Slide 1

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

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Slide 2

Purposes of this paper

▶ Provide background regarding classroom-based oral language assessment of English Language Learners (ELLs), in ESL contexts.

▶ Describe and compare five Language Learning Progressions (LLPS) used for oral language assessment in five countries with ESL contexts.

▶ Discuss implications for the New Zealand context.

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Background

▶ Purposes of language assessment
▶ Young ELL assessment
▶ Classroom-based assessment
▶ Assessment of oral language

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Slide 4

Purposes of language assessment

Internal mandate/pedagogic purposes
➢ "primarily related to the needs of the teachers and learners working within a particular context."
(Fulcher, 2013. p.1)
➢ For formative and diagnostic purposes
➢ Low-stakes assessment

External mandate/accountability purposes
➢ "A reason for testing that comes from outside the local context." *(Fulcher, 2013. p.2)*
➢ To certify an ability to perform at a specified level
➢ For summative purposes
➢ High-stakes assessment

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The importance of young ELL language assessment

To ensure that ELLs have "access to appropriate instructional services that match their strengths and needs."
(Lopez, Pooler, and Linquanti, 2016, p. 1)

To ensure that ELLs "have an equal opportunity to achieve the same academic standards as other students."
(Lopez et al, 2016, p. 11)

To track the two kinds of language necessary for school success – social (BICS) and academic (CALP).

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Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA)

▶ Also known as T(eacher)BA and S(chool)BA

▶ "a more teacher-mediated, context-based, classroom-embedded assessment practice " (*Davison & Leung, 2009, p. 395*)

▶ "**policy-supported in a number of educational systems internationally,** including Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United Kingdom " *(Davison & Leung, p. 395)*

▶ Linked to Assessment for Learning (AfL)/Formative Assessment

▶ "…**provides feedback** which helps pupils recognise their next steps and how to take them."

▶ "…**both teachers and pupils review and reflect on assessment data** " *(Davison & Leung, p. 397)*

▶ "**promotes authentic assessment in a naturally occurring language learning context**." *(Stille, Jang & Wagner, 2015, p. 7)*

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Issues with Classroom-Based Assessment

- "…there are questions as to the status and the nature of the information it produces." *(Leung, 2005, p. 871)*

- Assessments "are not wholly reflective of individual cognitive processes, but also reflect social, affective, and academic circumstances and learners' instructional learning experiences."
  (Stille, Jang & Wagner, 2015, pp. 6-7)

- "A lot of it is observation and how they're relating to one another." *(Leung, p. 878)*

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Oral Language Assessment

- "…oral language is the mainstay of both language learning and academic learning for young learners, and a central tool in teaching and assessment in the classroom."
  (McKay, 2006, p. 176)
- ELLs in ESL contexts develop oral language skills alongside literacy skills, rather than build on existing skills, as native speakers do.
  (Jang et al., 2015, p. 96)
- "The assessment of listening abilities is one of the least understood and least developed, yet one of the most important areas of language testing and assessment."
  (Alderson and Bachman, 2001, p. x)
- Speaking is "a complex skill requiring the simultaneous use of different abilities that often develop at different rates."
  (Coombe, Folse & Hubley, 2007, p. 113)

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Ways of assessing oral language abilities in the classroom

McKay (2006):

- **Observation** is "a central tool for assessment of oral language in the classroom." *(p. 195)*
- **Creation of portfolios** of children's oral language, as "a means of closer analysis of performance and a record of progress." *(p. 197)*
- **Listening and Speaking:** question and answer tasks, oral interviews, mini-dialogues and role plays, oral information gap tasks, partner and group discussions.
- **Listening**: 'action tasks', total physical response tasks, true/false tasks, aural cloze, noting specific information, matching tasks, 'spot the mistake', responding to a series of comprehension questions, and dictation.
- **Speaking:** news telling, storytelling, picture talks, categorization tasks, oral presentations, debates, describing an anecdote, person, or place, giving instructions.

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Considerations in oral language assessment

- Teachers should assess listening and speaking together in situations which normally combine these skills as well as assess them separately. *(McKay, 2006, p. 176)*
- "This means real oral and interactive classroom situations, where the language is not rehearsed." *(Gibbons, 1991, p. 43)*
- Choose tasks which are part of normal school activities, and are familiar to learners
- Gather information from classroom tasks from all subject areas
- Tasks should be "cognitively demanding, communicative, enjoyable, have a clear purpose for the learners, and likely to produce stretches of language." *(Gibbons, p. 44)*

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Terminology

Standards

Progressions

Scales/Bandscales

Frameworks

"The field of learning progressions research has not yet settled on common terminology and definitions" *(Achieve, 2015, p. 2).*

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What are language standards?

- Standards "represent **a prescriptive or normative focus on outcomes for specific points in schooling**, usually at the end of each grade level. They do not characterize in any detail how student learning progresses from one standard to another."
  (Bailey and Heritage, 2014, p. 484)

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What are Language Learning Progressions (LLPs)?

- Progressions aim to provide "**empirically-validated descriptions** of **significant steps students tend to, or are likely to follow** along pathways leading to end-of-school learning goals."

  (Bailey & Heritage, 2014, p. 484)

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Advantages of LLPs

- Can provide greater specificity of growth in language than language standards. *(Bailey, Chang & Heritage, 2015)*
- Can help to integrate teaching, learning and assessment
- Can be used in classroom-based assessment
- Have formative and diagnostic potential to inform students' strengths and weaknesses. *(Jang, Wagner & Stille, 2011)*
- Initial work with teachers suggests their use increases language knowledge and supports instruction and formative assessment. *(Bailey & Heritage, 2014)*
- Can advance teacher knowledge of ELLs' language development.
- Can promote an assessment for learning culture among teachers. *(Stille, Jang & Wagner (2015)*

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Potential Issues with LLPs

- Have descriptors used in the progressions been validated?
- Empirical validation is necessary *(Bailey & Heritage, 2014)*
- Has academic language development been included as well as social language development?
- "curriculum content language" and "school navigational language" *(Bailey & Huang, 2015)*
- Do the descriptors distinguish between language learning and learning of mainstream curriculum content? *(Jang et al, 2015)*
- Do teachers have the necessary assessment literacy? *(Bailey & Wolf, 2012; Bailey & Heritage, 2014, Stille et al, 2015)*
- How do teachers know which assessment tasks, tools, or activities to use to capture authentic language use in the classroom?
- Are teacher assessment judgements based on progressions valid and reliable? *(Stille et al, 2015)*
- Are descriptors clear and interpretable by teachers? *(Stille et al, 2015)*

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Contexts:

5 English-dominant societies

New Zealand
Australia
The U.K.
Canada
The U.S.A.

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Overview of Language Learning Progressions

New Zealand	Ministry of Education (2008**). *The English Language Learning Progressions.*
Australia	Australian Curriculum, Assessment, and Reporting Authority (ACARA). (2015). *English as an additional language or dialect teacher resource: EAL/D Learning progression Foundation to Year 10.*
The U.K.	The Bell Foundation (2017). *EAL assessment framework for schools*
Canada	Ontario Ministry of Education (2012). *Steps to English Proficiency (STEP) language proficiency framework.*
The U.S.A.	CRESST (2017). *Dynamic Language Learning Progressions*

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New Zealand

Ministry of Education (2008). *The English Language Learning Progressions (ELLP)*

- **Four sets of Progressions/Language Mode:**
  Oral Language Input, Oral Language Output, Reading, Writing
- **For three stages of schooling:**
  Years 1-4, Years 5-8, Years 9-13
- **Five levels of proficiency within each stage:**
  Foundation, Stage 1, Stage 2, Stage 3, Stage 4

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Features of ELLP Assessment

- Must be completed twice each year in all New Zealand schools
- Completed by mainstream teachers, with support from ESOL specialists, if present in a school.
- Primarily for identification/screening purposes, and also 'reclassification'.
- Determines how much additional funding schools receive from the Ministry of education for supporting ELLs.
- A relatively high-stakes assessment, although results are often arrived at largely by means of informal CBA.
- Teachers arrive at Overall Teacher Judgements (OTJs) about 'best fit' for ELLs on the ELLP (Ministry of Education, 2008).

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Oral Language Matrix - Output: Years 5-8, Stage 2

	The learner may:
Interpersonal context	- respond in an appropriate or relevant way for the audience and the purpose for communicating - participate in different interactive group situations, such as pairs, groups, and whole- class discussions - use English confidently and appropriately in a range of situations
Content	- ask questions, give instructions, negotiate disagreements, buy something in a shop, arrange appointments, or explain a problem
Delivery	- use a larger vocabulary and give detailed responses -speak fluently, with occasional pauses and hesitation - pronounce most words in a way that is usually clear to the listener, although they may retain some features of their first language - make distinctions between minimal pairs in English (e.g., "pin" and "bin", "ship" and "sheep")
Non-verbal responses	- begin to make use of non-verbal features of the English language
Language Structures	- include structural vocabulary to produce fairly coherent and accurate standard English - rely less on formulaic chunks and use more independently generated language structures

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Australia

Australian Curriculum, Assessment, and Reporting Authority (ACARA). (2015). *English as an additional language or dialect teacher resource: EAL/D Learning progression Foundation to Year 10.*

- **Four sets of progressions/Language Modes:**
  Listening, Speaking, Reading/Viewing, Writing
- **For three stages of schooling:**
  Foundation-Year 2; Years 3-6, Years 7-10
- **Four levels of proficiency within each stage:**
  Beginning, Emerging, Developing, Consolidating

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Features of the EAL/D Learning progression

- Developed primarily for teachers who are not EAL/D specialists.
  (ACARA, 2015, p. 5)
- Designed to "**assist teachers to identify and track where their EAL/D students are positioned on a progression of English language learning.**"
  (ACARA, p. 5)
- Also has an 'external' or 'accountability' purpose. NSW Department of Education advises it is "**suitable for use in NSW government schools for the purpose of allocating ESL funding to schools.**"
  (Sabatier, n.d.)

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Speaking Years 3-6: Emerging (ACARA)

Use formulas, well-rehearsed and common sentence patterns, and short, simple telegraphic utterances to make basic requests, express basic needs and to contribute some relatively complex ideas, usually about concrete subject matter

Use speaking behaviours from first language to communicate and predict meaning of some unfamiliar spoken texts by using their first language culture and personal experiences

Use vocabulary that is mainly everyday, but begin to use some technical vocabulary when talking about topics more technically (eg animals, weather)

Use utterances with varying degrees of grammatical accuracy

Demonstrate limited control of primary tenses (past, present, future), simple linking conjunctions (and, but) and a small range of pronouns

Use comprehensible pronunciation and attempt to approximate English stress and intonation

Rely on an attentive interlocutor who is prepared to fill in gaps and predict meaning

Make use, when available, of first language speakers to provide words, clarification and translation

Imitate oral language conventions, such as taking turns and speaking at a volume suited to the situation.

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The U.K.

The Bell Foundation (2017). *EAL assessment framework for schools: Primary.*

- **Five bands of language proficiency:**
  New to English; Early Acquisition, Developing Competence, Competent, and Fluent

- **10 descriptors within each band**
  There is no expected set order of achievement of the descriptors within each band.

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Features of the EAL Assessment Framework

▶ The Department for Education (DfE) requires all schools to include details of their EAL pupils' English language proficiency as part of school census data.
(The Bell Foundation, 2018)

▶ The EAL Assessment Framework is based on the **DfE Proficiency in English Scales** – (Holistic descriptions of five bands).

▶ Aims to provide "**a a straightforward, easy-to-use assessment tool for assessing learners with English as an Additional Language.**"
(The Bell Foundation, 2018)

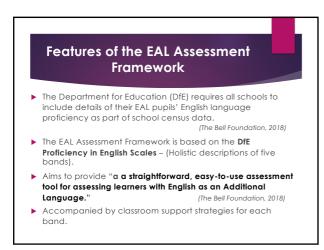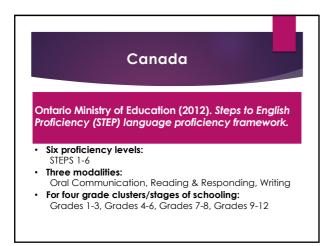▶ Accompanied by classroom support strategies for each band.

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EAL Assessment framework: Primary Speaking

Band C	Emerging competence in spontaneous expression and communication
PrS-C1	Can communicate immediate, concrete matters using connected utterances
PrS-C2	Begins to notice and can sometimes self-correct irregularities in own speech (e.g. 'comed', 'goed', 'he do')
PrS-C3	Can use some vocabulary that has been introduced on tasks and in taught sessions
PrS-C4	Can express likes, dislikes, or preferences with reasons (e.g. 'I like ice-cream because it's sweet')
PrS-C5	Can speak to others socially using simple but mostly regular grammatical structures
PrS-C6	Can take part in role play making some appropriate unscripted contributions
PrS-C7	Can ask questions for social and academic purposes
PrS-C8	Makes relevant spontaneous comments socially and during tasks
PrS-C9	Can use English spontaneously, without long pauses for internal translation and composition
PrS-C10	Can make observations and explain ideas simply during creative and exploratory activities

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Canada

Ontario Ministry of Education (2012). *Steps to English Proficiency (STEP) language proficiency framework.*

• **Six proficiency levels:**
STEPS 1-6
• **Three modalities:**
Oral Communication, Reading & Responding, Writing
• **For four grade clusters/stages of schooling:**
Grades 1-3, Grades 4-6, Grades 7-8, Grades 9-12

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Features of STEP

▶ Designed "**to assess, track, and support the language proficiency of English language learners.**" *(Jang, Wagner, Stille & Dunlop, 2015, p. 88)*
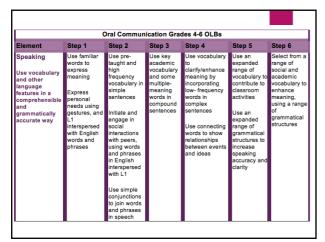
▶ "**To help ensure that decisions about the types and amount of services and supports provided to [English language learners] are based on proper monitoring of their progress.**" *(EduGAINS, 2015, p. 6)*

▶ Comprises "**a set of descriptors that are intended to capture language behaviours observable in classroom learning specific to Ontario curriculum expectations.**" *(Jang et al, 2015, p. 89)*

▶ Descriptors are called **OLBs – Observable Language Behaviours**

▶ Descriptors in each step are organised according to several 'Elements' which reflect core skills in the curriculum.

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Oral Communication Grades 4-6 OLBs

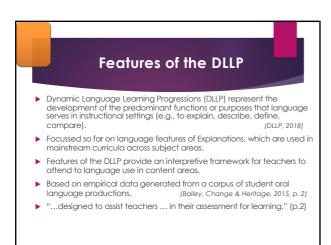| Element	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6
Speaking **Use vocabulary and other language features in a comprehensible and grammatically accurate way**	Use familiar words to express meaning Express personal needs using gestures, and L1 interspersed with English words and phrases	Use pre-taught and high frequency vocabulary in simple sentences Initiate and engage in social interactions with peers, using words and phrases in English interspersed with L1 Use simple conjunctions to join words and phrases in speech	Use key academic vocabulary and some multiple-meaning words in compound sentences	Use vocabulary to clarify/enhance meaning by incorporating low- frequency words in complex sentences Use connecting words to show relationships between events and ideas	Use an expanded range of vocabulary to contribute to classroom activities Use an expanded range of grammatical structures to increase speaking accuracy and clarity	Select from a range of social and academic vocabulary to enhance meaning, using a range of grammatical structures

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The U.S.A

CRESST (2017). *Dynamic Language Learning Progressions.*

• **Four phases:**
Not yet evident, emerging, developing, and controlled

• **For Grades K-6**

• **Features of each stage described according to 8 categories of development:**
Descriptors have been developed for oral Explanations.
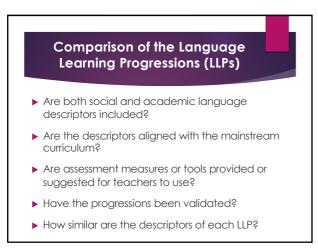
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Features of the DLLP

- Dynamic Language Learning Progressions (DLLP) represent the development of the predominant functions or purposes that language serves in instructional settings (e.g., to explain, describe, define, compare). *(DLLP, 2018)*
- Focussed so far on language features of Explanations, which are used in mainstream curricula across subject areas.
- Features of the DLLP provide an interpretive framework for teachers to attend to language use in content areas.
- Based on empirical data generated from a corpus of student oral language productions. *(Bailey, Change & Heritage, 2015, p. 2)*
- "…designed to assist teachers … in their assessment for learning." (p.2)

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Sophistication of Verb Forms (DLLP)

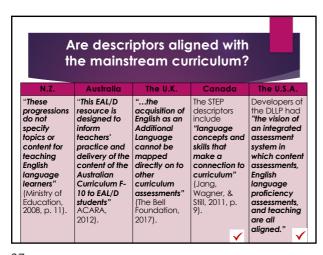| DLLP Not Evident	DLLP Emerging	DLLP Developing	DLLP Controlled
• No verb use in English OR • Simple verbs used in sentence fragments (may be used inaccurately)	• Use of simple verb types (including simple present, past, and future tense as evidence of different types), negation, and infinitive verbs in mostly accurate usage • Complex verb forms (i.e. modals) may be borrowed from prompt and repeat the phrasing exactly	• Repetitive use (i.e., relies on some complex verb types [not necessarily the same verb word itself] such as mainly modals, past/present participles, perfect verbs, or gerunds) in phrasing • May be used accurately or inaccurately	• Mostly correct use of many, varied verb types • A combination that includes evidence of correct usage of a simple and complex verb types

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Comparison of the Language Learning Progressions (LLPs)

- Are both social and academic language descriptors included?
- Are the descriptors aligned with the mainstream curriculum?
- Are assessment measures or tools provided or suggested for teachers to use?
- Have the progressions been validated?
- How similar are the descriptors of each LLP?

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Are both social and academic language descriptors included?

N.Z	Australia	The U.K.	Canada	The U.S.A.
Descriptors include examples of both social and academic language use, although these are not explicitly labelled as one or the other.	Descriptors include examples of both social and academic language use, although these are not explicitly labelled as one or the other.	Descriptors contain references to both social and academic language use, with more of a focus on academic language overall.	More focus on academic language. "The descriptors focus on linguistic performances that are observable by teachers during curriculum learning tasks."	The DLLP supports teachers in gathering evidence of student learning in academic settings.

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Examples of social language descriptors

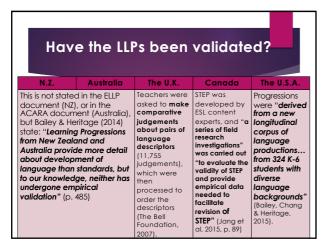| New Zealand	*The learner may ask questions, give instructions, negotiate disagreements, buy something in a shop, arrange appointments, or explain a problem* (Oral language Output, Stage 2).
Australia	*Participate in two-way conversations on familiar topics in familiar informal English* (Years 7-10, Emerging English – Listening).
The U.K.	*Make relevant spontaneous comments socially and during tasks* (Primary Speaking, Band C).
Canada	*Respond to a personally relevant question with a single word or phrase in English or L1* (e.g. What's your name?) (Primary Oral Communication, Step 1).
The U.S.A.	*No use of topic (essential or otherwise) vocabulary in English or only repeating vocabulary from prompt.* (DLLP - Vocabulary)

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Examples of academic language descriptors

New Zealand	*The learner may understand curriculum content that reflects what their peers are learning in mainstream classes* (Oral language Input, Stage 2)
Australia	*Begin to produce a range of text types from across the curriculum, showing coherence and an awareness of purposed and audience* (Years 7-10, Developing English – Writing,)
The U.K.	*Has access to a wide vocabulary including abstract nouns, and a growing bank of subject-specific words related to curriculum tasks* (Primary Listening Band D).
Canada	*Locate and use subject-specific vocabulary (e.g. to complete graphic organisers)* (Primary Reading, Step 4).
The U.S.A.	*At least 1 instance of a cohesive device (e.g., pronominal reference, ellipsis, or substitution) that may or may not accurately tie together 2 (or more) elements of the explanation* (DLLP - Coherence and Cohesion).

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Are descriptors aligned with the mainstream curriculum?

N.Z.	Australia	The U.K.	Canada	The U.S.A.
"*These progressions do not specify topics or content for teaching English language learners*" (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 11).	"*This EAL/D resource is designed to inform teachers' practice and delivery of the content of the Australian Curriculum F-10 to EAL/D students*" ACARA, 2012).	"*…the acquisition of English as an Additional Language cannot be mapped directly on to other curriculum assessments*" (The Bell Foundation, 2017).	The STEP descriptors include "*language concepts and skills that make a connection to curriculum*" (Jang, Wagner, & Still, 2011, p. 9).	Developers of the DLLP had "*the vision of an integrated assessment system in which content assessments, English language proficiency assessments, and teaching are all aligned.*" ✓

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Are assessment measures provided or suggested?

N.Z.	Australia	The U.K.	Canada	The U.S.A.
"*a range of assessments …informal observations and other formative assessment procedures as well as summative assessments*" (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 20).	"*By considering examples of EAL/D students' work…teachers can identify linguistic elements and/or behaviours that best match those found in the the EAL/D learning progressions*" (ACARA), 2014, p. 11).	**Checklists** are provided but there is no indication of what types of tasks teachers can or should use to judge language proficiency levels of learners.	Classroom teachers will "*observe and evaluate language proficiency in the context of their curricular teaching and learning activities*" (Jang et al., 2011) Teachers use the OLB Continua.	The DLLP do not contain sample assessment tasks, as the descriptors themselves are intended to be guidelines for classroom observation.

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Have the LLPs been validated?

N.Z.	Australia	The U.K.	Canada	The U.S.A.
This is not stated in the ELLP document (NZ), or in the ACARA document (Australia), but Bailey & Heritage (2014) state: "*Learning Progressions from New Zealand and Australia provide more detail about development of language than standards, but to our knowledge, neither has undergone empirical validation*" (p. 485)	Teachers were asked to **make comparative judgements about pairs of language descriptors** (11,755 judgements), which were then processed to order the descriptors (The Bell Foundation, 2007).	STEP was developed by ESL content experts, and "a **series of field research investigations**" was carried out "to evaluate the validity of STEP and provide empirical data needed to facilitate revision of STEP" (Jang et al, 2015, p. 89)	Progressions were "*derived from a new longitudinal corpus of language productions… from 324 K-6 students with diverse language backgrounds*" (Bailey, Chang & Heritage, 2015).	

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How similar are the descriptors?

Country	Stage/Step	Descriptors of grammatical structures
NZ	Stage 2 (of 5)	• include **structural vocabulary** to produce **fairly coherent and accurate** standard English • - rely less on formulaic chunks and **use more independently generated language structures**
Australia	Emerging (Stage 2 of 4)	• Use formulas, well-rehearsed and **common sentence patterns** • **limited control of primary tenses** (past, present, future), simple **conjunctions**, and some **pronouns**
Canada	Step 3 (of 6)	• Use key academic vocabulary and some multiple-meaning words in **compound sentences**
The U.K.	Developing competence (Stage 3 of 5)	• sometimes self-corrects **irregularities** • simple **mostly regular grammatical structures**
The U.S.	Emerging (Stage 2 of 4)	• Use of simple **verb types… in mostly accurate usage** • **Complex verb forms may be borrowed** from prompt and repeated exactly.

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Summary

► All the LLPs contain references to both social and academic language development.

► It is not clear that the descriptors in all or any of the LLPs are based on the actual language that is needed for success in school, whether social or academic.

► Only two of the frameworks reviewed contain descriptors which have been aligned to mainstream curriculum language demands (Canada and the U.S.).

► None of the frameworks include specific assessment tools or tasks for teachers to use when assessing their ELLs' language skills in relation to the LLP descriptors.

► Use of each LLPs requires some knowledge of linguistic terminology.

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Conclusions

► LLPs would seem to be a very practical, fair and authentic way to approach ELL language proficiency assessment, and also encourage formative assessment.

► **However:** Successful use of LLPs requires teacher inferences and judgements of language proficiency based on classroom interactions and observations.

► There will no doubt be variation among teachers in their interpretation and use of the frameworks, leading to reliability and validity issues.

► Working closely with teachers to increase their ability to **"attend productively to student language"** (Bailey & Heritage, 2014) would seem to be the key to tapping the potential of LLPs to ultimately improve learner achievement through focused formative assessment of learners.

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Application to the New Zealand context

- **Analysis of the academic language demands** of the NZ mainstream curriculum areas, distinguishing between oral and written language demands.

- **Description and analysis of the expected stages of both social and academic oral language development** (with the help of descriptors from other contexts).

- **Revision/Rewriting of the ELLP descriptors** to incorporate clear stages of social and academic language development, in language that is clear for teachers, and incorporates observable language behaviours

- **Provision of assessment tools for use in the classroom directly linked to the revised descriptors, which are practical, valid and reliable.**

- **Empirical validation** of the stages of English Language Learning in the revised ELLP descriptors, with 'experts' and teachers.

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Selected references

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