

Assessment practices in schools

Although statutory assessment for pupils with EAL is the same as for pupils with English as a first language, many schools use specific initial and ongoing language assessments for pupils learning EAL. Student teachers need to be prepared to meet a diversity of EAL assessment practices in their school placements. One way that initial teacher educators can address this is through a taught [session or assignment on assessment](#). Within such sessions, it may be helpful to encourage students to consider not only assessment strategies and instruments, but also to reflect on the thinking about language development and school learning that underlies assessment practices in their placement and other schools.

Additional summative and formative EAL assessment systems are widely used in schools in England. Many are loosely based on Hester's (1990) Stages of English. These stages cover aspects of bilingual children's language development in English and reflect an approach to learning in which young children acquire English language through exposure to it in a welcoming environment..

- Stage One - new to English
- Stage Two - becoming familiar with English
- Stage Three - becoming confident as a user of English
- Stage Four - a very fluent user of English in most social and learning contexts

Each stage describes language development in broad strokes. Although they are not age-related, they often appear to describe very young children, with references to 'songs and rhymes', 'echoing words and phrases' and 'simple stories' heard read aloud. . Trainee teachers may also encounter the modification to the attainment levels in National Curriculum English through [A Language in Common: Assessing English as an Additional Language](#) (QCA, 2000) which introduced pre-National Curriculum 'steps' and allowed for subdivision of NC English Level 1. attainment levels for the assessment of the English language development of pupils with EAL.

In many local education authorities 'Stages of English' have been developed to highlight aspects of bilingual pupils reading, writing, speaking and listening development. Two examples are [NASSEA's EAL Assessment system](#) and Westminster's [Stages of English for Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing](#)

Although not a requirement, many schools use summative language assessments in conjunction with pupil data to work out the distribution of teaching support for pupils learning EAL by school-based or peripatetic support staff. Local authorities often use similar data to allocate additional funding through the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant to local schools.

Student teachers may also experience the use of initial or diagnostic first language assessments in their placement schools. 'Initial' first language assessments are not uncommon in multilingual schools and take place on the child's entry to school, whether as part of foundation stage profiling or as part of a school's [admission procedures for older, newly arrived bilingual learners](#). The second common use of first language assessment is diagnostic. A first language assessment may take place where a bilingual pupil is seen as making less than expected progress. Nationally, the purpose and practice of first language assessment has received little attention and has not been addressed systematically.

References

Hester, H. (1990) The Stages of English, in Patterns of Learning. London : CLPE

Copyright NALDIC 2011