

LANGUAGE

English as a foreign language

TARGET

Primary School, Sixth Class.



USING THE OXFORD YOUNG LEARNERS PLACEMENT TEST TO KEEP AN EYE ON PROGRESS

Dans la compilation de deux extraits tirés de son blog, Denise Kündig décrit, en premier lieu, comment elle a utilisé le *Oxford Placement Test* comme partie de son évaluation annuelle avec des élèves de 7ème année H: les élèves ont pu s'évaluer deux fois au cours de l'année et ainsi mesurer leurs progrès selon un test standard. Dans le second extrait de son blog, elle nous montre comment utiliser *Lehreroffice* (un outil pour enregistrer les performances des élèves et monitorer leurs progrès, cf. <http://www.lehreroffice.ch/>) avec cette même classe.

● Denise Kündig | Zürich

Denise Kündig is a primary school teacher in Zürich and lives in the canton of Thurgau. Her blog can be found at:

<http://kuendigsbachelorthesis.blogspot.ch/>



Blog entries on The Oxford Young Learners Placement Test

At the beginning of the 2015–2016 school year, my class took the Oxford Young Learners Placement Test. This placement test tests the students' abilities in "language use" and "listening" and marks it with a pre-A1 to B1 CEFR (Common European Framework Reference). Oxford emphasizes that the test results are NOT official Oxford certificates and that it's only an indication. If you take the test yourself, you'll know why. It's really short and it's meant to be child-friendly and motivating rather than demanding and difficult. But that was just perfect for my sixth grade class!

According to the curriculum of most German-speaking cantons in Switzerland, the aim in receptive skills such as listening and reading by the end of primary school is A2.1 (basic) to A2.2. (advanced). The same is true for oral production skills such as speaking and communicating. The expected written productive skills are A1.2 (basic) to A2.1 (advanced).

So I told the class that they would be doing an exercise on the computer and

that they should try their best but not worry if they didn't understand it all. I prepared all the computers in the media room for them so they could just come in, log in and start with the test. To keep this anonymous, I cut off the names in the results shown in Figure 1.

The first thing I noticed was that 10 out of 17 learners scored at a B1 level and almost all of the others at A2 which meant that they have already reached the level they should have after sixth grade. But how can this be if they cannot speak at all? I don't mean to be rude but so far I have not heard one correct sentence from them. Then I saw that I could split the results and see how they did in "language use" and "listening" and now it started to make a little more sense. So really all except for two reached a B1 there. So this is good to know: They can understand spoken English!!! In "language use" they are between B1 and A1. It's amazing to see that one child is so much better in this category than he is in listening. So there is so much potential in this class and my focus will definitely be on speaking and producing English because that's what

they struggle with the most. You can find more information about how I focused my instruction on this throughout the rest of the year in my blog (<http://kuendigs-bachelorthesis.blogspot.ch/>). It's a pity, though, that I don't have any tests on their speaking ability to see how they will improve there!

Performance on the test five months later

After a lot of hard work, trying out the Birkenbihl translation approach (see Birkenbihl, 2011 or Fairbanks, 2006) and many other ideas, five months later, at the end of the first term, I administered the second Oxford Young Learners Placement Test to my class. I tried a test the day before because I didn't want to stand in front of the class not knowing how they should log in or what was going to happen. And I started worrying about how the class would do because there were topics in there we didn't cover at all like the use of the past tense, prepositions and so on and some of the questions were tricky. But still, I wanted to do this test again but it was kind of good seeing what those questions were about.

13 of my 17 students took the test. What interested me most was their change of level and points since the first exam (see the 'change' column in Figure 1).

Language Use

What does not bother me at all are the -10 of this one child. He's the one who is exempt from the learning targets and the A2 level he had achieved was probably just lucky guessing. He even told me after the test that he had no clue in the first part of the test and just guessed the answers and that's ok. What does hurt is the -8, the -2 and even the +1 because that's not much of a change. The -8 is a girl who is having a hard time at the moment when it comes to taking tests but that's no excuse at all.

The only thing that's consoling me a little is that all three were B1 and are still B1 so there level was already rather high.

Then I have three more changes that are a little below average 7, 9, and 9 BUT all those three kids have made it to the maximum! They have changed from a high level to an even higher. So they all achieved a B1+ now. Then I got +16, +16, and +17 which I think is pretty amazing and what even strikes me are +24, +31 and +45!!! Wow, one girl had 31 points in her first test and 76 in her second. That's from A1 to B1 in half a year.

Listening

In the listening, I didn't get a single negative result. One child who made such progress in language Use got the same points for listening. But in listening, pretty much all of them had a B1 in the first test so there was not much to improve there but still, all of them are above 70 points even 8 have 79 and above. The only child that didn't get a B1 last time improved the most so she made it from an A2 to a B1+. This one child who is freed of learning targets had improved by 25 points too but I don't really know how I should weigh that. Was it just luck or did he really profit that much? Well I cannot ignore his -10 in Language Use and then say that his +25 in listening was because I did a good job. I'll just let that stand there.

Average

On average, all of them have improved. Some a little more and some a little less. It's interesting though how some improved tremendously in one part and stagnated in

Figure 1: End of term test results
(February 2016)

*August 2015/ **February 2016



Language Use Scores:					Listening Scores:					Average Scores:				
Score1*	Level1*	Score2**	Level2**	Change	Score1*	Level1*	Score2	Level2	Change	Score1*	Level1*	Score2**	Level2**	Change
71	B1	80	B1+	9	79	B1	80	B1+	1	75	B1	80	B1+	5
71	B1	80	B1+	9	71	B1	80	B1	9	71	B1	80	B1+	9
73	B1	80	B1+	7	55	A2	80	B1+	25	64	B1	80	B1+	16
52	A2	76	B1	24	71	B1	81	B1+	10	62	B1	78	B1	16
62	B1	78	B1	16	71	B1	76	B1	5	67	B1	77	B1	10
31	A1	76	B1	45	75	B1	75	B1	0	53	A2	76	B1	23
70	B1	68	B1	-2	60	B1	80	B1	20	65	B1	74	B1	9
65	B1	66	B1	1	76	B1	79	B1	3	70	B1	73	B1	3
50	A2	67	B1	17	70	B1	79	B1	9	60	B1	73	B1	13
71	B1	63	B1	-8	67	B1	80	B1+	13	69	B1	72	B1	3
38	A1	54	A2	16	70	B1	73	B1	3	54	A2	64	B1	10
24	A1	55	A2	31	61	B1	70	B1	9	42	A2	63	B1	21
51	A2	41	A2	-10	14	A0	39	A1	25	32	A1	40	A1	8
average change				11,92	average change				10,15	average change				11,23

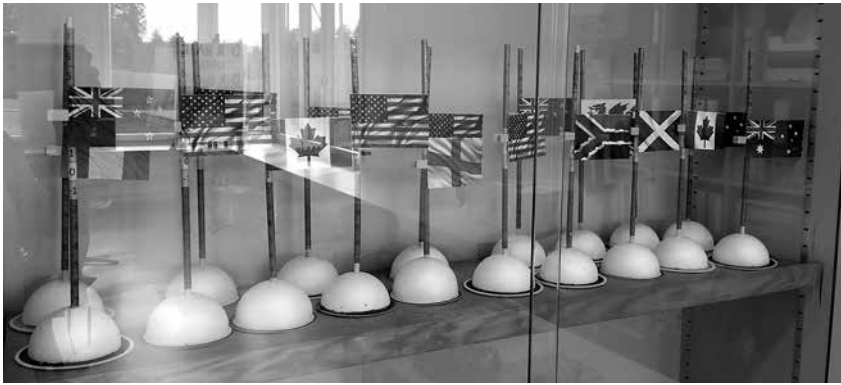
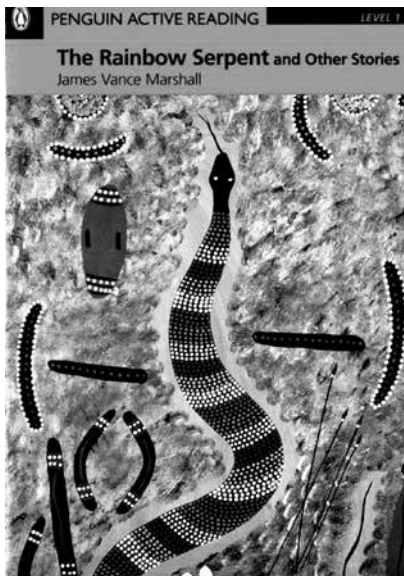


Image 1: Motivation and awareness to stick to the target language



References

- Birkenbihl, V. (2010). *Sprachenlernen leichtgemacht: Die Birkenbihl-Methode Fremdsprachen zu lernen*. München: mvg-Verlag.
- Fairbanks, N. (2006). *The Birkenbihl Approach: Brain-Friendly Accelerated Language Learning*. SpeakEZ Languages.
- Marshall, J. (2008). *Rainbow Serpent: Level 1*. Penguin.
- Oxford University Press. *Oxford Young Learners Placement Test*. Available at: <https://www.oxfordenglishtesting.com/>

the other. But overall I'm happy with the outcome of the test especially since I have seen that it can be tricky and that we have not covered all of those topics that were asked for in the Language Use part. If it actually takes a learner some 170-200 guided learning hours to get from an A2 level to a B1 level then I dare say that with about 30-40 hours' worth English lessons in half a year of public school (2 lessons at 45 minutes a week for about 20 weeks=30 hours) this is not a bad outcome at all and it is motivating for myself and for the learners to see their progress!

Blog entries on Grading in Lehreroffice

In this example, I provide you with my grading policy for the first two units of the year (August/September 2015) with my sixth graders. Generally, I group grades into projects or Units. In this example, the first project was reading the Rainbow Serpent Story (Marshall, 2008), the next was Unit 1 including the tests from the teaching material and the vocabulary test I made myself (gap fill and sentence transition). Question Formation will be an upcoming project too, but we've only had one small test so far. I tried to compare the weight of those projects and came up with the number 5 for a whole Unit or theme.

> For the Rainbow Serpent reading project, where learners had to work with various easy readers in different ways, I thought that this was a rather big project but not as big as the whole Unit 1 was so I gave it a weight of 4. I entered the grades in the "Lehreroffice" once for a speaking test with a weight of 3 and once for a reading test with a weight of 1. Most of what I graded was their fluency, accuracy and pronunciation but without really understanding the text (reading comprehension) they would not have been able to answer the

questions they were asked after reading. This is why I gave the reading a weight of 1 even though it was mainly a speaking test.

> For Unit 1 I weighted the vocabulary test just with 1 and the two tests out of the teaching material with 2 each for a total of 5. Why did I do that? I don't think that the grade of a vocabulary test says much about understanding the unit or the actual language skills. It's just a question of effort and cramming. You can do well on a vocabulary test without being able to say one sentence correctly AND you can do very poorly in a vocabulary test and still participate in conversations. For all three tests in Unit 1, I also gave reading grades, because I think that even if it is listening comprehension, the kids can only tick the right answer if they were able to read and understand the statement they had to judge. This was the same thing for the questions on the use of *much* or *many*. If they had not been able to read and understand the provided response sentence (such as "There are three gallons of milk in the fridge"), they would not have been able to write a decent question (such as "How much milk is there in the fridge"). Though the children only saw one grade for this, because we are expected to separate grades into the four skills for the report cards, I split up scores into different categories (reading, writing, speaking and listening) in our Lehreroffice tool so to create a more fair and differentiated assessment of my learners.

> And then there are just the Bits and Pieces Project of other things that I tested and recorded, like the good morning conversations every day, sticking to the aim of speaking English and raising the flag on the pole (Image 1: when they are speaking too much German for reasons that are not instructional, I lower the flags). I just gave these pieces a 1 for right now, at the beginning of the year, in speaking.

My way of teaching is more about understanding and using the language than cramming for a test and that's good for some but maybe bad (when it comes to the grades) for others... But isn't this what language learning is all about? To be able to use it? Thus I find myself entering different points and comments into different categories for the same test or performance assessment into Lehreroffice.