

Assessment

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The statutory requirements for assessing pupils with EAL is the same as that for pupils with English as a first language. Teachers are required to use the National Curriculum English attainment levels for the assessment of the English language development of pupils with EAL, although a modification to the attainment levels in [A Language in Common](#) (QCA, 2000) introduced pre-National Curriculum 'steps' and allowed for subdivision of NC English Level 1. Many schools are currently involved in using Assessing Pupil Progress materials in order '*to link classroom assessment reliably to NC levels*'.

EAL is not a uniform phenomenon at the level of individual pupils. Some pupils with EAL are bi/multilingual local young people with (relatively) long experience of residency. These pupils tend to have a working knowledge of local ways of using English, particularly in the spoken mode in informal social contexts. Others arrive at school from Europe and other world locations with some knowledge of the English language but they have little experience with the use of English for a variety of personal, social and academic purposes. Yet others join school as absolute beginners of English and new comers to local British culture. These latter groups of pupils have different language and literacy learning needs from those who are already long term residents in local communities. Teachers have found that it is very important to identify the distinct types of pupil English language needs with reference to different ages, language backgrounds/levels of English proficiency, educational experiences, and community contexts through assessment. While it is understood that the use of any assessment criteria will yield a result, the issue is whether the assessment result is summatively meaningful and formatively useful (for responding to pupil needs). Our experience tells us that effective assessment of EAL development, particularly for formative purposes, requires specialist professional knowledge and practice. [NALDIC has recently trialled descriptors](#) for formative assessment in KS1 and KS2.

Recent research in educational measurement has shown that well-planned and pupil-oriented formative assessment, sometimes referred to as 'assessment for learning', can have a very beneficial effect on learning (for example see the [QCA Assessment for Learning](#) website at <http://www.qca.org.uk/10009.html>). Formative assessment is carried out by teachers in the classroom and is directly concerned with improving pupils' learning. Sensitive formative assessment of pupils' classroom performance demands a high level of teacher awareness of pupil needs. Given the very diverse language experiences and language learning needs of the different groups EAL pupils, account needs to be taken of not just the 'nuts and bolts' of the English language, e.g. vocabulary, pronunciation and word order, but also the even more complex and less 'visible' aspects of language use. These include social rules of language use (e.g. politeness and formality in context), use of literary and metaphoric language expressions for different purposes, subject specific registers, established and taken-for granted social ways of doing things through language in school and in the local community (e.g. conventionalised ways of offering information during circle time, collaborative talk in group tasks).

The complex issues in assessing pupils learning EAL have been debated in recent years. Since the late 1980s, many local authority EAL specialist teams have devised schemes to describe the developmental stages of English language acquisition and to identify some of the less visible pupil gains and needs. An early example of such schemes is the Stages of English (see Hester, 1990). Another example is the EAL assessment system produced by NASSEA. It has been argued that these help teachers to identify the progress learners make in their acquisition of English and that they are a useful means of ensuring that the distinctive learning situation of pupils with EAL is taken into account. However, as is indicated above, the current official view in England is that only the level descriptors for the NC subject English (with the additions set out in 'A Language in Common') should be used. The fundamental issue is whether specific descriptors relating to the acquisition of English for pupils learning EAL in mainstream schools are necessary or not. Put differently, would a set of commonly applied assessment criteria (mainly normed to the mainstream mother-tongue English pupils) be educationally adequate for different groups of linguistically diverse pupils? For an alternative view, see the [NALDIC position statement](#) (NALDIC, 2003).

Student teachers should understand the official position on the assessment of EAL and use may be made of 'A Language in Common' for this purpose. It is possible that some students may practice in schools which make use of a local alternative EAL assessment scheme (see [Assessment Practices In Schools](#)). The issue of how best to assess pupils learning EAL might be the subject of discussion in tutorials and seminars.

Government department, curriculum agencies and professional bodies in many other English-speaking countries with linguistically and ethnically diverse populations have published dedicated EAL (sometimes referred to as ESL) assessment scales. The list below provides some examples of such publications.

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Online Assessment Resources

Center for Applied Linguistics - Alternative Assessment and Second Language Study

<http://www.cal.org/resources/digest/hancoc01.html>

Center for Applied Linguistics - English Language Learners and High-Stakes Tests

<http://www.cal.org/resources/digest/0207coltrane.html>

Center for Applied Linguistics - Practical Ideas On Alternative Assessment for ESL Students

<http://www.cal.org/resources/digest/tannen01.html>

NALDIC's Position Statement on Assessment of English as an additional language

www.naldic.org.uk/docs/research/assessment.cfm

[NALDIC EAL Trial Formative Descriptors - KS1](#)

[NALDIC EAL Trial Formative Descriptors - KS2](#)

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority - Assessment for Learning

http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_4334.aspx

Queensland Government Writing Bandscales for speakers of other languages

<http://education.qld.gov.au/students/evaluation/monitoring/bandscales/writing/index.html>

TESOL - Organisation of the ESL Standards

http://www.tesol.org/s_tesol/sec_document.asp?CID=113&DID=312

U.S. Office of English Language Acquisition - ELP Standards and Assessment

<http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/elp/>

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, Australia - English as a Second Language Companion to the Victorian Essential Learning Standards <http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/support/esl/esl.html>

References & Further Reading

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