

Identification and Assessment: Language needs or Special needs?

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Outline of session

- Key principles & issues
- Students who are speakers of EAL-
Assessment of need: General Principles
 - Multilingualism and dyslexia
- **Some guidelines for assessment:**
Language needs and/ or special needs?
 1. A hypothesis testing approach
 2. Filter questions: SEN or EAL?

Key Issues to consider

- Has the child/ young person had '**sufficient opportunity to learn**'?
- Disproportionate (**over** and **under**) representation of *some* minority groups in *some* categories of SEN (Lindsay, Pather & Strand, 2006)
- Do these group differences reflect *real differences* or *discriminatory decisions* in
 - assessment
 - placement
 - provision ?

Cummins Framework

- | Social/Conversational Language | Academic Language Proficiency |
|--|---|
| ■ social interaction | ■ language for learning |
| ■ develops quickly and in interpersonal contexts | ■ develops more slowly and requires the learner to manipulate, reflect on and use language outside interpersonal contexts |
| ■ context-embedded | ■ context-reduced |
| ■ needs non-verbal support for understanding and use | ■ higher-order thinking and problem solving |

(Adapted from content developed by EAL service of PPDs)

Academic Language Proficiency

- The ability to understand and produce more complex oral and written language
- Low frequency words, more complex syntax, abstract language
- Expected to understand more linguistically and cognitively demanding tasks within the content areas of the curriculum and to use these in their written work

Academic Language Proficiency 2

- Requires *at least* 5 years exposure to academic English
- 'Catching up' with a 'moving target' (Cummins)
- Development of reading comprehension particularly within the content areas
- Extensive reading of the text supported by direct teaching of comprehension skills and strategies

Principles to guide assessment

Assessment should be:

- Understandable
- Beneficial
- Equitable
- Contextual
- Accurate
- Reproducible
- Take place with the agreement and full involvement of parents

(Shah et al. 1997, as cited in Frederickson and Cline, 2009, p.139)

Assessment: General principles

- Particular care should be taken when working with children from minority ethnic groups, including children for whom English is an additional language
- Record and review information on a child's knowledge and use of their home language, any other languages and English
- Consider the child within context of home, language, culture and community
- Set and review specific educational aims covering language and cultural needs

See EAL/SEN assessment checklist at www.school-portal.co.uk/ (Choose Portsmouth)

Assessment

(At least!) Two errors to be avoided:

- **False positive:** diagnosing a disability when none is present, labelling the child and possibly changing the teaching and learning environment to one less suitable or unsuitable
- **False negative:** failing to diagnose a disability and therefore giving insufficient support at an early stage
- Very useful guidance in NCCA (2005, 2006) *Intercultural Education in the Primary/Post Primary School*

Fair Assessment

- "Fairness is a sociocultural rather than a technical issue" (Stobart, 2005)
- Cannot be seen in isolation from
 - The curriculum
 - The opportunities available to students
- "if two children are being assessed on something they have not had equivalent opportunities to learn, the assessment is unjust" (Gee, 2003 cited in Stobart, 2005)

Bias in assessment

Bias in

- test content but also
- the way tests are **used** and **interpreted**
- bias related to testing **context**
 - Speed of response required
 - Translation
- Format

For more see: Frederickson and Cline (2009), chap. 7; Stobart (2005); NCCA, 2005 and 2006

Initial assessment questions

- What is the purpose of the assessment?
- What information is required for that purpose?
 - With children learning EAL it may be important to check their knowledge of the vocabulary for the subject
- What methods will provide this information?

Initial assessment questions (cont'd)

- What way will the tasks be presented?
 - on paper, by demonstration, in practical situations, through normal class work? Methods that place a premium on language proficiency might mean that the pupil fails to understand the question/ task properly
- What ways will the pupil respond?
 - Multiple choice, writing, drawing, constructing, speaking
- What criteria will be used to judge the response?
 - Comparing with others, comparing with stated performance criteria, comparing with pupils' previous performance
- What way will the results be presented?
 - No. of correct answers, grade, qualitative comments

Multilingualism and reading difficulties: *Some questions*

- What *strengths* and *achievements* might multilingual learners bring which could be a foundation for further learning?
- How might we *compensate* for areas of difficulty?
- Diszlexiaveszélyeztettség

More questions!

1. According to The European Dyslexia Association up to 10% of the population is dyslexia. So if there are 500 Polish speaking pupils in schools in Dublin 15, where are the 50 dyslexic Polish children?
2. Does the claim hold true outside European languages?

See Smyth (undated) *Multilingualism and Dyslexia*.
www.naldic.org.uk

diszlexiaveszélyeztettség

A case study: Jose

Jose moved from Mexico to the UK at the age of 9 and has been living in the UK for some two years. He showed no literacy difficulties in Spanish, his first language, but compared to others in a similar situation he was struggling with English literacy. In particular, Jose was using letter-to-sound conversion rules based on those learnt in Spanish. Given the relatively regular form of the Spanish orthography, these rules supported learning of Spanish literacy but were failing him in English.

A hypothesis testing approach

(Adapted from Wright 1991, cited in Frederickson & Cline, 2009)

Q: Why is this bilingual pupil not making the progress I would expect?

1. The child is learning more slowly than others because the ethos and curriculum of the school are experienced as challenging and alien, rather than welcoming and accommodating.
2. The child is not learning because their good level of conversational English has misled the teacher into setting tasks that are too abstract for their current language level.
3. The child is learning at an appropriate rate and just needs more time.

More hypotheses!

4. The child has not attained a basic language proficiency in any language, because neither language has been given adequate opportunities to develop.
5. The child is failing because of a preoccupation with environmental stress.
6. The child has a general difficulty in learning, i.e. has special educational needs.
7. The child is failing because of a specific language disorder.

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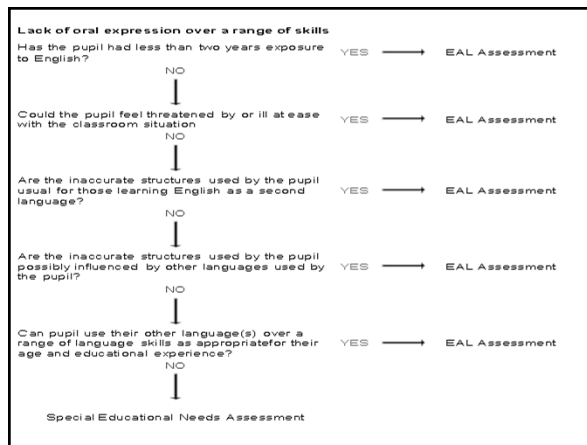
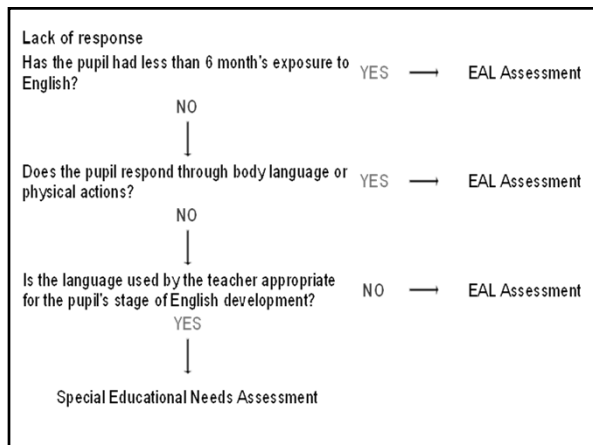
SEN or EAL Filter Questions

- These questions are for initial assessment only.
- Decide the most appropriate first point of assessment for a particular bilingual pupil
- As a pupil has further exposure to English, Special Educational needs may become apparent.
- For some pupils, it may be appropriate to follow *both* courses of action for some bilingual pupils
- All answers should be based on *good evidence* collected in a *variety of circumstances* over a *period of time*
- All evidence should be accurately recorded and dated

Available from <http://www.school-portal.co.uk/GroupWorkspaces.asp?GroupId=922201&WorkspaceId=1568041>

SEN or EAL Filter Questions: Areas of need

- Lack of response
- Problem with listening
- Lack of oral expression over a range of skills
- Difficulty in progressing in areas of the curriculum other than English
- Slow or little progress with reading
- Difficulties with writing for a variety of purposes
- Difficulties with handwriting
- Behavioural, emotional or social difficulties



Some useful websites

- www.school-portal.co.uk (choose Portsmouth)
- www.ncca.ie
- www.elsta.ie
- www.slss.ie
- www.ppds.ie
- www.naldic.org.uk

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