

## **NALDIC Formative Assessment video – Session notes for tutors**

In this 30 minute DVD, we present footage of primary bilingual pupils and their teachers working on aspects of their language development, together with a commentary on assessment for learning and pupils learning English as an additional language (EAL). The DVD also contains interviews with teachers and Professor Paul Black, a leading expert in formative assessment, explaining their approaches to classroom assessment for bilingual pupils. You may wish to use the material as part of a taught component of an initial teaching training and/or a continuing professional development course. The resource can also be used as a self-study module.

There are three suggested pause points for participant discussion and/or activities. Resources to support these discussion points are included on the DVD as downloadable PDF documents (Introduction to NALDIC Formative Descriptors, NALDIC KS1 and KS2 Formative Descriptors, Transcript), along with a transcript of the audio commentary and interviews. Additional materials can also be downloaded from <http://www.naldic.org.uk/ITTSEAL2/teaching/Assessment.cfm>

### **Introduction to the Principles of Language Acquisition**

*Tutors may wish to make some of these points in their introduction to the video.*

The key principles of additional language acquisition draw on recent research findings and theoretical models of the ways in which language is acquired. Broadly speaking, these principles relate to a view on what language does and how languages are learned as first and second languages. These principles are described below:

Firstly, language can take on different forms in terms of style, formality and politeness. It varies according to context, from speaker to speaker, from topic to topic and according to purpose and situation. All speakers are aware of these differences in their first languages. There are also variations in language according to social class, region and ethnic group. In schools, language also varies from subject to subject. For example, the language used in mathematics is very distinct from the language used in literature. EAL learners need to become familiar with the variation in written and spoken language that is used in schools and local communities.

Secondly, language is functional. It is essentially a means of communication. We use language to interact with one another and to express our feelings or viewpoints, our collective and individual needs and to learn about the world. Addressing the functional nature of language within the classroom context entails a move away from a narrow focus on the mastery of the grammar and the acquisition of vocabulary. Within the context of the curriculum, EAL learners need to be able to function effectively in English while they are engaging with intellectually stimulating academic curriculum content.

Acknowledging that cultural learning is closely intertwined with language learning is a third fundamental principle of language acquisition. Children acquire knowledge about the norms and values of their own culture as they learn their first language. Similarly, when they learn an additional language, they learn about the cultural expectations, beliefs and practices associated with this language. In doing so, students need to broaden their cultural perspectives and develop their ability to reflect on their own language and cultural belief systems. This valuing of and respect for differences in cultural backgrounds needs to be recognised in any educational programme in order for EAL learners to attain the same high standards as those whose first language is English. It is important for learners to appreciate that bilingualism and biculturalism go hand in hand.

Research findings have indicated that language learning is most effective when learners are exposed to or involved in meaningful situations. Learners acquire language through social interaction but also through in-class activities that offer cognitive or intellectual challenge. Therefore, learners need to be given the opportunity to engage in social interaction while undertaking activities that offer an element of cognitive challenge. Importantly, students also need to receive feedback on their language use.

A further key principle of language acquisition is the awareness of the interdependence of the four modes of language. While often presented as four skills in educational contexts – listening speaking, reading and writing - in real life contexts these four modes are naturally interdependent. In authentic language use, learners frequently use different modes at the same time and acquire the ability to use them, not in a linear fashion (with listening preceding speaking for example), but simultaneously and interdependently. Furthermore, these language processes develop as students use multi-modal technologies such as film, video and ICT. The implication of this is that EAL learners need to be provided with opportunities to develop their language abilities by using different modes and technologies in a learning environment that recognises the interdependence of listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Furthermore, it is understood that language learning is not short term. It takes place over time. Individual learners acquire language at different rates. There are many individual differences that contribute to different rates of language learning. These may relate, for example, to background –both linguistic and educational - or to socio-cultural factors such as the influence of English or the local language community in the learner’s life. Learners’ thinking and learning styles may also play a role in the rate of acquisition, as may affective factors such as motivation and personality. It is important to note that EAL learners frequently acquire informal conversational skills more quickly than academic language skills. Educators need to be aware that acquiring academic language skills may take much longer (5 to 7 years) than developing social conversational skills .

Recognising the value of bilingualism is a key principle of language acquisition. It is widely acknowledged that acquiring an additional language enhances a learner’s linguistic and cognitive skills. However, in order for pupils to benefit linguistically and cognitively, they need to be very proficient in both languages. This implies that the most effective environment for EAL learners is one in which the development of the first language(s) for both academic and social purposes is promoted alongside the learning of English.

It is widely recognised that EAL learners who are literate in their home or first language(s), bring to the task of additional language learning an understanding about the general characteristics of language. They understand what it means to be literate, how written forms of the language can be used and for what purposes. Being literate in the first language aids the acquisition of literacy in an additional language. Furthermore, where teaching makes use of EAL learners’ first languages, then learners’ academic achievement is enhanced while they are acquiring English. Literacy in another language helps learners to make sense of academic texts in English as they have an understanding of how different kinds of texts work. Importantly, learning a new language also offers learners insights into their first languages.

Professional experience in school over the past thirty years has shown EAL development is a very complex phenomenon. In our multiethnic and multilingual school population we have bilingual/multilingual pupils who may be first language users of a community language, such as Spanish or Urdu, but their level of English language competence is close to that of their first language English speaking peers. At the same time there are other pupils who are at the very beginning stage of learning English at the point of arrival at school. Between these two types there are countless others who are at various stages of learning to use English for academic and social purposes.

For pupils who begin their English language learning at the point of entry into Key Stage 1 or 2, many aspects of their language development are different and more challenging than those faced by their first language English speaking peers learning the National Curriculum subject English. For instance, they will have to grapple with everyday vocabulary and pronunciation, something that their first language English speaking peers will have attained through experience at home and in school. Beyond that, there are the more demanding tasks of learning English grammar and social/academic rules of

language use which, if unassisted, can present formidable difficulties and can entail years of hit-and-miss efforts. In their work in multilingual classrooms, teachers need to recognise and respond to pupils' language learning needs and scaffold their further language learning within the curriculum context. Formative assessment can help teachers in this important task.

### **Formative Assessment and EAL learners**

Teachers of all pupils have found informal day-to-day assessment, e.g. knowledge and insight gained while talking to pupils about their work or marking pupils' writing to be an important part of their teaching. The insights gained in this informal assessment can be used to work out the help pupils need to make progress with their curriculum work. This kind of assessment is referred to as formative assessment, also known as assessment for learning. The following principles for assessment for learning have been widely endorsed by teachers:

#### *Assessment for learning*

1. is part of effective planning
2. focuses on how students learn
3. is central to classroom practice
4. is a key professional skill
5. has an emotional impact
6. affects learner motivation
7. promotes commitment to learning goals and assessment criteria
8. helps learners know how to improve
9. encourages self-assessment
10. recognises all achievements

(Assessment Reform Group, 2002)

These general principles of formative assessment are useful when working with pupils learning English as an Additional language. But they also raise some distinctive issues for teachers of EAL learners. Curriculum-related discussions on formative assessment assume that pupils are able to communicate their thinking, orally or in writing, and to understand teacher feedback in order to apply it to their work. For EAL learners, this ability to engage in formative dialogue with teachers cannot be assumed – particularly for those who are at early stages of learning English. Pupils learning EAL may not understand what is required of them by teachers or in classroom activities and/or they may not be able to demonstrate their understanding and learning, orally or in writing. When working with bilingual pupils who are still developing their English language skills, teachers will therefore need to be able to assess pupils' language learning and curriculum content learning holistically *and* separately.

The initial video sequence outlines a number of these issues.

### **Pause 1 - Activity**

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

While participants may be familiar with the general principles of formative assessment, they may have had very little opportunity to consider the distinctiveness of formative assessment for pupils learning EAL. If the following points do not emerge in the discussion, it may be useful for tutors bring to participants' attention that teachers need to consider:

- 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, and
- 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?**

It may be useful for tutors to introduce participants to the NALDIC formative assessment descriptors for Key Stage 1 and 2. These have been designed for day-to-day assessment of pupils' learning as part of teaching (e.g. talking to pupils about work or marking pupil writing) and, using the insight gained from informal assessment, to help pupils make progress with their curriculum work. More specifically, they are designed to assist teachers in:

- recognising the language accomplishments made by many of the EAL learners-users as they move through the various stages in the long process of developing English language competence in ordinary curriculum contexts
- gaining an overview of the long term EAL developmental trajectories. This professional knowledge of EAL development is vitally important in any attempt to assist pupils to make progress with their language development through the curriculum on a day-to-day basis, and
- developing professional expertise in noticing pupils' EAL accomplishment, diagnosing their language learning needs and offering informed guidance to lead pupils to achieve their next level of learning.

The descriptors, building on the earlier work published by colleagues in this country, Australia and North America, have been phrased in ways that can be understood in a variety of curriculum and subject teaching contexts. The curriculum demands and the associated uses of English in different key stages can be different. There are therefore separate sets of descriptors for Key Stage 1 and for Key Stage 2. These descriptors can be seen as a **metaphorical EAL road map** providing an overview of the key milestones and stages to assist teachers to negotiate the actual journeys of planning, teaching and assessment (for learning).

*Copies of the NALDIC descriptors should be circulated at this point to support the discussion. These can be downloaded from the DVD.*

### **Year 6 segment**

The next section of the DVD was filmed in a Hounslow primary school where over 40 languages are spoken. The headteacher, mainstream classroom and EAL specialist teachers work together to develop appropriate assessment strategies for pupils learning English as an additional language. In this section, participants are introduced to;

- 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 Ki-Swahili sshe 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.

Using the class novel, *The Silver Sword*, the EAL specialist works with these pupils in a group activity. 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 - Activity**

When working with bilingual pupils who are still developing their English language, teachers often need to go beyond broad principles because the pupils concerned may not be able to express their knowledge and understanding effectively, as they are still grappling with the English language. Teachers may decide to scaffold and practise words and language expressions that pupils are still trying to learn to use. Participants have just seen the teacher working with her pupils in this way. Tutors may find it useful to share the transcript (included on the DVD) and ask participants to identify the ways in which the teacher has responded to the pupils' language learning needs and how she has provided scaffolding for further learning immediately.

### **Year 4 segment**

This segment is filmed at Cavendish primary school in Hounslow. The film shows the EAL specialist teacher working 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.

EAL learners in the group are:

- 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. In the group activity, 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, and
- 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 – Activity**

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

Formative assessment of pupils learning EAL will reflect an understanding of what pupils 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.

At this point, tutors can lead a discussion of the knowledge that teachers need to have in order to carry out formative assessment of EAL learners, encouraging participants to reflect on what they have seen

and read. It may be useful for tutors to bring to participants' attention that teachers of EAL learners need:

- An 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, and
- Professional expertise in organising learning and teaching activities, such as one-to-one talk, collaborative group work, teacher-led talk.

Participants can be invited to reflect on their own learning and possible development needs.

### **Further reading and follow up tasks**

Assessment Reform Group (2002) *Assessment for Learning: 10 Principles Research-based Principles to Guide Classroom Practice* Downloaded from <http://www.assessment-reform-group.org/images/Principles%20for%20website.doc>

Black, P., Harrison, C., Lee, C., Marshall, B., & Wiliam, D. (2002). *Working inside the black box*. London: Dept of Education and Professional Studies, King's College London

Black, P., Harrison, C., Lee, C., Marshall, B., & Wiliam, D. (2003). *Assessment for learning: putting it into practice*. Maidenhead, Berkshire: Open University Press

Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (1998). *Inside the black box*. London: King's College London.

Leung, C. (2004). Developing Formative Teacher Assessment: Knowledge, Practice and Change. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 1(1), 19-41.

Leung, C., & Mohan, B. (2004). Teacher formative assessment and talk in classroom contexts - assessment as discourse and assessment of discourse. *Language Testing*, 20(3), 335-359.

Tutors may want to introduce participants to these texts for pre- or post-session reading.

Possible additional tasks could include consideration of what teachers need to know in order to carry out formative assessment of pupils learning EAL with reference to the NALDIC formative descriptors which are included on the DVD. Alternatively, tutors may want to ask participants to consider the NALDIC formative descriptors with reference to a particular bilingual pupil in their teaching situation.