Classroom Assessment of English as an Additional Language: Key Stage 1 Contexts

End of Award Report of the Findings of the Economic and Social Research Council funded project: 1999 – 2002

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Full Report of Research Activities and Results

1. The Research Team

The research – of 28 months duration - was conducted between October 1999 and November 2002 and was based in the Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol. The principal investigator was Dr Pauline Rea-Dickins (Bristol) and co-investigator was Dr Sheena Gardner (Warwick University). The project had Research Assistant support (Jane Andrews in the final year) and administrative and clerical assistance was sought as required.

2. Enquiries

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3. Executive Summary of Research Results

The overall aims of the research have remained largely unchanged during the two phases of the project. These were to explore, in Phase 1:

(i)   teacher assessment practices to identify and describe the range of assessment activities in the support of learners for whom English is an Additional Language (EAL),

(ii)   how teachers: (i) perceive the purposes and focus of assessment; (ii) design and implement assessment activities in preparing learners with EAL to access the National Curriculum; and (iii) interpret and use the EAL language scales and the NC levels for English in their assessment practices.

However, from Phase 1 of the research there was not a strong sense that classroom embedded assessment could develop children's language learning through the creation of 'rich' opportunities for classroom interaction, (e.g. through different learner modes of classroom participation, different feedback strategies), thus the research focus of Phase 2 evolved in a number of different ways that augmented the original aims of the research. In particular it involved an intervention of four specifically designed assessment activities and an extensive analysis of their contextualised classroom language use.

These aims have been achieved by addressing the following research questions:

RQ1:   How do teachers decide on the design and focus of their assessment activities to support learners with EAL who are as yet unable to access the National Curriculum?

RQ2:   What is the design and focus of the assessments teachers use to monitor the different aspects of English language development across a range of NC contexts?

RQ3:   What type of learner output is elicited by the different assessments?

RQ4: How does the language produced by learners with EAL at different levels of language proficiency differ across the range of language focused assessments?

RQ5: On the assessments that are undertaken by all children at Key Stage 1, in what way does the language produced by the learners with EAL differ from that of their monolingual peers?

RQ6: How is EAL assessment linked to the National Curriculum?

RQ7: What is the relationship between the underlying teacher-constructs of English language abilities and development and the validity of the assessments?

RQ8: How useful are existing models in elaborating a typology for EAL classroom assessment?

The principal findings are summarised as follows:

3.1 Aspects of the assessment process which are distinctive for learners with EAL have been identified. These include scaffolding that ensures cognitive challenge is maintained alongside linguistic support; not assuming shared socio-cultural understandings; promoting extended interaction in the exploration of ideas; as well as use of heritage languages by learners in pairs, and with bilingual assistance provided by the Bilingual Education Assistants.

3.2 Different yet complementary purposes for class teacher and language support teacher assessment have been identified. This highlights the importance of effective partnerships in the support and assessment of children with EAL.

3.3 A rich descriptive account of current classroom assessment practices for learners with EAL has been elaborated. This has revealed:

(i) that a range of factors influence teacher decision making in language assessment; and that these are related to different underlying teacher purposes and strategies for assessment in relation to concerns of (a) planning and (b) implementation of assessment activities; (c) the monitoring of learner achievement and (d) reporting requirements;

(ii) a range of engagements that are possible within assessment activities from linguistic, content and language processing perspectives for learners with EAL at various levels of language proficiency; these show the different potential of assessment activities to provide formative opportunities for teachers and, importantly, for the children themselves;

(iii) a range of influences on teacher assessment practices - i.e. in the design, focus and implementation of assessment activities that teachers use to develop and to measure English language development and attainment – and in particular:

- the diversity that exists in the teachers' understandings of (a) assessment, (b) complexities of the language systems, (c) roles of home language and literacy practices, (d) processes of second language acquisition, (e) use of metalanguage and (f) variables of language production;

- influences from Language Development Records, 'local' scales and NC Levels;

- different models of language represented (e.g. traditional grammar, functional-notional modes, genre-based modes);

(iv) that children use a wide range of social, cognitive and metacognitive strategies when working through assessment activities;

(v) the influences that the design of different assessment have on the range of potential language development opportunities for the learners; together with the importance of creating opportunities for interaction in classroom formative assessment processes;

(vi) evidence of children's language development in relation to:

- wording, construing and co-constructing meanings
- demonstrating awareness of lexico-grammar
- using appropriate language functions
- participating in routine classroom interactions
- using subject specific language (register) and genres
- expressing increasingly abstract events
- asserting and developing own socio-cultural identity and role(s) in class;

(vii) teachers' perceptions of classroom English language assessment are shaped by a view of assessment that (a) is largely summative in orientation, (b) is potentially formative for the teacher and (c) places less emphasis on the formative potential for language development for the learners themselves.

4. Full Report of Research Results

4.1 Background

This research project took place between 1999 and 2002, at a time when there was evidence of considerable and increased interest in (a) assessment generally and formative assessment in particular, and (b) the assessment for learners for whom English is an Additional Language (EAL). Within this context, the present study set out to identify the full range of assessment practices that were used both to monitor English language learning progress and to measure the attainment of learners for whom English is an Additional Language. This research aimed to develop a knowledge base of assessment practices that would promote both the content and language learning of EAL children. A key facet of this research and its context is that the targeted children are not only learning their school subjects but are also simultaneously developing their English language proficiency to facilitate their participation in mainstream primary classrooms as independent learners.

(a) Policy context

In 1997, OfSTED reported on a national survey of EAL assessment practices in LEAs in England and Wales which revealed what was already commonly held that enormous variation exists across LEAs. There was also heightened awareness of EAL assessment, within schools generally and particularly amongst teachers with responsibility for learners with EAL, as the research period coincided almost exactly with the QCA's consultation process on the assessment for learners with EAL which led to A Language in Common (QCA, 2000). The research was also conducted at a time when there was increased recognition of the need for support within the mainstream context for learners with EAL in relation to the specific agenda of raising ethnic minority achievement. However, policy documentation in relation to the assessment of children with EAL emphasised 'standards' and the measurement of children's attainment in relation to outcomes based descriptors, rather than in relation to assessment which might have formative benefits – for both the teacher and the child. Whilst policy documentation drew attention to both formative and summative dimensions of EAL assessment, these were presented largely as unproblematic.

(b) Previous research

(i) Whilst the knowledge base in the primary phase, including Key Stage 1, was gradually developing in *general educational assessment* (e.g. Tunstall & Gipps 1996, Torrance & Pryor 1998), there was little known research which (i) focused specifically on classroom-based *language* assessment for learners with EAL or (ii) was undertaken from an Applied Linguistics perspective with a focus on language development and attainment, i.e. where English is the medium of instruction for children who do not have English as their first language. During the period of this research, the researchers became aware of related research from the publications from the Assessment Reform Group (e.g. Black & William, 1998). Equally, since the start of the project there has been an increase in attention to EAL classroom interaction in *applied linguistics* (e.g. Cummins 2000, Gibbons 2001). Our research uniquely brings together trends in general educational assessment with analysis of classroom discourse in EAL contexts.

(c) theoretical perspectives

see **4.5.8** below

4.2 Research Objectives

The overall aims of the research have remained largely unchanged during the two phases of the project. These were to explore, in Phase 1:

(iii)   teacher assessment practices to identify and describe the range of assessment activities in the support of learners for whom English is an Additional Language (EAL),

(iv)   how teachers: (i) perceive the purposes and focus of assessment; (ii) design and implement assessment activities in preparing learners with EAL to access the National Curriculum; and (iii) interpret and use the EAL language scales and the NC levels for English in their assessment practices.

However, from Phase 1 of the research there was not a strong sense that classroom embedded assessment could develop children's language learning through the creation of 'rich' opportunities for classroom interaction, (e.g. through different learner modes of classroom participation, different feedback strategies), thus the research focus of Phase 2 evolved in a number of different ways that augmented the original aims of the research. In particular it involved an intervention of four specifically designed assessment activities (see **4.3** below) and extensive analysis of their contextualised classroom language use.

4.3 Methodology

Overview
The research adopted a broad socio-cultural approach, which emphasised the need to understand assessment practices and the language learning potential of these practices within the social and cultural context in which it takes place. This theoretical approach led to a methodology in which assessment was studied in depth within the ecology of the classroom, within a relatively small number of schools, and one in which assessment practices were analysed from an interactional perspective through the analysis of classroom discourse.

There were two phases to the project. In Phase 1, with the aim of analysing assessment practices across the curriculum, two target learners from Year 1 and Year 2 were observed and recorded in all lessons (literacy – plus extended writing and quiet reading –, numeracy, science, 'topic', design, music, art, RE, computer) in 3 schools for a full week each term from January to December 2000.

In Phase 2, with the aim of focusing on the implementation of activities with a range of characteristics, teachers in three project schools and one 'monolingual' school were asked to implement four specific activities. The literacy activity involves learners constructing alternative story endings in pairs; in numeracy the barrier activity involves exploration of properties of shapes; the science activity engages learners in predicting then testing out and reporting how forces work; and the history/ geography activity involves comparison of (e.g., urban and rural) settings. The activities are, thus, different in significant ways including length, staging, convergence and contextualisation (through a story in literacy, visuals in numeracy, realia in science and experience or general knowledge base in social science); as well as in anticipated learner engagement and planned outputs. One school was able to implement the 4 activities in both years, but generally this was not possible. A total of 15 lessons were implemented, observed and recorded in the original project schools, 4 in the monolingual school (literacy and numeracy in Years 1 and 2); and 6 lessons from 4 additional 'EAL' schools in another LEA were added to enhance the data set and as a check on the validity and practicability of the activities.

Sample

(i) Schools: the research was conducted in 3 primary inner city schools, which were part of a larger Education Service Intervention Project aimed at supporting Key Stage 1 EAL learners who were not yet able to access the National Curriculum independently.

The schools selected were those in which there were language support teams working alongside mainstream class teachers in the support of children with EAL. Three primary schools each with a different density of bilingual learners and overall size were selected for Phase 1 of the research; in Phase 2, one of these continued with an additional 2 schools from the Intervention Project, as well as a 'monolingual' school and additional schools in a second LEA.

(ii) Teachers: The central participants were Language Support Co-ordinators, i.e. teachers who co-ordinate Language Support work in partnership with mainstream teachers. Other Language Support Teachers, Bilingual Education Assistants and Mainstream Class Teachers also participated in the research.

(iii) Targeted Learners: In each class, the two target learners with EAL were selected as higher and lower proficiency. None had no English, and all were receiving language support.

Data Collected

Different data sets were gathered and comprised:

(i) Interviews
- *Semi-structured interviews* with teachers (Language support and mainstream Class Teachers) and Bilingual Classroom Assistants at various stages throughout Phase 1 of the project (30 were transcribed)
- *Structured interviews* with a small sample of targeted children – either on an individual 1-1 basis or as a small focus group - in Phase 2 of the project (6 were transcribed)
- *Structured interviews/ discussion* with teachers pre- and post-lesson observations (12 were transcribed)
- *Group discussions* with the participating teachers (both Phases) were also conducted during the Project Dissemination Meetings .

Classroom Observations
Classrooms were observed in both phases of the research. In Phase 1, 30 assessment activities were transcribed (from video and audio recordings) from across the 3 schools over 3 terms; in Phase 2, 23 activities were transcribed.

Field Notes
Field notes were used to support classroom observations during lessons.

Documentation
This included
- learner outputs (language and work produced in class)
- language samples of learner outputs
- language development records
- pre- and post-activity questionnaires completed by teachers
- medium term and weekly lesson plans
- materials used in class, where possible
- curriculum and policy documentation.

4.4 Data Analysis

The analysis was carried out using a multi-layering technique combining ethnography, discourse analysis and linguistic description, as follows:

Layer 1: used observations, interviews and demographic data to provide a rich *ethnographic* description of the ecology of the classroom in which the processes of assessment were implemented.

Layer 2: adopted a *discourse analysis* approach for investigating the teacher interview.

Layer 3: used classroom transcripts for the *linguistic and discourse analysis* of children's talk and, in particular, the linguistic outputs and interaction along dimensions that emerge as significant from research on EAL development. Contrasts were made through the stages of an activity; across subject areas; among different implementations of the same activity across classes; and among learners.

Layer 4: used classroom transcripts to analyse the *interactional features* of lived assessment in key stage 1 classrooms - in the subject areas of numeracy, literacy, social science, and science - in relation to (i) ways in which teachers assisted learner's linguistic performances , (ii) different modes of learner engagement at various levels of language proficiency, and (iii) peer interaction.

4.5 Results

This section summarises our main findings; these are presented as answers to our original eight research questions. Throughout we refer to illustrative examples and more extended discussion in Nominated Publications 1 and 2 (**NP1** and **NP2**).

4.5.1: How do teachers decide on the design and focus of their assessment activities to support the learners with EAL who are as yet unable to access the National Curriculum?

A typology of teacher decision making was derived from 30 semi-structured teacher interviews over one school year (1999-2000). The transcribed data were managed and analysed using WinMAX (Kuckartz, 1998). This allowed us to:

(i)   conceptualise the relationship between different stages in the teachers' decision making process in terms of the assessment cycle constructed around four central stages – delineated by *time* and teacher *purpose*: Stage 1: *Planning*; Stage 2: *Implementation*; Stage 3: *Monitoring*; and Stage 4: *Formal Recording and Dissemination*; (see **NP2:p435**). Planning issues were identified by all the teachers as an essential – yet multifaceted - first stage for any assessment activity and have particular salience for the *language* assessment of learners with EAL. This stage, they distinguished from the implementation phase during which the learners engage in an assessment either as part of routine instruction or as a stand-alone activity. Assessment strategies associated with this second stage (see **NP2:p445ff**) include teacher observation and listening, scaffolding learner performance through teacher questioning and feedback, as well as the creation of opportunities for (a) sustained small group interaction between learners and their teacher and (b) effective collaboration amongst the learners themselves. The third stage (Monitoring) was concerned with decision making at the 'local level' in that the information derived from the assessments was used either by the individual teacher as part of her everyday classroom practice or shared informally with other teachers within the year group. The fourth stage (Formal Recording and Dissemination) emerged as qualitatively different from and related to formal summative reporting 'external' to the class context.

(ii)   identify strategies supported by teachers' beliefs and understandings about classroom assessment for learners with EAL and to develop a typology of teacher decision-making strategies developed. The distinctiveness of classroom-based assessment of EAL was largely related to the strategies linked to Stages 1 and 2 of the assessment cycle and, sometimes, to Stage 3 in terms of the interpretation of and subsequent action on assessment data.

(i)   Further, whilst these sub-categories are listed as discrete elements, they do not operate in practice as fixed or separate entities but as interdependent factors which represent teacher strategies within a given stage in the assessment cycle.

In summary, teachers use different strategies at different stages of the classroom assessment cycle and these are informed and developed through partnerships (i.e. between language support teacher, class teacher and bilingual education assistant), by the assessment purpose, and the linguistic capacities of the learners.

4.5.2: What is the design and focus of the assessments teachers use to monitor the different aspects of English language development across a range of NC contexts?

In *Phase 1* of the research, a framework was developed (**NP1:221-222**) which identified (a) the nature of the assessments used; (b) their primary purpose; (c) who was assessed; (d) who implemented the assessments; and (e) when and how often. The data suggested that teachers' perceptions of classroom English language assessment were largely summative in orientation, but there was clear evidence of data from assessments feeding into future planning (i.e. formative use of data by the teacher), as well as informing decision making on NC related attainment levels (i.e. a summative representation of learner performance).

The focus of assessment for teachers of EAL was repeatedly differentiated from that of class teachers (in interview, classroom practice and documented assessments) in that the former focus on language across the curriculum; the latter more on literacy (e.g. reading), science and 'content' in general. In cases where jointly prepared assessments were interpreted by both language support and class teachers, each with their own focus, this was particularly clear (see

NP1). In this respect the English language stages in the Linguistic Ability Assessments were crucial in shaping the design, focus and coverage of EAL assessments. We argue that they not only provide a general reference point that facilitates communication between stakeholders, but also are a primary form of cultural capital, embodied within the Language Support Teams, objectified in the Stage Descriptors and institutionalised in their use.

We found that teachers used a mix of convergent and divergent approaches to the design and implementation of classroom assessment, with a tendency towards the more convergent end of the spectrum and a concern with eliciting language 'displays' (attainment) rather than on developing insights into what a learner knows or understands.

Language Sampling, however, which – being embedded in classroom teaching – was described as the most flexible and widely used procedure and found to be central to assessment that was formative for the teachers. There was, overall, less emphasis on the formative potential for language development for the *learners themselves*. Further, we did not get a strong sense of a principled approach to the design of assessment activities for the support of language development.

Various influences on teacher assessment activities were also identified, with evidence that the Language Support Teacher:

- draws upon the mainstream curriculum (i.e. subject knowledge, learning objectives and outcomes) to inform the content, and the design of the assessment activities.
- is influenced by high stakes Key Stage 1 national tests in terms of activities, content and criteria;
- has 'norm-related' concerns, e.g. (i) issues of 'access': can the learners work independently and have they reached the required 'standard' as referenced to a monolingual 'norm'?; (ii) in relation to psychometric notions of reliability and norming (see **NP1**): e.g. asking each child the same question under the same conditions; SATs exam practice; withdrawing a group of learners for norm-referenced spelling and reading assessment;
- is certainly aware of an interactional perspective on classroom formative assessment and the importance of creating 'opportunities for sustained talk in the classroom'.

Thus, in *Phase 2* of the research, teachers were asked to trial four specific language assessment activities (see **4** above) which were deliberately contextualised in different ways in order to capture spontaneous and creative use of language through different modes of learner participation, that formal assessment mechanisms have failed to grasp. For this we developed a prototype for the design of assessment activities. These design and implementation criteria have been applied to teacher assessments, see **NP2:436-37**.

Finally, in *Phase 2* of the research, where the researchers designed specific activities and supported teacher implementation through guided workshops, clear evidence was gathered of the formative assessment of individual learners.

4.5.3: What type of learner discourse is elicited by the different assessments?

It was predicted, and found, that the 4 activities would elicit different outputs as planned (including in terms of mode, content area register, genre, academic language functions, activity stage, opportunities to develop socio-cultural identity and convergency). For example, in the numeracy activity, which is conceptually and linguistically the most highly structured and convergent of the four, the target language is practiced more, is more focused, and the proportion of reciprocal to non-reciprocal exchanges is highest.

What was less predictable was how the teachers would implement activities. Variation in implementation had significant impact on learner engagement and language output. In cases where two teachers had planned a similar stage to an activity, and where both utilised recast to highlight the type of language expected, there could be significant variation in the nature of the interaction and subsequent learner output along key dimensions. Such differences are an important focus of this research.

Differences in implementation were also significant in staging activities. For example, in one class where the numeracy activity was first modeled, then practiced in pairs and a final reporting, consolidating and reflection stage was included, the evidence of language development was more evident than in other classes where the activity was simply explained and practiced in pairs.

The best opportunities for sampling the language of social role negotiation occurred when children were paired or in small groups with other children they were not used to working with and the task required them to co-operate through language. Unfamiliar tasks elicit good samples of children making sense of a task.

In short, the language output elicited by the assessment could be predicted in a general sense (e.g. story language), but the variations in implementation - and associated variations in formative assessment - underscore the importance of our multilayering technique. **Appendix 1** illustrates a sample analysis'; see also **NP2**.

4.5.4*:* **How does the language produced by learners with EAL at different levels of language proficiency differ across the range of language focused activities?**

Learner output and interactional data were analysed in answer to this question and the results show differences between learners with high and low proficiency along key dimensions (see **Appendix 2**). Thus, although it has general potential, specific examples relate to the language proficiency of the Key Stage 1 EAL learners observed. The most salient differences between high and low proficiency relate to linguistic uptake; syntactic complexity; ability to justify, explain, generalise and hypothesize; influence on group task outcomes; and length of reciprocal exchange. Instances of self-correction in our data are all produced by Year 2 learners, and those considered to be the more independent.

Differences among individual learner outputs across the curriculum were less marked by subject area than by task engagement. Where learners were involved with the task and output was expected, they produced language that stretched their linguistic resources. Different curriculum genres put different pressures on their linguistic resources. e.g. mental math requires quick understanding, calculation and response; writing instructions requires reflection on the process, sequence and audience. There was evidence of work across the curriculum that reinforced the core academic language functions of describing, sequencing, reporting, justification and explanation. Although pair and group work was encouraged across the curriculum, and there was clear turn taking in that everyone would contribute to the task, there was little evidence that explicit attention had been given to the language or group conventions (e.g. ask everyone for their opinion) that might have enhanced completion of such tasks.

4.5.5: **On the assessments that are undertaken by all children at Key Stage 1, in what way does the language produced by the learners with EAL differ from that of their monolingual peers?**

This was not a major focus of the research. The most noteworthy differences from the analysis of four monolingual classes in Literacy and Numeracy emerged in:

1.   A comparison of teacher elicited descriptive 'story' language, where monolingual children readily produce examples, using lower coverage vocabulary, where there is no perceived need to explain meanings to the class; and where elicitation of lexical items does not involve extended interaction.

2.   A comparison of writing story endings where monolingual children were generally, encouraged to write (draft) individually, while the EAL teachers we observed encouraged pair and group writing among EAL learners. This latter approach promoted interaction and both self- and peer-assessment.

3.   A comparison of group work where monolingual children engage in extended critique of each others' story endings. This type of interaction was not attempted with EAL learners in the same detail, as there was only one instance in the EAL classes observed of an attempt to initiate – via posters of work on the wall – a peer discussion of ideas in the story endings.

4.   On the more restricted, convergent numeracy task, differences in performance are related more to cognitive and strategic differences than language differences. There are more non-standard grammatical features in the EAL children's language, but these do not impede task completion.

5.   EAL children develop their capacity for reciprocal exchange from Year 1 to Year 2 as evidenced by a higher proportion of reciprocal exchanges, longer exchanges and more focus on content rather than procedure. In comparison with the literature (Ogden 2000), EAL capacity would appear to be similar to monolingual children of the same age.

4.5.6:   How is EAL assessment linked to the National Curriculum?

One mode of EAL assessment focuses on learners' readiness for Key Stage 1SATs, taken towards the end of Year 2. There was evidence of task rehearsal (e.g. writing instructions) and grading according to SATs criteria and norms, e.g. in terms of written language outputs compared to expected standards.

A second mode is focus on the extent to which learners could access the national curriculum independently. Here the learner strategies (e.g. reading strategies) were assessed along with classroom coping strategies such as ability to work independently and to ask for help as needed.

A third mode is the creation of opportunities for EAL assessment within the national curriculum. Our analysis shows that EAL assessment opportunities were created by, for example, increasing opportunities for spoken interaction with and among learners. This is consistent with the relatively greater emphasis on the development of language through speaking among language support teachers as compared with mainstream class teachers. Analysis of the implementation of national curriculum activities shows that the time spent on interaction with learners with EAL to ensure meaningful understandings and associated language development provides powerful explanations of exactly how and why learners with EAL take 5-7 years to catch up with proficient monolingual peers.

Finally, it is noted that EAL assessment is assessment of language and content, thus feedback is given on both, or indeed on language, content and strategies as appropriate at different stages in an activity. Effective EAL feedback on language is not simply of the error-correction kind, but rather of the kind that pushes the learner towards the academic register required by the curriculum genres, or towards being a more effective learner.

4.5.7: How valid are the assessments in relation to underlying teacher-constructs of English language development?

The teacher interviews on assessment, lesson plans and classroom activities (through transcripts) were examined in order to identify the teachers' representations of language as well as the way these were presented. Following Freeman 1994, presentation was considered from the perspective of Expression, Voice and Source. So the teachers were not asked explicitly about the nature of English, but rather, in the context of the audience and purpose of their communication, their conceptual focus, understanding, metalanguage, and intertextuality were examined.

Some Findings:
- enormous range of sophisticated understandings of the complexities of the language system, language development, language assessment, roles of home language and literacy practices, language curricula, and the variability of language production.
- influence of Linguistic Ability Assessments in areas of communicative functions; at times sophisticated understanding unsupported by metalanguage
- influence of metalanguage from the literacy strategy, at times unsupported by full understanding (e.g. phoneme = sound, antonym = opposite). This is particularly unfortunate for bilingual learners as a sound understanding of phonemes and antonyms would facilitate comparison with learners' first languages.
- basic core metalanguage (past tense, noun, pronoun) from traditional grammar, with many terms unclear (e.g. what part of speech is *mine,* or *my*; Is *Tell me about your holidays* a question?)
- Many different models of language represented (traditional grammar, functional-notional models, structural 'building block' models, genre-based models, socio-linguistic models of language variation, and many more).
- representations of language vary with the audience, and with the stage of the assessment process.

4.5.8: How useful are existing models in elaborating a typology for EAL classroom assessment?

We have drawn on a range of models, tools and explanatory frames, that include the following:

1. Language Testing Perspectives: language test specification
The theoretical framework Bachman and Palmer (1996) has been useful in providing (a) pointers towards the analysis of our TLU situation, (i.e. the situation in which the 'test takers' will find themselves and in which they will be expected to be proficient in their use of English) and b) a basis for describing (i) language task characteristics and (ii) language ability, including strategic competence. However, (c) language performance is analysed as a measure of proficiency in relation to 'add on' formal assessment procedures, i.e. divorced from teaching and learning and is, thus, unhelpful in an analysis of assessment of language progression over time. As a 'static' checklist, the frameworks have been useful but they do not – nor were they intended to – explain lived language processing within a curricula context and they therefore lack connectivity in terms of language assessment learning as experienced in the social context of the mainstream classroom.

2. A Cognitive Approach to Language Learning
Skehan (1998), plus subsequent publications, has developed a cognitive framework for the analysis of language performance and processing. Language performance has been researched (a) not in terms of a single performance on a language test but in relation to (b) a series of contrasting EFL language tasks which (c) manipulate – experimentally - a number of

processing variables such as 'planning time', in interaction with (d) different task types; and (d) linguistic output has been analysed through measures of accuracy, complexity, and fluency. In the development of our assessment activity framework, we have drawn on this conceptualisation of language performance and analysis of language processing variables (e.g. planning time, opportunities for repetition) and built on Skehan's characterisation of different task-types which, in turn, has guided part of our analysis of linguistic variation in the target children. This work does not, however, impact on differences in classroom discourse types and the interactional demands of mainstream classroom teaching, learning and assessment and, in particular, on children's language learning opportunities afforded within 'intact classroom interaction' in the *content and language learning* of mainstream NC subjects - nor was it intended to.

3. Language Analysis Frameworks
The language analysis was conducted within a systemic functional linguistics (SFL) approach as one that is eminently suited to the analysis of functional language in context. Within SFL, four frameworks were perceived to have particular relevance to the analysis of classroom language:

1. Cloran's (1999) work on rhetorical units links meanings expressed to context-embedded – context-reduced and particular – general dimensions which are useful for analysing the extent to which language can be understood from the context or is more decontextualised and academic (Cummins 2000). Cloran's work developed in the context of pre-school monolingual children. Our analysis showed its relevance to the assessment of bilingual school age children.

2. Martin's work (1984, 1992) on the mode continuum, as developed by Gibbons (1998, 2001) who attaches particular importance to the interaction in the teacher guided reporting stage of lessons as an opportunity to raise the register of learner language. Gibbons' work was developed and illustrated in upper primary science contexts. Our research found evidence to extend this to lower primary literacy contexts as a useful framework for analysing language development through the course of one lesson or teaching unit.

3. Mohan's work (1990) on knowledge structures is particularly relevant to academic language functions and was useful for planning and identifying common knowledge structures across the curriculum. Its application to formative assessment in classroom discourse was valuable in our analysis.

4. Genre-based analysis of texts (e.g. Martin & Rothery) and classroom discourse (e.g. Christie 1997). These provide useful frameworks within which learner language can be analysed. Narrative and instructional genres were a clear focus of assessment by the teachers, and analysis of pedagogical genres provided significant insights into the work EAL teachers do to impart knowledge and draw understandings from the learners.

In addition to the analyses above, learner language was examined as product focusing on SFL lexico-grammatical and discourse categories (such as nominal groups, cohesion). Such analysis provides a useful window on language development 'stages' by comparing the output of more and less proficient learners engaging with the same activity. Each of the frameworks has explanatory power in the analysis of classroom language; none is exhaustive, nor is meant to be.

4.6 Conclusions

This research project has provided the basis for the development of a conceptual framework for classroom language assessment, with specific reference to learners with EAL (see **Appendix 3**). This conceptualises language assessment as embedded within the social,

cultural and discourse contexts of the multilingual classroom. We highlight the following main conclusions to be drawn from our work.

4.6.1   The children showed evidence of language development in a wide range of areas and this language development was enhanced through appropriate formative assessment opportunities and rich teacher scaffolding that ensures cognitive challenge is maintained alongside linguistic support.

4.6.2   There is considerable diversity around classroom language assessment practices, beliefs and understandings, including some very sophisticated understandings. However, this diversity - in some cases - may be acting to lower the potential of children's language development.

4.6.3   Attempts to improve classroom language assessment should focus (a) on the importance of providing children with a range of activities for cognitive and language processing and, in particular, (b) on creating opportunities that promote meaningful and sustained interaction, not only with the teacher but also with peers.

4.6.4   Attempts to improve an understanding of the language learning potential associated with different assessment activities could benefit from application of the typology of activity design and focus.

4.6.5   Our research shows that while classroom assessment has the potential to enhance language learning, it often fails to do so.

4.6.6   Our research shows that the conceptualisation of language testing – as currently exemplified in this specialist literature – fails to capture the dynamics of classroom language assessment.

4.7   Impact

This research has been acclaimed in the international research community (see McNamara, 2002: 231; has enhanced in-service training with its analysis of good practice; and has been engaged with – at different levels - by the professional community at large through meetings, publications, and a national conference on the assessment of children with EAL.

In addition, research students are working with the frameworks and typologies developed; current graduate students at Bristol and Warwick are building on this work with reference to classroom based assessment discourse in the U.K and overseas (e.g. Cameroon and Kenya).

4.8   Knowledge Transformation & Dissemination Activities

(a)   Teacher Engagement

Teacher engagement with the project developed in ways that not only enhanced the project but also extended professional development opportunities for teachers of EAL nationally. Findings and issues from the research were presented, discussed and developed with people in the teaching profession through research progress reports, workshops with participating teachers, in-service courses that developed to meet the needs identified through project work, best practice scholarship, a national conference and national publications (see **Appendix 4**)

(b)   Presentations

Over the three years of the project, a total of 24 presentations were given at international, national, and local meetings of applied linguists, teachers, university research groups, and testers. An additional 5 are confirmed for 2003 and it is anticipated more will follow. (see **Appendix 5**)

(c)   Publications

15 publications have appeared to date in journals, edited collections, conference proceedings and professional newsletters, directed at both practitioner and researcher audiences; 7 further papers are being prepared for publication (see **Appendices 6** & **7**).

4.9   Future Research Priorities

We have identified the following areas where further research is needed:

(a) a study leading to a conceptualisation of classroom-based formative language assessment (language development and proficiency) that integrates insights from second language acquisition research. A particular focus would be on manipulating experimentally – through an intervention study – measures of implicit and explicit (language) knowledge and effects of teacher feedback.

(b) an action research project with teachers linked to (a) above.

(c) as an R & D project, the development of training materials for teachers based on this research; this would include a website, and CD Rom which would exemplify for the profession the conceptual frameworks in relation to formative language assessment for EAL in intact classrooms with detailed exemplars drawn from this research.

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Appendix 1 (4.5.3) : An example of learner output analysed in context.

After literacy partners have made initial plans for their story ending for *The Lion and the Mouse*, the teacher asks for examples before they go to tables to develop and draw their ideas.

76.	T	ok the mouse takes the net off the lion fine ok that's another lovely end - that's a bit different - right Johti let's just have yours and then -
77.	Johti	you can get scissors and cut the rope to get the (.) the lion out
78.	T	ok who would get the scissors?
79.	Johti	mouse
80.	T	the mouse would get the scissors – where would he get them from?
81.	Johti	erm
82.	T	not quite sure?
83.		*Johti shakes her head*
84	T	ok so then he got the lion out - and then what happened?
85.	BEA	Phachi shu thai? *Gujerati for 'What happens next?* Bhaki cha? *Gujerati for 'There is something left?'*
86.	Johti	(**) *indecipherable response to BEA in Gujerati, presumably rehearsing turn 88*
87.	BEA	English ma ka. *Gujerati for'Say that in English'*
88.	Johti	After that the lion comes out
89.	T	and after that the lion comes out - ok - …

Key: T = Teacher; BEA = Bilingual Education Assistant; Johti is a pseudonym;
   (.) = pause; (**) = indecipherable stretch of language

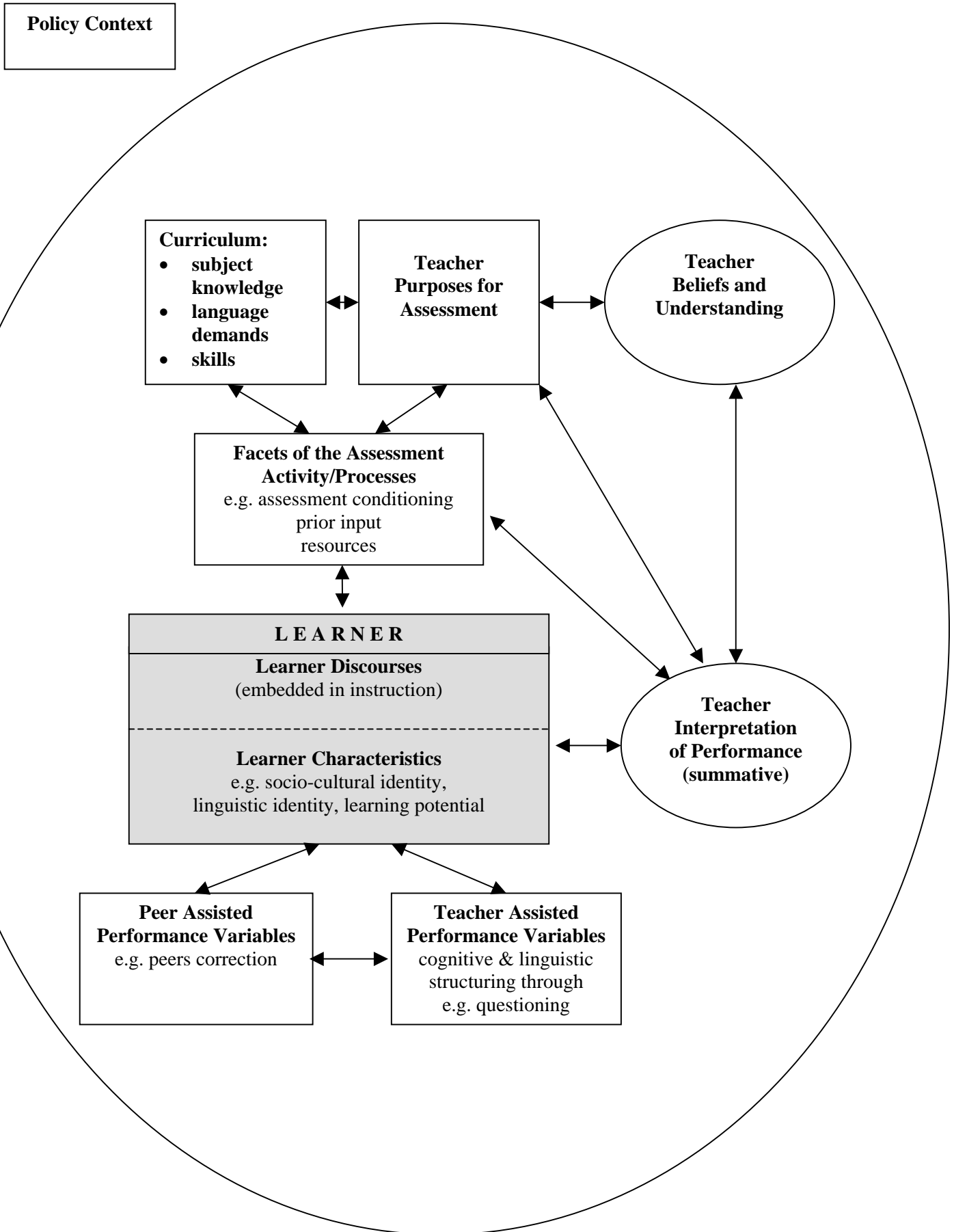This extract illustrates the following points about Johti's language development.

- Johti creates her own meaning; she uses her own lexical items (*scissors, cut*) (77) (A1)
- She clarifies her meaning for the teacher (79) (A2)
- She uses lexico-grammatical items from the activity (*lion, rope, mouse, get out*) (77) (A8)
- She uses *can* which suggests this is one possible ending, as instructed (77) (B5)
- Johti narrates a sequence of events in her story (77) (C6)
- She uses language typical of the spoken end of the mode continuum (*you*, ellipsis, gestures) for this planning stage (D1)
- Her use of present tense in turn 88 is contingent on turns 85-87, although the teacher who does not speak Gujerati may not realise this – the teacher switches from hypothetical (*would*, 80) to past (*got, happened*, 84); and the BEA switches to present (85) – i.e. they move back along the RU continuum, and Johti follows, responding in the present (88) as appropriate to the last question asked (85). (D3)
- She participates well in this classroom routine - where the teacher elicits, students respond by initiating *their* ideas or findings, etc., and the teacher responds. (D4)
- This is a sustained interaction, 14 turns, which is significantly long for Johti. (D5)
- Johti uses some story language - she is able to sequence the three events in her narrative, each of which is an appropriate material process. (77) (E1)
- She has thus provided a satisfactory basic story ending. In later versions she develops it. (E2)
- In this interaction the progression is towards the present from hypothetical (77) to past (84) to present (85-89) (F1)
- (In her later written version of the story Johti starts with concrete material processes then develops to include relational and verbal processes.) (F3)
- Johti code switches easily, and is comfortable listening to and speaking Mirpuri. (G3 & G5)

For meanings of codes (A1 – G5), see **Appendix 2**

Appendix 2 (4.5.4)   The children showed evidence of language development through:

A. *Wording and Construing and Co-constructing Meanings*
   1. make meaningful contributions in class (e.g. express own ideas, opinions, answers)
   2. clarify meanings intended with increasing precision (e.g. pronominal reference)
   3. express increasingly precise meanings (e.g. with appropriate modality or hedging)
   4. elaborate on meanings appropriately (e.g. increasing length of clause complexes)
   5. justify or explain meanings appropriately
   6. project the ideas of themselves and others (e.g. He thought ...)
   7. expand and clarify ideas (including greater accuracy) through opportunities for repetition
   8. use target lexico-grammar and ideas from the activity (e.g. lion, rope, mouse)

B. *Demonstrating Awareness of Lexico-grammar*
   1. correct each others' pronunciation and spelling
   2. complete lexical gaps
   3. explore alternative wordings and meanings in context
   4. notice language features, express awareness, and point them out at a later date (e.g. he/she)
   5. respond to teacher target setting
   6. 'play' with and enjoy language awareness

C. *Using Appropriate Academic Language Functions*
   1. explain cause and effect (science and literacy)
   2. predict (science and literacy)
   3. describe (literacy and numeracy)
   4. explain and justify ideas (literacy, science)
   5. compare and contrast (social studies)

D. *Participating in Routine Classroom Interactions*
   1. vary language use according to the task (e.g. plan with L1 partner; negotiate roles and meanings in hands-on task (e.g. drawing); report/present ideas/ story/ etc to class)
   2. vary language use according to the audience and setting
   3. vary language use according to the prompt or question
   4. participate in interaction sequences appropriate to the stage of the curriculum genre (e.g. Student Initiation/Teacher Recast in Teacher Guided Reporting; question & answer sequence in barrier activity)
   5. engage in increasingly long reciprocal interactions (developing from Year 1 to Year 2)

E. *Using Subject Specific Language (Register) and Genres*
   1. use story language (past tense, sequencers, circumstantial detail) in narratives
   2. use cohesion, theme and thematic progression to develop texture
   3. produce story endings in literacy
   4. take up genre developing prompts (e.g. *What happened next?*; *I need to write some more*)
   5. use scientific language to formulate hypotheses (language of prediction, cause and effect)
   6. report findings in science

F. *Expressing Increasingly Abstract Events*
   1. move from concrete present to absent/past to general to hypothetical events
   2. move from personal to general to hypothetical participants
   3. move from physical processes to verbal processes to mental processes

G. *Asserting and Developing own Socio-cultural identity and Role(s) in Class*
   1. express preferences, opinions, evaluation of self and others
   2. bring in examples/ references from home, own experience, home culture
   3. assert/ negotiate social role in pair or group work
   4. initiate interaction
   5. code switch in a range of contexts and ways (e.g. respond in English to L1 input)

Appendix 3

A Conceptualisation of Classroom-Based Language Assessment for English as an Additional Language

Policy Context

Curriculum:
- **subject knowledge**
- **language demands**
- **skills**

Teacher Purposes for Assessment

Teacher Beliefs and Understanding

Facets of the Assessment Activity/Processes
e.g. assessment conditioning
prior input
resources

L E A R N E R

Learner Discourses
(embedded in instruction)

Learner Characteristics
e.g. socio-cultural identity,
linguistic identity, learning potential

Teacher Interpretation of Performance (summative)

Peer Assisted Performance Variables
e.g. peers correction

Teacher Assisted Performance Variables
cognitive & linguistic
structuring through
e.g. questioning

Appendix 4: Teacher Engagement with the Project

Findings and issues from the research were presented, discussed and developed with people in the teaching profession in the following mutually beneficial ways:

1. **Research Progress Reports:** Presentations were given on the progress of the research to teachers (including those participating in the study), head teachers and LEA administrators at MGSS Coventry in June 1999, July 2001 and July 2002, and at BEMAS Bristol in June 2002. In addition to presenting and receiving feedback on developing findings, these meetings were useful for thanking participating teachers in a public forum, and for preparing schools for any future stages of the research.

2. **Workshops with Teachers:** In January and February 2002, prior to data collection in Phase 2 of the project, workshops (with substantial project packs) were held with language support teachers in Coventry and Bristol who expressed an interest. These workshops had a professional development function for all participants in that we explored the nature of formative assessment with examples of good practice from Phase 1 (some of which, without access to transcripts or video replay, the teachers themselves were not conscious of). They also served to prepare the teachers for the implementation of the activities and to give the research team feedback on the teachers' perceptions of the activities.

3. **In-service Education for Teachers:** It became clear during the project that the ongoing research and its findings had significant relevance for teachers, and not only those who were cooperating with the project. A teacher in-service initiative developed - through the collaboration of MGSS in partnership with the University of Bristol – and *Further Professional Studies Certificates in Education* (accredited through the University of Bristol) were offered within the Education Service during the course of the project. These units were open to teachers in the research schools as well as others with responsibilities for learners with EAL. Recently they have been extended to teachers from other LEAs. They draw significantly on data collected as part of the research. Participating teachers have successfully completed 2 FPSC units, five of whom are now taking M level units and intend to progress towards the dissertation stage for an MEd degree. This collaboration in research and in training, we consider to be one of the project's significant achievements. To date over 70 teachers have taken accredited courses linked to this research project.

4. **Best Practice Scholarship:** One of the teachers involved in the research project has been awarded a DfES *Best Practice Scholarship* and is mentored by one of the researchers (Rea-Dickins).

5. **National Conference for Teachers:** Further, interest in the project stimulated a Joint Conference on Assessment at the University of Bristol, which brought together in partnership Bristol Ethnic Minority Achievement Service, Minority Group Support Services, Coventry and the National Association of Language Development in the Curriculum. 130 delegates from Britain, including a few teachers from overseas, attended the event. Presentations and publications from this conference are listed below.

6. **Publications through NALDIC:** NALDIC members have been kept informed about the progress of the research through research updates in *NALDIC News* (including the special conference issue). Moreover, the occasional paper on language sampling (Gardner & Rea-Dickins 2002) was distributed to all members. As a result, there have been favourable reports of teachers taking up ideas from the paper in their teaching from across the country.