

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> King's College London		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 23 Education		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Addressing the gap in the assessment and support of learners with English as an Additional Language		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2000 – 2019		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Constant Leung	Professor of Educational Linguistics	From 01/09/1999
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> Jan 2017 – Dec 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		

### 1. Summary of the impact

Approximately 20% of children in English schools have diverse language backgrounds and many experience lower academic achievement associated with their reduced English language proficiency. Research conducted by Professor Leung at King's College London has underpinned the development of the English Language Assessment Framework for Schools (AFfS), which has been designed to address the language needs of these students. The Framework provides teachers with formative assessment tools to accurately record the language progression of English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners, and performance descriptors to chart their achievement across the curriculum. The AFfS, which is free to download, is the first theoretically underpinned and empirically validated framework for assessing EAL language learning available for use by UK schools. It is a web-based platform maintained by a national education charity and is recommended for use in schools by local and national governments. AFfS is transforming EAL learner assessment and support in the UK and has received a British Council Innovation Award for English language education.

### 2. Underpinning research

21% of primary and 17% of secondary school children in England have diverse language backgrounds and many experience lower academic achievement associated with their reduced English language proficiency. In a substantial body of research built up over two decades, Professor Leung has examined the ways in which learners with English as an additional language have been assessed, and how their progression might be more accurately recorded and their learning better supported.

#### The assessment of EAL learners

In a critical analysis of EAL and Second Language Acquisition research and assessment frameworks from international locations over the last 20 years, Leung's research has shown that mainstream English-medium classroom activities and assessment practices have not, by themselves, provided sufficient opportunities for meaningful English language development. For example, this research has demonstrated that the use of curriculum tests and tasks normed on English as a first language can result in inaccurate assessments of the academic performance of EAL learners. Specifically, Leung's analysis [1] showed that the dominant psychometrically orientated, standardised testing approach to learning is inappropriate because it misconstrues EAL proficiency. Further theoretical research on the conceptual limitations of psychometrics in relation to assessing language proficiency [2] highlighted the need for more context-sensitive assessment approaches that meet the needs of individual learners in their local settings. An analysis of historical EAL policy and provision [3], meanwhile, critiqued practices whereby student performance across all curriculum areas is assessed against a common set of criteria that do not differentiate between EAL and English as a first language learners, called for greater support for

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teachers who are expected to make judgements with limited training, and further drew attention to inconsistencies in the level and nature of specialised provision afforded to EAL learners.

#### Developing a Framework

The Assessment Framework for Schools (AFfS) was developed by Prof Leung and his colleagues at the University of Cambridge – Dr Michael Evans, Dr Neil Jones and Dr Yongcan Liu. It comprises a curriculum embedded EAL learner development map with assessment descriptors which is designed to be used as a formative assessment tool that enables teachers to chart pupil performance to support progress. These descriptors have been designed for use by teachers of all subject areas with limited understanding of EAL learner trajectories. The Framework also provides a means of systematically recording pupil performance that can serve as the basis for producing a summative report of achievement. The Framework is conceptually underpinned by Leung's analyses, summarised above, of the ways in which EAL learners' language development and progression may best be recorded and supported [1,2,3]. The Framework is further grounded upon the following research:

- Ethnographic research investigating learner participation and discourse in school and university classrooms which challenged existing conceptualisations of communicative competence and emphasised the need for more contingent, formative assessment mechanisms focussed on the efficacy of communication in local contexts [4].
- Case study research investigating teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil classroom discourse data [5], which mapped and analysed the interactional pathways that can support formative assessment during classroom learning activities including scaffolding techniques on the part of teachers to guide learners' rejection of incorrect answers and identification of correct answers through reasoned discussion.
- Research that applied the concept of dynamic assessment (drawing on the Vygotskian approach to sociocultural theory) to language development in curriculum tasks [6]. This work has provided the conceptual basis for designing tasks to track learners' progress and identify problems that require further teaching support.

The development of the Framework was supported by the analysis of 12,000+ teacher judgements of gradations of EAL proficiency. The teachers, recruited at language education conferences and professional meetings, were invited to rank proficiency descriptors on a web platform. Their judgements on the relative difficulty levels of the descriptors were compared with other internationally used EAL scales to moderate the selection and use of the descriptors.

### 3. References to the research

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- [1] Teasdale, A. & Leung, C. (2000). Teacher assessment and psychometric theory: a case of paradigm crossing? *Language Testing*, 17(2), 163-184. [Winner of Best Research Paper Award 2000, International Language Testing Association]. DOI: 10.1177/026553220001700204
- [2] Jenkins, J. & Leung, C. (2019). From mythical 'standard' to standard reality: The need for alternatives to standardized English language tests. *Language Teaching*, 52(1), 86-110. DOI: 10.1017/S0261444818000307
- [3] Leung, C. (2016). English as an additional language – a genealogy of language-in-education policies and reflections on research trajectories. *Language and Education*, 30(2), 158-174. DOI: 10.1080/09500782.2015.1103260
- [4] Leung, C. & Lewkowicz, J. (2012). Language communication and communicative competence: a view from contemporary classrooms. *Language and Education*, 27(5), 389-414. DOI: 10.1080/09500782.2012.707658
- [5] Leung, C. & Mohan, B. (2004). Teacher formative assessment and talk in classroom contexts: assessment as discourse and assessment of discourse. *Language Testing*, 21(3), 335-359. DOI: 10.1191/0265532204lt287oa
- [6] Leung, C. (2007). Dynamic assessment – assessment as teaching? *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 4(3), 257-278. DOI: 10.1080/15434300701481127

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### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The EAL Assessment Framework for Schools (AFfS) was developed to provide teachers with the tools to support EAL learners whose classroom and curricular needs may not have previously been met. Grounded on Leung's conceptual analysis [1,2,3] and empirical classroom research [4,5,6], the AFfS provides a phase-specific development map enabling teachers to chart EAL learners' performance and progress, and performance descriptors to support EAL learner achievement across the curriculum.

The development of the AFfS was funded by the Bell Foundation, an education charity that aims to enable speakers of EAL to overcome disadvantage through language education. In January 2017 the Foundation published the AFfS on a website along with guidance for its practical implementation in schools and classroom resources for primary and secondary teachers – the latter also having been developed by Leung and his Cambridge colleagues. The Framework is free to download and is the first theoretically underpinned and empirically validated tool for assessing the language progression of EAL learners available for use by schools [A].

#### Changing assessment practices in schools

Between 1 January and 1 December 2020 alone, the AFfS was downloaded 31,582 times. During 2020, support for teachers keen to use the Framework was provided by webinars: 496 attended webinar sessions in April and May; a further 2,250 viewed recordings of these webinars; and 113 attended assessment-related, online training courses [B].

The AFfS is promoted by the Bell Foundation's five national Centres of Expertise for EAL assessment and professional development [C p.4,10] located in areas across England which have been identified as having high need for targeted EAL support and professional development training. The Bell Foundation is now extending the AFfS internationally. As of March 2020, 475 international schools and other educational organisations had downloaded the Framework from across 82 countries [B].

Educators have described the Framework as a 'game changer' [C p.11] in helping them to set appropriate targets for their learners. One EAL coordinator explained in a testimonial on the project website that the AFfS *"has helped the EAL department show real progress [by] our students, as opposed to tracking them against the National Curriculum [ie standardised attainment criteria predicated upon English as a first language learners]. Using the old system, we couldn't see the progress as much but with The Bell Foundation assessment we can share the results with the students and parents to show real progress"* [A].

#### Informing national guidance

The value of the AFfS has been recognised by local and national governments in the UK. In England, for example, in response to the Rochford Review (2016), which had called for further research into how teachers can be better supported to assess EAL learners, the Department for Education (DfE) cited the AFfS as an example of positive action being taken [D p.23].

Ethnic Minorities and Travellers Achievement Services based within local education authorities in England have recommended that schools use the Framework to enable staff to conduct more accurate assessments of EAL learner progression and thereby also help inform the setting of more appropriate targets for EAL learners [E], while in Scotland, the Framework is recommended by Education Scotland's 2020 report *Learning in 2(+) Languages* [F] which provides guidance to education practitioners working with EAL learners. The Framework has also been recommended to schools in Wales as part of Statutory Guidance for the 2022 Welsh National Curriculum. Supporting documentation for the new curriculum, accompanying the Government of Wales' website, states that *"The MEALA Group [Minority Ethnic Achievement Local Authorities Group which represents all local authorities in Wales] can recommend The Bell Foundation's assessment tool which is free to use for schools"* [G p.7].

The Framework is also actively promoted by the National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum (NALDIC). As the UK's subject association for EAL, NALDIC provides a professional forum for teachers of English as an additional language and promotes the development of EAL classroom practices to support bilingualism and raise the achievement of ethnic minority learners. After the DfE removed the requirement for schools to report a Proficiency

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in English scale for all EAL pupils in 2018, NALDIC advised schools to continue to assess learners for internal purposes, specifically recommending that they use the AFfS [H].

In 2018, a joint report by the Bell Foundation and the Education Policy Institute, an independent, evidence-based research institute that aims to promote high quality education outcomes for young people, identified prior inadequacies in EAL assessment in England and emphasised the important role played by the Framework in supporting schools to overcome these challenges by enabling teachers to conduct more rigorous assessments of students' language proficiency [I p.12]. In recognition of its quality and significance, the Framework was awarded the 2018 British Council ELTons International Award for Local Innovation. The British Council is the world's leading authority on English language education, and in presenting the award, the panel noted that the AFfS "*enables teachers within primary and secondary settings to effectively report English language proficiency of EAL learners to the DfE and gives practical strategies on how best to support and track progression*" [J].

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

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- [A] The Bell Foundation (2021). *EAL Assessment Framework* [webpage].
- [B] Testimonial from EAL Programme Officer, The Bell Foundation, 1 December 2020.
- [C] Bell Educational Trust Limited. *Annual Report and Financial Statements (year ended 31 December 2019)*.
- [D] Department for Education. (2017). *Primary school pupil assessment: Rochford Review recommendations: Government consultation response*.
- [E] Hampshire County Council. (2017). *EMTAS (Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service) Position Statement*.
- [F] Education Scotland. (2020). *Learning in 2(+) languages. Ensuring Effective Inclusion for Bilingual Learners. Good Practice of Teachers, Educational Establishments and Local Authorities*.
- [G] Welsh Government (2019) *Language acquisition needs assessment survey toolkit: English as an additional language (EAL)* (Annex C: Training presentation on EAL NAS assessment).
- [H] NALDIC. (2020). *EAL Assessment Framework for Schools* [webpage].
- [I] Hutchinson, J. (2018). *Educational Outcomes of Children with English as an Additional Language*. Bell Foundation & Education Policy Institute.
- [J] British Council. (2018). *ELTons Innovation Awards 2018* [video available [online](#) at 36:00-45:00 minutes].