

Lora Petronić Petrović*
Center for Foreign Languages Lingva

PERFORMANCE-BASED AND AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT FOR CAMBRIDGE PRE A1 STARTERS EXAM¹

The aim of this paper is to present possibilities of transforming activities from English courses for Young Learners into activities which will help them become aware of the elements that comprise Pre A1 Starters, formerly known as Cambridge YLE Starters Exam. The proposed activities focus on two important aspects of an exam: the ways to minimize student-related unreliability and the ways to maximize test validity, to bring test format closer to students. It also considers important aspect of learning – background knowledge, since new knowledge is most effectively acquired by building on existing one. This has led to using alternative assessment as the most suitable way to implement prior knowledge, as well as make young students reflect on their own learning. The paper presents ways of self-assessment and peer assessment of authentic and performance-based activities as they best fit the student's book and portfolio tasks prescribed by the course book used.

Key words: self-assessment, peer assessment, reading, writing, speaking, alternative assessment, scoring rubrics.

1 The paper was presented at the 4th International Conference *Teaching English to Young Learners: Assessment and Learning*, organized by the University of Kragujevac, Faculty of Education in Jagodina, June 6, 2015.

* Center for Foreign Languages Lingva, Vlade Danilovića 40/1, 14000 Valjevo; lora.va@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Learning a foreign language at an early age began to gain momentum during the 80s of the last century, but unlike the classroom pedagogy that developed in parallel with the flourishing of this process, the same did not happen with the principles of assessment. In the first place, it is possible that the reason for this is to be found in the fact that this field required an extremely careful approach. Namely, there is indubitably certain apprehension that the wrong effects of assessment at an early age can irreparably damage the children's perception of their self-worth. Furthermore, grading errors could possibly negatively affect motivation towards learning. It was not until the beginning of the 21st century, hence, that early childhood assessment became one of the main topics to consider within the teaching and learning process. As Danijela Prošić-Santovac and Shelagh Rixon state, after more than 30 years, it has become evident that in addition to age-appropriate teaching practices, it is equally important to develop age-appropriate assessment practices (Prošić-Santovac and Rixon 2019: 6). This is best supported by the fact that one of the few books dealing with this topic at the international level, *Integrating assessment into early language learning and teaching*, comprised of sixteen chapters written by experts in the field, was published only in 2019.

In this paper we will present how we tackled this complex area. We begin with a description of international tests for children, *Cambridge Young Learners Exams*, which were introduced in 1997 by Cambridge English Language Assessment (previously known as University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations). We continue with the review of the "Lingva" Center for Foreign Languages from Valjevo practices regarding children who take this exam. We then present alternative assessment activities which are possible way to familiarize children with the grading criteria of the exam, as an important part of the assessment process. We include a description of assessment handouts and scoring rubrics, and the ways they were created and implemented in tasks. We conclude by identifying these activities as the examples of good practice which can be applied not only for testing purposes, but for all kinds of assessment.

2. Young Learners English Tests (YLE)

Cambridge Young Learners Exams are intended to children aged from seven to twelve, and cover three levels: Pre A1 Starters, formerly known as Cambridge English: Starters (YLE Starters) (<https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams-and-tests/starters/>), A1 Movers, formerly known as Cambridge English: Movers (YLE

Movers) (<https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams-and-tests/movers/>), and A2 Flyers, formerly known as Cambridge English: Flyers (YLE Flyers) (<https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams-and-tests/flyers/>). Tests comprise of Listening, Reading/Writing and Speaking parts, and they last from forty-five to an hour and fifteen minutes, respectively. Assessment consists in earning shields for each part of the test, and there is no pass or fail mark, as each child gets a Cambridge English award.

Pre A1 Starters is the lowest level in the system of the Cambridge Young Learners English Tests. Being below Level A1 on the CEFR, it is aimed to give children a good foundation for language learning, as well as show their parents and teachers how they are progressing in English. The score of ten shields indicates the minimum limit for preparing students for the next level.

3. Young Learners English Tests in “Lingva” Center for Foreign Languages

Young learners from “Lingva” Center for Foreign Languages from Valjevo have been taking these exams since their introduction in 1997. The age at which children in “Lingva” start taking the Starters exam is nine years old, considering that only then they master the Latin alphabet according to the formal, public-school program. The main materials for teaching used in classes are different course book series from renowned publishers, since not all students take this exam. However, official exam preparation materials, *Cambridge YLE Past Papers books*, are used as additional resources in practicing all skills and assessment of speaking for all students, as well as for preparation of YLE exam candidates in extra classes.

Course book used for young learners at pre-A1 level in “Lingva” during school year 2015/2016 was Oxford University Press *New Chatterbox 2* by Derek Strange. It comprises of *Pupil's Book* (Strange, 2011a) with fifteen units, and *Activity Book* (Strange, 2011b) with additional exercises and projects, and has two forms of assessment – tests and portfolio. Tests follow each three units and are aimed to assess pupils' knowledge through testing listening, reading and writing skills. Portfolio contains activities which assess speaking skill, as well as encourage students to reflect on their own learning (*Now I can* picture prompts), and the list of projects.

However, the task format in the tests and portfolio differs from the one in Cambridge YLE Starters Exam, hence the teacher, set herself two goals. The first one was to minimize student-related unreliability and the second one to increase

test validity, both to the maximum extent. The goal was to defeat possibilities of students being anxious or having “a bad day” by exposing them to exercises which would both bring test format closer to them and put them in the exam similar circumstances from the very beginning of the school year.

4. Alternative assessment

Taking into account previously mentioned characteristics of the Pre A1 Starters Exam, and the fact that young students should be prompt to reflect on their own learning, the author of this paper faced quite a challenging task. Therefore, her first step was to create ways of supplementing materials from the course book and portfolio in order to achieve her goals, and as the most suitable means to do that she recognized alternative assessment. She especially focused on performance-based and authentic assessment as they were most in accordance with aforementioned book and portfolio activities. Also, these two types of assessment best embodied the importance of background knowledge, since “new information is learned most effectively by building on prior one” (Gagné, Yekovich and Yekovich 1993; Jones et al. 1987 as cited in O’Malley and Pierce 1996: 17). Furthermore, they were also suitable since they intertwined in a way – performance-based assessment is considered “any product or behavior that you wish the student to create or display” (Evans 2009: 1), such as posters, songs or presentations, and “a means to give the students a context through which to acquire language skills” (Evans 2009: 1), while “an authentic assessment usually includes a task for students to perform and a rubric by which their performance on the task will be evaluated” (Mueller 2014). In other words, authentic assessment actually represents teacher created activities which assist students in recognizing both the learning process and learning outcomes beyond the “one right answer” approach. Also, in this way, students become familiar with the criteria and assessment from the moment they are given the instructions for the assignment.

Since one of the teacher’s primary goals was to raise her students’ awareness to what they should pay attention to when taking the exam, she firstly referred to *Cambridge Young Learner English Handbook for Teachers* (*Handbook*, in the remainder of the text) and its recommendations for candidate preparation. Secondly, also in order to raise the students’ awareness to what they should pay attention to when taking the exam, she opted for self-assessment and peer assessment sheets and scoring rubrics. Thirdly, she decided to use Serbian language for some of the forms in order to overcome the students’ limited proficiency in English as an obstacle in self or peer evaluation.

5. Self-assessment for reading and writing

Since reading and writing usually represent an introduction into each other or follow up activities one after the other, the self-assessment activities teacher created for this kind of exercises are further described below.



5.1. Reading assessment



The teacher based the reading assessment on an activity from the Pupil's Book. It consisted of a postcard which students had to read and match to the appropriate picture, and then answer its following questions (Picture 1)

Unit 6

A holiday postcard

● Read and match. Choose: A or B?

● Answer the questions.






- 1 Who is writing this postcard?
- 2 Who is she writing to?
- 3 Where is her family's hotel?

- 4 Where is she sitting?
- 5 What is today's weather in Spain?
- 6 What is her sister doing?

26 page twenty-six

Picture 1. Reading skill activity (Strange 2011a: 26)

Teacher expanded this exercise by adding a self-assessment sheet to it. The sheet was a list of five sentences in Serbian which students had to answer or circle cross (X) or tick (√) as the answer (Picture 2).

	Pažljivo sam čitao/la, nisam žurio/la da pročitam. ✓ X
	Prepoznao/la sam sliku po sledećim rečima:
	Znam ko piše razglednicu zato što
	Znam kome pišu razglednicu zato što
	O čemu je pisala Karolina?

Picture 2. Example of self-assessment sheet for reading activity (original)

These sentences were based on the recommendations for *Starters Reading & Writing paper* in the *Handbook* (2015: 10) where, among other issues, the next is stated:

Part 1 (...)

Give candidates practice in marking sentences with ticks or crosses to indicate whether they are true or false.

Part 2

Give candidates plenty of practice in matching sentences to pictures. (...)

Part 4

Candidates should be encouraged to read holistically for a sense of the text before trying to answer questions. (...)

Part 5

(...) Do exercises which encourage careful reading. (...) ... do exercises which encourage quick, accurate reading so that key question words are correctly identified and understood.

Hence, the students had to assess their own performance by completing and answering the next sentences and questions in their first language:

I was reading carefully, I didn't hurry to finish reading (✓ / X)

I recognized the matching picture by the next words ...

I know who is writing because ...

I know to whom the postcard is written to because ...

What did Caroline write about? ...

5.2 Writing assessment

Assessment of writing was created in a similar manner. An exercise for this skill, which was introduced after the previously described one, also included in Activity Book, instructs students to write an email from their holiday. Since students at this age have not yet learned how to write an email, the teacher modified the exercise as writing of a postcard. They had already been taught rules for writing a postcard in their first language, therefore, teacher decided to elicit students' prior knowledge orally, and thus reminded pupils of the rules before starting writing, as suggested by O'Malley and Pierce (1996: 175). In order to motivate them, teacher prepared pairs of pictures of different holiday places which students picked up randomly (see Picture 3). In this way, the teacher created writing prompts that covered vocabulary and structures done in the classes – who they were with, what the weather was like, what they did, what they ate and drank, as well as when to use and how to form the present continuous tense.



Picture 3. Example of the prompt for writing activity (original)²

For creation of this self-assessment sheet teacher was inspired by the Smiley Sentences Poster found on *All Students Can Shine* blog (Young 2012). Here students were supposed to draw a mini smiley face as a possible point to verify their work (see Picture 4).

List of sentences comprised five sentences based on the next recommendations from the *Handbook* (2015: 10):

2 Photo of *La Sagrada Familia* taken from http://community.fansshare.com/pic98/w/modernism--roman-catholicism-/369/14374_sagradafamilia.jpeg.jpg; photo of flamenco scene taken from <https://iberinbound.com/default/travel-origins-flamenco-assistance-iberinbound/>

General comment

Many marks are lost because letters and/or words are not clearly written. Remind candidates to check that what they have written is clear enough to be read by someone who is not familiar with their handwriting.(...)

Part 2

(...) Do plenty of exercises comparing and contrasting different structures and vocabulary related to pictures, for example, prepositions such as *in* and *on*, the present continuous tense, different sports, etc. (...)

Part 5

Train candidates to learn the correct spelling of Starters words. (...)

In order to assess their own writing performance, students' attention was focused on the next issues:

Others can read what I wrote

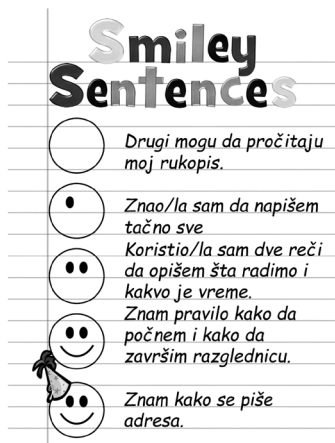
I spelled correctly all the words

I used two words to describe weather and what we are doing

I know the rule how to start and how to end the postcard

I know how to write an address

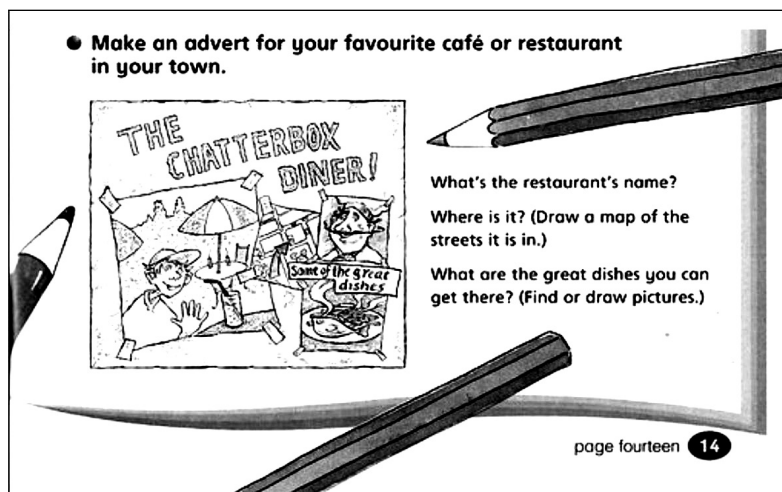
Example of this self-assessment sheet can be seen in Picture 4.



Picture 4. Example of the self-assessment sheet for writing activity (adapted from www.allstudentscanshine.blogspot.com)

6. Peer assessment for speaking

As mentioned before, the Chatterbox Course offers plenty of project activities, both in the Activity Book, or as a part of the student’s portfolio. Being “often an excellent integrated assessment, since they usually involve the use of the four language skills (...)” and since they “usually require some type of oral presentation” (Shin and Crandall 2014: 260), the author of this paper opted to use a project – a poster making activity for practicing and assessment of speaking. The pupils’ task was to design a poster of their favourite restaurant, to write its name, draw a map of the streets it is in, and name the dishes and drinks they can eat or drink there (Picture 5). The students made their posters in pairs, and the follow up and wrap-up activities were to orally present their restaurant and answer their classmates’ questions about it. The oral presentation consisted of telling the name of the restaurant, its address and telling what dish students usually eat there, while their classmates had to find out what the restaurant is like, and what else they could eat or drink in it.



Picture 5. Portfolio activity (Strange, 2011b:14)

Activity was expected to proceed in the following manner:

Student(s) presenters: “Hello, my name is Ana. This is my favourite restaurant. Its name is “Hemingway”. It’s at 12 Knez Miloševa Street. I like eating pizza and drinking apple juice there.”

Peers' questions:

“What colour are the chairs there?”

“Is it a big or a small restaurant?”

“Can you eat pancakes there?”

“Can you drink hot chocolate there?”

“What else do you like eating there?”

Students were instructed orally about what to ask based on the next recommendations from the *Handbook* (2015: 13):

General comments

Candidates in the *Starters* Speaking test are required to follow simple instructions, answer simple questions about a picture and about themselves.

Part 3

Candidates should also practice answering simple questions about a picture (with one-word answers). For example:

What's this? (elephant)

What colour is it? (grey)

How many elephants are there? (two)

What's the boy doing? (drinking)

In Parts 4 and 5, candidates need to feel confident that they can give basic information about themselves and can answer questions such as:

How old are you?

What's your friend's name?

Is your house/flat/apartment big or small?

Can you play table tennis?






What's your favourite colour/animal/sport/food?

For this assessment activity the teacher created scoring rubrics together with her students. They were explained that they would assess their peers' presentation and they were asked what they thought was important when presenting their work to others. The students' response was that “(...) the presenters should speak correctly and loudly, but that the audience should listen to them as well”. It is worth mentioning that the teacher was rather astonished by this observation, since her previous experience did not indicate that children at this age are aware of the fact that speakers should be listened to carefully.




Based on that, a table with following criteria was created and each student was assessed accordingly:

- If as presenters they look at the audience
- If they speak correctly and loudly
- If they answer the questions
- If they don't need teacher's help
- If, when in audience, they listen to presenters

The procedure of the assessment consisted of putting a tick for yes, or a cross for no, in the appropriate field of the student's row. The score of five ticks meant that the student's performance was great, four ticks meant good mark, and three ticks meant that the performance needs improvement. Example of the speaking assessment rubrics is given in the Picture 6.

NAME OF THE STUDENT	LOOKS AT AUDIENCE 	SPEAKS LOUDLY AND CORRECTLY 	ANSWERS THE QUESTIONS 	DOESN'T NEED TEACHER'S HELP 	LISTENS TO PRESENTERS 

√ - YES X - NO

 (= 3√ + 2X) OK (NEEDS IMPROVEMENT)	 (= 4√ + 1X) GOOD	 (= 5√) GREAT
---	---	---

Picture 6. Scoring rubrics for the speaking (original)

7. Conclusion

The author of this paper presented the way she used available resources to create additional materials for successful preparation of young learners for their first encounter with official way of examination. She applied student-focused approach through assessment procedures which helped her raise her students' awareness about important aspects of Cambridge English Pre A1 Starters Exam, and thus decrease the possibility of student related unreliability in the tests. She also took

into consideration the fact that the age of eight is the minimum age when students are able to reflect on their own learning (Shin and Crandall 2014: 216). The activities she created represent an example of how any course material could be adapted for testing purposes, and how the exam requirements can be successfully integrated into learning programmes. To conclude, it is worth mentioning that seeing themselves as assessors was a great motivational factor for young learners.

Literature

- Cambridge English: Starters (YLE Starters) | Cambridge English. [<http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams/young-learners-english/starters/>]
- Cambridge Assessment English: *Cambridge English Qualifications. Pre A1 Starters, A1 Movers and A2 Flyers. Handbook for Teachers*. [<http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/images/153612-yle-handbook-for-teachers.pdf>]
- Evans 2009: D. Evans, *The end product: Doug Evans looks at performance assessment in the EFL classroom. (Practical ideas) (English as second language)*. Cengage Learning, HighBeam Business.
- Mueller 2014: J. Muller, What is authentic assessment? (Authentic assessment toolbox). Jon Mueller. [<https://jfmuller.faculty.noctrl.edu/toolbox/whatisit.htm>]
- O'Malley and Pierce 1996: J. M. O'Malley, L. V. Pierce, *Authentic assessment for English language learners: Practical approaches for teachers*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.
- Prošić-Santovac and Rixon 2019: D. Prošić-Santovac, S. Rixon (eds.), *Integrating assessment into early language learning and teaching*. Multilingual Matters.
- Shin and Crandall 2014: J. K. Shin, J. A. Crandall, *Teaching young learners English: From theory to practice*. Boston: National Geographic Learning.
- Strange 2011a: D. Strange, *Chatterbox: Pupil's book 2*. (Oxford English.) Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Strange 2011b: D. Strange, *New chatterbox 2: Activity book*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Young 2012: V. Young, *All students can shine*. [<http://www.allstudentscanshine.com/>]

Лора Петронић Петровић

ПРОЦЕНА ЗНАЊА ЗАСНОВАНА НА ПЕРФОРМАНСИ И АУТЕНТИЧНО ОЦЕЊИВАЊЕ ЗА КЕМБРИЦ А1 ИСПИТ ЗА ДЕЦУ

Резиме

Циљ овог рада је да представи могућности преиначавања активности из уџбеника енглеског језика за децу у активности које ће им помоћи да постану свесни карактеристика Кембриц испита за децу (*Pre A1 Starters* првобитно назван *Cambridge YLE Starters Exam*). Предложене активности се фокусирају на два важна аспекта испита: начине да се што више умањи могућност подбачаја ученика и начине да се повећа валидност теста, односно да се формат теста што више приближи ученицима. Такође, разматра се важан аспект учења – основно знање, јер се нова знања најефикасније стичу надоградњом на постојећа. Претходно наведено довело је до тога да се алтернативно оцењивање користи као најпогоднији начин за примену већ постојећих знања, као и да се деца наведу да размишљају о сопственом учењу. У раду су представљени начини самооцењивања и вршњачке процене аутентичних и на учинку заснованих активности на такав начин да најбоље одговарају задацима из уџбеника и портфолија који су прописани уџбеником који се користи.

Кључне речи: самооцењивање, вршњачко оцењивање, читање, писање, говор, алтернативно оцењивање, табеле за оцењивање.