Classroom-based assessment of oral language proficiency of young ELLs in ESL contexts.

With increasing numbers of young English language learners (ELLs) entering schools in English-speaking countries, assessment of their English language proficiency has become important for screening, placement, and diagnostic purposes, as well as for ongoing formative and summative assessment. A key assessment event for many teachers in New Zealand schools, particularly those with large numbers of ELLs, is the twice-yearly ‘ELLP Assessment’, in which ELLs’ language skills are rated against descriptors in the English Language Learning Progressions (ELLP) (Ministry of Education, 2008). This assessment is high stakes because the results determine whether a school receives Ministry of Education funding for additional support of ELLs. As ELLs are placed in mainstream classrooms in New Zealand schools, it is important that mainstream teachers, who generally have no specialist training for working with ELLs, are equipped with strategies and tools for completing ELLP assessment effectively, in order to accurately assess ELLs’ language skills. For practicality, assessment strategies and tools also need to be appropriate for classroom-based assessment. This paper reviews the literature regarding the use of, and issues associated with, classroom-based oral language assessment of ELLs in ESL contexts. It then describes a number of guidelines, strategies and tools from several English-speaking countries which have been designed to facilitate teacher assessment of ELLs’ oral language proficiency. Finally, the paper discusses the potential usefulness of these assessment guidelines or tools for teachers in the New Zealand context who are required to complete ELLP assessment.

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• Arial, 12 point
• Maximum of 250 words
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Biography
You will be required to upload a short biography (maximum of 100 words) on every presenting author, during the online submission process

I am currently the Programme Coordinator and Principal Academic Staff Member on the Graduate Diploma in TESOL at Wintec, Hamilton, NZ. My main area of research interest for some years has been exploring the situations and practices of teachers working with English Language Learners (ELLs) in New Zealand primary
and secondary schools. I have gradually narrowed my field of inquiry to investigating the ways in which both specialist ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teachers and also mainstream classroom teachers approach the task of assessing the language skills of their ELLs.

Issues

Importance of oral language in second language learning


Essential problem is how to best operationalise the descriptors (Hasselgreen, 2000)

Nature of the descriptors
- Do they relate to curriculum content?
- Are they specific enough for teachers to be able to relate them to what they see in the classroom?
- Are descriptors based on empirical evidence of second language development?

Use of mainstream assessment tasks for ELLs?
- Are they suitable?
- Can they be used for ELLP assessment? i.e. one assessment, two purposes – not theoretically possible.

Teacher assessment literacy
- Are teachers familiar with SLA processes and sequence?
- Can teachers interpret descriptors in a meaningful way?
- Do teachers have a range of tools and strategies at their disposal?
- Are teachers lacking oral assessment skills because of a lesser focus in the curriculum? (check NZC for this). Greater importance of literacy skills.

“Essential considerations for assessing young learners”
- Haworth
- Malloy
- McKay
- NAEYC recommendations
- Wolf & Butler

Oral language assessment guidelines/protocols/tools
- Ireland observation checklist
- STEP observation continua – Canada
- Australia – guidelines in EAL/D resource
- ELLP – descriptors
- England – EMTAS? /Bell Foundation descriptors
- Alberta K-12 proficiency benchmarks
- Bailey (2010) – good article
- EAL/D Queensland – how to bandscale learners
- Davison – online resources??
- Jost – NZ – suitable for use with ELLs (for NS years 1-3)
- McXay chapter on oral language assessment
- Guidelines – UK (2000), NZ – a range of evidence – across different subject areas – this is reasonable, but how should it be collected?

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*Importance of oral language proficiency in the school environment.*

BICs - acquired in a relatively short time in ESL contexts. However, the academic language proficiency needed to succeed at school is acquired at a much slower rate, and may take up to seven years (reference). Even if learners can communicate socially and understand classroom interaction, they may not be able to understand or orally communicate concepts associated with the content of the mainstream curriculum areas.


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