

GENERAL ASSESSMENT PRINCIPLES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR SUBJECT-AREA ASSESSMENT FOR EAL LEARNERS

(Information taken from Curriculum Framework for English and an Additional Language (EAL) and Literacy, Academics, and Language (LAL) Programming, June 2011 Draft – Section 7: Assessment of EAL and LAL Learners. Available at www.edu.gov.mb.ca)

Typical assessment strategies, especially for assessment *of* learning, are often highly language-dependent and teachers often question how they can separate subject-area knowledge from English language skills. The following guide, based on research by Reiss and Coelho, is relevant to all subject areas and may assist teachers in self-assessing their use of appropriate approaches that provide useful and accurate information about EAL students.

ALWAYS

- Determine the purpose of the assessment
- Choose the form of assessment that fits the purpose
- Distinguish between language and content outcomes
- Ensure that the assessment of content-area learning does not require grade-level knowledge of language forms that are not part of the stated outcomes

A. STUDENT EXPECTATIONS/OUTCOMES

- Maintain challenging expectations for students while recognizing their individual EAL stage and educational background
- Focus on what will be taught and what students should reasonably be expected to know, and build assessment into the teaching and learning cycle
- Focus on the development of the individual student
- Recognize that EAL learners are on a continuum of language development and may demonstrate more or less progress in different skills (e.g., *a student may understand more than she or he can produce*)
- Focus on what the student can do rather than on what the student cannot do, while indicating targeted outcomes and areas of concern
- Give clear criteria of what is expected and valued in a good response, as some EAL students may be accustomed to a more traditional assessment process. This particularly applies to more open-ended tasks where a degree of analysis or reflection is required
- Communicate to the student and the parent from the beginning if the focus of learning and assessment is on EAL Curriculum goals and alternative subject-area outcomes due to the stage of the student
 - However, it should also be explained that as the student progresses, the course outcomes and balance of assessment will increasingly reflect the regular curriculum

B. ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

- Employ assessment activities across a range of tasks and contexts
- Collect data over an extended period of time (a “photo album” of the student’s progress rather than a snapshot of one point in time)
- Distinguish between objective and subjective assessment
- Include alternative and authentic strategies, tasks and tools within learning experiences and sequences
- Ask students in the earlier stages of learning English to show their understanding visually (e.g., through hands-on demonstration or drawings)
- Where appropriate, use graphic organizers, sequenced pictures, labelled diagrams, and maps to demonstrate content knowledge instead of essay questions that require strong writing skills
- Substitute linguistically simplified formats, such as true/false, identification, and completion questions, or reduce the number of options on multiple-choice questions, which require strong reading skills and the ability to discern subtle distinctions in wording
- Use shorter extracts of texts, or ask for shorter responses
- Observe and note how students perform specific tasks or activities
- Ask questions, preferably while the students are engaged in a relevant task, as this provides contextual support
- Teach students the skills and language needed to understand how to reflect on their own learning (e.g., journals, logs)
- Discuss and compare assessments with other teachers
- Increase the language component of the tasks as students become more proficient
- Avoid using standardized norm-referenced tests that are intended for English speakers to gather critical information about an EAL learner

C. CONDITIONS FOR ACCURATE AND EQUITABLE ASSESSMENT

- When possible, use the student’s dominant language to assess prior content learning; assess the student’s academic knowledge and not just language knowledge
- Where appropriate, ensure that tasks are graded in terms of language demands so that, while the rest of the class may attempt all questions or tasks, there will be some more accessible ones that EAL students can be also perform successfully
- Give students time to prepare for formal assessment tasks
- Explain the assessment procedures, conditions, and criteria for assessment when setting formal assessment tasks (using bilingual assistance where necessary)
- On tests, consider allowing students to use a bilingual dictionary to clarify English words they are not being tested on
- Use flexible timing to allow students to process reading, think and write in their new language (*e.g., Allow additional time; break one assessment task into several parts; shorten the length of the task*)
- Show models of acceptable to outstanding work for performance tasks, and provide some guidance on how the task is to be presented
 - For larger presentations, such as a report, model a sample structure of what each section might contain and, where appropriate, offer some language supports

- Give sentence starters for each section or provide examples on the board of the kind of language needed
- Allow students opportunities to improve their performance (students may use the assessment task as a way of identifying areas to improve, as they need opportunities to do so)

EAL ASSESSMENT PROVIDES INFORMATION TO:

- Assist in making student grade placement and programming plans
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching program and learning activities, and make decisions concerning both short- and long-term curriculum and programing planning
- Identify or diagnose students' needs, strengths, and weaknesses
- Monitor and measure linguistic and academic progress
- Determine whether changes are needed in instructional approaches, content, and associated language development activities
- Help students participate in the learning process by giving constructive feedback that encourages them to reflect on their learning
- Inform other teachers of student progress
- Inform parents of student progress
- Meet divisional and departmental EAL funding and accountability needs

Therefore, all EAL and LAL learners and educators will benefit from assessment policies, protocols, and practices that are appropriate for EAL learners.

FAMILIARIZING EAL STUDENTS AND FAMILIES WITH THE MANITOBA APPROACH TO ASSESSMENT

Schools should ensure that students and parents understand the purpose and means of various assessment activities and that information about progress is communicated in clear and meaningful ways.