

Assessment for Learning Working with pupils learning English as an Additional Language

Introduction

Using assessment to give feedback to pupils, with the aim of pupils responding to this feedback in order to improve their learning and understanding, is an important part of good classroom practice.

The research of Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam has highlighted the benefits of teachers' ongoing, formative assessment through observation, listening to pupils talk about their work, and asking questions which invite pupils to explore their thinking orally and in writing.

Professor Paul Black, King's College London

A pupil can say something. The teacher can actually so phrase a question or an activity that that 'something' is an important indicator of learning. And then the teacher can then decide, on the basis of what has been said, how to respond, how to help that pupil to move ahead in their learning, to correct or change the way they are thinking about something. So formative assessment is about that close interaction, almost minute-by-minute or even more fine in time, that encapsulates the way in which teachers help pupils to learn.

This type of formative assessment, also known as assessment for learning, is different to summative assessment which gives a final mark or grade on pupils' performance. It is assessment which, as part of everyday teacher- pupil interaction, develops opportunities for teachers to respond to, and build upon, what pupils understand. In classroom activities, teachers carry out formative assessment by making an effort to discover what pupils know or can do as they work.

Professor Paul Black, King's College London

You have to set up a situation, a task or a set of questions which are open enough that the pupil can think around them, and by trying to answer reveal to what extent they understand or don't understand or more usually partially understand what is at issue. It's that evidence the teacher needs in order to act on what the pupil said, to promote learning.

In the classroom, formative assessment is built on observation and dialogue, where the kinds of questions teachers ask enable pupils to respond in ways which reflect their learning needs.

Professor Paul Black, King's College London

If questions are dealt with by single word answers they are probably not the right sort of questions; they are yes/no tests of knowledge only rather than of understanding. If they can be a basis for discussion then one is more confident that this is really helping to engage the pupil in their own learning.

For pupils to make progress using formative assessment, they need to have a clear sense of what they are expected to achieve in curriculum activities. Regular and informative explanation and feedback from teachers is an important element in this process.

In the classroom, teachers look for, and also plan, opportunities for formative assessment, where they:

- 1) Notice something, expected or unexpected, that the pupil says or does;
- 2) Make a judgement about what this observation means, in terms of pupil understanding and learning; and
- 3) Decide what to do next to provide support and promote learning; this might be
 - to wait, and observe what the pupil does next
 - to ask questions or offer possible ways forward which invite the pupil to do or say more or,
 - to give direct instruction to the pupil on the next steps

Formative assessment relies on pupils being able to communicate their thinking, orally or in writing, and to understand teacher feedback in order to apply it to their work.

But what if, for some pupils, the language of learning and of assessment - English - is not yet securely in place? In this video, we look at formative assessment for pupils who are learning English as an Additional Language – pupils who are learning curriculum content and English language at the same time. For these pupils, the ability to engage in formative dialogue with teachers can not be assumed – particularly for those who are at early stages of learning English.

The general principles of formative assessment are useful when working with pupils learning English as an Additional Language. But there are also some distinctive issues:

- 1) Pupils learning EAL may not understand what is required of them, by teachers or in classroom activities and
- 2) They may not be able to demonstrate their understanding and learning, orally or in writing

So teachers need to be able to assess pupils' language learning and curriculum content learning holistically and separately.

In this programme, we focus on the types of practical learning activities which can support formative assessment of pupils who are learning English language and curriculum content at the same time. We will look particularly at spoken language in classroom interaction; for pupils learning EAL, oral language is a helpful basis for reading and writing development.

Pause 1

What should teachers take into account in the formative assessment of pupils learning EAL?

- pupils' language development needs: how effectively do pupils use English expressions to convey meaning? Do they use vocabulary and grammar in English appropriately? Is their pronunciation understandable?
- curriculum learning objectives and success criteria
- pupils' prior knowledge and personal experiences
- the nature of the learning activity: talk, reading or writing
- how much time/space for pupils to formulate responses
- how far to 'push' pupils
- social and academic aspects of school and classroom life

What additional considerations would we need to take into account when working with pupils who are learners of EAL?

You may refer to the session notes here.

Year 6

Over 40 languages other than English are spoken by pupils at Marlborough primary school in Hounslow. The headteacher, mainstream classroom and EAL specialist teachers work together to develop appropriate assessment strategies for pupils learning English as an Additional Language.

Gary Morrel, Headteacher, Marlborough Primary School

Well I think it's an essential part of what we do, to start with. In terms of the practicalities of it, I mean obviously there are a number of ways of gathering evidence about children's learning, and actually the challenge is embedding that in teachers' practice.

One of the things that I think is quite apparent is in the Foundation Stage of learning now where the guidance is that teachers spend 50% of their time actually observing children in that sort of assessment situation. I think teachers to begin with can be quite worried about that and they are worried about the impact. They feel they need to be teaching rather than observing and gathering that evidence. We need to encourage teachers to be braver about that – and taking on that model from the Foundation Stage and giving them freedom in that regard. You learn so much about the children in your class when you are able to do that. As a headteacher the role is to give the encouragement and the guidance that that is OK – not only is it OK, but it is part of good practice.

The Year 6 class are reading *The Silver Sword*, a novel about children who survive in the Warsaw ghetto during World War Two. The class teacher, Natalie Tizzard, works collaboratively with the EAL specialist Dominique Van Dooren to plan a lesson focused on speaking and listening, where pupils learning English work in the mainstream class and also in a small group.

In the classroom, pupils generate questions aimed at finding out more about the main character in the novel. This oral work prepares pupils for writing a profile of the character.

The teachers create opportunities for formative assessment with pupils who are learning English by giving them time to rehearse and practise, and to listen to teachers and to peers modelling and scaffolding language. Pupils learning EAL have time to think and talk collaboratively, before producing language themselves. The class teacher observes pupils as they think aloud and frame questions.

Using the class novel, the EAL specialist works with pupils in a group activity. They are:

- Jamila, who has been in the UK, and in the school, for three years. She was born in Afghanistan and her first language is Turkmen. Her three years in the school are her only experience of ongoing formal education.
- Michelle who arrived from the Phillipines two years ago, whose home language is Tagalog
- Siman, who was born in the Netherlands and speaks Dutch, Somali and French, and has been in the UK for two years.
- Mulhat, who was born in Zanzibar and speaks Kiswahili; she arrived in the UK two years ago and had no formal education for 6 months while she waited for a school place.
- And Sophia, who came to the UK from Iraq 6 years ago and who speaks Kurdish. She lived in Scotland for two years and says the London accent was like learning a new language.

The teacher's aim is for these pupils to extend their descriptive vocabulary, using the class novel as a starting point. She first elicits what the pupils understand at word level -

adjectives and their meanings – and then at text level, where they discuss the characters of the novel and the reasons for their actions.

Throughout this group work, pupils discuss what they understand about specific vocabulary, the historical context of the novel, the motives of the fictional characters, and subtle meanings of words and phrases; they also work on their pronunciation in English.

The teacher engages the pupils in literal as well as inferential talk. She reformulates and recasts pupils' language as the group considers different meanings of words in the context of their reading.

Pause 2

Here you have an opportunity to raise questions and discuss your observations of the EAL teacher working with the group.

You may refer to the session notes here.

Year 4

At Cavendish primary school in Hounslow, EAL specialist teacher Sandra Davies works with a group of Year 4 pupils on developing oral and written persuasive language. The topic of the discussion is: which type of charity deserves more support – animal charities, or charities which help people? This group work prepares pupils learning English to participate in a whole-class debate.

The pupils first read and classify statements; this allows them time to consider their reasons for choosing a charity and to explain their thinking. Here, the teacher has an opportunity to observe and assess the pupils' use of language as well as their understanding of the topic.

In the group you will see

- Olta, whose home language is Albanian
- Hana, whose home language is Somali
- Munib, whose family is from Bosnia
- And Abdi, whose family is also from Somalia

All of these pupils have been in the school since Nursery or Reception, and they are at different stages of learning English.

Next, the pupils practise formulating and using sentence structures; these act as linguistic scaffolds to help the pupils articulate their ideas. The teacher encourages the group to:

- use the prepared statements to generate ideas and construct their own responses;
- develop and explain their thinking and their reasoning as they produce and practise sentence structures in English.

The teacher also allows time for pupils to re- think and re-formulate their initial responses.

Pause 3

What do teachers need to know in order to carry out formative assessment of pupils learning EAL?

- Awareness of both curriculum learning demands and language learning demands made on pupils in activities

- Age or phase-specific content knowledge, in order to be able to convey the meaning of curriculum content and the use of subject-specific discourse (how language is used differently in different subjects)
- Knowledge about English language usage and conventions: vocabulary, grammar, genre, collocations
- Knowledge of EAL development and different types of EAL backgrounds, including early stage new arrivals and advanced bilingual learners
- Knowledge of how different EAL backgrounds influence pupils' capacity to use English for academic purposes
- Professional expertise in organising learning and teaching activities, such as one-to-one talk, collaborative group work, teacher-led talk

You may refer to the session notes here.

Conclusions

To develop effective strategies in the formative assessment of pupils learning English as an Additional Language, teachers will have an overall, long-term appreciation of pupils' language learning and curriculum learning.

Sandra Davies, EAL specialist, Cavendish Primary School

These children are at a very high cognitive level – perhaps in their own language – so it's important to get them into the curriculum as soon as possible. Yes they have problems with English, so you can't expect the same kinds of outcomes from them. But they do need to be thinking along their own level. So you have to enable them to have access the curriculum but with detailed scaffolding in mind to help them access that.

In the formative assessment of pupils learning English as an Additional Language, teachers will

- Communicate the curriculum content and the task in contextualised and multi-modal ways
- Create opportunities for pupils to engage directly in a learning task, to share their thinking with other pupils and to respond to teacher questions
- Evaluate pupil achievement in how they accomplish the task and in the language expressions they use, which are an intrinsic part of accomplishing the task
- Make judgements about language expression and curriculum content holistically and separately - and decide how much and how far to work on, in each area

Formative assessment of pupils learning English as an Additional Language will reflect an understanding of what they can achieve in the immediate moment and how this might help them move on to broader language development and understanding. In this way, the teaching of language and the teaching of curriculum content are integrated, and in-class formative assessment is very much part of this integrated process.

Gary Morrel, Headteacher, Marlborough Primary School

What you need to do is communicate a shared vision or value or shared rationale of what we mean by assessment for learning and why it's important. If teachers can't see that it becomes a paper exercise. It's important to put trust in teachers' judgement as well, which comes with training and their own confidence.

Dominique Van Dooren, EAL specialist, Marlborough Primary School

Assessment for Learning really is you are continually assessing the children as you work with them and taking stock of what they know, and thinking what am I going to teach them next, how am I going to work with them, to move them on to what they need to learn next?

Natalie Tizzard, Year 6 teacher, Marlborough Primary School

With assessment for learning I've noticed there's a lot more focus now on watching children and actually seeing how they learn and the processes of learning, rather than them listening to the teacher all the time and marking – it's much more watching children, how they perform.

Professor Paul Black, King's College London

The primary teacher has got the whole thing, got the pupil all the time, and therefore has much better opportunities for example to develop the confidence of pupils in the process of giving feedback, of taking suggestions for improvements and not being worried about their judgement of him or her, and better opportunities for the teacher to help pupils to realise they are capable of learning, whether are doing badly or have done badly or doing well, they are all capable of improvement.

Credits:

Assessment for learning working with pupils learning English as an additional language was developed by the National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum with funding support from the Training and Development Agency for Schools. It was produced with the support of teachers and teacher educators.

We are most grateful for all the contributions made by schools, teachers and pupils featured in the video sequences and in research and development. In particular, for their special contribution to the development and content of the DVD we would like to thank:

Staff and pupils of Cavendish Primary School, Hounslow
Staff and pupils of Marlborough Primary School, Hounslow
Hounslow Language Service
Paul Black, King's College London

Production
Editorial Team
Constant Leung King's College London
Kimberly Safford Open University

Narration
Alison Kelly Roehampton University

Filming
Television Roehampton