Abstract

In many ESL/EFL classrooms, instructors focus on formal assessments to evaluate students. These assessments are practical and useful in numerous settings and are familiar to students. While familiarity can facilitate understanding of the task, it can leave little room for creativity. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how an alternative assessment was designed for a literature based class. This methodology could be applied to a wide variety of classroom settings. Specifically, this paper will focus on how creation of manga can be used in conjunction with the framework of Bloom’s Taxonomy (2001) as well as the theory of an “open work” as presented by Umberto Eco (1989). Finally, suggestion will be given on how to implement an alternative assessment into a classroom.

Bloom's Taxonomy

Bloom’s Taxonomy is a method of arranging cognitive skills into categories in order to differentiate educational objectives. By categorizing these qualities, one may derive what purpose a certain assessment might want to achieve. These categories were originally purposed by Bloom to include: Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation (1956). A more modern interpretation has been purposed by Anderson et al. (2001) to instead be constituted as: Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze, Evaluate, and Create. Each category is further explained in the following way:

Remember: An item is recognized and is able to be recalled
Understand: Information can be used by interpreting, exemplifying, classifying, summarizing, inferring, comparing or explaining

Apply: The learner is able to use information to solve problems

Analyze: Viewing the information in its component parts and seeing the relationships between them

Evaluate: Learners make judgements about the information

Create: Using the learned information in a new or novel way

This is not a strict taxonomy in that not all of the previous steps are necessary to facilitate the highest steps (Anderson et al. 2001). For example, while it is necessary to remember and understand what you are learning in order to evaluate, it is not necessary to evaluate pieces of information in order to create something original. This flexibility in the taxonomy allows for students who may not be able to use the targeted information in one aspect of higher order thinking such as evaluating, to use it in another, such as creating. Furthermore, the construct of creating incorporates the synthesis of ideas. In the case of a literature classroom, this can take on the aspect of the reader merging one’s own experiences and knowledge with the target text for the class.

Open Work

The idea of the reader and the author being coequal partners in the action of reading a book was purposed by Umberto Eco (1989) in his book The Open Work. In this book, Eco suggests that the individual reading the book brings with them their own set of cultural norms and experiences to the reading of a text and it is by doing so that an individual creates or synthesizes a unique understanding of the text. In the case of an EFL classroom, the students reading a text in a foreign language will need to negotiate not only the
language but also the context and culture of author and text. For example, it would be very difficult to understand a text like *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Twain, 1996) without understanding the cultural aspects of pre-Civil War America as well as the regional dialects of American English. However, due to this temporal and cultural difference, there is a rich opportunity for students to create meaning for themselves about the text. This is not to say that there are not misunderstandings about the text or intent of the author but rather that in understanding the author’s intent of the text and your impression of that intent, the reader or student can create a unique interpretation for themselves.

**Assessment**

The challenge in an EFL classroom that is focused on developing higher order thinking skills, is to make sure the content and assessment are such that the student is able to full express their opinion. This particular case is set in a classroom of 30-35 first-year students. The students have a range of TOEIC scores from 200-600 points. This part of the course is focusing on reading the graded reader novel of *Frankenstein* (Shelley, 2007) with a final assessment of recreating the story in the form of a manga. The students are given the option to either retell the story in a different way by changing the content or the characters. This assessment has no upper limit for word count but all students are expected to exceed 250 words.

After creating their manga the students are expected to justify their choices in small groups. This portion of the assessment was scored informally but all students were given 2 minutes to explain followed by 1 minute for follow-up questions. The goal is to first have the students understand the text as it is as would be expected in the *Understand* taxa while justifying
their understanding of their own text. From this base of knowledge about the text, the students can analyze the text and evaluate which parts they would like to change or that they felt needed to change. This is not to suggest that all students traverse this path. Alternatively, some students approach this from the opposite and create a new idea they want to explore first and then travel backwards through the taxonomy in order to create something new.

**Drawbacks**

In traditional academic writing, there is a focus on form due to the end goal which is a standardization of information through convention. By using a manga, the students are freed from this requirement and allowed to create a story both entertaining and unique. One potential drawback of this approach is that there is no explicit vocabulary requirement for complexity. For example, it is perfectly reasonable to expect a student can tell a very interesting story with very limited vocabulary. This limits the students from being able to focus on form (Long 1991). Without this explicit instruction it is easy to imagine that students could be gaining more total language ability with more explicit instruction. This is constrained, however, by the amount instruction time that is available and therefore falls to the instructor to assign priority.

Another drawback is students with more artistic ability may feel more motivated whereas those with less may feel unmotivated. The purpose of the drawings is to add to the story. Therefore, no points are deducted for poor artwork but a small amount of bonus points are available to those who did excel artistically.

One last drawback is that there is a tendency for students to ignore
feedback from the teacher once they choose a certain creative path. While this is good for their engagement in the task, it does present challenges when the feedback is grammatical instead of semantic. This could be overcome by using drafts or peer-review.

**Conclusion**

This type of assessment may not be universally appropriate but it is universally applicable. If the goal of a certain curriculum is to prepare students for study abroad or an academic career, then more formal types of assessment for a primary assessment would make sense. However, this type of assessment can be used in a smaller context as a brainstorming activity in a single class context. It therefore can have merit in as a secondary type of assessment. Likewise, this type of assessment has several merits that may not be immediately obvious. When students are creating their manga they need to talk about the story, they need to talk about thinking and they need to explain why they made the choices that they did. All of these aspects force the students to think about thinking which is at the essence of higher order thinking skills. By emphasizing this aspect, students can develop aspects of their own thinking that will be applicable in future tasks as well.

**References**


