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Online Evaluation Software in Writing Courses

Experimental syllabus design developed as part of the SELHI project: Writing for 11th graders

Problems with the standard syllabus:

' Accumulated entities' approach to language learning. Controlled practice = form to meaning. Dependence on/ encouragement of a transference of L1 structural features.

Proposed solutions:

Addition of chances for free production:

Original example sentences

Secret Friend Journals

'Criterion' online timed essay evaluation software

Things added to the 'Criterion' lessons:

Process writing. (Plan > Draft > Revise)

Input of writing of the same genre, on the same topic. ('Quizlab' online software)

Explicit instruction on essay stucture: (Intro-Thesis-Support-Conclusion)

Grammar beyond the sentence level. (Combined with relevant input using 'quizlab')

The 'Criterion' site:

1) Student answers an essay question within a time limit and clicks 'Submit this essay'.

2) Student receives a 'holistic score' of 1 though 6   (Very motivating, the best feature)

3) Student clicks further and receives 'Trait Feedback Analysis' in 5 categories (unreliable)

Other features:

Students may view classmates' essays if instructor enables the function.

Instructor may add comments to individual essays.

Instructor may adjust/edit functions and create original essay questions freely.

*Instructor created essay questions will **not** produce the 1-6 'holistic score'.

Feedback issues / alternatives:

For revision, feedback on **content** is more effective then feedback on form.

Peer review (easy with the software, but learners may be uncomfortable about receiving criticism from peers)

Verbal feedback from instructor. (Time limitations in a H.S. setting)

Results: Learners preferred these procedures (Criterion) to the standard syllabus and showed improvement. 'Criterion' is effective when an integral part of a writing course, not when it is the basis for one. (problems with feedback, and salience of other functions)