



TEACHING AND  
TEACHING PRACTICE:  
BUILDING BRIDGES  
INTO THE FUTURE

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**Actas del V Encuentro Nacional de Profesorados de Inglés**

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Editores

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## Notas de los editores

1. **Contexto:** esta publicación incluye algunos de los trabajos presentados bajo el formato de *papers* en el Quinto Encuentro Nacional de Profesorados de Inglés del Instituto Juan Zorrilla de San Martín realizado los días 15 y 16 de abril del 2016. Estos encuentros ofrecen un espacio en el cual diferentes voces puedan expresarse, es decir, profesores, estudiantes e investigadores.
2. **Posicionamiento de los editores:** los tres editores somos docentes del Profesorado de Inglés del Instituto Juan Zorrilla de San Martín y de otras instituciones en la que formamos a futuros docentes. Como tales, estamos continuamente en la búsqueda de lecturas actualizadas con una mirada sobre investigaciones que se desarrollan en nuestro contexto en particular que puedan ser usadas en nuestras aulas. Posiblemente, esta sea una visión que compartimos con otros formadores. Desde esta perspectiva, apelamos a que la lectura de los trabajos publicados se realice de *manera crítica* en caso de ser utilizados como material de referencia académica en lo que se refiere tanto a contenido como a estilo.
3. **Contenido y formato de los *papers*:** los editores enviamos sugerencias a los autores con el fin de buscar que el lenguaje y la estructura de los trabajos sean consistentes con los requerimientos para publicaciones académicas. Si bien nuestros comentarios apuntaron principalmente a cuestiones de forma, algunos de ellos invitaron a los autores a que completaran, reformularan o profundizaran conceptos para lograr que los *papers* tuvieran una mayor coherencia y cohesión. Los autores pueden o no haber realizado los cambios sugeridos. Finalmente, tanto en el encabezado de los trabajos como en las biodatas de los autores, respetamos el orden que estos eligieron para el envío de las versiones finales.

## Agradecimientos

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¡Hasta el próximo Encuentro!

Cordiales saludos,

Alfredo Brunori, Alina Machnicki y Carolina Orgnero.

# La Enseñanza y el Aprendizaje del Oficio de Enseñar en La Práctica Profesional Docente: Debates, desafíos y propuestas

Plenario

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## Resumen

El trabajo presenta los ejes de discusión, análisis y producción de saberes pedagógicos que resultan de la consolidación de un grupo de trabajo comprometido y motivado para superar el desafío que implica el trayecto de la formación en la práctica profesional docente correspondientes a los profesorado del Departamento de Educación y Formación Docente de la Facultad de Ciencias Humanas de la Universidad Nacional de San Luis. El mismo representa una etapa de movilización personal para los/as estudiantes-practicantes, que pone en juego la formación adquirida y la construcción de saberes de experiencia. Los desafíos para pensar esta formación se orientan a considerar:

- Una perspectiva crítico-reflexiva que promueva un pensamiento autónomo, contemple la propia historia de formación y la construcción de un posicionamiento personal.
- La construcción de la buena enseñanza sobre la base de múltiples herramientas de la cultura y las TIC.
- La consolidación de dispositivos de colaboración profesional y constitución de comunidades de práctica.

**Palabras claves:** práctica profesional docente – saberes pedagógicos – comunidad de prácticas

## I- Introducción

Desde hace unos años, docentes integrantes de los equipos de prácticas y residencias docentes de los profesorado en Ciencias de la Educación, Educación Inicial y Educación Especial de la Facultad de Ciencias Humanas de la Universidad Nacional de San Luis advertimos que compartíamos espacios de formación y objetos de conocimiento similares, identificando diversas problemáticas e intereses comunes, tales como:

- La desconexión entre los contenidos de los programas que ofrecemos en la universidad y la realidad de las instituciones escolares en todos los niveles y modalidades del sistema educativo.
- La división tradicional de la formación entre teoría y práctica, teniendo en cuenta que el modelo predominante ha sido el de la “aplicación de la teoría” que supone que los estudiantes aprenden teorías en la universidad y luego van a las escuelas a practicar o aplicar lo que aprendieron en la universidad.
- La tendencia generalizada a considerar a las instituciones de práctica como “escuelas sede o destino”, siendo meras receptoras de practicantes; con escaso reconocimiento de la tarea y de los saberes del docente coformador.

- La imposibilidad de brindar una guía personalizada, teniendo en cuenta que no hay una relación directa entre cantidad de practicantes/residentes con la conformación de los equipos docentes, las distancias entre instituciones, los horarios de práctica, etc.

Partimos de considerar que la práctica debiera convertirse en un espacio que permita a los/as estudiantes, tomar conciencia progresivamente del acto de enseñanza y poder reflexionar sobre el mismo, de manera individual pero también en forma colectiva junto a los demás actores que son parte de esta instancia de formación.

Estas acciones iniciales dieron lugar a la constitución de diversos Proyectos conjuntos, actividades de extensión y esencialmente hemos podido generar un espacio de trabajo que coloca en diálogo a los distintos actores de estos trayectos de formación: los/as estudiantes que se encuentran realizando las prácticas profesionales, los equipos de prácticas de las instituciones formadoras y los/as profesores/as de las instituciones de prácticas o cofomadores.

Si bien en los últimos años se han producido importantes transformaciones en los planes de estudio para la formación del profesorado, en donde la formación en la práctica se amplía y reformula, esto no siempre representa cambios sustantivos en la formación. Liliana Sanjurjo (2009) señala que esto se debe quizás a que aún subsisten configuraciones de pensamiento y de acción que, construidas históricamente, se mantienen a lo largo del tiempo, por cuanto están institucionalizadas, incorporadas a las prácticas y a la conciencia de los sujetos.

Esta ponencia tiene por objeto compartir los ejes de discusión, análisis y producción de saberes pedagógicos que resultan de la consolidación de una comunidad de prácticas, comprometida y motivada para superar el desafío que implica la formación en la práctica profesional docente. Nuestra mirada se centra en las prácticas y residencias docentes en pos de resignificar los procesos de formación, así como también establecer un espacio de intercambio en relación con las prácticas de enseñanza desde un abordaje reflexivo, donde discutimos y debatimos propuestas alternativas a problemas compartidos.

## **II- Prismas conceptuales para mirar la formación en la práctica profesional docente**

En primera instancia concebimos la **formación desde una perspectiva amplia**; esto conlleva dos cuestiones fundamentales:

**1- La formación integra en la experiencia la identidad personal y profesional.** En concordancia con Ferry (1990), Barbier (1999), Filloux (1996) entendemos la formación como la *dinámica de un desarrollo personal* para adquirir las formas requeridas en el ejercicio de un oficio, una profesión, un trabajo. Una forma para actuar, para reflexionar y perfeccionar esta forma. En este sentido, formar implica *formar identidades* en el sentido de que se trata de un trabajo sobre sí mismo, sobre situaciones, sucesos e ideas. Esta formación se torna en un proceso social de carácter institucional, sustentado en la intersubjetividad: proceso socio-histórico en el que el sujeto construye imágenes, creencias, valoraciones, saberes, acerca de la enseñanza y de su quehacer que van configurando la identidad docente. Reconocer el valor de la intersubjetividad en la formación requiere entender los vínculos como fundantes de la relación pedagógica y el aprendizaje. Implica ver la dimensión de la

educación en su carácter de *teorías y prácticas que producen personas*, que, además de construir y transmitir una experiencia objetiva del mundo exterior, construye y transmite también la experiencia que las personas tienen de sí mismas y de los otros como sujetos. Larrosa (1995) expresa que, según Foucault, las formas de subjetivación que constituyen la interioridad del sujeto están en estrecha relación con la *experiencia de sí* en el seno de dicha cultura. Aquí lo importante no es que se aprenda algo exterior, un cuerpo de conocimientos, sino que se elabore o reelabore alguna forma de relación reflexiva del educando consigo mismo.

**2- Involucra la biografía escolar, la formación inicial y la socialización laboral.** Desde Davini (1996) la formación docente es “el proceso de conformación del pensamiento y del comportamiento socio-profesional que se inicia formalmente en la enseñanza sistemática de grado y se desarrolla en el desempeño en el puesto de trabajo” (p. 34); y damos especial atención a la biografía escolar como cimiento de esta formación. Diversas investigaciones nos muestran que las historias de formación escolar, los modelos de docente que cada estudiante de profesorado ha tenido, dejan una fuerte impronta en la actuación que posteriormente se lleva a la práctica y tienen una incidencia importante en el modo en que cada sujeto significa los trayectos de formación posteriores. Resulta de alto valor considerar la propia *biografía escolar como una instancia formativa ineludible* o, como la llaman diversos autores, *la primera fase de la formación profesional*. De esta manera, “los saberes incorporados en la trayectoria escolar previa funcionan a modo de ‘teorías implícitas’, ‘ideas previas’, ‘conocimiento en la acción’ en lo que los docentes hacen...” (Alliaud, 1999, p. 52). Adoptar esta perspectiva, requiere entender al estudiante como el resultado de una historia de aprendizajes y enseñanzas en contextos educativos vinculados particularmente al espacio en el que en un futuro ejerce su práctica laboral. Ello tiene influencia decisiva en las prácticas de enseñanza posteriores en las que difícilmente se pueda despojar de las vivencias, los sentimientos que tales lugares despertaron, los obstáculos e incluso los éxitos y satisfacciones que provocaron el paso por las aulas como estudiante. En este sentido “cuando un alumno ingresa al profesorado para formarse como docente, lleva acumulado un considerable período de socialización en el rol: el que corresponde a su trayectoria escolar previa” (Diker y Terigi, 1996, p. 34). La formación inicial resulta muy poco operativa al no poner en cuestión los esquemas y las matrices construidos e incide, por lo tanto, escasamente en la generación de esquemas prácticos alternativos. De esta manera, si no se inicia un proceso de formación que reconozca ese pasado e intente dar cuenta de él, difícilmente se superarán los esquemas estructurados. En esta misma línea de pensamiento Rosa María Torres (1999) expresa que el nuevo rol docente requiere de un aprendizaje permanente, otorgando “centralidad al aprendizaje del docente, entendiendo que los saberes y competencias docentes son el resultado no solo de su formación profesional sino de aprendizajes realizados a lo largo y ancho de la vida, dentro y fuera de la escuela y en el ejercicio mismo de la docencia” (p. 39). Considera que, al asumirse que la formación docente arranca con la formación inicial, se ha desconocido la importancia que puede tener la biografía escolar del futuro docente, afirmando así que, en el ex escolar que vive en cada docente, parecerían estar claves mucho más importantes y determinantes sobre las prácticas educativas y los estilos de enseñanza que en la formación profesional inicial o en servicio. Estos últimos trayectos, en todo caso, pasan a tener “una función eminentemente reproductiva o

correctora de esa matriz básica en la que se configuran creencias, saberes y sentidos comunes respecto de lo que es enseñar y aprender” (Torres, 1999, pp. 46-47).

### III- Los espacios de formación en la práctica profesional docente

El campo de la formación en las prácticas profesionales se constituye en un espacio curricular específico destinado a la construcción del aprendizaje del oficio de enseñar. Toda acción práctica situada se enmarca en un contexto particular que le otorga sentido; es así que este campo curricular es responsable del desarrollo de la práctica docente a través del análisis, la reflexión y la intervención práctica, resignificando los conocimientos de otros campos de formación, a través de la participación e incorporación progresiva de los estudiantes en distintos contextos socioeducativos.

En general, durante mucho tiempo se consideró que la mejor manera de adquirir una práctica es a través de la imitación de aquellos experimentados, al modo del artesano. El avance en el desarrollo de los conocimientos y la mayor comprensión de los problemas que el ejercicio de una profesión podría implicar llevó a la necesidad de una formación teórica previa a la realización de diferentes desempeños. Esta manera de entender la relación teoría y práctica es denominada genéricamente como “*enfoque tradicional*” de la formación en la práctica (Sanjurjo, 2009), que incluye tanto la perspectiva tradicional propiamente dicha como la tecnocrática en la enseñanza. En este enfoque subyace la idea de que la teoría ilumina la práctica y que el aprendizaje resulta de la simple aplicación de la teoría, olvidando la dimensión subjetiva de la práctica y su carácter político y social.

En el intento de superar esta visión, desde las perspectivas hermenéutico-reflexiva, crítica y el paradigma de la complejidad, surgen otros enfoques de abordaje de la práctica. Schön (1992) realiza aportes en este sentido planteando que la *racionalidad técnica* (epistemología de la práctica derivada del positivismo) se presenta como la concepción hegemónica en la construcción del conocimiento y en la formación de profesionales. La resolución de los problemas de la práctica profesional se realiza mediante la selección de los medios técnicos más idóneos para los fines definidos (*relación fines-medios*). Por lo contrario, la perspectiva de la *racionalidad práctica* se expresa en aquellas situaciones problemáticas para las cuales no alcanza el conocimiento experto del que se dispone y hace necesario la reestructuración de los propios conocimientos e incluso generar otros sobre la marcha. Para este autor, la resolución de las zonas indeterminadas de la práctica requiere la formación de un *profesional reflexivo* capaz de concretar *procesos de reflexión en la acción y sobre la acción*. Concibe así el *practicum* como la clave de complementariedad entre las dos racionalidades, definiéndolo como una

situación pensada y dispuesta para la tarea de aprender una práctica. En un contexto que se aproxima al mundo de la práctica, los estudiantes aprenden haciendo, aunque su hacer a menudo se quede corto en relación con el trabajo propio del mundo real. Aprender haciéndose cargo de proyectos que simulan y simplifican la práctica a llevar a cabo, relativamente libre de las presiones, las distracciones y los riesgos que se dan en el mundo real al que, no obstante, el *practicum* hace referencia. Se sitúa en una posición intermedia entre el mundo de la práctica, el mundo de la vida ordinaria, y el mundo esotérico de la universidad. (Schön, 1992, p. 46)

Quienes somos responsables de instancias finales de práctica docente profesional y/o residencia, advertimos que las mismas representan una etapa de profunda movilización personal y sustantivos aprendizajes, en tanto que los estudiantes de profesorado se ven involucrados en un proceso de carácter complejo que pone en juego la formación adquirida, al mismo tiempo que promueve la construcción de nuevos saberes y la movilización de sentimientos variados. En este contexto, se promueven diversos dispositivos, estrategias y actividades de intercambio y reflexión que posibilitan la visibilización de estos procesos, haciendo factible la construcción de saberes de experiencia (Contreras Domingo, 2010).

Los desafíos para pensar la formación se orientan a considerar tres ejes:

**a- Una perspectiva crítico-reflexiva que promueva un pensamiento autónomo, y contemple la propia historia de formación y la construcción de un posicionamiento personal**

Partimos de considerar la enseñanza como una actividad práctica, de carácter situada, de alto compromiso social, ético y político, cuyo objeto está orientado a facilitar y promover el acercamiento y apropiación de las herramientas culturales a las nuevas generaciones. Esta práctica, altamente compleja y multidimensionada, representa un aquí y ahora resultante de un proceso histórico que condiciona su naturaleza actual y que involucra tanto condiciones objetivas como subjetivas.

Anijovich y Cappelletti (2014) afirman que “la gestión de la práctica de enseñar exige algún grado de conocimiento de cómo es la dinámica que sigue la realidad y cómo se desempeña el conocimiento en situaciones de práctica real” (p. 13). Definen los **conocimientos prácticos** como aquellos que poseen los docentes a partir de las experiencias en sus clases y las conexiones que van construyendo con la teoría. Los mismos se caracterizan por encontrarse en forma implícita o explícita en los discursos y acciones de los docentes, referidos a qué y cómo hacer. En este sentido, plantean que “el desafío es diseñar propuestas de formación docente que creen condiciones para favorecer la capacidad de los estudiantes de reflexionar sobre sus prácticas de enseñanza, utilizando sus conocimientos prácticos” (Anijovich y Cappelletti, 2014, p. 14).

Ferry (1990), quien es uno de los precursores de esta idea, expresa que “Es falso pensar en formarse haciendo [...] salvo si encuentra los medios de volver, de rever lo que ha hecho, de hacer un balance reflexivo. Reflexionar es al mismo tiempo reflejar y tratar de comprender, y en ese momento sí hay formación” (p. 56). Entonces solo hay formación cuando se dispone de un tiempo y un espacio para el trabajo sobre sí mismo. Esto implica un cierto modo de vincularse con la realidad, dialéctica que requiere retirarse de la realidad para representársela, analizarla y luego volver a ella con otra mirada.

En el campo educativo, diferentes perspectivas confluyen en la idea de la reflexión como eje de la formación, buscando alternativas al modelo de racionalidad técnica e instrumental dominante en la formación docente. Para Perrenoud (2001), uno de los criterios a los que debería responder una formación profesional de alto nivel es el de “una transposición didáctica fundada en el análisis de las prácticas y de sus transformaciones” (p. 5), para lo cual indica que “sería indispensable crear en cada sistema educativo un observatorio permanente de las prácticas y de los oficios del docente, cuya misión no sería pensar la formación de profesores, sino dar una imagen realista y actual a los



problemas que ellos resuelven en lo cotidiano, de los dilemas que enfrentan, de las decisiones que toman, de los gestos profesionales que ellos ejecutan” (p. 7). En la distancia que se observa entre la realidad del oficio y lo que se toma en cuenta en la formación, radica una gran parte de las desilusiones, inconsistencias y contradicciones que se advierten en los procesos de formación.

Este mismo autor, en uno de los capítulos de su obra *Desarrollar la práctica reflexiva en el oficio de enseñar* (Perrenoud, 2006), plantea como interrogante: ¿el objetivo fundamental de la formación de los enseñantes es saber reflexionar sobre su propia práctica? Al respecto indica que los procesos de reflexión permitirían: compensar la superficialidad de la formación profesional, en la que la formación pedagógico-didáctica suele ser la más débil; iniciar el camino hacia la profesionalización; favorecer la acumulación de saberes de experiencia; preparar para asumir la responsabilidad ética y política de la tarea de educar; ayudar a sobrevivir en un *oficio imposible*, por la dificultad de excluir el fracaso de antemano; disponer de herramientas para definir problemas y establecer una relación activa y autónoma con el mundo; proporcionar los medios para trabajar sobre uno mismo; ayudar a afrontar la irreductible alteridad del aprendiz; favorecer la cooperación con compañeros, desde procesos de metacomunicación, y, por último, aumentar la capacidad de innovación, entendida como capacidad de transformar la propia práctica. Todo esto es posible en la medida en que **la reflexión se convierta en un componente duradero del habitus.**

Perrenoud (2006) parte de considerar que la acción pedagógica se moviliza constantemente bajo el control del *habitus*, entendido como sistema de disposiciones internalizadas o conjunto de esquemas de percepción, evaluación, pensamiento y acción que funciona como estructura estructurante[1] (Bourdieu, 2002). Sin embargo, estos esquemas que permiten enfrentar incidentes críticos dan lugar a la formación de un nuevo “*estrato*” del *habitus*, cuya génesis no surge de la vida en general sino de la experiencia en la clase. La posibilidad de la toma de conciencia y la transformación de los esquemas internalizados se vinculan esencialmente con el develamiento de su funcionamiento y el paso a un control más racional, trabajo personal que requiere superar las propias resistencias, que exige tomar ciertas precauciones, seguir un método y sustentarse en una ética.

Ahora bien, en cuanto a la pregunta respecto a que si es posible promover dispositivos de formación de un *habitus profesional*, Perrenoud entiende que un dispositivo de formación que pretenda contribuir a la construcción del oficio de enseñante orientado hacia la profesionalización de la tarea exige avanzar en el desarrollo de procesos de autonomía y responsabilización ética, desde la capacidad de reflexión en-la-acción y sobre-la-acción, para transformarla. Se trata de la posibilidad de capitalizar la experiencia, reflexionar sobre la propia práctica para reestructurarla.

Gloria Edelstein (2011) afirma que la práctica reflexiva implica la reconstrucción crítica de la propia experiencia (individual y colectiva) poniendo en tensión las situaciones, los sujetos, sus intervenciones y los supuestos que le dan fundamento. Lo que importa aquí es reconocer los mecanismos más sutiles que permiten develar el sentido y orientación de la práctica, dando cuenta de su intencionalidad y racionalidad. Hacer posible estos procesos requiere promover instancias auto- y heterocomunicativas que comprometan al diálogo consciente con uno mismo y en relación con otros. Estos otros son quienes se constituirán en el espejo que devuelve una imagen “desde

afuera”, que facilita la toma de conciencia de las creencias, los propios procesos, limitaciones, coadyuvando a construir una mirada más crítica sobre sí mismo.

La construcción de saber pedagógico (aquel que resulta de la experiencia) se propone como camino para la profesionalización, reconociéndose al colectivo docente, en el contexto de las instituciones educativas, como el espacio natural para la generación del mismo, de desarrollo profesional y la posibilidad de transformación de la práctica. Aquí se prioriza la escritura de la práctica como la forma particular de articular la reflexión con las teorías. “La escritura es la que otorga condición de existencia al saber pedagógico” (De Tezanos, 2007, p. 11), interpelando los modos en los que la misma se lleva a cabo. La elucidación de estos “saberes de experiencia” (Tardif y otros, 1991) que se desarrollan en la práctica del oficio se vincula esencialmente con la problemática de la formación.

Las *habilidades profesionales* son definidas por Altet (2008) como “el conjunto de conocimientos, habilidades, procedimientos y el saber-estar, pero también el hacer y ser necesarios para el ejercicio de la profesión docente” (p. 41). La noción de saber, de carácter polisémico, es retomada por esta autora de Anderson (1986), quien distingue entre *saber declarativo (saber qué)*, *procedimental (saber cómo)* y *condicional o contextual (saber cuándo y dónde)*. Desde diferentes investigaciones, se reconoce que la posibilidad de acceder a conocer cómo se construyen estos saberes de experiencia práctica es a partir de la verbalización de sus acciones y explicitación de los supuestos que subyacen a sus decisiones. Altet (2008, p. 47) adopta el concepto de *saberes intermediarios* para analizar, leer, nombrar y teorizar las prácticas, es decir, traducir en palabras las prácticas. Plantea además que el “profesionalismo se construye gracias a la experiencia y a la práctica en el terreno, pero con la ayuda de un mediador, que favorece la toma de conciencia y la adquisición de conocimiento, y participa en el análisis de las prácticas dentro de un enfoque de coformación” (Altet, 2008, p. 49). De esta manera, los dispositivos de análisis de las prácticas y la investigación respecto del enseñar y aprender se constituyen en procesos de formación que posibilitan el desarrollo de la *metahabilidad de saber analizar*. La formación se concibe desde la dialéctica práctica/teoría/práctica y donde *acción-formación-investigación* quedan intrínsecamente vinculadas.

En última instancia, la formación en la reflexión de la práctica se vincula a la posibilidad de *crear sentido*,

...el sentido del trabajo y de la escuela (Develay, 1996) pero también el sentido de la vida, ya que difícilmente pueden separarse en un oficio de lo humano y, en general, en una sociedad en la que el trabajo es una fuente principal de identidad y de satisfacción, pero también de sufrimiento (Dejours, 1995)”. (Perrenoud, 2006, p. 60)

#### **b- La construcción de la buena enseñanza sobre la base de múltiples herramientas de la cultura (arte, juego, etc.) y las TIC.**

Tomar como punto de partida la emblemática definición de buena enseñanza de Gary Fenstermacher (1989) permite traer la diferencia esencial que realiza con la *enseñanza con éxito*, sustentando la *buena enseñanza* en fundamentos epistemológicos y ético-morales.

Preguntar qué es buena enseñanza en el sentido moral equivale a preguntar qué acciones docentes pueden justificarse basándose en principios morales. Preguntarse qué es buena

enseñanza en el sentido epistemológico es preguntar si lo que se enseña es racionalmente justificable y, en última instancia, digno de que el estudiante lo conozca, lo crea o lo entienda” (p. 158).

Este pensamiento, muchas veces banalizado, requiere considerar también el carácter político de la enseñanza. En este sentido, resulta significativo si avanzamos en la construcción personal que cada uno puede tener acerca de la misma; por ello, en los fundamentos explicitados hasta el momento, yacen las ideas centrales que sustentan nuestra mirada respecto a la buena enseñanza en el espacio de la formación en la práctica profesional docente. Asimismo, como formadores de formadores, promovemos que los estudiantes que realizan sus prácticas elaboren su propia concepción.

Considerando que nuestra tarea se orienta a construir espacios que acompañen el proceso de aprender el oficio de enseñante, asumimos el concepto de construcción metodológica, por cuanto representa una instancia que permite dar respuesta al problema de articulación entre el conocimiento como producción objetiva (lo epistemológico objetivo) referido al qué enseñar y el conocimiento como problema de aprendizaje (lo epistemológico subjetivo) vinculado a cómo se aprende (Díaz Barriga, citado por Edelstein, 1996). Esta autora la define como “acto singularmente creativo de articulación entre la lógica disciplinar, las posibilidades de apropiación de ésta por parte de los sujetos y las situaciones y contextos particulares [...] donde ambas lógicas se entrecruzan” (Edelstein, 1996, p. 85), desde una perspectiva axiológica determinada.

Entendemos el proceso de conocer como acción situada y distribuida y revalorizamos el carácter social y cultural tanto de la producción del conocimiento como de su apropiación. Desde esta perspectiva, los entornos se constituyen en las estructuras mediadoras de la actividad de los sujetos, incluyendo tanto el medio físico como las relaciones sociales y las herramientas y representaciones simbólicas de dicha cultura. En consonancia con ello, decidimos ofrecer a nuestros estudiantes-practicantes instancias que les permitan conceptualizar, vivenciar y apropiarse de múltiples herramientas que orienten la tarea de construir la propia síntesis de opciones metodológicas para la propuesta de enseñanza. Para ello programamos talleres recuperando diversos instrumentos mediadores: artes plásticas, literatura, música, teatro, cine; las TIC; el juego; el humor; la realidad social, entre otras. El fin que perseguimos no es solo disponer de estas herramientas, sino también reflexionar sobre la potencialidad de las mismas para favorecer la construcción de conocimiento en el aula. En su organización, coordinación y desarrollo participan diversos sujetos (estudiantes, artistas, profesores de la institución, otros sujetos invitados) que hacen su aporte desde los propios saberes, habilidades, intereses.

### **¿Por qué la vivencia desde talleres que contemplen las diferentes herramientas culturales?**

La cotidianeidad de las prácticas escolares va sedimentando en formas de enseñar estandarizadas; esto influye en las prácticas posteriores, ya sea desde la imitación de docentes que se tuvieron, la observación de otros, la influencia de las mismas dinámicas escolares entre otras cuestiones implícitas, propiciando la reproducción de las formas de enseñanza de generación en generación en los profesores. Diferentes investigaciones constatan que los modelos docentes incorporados tienen alta incidencia en las prácticas que finalmente se llevan a cabo en las aulas. En

este contexto, lo nuevo, lo diferente se constituye en desafío. De allí que ser parte de experiencias que contemplen diversas fuentes culturales se constituye en el camino alternativo para modificar estructuras de pensamiento y acción respecto a la enseñanza y el aprendizaje en cierta área de conocimiento.

Los talleres han sido muy reconocidos y valorados por los estudiantes-practicantes, y nos han generado la necesidad de concretarlos con la anticipación necesaria, para que los practicantes puedan disponer de herramientas variadas para pensar las propias planificaciones didácticas. Se constituyen en un fondo de experiencias para plantearse las vías que permitan “deconstruir ciertas estructuras producidas para ser apropiadas, construidas o reconstruidas por el sujeto de aprendizaje” (Díaz Barriga, citado por Edelstein, 1996).

### **¿Por qué y desde dónde el arte?**

La presencia del arte la consideramos desde tres perspectivas: el arte como experiencia (*el arte por el arte*) que expresa y estimula la vida interior del sujeto permitiendo aportar emoción, provocación, movilización, el despertar de los sentidos; el arte como herramienta para pensar la construcción de propuestas de enseñanza y posibilitadora de aprendizaje (*el arte para la enseñanza*), instancia que se constituye en mediadora de la cultura, dando lugar a la representación, abriendo camino a la metáfora como manera diferente de nombrar y ser nombrado; por último, el oficio de educar como una forma de hacer arte (*la enseñanza como arte*) (Clavijo, 2015).

#### **-El arte como experiencia... *el arte por el arte***

Augustowsky (2012) reconoce el papel formativo del arte e indica que producir experiencia con el arte desde el ámbito educativo requiere considerarlo ligado a la experiencia vital de los sujetos, a la construcción identitaria, la expresión, la producción; esto “implica enseñar a los chicos, chicas y jóvenes a crear con sentidos propios conectados consigo mismos pero a la vez involucrados con su entorno y con los otros” (p. 18).

En esta línea de pensamiento, Amelia Álvarez y Pablo del Río (2015) reconocen al arte como algo para vivir, ligado a búsqueda personal y a la creación de sentidos y retoman de Vygotski una metáfora que el mismo recupera de otro autor y que expresa: “el arte es a la vida como el vino es a la uva” (p. 68).

Esta perspectiva del lugar del arte en la enseñanza cobra especial atención en los ámbitos de formación de profesores, pero no solo para las disciplinas artísticas, sino ampliar su proyección hacia otros espacios curriculares desde los cuales ofrecer la posibilidad de generar experiencia estética.

#### **-El arte como herramienta para enriquecer y diversificar las propuestas de enseñanza... *el arte para la enseñanza***

El objeto artístico (pintura, cuento, canción, película, etc.) constituye un producto cultural que condensa una multiplicidad de sentidos sociales, históricos, estéticos, políticos, éticos, poéticos. Representan situaciones, sentires, sueños, ideas, conocimientos, en síntesis: un fragmento de la realidad. En tanto creación humana, digna de deleite e interpretación, pueden constituirse también en herramientas de mediación para la construcción de conocimiento. De este modo, son factibles de ser integrados al interior de una propuesta de enseñanza, pensada como actividad didáctica facilitadora de un aprendizaje que deje huellas y marcas. Álvarez y Del Río (2015) afirman que “conviene

recuperar el poder de los instrumentos artísticos como una modalidad que atesora una capacidad formativa tan esencial como la del conocimiento científico para construir la realidad” (p. 56).

De esta manera, no solo se está pensando en aproximarse a la realidad social, política, cotidiana, urbana, rural, desde un objeto artístico, transformando a éste en herramienta didáctica, sino que transitando un camino inverso, puede constituirse en el vehículo para dar a conocer pensamientos, ideas, conceptos, interpretaciones acerca de una problemática, tema o situación particular.

Los diferentes lenguajes artísticos constituyen artefactos culturales que promueven posibilidades de expresión y de comunicación; representan “sistemas simbólicos mediante los cuales los sujetos desarrollan un repertorio de recursos expresivos, críticos y explicativos del mundo que les rodea y, a la vez, construyen una visión reflexiva sobre sus experiencias” (Elichiry, 2015, p. 19).

#### **-El oficio de enseñar como una forma de hacer arte**

Scrinzi (2010) afirma que “el oficio es aquello que cada día aviva el deseo a través de nuestro arte. Y un oficio hecho con arte implica implicarnos [...] Quizás es aquí donde radica la ética del trabajo docente, en hacer lugar a ‘la diferencia’, a través de ‘una marca’ que se transmite” (p. 152).

La tarea de enseñar requiere de un importante grado de creatividad que se pone en acción a partir de propuestas ajustadas a sujetos particulares y contextos institucionales, sociales y culturales específicos, produciendo las transformaciones necesarias de aquellos conocimientos considerados relevantes en los procesos de formación. Sin embargo, el oficio docente no solo se dibuja desde el campo de conocimiento específico que domina y transmite, sino particularmente (Contreras Domingo, 2010) desde lo que uno es y lleva incorporado: “Al enseñar, uno se expone, se enseña: no solo enseña un saber sino la propia relación con el saber; no solo está allí, entre estudiantes, sino que es ante todo presencia” (p. 65).

En síntesis, el **arte** invita a desestructurar nuestras formas de estar y de hacer en el aula.

Otros caminos alternativos para promover y facilitar el aprendizaje, al mismo tiempo que disfrutar de la actividad de aprender, lo constituyen el **juego** y el **humor**. El juego, además de ponernos en movimiento, nos muestra nuevas formas de enseñar, propiciando un espacio para la espontaneidad y para la transformación de nuestras prácticas convencionales; invita a incorporar el cuerpo, crear, imaginar. El humor (desde sus diferentes manifestaciones: historietas, imágenes, etc.) aparece también como expresión cultural que impacta en la subjetividad de los estudiantes.

Dewey (1995) expresa que la experiencia es capaz de generar impronta en los sujetos que las atraviesan. De este modo, en nuestras historias de formación surgen con especial fuerza formativa las experiencias propiciadas por determinados docentes, en variadas situaciones de enseñanza. Las mismas constituyen acontecimientos que tienen la capacidad de dejar huellas en los sujetos, promoviendo la movilización subjetiva. En acuerdo con esta línea de pensamiento, desde el año 2011, invitamos a los practicantes a presentar la reconstrucción de la experiencia de formación transcurrida en la práctica docente, recuperando aquellas situaciones o acontecimientos de sus prácticas que los hubieran movilizado e interrogado, eligiendo para ello un formato didáctico creativo que ponga en juego múltiples lenguajes de expresión (historietas, cuentos, poesías, videos, teatro, títeres, pinturas, canciones, entre otras), de tal forma que se constituyan en objeto de análisis y

reflexión colectiva. Desde entonces estos talleres finales constituyen el espacio principal para comunicar aprendizajes, vivencias, reflexiones.

### **¿Qué lugar pueden ocupar las TIC?**

En la cotidianidad de las escuelas y en nuestras vidas en general, se evidencia la presencia generalizada de herramientas tecnológicas digitales. Esta situación interpela la noción de aprendizaje que sustentan las propuestas pedagógicas que se llevan a cabo y que se promueven en los estudiantes de profesorado. El concepto de aprendizaje ubicuo aportado por Burbules (2009) resulta pertinente, en tanto se define como aquel que contempla el acceso al aprendizaje en múltiples contextos y tiempos, haciendo necesario tender puentes entre la propuesta de las instituciones educativas y los contextos familiares, sociales y culturales actuales. En este sentido, reconocemos el potencial que tienen las tecnologías de la información y comunicación (TIC) para promover aspectos comunicativos y aprendizajes grupales, facilitando la creación conjunta de conocimiento. Los medios digitales abren caminos para acceder a la realidad política, social y cultural de diferentes partes de nuestro planeta, acortando distancias y poniendo en juego una modalidad particular de construcción de subjetividades. Lo aquí expresado sacude los procesos de formación de docentes, aguijoneando a quienes somos parte de las instituciones formadoras. Se hace evidente la necesidad de asumir el compromiso y la responsabilidad de estructurar una experiencia pedagógica que haga posible el conocer, pensar y apropiarse de herramientas tecnológicas para construir los procesos de mediación de cultural.

Promover un acto pedagógico que deje huellas, que haga posible la experiencia, está en íntima relación con las propias vivencias de quienes se forman como docentes. En este sentido, hemos comprendido que los talleres que proponemos intentan constituirse en fuente de vivencias personales en torno a los diferentes ámbitos culturales y sociales y su implicancia en el enseñar y aprender, con la expectativa de alentar a considerar nuestro oficio como un “medio de hacer vivir a los demás la alegría de descubrir lo que nosotros mismos hemos vivido” (Meirieu, 2006, p. 36).

### **c- La consolidación de dispositivos de colaboración profesional y constitución de comunidades de práctica y aprendizaje**

En este punto consideramos que radica la posibilidad de construir caminos que permitan revisar las prácticas instituidas, identificar los problemas no resueltos, recuperar las experiencias movilizadoras, buscando una formación de carácter investigativo que confronte al oficio docente con la producción de saberes.

Interesa aquí recuperar la noción de comunidades de práctica vinculadas con el ámbito educativo, como “grupos de docentes que se constituyen como tales en función de reflexionar sobre sus experiencias prácticas a través de la participación en un espacio prefigurado de un grupo experimentado en la tarea de enseñar. Se establecen relaciones de participación mutua en función de intercambiar, aprender y reflexionar sobre la práctica docente. Este compromiso se traduce en el interés de recrear y compartir sus saberes, enriquecerlos y transformarlos en nuevos conocimientos” (citado por España 2009, p. 160). La posibilidad de generar espacios de comunicación y diálogo relativos al oficio de enseñar no solo permite desnaturalizar las propias prácticas, sino también construir saberes acerca de la misma, a la vez que promover su transformación.

De este modo, la constitución de redes de carácter institucional y de colectivos docentes se constituye en fuente de sostén y alternativas para dar respuesta a la complejidad de la práctica cotidiana en las aulas, a la vez que reestructurar los procesos de formación.

Desde el convencimiento respecto al valor que puede tener la constitución de comunidades de práctica y aprendizaje, es que buscamos alternativas que promuevan el intercambio, el análisis, la reflexión y producción de conocimiento compartido. Han sido múltiples las acciones desarrolladas entre equipos de prácticas y residencias, y con coformadores de diversas instituciones, estableciendo espacios para compartir experiencias y conocimientos en torno a la práctica de enseñar, en el marco de la formación docente. Asimismo, se ha iniciado un proceso de intercambio y discusión entre los/as estudiantes de diversos profesorados e instituciones de formación, inaugurándose desde el 2015 el primer encuentro anual de practicantes y residentes de profesorados que habilita un espacio para el intercambio y diálogo entre los/las estudiantes de profesorados de la UNSL y del Instituto Formación Docente San Luis.

Podemos advertir que, en los últimos años, se ha producido un desplazamiento de los límites que circunscribían las instancias de práctica para cada profesorado, desarrollándose un nuevo espacio de trabajo compartido entre los actores de los diferentes profesorados. Surgieron así innovadoras áreas de trabajo colectivo que van permitiendo el encuentro, análisis y reflexión acerca del enseñar y el aprender; al mismo tiempo, dicho espacio ha promovido la consolidación de un grupo que se proyecta en una nueva actividad investigativa.

#### **IV- Expectativas... aires de cambio**

Lo planteado aquí nos coloca, desde nuestro lugar de responsables de prácticas profesionales, ante el desafío de revisar nuestras propias prácticas de formación, en la búsqueda de nuevas formas de enseñanza a partir de proyectos que promuevan la interacción y construcción colectiva de conocimiento. El camino iniciado se torna promisorio en oportunidades, alternativas y posibilidades de encuentros, entendiendo que las prácticas pedagógicas requieren sostenerse en la experiencia y en el saber de la experiencia, que no es solo el de la enseñanza, sino el que nos constituye como sujetos (Contreras Domingo, 2010).

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[1] Bourdieu, P. (2002) define al habitus como “sistema de disposiciones adquiridas por medio del aprendizaje implícito y explícito que funciona como sistema de esquemas generadores, genera estrategias que pueden estar objetivamente conformes con los intereses objetivos de sus actores sin haber sido concebidas expresamente con este fin” (p. 125).

## **Biodata de la autora**

**Patricia Mónica Clavijo** es Profesora de Enseñanza Media y Superior en Ciencias de la Educación de la Universidad Nacional de San Luis, Especialista y Magister en Didáctica por la UBA, Diplomada Superior en Educación y Nuevas Tecnologías (FLACSO–Argentina), Especialista de Nivel Superior en Educación y TIC (Ministerio de Educación de la Nación Argentina) y Profesora en Enseñanza Primaria.

Tiene una trayectoria docente de más de 25 años, desempeñándose en diferentes niveles educativos: maestra de grado en la primaria y profesora de nivel secundario; en su carácter de formadora de formadores actuó en diversos profesorados de nivel superior no universitarios (MEB, PTFD) y universitarios (Matemática, Física, Computación) en espacios curriculares en temas de psicología del adolescente y aprendizaje, didáctica y práctica pedagógica. En particular en los últimos ocho años se desempeña como responsable de Praxis IV: La práctica docente correspondiente al profesorado en Ciencias de la Educación de la Facultad de Ciencias Humanas de la UNSL. El trabajo desarrollado en el ámbito de la formación en la práctica profesional docente y las investigaciones llevadas a cabo, le ha permitido profundizar en los procesos de formación en la práctica y problematizarlos desde una mirada crítica que posibilite la comprensión y la construcción de conocimientos acerca de la misma. Los resultados alcanzados constituyen presentaciones realizadas en eventos científicos y publicaciones.

Por otra parte, el acercamiento y trabajo conjunto con equipos responsables de las prácticas y residencias docentes de diferentes carreras de profesorados de la UNSL y profesorados del IFDC San Luis ha posibilitado la elaboración de proyectos y actividades de servicio, dando lugar a la paulatina constitución de una comunidad de prácticas. En este marco se instituyeron Proyectos de formación e intercambio entre la universidad y las instituciones educativas de prácticas del medio, a partir del cual se buscó reconocer la tarea de los profesores coformadores que reciben practicantes, como corresponsables en la formación de formadores. En la actualidad se han comprometido también en la concreción de un nuevo Proyecto de Investigación que integre la experiencia de cada uno.

# Teaching Reading Comprehension at University Level, UNC

Area: English for Specific Purposes

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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to describe the teaching practice in the reading comprehension courses that DIFA (Departamento de Idiomas con Fines Académicos), UNC, offers to undergraduate students in most faculties at UNC. Our courses are designed on the basis that our students interact in a certain sociolinguistic community which presupposes that they will read texts that circulate in that specific community. In this work, I will describe our courses making reference to the theoretical assumptions that guide our practice in the classroom.

**Keywords:** teaching practice – social activity – course design

## Introduction

In our work, the act of reading in a foreign language is not only a cognitive task in which the reader is alone, but it is also a social activity where the reader is in constant interaction with the text, the author, and the situational context. It is a social activity because the reader interacts in a certain sociolinguistic community so he will encounter texts that circulate in that specific community. On the basis of this assumption, this paper intends to describe the reading comprehension courses designed for undergraduate students in most faculties in UNC. In order to do so, I will start with a brief account of some pedagogical approaches in reading in a foreign language. Then, I will refer to text selection and, finally, I will describe our courses.

## Reading in a Foreign Language: Some Pedagogical Approaches

In the introduction to this paper, I stated that our courses are designed upon the assumption that the reader interacts with the text, the authors, and the situational context. In order to understand his idea, it is necessary to give a short account of the approaches that have preceded this way of considering reading comprehension in a foreign language.

Dorronzoro and Klett (2006) state that, in the Argentinean context, three approaches have become popular in the teaching of reading comprehension in a foreign language: the declarative approach, the procedural approach, and the context-based approach.

### Declarative Approach

The declarative approach presupposes that the knowledge the student has to acquire is explicit; the teacher chooses the contents that she wants the students to learn in that class. It implies

knowledge of the lexis and the grammar. For example, students have to learn about explicit elements, such as nouns, pronouns, verb tenses, and complex and simple sentences. According to this view, students are considered “empty vessels” that the teacher fills with knowledge. This approach states that the aim of language is to represent reality and thought; that is to say, its main goal is to represent the world and thought so we can get a clear image of them through the content of the text.

The class is usually organized in two different parts or moments. The first part consists of introducing the elements of the language that the teacher wants to teach in that class. In the second part, the students do some exercises that are thought to help them internalize that knowledge. The language is taught in chunks, from the smallest units to the most complex ones. Then, putting all the elements together, the language is reconstructed again.

As regards the text, the class is usually organized around it. The students work on the grammatical and lexical elements that the text presents. The activities are planned according to the linguistic components; it is the text which “programs” the mode of reading. So, students must have a clear understanding of the linguistic elements of the language (Dorronzoro, 2005, p.17).

Some restrictions to this approach are as follows: if the language aim is only to represent the world and thought, its communicative function is in second place; that is to say, it does not take into account other factors, such as the conditions in which the language is produced, or the effects that a certain situation may exert on the verbal activity. So the use of the language for a social purpose is not considered to be the most important. In turn, the reader comes second because he is supposed to understand the interpretation that the author thought for the text. So the aim of the declarative approach is that the reader can reproduce the content of the text, which tends to be the author’s point of view.

### **Procedural Approach**

Another approach that the authors describe is the procedural approach. According to this approach, the knowledge the student has to acquire is the “knowhow”, which is implicit and unconscious and it demands long training. Knowledge of reading strategies, such as prediction, anticipation, or inferencing, is central.

In this approach, students are not passive when reading. They read the text but the aim is not to learn information. On the contrary, they try to reconstruct the information by creating their own representations. For this, they make a hypothesis based on their knowledge of the world. If they make a wrong guess, the hypothesis is rejected and changed by a new one, until they can finally understand the text (Dorronzoro, 2005, p.20). Students learn to read by reading. They discover and reconstruct the text with the teacher’s help.

In the class, the reading process starts with activities in which students have to apply inference and solve a problem. The activities are based on practical situations which the students may encounter in real life. Then, there are other activities which focus on relevant aspects of the language, common to the texts being read.

As regards the texts, these are authentic; they are chosen taking into account the students’ interests and needs and not because of the linguistic elements they present. The language is seen as a whole and not as isolated units. The reader’s activity is in first place. There is a subordination of the

text to the reader. There is no one sense in the text; sense depends on the different readings the students can do. In this context, reconstruction of sense depends on the strategies the students use.

The procedural approach constitutes a different approach to the teaching of reading comprehension. There is a shift from “what to teach” to “how we learn”. There is a need to understand how students read. The focus of analysis is on the students’ behaviour when addressing a text. The assumption is that any good reader has to go through certain stages to process a text.

However, there are also some restrictions to this approach. According to Dorronzoro, although in the procedural approach the language serves a communicative purpose and it is not a mere representation of the world and thought, communication is understood only as transmission of information. To communicate means giving access to some information the reader does not have. Another restriction is that mechanization in the use of reading strategies implies the risks of not being able to choose the appropriate strategies for a given text, not being able to decide which strategies to use, or using the same strategies for all texts, even when some prove to be inadequate (Dorronzoro, 2005, p.22).

So far, the approaches described above do not take into account the fundamental social character of reading. They do not take into account the relationship between reading and context.

### **Context-Based Approach**

The third approach Dorronzoro and Klett refer to is context-based approach. In this approach the aim in teaching reading in a foreign language does not only have to do with teaching the elements of the language or reading strategies. The knowledge the students need to acquire in the context-based approach is knowledge about when to choose one or another strategy and why that strategy is necessary to understand the text. For example, students need to know when there is a need to read the text in detail or when they need to stop at certain linguistic elements that hinder comprehension. To do so, students use knowledge of the context. Thus, the reading process starts from the opposite direction: instead of analysing and teaching the elements of the language, the focus is on the context where the reading takes place. The language does not serve a mere communication purpose of providing knowledge on a certain subject. Communication is understood as a dialogue between the author, the reader, and the text (Dorronzoro, 2005, p.29).

In the class, the reading tasks resemble real life tasks and imply the resolution of problems. A purpose for reading guides the students as to what strategies they need to apply. The purpose for reading must resemble real life as much as possible, so the aims of the tasks will also be similar to real life situations, but they will conform to academic demands: students are expected to do certain tasks “in order to get a result” (Dorronzoro, 2005, p.26).

*Didáctica Contextual* does not exclude the approaches described above. On the contrary, it implies working with linguistic elements and reading strategies but starting directly from the text, demanding from the students a process of reflexion.

So let’s go back to the assumption upon which our courses are designed: reading is a social activity where the reader is in constant interaction with the text, the author, and the situational context. According to the principles supported by the context-based approach, we can claim that the context-

based approach is the one that best fits our needs. However, this does not mean that we should not pay attention to the elements of the language or the reading strategies. On the contrary, we adhere to an eclectic approach in which each element receives considerable attention, according to students' interests and needs.

### **Text selection**

At the beginning of this paper we stated that the reader interacts in a certain sociolinguistic community. This presupposes that he/she will read texts that circulate in that community. These texts share certain regularities that distinguish them from other types of texts. Our criterion for text selection is based on a consideration of genre. Following advice from subject specialists and students' opinions and suggestions, we include different types of texts, such as expository, descriptive, narrative, instructive, essay writing, etc.

### **Course Description**

#### **Context**

Our courses are taught to undergraduate students in most faculties at UNC. Students' level of English varies from elementary to FCE in some cases.

### **Course Design**

The book the students work with is organized into units and the units are formed by study guides. The starting point in each study guide is the text, which is selected according to the different specific fields of study in each undergraduate degree program. The guides are designed in two clear sections: the reading comprehension section and the section where we deal with the elements of the language. There is also an appendix at the end of each unit in which we develop some grammar topics in more detail.

In the reading section we consider the following issues:

- Purpose for reading
  - Give a talk in a conference, a meeting, etc., using information from the text.
  - Prepare a poster, a web site for a conference, meeting, etc.
  - Reconstruct the (facts) that led to a certain result.
  - Find similarities and differences (among issues in different countries).
  - Agree or disagree. Give reasons and provide a different solution.
  - Identify pros and cons.
  - Identify parts, stages, patterns.
  - Follow instructions to get a result.
  - Prepare a presentation for an exam.
- Strategies

- Skimming
  - Scanning
  - Detailed reading
  - Inferencing
  - Using background knowledge
  - Finding main and secondary ideas
  - Using the dictionary
  - Activation of background knowledge
  - Extracting information from charts and graphics
  - Drawing outlines
  - Writing summaries
  - Finding main and secondary ideas in a paragraph
  - Interpreting different sources of information
  - Reading and interpreting words in bold
  - Reading titles and subtitles
- Tasks
- Students may work individually, in pairs, in groups, or as a whole class group.
- Say if the ideas are in the text and write the line/paragraph where they appear in the text.
  - Fill in charts.
  - Complete timelines.
  - Answer questions.
  - Answer true/false and correct false statements.
  - Identify text type.
  - Identify concepts developed in the text from a given list.
  - Identify a sequence of elements, procedures, etc., from a given diagram, outline, chart, etc.
  - Find stages, moments, etc., in the text.
  - Make outlines, summaries.
  - Find main and secondary ideas and write a summary.
  - Use parallel texts to complete, explain, enlarge, etc., concepts developed in another text.
  - Draw timelines.

In the second section of the study guide, we deal with elements of the language. Grammatical aspects which may interfere with understanding or that may be characteristic of the genre are given appropriate attention. Grammar is taught on the basis of a specific need that may arise from the text. Grammar is considered a means to comprehension. Some activities are:

- Read sentences and choose the correct equivalent/ option for certain elements.
- Classify past forms.

- Choose the best meaning of modal verbs and say what intention the author had, etc.
- Draw a timeline.
- Write ideas related by connectors.
- Classify connectors according to logical ideas.
- Find the referent.

Lexis is also important in our classes. In the upper levels, students do not present much difficulty in understanding terminology, since they easily resort to their background knowledge. However, in lower levels, more instruction is necessary. Some activities are as follows:

- Create a glossary.
- Classify words.
- Choose the correct word for a given context.
- Matching exercises based on a text.
- Work on family words.
- Identify the context for a given word.

As can be seen, in our courses students interact with the text. They have a purpose for reading. Also, grammar and lexis receive appropriate attention. In our classes, students are not passive. On the contrary, they are engaged in activities where they have to assume a role, criticize, or even challenge the author's point of view. Their personal opinions serve as a springboard for checking understanding and confirming or rejecting ideas about the content of the text. In our classes, students decide what reading strategies will be most useful to apply.

To conclude, we support the view that reading – and, in our case, reading in a foreign language – is a social activity that takes place in a certain sociolinguistic community where our students interact. So our goal is to help them become autonomous readers, capable of facing new challenges in their field of reading.

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# **English Writing Assessment in an EFL university context: comparing results from teacher reports and teachers' comments on essays**

Area: Foreign Language Teaching

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## **Abstract**

This study is part of the work done in the context of a larger research project titled "Criteria for assessing foreign language writing skills (English) at undergraduate level", which aims at exploring English Language II teachers' practices, attitudes and beliefs during instances of summative assessment. In this paper we will compare and contrast the data gathered through teacher reports on students' essays and teachers' comments on these essays. The findings may help us reflect upon our own decisions as teachers and may pave the way towards reaching a consensus on the assessment criteria.

**Keywords:** foreign language assessment, undergraduate level, teacher reports, teachers' comments

## **Introduction**

The assessment of foreign language writing skills has always been studied from different perspectives due to its complex nature. Research on this field yields fruitful results that may later guide teaching decisions. Thus, a research team of the School of Languages, Universidad Nacional de Córdoba (UNC), established as a research objective to have an insight on the criteria for assessment of writing skills that the teachers of the chair English Language II (Teaching, Translation and Licenciatura<sup>1</sup>programmes) employ to evaluate the written production of second year students. To this end, a research project was created during the period 2014- 2015 and it was entitled "Criteria for assessing foreign language writing skills (English) at undergraduate level" and its main objective was to explore English Language II teachers' practices, attitudes and beliefs during instances of summative assessment. Prior research projects had focused on the writing process, on different means through which undergraduate students could be provided with feedback and on the effect of feedback on students' written work. As a result of this research work, the chair felt the need to dwell on the teachers' criteria when assessing students' writing skills and their impact on students' performance; thus, this topic has become the objective of the chair's present research project.

In this paper we will compare and contrast the data collected through reports teachers had to complete on some students' essays and teachers' comments on these essays. Our main aim is to

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<sup>1</sup>A five-year degree program at university level.

analyse teachers' comments related to use of English, content and organization and to identify up to which extent they coincide with what teachers expressed in their reports.

## **Theoretical framework**

### **Evaluation**

Assessment plays a fundamental role in the teaching and learning process since evaluation is a formative process closely linked with the planning, design and selection of teaching strategies. Evaluation is defined by some researchers as "any method used to inquire students' degree of knowledge at a particular time" (Collins & O'Brien, 2003:29). In a similar way, Crooks (2001) refers to evaluation as "any process that provides information about the achievements and the progress of the students". Other authors put forward the idea that assessment is a systematic process that implies gathering, selecting, describing, analyzing and interpreting information coming from a variety of sources to understand what students know, comprehend and can perform with the knowledge acquired from their educational experience. This information is later used in different levels to improve the teaching and learning process establishing changing in class material, syllabuses, timetables and methodology (Allen, 2004; Erwin, 1991; Huba & Freed, 2000). Generally, this evaluation process is carried out by teachers on a regular basis by means of different assessment tools such as exams, homework, papers, projects, oral presentations and other activities.

Similarly, Hyland (2003) claims that grading and feedback significantly contribute to students' learning process and the development of an effective writing course. Developing effective assessment procedures is necessary to make sure that the teaching process is having the desirable impact and that students are being evaluated in a fair way. The results from the evaluations can provide information about students' current knowledge and the objective crafted for that course so as to help them achieve it. Besides, assessment can help teachers motivate their students to feel proud of their achievements, guide them about the teaching content and evaluate different teaching strategies, assignments and class materials used in the course. Assessment of writing skills has pedagogical objectives since its results have a direct impact on the teaching process.

Assessment can be classified into two types: summative (assessment of what has been learned) and formative (assessment about the learning process). Summative assessment is carried out towards the end of course and is used to gather data about students' learning in relation to the objectives set for the course. The result of this type of assessment generally determines whether students have successfully completed the course or not. There are different tools that can be used to assess students: tests, projects or tasks. The final result tends to be a grade (Black & William, 2009; Bloom, Hastings & Madaus, 1971; Crooks, 2001; Shepard, 2005).

On the other hand, formative assessment is undertaken throughout the course and its main objective is to obtain feedback from the teaching and learning process identifying its strengths and weaknesses (Collins & O'Brien, 2003; O'Malley & Pierce, 1996). In this continuous assessment process, information about students' performance is collected by means of different evaluation tools. This information allows education experts to take well informed teaching decisions. Since this evaluation is carried out during the teaching and learning process, the aims of this type of assessment

are varied: to assess students' progress and the effectiveness of the course, to identify problems and provide possible solutions. Formative assessment presents shades of constructivist learning (Bruner, 1986, 1990; Vygotsky, 1962), since students are active participants in the construction of meaning within their educational context and teacher-student interaction is highly favoured. The information provided by formative assessment allows educational experts to diagnose and guide this interaction. Thus, verification lists, conferences, self-assessment, assessment scales, participant observation, among others, are frequently used in this type of assessment (Black, 2013; Gipps, 1994; Guskey, 2003).

The assessment of writing skills that is under study in this paper can be considered an instance of summative assessment since students are graded at the end of the teaching process to determine if the objectives stated for the course have been met. Besides, this type of evaluation is considered *direct assessment* of writing skills because writing is evaluated through an individual written production and not through exercises that assess linguistic components that are part of written tasks (such as vocabulary and grammatical exercises), which is defined as *indirect assessment* of writing skills (Williams, 2005, p. 120). Direct assessment is considered to be one of the most effective ways to assess students' written performance (Hamp-Lyons, 2001; Williams, 2005), mainly because it deals with a real instantiation of a written task, in which writers and evaluators interact; in other words, the human component is central to this type of assessment (Hamp-Lyons, 2001, p. 120-121).

## **Feedback**

The acquisition and mastery of the skill of writing implies acknowledging the importance of generating, formulating and reformulating ideas (Bromley, 2003; Hayes, 2004). According to Hyland (2003), a student can become a fluent writer once he/she has been able to write a draft, to rewrite it and edit it in order to improve different aspects of it, guided by the feedback that peers or teachers provide to that piece of writing. Since students construct meaning when writing, this process implies following several stages such as planning, writing, editing, and rewriting. In each of these stages, students receive feedback so that they can analyze and evaluate their productions (Hyland, 2003; Williams, 2005). Therefore, feedback becomes essential in the learning process (Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Ferris, 2002), and in the acquisition and improvement of the writing skill. In this case, feedback is formative, since it allows students to modify and improve the different drafts, and the focus is on the process, not on the final version of the text. Authors such as Mandel, Morrow and others (2003) highlight the importance and effectiveness of a type of feedback which is formative and interactive. Furthermore, several authors also point out the role of the teacher, who has a more noticeable participation in the process of acquiring the writing skill. According to Hyland and Hyland (2006), formative feedback aims at promoting the development of writing skills and becomes crucial in consolidating the learning process (177). The question still remains of who should provide such feedback, and which should the focus of attention be, either language, content or organization. Fathman and Whalley (1990) show in their research that students improved their skills in those cases in which they received feedback not only on their use of language, but also on other aspects such as content and organization. Thus, it becomes vital that teachers take into account all the different

aspects of any given text, so as to be able to provide useful feedback. Teachers should also strike a balance between positive and negative comments, so that feedback does not only imply the marking of mistakes, but also provides students with opportunities to improve their writing assignments. Hyland and Hyland (2006) state that students benefit from positive comments but they also need criticism that is constructive in order to be able to understand the nature of their mistakes and then make all the necessary corrections. Therefore, feedback should be considered the starting point to correct and improve the written text.

Ellis (2009) suggests several methods to provide feedback, such as direct, indirect, metalinguistic, and indirect explicit. Ferris (2003) also proposes peer feedback and electronic feedback. In this last case, students and teachers can communicate by means of a new channel, since feedback is provided by email or in a virtual platform. The student sends his/her writing assignment, and then receives feedback given by the teacher using the “comment” tool in Word. This type of feedback can be given either with marginal comments or comments at the end of the text. Such comments at the end of the text provide an answer to the text, more than an evaluation of it. This allows the teacher to provide insightful comments without considering constraints, such as space limitations, as in the case of marginal comments. Moreover, these comments at the end give a more holistic view of the text. On the other hand, marginal comments have certain advantages, such as the one of immediacy. In this way, the student can understand what the comment is aiming at, and thus, it becomes relevant. Both types of feedback have advantages and disadvantages; therefore, achieving a balance between both would mean more exhaustive feedback so that the student can develop and improve his/her writing skills.

In our context, from the English Language II Chair, at Facultad de Lenguas, UNC, the methodology used in order to provide feedback to our students' writing assignments is indirect explicit, which makes use of a feedback code that describes the error, whether it is a mistake in language use, content, organization, or any other relevant aspect. Students send their texts in a word document and receive electronic feedback, which teachers provide by using the tool “comment” in Microsoft Word. Students are first familiarized with the correction code and its categories, so that there are no difficulties when receiving feedback. The correction code is divided into language use, including cases of agreement, prepositions, spelling, syntax; and content and organization, for instance, irrelevant or unnecessary ideas, problems in the development of ideas, lack of clarity, among others. Students carry out the writing assignments in the context of the virtual classroom in Moodle, which works as a communication channel between teachers and students, since students submit their texts and receive feedback from their teachers. All these tasks are cases of informal assessment, as they are not graded, but they are useful instances in which students can practise and write and re-write their drafts. Said practice is relevant and necessary for students in order to prepare them for the instances of formal assessment, two term tests and a final exam, in which great value is granted to the writing section.

## **Context and methodology**

## Participants

The participants of this research project were nine teachers from the English Language II chair that are in charge of grading students' written production on different instances of evaluation.

## Procedure and materials

First, from the essays teachers had corrected in a term test situation, they were asked to select two of them randomly, one with a passing grade and one with a non-passing grade. They had to complete a report (see Appendix 1) explaining and supporting the feedback and the grades given to the essays. They also had to order different aspects — content, organization and language precision — in terms of the importance they assign to them when assessing writing assignments.

Second, the comments and the feedback provided to 258 essays in an exam situation were analysed and classified according to whether they were about content, organization or use of language, and depending on whether they were positive or negative comments.

Last, the results of both analyses were compared and contrasted.

## Results

As it was previously stated, in the first stage of the research project we analyzed 14 reports that teachers had completed with their perceptions when correcting essays in an exam situation. Teachers had to explain and justify why they had given a certain grade to those essays. We studied the marks and comments teachers had made in the texts, and categorized them into language use, content, or organization. The other corpus used were 258 essays assessed by the teachers of the Chair, and the same procedure was applied, following the same categorization.

The 14 reports recorded 286 comments/marks on the texts that were related either to precision in language use, content, or organization. In fact, 205 (72%) were related to language use, 60 comments (21%) made reference to content, and only 21 (7%) were comments about organization. At the same time, when teachers were supposed to report on those aspects that they consider most important when grading an essay, 10 of the reports (71%) stated that organization was the most important aspect in an essay, followed by content, and finally precision in the use of language. On the other hand, the four remaining reports (29%) assigned more importance to content, followed by language use, and finally organization. The classification of those categories is shown in Table 1.

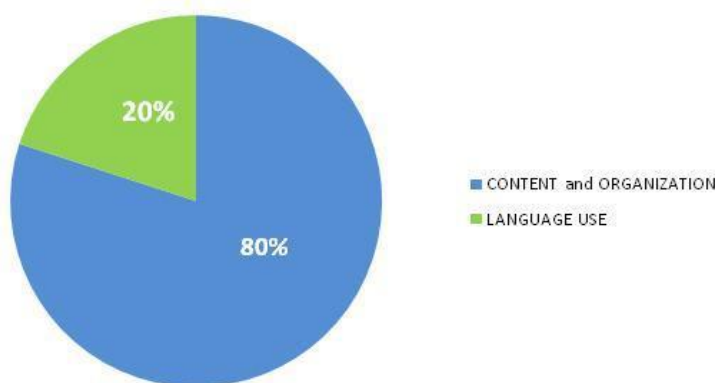
| Reports | Comments/marks (precision + content + organization)   | Relevant aspects to consider when correcting an academic text |
|---------|---|---|
| 14      | 286<br>205 (75%) precision (language use)<br>60 (21%) on content<br>21 (7%) on organization | 10 reports (71%):<br><b>Organization, content, precision</b>  |
|         |   | 4 reports (29%):<br><b>Content, precision, organization</b>   |

Table 1: reports

From those 286 comments, 34% of the marks/comments were found in essays that had a passing grade whereas 66% of the marks/comments recorded were taken from essays that failed to reach the passing grade for the writing section.

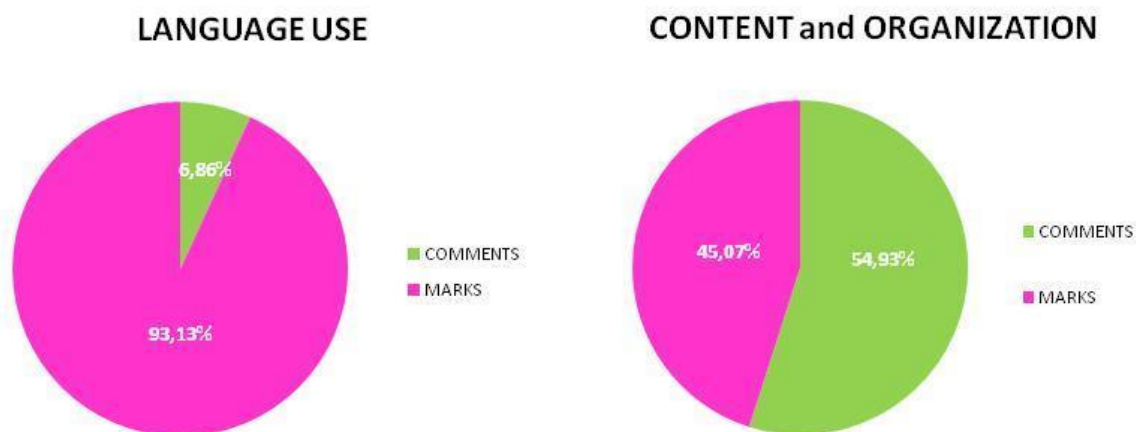
On the other hand, when analyzing the comments made in all the corpus of essays, that is 258 essays, comments were studied first in terms of their nature, that is, whether they were comments related to language use, content or organization. At the same time, those comments were categorized into comments that were either marginal or at the end of the essays, or into marks which were mostly found on the margins, pointing out mistakes of some of the categories mentioned before. One last area reflected upon was on the nature of the comments, whether they were positive or negative.

To begin with, 80% of the comments/marks were related to content and organization, whereas only 20% of them were about language use (see Graph 1). This is an interesting fact that validates what teachers had stated in their reports, where they give content and organization more weight than the one they give to precision in the use of language. However, even if teachers claim that they give more importance to content and organization, when analyzing the marks and comments reflected in the reports, 75% of them were based on language use. Even when this might seem like a contradiction, it is related to the fact that teachers will give more value to the marginal comment or comment at the end, which gives them the possibility to expand on the explanation of the mistake than to simply point out a linguistic error.



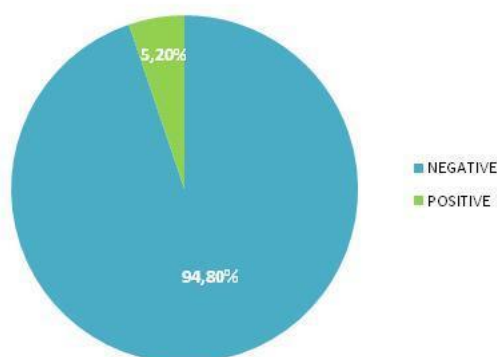
Graph 1

The second categorization in the analysis was related to comments on the one hand, and marks on the other hand (See Graph 2). In the case of language use, 93.13% were marks, whereas 6.86% were comments. At the same time, comments about content and organization represented the higher percentage, with 54.93%, while 45.07% were marks. This difference might be related to the fact that teachers tend to view comments as more holistic than marks, letting students reflect upon the feedback provided. The high percentage of marks in the case of language use may respond to the factor of immediacy and also to the fact that when the teacher points out a linguistic mistake, students are able to solve that problem without making changes in terms of content or organization, for which further explanation would be needed by means of a comment for example.



Graph 2

Finally, comments/marks were categorized into positive and negative and the results are striking (See Graph 3). 94.8% of the comments or marks are negative, whereas only 5.2% of them are positive.



Graph 3

The reasons might have to do with the fact that teachers sometimes need to justify a grade, for example a non-passing grade; therefore, they include as many negative comments as necessary. However, these numbers show that teachers need to reflect upon their own practices in order to strike a balance between positive and negative feedback.

## Conclusions

In this paper we have analyzed the different comments that teachers from the English Language II chair used as an assessment strategy to provide students with meaningful feedback in an instance of summative assessment.

Close analysis of these comments reveals a higher number of comments focusing on negative aspects of the essays in those essays that did not get a passing grade than in those which received a passing mark. This tendency can be explained as the teachers' need to justify the non-passing grade but it can also refer to a general tendency to focus on the weakness rather than on the

strengths of a paper. This focus on the weaknesses is further emphasized by the small number or absence of positive comments on students' work. What is worth pointing out is that, although the subject focuses on both content and language, even when students attain a passing grade, there are no comments in which the teachers focus on this strength.

It is worth noticing that all teachers produced similar comments even in those essays in which some teachers would award students a passing grade while others would not; thus, the difference in the final grade could be explained in terms of the different weight each teacher places upon the elements that constitute the evaluation criteria. Teachers' hesitation whether to provide students with a passing grade or not is generally based on comments related to content and organization and not language usage. This coincides with the data gathered during an interview session in which teachers were asked to explain what elements they considered to be the most important ones in order to provide a passing grade. In other words, there is consistency between teachers' beliefs and assessment outcome.

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## Appendix 1

### REPORT ON ESSAY N°

RATER:

FINAL MARK:

**A. Identify the comments/ marks you made on this essay and answer the questions below:**

1. How many comments/ marks are related to **accuracy** (language use)?

Write an example of this type of comment:

2. How many comments / marks are related to **content** (ideas, development of ideas, information focus)?

Write an example of this type of comment:

3. How many comments / mars are related to **organization** (thesis statement, paragraphing, general structure of the text)?

Write an example of this type of comment:

**B. Of the three main aspects mentioned above (accuracy, content, organization), which one is, in your opinion, the most important aspect to consider when evaluating an academic text? List the three aspects in order of importance (1 being the most important aspect and 3 the least important):**

- C. In a few words (no more than four lines), describe what you consider are the main strengths of the essay under analysis:
- D. In a few words (no more than four lines), describe what you consider are the main weaknesses of the essay under analysis:
- E. What do you expect students to do with the feedback given in this essay?
- F. What do you think students actually do with the essays you correct?

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# Language Learning Strategy Instruction: Results of a Workshop on Writing Strategies

Area: Foreign Language Teaching

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## Abstract

The relationship of language learning strategies to success in a foreign language has been the focus of research over the past decades. Studies have shown that, by using strategies, students can become less dependent on the teacher. Therefore, carrying out research in the language classroom can give teachers a deeper insight into the field of foreign language teaching and learning. This paper reports the results of a workshop on writing strategies, which was part of a larger project carried out by the Chair of English Language I to develop learning strategies in an English as a Foreign Language course at university.

**Keywords:** language learning strategies - strategy-based instruction - writing strategies - students' perceptions - students' performance

## Introduction

Over the years, different approaches to language teaching have emerged and influenced both teaching and learning. As a result, the field has become eclectic. This has generated interest in the contribution made by learners to the teaching and learning process and in the learning strategies they employ.

Language learning strategy theory postulates that success may be attributable to the strategies learners bring to the task (McLaughlin, as cited in Griffiths & Parr, 2001).

Following from the observation that some students are more successful than others, and that this may be the result of more effective strategies, it is assumed that the strategies employed by successful students may be taught and learnt by those who are less successful.

Language learning strategy theory fits easily with a wide variety of approaches, which means that it has a potential to be a component of eclectic syllabuses. Strategies-based instruction is not so much an instructional method as it is sound strategy instruction interwoven with the general communicative language teaching approach. Chamot and O'Malley (1994) describe the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach, a form of strategy-based instruction

for ESL learners that includes explicit strategy instruction, content area instruction, and academic language development.

Under various names, such as *learning skills*, learning strategies are the way students learn how to improve their skills in a second or foreign language (Oxford, 1990). As Weaver and Cohen (1997) point out, strategy-based instruction is a learner-focused approach that emphasizes explicit and implicit integration of language learning strategies in the classroom with the aim of assisting learners in becoming more efficient in their efforts to learn the target language. The strategy movement has as its tenet that anyone can successfully learn a foreign language given enough time and guided effort. The underlying premise is that students should be given the opportunity to understand not only what they learn but also how they can learn it more effectively and efficiently. Through this method, students can become less dependent on the teacher because they are provided with tools to self-direct and self-evaluate their learning.

The relationship of the use of language learning strategies to success in a second or foreign language has been the focus of research over the past decades. According to Oxford (1990), however, much of the research has had the limitations of an aerial photograph: it shows prominent features of the landscape but only gives hints as to what the buildings in the picture would look like. This is so because most studies have paid more attention to the use of broad categories of strategies than to the effectiveness of individual strategies. The current study presents a more detailed picture by examining the use of specific strategies.

## **Objectives**

### **General Objective**

- To determine whether writing strategy training in a workshop setting has positive effects.

### **Specific Objectives**

- To assess whether writing strategy training leads to:
  - a) changes in students' performance and observable strategy use, and
  - b) changes in their perceptions.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of this study is provided by research into learning strategies, and their theoretical anchoring, cognitively-based theories of learning that view second language acquisition as the acquisition of complex cognitive skills.

In cognitive theory, learning strategies are viewed as complex cognitive skills, which can be defined as conscious behaviour, actions taken to enhance one's own learning

through storage, retention, and use of information about the target language (Weaver & Cohen, 1997). They are important in language learning because they are tools for active involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence. The use of appropriate strategies results in improved proficiency and greater learner autonomy (Oxford, 1990).

Several classifications of language learning strategies have been published (e.g., Chamot & O'Malley, 1994; Oxford, 1990). The three best-known taxonomies, Chamot and O'Malley (1994), Oxford (1990), and Rubin (as cited in Weaver & Cohen, 1997), share many strategies. According to Oxford (1990), strategies can be classified into two major classes: direct and indirect:

**Direct strategies:** (Those that deal directly with the language)

1. Memory strategies: these involve storing and retrieving the new language (creating mental linkages, applying images and sounds, reviewing and employing action).
2. Cognitive strategies: these are selected to better understand and produce new language (notetaking, summarizing, classifying vocabulary).
3. Compensatory strategies: these are chosen to make up for lack of knowledge of the target language (guessing intelligently, overcoming limitations in speaking and writing by means of circumlocution or synonyms).

**Indirect strategies** (Those for general management of learning)

1. Metacognitive strategies: these are used to regulate cognitive processes (planning how to accomplish a task, self-monitoring one's comprehension and production, and self-evaluating how well one has accomplished a task).
2. Social strategies: these represent external efforts to learn and actions taken to interact with other learners, the teacher or native speakers (asking questions for clarification, cooperating with others).
3. Affective strategies: these help the learner regulate attitudinal and emotional factors that have a bearing on learning. They reflect internal efforts to regulate the learning process (encouraging oneself through positive self-talk, reducing anxiety by using relaxation techniques).

Direct and indirect strategies support each other. The first class, direct strategies for dealing with new language, is like the performer in a play, working with the language itself in a variety of specific tasks. The second class, indirect strategies for general management of learning, can be likened to the director of the play who serves the functions of organizing and coaching the performer. Nowadays, the teacher encourages the learner to take more of the director functions that used to be reserved for the teacher (Oxford, 1990).

Research reveals that learning strategies influence second and foreign language proficiency. In fact, researchers have found that conscious use of appropriate strategies typifies good language learners. The characteristics of good language learners refer to a variety of learning strategies, such as taking advantage of practice opportunities, guessing, and monitoring one's production (Green & Oxford, 1995; Oxford, 1990; Weaver & Cohen, 1997). Several years have passed since the publication of Rubin's (as cited in Weaver & Cohen, 1997) original list of characteristics that formed the profile of "good" language learners: those who are accurate guessers and have a strong drive to communicate; those who are uninhibited and willing to practise; and those who spend time monitoring their own speech and that of others, and are attentive to form as well as meaning. Since the early good learner studies, most of the research has focused on the identification of strategies and the impact of strategy training and it has been proved that effective language learners are aware of the strategies they use (Green & Oxford, 1995).

In spite of the support that the strategy movement has received, the emphasis has been on the teaching side of instruction. More recently, however, language teaching has been expanded to include both the teaching and the learning sides of instruction. As the domain of language teaching has become more learner-focused, there has also been an emphasis on helping students become less dependent on the teacher. According to Weaver and Cohen (1996) and Cohen (1998), the philosophy of foreign language teaching has become more interactive and communicative and less teacher-centred. Inherent in this shift in focus is a shift in the responsibilities of both teachers and students. No longer does the teacher act as the locus of instruction. Rather, learners are sharing the responsibility and becoming less dependent on the teacher. By being given more responsibilities, students become more autonomous, less dependent on the teacher, and they self-direct their learning.

### **Research Review**

Metacognition has been a focus of interest in language research since the mid-1970s (Brown, as cited in Wong Mei Ha & Storey, 2006). It provides an opportunity for learners to be aware of what they learn and review their progress. In fact, Hartman (as cited in Wong Mei Ha & Storey, 2006) postulates that metacognition can make or break student academic success.

Metacognitive strategies go beyond cognitive devices and help learners coordinate their learning. They include three strategy sets: centring your learning (e.g. overviewing and linking with already known material, paying attention, etc.), arranging and planning your learning (e.g. setting goals and objectives, identifying the purpose of a task, planning) and evaluating your learning (e.g. self-monitoring and self-evaluating). Metacognitive strategies

are essential for successful language learning as they enable learners to arrange, plan and evaluate their learning in effective and efficient ways.

According to O'Malley and Chamot (1994), metacognitive strategies are "higher order executive skills that may entail planning for, monitoring, or evaluating the success of a learning activity" (p. 44). Recently, Rubin (as cited in Lam, 2009) has considered the ability to deploy metacognitive strategies to be inherent in the good language learner. The role of these strategies is to oversee the learning process by enabling the learner to think ahead of the learning task, plan for some action to tackle it and to assess how well one has done it. Little's (as cited in Lam, 2009) postulation of task planning – comprising both the prospective and retrospective aspects – is a good description of the role of metacognitive strategies. The prospective aspect determines the requirements of the activity and the retrospective aspect establishes how successfully the activity has been performed. In this respect, evaluation may promote reflection after the L2 task is completed.

Since the 1990s, self-reflection has been considered a meaningful process in learning. The methodology of assessing learning has shifted from originating with the teacher to being student-generated. Monitoring and self-assessment have become essential elements in learning languages in order to raise students' awareness and promote their autonomy. The usefulness of these strategies has been widely accepted by researchers.

A study by Moritz (as cited in Kato, 2009) regards self-assessment in foreign language education as a non-traditional form of assessment, and a logical component of a learner-centred pedagogy and more self-directed learning programmes. Similarly, Todd (as cited in Kato, 2009) refers to self-assessment as a prerequisite for a self-directed learner. Likewise, Yang (as cited in Kato, 2009) integrated self-assessment activities into ESL classes and reported that these were helpful in promoting learner autonomy.

Despite the importance of metacognitive strategies, Lam (2009) argues that the number of metacognitive strategy instruction studies remains small. Reactions to strategy instruction have been mixed and conclusive findings are yet to be established. Furthermore, research shows that learners use these strategies only sporadically. In several studies of second and foreign language learning reported by Oxford (1990), students used metacognitive strategies less often than cognitive ones and were limited in their range of such strategies with little self-monitoring or self-evaluation.

This review of studies indicates the paucity of work on the impact of metacognitive strategy instruction. In this sense, Devine (as cited in Wong Mei Ha & Storey, 2006) points out that there are few metacognitive studies of writing. This provides a good justification for more studies in the area.

## **The Current Study**

The following metacognitive strategies from Oxford's (1990) and Chamot and O'Malley's (1994) taxonomies have been selected:

- **Planning how to accomplish a writing task:** brainstorming, listing, clustering, mindmapping, freewriting, outlining
- **Self-monitoring one's production:** revising and editing

## **Materials and Methods**

### **Context**

The context of the current study is the School of Languages, National University of Córdoba.

### **Sample**

Twenty-eight students participated in this study. The sample consists of students enrolled in English Language I (an intermediate course belonging to the first year of five-year English Language Teaching, Translation and/or Licentiate programmes at the School of Languages). This group of students received strategy-based instruction in a workshop organised by the Chair. Two EFL teachers also participated in this project.

### **Instrumentation**

A multi-method approach to assessing the effects of metacognitive strategy instruction was used. The following strategy assessment tools were employed:

- **Writing tasks:** to analyse students' performance and observable strategy use
- **Written surveys:** to assess students' perceptions of their strategy use

### **Data Collection**

The strategy assessment tools were administered to the group at the beginning and at the end of the workshop so as to determine if writing strategy instruction had a positive effect.

### **Treatment**

The group received metacognitive strategy instruction during a three-hour workshop organised by the Chair. The instructional approach adopted was explicit strategy instruction, which consisted of the two components suggested by Weaver and Cohen (1996):



1. **Strategy training**: The first part of the workshop was devoted to raising students' awareness of the relevance of metacognitive strategies for the writing skill. Students were taught how, when, and why these strategies can be used to deal with the writing skill. The teacher described, modelled, and provided examples of the strategies by performing tasks and thinking aloud. She also elicited examples from the students. To achieve this, awareness-raising and strategy-training activities were provided.
2. **Strategy integration**: The second part of the workshop was devoted to putting the strategies into practice in a writing task. This activity helped reinforce the strategies assimilated during the strategy training phase.

### **Analysis Procedures**

Data obtained from the surveys administered to the group before and after strategy training were transformed into quantitative data and used to determine if there was a positive change in students' perceptions of metacognitive strategies for the writing skill. Students' performance in the writing tasks was analysed to determine whether students' manifested use of strategies in the survey was also revealed in their performance and observable strategy use.

### **Results**

#### **Results of Students' Performance in the Pre-Test**

In the pre-test, students wrote a paragraph in response to these instructions:

Write a paragraph of about 200 words on the following topic: *The advantages of living at home with your parents when you are a university student.*

Students' performance and observable strategy use were analysed taking into account content, organization, language use, and formal conventions. The following results were obtained:

- **Content**: most paragraphs were poor and showed no evidence of writing strategies to generate ideas such as brainstorming, listing, clustering, mindmapping, freewriting, and outlining.

- **Organization:** most paragraphs showed no evidence of planning, drafting, or revising. In fact, 58% of the paragraphs did not have a topic sentence, supporting details, and/or a concluding sentence.
- **Language use:** there was little or no editing of lexico-grammatical features.
- **Formal conventions:** many of these were not followed. In fact, 70% of the paragraphs did not have a title, 37% were not indented, 56% had contracted forms, 90% did not include the word count.

### Results of Pre-Study Survey

**Question 1:** Have you ever received instruction in academic writing?

56% of the students reported that they had received instruction in academic writing, while 44% reported that they had not received that type of instruction.

**Question 2:** Have you ever received instruction in how to write a paragraph in English?

74% of the students reported that they had received instruction in how to write a paragraph in English, while 26% reported that they had not received that type of instruction.

**Question 3:** Do you know the parts of the paragraph?

37% of the students reported that they knew the parts of the paragraph, while 63% reported that they did not know them.

**Question 4:** If you answered yes, which are these parts?

Only one student mentioned all the parts of the paragraph (title, topic sentences and details, supporting sentences, and concluding sentence). Most students mentioned topic sentence/introduction, main body/development, and conclusion. The rest of students only mentioned some parts, for example, "topic sentence, concluding sentence". Some made vague reference to the formal conventions and punctuation: "*sangría, oraciones, puntos seguidos, comas, punto final o aparte*".

**Question 5:** Have you ever received instruction in writing strategies?

33% of the students reported that they had received instruction in writing strategies, while 67% reported that they had not received such instruction.

**Question 6:** If you answered yes, specify which ones.

The students explained that they received instruction in pre-writing strategies in the introductory course. In particular, they mentioned brainstorming, making a mindmap, outlining, and using connectors.

**Question 7:** Do you consider that receiving instruction in academic writing, in how to write a paragraph in English, and in writing strategies would be beneficial?

93% of the students reported that receiving instruction in academic writing, in how to write a paragraph in English, and in writing strategies would be beneficial; while 7% reported that it would not be beneficial.

**Question 8:** Why?

Students expressed that receiving such instruction would be beneficial because it would improve the organization, coherence, fluency, and accuracy of their paragraphs, their writing skills in general, their performance at university, and their job opportunities in the future. The following are extracts from students' answers:

*"Proporciona las herramientas para lograr escribir los párrafos que nos piden. Nos da una estructura con respecto a sus partes y a cómo organizar nuestras ideas de forma ordenada y lógica tanto para la escritura como para la ejercitación oral."*

*"Es importante para la carrera ya que brindaría las herramientas para redactar párrafos con sentido, coherencia y cohesión."*

*"Es importante expresarse de manera correcta y fluida por escrito."*

*"El conocimiento que tengo de inglés es del ámbito informal. Podemos mejorar nuestras producciones escritas en exámenes, nuestro vocabulario, uso del idioma y nivel de lengua requerido en la universidad porque la escritura académica es una de las bases de la carrera."*

*"Porque entrenarse en escritura tanto en español como en inglés es esencial para el desempeño estudiantil y laboral. Por eso conocer estrategias de escritura me parece una excelente manera de comenzar a estudiar."*

### **Results of Students' Performance in the Post-Test**

In the post-test, students wrote a paragraph in response to these instructions:

Write a paragraph of about 200 words on the following topic: *The advantages of distance learning when you are a university student.*

Students' performance and observable strategy use were analysed taking into account content, organization, language use, and formal conventions. The following results were obtained:

- **Content:** Most paragraphs showed evidence of the use of writing strategies to generate ideas such as brainstorming, listing, clustering, mindmapping, freewriting, and outlining.
- **Organization:** Most paragraphs showed evidence of planning, drafting, or revising. In fact, all of them had a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence.
- **Language use:** There was evidence of editing of lexico-grammatical features.
- **Formal conventions:** Most of these were followed. In fact, all the paragraphs had a title, were indented, and included the word count.

### **Results of Post-Study Survey**

**Question 1:** Has the instruction in academic writing strategies received been useful? Why? 100% of the students reported that the instruction in academic writing strategies received had been useful. The following are extracts from students' answers:

*"Me aportó conocimiento acerca de estrategias para organizar un párrafo, expresar mejor mis ideas, mejorar la escritura y evitar errores comunes."*

*"Pude profundizar los conocimientos adquiridos en clase y adquirir otros."*

*"Además del material claro y conciso nos dieron algunos tips que no están en los libros."*

*"Saber organizar un párrafo académico es esencial para poder realizar escritos en los años siguientes."*

*"Es muy diferente la forma de escribir en inglés a lo que hacemos en nuestro idioma entonces es un gran desafío escribir en inglés. Estas estrategias nos ayudarán a hacerlo correctamente."*

**Question 2:** What strategies turned out to be particularly useful?

The strategies that were useful for students were the following: outlining, planning, brainstorming, listing, clustering, and mindmapping. They also found editing (checking grammar, spelling, and punctuation) and revising content and organization especially helpful. They explained that the paragraph revision checklist provided and the training in the use of connectors were very interesting.

**Question 3:** Did you know or were you familiar with the strategies presented?

79% of the students reported that they were familiar with most of the strategies presented, while 21% reported that they were not familiar with them.

**Question 4:** Do you consider that receiving more instruction in academic writing, writing paragraphs in English, and writing strategies would be beneficial? Why?

96% of the students reported that receiving more instruction would be beneficial, while one (4%) student reported that it would not be useful. The following are extracts from students' answers:

*"Las horas de clase no son suficientes."*

*"Tenemos un nivel muy bajo y necesitamos recibir instrucción para mejorar."*

*"Nuestra forma de escribir en español es diferente a la forma de escribir en inglés; por lo tanto, resulta difícil adoptar otras estructuras de escritura."*

*"Al aprender un nuevo idioma debemos aprender las convenciones de escritura."*

*"Escribir párrafos no es tarea fácil más cuando no se aprendió en la propia lengua."*

*"Es una parte eliminatoria en los exámenes."*

*"No sólo sería beneficioso en los próximos años sino también en situaciones futuras."*

**Question 5:** What aspect of this workshop did you find most interesting/positive?

The aspects of the workshop that students considered to be most positive were the theoretical explanations, the practice provided, and the analysis of common errors.

**Question 6:** What aspect of this workshop did you find irrelevant/unnecessary?

Most students stressed that all the aspects of the workshop had been relevant and the only aspect they considered to be unnecessary was making several drafts.

**Question 7:** Have you got any comments or suggestions?

Students were grateful for the opportunity to learn provided by the workshop and for the teachers' willingness to answer questions and clear doubts. They commented that the workshop was complete and suggested that it was necessary to have more workshops of learning strategies in general and writing strategies in particular, as well as more opportunities to practise.

**Conclusion**

In this study, metacognitive strategy training and use in the writing skill led to improved performance and observable strategy use in writing tasks and students' perceptions. These results constitute a basis for taking action that leads to improved teaching and learning practices. The outcome of this project could be used to outline more comprehensive research that provides training in a wider range of strategies aimed at enhancing the writing skill. Further research could focus on transfer and variation in strategy use by age and proficiency level and include case studies.

As regards the limitations of this study, although the subjects can be considered representative of the population under analysis, the results may not be generalizable to a population outside this context. Therefore, the results should be viewed as hypotheses to test with groups of different backgrounds. The value of this work should also be confirmed by larger studies that trace students' progress over time.

We expect that a strategy-based approach to teaching, namely, a learner-focused method of instruction that emphasizes both the what and the how of learning, will eventually become the norm in the teaching of English as a foreign language.

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# Language Learning Strategy Instruction: Design, Implementation and Results of a Workshop on Listening Strategies for EFL Students

Area: Foreign Language Teaching

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## Abstract

Language learning strategies are considered keys to learners' autonomy and meaningful learning. Teachers play an important role in helping learners become aware of, develop, and use strategies to complete tasks. In 2015, a series of workshops using "one-time strategy training" (Oxford, 2011, 1990) were delivered to train EFL students doing the course *English Language I* at the School of Languages (U.N.C.) in the use of direct and indirect language learning strategies to apply to the four macroskills. This paper reports the design, implementation, and results of the workshop on listening strategies to carry through listening tasks at B1 level.

**Keywords:** language learning strategies – strategy-based instruction – listening strategies

## Introduction

Over the last thirty years there has been an important shift in the field of language learning and teaching with greater emphasis put on learners and learning rather than on teachers and teaching. At the same time, researchers have focused on how learners process the new information and what strategies they use to learn the new language. According to Rubin and Wenden (1987), most of the research has aimed at "identifying what good language learners report they do to learn a second or foreign language, or, in some cases, are observed doing while learning a second or foreign language" (p. 19).

Since the 1980s, Strategy-Based Instruction has been widely implemented in ESL/EFL teaching methodology (Brown, 2007). Based on the great amount of research in the field, Oxford (2011) has presented the Strategic Self-Regulation (S<sup>2</sup>R) Model, which defines language learning strategies as "deliberate, goal-directed attempts to manage and control efforts to learn the L2" (p. 12) and which offers a new taxonomy of strategies. As learning strategies can be taught, teachers play an important role in helping language learners become aware of, develop, and use the different strategies to successfully complete different tasks (O'Malley & Chamot, 1994; Oxford, 2011, 1990). However, it is quite challenging to teach students to use new strategies with cognitive tasks as, in the early stages, strategies are complex procedures that place an extra burden on the task (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

Different instructional approaches have been suggested to train L2 learners in the appropriate use of strategies with various results depending on the students' needs, the macroskills, and the context of learning (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990). One of such approaches, "one-time



strategy training”, consists in teaching one or more strategies particularly needed by the learners with actual tasks in one or a few sessions (Oxford, 1990). “This kind of training gives the learner information on the value of the strategy, when it can be used, how to use it, and how to evaluate the success of the strategy” (Oxford, 1990, p. 203). Using this approach, in 2015 a series of workshops were delivered to train EFL students doing the course *English Language I* at the School of Languages, Universidad Nacional de Córdoba (U.N.C.), in the use of language learning strategies to apply to the four macroskills. The goal of the workshops was to develop learning strategies in an EFL course at university and to raise students' awareness of the need to take responsibility for their own learning and develop autonomy. This paper reports the design, implementation, and results of the workshop on listening strategies useful for *Language I* students to carry through listening tasks at B1 level (Field, 2008, 1998; Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Lynch, 2009; Vandergrift, 2003).

### **Key Issues in ESL/EFL Listening Strategies**

Strategy-Based Instruction has been widely implemented in ESL/EFL teaching methodology since the 1980s (Brown, 2007). In her early work, Oxford (1990) defines language learning strategies as “actions taken by second and foreign language learners to control and improve their own learning” (p. ix). Oxford (1990) groups the strategies according to the impact they have on learning. Thus, the two broad categories are *direct strategies* (memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies) that directly involve L2 and *indirect strategies* (metacognitive, affective, and social strategies) that indirectly support language learning (Oxford, 1990). Recently, Oxford (2011) has proposed a new model of strategic competence that focuses on how learners regulate their own language learning behaviour through the use of strategies. In fact, Oxford (2011) redefines language learning strategies as “deliberate, goal-directed attempts to manage and control efforts to learn the L2” (p. 12). The Strategic Self-Regulation (S<sup>2</sup>R) Model integrates socio-cultural, cognitive, and affective dimensions (Oxford, 2011). Thus, the model includes *cognitive, affective, and sociocultural-interactive strategies*, all of which are actively managed and controlled by the learner through the use of *metastrategies* (Oxford, 2011). Regardless of the taxonomy used, teachers play an important role in helping language learners become aware of, develop, and use the different strategies to successfully complete different tasks and master the language macroskills (O'Malley & Chamot, 1994; Oxford, 2011, 1990). A language teacher should, therefore, provide a wide range of learning strategies in order to meet the needs and expectations of their students possessing different learning styles, motivations, strategy preferences, etc. It can be stated that the most important teacher's role in foreign language teaching is the provision of a range of tasks to match varied learning styles (Hall, 1997, p. 4).

Listening is considered the most important skill for ESL/EFL learners as “it internalizes the rules of language and facilitates the emergence of other language skills” (Vandergrift, 2011, p. 455). In a way, language learning depends on listening as it provides the aural input that serves as the basis for language acquisition and enables learners to interact in spoken communication. Listening is also considered the most difficult skill to learn because of its temporal nature, the complexity of the listening processes, and the special features of spoken language (Field, 2008; Lynch, 2009; Ur, 1984;

Vandergrift, 2011; Wilson, 2008). Different types of knowledge are used in listening and there are two common views about the order in which they are applied: bottom-up and top-down (Buck, 2001). “Bottom-up processing involves decoding, i.e., segmenting the sound stream into meaningful units” (Vandergrift, 2011, p. 456). When using this type of knowledge, the listeners rely on the language in the message, the meaning created by the combination of sounds, words, and grammar. In contrast, “top-down processing involves the application of context and prior knowledge to build a conceptual framework for interpretation purposes” (Vandergrift, 2011, p. 456). The listeners need to draw upon their background knowledge of the topic, the situation or context, the type of text, and the language. This background knowledge will activate their schemata, a set of expectations that will help them to interpret what is heard and anticipate what will come next. There is general consent among listening researchers that both bottom-up and top-down processes operate interactively (Buck, 2001; Field 2008; Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Vandergrift, 2011; Wilson, 2008). However, the prevailing type of process that the listener will use depends on the type of listening, the listening purpose, the listening context, and the listener’s language knowledge (Field, 2008; Vandergrift, 2011; Wilson, 2008).

Given the critical role of listening in language learning and the different types of knowledge used, students need to “learn to listen” (Field, 2008, 1998; Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Lynch, 2009; Vandergrift, 2003). Listening strategies are techniques or activities that contribute directly to the comprehension and recall of listening input. Effective language instructors should show their students how they can adjust their listening behavior to deal with a variety of situations, types of input, and listening purposes. They should also help students develop a set of listening strategies and match appropriate strategies to each listening situation. Vandergrift (2003) states that skilled listeners “orchestrate” the use of different strategies. In order to become skilled listeners, L2 students should be explicitly trained in the use of listening strategies, especially during the early stages of their listening instruction (Field, 2008). In the listening strategy literature, there are three main categories of strategies that L2 listeners should use: *cognitive strategies*, to make sense of the spoken text; *metacognitive strategies*, to plan, monitor, and evaluate understanding; and *socioaffective strategies*, to include contextual factors and encourage the listener to understand (Lynch, 2009, p.79). Based on the most important listening strategies mentioned in the literature (Field, 2008; Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Lynch, 2009; Wilson, 2008), the workshop to teach listening strategies was designed and implemented.

### **Design and Implementation of a Workshop on Listening Strategies for Students of *English Language I* at the School of Languages**

The workshop on listening strategies was aimed at helping *English Language I* students improve their listening strategies. *English Language I* is an intermediate course of the first year of English Language Teaching, Translation and/or Licentiate programmes at the School of Language, National University of Cordoba. The workshop was designed following what Oxford (1990) names “one-time strategy training,” which consists in teaching one or more strategies particularly needed by the learners with actual tasks in one or a few sessions. Thus, the workshop took place in a three-hour

session and it was taught by the authors of the paper to 22 EFL students who voluntarily attended it. To learn about the students' perceptions of the listening strategies and the impact of the workshop, a pre- and a post-survey were administered respectively (see Appendix). The surveys were written in Spanish, the students' L1, so that language proficiency would not hinder students from expressing their opinions and suggestions. The survey analysis and results, as well as the explicit teaching of key listening strategies, have shown some interesting findings.

### **Pre-Survey**

Wilson (2008) states that listening is the skill that is least practiced in class and that is sometimes considered "the Cinderella skill", overshadowed by the other macroskills. This was in fact reflected in the pre-survey as only 32% students admitted to having received instruction in L2 listening, while the great majority stated they had not. All the students surveyed expressed that they were willing to receive instruction in listening strategies and the reasons varied greatly: to understand audios in English (7), to improve my listening skills (5), to know what to do while doing a listening activity (2), to answer the questions in the listening activity correctly (2), to understand what the other speaker says (1), to overcome listening problems (1), and to perform better in tests and exams (2). Interestingly, 2 students mentioned that they wanted to improve their perception skills. Main experts in listening (Cauldwell, 2013; Field, 2008; Ur, 1984) agree that many listening comprehension problems are caused by decoding mistakes and that listening for perception should be given primarily importance especially in the early stages. One student explicitly mentioned that s/he wanted to learn listening skills to become more confident while listening in English. In fact, Field (2008) states that listening is the skill that makes students feel the most insecure, as it is difficult to measure their progress in the skill and a stream of speech cannot be remembered for long.

### **Listening Activities**

The three-hour session consisted of 5 main listening activities. Selection of the right audios was essential to design appropriate and motivating activities. To select the audios, their type, source, content, and delivery were considered. Both graded/scripted and authentic audios were used, as both types have advantages and disadvantages. The listening activities 1, 2, and 3 used graded/scripted audios, as "students may learn best from listening to speech which, while not entirely authentic, is an approximation to the real thing, and is planned to take into account the learners' level of ability and particular difficulties" (Ur, 1984, p. 23). Moreover, as Field (2008) states, graded/scripted audios boost L2 listeners' confidence and motivation in the first stages of their listening training. Listening activities 4 and 5 used authentic audios, i.e., "recordings of people speaking naturally and without the purposes of language learning in mind, relevant to my students and suitable for their language level" (Field, 2008, p. 270). In this way, students could listen to speech at its normal rate of delivery and with its typical features of spoken discourse, as they will encounter it outside the classroom (Field, 2008, 1998; Lynch, 2009; Thorn, 2013; Vandergrift, 2007; Wilson, 2008). Moreover, "learners' motivation is boosted enormously by evidence that they can apply classroom learning to instances of L2 in the real

world” (Field, 2008, p. 277). The audios were mainly taken from different EFL websites to offer variety and to familiarize students with these learning resources.

Listening Activity 1 aimed at introducing students to the listening strategy *listening for gist* by using a joke. Students were explicitly trained in the strategy before listening to the joke (see Figure 1). Students were asked to listen for gist to understand “one of the funniest jokes in the world” taken from the LearnEnglish website (<https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/magazine/funniest-jokes-world>). After listening to the joke, the teachers pointed out the advantages of the strategy *using the tapescript* as, among others, it helps listeners compare what they think they have heard with what was actually said and see the difference between the pronunciation and the spelling of a word (Oxford, 1990). To encourage the use of this strategy, the tapescripts of all the audios were included in the students’ handout.

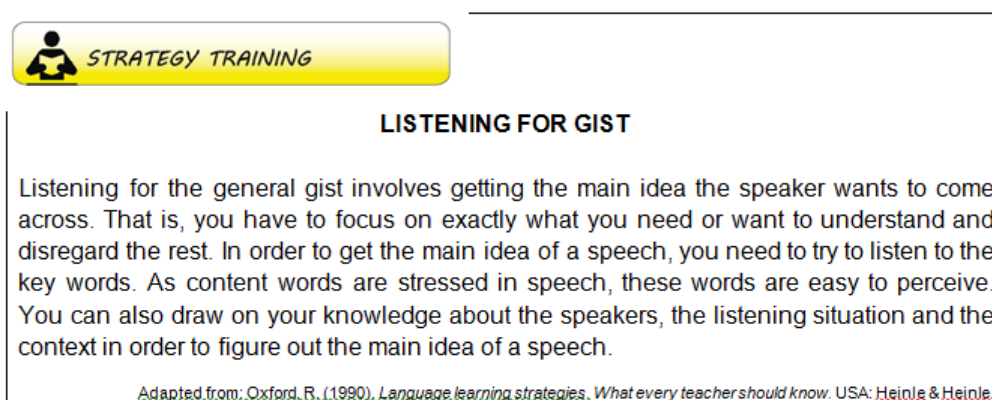


Figure 1. Explicit instruction of the listening strategy *listening for gist*

The objective of Listening Activity 2 was to teach students the strategy *listening for detail* by asking them to listen to a recorded telephone message and complete the notes with words and numbers. The audio was taken from the Handbook of *Certificates in English Language Skills* (2001). To help students make out the sounds and words that they could not hear, the strategies *predicting* and *guessing intelligently* were also explicitly taught. The strategies are defined by Oxford (1990) as compensation strategies since they “enable the learner to use the new language for either comprehension or production despite limitations in knowledge” (p. 47). Students were advised to predict before listening and to make intelligent guesses after listening to the audio.

Listening Activity 3 was designed to train students in the use of the strategy *using graphic organisers*. To achieve this aim, after introducing the strategy (see Figure 2), students were asked to draw the sketch of a house as it was described. The audio was taken from the well-known EFL website ELLLO (<http://www.ello.org/english/0501/533-Eucharía-NewHouse.html>)

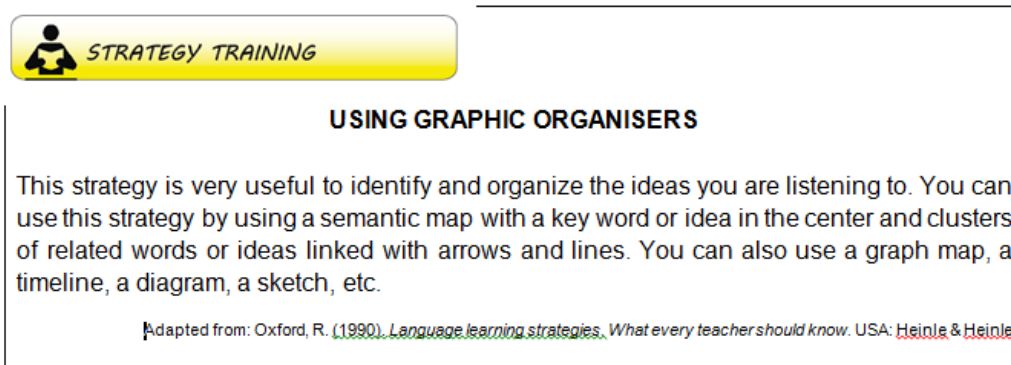


Figure 2. Explicit instruction of the listening strategy *using graphic organisers*

The strategy *taking notes* was taught through Listening Activity 4. Following Oxford (1990) and Wilson (2008), students were instructed in the use of different ways of taking down notes by using notes, shopping lists, and the T-list format. Particular emphasis was put on the T-list format, as it allows students to arrange what they hear in an organised and effective way (Oxford, 1990). The students were then asked to listen to two people talking about the difference between the United Kingdom and Great Britain and note down the main differences. The video was taken from the LearnEnglish website (<http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/how/how-understand-difference-between-uk-and-great-britain>).

Finally, The Beatles' song "Here Comes the Sun" was used for Listening Activity 5. This activity focused on helping students revise the strategies learned in the session as they had to 1) listen to a song and comment on its message and 2) listen and fill in some gaps in the lyrics. The song was also a good opportunity to familiarize students with the strategy *lowering anxiety*, as listening to a familiar piece of music that most students like helps them to relax and become less anxious about the listening activity. After listening to the song twice, students were asked to think about their performance and to evaluate it by considering a score from 1 to 10. In this way, students learned about the use and importance of the strategy *self-evaluating*.

### **Post-Survey**

After the session, a post-survey was administered to evaluate the impact of the workshop and learn about students' perception of the treatment (see Appendix). Fortunately, when asked if the workshop on listening strategies had been useful, all the students answered affirmatively and the reasons varied. 45% of the students stated that they found the workshop useful, as they would be able to put into practice what they had learned when doing a listening activity. Many students mentioned that they found the workshop useful, as they would be able to apply what they had learnt in further opportunities; some mentioned that the workshop prompted them to keep on practising listening and one student stated that she was able to pinpoint her weaknesses when listening thanks to the workshop.

The second question asked students to name at least 4 listening strategies taught in the workshop without looking at the handout. Interestingly, all the students managed to name one or more

strategies: 68% of the students successfully named 4 or more strategies and 32% of the students named 3 or fewer strategies (see Figure 3).

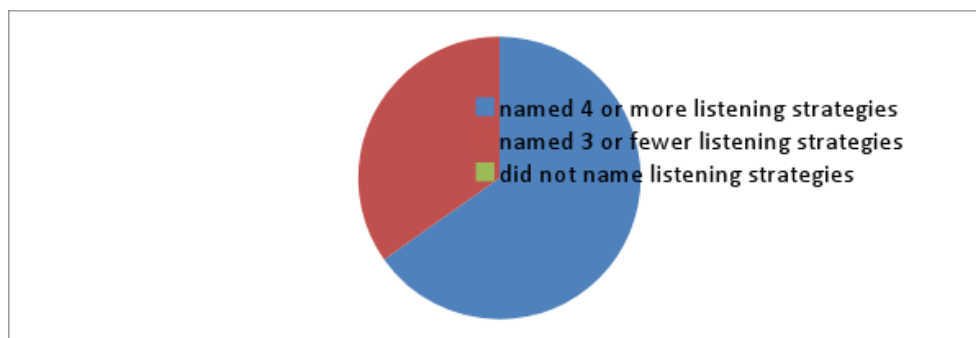


Figure 3: Percentage of students that named listening strategies

To the question “Were you familiar with all or some of the listening strategies taught in the workshop?”, 55% answered “no” and 45% answered “yes”. Students mentioned that they were already familiar with the listening strategies *predicting*, *guessing intelligently*, *taking notes*, and *using the tapescript*.

When the students were asked to mention the aspect of the workshop that they had found the most interesting/positive, 6 out of the 22 students named *using graphic organizers* as the most interesting. Their comments were “*The drawing strategy is very interesting, I had never heard of it*”, “*It is a technique I did not know and I find it very helpful. It is helpful and interesting.*” 4 students mentioned *taking notes with a T-list* as the most interesting strategy. One student mentioned that s/he liked learning how different strategies were used for different types of listening activities and another student thanked the teacher for showing different websites to put the strategies learned into practice.

When asked about the aspect of the workshop that they had found irrelevant/unnecessary, most students stressed that all the aspects of the workshop had been relevant and only two students mentioned that *using graphic organizers* was not useful.

As for their further comments or suggestions, many students said that the workshop had been very interesting and fun, many suggested that the teachers should organize more listening workshops because they had found the activities very productive and one student mentioned that it was really useful to gain confidence in the listening skill.

## Conclusion

Language learning strategy training facilitates L2 learning. Many teachers are explicitly promoting strategy awareness in different ways so that “learners can learn more language and learn it more quickly” (Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Snow, 2014). With this workshop on listening strategies we tried to introduce *Language I* students at the School of Languages, U.N.C., to the use of different strategies for different listening types and we think we have been quite successful. In fact, after delivering the workshop and analyzing the pre- and post-surveys, we can conclude that explicit

training in the main listening strategies in a workshop setting has had positive effects. Using different types of audios and listening activities to teach different listening strategies has surprisingly proven to be really useful and it has also been valued positively by the students who attended this one-time strategy training. Students showed great enthusiasm throughout the workshop and, hopefully, they will start using the different strategies presented in the workshop to accomplish different listening tasks.

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## Appendix

|                 |
|-----------------|
| <b>PRE-TEST</b> |
|-----------------|

**Por favor, antes de realizar el taller conteste las siguientes preguntas.**

1. ¿Alguna vez ha recibido instrucción en lectura?

Sí            No

2. ¿Alguna vez ha recibido instrucción en estrategias de lectura?

Sí            No

3. Si contestó "Sí", especifique cuáles.

4. ¿Considera que recibir instrucción en estrategias de lectura sería beneficioso?

Sí            No

5. ¿Por qué?

6. ¿Qué hace cuando tiene que ...?

|  |  |
|--|--|
| escuchar una historia/anécdota en inglés   |  |
| escuchar un chiste en inglés   |  |
| realizar un ejercicio en el que hay completar con las mismas palabras utilizadas por los hablantes en inglés |  |
| escuchar a alguien que da instrucciones en inglés  |  |
| escuchar al profesor hablar en clase en inglés   |  |



|                                       |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| escuchar una canción en inglés        |  |
| escuchar una serie/película en inglés |  |

7. ¿Hace lo mismo cuando lee textos en español? ¿Por qué?

8. ¿Qué audio/situación de escucha considera que es el más difícil de entender en inglés? ¿Por qué?  
 ¿Utiliza alguna técnica/estrategia para facilitar su comprensión? ¿Cuál/es?

### POST-TEST

**Por favor, marque con una cruz o conteste las siguientes preguntas:**

1. ¿Cree que el taller fue útil?

Sí                  No

2. Si respondió "Sí", ¿cómo cree que lo aprendido hoy lo ayudará?

3. Sin mirar el material que preparó el docente, indique el nombre de al menos cuatro estrategias de escucha.

4. ¿Conocía o estaba familiarizado con las estrategias presentadas (o con algunas de ellas)?

Sí                  No

5. Si contestó "Sí", especifique cuáles.

6. ¿Qué aspecto le resultó más interesante/positivo?

7. ¿Qué aspecto le resultó irrelevante/innecesario?

8. ¿Tiene algún comentario o sugerencia? Por favor, escríbalo a continuación.

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# Advantages of implementing a portfolio in the areas of grammar and phonetics

Area: Foreign Language Teaching

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## Abstract

Research shows that students at all levels see assessment as something that is done to them on their classwork by somebody else. Likewise, more and more teachers are getting dissatisfied and frustrated with the use of standardized tests as the only method to assess their students, since they consider assessment a true learning experience, and not external to the learning process. In this paper, we analyse the benefits of implementing the portfolio system as a means of evaluating students' progress in the fields of grammar and phonetics at tertiary and university level.

**Keywords:** assessment – summative evaluation – formative evaluation - portfolio system -

## Introduction

Research shows that students at all levels see assessment as something that is done to them on their classwork by somebody else. Likewise, more and more teachers are getting dissatisfied and frustrated with the use of standardized tests as the only method to assess their students, since they consider assessment a true learning experience, and not external to the learning process. In contrast, there are some teachers who keep a conservative attitude towards assessment.

We are aware of the fact that the current assessment system implies, more particularly at tertiary and university level, certain formal or legal requirements to be met (summative assessment). However, there is nothing that prevents us from carrying out a *formative* assessment system to complement the *summative* one.

In this context, the recent emphasis on foreign language education concerning student performance has resulted in a reevaluation of instruction and assessment approaches. Current trends in the assessment of student learning recommend that alternative forms of assessment, rather than standardized tests alone, be used to assess students' progress in school achievement (Barberá, 2007; Martín, 1997). Thus, it is essential that teachers often assess the students' academic performance not only quantitatively but also qualitatively.

In this regard, the implementation of a portfolio is considered to be one of the most popular procedures within alternative assessment (Barberá, 2007; Barnhardt, Kevorkian & Delett, 1997; Delmastro, 2005; Martín, 1997), as it provides evidence of the students' knowledge, skills and even their decision to take action in different ways. Furthermore, this tool — regarded as a sample of the work of the student that is comprehensive enough to generate a representation of his/her performance throughout time — enables EFL teachers to have a global and comprehensive sample of

the student's learning process and thus avoid judging the process only by means of a fragmented or non-continuous assessment.

Summing up, the portfolio enables teachers to integrate the learning process tasks with evaluation, as its implementation can result in a good opportunity to make changes concerning the traditional assessment methodology applied in the EFL classroom. It can also provide the teacher with more information on students' knowledge and skills and their compliance with all the tasks assigned. Following these lines, in this paper, we propose implementing the portfolio system, as we consider it an interesting and innovating complementary alternative to traditional assessment in the areas of grammar and phonetics.

### The process portfolio: definition and objectives

Process portfolios are ideal because they contain work that shows the student's progression throughout the course; in other words, they document stages that students go through as they learn and progress (Ven, 2009, p. 33). Hence, in recent years, a number of EFL teachers and researchers have noticed the importance of helping students to become effective and autonomous learners. In practical terms, a student portfolio for assessment purposes can be said to be a "library" of reports, papers, and other materials, together with the reflection of his/her learning and on strengths and weaknesses. As a purposeful collection of student work, portfolios show effort, progress, achievement, and self-reflection in one or more areas (Paulson & Paulson, 1991).

In this regard, Varvus (1990) explains that a student portfolio is a systematic, organized collection of student work and related material that depicts a student's activities, accomplishments, and achievements in one or more school subjects. This body of evidence is used by the teacher and the student to measure growth of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Barnhardt et al. (1997) define portfolio assessment as "[...] the evaluation of a collected, organised, annotated body of work, produced over time by a learner, which demonstrates a progressive record of student growth towards specific objectives" (p. 3). Javanmard and Farahani (2012) define portfolio as as a purposeful collection of any aspect of the student's work which is kept in a file folder, box, or any durable and expandable container that tells the student's improvement, progress and achievement. Neiman (cited in Serhani, 2007) defines portfolio assessment as a selected collection of work that shows not only the best work but also the development of the individual's work over a period of time.

A process portfolio is the systematic collection and evaluation of student work measured against predetermined scoring criteria, such as scoring guides, rubrics, checklists, or rating scales (O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996). In other words, process portfolios can provide a continuous picture of student progress rather than the snapshot of student achievement that single-occasion tests usually provide.

Martinez Lirola (2008) states that assessment is not considered an end in itself but a means to improve the teaching-learning process in such a way that students and teachers benefit. Following

Colen, Giné and Imbernon (2006), a portfolio assessment system is very reliable if it seeks the following objectives:

- (i) it helps students assume the responsibility for their own learning, since they have to be involved in the evaluation process;
- (ii) it gives teachers detailed information about students' work and progress;
- (iii) it integrates evaluation into the learning process;
- (iv) it encourages teachers and students to introduce changes in the way of teaching and learning;
- (v) it organises and gives coherence to the information the students have prepared.

### **Main differences between portfolio assessment and traditional assessment**

First, portfolios measure students' abilities over time, while in traditional assessment it is measured at one time. Second, whereas portfolio assessment is done by teacher and student and the latter is aware of the criteria, traditional assessment is done by the teacher alone and the student is often unaware of the guidelines used. Third, portfolio assessment is embedded in instruction, while traditional assessment is conducted outside instruction. Fourth, portfolio assessment captures many facets of language learning performance, whereas traditional assessment does not capture the range of students' abilities. Fifth, portfolio assessment highlights improvement, effort and achievement, while traditional assessment focuses only on results. In other words, portfolio assessment is process-oriented, whereas the traditional approach is product-oriented. Finally, portfolios connect learning, assessment and instruction, while these aspects are separated in traditional assessment.

### **Steps to follow when implementing the portfolio**

As has already been stated, the portfolio is a work and assessment strategy during the teaching-learning processes, accompanying and helping the teacher in the instruction planning and design activities (Delmastro, 2005, p. 196). Even if each teacher can decide how to implement this system according to his/her classroom activity, most authors agree on describing three phases or stages in its implementation: a previous stage of information and preparation for the experience (preparation stage), a development and follow up stage, and a last stage of final presentation, closing and assessment of the experience.

During the preparation stage, the teacher will inform the students about the characteristics of the portfolio, the general guidelines, contents to include and the criteria for assessment of the contents. Then, the teacher will explain the second stage: development and follow up. At this point, students will be informed about the methodology they will work with and what role the portfolio will play in it. In addition, the teacher will present a schedule with activities; s/he will also explain how such activities will be carried out as well as how participation in class will be assessed; besides, students will be guided as to the way in which the different materials will be used and their correction; it is at this stage when the process starts to receive feedback, guiding those students that have more

difficulties and following up on all the students in their learning process. At the end of the course, they will be able to present their portfolios with all the activities done during the course; each portfolio will work as proof of the learning process that each individual has gone through during the academic year.

### **Advantages of implementing the portfolio system**

There are a number of reasons why portfolios are considered an excellent tool to enhance the teaching-learning process. Implementing the portfolio class system allows teachers to:

- assess students' progress in their academic achievement;
- focus not only on quantitative aspects (the grade students obtain in mid-term tests and final exams) but also on qualitative ones;
- collect a sample of the student's work that is comprehensive enough to generate a representation of his/her performance over an extended period of time;
- change the old assessment habit where first drafts were considered final products; this requires giving the students an opportunity to take a second look and think about how they could improve future work;
- assess the development of the teaching-learning process throughout time so that they can make adjustments and reorganise the actions taken by both teachers and students on the basis of the results obtained;
- promote student independence, self-evaluation, reflection, and critical thinking;
- measure performance based on genuine samples of student work;
- provide flexibility in measuring how students accomplish their learning goals;
- enable teacher and students to share the responsibility for setting learning goals and for evaluating progress towards meeting these goals;
- give the students the opportunity to have extensive input into the learning process;
- facilitate cooperative learning activities, including peer evaluation and tutoring, cooperative learning groups, and peer conferencing;
- serve as a vehicle for enhancing students' awareness of the key role played by learning strategies in and beyond the classroom;
- offer the teacher and the student in-depth knowledge of the student as a learner, which means that the teacher can individualize instruction for the student. In this way, weak areas can be strengthened and areas of mastery built upon;
- standardize tests and all problems found with such testing.

### **Disadvantages of implementing the portfolio system**

Among the disadvantages of implementing the portfolio system to assess the students, we can mention the following:

- it can be very time consuming, as it requires extra time for planning an assessment system and constructing the assessment: reviewing and commenting on student work, especially if portfolios are done in addition to traditional grading. We should highlight that the portfolio system involves the extensive use of subjective evaluation procedures such as rating scales and professional judgement; in other words, teachers need to spend a great deal of energy on portfolio management. They need to get involved in developing strategies and materials, conferencing with individual students or small groups, reviewing portfolio contents, and providing feedback;
- scheduling individual portfolio conferences is difficult and the length of each conference may interfere with other institutional activities;
- problems in scoring may emerge, as the portfolio contains a variety of work samples for different purposes which are collected over time. The challenge is that portfolio assessment may produce unacceptably low inter-rater reliability, especially if the assessment rubrics are not properly prepared or are used by untrained assessors.

### **The portfolio system as a new way of assessing the students' performance in the fields of grammar and phonetics**

It is high time we started exploring new ways of assessing our students; such approaches should eventually lead us to mirror the students' learning, understanding, achievements, motivation and attitude in a comprehensive way, which will allow us to assess the development of the teaching-learning processes with the ultimate goal of making necessary adjustments and reorganizing the actions taken both by teachers and students.

In this regard, the typical written exam as the only method for measuring student progress is widely criticized by authors like Barberá (2007), who argues that assessment should not be a mere data gathering process but

a process that facilitates group analysis and the reconstruction of learning through shared interpretation of the data gathered by the teacher and the students. In these terms, the assessment process will be completed with a series of actions that are the main responsibility of the teacher and that will be ignored if assessment is understood as a diagnosis of students' knowledge (p. 123).

Barberá (2007) describes these actions as:

- a) decision-making regarding learning on the basis of the results obtained (what to do, how to continue) in the midterm tests or final exam;
- b) the actual realization of these decisions — many a time taken for granted just because it was indicated or because its scope is not considered real; and
- c) a follow up of the development of the decisions made, which will result in assured and true progressive learning.

Thus, we propose the portfolio system, also known as the *work portfolio* or *work dossier*, as an interesting and innovating complementary alternative to traditional assessment. In the educational

field, the portfolio system was at first nothing but a folder with a series of achievements and certifications of the students with promotional purposes. As time went by, this assessment procedure was developed including curriculum data of the student. The turning point was its use with instructional purposes.

Although interest in portfolios as assessment devices first emerged in the field of composition instruction, it has recently evolved in other disciplines in the language arts, such as reading and oral language development (Fair & Tone, 1994; Hewitt, 1994). Since then, portfolios have proved a quite meaningful source for providing information that can be most useful for teaching and learning. This information becomes the evidence of the students' language proficiency based on a broader representation of agents and materials, which together engage in a process of contextualization by obtaining evidence from a different source other than the final examinations.

An advantage of this instrument is that it can provide evidence of growth in a number of different dimensions of learning. In other words, the portfolio entails a useful tool in the fields of grammar and phonetics, since it features materials that show the students' progress, the level of understanding of the contents, and their ability to develop new skills.

Through constructive, interpretive and dialogical sessions, each participant collects language data and demonstrates them in an interpretive and contextualized manner. Although this practice may turn out somewhat time-consuming, it may prove quite useful, since each student will be able to maintain a collection that will include his/her personal goals and objectives, self-assessments, teacher assessments, and all practice activities carried out during the course.

The implementation of the portfolio also highlights the importance of providing high quality feedback on performance to learners. Without it, they may think they have mastered something when they have not, fossilize in errors, become discouraged, or resent the effort they have put in. For this reason, we intend to encourage learners to monitor and record significant moments in their experience of the course. This aim is in line with the goals of autonomous learning, in that it encourages students to take an active role in formulating their learning objectives and assessing to what extent these have been met.

An important dimension in language learning is students' development of appropriate learning strategies. However, traditional tests do not capture these mental processes. Because learning strategies are most often not observable phenomena, teachers need to rely on students' own reports about the strategies they have used. By implementing the use of the portfolio in the grammar class as an alternative form of assessment, students record a summary of the strategies they have used when accomplishing a particular practice activity.

The students' work samples collected on a regular basis throughout the school year will allow teachers to gain an opportunity to truly understand what their students are learning. As products of significant instructional activity, portfolios reflect contextualized learning and complex thinking skills, not simple routine, low-level cognitive activity. Portfolios should aim at making sense of students' work, communicating about it, and relating the tasks to a larger context.

It is well known that language development occurs at different rates through a series of trials and errors. It is precisely through well-designed portfolios that students can document the process of



trial and error in the fields of grammar and phonetics, for example when using a new structure, introducing a rule, producing the English sounds. This thinking process can be documented through self-assessment, goal-setting, and the kind of reflective statements typical of portfolio assessments (Gómez, Graue & Bloch, 1991; Keiffer & Faust, 1994).

Language proficiency is holistic and focuses on communicative and functional language abilities as well as the attainment of discrete skills (Moya & O'Malley, 1994). In this sense, work portfolios show the whole learning process and also demonstrate how, when, where, and to what extent the concepts, skills, and competencies have been acquired by the students. As Martin (1997) puts it, the information included in the portfolio generates a whole assessment picture about the skills, competencies, knowledge, readiness to act, and the actual willingness of the students.

Martínez Lirola and Crespo Fernández (2007) make it clear that the portfolio is a useful tool in higher education, since it is composed of materials which show students' progress, the degree of assimilation of the contents and the ability to develop certain competencies previously established by the teachers. In this sense, the portfolio is an authentic form of evaluation because it establishes a link between theory and practice.

The portfolio is not simply a qualitative and comprehensive assessment strategy; concerning grammar, this tool may serve the purpose of filing documents: practical assignments; the exercises asked for and corrected by the teacher; the term tests, among others. It may work as a portfolio of the whole process or a collection of all the papers completed on a specific topic. Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000) state that "the portfolio . . . has become an important concept in developing writing skills and in giving teachers a fairer and more perceptive way to evaluate" (p.159). Following Brown (2003), in the area of phonetics, "the portfolio can include video or tape recordings, and any other activities that teachers want to include" (p. 148). Among such activities, we can mention several transcriptions of one text, dictations of the same passage done on different days so that comparisons of multiple productions may allow for tracking improvement. Stress and intonation marking can also be conducted with working explanations of the choices made. This may facilitate understanding of the communicative value of intonation and its significance for oral communication.

### **Concluding remarks**

It is said that a picture can be worth a thousand words; thus, we can think of a portfolio as a kind of scrapbook or photo album that records the student's academic progress throughout the academic year. In this sense, a portfolio is often seen as a highly valid instrument for assessment, as it can provide a rich view of the learning process; however, the data in a portfolio, being often descriptive, context-bound and personal, ask for much interpretation before they can be scored. Lyons and Condon (as cited in Fahed Al-Serhani, 2007) claim that there are three basic principles, namely *collection*, *selection*, and *reflection*, which serve as the requirements of the success of the portfolio assessment implementation. The advantages of using portfolios include offering the students a concrete way to value their work, reflect on their performance, enhance their learning and autonomy, alter their view of the teacher's and their own role, encourage themselves to take responsibility for their learning, and get involved in the assessment process.

Portfolios work as a means of empowering students to become active learners and decision-makers in their own learning. As Gottlieb (1995) puts it, portfolios “serve as a guide for students in making choices and in understanding how they reason, create, strategize, and reflect” (p. 12).

Portfolio assessment makes for more authentic feedback, but it needs to be continued; otherwise, it becomes just another type of summative assessment. By applying the portfolio assessment system, teachers can obtain clear insights into their teaching. Consequently, teaching plans can be modified to improve the instructional process in the classroom. In this regard, the portfolio assessment strategy is found not to alter the traditional forms of assessment; on the contrary, portfolio assessment and standardized testing can intertwine and complement each other.

To sum up, we strongly support the implementation of the portfolio assessment system in the fields of grammar and phonetics, as it fosters student self-evaluation, reflection and critical thinking. In addition, it measures performance based on genuine samples of student work; it provides flexibility in measuring how learning goals are accomplished and facilitates cooperative learning activities. Finally, it provides opportunities for teachers and students to discuss learning goals and progress toward those goals in structured and unstructured conferences.

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# Workshops to help foreign language learners of English develop effective reading strategies

Area: Foreign Language Teaching

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## Abstract

The final objective of this study is to evaluate whether reading sessions for university learners of English as a foreign language help students become critical and effective readers of particular genres used in foreign language classes. In order to learn about the students' actual reading performance, we will implement reading workshops in which we will analyze the students' reading comprehension strategies. We will compare students' performance by comparing the results of reading tests administered before and after the teacher's' interventions. The participants of the study will be third-year university students (Facultad de Lenguas, National University of Córdoba).

**Keywords:** reading strategies - foreign language learners - genres

## Introduction

As reported by several linguists and researchers (Boccia, 2013; Carlino, 2005; Natale, 2012; Navarro, 2014; Morra, 2014, among others) the successful development of students' reading skills is achieved gradually. In order to gain this, it is necessary for teachers to intervene in practices that imply the application of reading comprehension strategies, which involve students' full reflection on the texts they read at school or university. In view of this, we have designed this investigation to empower our students to become effective independent readers through an intervention with concrete reading practices. The need for this research and for workshops is the faulty performance university students have shown to have throughout their course of university studies. In particular, results in exams, term tests and the teachers' perceptions of the way students understand texts have served as the basis for the present study.

## Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that has been used to anchor the present study derives from Rose and Martin's (2012) and Hyland's (2004) approaches to reading and writing specific genres at school. They postulate that there is an important social tradition that states that studying and handling particular genres that circulate within the different disciplines contribute to developing reading and writing skills. In this investigation we only look at the problem of reading at university, since we understand that, most of the times, writing well stems from reading well. It is our intention to explore the reading skills first and then move on to the writing capacities in future research studies.

Some of the researchers consulted (Boccia, 2013; Carlino, 2005; Natale, 2012; Navarro, 2014; Morra, 2014) foster teachers' concrete interventions when instructing students to learn to read. They state that apprentices need to follow steps to develop their reading strategies. They also indicate that one can learn by the sole action of reading but if one is taught strategies and tactics to read effectively, the process is reduced in time and gains efficiency. In this study we have considered most of the experts in reading mentioned above for the design and implementation of the reading workshops for our university students.

At the same time, Systemic Functional Linguistics and the Genre Pedagogy (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Rose & Martin, 2012) promote the reading and writing of specific genres at school, and postulate that there is an important social tradition that states that studying and handling particular genres that circulate within the different disciplines contribute to developing reading and writing skills. Within the Genre Pedagogy, in particular, these researchers reveal a cycle to approaching and teaching specific academic genres. The steps that should be followed to learn how to understand and produce the different academic genres consist of (a) the joint (students and teachers) deconstruction of a genre, (b) the students' imitation of the genre, and (c) the students' reconstruction of the same genre. These stages followed repeatedly push students to reflect upon the texts used during formal instruction (school or university), to internalize the constituents of the text under study, and to eventually produce an accepted instance of the genre. In this investigation we will focus on the first phase of this cycle, which implies solely reading genres conscientiously. After a full analysis of this phase, we intend to move on to the following stages – imitation and free production of the genre – in future research studies.

## **Main Objective**

The main objective of this study is to empower our students to become effective independent readers through an intervention with concrete reading practices. In the future we aim to encourage these same students to improve their written productions of particular academic genres. We support the idea that good and effective students' written productions will derive from effective readers.

## **Methodology**

The methodology proposed for the study has included reading workshops in which we have analyzed the students' reading comprehension strategies before and after the teachers' intervention during the workshops. In other words, we have tabulated the results of two reading quizzes: one administered the moment the students started the workshop (without the actual teaching of reading strategies) and another reading quiz after the teacher instructed students on good reading strategies to approach a particular academic genre. The results of both tests were compared, analyzed and discussed in depth. A survey on reading strategies was also administered to learn about the students' perceptions of the way they actually read these genres.

The attendants to the workshops and participants of this study were third-year university students (Facultad de Lenguas, National University of Córdoba) who are currently taking the Grammar II course. The teachers involved in the instruction of the reading strategies were the same

teachers in charge of Grammar II. They are well aware of the Genre Pedagogy, since they are also researchers carrying out a larger study on reading and writing workshops which use this theory to help students improve their skills.

As part of the methodology used during the workshops, students were provided with some prototypical models of descriptive and expository texts they use in their real classes. After reading them, they explored the rhetorical structures and the typical configurations of these genres. We expected that these students would read more effectively after these sessions, since they had to reflect upon the constitutive parts of these expository genres and also criticize the use of their own reading strategies. In the reading sessions the students analyzed and deconstructed the genres by applying concrete reading strategies, since we considered that this technique would help them discover the obstacles that might be blocking the comprehension of the texts. In future instances we expect that they will approach academic texts more successfully. After these workshops we aim to evaluate whether these types of reading sessions help students become critical readers and thus effective ones.

### **Workshops**

We have planned to implement five workshops of 80 minutes each. For this study we have only analyzed the results that stem from the first workshop so as to explore the preliminary results, polish up the different aspects involved in the implementation and continue having the rest of the reading sessions with a positive impact and thus making them as beneficial as possible. The workshops have been scheduled to take place once a month so that students have time in between to internalize and practice the new techniques when reading any text.

The reading material used is made up of the academic texts (expository genres) the students have to read and comprehend in their Grammar II course. The mechanics employed during the sessions is the following: first, students read half of a text (approximately a page long); second, they answer a reading comprehension questionnaire without any kind of intervention on the part of the teacher so as to be able to analyze their general comprehension of the text under study. Immediately after this task is carried out, the teacher administers a survey on the students' perception of their own reading skills. This is done to make students aware of their own reading practices. They reflect upon the way they actually read and self-evaluate their performance in terms of reading comprehension. Next, teachers intervene by going back to the texts the students have read, but this time the teachers make students share the answers with the rest of the participants and have them deconstruct the text by labeling paragraphs, underlining main ideas in each paragraph, and fully analyzing the different genre moves (schematic structure) that make up the text under study.

After the first part of the text is exhausted, students read the second part of the same text but this time they are supposed to use the strategies explained by the teacher in the intervention during the first part of the workshop. In other words, with this second text, in fact the second part of the text, students read and, on their own, apply reading strategies like labeling paragraphs, analyzing the title (or subtitles), considering the rhetorical structure of the text (grouping of ideas, moves, indicators of change of moves, etc.).

The reading comprehension questionnaires used for the first workshop were the following:

**Test #1 (First part of the text)**

**Reading Comprehension Questionnaire**

**Part I**

1. What is the text about? Answer in no more than 2 lines.
2. What does the ideational metafunction show?
3. What does the interpersonal metafunction show?
4. What does the textual metafunction show?

**Test #2 (Second part of the text)**

**Reading Comprehension Questionnaire**

**Part II**

1. What is this part of the text about? Answer in just one line.
2. Could you paraphrase in 1 or 2 lines the following extract?

*“Even within the same situation, language opens up a range of options and our choices acquire meaning in relation to the other linguistic choices that could have been made but were not. However, we should keep in mind that not all linguistic choices are appropriate for all contexts.”*

Both the first and the second reading comprehension tests contained questions of different types. The first question in each case was designed to measure information related to the students' capacity to understand general ideas; that is to say, it aimed to determine if the students used good skimming strategies. The second set of questions in both tests intended to analyze the students' scanning strategies. After the workshop, the teachers/researchers marked questionnaires with a scale 1–10 (1 being the lowest grade).

At the end of the workshop, after their comprehension was actually checked by the teacher together with the participants, the students themselves allotted a percentage to the understanding of the first part of the text (before the teachers' intervention) and to the second part (after the teachers' intervention). These two percentages were compared. Through this comparison, the students clearly noticed the difference between what they were able to understand just by reading the first part of the text using scarce or no reading strategies and the level of decodification of the text they gained after using the reading strategies deployed during the workshop.

**Deconstruction of genres: an example**

One key phase in the development of the workshop is the deconstruction of the text after a first reading. This step is part of a cycle proposed by the Genre Pedagogy and it comprises a set of strategies that empower learners to explore the “backstage” of a text. After this deconstruction phase,

learners feel confident enough to construct a text collaboratively – together with the teacher and peers – and to imitate the way in which a particular genre is organized (second phase); finally, they are ready to produce similar texts on their own (third phase). As mentioned above, during this workshop students were instructed on the first phase only. In future workshops the rest of the phases will be introduced gradually.

To carry out the deconstruction of the genre, the teacher provided students with the following text (in fact, the first part of a full article that is included in the students' reading packet for the Grammar II course):

*[Language is a meaning making resource. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Halliday, 1978, 2002, 2004) has developed a model of language in context that allows us to describe and explain its uses.]<sup>2</sup> [From this perspective, language is a resource for construing and interpreting meanings in the context in which they occur. Different aspects of the social context in which language is used, such as what is being talked about, the people involved in the interaction and the social relation between them, and the role language plays in the interaction have an influence on how language is deployed and are also influenced by language use.]<sup>3</sup> [In other words, speakers/writers use language differently depending on the 'topic' or subject matter, who they are talking or writing to (their status, proximity-distance), and what the work language is doing in a particular communicative situation. For example, we do not talk about sports in the same way we talk about medicine; if we talk about medicine, we will make different linguistic choices depending on whether our interlocutor is our friend or our doctor. If we are talking about medicine with our doctor, an additional dimension of linguistic choice will be whether we are interacting face-to-face, on the phone or via e-mail.]<sup>4</sup>*

After the first reading, the teacher drew the students' attention to the organization of the text in terms of ideas and also in terms of alteration of ideas. The whole group came to the conclusion that the text is divided into three main moves or rhetorical stages:

- 1) A general definition of *language* from a systemic approach
- 2) Elaboration of the general concept (detailed definition of *context*)
- 3) Rephrasing and clarification of stage 2.

The teacher also channeled the students' attention to the markers used to introduce a new stage like the connector *in other words*, which clearly signals that this upcoming stage will aim at paraphrasing what the authors introduced in the second stage when they mentioned *what is being*

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<sup>2</sup> First rhetorical stage

<sup>3</sup> Second rhetorical stage

<sup>4</sup> Third rhetorical stage



*talked about, the people involved in the interaction and the social relation between them, and the role language plays in the interaction.* The concepts of *what*, *who* and *how* are reintroduced in the third stage but explaining more in depth what is meant by the topic (what), participants (who), and organization of the text (how) in a language interaction.

The deconstruction of a genre helps students understand the "backstage" of the text and not only helps them to comprehend the text they are reading but also empowers them to dare produce a similar text when the time comes to writing. This phase of the full cycle should be repeated many times before plunging into the genuine production of a new text of the same genre.

### **An example of the survey on reading strategies**

After the students read the first part of the text, they were administered a survey so that they could reflect upon the reading strategies that they already handled and used when approaching texts. After the workshop the teachers/researchers marked the answers by considering the number of strategies that each student actually used. It is important to note that the questions that were tabulated for this study were the yes/no (1, 3, 5, 7, 9) and question 10.

The strategies surveyed were five. For example, if a student expressed that he/she explored the title before reading a text and found a main idea running through the text, he/she was graded 2/5, that is to say, that he/she was accustomed to employing two of the five strategies mentioned in the survey.

Below is the actual survey. It aimed at exploring the following reading strategies:

- Analysis of titles
- Skimming
- Rhetorical structure of the text
- Notes on the margin
- Fast reading

*Dear students,*

*We kindly ask you to answer the following questions. Your collaboration will be very useful in determining some of the difficulties that students experience when reading discipline-specific materials so that we can later design activities that might help students overcome them .* **For each question below, please circle the answer that best represents your opinion.**

1. Did you read the heading of the text before starting to read the text?      YES                      NO
2. If your answer to the previous question was "yes," how important was understanding the heading for the understanding of the main point in the text?  
Extremely important      Very important      Somewhat important                      Not important
3. Did you stop reading when you didn't understand something, for example, a word or expression, to figure out what that word or expression meant?      YES                      NO

4. If your answer to the previous question was "yes," how important do you think it is to stop and reflect on what you are reading?

Extremely important      Very important      Somewhat important      Not important

5. Did you find a main idea running through the text?      YES      NO

6. If your answer to the previous question was "yes," how difficult was it for you to find that main idea?

Extremely difficult      Very difficult      Somewhat difficult      Not difficult

7. Did you pay attention to the way in which the text was organized? In other words, did you pay attention to how the main idea was presented and explained?      YES      NO

8. If your answer to the previous question was "yes," how well do you think you could describe for somebody else how the main idea was presented and explained?

Extremely well      Very well      Not very well      Not well at all

9. Do you use any techniques or strategies when you read with the aim of understanding a text for your classes?      YES      NO

10. If your answer to the previous question was "yes," please briefly describe what you do when you read a text for your classes for the first time. You may choose one or more options:

- a. read the text quickly and then do a second slower reading
- b. stop after each paragraph and reflect upon it before moving on to the next one
- c. try to understand every line you read before moving on to the next one
- d. jot down the main ideas in each paragraph in the margins
- e. underline the main ideas while reading and then do a second reading only for those underlined parts

f. If you use other techniques, please write them down below or on the back of this page.

*We do appreciate your time and help in answering this survey.*

The objective of the survey on strategies was to compare the answers with the results of the reading comprehension tests referred to above; this comparison revealed important information.

### **Preliminary Results and Discussion**

The general results of the first workshop were compressed in Table 1. The darker color was used to highlight the general tendency, whereas the lighter one pointed out the exception. The students that participated in the workshop were 9 and each one was given a code (S1–S9).

*Table 1: General results. First workshop.*

| <b>SS</b> | <b>Q1<br/>Text 1</b> | <b>Q2<br/>Text 2</b> | <b>Reading<br/>strategies</b> | <b>Percentage of<br/>understanding<br/>Text 1</b> | <b>Percentage of<br/>understanding<br/>Text 2</b> |
|-----------|----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|---|---|
|           |                      |                      |                               |   |   |

|    |   |   |     |     |     |
|----|---|---|-----|-----|-----|
| S1 | 3 | 5 | 5/5 | 65% | 85% |
| S2 | 6 | 5 | 2/5 | 40% | 70% |
| S3 | 7 | 0 | 5/5 | 65% | 65% |
| S4 | 5 | 6 | 3/5 | 50% | 80% |
| S5 | 6 | 2 | 2/5 | 55% | 40% |
| S6 | 2 | 6 | 4/5 | 30% | 70% |
| S7 | 3 | 5 | 3/5 | 40% | 87% |
| S8 | 6 | 8 | 2/5 | 60% | 90% |
| S9 | 5 | 6 | 3/5 | 60% | 95% |

The scores in the first column indicate the results of the first test (Reading comprehension Questionnaire 1), in which the students answered the questions before the teacher's intervention. The second column (Reading comprehension Questionnaire 2) shows the results to the answers after the intervention. The numbers in both columns represent the score given by the teacher, who used a scale of 0–10 (marks 4 and above are equal to a pass). The third column compiles the results of the survey on reading comprehension strategies. The last two columns indicate the percentages the students themselves allotted to the amount of understanding for each text.

After the results were tabulated, we arrived at the conclusion that most students improved their reading performance after the teacher's intervention. Even though the sample seems to be small, we see that six out of nine students improved their reading performance with the instruction on reading strategies. Three students showed poorer results in the second test after the intervention.

It is interesting to note that most of the students that improved their reading performance as shown by the questionnaires also acknowledged the fact that they used several reading strategies, except for S8, who expressed that he/she only was acquainted with 2 out of the 5 strategies mentioned in the survey. Conversely, two of the three students who did not have a better performance in the second test demonstrated a poor use of the reading strategies mentioned in the survey.

The percentages the students allotted to each text also showed that the students understood the second text better after the teacher's intervention. In other words, the results clearly indicate that the students perceived that the instruction of the reading strategies implemented during the workshop was effective and helped them to better comprehend the texts.

## Conclusion

This study has shown that, at Facultad de Lenguas, undergraduates enrolled in the Translation and Teaching programs taking Grammar II have improved their reading strategies after taking a

reading workshop based on the Genre Pedagogy. The investigation has also demonstrated that all the students who participated in the study had a positive perception of the tasks carried out during the workshop. The results should motivate teachers of English as a foreign language to devote some of the time of their classes to teaching their students reading strategies, since that will possibly have a positive impact on the understanding of the material and thus on the learning process itself.

The present results are not enough to generalize or to plunge into a tendency; therefore, another similar study with a larger corpus is expected to be replicated with the workshops that have already been scheduled for this year. The results that will stem from them will serve to evaluate whether the meager results of this investigation confirm the fact that readers become efficient at university level after a good instruction on reading strategies. What is more, considering the analysis carried out in this study we may anticipate that after the implementation of the several workshops, students will internalize the use of the strategies taught in the first workshop and others that will help them become effective readers not only at university but also in other contexts. Moreover, a deeper analysis of the questions in the surveys and some more insights on the students' perceptions of the workshops should be part of future research studies.

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# Self-assessment in English Pronunciation at University Level: Preliminary Results

Area: Phonetics

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## Abstract

Self-assessment in EFL pronunciation can be conceived as both a learning and metacognitive strategy (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996; Ingels, 2010) that allows students to reflect on their performance, revise which aspects of their linguistic competence should be reinforced, and set learning goals based on this self-assessment (Ur, 1996). This paper presents a pedagogical proposal which includes self-assessment for the teaching of English phonetics at university level. In this work, we will describe the preliminary findings of the analysis of our corpus, identify students' perceptions of their oral performance and analyse those recurrent patterns that will guide our future research.

**Keywords:** self-assessment, English pronunciation, university level, students' perceptions

## Introduction

The teaching of pronunciation of English as a foreign language (EFL) presents certain challenges, especially at university level. From our teaching experience in this particular area, there emerged the need of incorporating learning strategies that could allow students to develop skills for becoming more autonomous learners and to adopt a more active role all through their learning process. With this objective in mind, a pedagogical proposal was designed in the form of a workshop. The target audience were first-year students enrolled in the English courses at undergraduate level at the School of Languages, National University of Córdoba. This pedagogical intervention incorporated an instance of self-assessment, which is conceived as a metacognitive strategy and as an instrument for learning that allows students to reflect upon their own performance, revise which aspects of their linguistic competence should be strengthened and set concrete learning objectives based on the findings of the self-assessment (Ur, 1996). In the present study, the results emerging from the analysis of the data collected from the instance of self-assessment are reported. The corpus was analysed drawing upon quantitative as well as qualitative methods. Finally, the pedagogical implications that the results entail are described.

## Theoretical Framework

### Self-Assessment in EFL Contexts

The assessment of foreign language performance has always attracted the attention of teachers and researchers in the field. It is a pivotal point in the area of teaching EFL and of teaching English as a second language (ESL)<sup>5</sup> because of the relevance of the data collected during the assessment process and the decisions and consequences involved in it. Those in charge of assessing foreign language students' linguistic abilities have a great responsibility, which confronts them with several questions and dilemmas that are not always easy to deal with. Studying and doing research on different aspects of language assessment in educational contexts will surely contribute to the transparency, objectivity, and fairness of this process.

In educational contexts, such as that of the present study, assessment of students' oral performance in English forms part of the teaching practice. Assessment is used to collect information that will later have an impact not only on students but also on the decisions made as regards programmes of study, course contents, teaching methodology, assessment and scoring methods and instruments, kind of feedback, among others. Measuring language ability through a test or examination is a complex phenomenon that involves a variety of issues that need to be considered simultaneously such as construct definition, test reliability, validity of scores, inter-rater reliability, fairness, consequences of test use, and test taker or background characteristics (Cheng & Curtis, 2010; Kunnan, 1995).

Even though English language assessment has traditionally been carried out by teachers, students can also be the ones who assess their own performance or their peers' production. In the last decades, following Falchikov, and Havnes and McDowell (as cited in Disasa Worabu, 2013), there has been a "shift from teacher-controlled assessment to learner-involved/negotiated through self and peer assessment" (p. 22). In the light of this changing world, where people need to become autonomous lifelong learners so as to keep up with the demands of the job market, self-assessment has gained a protagonist role. Bolívar-Cruz, Verano-Tacoronte and González-Betancor (2015) point out that teachers are the ones responsible for encouraging learners' autonomy. They claim that students "should be capable of giving and receiving feedback and assessing their own work and that of others, which in turn would increase their professional competence" (p. 22). If students are engaged and deliberately instructed in how to reflect and critically monitor and assess their progress, this may help them increase their independence and also boost their motivation.

Authors such as Boud and Brew (1995) and Geeslin (2003) define students' self-assessment as the process of setting criteria and judging their own learning process, especially their achievements and results. Results of research studies on self-assessment (Campbel, Mothersbaugh, Brammer C. & Taylor, 2001; Falchikov, 2005; Ross, 2006; Sebba, Deakin-Crick, Lawson, Yu, Harlen & Durant, 2008; Topping, 2003) show that it fosters deep approaches to learning; encourages the use of higher order cognitive skills; develops reflective and critical skills; increases autonomy, self-esteem, and motivation; improves on-task behaviour; and fosters commitment to subsequent performance and participation. It may also have an impact on schemata activation and integration and it may help

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<sup>5</sup>[1] Even though *second language* and *foreign language* learning environments are related to different contexts and, consequently, the amount and quality of input also differ, in this study the terms will be used interchangeably because the underlying fundamental psycholinguistic processes involved are similar in both situations (Bilash, 2009; Gass & Selinker, 2008).

students manage and direct their own learning process. In spite of the positive impact that self-assessment may have on learning, according to Luoma (2004), learners are rarely put in charge of rating their own performance.

### **Fluency and Clarity of Expression**

Defining what is meant by fluency and clarity of expression in the context of this research study is of prime importance. According to Richards, Platt and Weber (1985), fluency can be defined as "the features which give speech the qualities of being natural and normal, including native-like use of pausing, rhythm, intonation, stress, rate of speaking, and use of interjections and interruptions" (p. 108). These authors also claim that, in second and foreign language learning, fluency is used to characterize a person's level of communication proficiency, including the ability to:

1. produce written and/or spoken language with ease;
2. speak with a good but not necessarily perfect command of intonation, vocabulary, and grammar;
3. communicate ideas effectively;
4. produce continuous speech without causing comprehension difficulties or a breakdown of communication (Richards et al., 1985).

As regards clarity of expression, it can be defined as the quality of being easily understood, which is very much related to being 'comfortably intelligible'. The term 'comfortable intelligibility' has been widely used since it was first coined by Abercrombie in 1956. He defined it as "a pronunciation which can be understood with little or no conscious effort on the part of the listener" (p. 37). Brown (2014) states that the pronunciation of speakers who are comfortably intelligible may possess some features of the speaker's native language but not those that will impair wider international intelligibility. He goes on to add that comfortable intelligibility may be reached by focusing on features contained in Jenkins' (2000) *Lingua Franca Core*, among which the mastering of consonant sounds, vowel sounds, and stress patterns are highlighted.

### **Context and Participants**

The experience took place at the School of Languages, National University of Córdoba, during the second term of the academic year 2015. The participants of the present study included 45 undergraduate first-year students taking the course *Práctica de la Pronunciación del Inglés* (English Pronunciation Practice). These students have Spanish as their mother tongue.

As our teaching context is a public university where a significantly high number of students attend classes and there are few human resources able to systematically monitor students' performance in a detailed way, the development of metacognitive strategies is of paramount importance so that they can build up the skills for becoming more autonomous learners in the process of learning English pronunciation.

Thus, a pedagogical proposal was designed in the form of a workshop with a series of activities with a highly practical component. The workshop was divided into two parts. During the first one, students had to work with different exercises aimed at practising and revising key aspects of the

course syllabus. During the second part, students had to work with self-assessment with an *ad hoc* instrument (see Appendix B).

## **Methodology**

The instance of self-assessment was carried out with the practice activity of retelling. This is a skill that consists in telling a story (narrative) in English, and, according to the syllabus of English Pronunciation Practice, it is taught and developed during the second part of the academic year.

Regarding the materials of the present work, a story (see Appendix A), similar to the ones with which the students work in class, was selected for them to complete the self-assessment task. The procedure followed during the stages of preparation and actual assessment involved a series of steps. First, the students had to “prepare the story” they were going to tell. The instructors elicited, with the whole class, the strategies that could be put into practice previous to the telling of the story so that it would be easier to do it (paraphrases of ideas, search of synonyms for complex terms, dictionary work to check pronunciation of unfamiliar words, marking or transcription of certain words, etc.). Then, a period of 15 minutes was allotted to carry out this preparation in small groups, and another period of 15 minutes was devoted to the actual oral practice. It is worth pointing out that the objective of following this procedure closely was to raise students’ awareness of the importance of applying learning strategies and of the need to carry out systematic practice in order to develop the skill in focus.

Once this stage was completed, the students were instructed to record their oral production with any voice recorder app in their smart phones. They were not given indications as to how many times they were allowed to record themselves. The following step consisted in students’ listening and assessing their own performance. In order to do this, they were provided with a self-assessment sheet that had been designed for these purposes. The descriptors and rubrics in the assessment sheet were explained in detail to the students prior to the completion of the task. The worksheet provided involved three small sections. In it, the students had to register, first, the assessment of their performance globally; that is, they had to rate their fluency and clarity by choosing among “Excellent”, “Very good”, “Good”, “Regular”, and “Lack of fluency/clarity”. Next, they had to state whether or not they were satisfied with their performance, and were required to provide further elaboration on their answers. Finally, they were asked to mention positive aspects of their production as well as aspects that needed to be improved.

It is worth clarifying that, even though the workshop was carried out in English, for the self-assessment section, the explanations of instructions as well as rubrics and answers provided by instructors and students, respectively, were developed in Spanish. This decision was taken considering that the subjects were first-year students, so it was necessary to make sure that the instrument was clear for them and that the language of instruction would not hamper the process of self-assessment.

In total, a number of 45 students completed the self-assessment task. This constitutes the corpus of the present study.



## Data Analysis and Findings

In this section, the results obtained are presented in terms of frequency and some possible explanations that could account for the findings are provided. The interpretation of the findings has implications that are outlined in the following section and are considered extremely useful for future work in research as well as teaching practices.

When considering the ratings for fluency and clarity, in general, the categories most frequently employed were “Good” and “Regular”, for both aspects. None of the 45 students used the category “Excellent” to rate their fluency or clarity. This means that students perceive their overall performance as being average or below average; that is, they have a negative impression of it. This could be related to the fact that many students think that the objective of the course is to achieve native-like pronunciation, and so they measure their production against that model. Then, when comparing both aspects, fluency was perceived to be weaker than clarity (see Table 1). As the subjects of this study are first-year students and the activity of retelling involves producing spontaneous speech, there are factors other than pronunciation that are at play and which could hamper their oral performance, namely poor grammar or vocabulary. Then, apparently, these factors affect the students’ fluency rather than their clarity, or, at least, they consider this to be the case.

These interpretations are grounded in the distribution and frequency of the students’ answers, which can be observed in Table 1.

**Table 1. Absolute and relative frequency for fluency and clarity**

| Descriptor | Fluency     | Clarity     |
|------------|-------------|-------------|
| Excellent  | -           | -           |
| Very good  | 3 (6,66%)   | 6 (13,34%)  |
| Good       | 17 (37,78%) | 19 (42,22%) |
| Regular    | 22 (48,89%) | 19 (42,22%) |
| Deficient  | 3 (6,67%)   | 1 (2,22%)   |

As regards fluency in particular, most of the students (56%) considered it to be rather poor, as 49% rated it as regular, and 7% perceived it as deficient<sup>6</sup>. The remaining 44% had a more positive opinion, 7% considered it to be very good, and almost 38% rated it as good, but nobody rated it as excellent. Thus, the tendency was to be rather critical of their oral performance in terms of fluency.

Regarding clarity, the results are inverted. Fewer than half of the participants (44%) considered this aspect to be poor, since 42% stated it was regular, and 2% thought it was deficient;

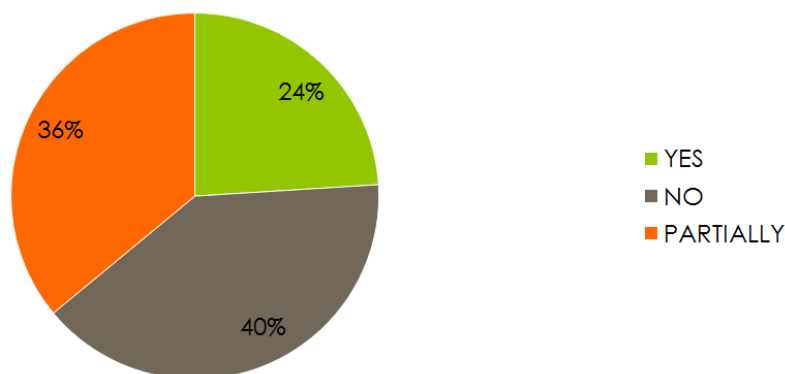
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<sup>6</sup> We use this term in the analysis of the data to refer to the ratings in the categories “lack of fluency” and “lack of clarity” present in the instrument designed.

while most of the students (56%) were optimistic – 42% judged their clarity in delivering the message to be good and 13% said it was very good.

The second section of the self-assessment involved the students stating whether or not they were satisfied with their performance, and supporting their answers. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the answers provided out of a total of 45, as this is the number of students that makes up the population of the present study.

**Figure 1. Degree of satisfaction with performance**



It can be observed that 76% of the participants expressed not being satisfied or being partially satisfied with their oral production. In fact, 40% stated they were not satisfied with their performance, and, among the reasons, the students mentioned lack of fluency, lack of practice, flawed pronunciation, and difficulty to express ideas. On their part, 36% showed being partially satisfied with their production, making reference, mostly, to the lack of fluency or to the need to improve the production in general. The students who claimed to be satisfied (24%) provided different reasons like good production in general, good use of grammatical structures or clarity in getting the message across. Figure 2 shows some of the answers<sup>7</sup> that the students provided .

**Figure 2. Sample answers from corpus**

| Why YES?  | Why NO?  | Why PARTIALLY?   |
|---|--|--|
| "Good production in general"<br>"I improved my fluency"<br>"Good use of grammar structures"<br>"Precise and concise production, intelligible message"<br>"The message can be understood despite the lack of connection of some ideas" | "Lack of fluency"<br>"Lack of clarity when expressing ideas"<br>"Flawed pronunciation"<br>"I need more practice"<br>"I'm very shy and this does not allow me to advance" | "There was improvement but still there are mistakes"<br>"I have to improve my production"<br>"I lack fluency; I get stuck frequently"<br>"I was quite clear when expressing ideas"<br>"I avoided difficult words and used synonyms or paraphrased statements"<br>"Fluency" |

<sup>7</sup> The answers the students provided were in Spanish. Thus, in Figure 2 we present the translations into English that we have done of them. We have included the original Spanish versions in Appendix C.

These findings accord with the pattern that emerged from the rating of fluency and clarity; that is, it is shown that the students are highly critical of their own performance. It is interesting to notice that some students assessed their language in general, rather than focusing on their pronunciation only, as it is evidenced from their comments related to grammar or lexis. This could show that they see pronunciation as integral to language, at least to language expressed orally; and that there are other factors that determine, or rather influence, the degree of satisfaction with their performance.

The last part of the self-assessment consisted in identifying strengths and weaknesses in their production. There were 43 instances of positive comments, and 4 students did not mention any positive points. On the other hand, there were 72 instances of comments related to aspects that called for improvement, and 2 students did not mention any weak points. The fact that the negative points overweigh the positive ones by 40% is proof, once more, of the disapproving judgement on the part of the participants.

For each group, positive and negative comments and the most recurrent aspects mentioned were identified in order to analyse them within each group of comments and to compare them across groups. At this point, it is relevant to state that different categories were created on the basis of the identification and grouping of recurrent aspects. Table 2 shows these categories together with their corresponding absolute and relative frequency indexes. The two most recurrent aspects in each group were highlighted.

**Table 2. Frequency of positive and negative aspects of performance**

| Aspect                   | Positive       | To be improved    |
|--------------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Fluency                  | <b>9 (21%)</b> | <b>23 (32%)</b>   |
| Clarity                  | <b>6 (14%)</b> | -                 |
| Retelling skills         | 5 (12%)        | 3 (4.2%)          |
| Pronunciation in general | 5 (12%)        | 9 (12.5%)         |
| Practice                 | -              | <b>11 (15.3%)</b> |
| Endings                  | 1 (2.3%)       | 9 (12.5%)         |
| Verb tenses/forms        | 2 (4.7%)       | 6 (11.1%)         |
| Vowels and consonants    | 3 (7%)         | 9 (12.5%)         |
| Weak forms               | -              | 6 (8.3%)          |

The positive aspects mentioned are mostly related with fluency (21%) and clarity when communicating ideas (14%). Regarding fluency in particular, it appears that it is an area very much in focus, as the students mentioned both that it was a positive aspect (9 comments) and that it was an

aspect to be improved (23 comments). This could be due to the influence of instruction, since professors highlight its importance on a regular basis, be it in class or during feedback sessions. Concerning clarity, 44% of the students had declared that they considered their clarity was poor; however, we see here that nobody claims that this aspect needs to be improved. The use of retelling skills and good pronunciation in general are in the third place, with exactly the same frequency (12%). It can be seen that the positive comments involve global aspects of their performance; that is, they are related with the performance in general rather than with elements at the microlinguistic level – production of segmental features in particular was mentioned only three times for vowels and consonants, and once in relation to endings. Moreover, nobody mentioned the use of weak forms as a positive aspect of their production, but 8.3% claimed it was an area that needed to be improved.

With regard to the weaknesses, we find fluency (32%) in the first place and practice (15.3%) in the second place. It is assumed that the students refer to the lack or need of practice, and it is interesting to see this course of action appearing in the second place, in terms of frequency, instead of an element from the system itself. On the other hand, this aspect is absent from the group of positive points. Then, this is a hint that students are well aware that practice is key in developing retelling skills, and that they are conscious of how much training they need, or, based on what they declared, that the amount of practice devoted to the preparation of the story was not enough. The following negative aspects mentioned were endings (12.5%), pronunciation in general (12.5%), vowels or consonants (12.5%), and use of verb tenses and forms (11.1%). It can be seen that, different from the positive points, the comments in this group pertain to the global performance as well as to the production of segmental features in particular, and one aspect involves the field of grammar.

The results of these findings gave way to a series of pedagogical implications that are detailed in the following section.

## **Conclusions and pedagogical implications**

After our experience, we were able to draw some interesting conclusions. First of all, the analysis of the corpora has shown that there is a marked tendency among the participants towards making a very critical evaluation of their oral performance. Most of the students who have taken part in this study rated their fluency and clarity as good or regular. What is more, none of the 45 participants have used the descriptor “Excellent” to describe their performance in relation to these aspects. Another related finding was that most students were not satisfied or were partially satisfied with their oral production. In addition, there were more comments related to the areas that needed to be improved than to the positive aspects of their performance identified. On the other hand, the students claimed that the lack or need of practice was an issue that needed to be addressed. Also,

many participants stated that their clarity in delivering the message was below an acceptable level; however, they did not include it as an area that called for improvement. Finally, it appears that the positive aspects of their production involve their performance in general, whereas the factors that affect it negatively pertain to the global as well as to the microlinguistic level, to a similar extent.

These results suggest the need for reshaping students' expectations about the goals and objectives established in the English Pronunciation Practice course in relation to what performance is expected. It is important to raise students' awareness of working on the issues that affect their clarity, as this aspect is very much related with gaining an acceptable degree of intelligibility, which, at the same time, accords with one of the objectives set for the course in question. There is also a need to work on the conception of error and its fundamental role in the learning process. Moreover, raising awareness about how to identify mistakes should be developed and practised with constancy so that students can work towards effective solutions to overcome them. Then, in order to meet the students' need of practice, extra activities should be designed drawing upon additional resources available, such as the virtual classroom, with focus on the features of pronunciation that were more recurrently identified as affecting their performance. Finally, self-assessment should be carried out systematically in the light of its contribution towards autonomy and the adoption of a more active role in the learning process on the part of students.

Beyond the useful findings that emerged from the present study, and aware of the possible limitations that it could have, some ideas for future research considering the notions of reliability and validity of self-assessment are outlined. Reliability "can be thought of as the degree to which test scores are free from measurement error" (Bachman, Davidson, Ryan & Choi, 1995, p. 52) or "the extent to which test scores are consistent" (Alderson, Clapham & Wall, 1995, p. 294). In order to measure intra-rater reliability, the same test may be administered twice over a period of time so as to correlate the results and evaluate consistency of the rating done by the same rater. This is called test-retest reliability. Following a similar procedure, the participants in our study could rate the same piece of oral production later in the academic year, so that it would be possible to see how the results from the two different instances compare. Another possible area for research involves inter-rater reliability, defined as the consistency between the scores assigned by different raters to the same performance using the same assessment criteria. In this sense, it would be interesting to establish a comparison between students' perceptions – through an instance of self-assessment – and instructors' assessment of students' oral performance in order to design efficient subsequent pedagogical proposals based on the findings

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## Appendix A

### Story for retelling

#### **To Absent Brothers**

An Irishman walks into a bar in Dublin, orders three pints of Guinness and sits in the back of the room, drinking a sip out of each one in turn. When he finished all three, he comes back to the bar and orders three more. The bartender says to him, 'You know, a pint goes flat after I draw it; it would taste better if you bought one at a time.' The Irishman replies, 'Well, you see, I have two brothers. One is in America, the other in Australia, and I'm here in Dublin. When we all left home, we promised that we'd drink this way to remember the days we all drank together.' The bartender admits that this is a nice custom, and leaves it there. The Irishman becomes a regular in the bar and always drinks the same way: he orders three pints and drinks the three pints by taking drinks from each of them in turn. One day, he comes in and orders two pints. All the other regulars in the bar notice and fall silent. When he comes back to the bar for the second round, the bartender says, 'I don't want to intrude on your grief, but I wanted to offer my condolences on your great loss.' The Irishman looks confused for a moment, then a light dawns in his eye and he laughs. 'Oh, no,' he says, 'Everyone is fine. I've just quit drinking!'

(Retrieved from <http://www.kidzworld.com/creations/19230-to-absent-brothers> on August 17th, 2015)



## Appendix B

### Self-assessment worksheet

- Listen to the audio for the first time and answer the following questions in Spanish:

**a) Califica tu fluidez y claridad para comunicar el mensaje. Subraya la opción elegida (1-5)**

**\* *Fluidez***

1. Excelente    2. Muy buena    3. Buena    4. Regular    5. Falta de fluidez

**\* *Claridad para comunicar el mensaje***

1. Excelente    2. Muy buena    3. Buena    4. Regular    5. Falta de claridad

**a) ¿Estás satisfecho/a con tu producción? ¿Por qué?**

.....

**b) ¿Qué aspectos positivos de tu producción destacarías?**

.....

**c) ¿Qué aspectos consideras que necesitas mejorar?**

.....

## Appendix C

### Answers from students

| ¿Por qué Sí?   | ¿Por qué NO?  | ¿Por qué PARCIALMENTE?   |
|--|---|--|
| «Buena producción en general»<br>«Necesito mejorar mi fluidez»<br>«Buen uso de estructuras gramaticales»<br>«Producción precisa y concisa, mensaje entendible, claro»<br>«Se puede entender el mensaje a pesar de la falta de conexión de algunas ideas» | «Falta de fluidez»<br>«Falta de claridad en la expresión de ideas»<br>«Pronunciación defectuosa»<br>«Necesito más práctica»<br>«Siento mucha timidez y esto no me deja avanzar» | «Hubo mejoras pero todavía hay errores»<br>«Tengo que mejorar mi producción»<br>«Me falta fluidez; Me trabo muchas veces»<br>«Fui bastante claro al expresar las ideas»<br>«Evité las palabras difíciles y usé sinónimos o ideas parafraseadas»<br>«Fluidez» |

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