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BENEFITS OF SCORING RUBRICS IN ORAL ASSESSMENT

Summary

What is the purpose of evaluation? Do we only grade our students because they have to have a grade at the end of the term, or does evaluation reflect other aspects of our jobs? How do we remain objective while we grade our students' performances? Is the grading transparent? This paper will draw a parallel between the purpose of assessment, objective and transparent grading, as well as meeting the learning outcomes and the use of rubrics to show the benefits of this authentic assessment tool. First, the paper will address the purpose of assessment and explain how the assessment of the students' performances can reflect our success as teachers. It will look into the validity and reliability of tests, touching upon norm- and criterion- referenced tests, and provide the readers with some tips on how to use the learning outcomes and standards set by the school or the Ministry of Education to write the lesson objectives. Then, the paper will point out the importance of fair grading and how rubrics can serve not only as tools for objective evaluation of oral exams, but also as proof of transparency for stakeholders such as parents, school administrators, or the Ministry of Education. Finally, in a step-by-step process, the paper will instruct teachers on how to create their own rubrics and how to use them to grade the students' performances in an oral exam.

***Key words**: Rubrics, Oral assessment, Fair and transparent grading*

PREDNOSTI KORIŠTENJA DESKRIPTORA TOKOM USMENOG PROCJENJIVANJA ZNANJA

Sažetak

Šta je svrha vrednovanja znanja? Da li učenike/studente ocjenjujemo jer na kraju semestra moraju imati ocjenu ili vrednovanje znanja odražava i druge aspekte našeg zadatka? Kako ostajemo objektivni dok ocjenjujemo sposobnosti učenika/studenata? Da li je ocjenjivanje transparentno? U ovom radu poredimo ciljeve provjere znanja, objektivno i transparentno ocjenjivanje, kao i ostvarivanje ishoda učenja i korištenje deskriptora, čime želimo ukazati na pozitivne efekte ovog posebnog instrumenta provjere znanja. U prvom redu ćemo govoriti o tome kakvu svrhu ima sama provjera znanja i objasniti kako ona može odražavati i kvalitet rada samog nastavnika. Zatim ćemo govoriti o validnosti i pouzdanosti testova, sa posebnim osvrtom na dvije vrste testiranja: testiranje "po normi" i "po kriteriju". Također ćemo navesti nekoliko savjeta o tome kako iskoristiti ishode i standarde učenja, a koje je definisalo Ministarstvo obrazovanja, za pisanje pripreme za časove. Potom ćemo ukazati na značaj nepristrasnog ocjenjivanja, na ulogu deskriptora kao instrumenta za objektivno vrednovanje usmenih ispita, ali i kao dokaz transparentnosti za sve zainteresovane strane kao što su roditelji, školska administracija ili Ministarstvo obrazovanja. Na kraju ćemo predstaviti neophodne korake za izradu deskriptora i upute za njihovo korištenje na usmenim provjerama znanja.

Ključne riječi: *deskriptori, usmeno procjenjivanje znanja, nepristrasno i transparentno ocjenjivanje*

Introduction

There is a difference between assessing and evaluating student performance. Same tests can be used for the purpose of the two, but it is the outcomes that differ. When assessing students, teachers actually share with them what they did well, as well as where there is need for improvement. If, for example, the students were assigned to do an oral presentation, a teacher may point out that a particular student did well on making eye contact with the audience, but that the student needs

to improve the vocabulary he uses, as well as use complete sentences when delivering an oral presentation. On the other hand, evaluation means giving the student a number grade for the work he has done. So, in case of the oral presentation, the only feedback the student receives when evaluated is a number grade such as 68%, while the assessment provides detailed feedback. Assessment is a better tool for expressing how well a student did as it provides the student with more detailed information on how well he/she performed, it is more transparent, and it allows the student to determine what he/she needs to do in order to improve the grade. At the same time, there are times when only the score matters, and the number grade is used to compare the student to other students for the purpose of college admission, for example. Using scoring rubrics, criterion-referenced tests, a teacher ensures that each individual student gets the necessary feedback and that the grading is objective and transparent. This paper will look into norm- and criterion-referenced tests, discuss test reliability and validity, and show how teachers can ensure transparency and objectivity when assessing their students' performance. It will also provide strep-by-step instructions on how to create and use a scoring rubric, as well as point out the benefits of using the scoring rubrics in oral assessment.

Purpose of Assessment

Assessing students' performance has several purposes. For one, grades are given to document academic achievement. They serve as a tool to share with the students how much they have achieved in a given field of studies. Most students aim at a high grade point average (GPA) because they want to pursue higher education, and because higher education institutions look at the GPA in the application process. By finding out what their grades are and which parts of the test they struggled with, the students can determine what they have not mastered and can focus on those parts for future tests. However, assessment is not only done for the purpose of documenting academic achievements. Teachers have other reasons for assessing their students' performance. One of them is to check if they, as teachers, have actually done a good job. A teacher can use the test to find out if he/she has transferred all the necessary knowledge to the students during the lessons. For example, if the

majority of students do well in a given area, one can assume that they have covered it in class and that the knowledge was transferred. If there is a part of the test that the majority of the students did not master, the teacher should think about the lesson(s) in which the given topic was covered and analyse whether the students struggled due to the teaching methods or the materials used in class. In that case, the teacher may consider changing the teaching method and/ or the materials. In addition to teaching and materials assessment, teachers can also use the test results to see if the curriculum they use is effective. If, for example, for several years the students perform poorly on a particular test, it is possible that the curriculum should be evaluated. Teachers can report the problem and see if it is necessary to make changes in the curriculum. Testing students can serve for academic documentation, but also to determine if the methods and materials used in class were appropriate, as well as if the curriculum needs to be evaluated.

Norm- and Criterion-Referenced Tests

Norm-referenced tests are used to highlight the achievement differences between students. Their main purpose is to classify students and they can be used as placement tests. The approach used for these tests is the "fill in the bubble" approach where the students do not express themselves in their own words, but select one of the possible answers as the correct one and "fill in the bubble" that corresponds with the answer they have chosen. If a particular test is taken on a state level, prior to the official testing, one group of students takes the test and their results become the norm, hence the name norm-referenced tests. Then the official testing takes place and all the other students take the test. Their results are compared to the norm, and the results are expressed in percentages. Schools in the United States of America often test their students, and the results serve to compare the overall knowledge that is acquired at a particular school on a particular grade level. All schools in the given state are then compared and the results show where there is a need for improvement. The scores do not influence the students' grades. Instead they are used to "grade" the school and the teachers on how well they transfer the necessary knowledge. Another area in which the norm-referenced tests are useful is student placement.

Colleges rely on the results of such tests to determine if they will admit the student or not. Of course, there are other measures, but every college and university in the United States of America uses the results of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), a norm-referenced test, as part of the college admission process, ensuring that they select the strongest candidates.

Criterion-referenced tests are authentic. They are based on real-life situations that the students encounter in their everyday lives. As opposed to the "fill in the bubble" approach that was mentioned above, these authentic tests allow teachers to assess the full range of higher-order thinking skills which require that the students construct responses to open-ended questions. For example, in an English language class, the students may read a novel, discuss it, create a play based on it, etc. Authentic assessment allows the teacher to grade all those activities, and thus motivate the students to continue the good work. It also provides the teacher with the feedback on how well he/she is doing – a teacher may notice that the materials that are used for instruction are very useful and will continue using them, but he/she may determine that the teaching approach used was not the best, thus deciding to change the approach next time a similar unit is taught.

Standards and Learning Outcomes

Standards and the overall learning outcomes are usually prescribed by the Ministry of Education and they need to be met. The curriculum follows these standards and the ultimate goal of every teacher is to make sure that the children meet these standards each year. When testing students, teachers should take into consideration the learning outcomes. For example, when it comes to oral assessment, the teacher should be able to check what is expected on a given grade level, and then create the lesson plans based on the expectations. If a given skill has been taught in class, teachers can test if the students have acquired the skill. The grades serve as feedback that the teacher gets, because they show if the students have mastered the given skill. According to the results, the teacher can determine if it is necessary to make any adjustments in the teaching approach or the materials used. This means that the curriculum and the learning outcomes that are set by the Ministry of Education are always a part of what the teachers do, be it in the instructional or the assessment part of their jobs.

Test Reliability

It is important to repeat that assessment is used to provide the students with feedback on their performance, while evaluation only provides the students with a grade. Teachers should try their best to use authentic materials, as well as teach authentic and useful skills, so that the students are engaged, but can use the acquired skills outside of the classroom. For the purpose of assessment, teachers can use scoring rubrics to ensure objectivity and transparency. Tests that are objective and transparent are also reliable.

Test Validity

What is it that you plan to test? How will you test it? Are you going to test what you actually taught? These are some of the questions teachers should ask themselves when they think of test validity. It is clear that only the knowledge and the skills that have been taught can actually be tested. Learning outcomes written in the lesson plans are always handy when it comes to creating tests. First of all, the learning outcomes should match the curriculum (this is checked when the lesson is being planned). Now, if the learning outcomes were used to create the lesson plans, then it is clear that this particular knowledge has been covered in class, and the teacher can test it. It is advisable to share with the students how they will be tested. There are many ways to test the students, and if they know ahead of time what the test will consist of, they will know how to prepare for it. All these aspects ensure that the tests are valid.

Transparency

Transparency assures better performance. If the teacher is straight forward and tells the students what the test will include, how it will be administered, and evaluated, the students are more likely to pass it. One is nervous prior to the test, and if the test is a surprise, the situation gets even worse. When the students are informed ahead of time when the test will take place, they can prepare for it. If the teachers share with the students what they plan to test, the students will know what to study and will not waste time on information that is not relevant to the given test. Some teachers choose to tell the

students what the test will consist of and how much each part of the test is worth. For example, the teacher may share that the first part of the test will consist of ten questions that are five points each, and the second part will be a five paragraph essay which will count as additional 50 points (10 points for each paragraph). Students would then know what they need to complete in order to get a passing grade. Such approaches to assessment ensure that everything is transparent, and the grades that the students get are rarely a surprise.

Objectivity

In addition to aiming for transparency, teachers should also do their best to stay as objective as possible. When assessing the students' performance, a teacher should be able to justify the grade. Scoring rubrics eliminate subjectivity.

Scoring Rubrics

Scoring rubrics are assessment tools that aid the teachers to fairly evaluate the knowledge and the skills of their students. By using scoring rubrics, the teachers not only give a number grade, but they also provide their students with a descriptive grade. Scoring rubrics are a handy tool that helps students understand what is expected of them, but also assist teachers in justifying the grades they give to their students. This is a criterion-referenced test as it focuses on individual students (not comparing them to others) and it is very authentic, because it evaluates the skills used in everyday situations. For example, students are expected to prepare an oral presentation, practice their speaking skills, and communicate the information to their peers. These skills are transferable to many jobs or an academic career. The feedback that the students get will be useful not only at that given point, but also in the future.

Scoring rubrics ensure objectivity. Teachers use a scoring rubric to assess the student's performance. The teacher circles the descriptors, which correspond with a specific score, adds up the score and then grades the student. This process ensures that the grade the student gets is objective – a teacher cannot circle that the student used new vocabulary and explained it if this was not the case.

It is advisable to share the scoring rubric with the students prior to testing them, as this helps them better understand what is expected of them. Students can then prepare their presentations using the guidelines provided by the teacher through a scoring rubric such as the one below.

Oral Presentation Rubric : Presentation

Teacher Name: **Jane Doe**

Student Name: _____

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
Preparedness	Student is completely prepared and has obviously rehearsed.	Student seems pretty prepared but might have needed a few more rehearsals.	The student is somewhat prepared, but it is clear that rehearsal was lacking.	Student does not seem at all prepared to present.
Uses Complete Sentences	Always (99-100% of time) speaks in complete sentences.	Mostly (80-98%) speaks in complete sentences.	Sometimes (70-80%) speaks in complete sentences.	Rarely speaks in complete sentences.
Speaks Clearly	Speaks clearly and distinctly all (100-95%) the time, and mispronounces no words.	Speaks clearly and distinctly all (100-95%) the time, but mispronounces one word.	Speaks clearly and distinctly most (94-85%) of the time. Mispronounces no more than one word.	Often mumbles or cannot be understood OR mispronounces more than one word.
Posture and Eye Contact	Stands up straight, looks relaxed and confident. Establishes eye contact with everyone in the room during the presentation.	Stands up straight and establishes eye contact with everyone in the room during the presentation.	Sometimes stands up straight and establishes eye contact.	Slouches and/ or does not look at people during the presentation.

Vocabulary	Uses vocabulary appropriate for the audience. Extends audience vocabulary by defining words that might be new to most of the audience.	Uses vocabulary appropriate for the audience. Includes 1-2 words that might be new to most of the audience, but does not define them.	Uses vocabulary appropriate for the audience. Does not include any vocabulary that might be new to the audience.	Uses several (5 or more) words or phrases that are not understood by the audience.

How to create a scoring rubric:

Each rubric has two main components, the categories and the points. Each category should have four descriptors. The first descriptor should be the highest that is expected of the students and it should be worth 4 points. The next step should be creating the lowest descriptor, which should be worth 1 point. The other two descriptors should be something in-between, and it is up to teachers how they want to word them.

The scoring rubric above was created using the website rubistar.4teachers.org. It is a very simple, step-by-step process and it provides the teachers with a template that can be used as it is or modified to meet teachers' needs.

Step one: Under "Create a Rubric" select the topic for the rubric (in this case "Oral Assessment"

Step two: Under "Oral Projects" select the type of project that you are assessing (in this case "Oral Presentation Rubric")

Step three: Fill in the rubric information

Step four: Select the assessment categories that you would like to use to assess your students (you can choose as many as you want, and the descriptors can be adjusted to your needs at a later point)

Step five: Once you have finished the selection of the categories, click on "Submit" and your rubric will open in a separate window.

Step six: Copy the rubric and paste it into a Microsoft Office Word document, so that you can make any necessary changes.

Step seven: You can now make changes in each category and in each descriptor that will adjust the scoring rubric to your needs.

Step eight: Once you have made the necessary changes, you can save your scoring rubric and share it with your students.

How to use the scoring rubric

During the presentation, it is the teacher's job to determine how well the student does in each category. For example, in the "Preparedness" category, if the student is somewhat prepared, yet could have rehearsed a bit more, the teacher would circle the description under number 3. In the next category, "Uses complete sentences," the student may sound choppy and only speak in complete sentences 75% of the time, so the teacher would circle the description under number 2. A student who does not use complete sentences will most likely mumble and mispronounce words, thus the teacher would circle the description under number 1. Next, if the student is standing up straight and establishing eye contact with the audience, the teacher could circle the description under number 3. Finally, if the student uses vocabulary that is appropriate for the audience, yet does not include any new vocabulary words, the teacher would circle the description under number 2. The numbers that represent the descriptions are the actual score that the student would get. In this case, the score is 11. The maximum score of this particular rubric is 20 (five categories, 4 points each). Based on this information, the teacher creates a scale. For example, if 50% is the minimum for passing the oral exam, the student would need 10 points to pass. With a total of 11 points, this particular student would get a passing grade, but not a very high one.

In addition to documenting the academic achievement of the particular student's performance in the form of a numeric grade, the scoring rubric allows the teacher to provide the student with descriptive feedback. Through it, the student will learn that for the next oral presentation more rehearsals are needed, that he should work on speaking in complete sentences, speak clearly, relax some more during the presentation, and use not only the vocabulary that is appropriate for the level, but also include some new vocabulary and explain it.

Benefits of scoring rubrics:

If at any point a parent or any other stakeholder wants to find out how well a particular student is doing and wants the explanation of why a particular grade was given, the teacher can use the scoring rubric to justify the grade. It describes the student's performance and even if this conversation takes place months after the actual evaluation, the teacher can explain the situation by reading the descriptive parts and explaining the number grade that the student received. Scoring rubrics are certainly a handy tool if one wants to ensure objectivity and transparency in the classroom. Additionally, a teacher may notice the areas in which the students need more work, and decide to concentrate on these particular skills in the future.

Conclusion:

Teachers decide which type of test they would like to use for which purpose. It is important to understand when evaluation is enough, and when assessment is a better choice. This paper has explained the use of both norm- and criterion-referenced tests. It has indicated how teachers can ensure that their students perform better on tests, as well as how teachers can use assessment to improve their teaching methods and possibly the curriculum. Finally, scoring rubrics were introduced, and it can be concluded that scoring rubrics are very useful when it comes to transparency and being an objective teacher. It is up to the teachers to decide how they want to proceed when it comes to assessing their students' performance, but the use of scoring rubrics will certainly make their jobs a lot easier once they become comfortable with them.

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