The English subject is also an opportunity to introduce them to other cultures, which will enrich and broaden students' view towards other countries. Finally, the use of ICTs was a constant in all the units, since the actual “teenager generation” has been born with the new technological innovations, and teachers should not see them as a threat but as a tool to be added to all the vast quantity of materials and resources that are available thanks to this “technological boom”. Besides, the use of ICTs is one of the eight evaluation criteria the curriculum identifies for each year at this stage, together with being able to produce written and oral texts, being able to understand oral and written texts in different registers and for different purposes, being able to use previous knowledge to self-correct and improve, showing interest towards the learning process and acknowledging the foreign culture in order to understand its features to interact more effectively.

Comparing the underlying principles of our Course Plan with the ones I chose for my Learning Unit. I also aimed at Integral Education by choosing a topic which had to do with civic behavior and respecting norms (*Against the Law* was the title given to the Unit). The choice was made after observation, since the school I had the opportunity to stay in was a Catholic School, concerned with human values and respect among school members. Besides, ICTs were given much importance, since I took advantage of the computer' room and I asked students to send e-mails (see Lesson 3, Annex 2), look for University Halls (see Lesson 2, Annex 2) or fill in an accident report form. Some of

these tasks did not work since students were not worried about University or obtaining the driving license yet. As it will be reflected later on, this was my main mistake, that I had not identified my target learners correctly, as individuals. Furthermore, I also tried to teach Grammar inductively, which is connected with the concept of *consciousness raising* as a form of *noticing*. This Inductive Approach is related to methods such as the Natural Approach or the Direct Method. It involves students' thinking in order to discover the grammatical rules and it is the approach to grammar that the current curriculum prescribes (third block on contents in the Aragonese Curriculum).

The Aragonese Curriculum was again the source of my planning. However, in this case I had to specifically take into account the objectives, contents and evaluation criteria described for the fourth year of Compulsory Secondary Education. It was a great opportunity to observe how, although contents, objectives and evaluation criteria are structured the same way for each course, a clear evolution is shown from one course to another. For instance, regarding the speaking skill, the Curriculum for first Year of Compulsory Secondary Education asks students to produce short oral texts about topics related to their interests, whereas for fourth Year of Compulsory Secondary Education, students should be able to produce oral descriptions, narrations and explanations about facts and events belonging to different topics. Therefore, the Curriculum establishes differences in terms of length, topics and fluency. This has to be reflected on the tasks teachers design. My big mistake was that, although I had read the objectives and written them for each lesson, the tasks I designed were beyond students' level of achievement, and therefore, I was not respecting the Curriculum in the real context. For instance, in Lesson 3 (see page 34 Annex 2), I wanted students to write a formal letter asking court institutions to be exempted from attending a trial. This outcome was in relation to the seventh objective in the second block of the Aragonese Curriculum. My mistake was that the task was not meaningful for the students, since the situation I wanted to establish was not close to students' interests.

The main difference among the Course Plan and the Learning Unit was that the former was designed but not implemented, whereas the latter was put into practice with real students in a real context. The implication was that I had the opportunity to observe how my learning unit worked, I could evaluate my own design but also its implementation. Being critical towards oneself is the first step for improvement, and I designed some tables to see how time was distributed during the lessons. My

conclusions were that I had not planned how to give instructions before entering the classroom, and thus I was not ready to face students' questions. Therefore, some time was wasted, students' time-on-task (Carroll, 1963) was reduced and the lesson was not as efficient as I had expected. Besides, I had not allocated carefully the amount of time that students were going to spend doing each task, because I had overrated their proficiency level. Therefore, students were not able to do all the tasks I had designed. Teachers' duty is to be prepared to solve these situations.

Both Projects were meaningful, but I would like to specifically focus on how I planned to assess my students in both cases. Was there an evolution among both Projects? Did I/we accomplish the theoretical bases I have summarized in the second section of this Dissertation? Which tools were used? Was it successful, in the case of the Learning Unit?

Regarding the Course Plan, the first thing we said on Evaluation and Assessment was that we wanted to assess, not only students, but also teachers' methodology and the Course Plan itself. We decided to do peer assessment inside our fictitious Department. My experience at the School Placement showed me that most teachers are reluctant to be observed by their colleagues, since they feel that observation a kind of intrusion. However, this practice should not be seen as an inspection, but as a tool to improve the teaching process. Therefore, schools shall encourage confidence among their employees. If we decide that students can assess their mates in order to help them to improve, why do not give teachers the same possibility? We also gave the opportunity to students to assess their teachers. This idea is connected with the emphasis the Aragonese Curriculum gives to learners' autonomy and ability to reflect. Thus, teachers will be assessed by themselves (informal observation), by peers (other teachers entering the lessons and observing different aspects) and by students (questionnaire). Similarly, the Course Plan is also assessed. On the one hand, we proposed weekly teachers' meetings, in which the syllabus would be analyzed in order to make changes, if needed. This is connected with the flexibility issue I was commenting on the previous section, since teachers' planning at the beginning of a course may suffer variations due to students' needs, unexpected activities in the school and many other unforeseen circumstances.

As far as students are concerned, we tried to diminish their anguish, often caused by exams. As part of our diagnosis, we wanted them to sit an initial test in order to check their knowledge. Many times, and especially at 1st Year of Compulsory Secondary Education, teachers are not in contact with those at Primary Education. Therefore, they are not aware of what contents they have covered, the methodology that has been followed, the grade to which objectives have been accomplished or any punctual difficulty they have as a class. An idea to solve these doubts is to make an initial exam, in which the teacher checks all the skills as a whole. In our case, marks were anecdotal, and they did not count for the whole mark at the end of the course. Final exams were designed for those students who had not been able to pass the continuous evaluation (it will be explained some lines below) or for those students in special situations (sick leaves, not being able to do a Project...).

The continuous assessment consisted of several steps. Students had to do two Projects per term, dealing with a pre-established topic, although two Projects were free-topic. That was the 60% of the total mark, which was divided into a 30% (written report) and 30% (oral presentation). The oral presentation was assessed by the teacher, their peers and the group itself. The remaining 40% was devoted to class participation (20%) and the design of a diary (20%), in which students had to write what they had learnt in each lesson, the difficulties they had encountered or any remarkable issue for their learning process.

With the evolution of this Master, I have now acknowledged that there are some lacks in the system we created. Although the section on assessment of the Course Plan and on teacher's methodology seems a good idea, it is true that students' assessment could be improved. On the one hand, the written report, the oral presentation and the diary cover 80% of the total mark per term. However, this seems to leave aside both reading and listening. It is true that class participation could contain listening and reading tasks (it is not explicitly said, since we did not need to create the tasks), but they should be integrated in the grading criteria. On the other hand, we did not create any rubric, scale or checklist in order to assess the oral presentation, for instance. We cannot expect our students to assess their peers if we do not give them the tools to do it. Similarly, the assessor must be as objective and accurate as possible, and some instruments should have been created in order to improve this assessing process. If we had had the opportunity to implement the Course Plan, this is an idea we would have

coped with just when listening to an oral presentation, but up to that time we had not had the chance of facing the reality (classroom and lessons).

Regarding the Learning Unit, the process was a bit different. First of all, the Learning Unit was aimed at real students and it was implemented. But obviously, I was a mere teacher in training who had to adapt to certain school policies and to professional teachers' methodology. The English Department at Santa Maria del Pilar Marianistas School has a clear policy on assessment. All students must sit an exam at the end of each term, and they will also have to face a final exam. Furthermore, they are also asked to do one group project per term, which accounts for the 40% of the total mark. The exams I had the opportunity to attend were "paper-and-pencil tests" assessing all the skills except speaking, which was assessed through the oral presentations and daily participation of the students. It must be said that teachers did not have any rubric to assess the oral presentations, they simply listened to what students said and assigned them a mark. In few words, assessment remained traditional and, in fact, exams at 2nd of *Bachillerato* were taken from old *Selectividad* exams. Therefore, students were facing achievement tests and they were prepared to overcome the kind of task established by the exam, far from real-life situations.

With that background, I decided not to make a specific exam for my Learning Unit. In contrast, I wanted to assess them daily, observing the way they performed in the tasks I designed, which aimed to be as realistic as possible. If students performed well, they could be ready to confront those situations when required. Besides, I did not want to give them a mark, since I considered that it is a way of labelling students. However, I designed specific rubrics for some tasks. These templates followed the system proposed by the CEFR.

I also wanted to assess my own performance and the Learning Unit itself. Regarding myself, my tutor gave me useful feedback after each lesson, especially in connection with classroom management. She told me that I was good at involving all students in the lesson and avoiding the use of L1, but I should improve my instructions in order to make the most of the allocated time and also my pronunciation, which was sometimes inaccurate because I got overexcited due to my lack of experience. Regarding the Learning Unit, students filled in a questionnaire. Data showed that I asked them to do

some hard tasks which were beyond their proficiency level, and they also told me about my own behavior.

Although I tried to give good feedback for many of the tasks (in many cases, they had to hand over what they had produced, i.e. an e-mail, a composition etc.), the rubrics I created were not consistent enough. Besides, I did not design any checklist, and I have learnt it is a good idea to alternate the assessment tools in order to be more objective. Furthermore, I did not give students the chance to do peer and self-assessment, and that was against my own principles. Thus, I have to improve the way I assess my students, and my proposal is going to be shown in the following section of my Dissertation.

5. MY PROPOSAL: TOWARDS FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

These Projects meant my first step towards assessment. Whereas for the Course Plan, we did not plan to assess skills separately, we did not design any assessment tool and we simply pointed out our grading criteria, for the Learning Unit I started thinking about skills separately. This does not mean that skills do not have to be integrated (in fact, it is just the opposite way), but teachers should try to assess them separately in order to look more deeply into students' lacks and problems. After being able to observe how my assessment design worked in a real context, I will now develop my proposal for my future professional development, based on that practical experience and on the theoretical basis I have summarized in section 3. The proposal will be divided into two parts: how to assess my own teaching process and how to assess students.

Regarding my own teaching process, I will certainly try to go on with that practice that encouraged continuous talk among the members of the English Department and peer observation inside the classroom. My School Placement allowed me to see that communication among peers makes a strong difference. If teachers are confident enough to let other teachers come in their lessons and observe certain aspects (the instructions, timing, the "action zone", how to give feedback...), the feedback they can give, as colleagues and experts in the same field of studies, can be significant and favourable in order to look for alternatives or solutions to our own lacks. Teachers need to leave prejudices aside, because students are now the focus and the ones who deserve

an ideal educative process. This is a tool which can help if teachers are in constant contact and they know what their colleagues have to observe and for what purpose.

But self-assessment is also a good tool for teachers. We must be prepared to evaluate ourselves. Teachers know what they have planned, what the purposes for each task are, the skill or skills they want to strengthen in each lesson... Thus, they are the ones who have more data about the outcomes students have to achieve. Therefore, teachers should be ready to design their own tools (checklists in order to see whether all students have been addressed, recording their lessons to analyze the amount of time spent on giving instructions or to analyze the instructions themselves...) so that they can see whether their teaching process can be improved or not. In sum, recording lessons and collecting data are necessary daily tasks teachers should carry out in order to analyze their own teaching process. Students' performance will also give them much information on whether they have acquired the knowledge they were asked to at the beginning of the lesson, but a disagreement among expectations and actual performance may be also due to students' lack of attention, for instance, which is more related to the learning process. Thus, how would I assess students?

When designing assessment for any course, teachers have to make choices. First of all, I opt for formative assessment against summative assessment. I am aware that it is not a matter of choosing between one and the other, since current legal prescriptions impose teachers to give students a mark, but my proposal is to use formative assessment consistently. My main aim is to aid students' improvement and teachers have to be prepared to modify their tasks whenever students' difficulties require it. Thus, I do not want to give priority to assigning a mark to my students, although I have to decide the level of achievement of the evaluation criteria; by contrast, I want them to be tested in order to improve their learning process. Obviously, due to the requirements of our Education System, students need to have a mark, because that means their passport to further education and even future employment. Marks that are gained at Bachillerato and Selectividad, an exam which does not measure students' oral skills, which implies contravening Aragonese Curriculum prescriptions. Since I cannot do anything but showing my disagreement towards this issue, marks will be given according to daily performance in all the skills.

There are further reasons for this choice, and they have to do with the psychological effects summative assessment produces on students. Very often, students experience a feeling of stress when they are waiting for a mark or when they feel that they have to perform well in order to get into the Degree they have always dreamt about. These feelings affect students' performance, and therefore the process is not as objective and as rigorous as it appears to be. Teachers should prepare students to face real life, and to develop strategies that can help them to solve any uncomfortable situation they may encounter. However, if they are stressful, when being involved in those situations, their thoughts will go back to those times in which they were assessed, and they may feel embarrassed or anguished. It is my contention that this is something teachers should avoid.

When assessing my students, thus, I will give equal weight to the four skills. However, as the Aragonese Curriculum describes, there is a fifth skill which has to do with ICTs' management and, as a future teacher, I resolve to include them in my assessment. In addition to being included in the Aragonese Curriculum, students will be asked in their future occupations to deal with ICTs. This includes designing good *Powerpoint* presentations, being able to design blogs or educative websites, coping with *Webquests*, looking for information on the Internet, identifying the structure of different websites in order to achieve the outcome proposed by a task...Nowadays, ICTs are gaining importance in the classroom, but they are overlooked when assessing students. Finally, there are two further evaluation criteria described by the Curriculum, which have to do with learners' autonomy (learning to learn) and the knowledge of the language culture. Therefore, I will try to assess my students as the table below shows. The remaining five percent will be given to daily participation.

Skill	Percentage for total mark
Reading	15%
Writing	15%
Speaking	15%
Listening	15%
Use of ICTs	15%
Learners' autonomy	10%
Knowledge of foreign culture	10%

From this basic structure, I will now explain how I will try to assess each skill, taking into account the psychological factors mentioned above and the formative quality I want to give to my assessing process.

Speaking: Nowadays, in the case that oral assessment is done in the Schools (which is not very frequent), students face the teachers and have to talk about a certain topic in order to get a mark. My proposal is to change these views. I think it will be a good idea to be involved in the task that is going to be assessed. For instance, if in a term we have dealt with travelling and I have prepared my students to interact in a hotel, a restaurant, in the airport and in all those real situations having to do with travelling, it would be fair to assess them in one of those situations. The teacher would play the role of the receptionist, the waiter or the flight attendant and students would have to respond to any problem that may arise. That way, teachers would be fulfilling the communicative outcome even in the assessment process and, at the same time, they would be able to give feedback simultaneously. Yet, this is only a possibility, since teachers could also remain outside the task and observe two or more students interacting. Then, teachers should decide whether they want to focus on fluency or accuracy... or just on being understood by the other speaker, which is a more realistic goal for our learners to achieve in compulsory education. Therefore, issues such as turn-taking, good listening, non-verbal behavior have to be taken into account when giving feedback to our students, and that is something which cannot be observed if we do not assess our students' oral ability in interactional situations. Below, there is a simple table which enables teachers to note down issues to improve and those which students perform well (they are only examples).

Areas for improvement	Good performance
Voice tone: You must speak louder	Accurate pronunciation
Too many gestures	Good employment of the register
Use more techniques to understand better: reformulating, asking for clarification...	

In order to assign a mark, I have already shown my problems in order to create good rubrics and scales. Therefore, the starting point would be that of selecting good rubrics/scales and designing variations from them. Below, there is an example from the British Council IELTS exams.

Bandscore	Skill level	Description
Band 9	Expert user	You have a full operational command of the language. Your use of English is appropriate, accurate and fluent, and you show complete understanding.
Band 8	Very good user	You have a fully operational command of the language with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies and inappropriate usage. You may misunderstand some things in unfamiliar situations. You handle complex detailed argumentation well.
Band 7	Good user	You have an operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriate usage and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally you handle complex language well and understand detailed reasoning.
Band 6	Competent user	Generally you have an effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriate usage and misunderstandings. You can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations.
Band 5	Modest user	You have a partial command of the language, and cope with overall meaning in most situations, although you are likely to make many mistakes. You should be able to handle basic communication in your own field.
Band 4	Limited user	Your basic competence is limited to familiar situations. You frequently show problems in understanding and expression. You are not able to use complex language.
Band 3	Extremely limited user	You convey and understand only general meaning in very familiar situations. There are frequent breakdowns in communication.
Band 2	Intermittent user	You have great difficulty understanding spoken and written English.
Band 1	Non-user	You have no ability to use the language except a few isolated words.
Band 0	Did not attempt the test	You did not answer the questions.

Reading: Nowadays, reading is nearly always assessed the same way. Students are exposed to a text, which sometimes is authentic but others it is created for academic purposes (artificial) and they have to do several activities with it, such as answering questions related to the text, answering True or False to certain statements regarding the text, looking for synonyms (joining vocabulary and reading comprehension)... However, this does not respond to a formative quality of the assessment. It is true that it may seem difficult to design assessment processes encouraging learning, but I think teachers could use some techniques in order to make reading assessment more real and formative. First of all, contextualizing a text is really important. Thus, after reading it, the best option to assess students' global comprehension should be to expose them to an open question in which they have to summarize the main ideas from the text. If questions are too specific, students may resort to looking for concrete data, and therefore they are missing a skill we all develop when reading a newspaper article (which is something we all do), which implies understanding what is beyond the surface of the text and what is known as *evaluative comprehension*. Questions to assess reading

comprehension should also include good reasoning testing, and students should be able to explain why the text says something, in few words, what the purpose of the text is. Regarding peer assessment in connection with cooperative work, something we all do when we do not understand a text is to ask for help to a mate or friend. This idea should also be encouraged inside the classroom, and it could also be part of our assessment (how to explain the meaning of a text, word or sentence to a classmate). In order to assess reading fluency, an option would be to make students read aloud for one minute and then ask them to paraphrase what they had read, without giving the possibility of re-reading. Finally, another possibility would be to make students analyze the structure of a text. This is not communicative, but students would have a first step to build coherent texts for their writing skill.

Writing: In order to assess writing, teachers must have a clear idea of what they want to measure. Depending on each course, current legislation establishes different objectives students must reach in connection with writing. Differences focus on the length of the written texts, their quality, students' capacity to produce coherent and cohesive paragraphs and also on the topics. My experience at School Placement proves that teachers are really concerned with assessing writing. The system my tutor used was the following one; she divided the assessment into four different sections, which were equally valued. These four sections were "Grammar" (how much Grammar from that unit/term did students use?), "Vocabulary" (did students include new vocabulary from that unit/term?), "Coherence and cohesion" (is the text coherent?) and "Originality" (is the text original?). These "tags" show that the approach is still grammar-based. Although my tutor seemed to focus on many different issues, she put the emphasis on grammar and vocabulary, forgetting about the purpose or communicative value of the finished product.

My views go on a different path. First of all it is important to note that students, when sitting a test, are asked to produce compositions of a determined length dealing with a specific topic, which sometimes is not so close to students' interests (some students may know nothing about that topic) and no purpose is established (many times compositions resemble the aspect of an oral speech/monologue, in which students talk about an issue with no purpose). Therefore, the first thing I should bear in mind is to ask students to produce texts which are close to their interests, but always with a communicative purpose. For instance, students could be asked to produce a formal letter

asking for information about a foreign High School (prices, location, subjects...). They could be also asked to write an e-mail to a friend who is visiting him/her in order to know at what time he is arriving (the register changes). These are instances of written texts which fulfill the communicative outcome and which resemble real-life situations.

How would I assess those written texts? First of all, I think accuracy plays a more important role in writing than in speaking. Oral communication is faster, fluency is what matters and the most important thing is to make oneself understood. However, in the case of written texts, and especially regarding formal register, students should be as accurate as possible. Therefore, checklists to point out spelling mistakes and even grammatical structure mistakes are useful to make students improve in terms of accuracy. The difference among my actual claim and what my tutor did is that I would not give them importance in terms of marking. Those checklists would be used in order to see what mistakes students are committing and to work on them. This has to do with the formative quality I want to give to my assessment.

The issues I would look at are more complex and many times overlooked in our current EFL classrooms. First of all, I want my students to be aware of the different registers existing. The problem is that students are not taught and therefore not assessed in these issues. For instance, an e-mail addressed to a close friend can include abbreviated sentences and contractions, which are not allowed in formal register. If students are aware of this and they produce texts respecting the register, they will be likely to produce good written texts when required. For my future professional development, I want to assess my students in terms of register adequacy. Cohesion and coherence is also a crucial aspect of written texts. An idea which is built across the whole text in order to produce a meaningful text is a structure which is many times forgotten. Teachers should be able to expose students to coherent texts, so that they are later able to produce them. Coherence and cohesion, together with adequacy to the register are two items that should be valued in terms of assessment.

Coherence and cohesion have to do with paragraphing. This is a term which has to do with the effective building of paragraphs according to the ideas a student wants to include in his/her text. Alternating short and long paragraphs, being able to engage the readers without boring them, producing good topic sentences (those sentences which introduce the topic at the beginning of a written text) are strategies that learners shall be

taught in order to improve their written skills. And this seems to have been overlooked in EFL classrooms at Secondary Education level and thus it will be part of my assessment process.

To sum up, I will try to design different kinds of written tests for students. Compositions are a good idea in order to test coherence and cohesion, for instance, but current legislation focuses on the communicative outcome and many times compositions do not respect this outcome. Thus, writing informal messages, e-mails, or formal letters are also tasks students should do for a test. Due to the formative quality I want to emphasize, students should be given feedback on register adequacy, correct punctuation and spelling, good paragraphing and organization of ideas. Although this will depend on my students' level, the table below shows the importance I will give to each aspect, and each aspect will have a rubric in which different levels of achievement will be shown. These rubrics will be given to students and, after explaining their content to them, the teacher will be able to mix his/her own assessment with self-assessment and peer assessment.

Sub-skill	Percentage of total mark
Coherence and cohesion	30%
Register adequacy	30%
Right punctuation, spelling and grammar	15%
Paragraphing	15%
Purpose	10%

Listening: This is a skill which is usually assessed in an isolated way. Students are exposed to an oral text on a podcast, video or a recorder and they have to answer questions on global comprehension or specific data. Sometimes listening tests take the form of a dictation, and students have to write word by word what the teacher/speaker is saying. This is something which causes much stress on students, since most times they are not able to succeed. However, this is not what occurs in real life. Listening goes together with speaking, it is not an isolated skill. Students should be instructed to respond to many different kinds of speech in diverse contexts, being able to identify the intention of the other speaker paying attention with suprasegmental features such as intonation and stress. Besides, they should be also exposed to oral texts in which

environmental features play a key role, because this is what happens in real life. Noises, other people disturbing and interrupting are features of oral communication and students should be able to cope with them. Finally, students should be exposed to many different kinds of spoken discourse and registers, and features such as ellipsis, hesitations, false starts or the use of expressions such as “kind of”, “thing”, “guys”, “and stuff” (which have to do with low precision but which facilitate production) should be taught to students.

For my future professional development, I will bear in mind the two processes that intervene in any listening activity: *top-down* and *bottom-up* (Richards, 2008). *Top-down* listening has to do with being able to use our own background knowledge about the topic in order to understand the other speaker. *Bottom-up* processing, in contrast, refers to that ability of dividing what the speaker is saying into structures. It is usually connected with tasks which prepare students in order to understand specific data.

In order to assess listening, I will design a checklist in order to see different aspects. Depending on the tasks I design, students will be assessed in terms of understanding directions, instructions or specific data. However, I will also focus on how students respond to lack of understanding (do they ask for clarification? Do they use different strategies in order to do so?). Also, students’ answers will show the degree of understanding, meaning that if they follow the topic or the conversation, they will give a coherent response. Being involved in real life situations (by means of role plays, interviews or even games) can encourage the interaction among speaking and listening skills, fulfilling the communicative outcome and giving a teacher a whole situation to give feedback about both skills. The key is to avoid students’ anxiety, providing them with texts that are not excessively cognitively demanding but offer the right amount of challenge to be appealing.

6. CONCLUSION

This Master Degree in Education has been the starting point for my future professional development. I have had the opportunity to understand current legislation and the number of factors that intervene and affect the teaching and learning processes. Besides, I have acknowledged that, due to the importance English is gaining in today’s

globalized world, EFL classrooms must be carefully planned, and reflection is needed in order to build students' learning step by step. That reflective process includes all agents that take part in the lessons. Therefore, teachers should think of their own activity, being critical in order to improve. For that purpose, colleagues and students themselves can show their own viewpoint, and teachers should be confident enough in order to ask them for feedback. Besides, students should be also prepared to be critical with themselves. That is the reason why formative assessment should be strengthened in current EFL classrooms. The Curriculum establishes summative assessment as a need, and teachers should manage to give marks (that is, deciding the level of achievement of the pre-established objectives) without creating anguish and stress and focusing primarily on the feedback they give to students, which will enable them to acknowledge their lacks and will be the starting point to prepare future tasks that can solve those problems. To sum up, the assessment process must resemble any real-life situation, in which we observe a problem by means of collecting data or evidence, we diagnose that problem and we react by implementing different measures we find appropriate to solve that situation (Brown, 2002: 13-17).

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